The Gristmill
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Preserving the History of Saratoga County
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Slavery in Clifton Park

By John L. Scherer

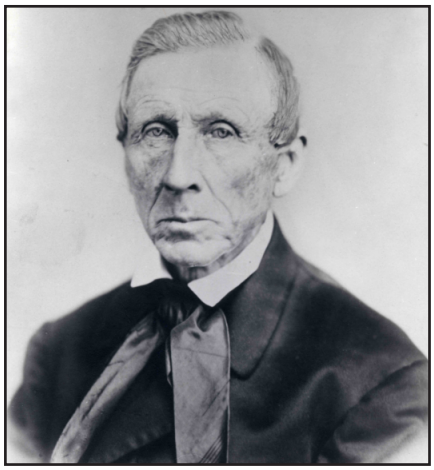
The Black Lives Matter Movement has been sweeping the country. Perhaps it is time to consider Clifton Park's history of slavery.

In this day and age it is inconceivable that one human being could own another. Yet just such a situation existed in our country prior to the Civil War. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries blacks were imported from Africa to Caribbean Islands and the southern United States where they were sold to plantation owners to cultivate and harvest huge rice and cotton plantations. Most of the slaves entered the United States at the port of Charleston, South Carolina, and were sold at auctions to the highest bidder. Black families were often divided.

Since slavery is customarily associated with southern plantations, we often forget that slavery was also practiced in the north. New Yorkers could purchase slaves at auctions held in New York City, or from other slave holding neighbors. Slaves in the north were household slaves rather than plantation slaves. The kitchen was the domain of the slave, where black women served as cooks, seamstresses and laundresses. Black men were skilled in caring for livestock, cutting wood, and serving as field hands. At a young age a slave was given to a white child of similar age and the same sex and then the two were brought up together. Being bred and educated together in such close proximity fostered confidence between master and slave. Although slavery seems foreign to us now, a number of families right here in Clifton Park owned slaves until 1827!

According to the 1790 federal census there were 135 slaves in the Town of Half Moon (Clifton Park was a part of Half Moon until 1828), which was 3.7% of its population. Half Moon was the largest slave holding town in Saratoga County. These 135 slaves were divided among 55 families. The largest slaveholder in Half Moon was Janatie Van Vranken (born 1721) who lived on a farm near Vischer Ferry. She was the widow of Nicholas Van Vranken (born 1719) and she owned 7 slaves.

The Van Vrankens were the largest slaveholders in Clifton Park. In 1684, when Ryckert Van Vranken (c. 1642-1713) moved from Albany to his farm along the Mohawk River where the present day Vischer Ferry Historic and Nature Preserve is now located, he brought a number of slaves with him. These slaves made it possible for him to develop his property. After Ryckert died, his Clifton Park farm (the area was then known as Canastigione) and his slaves were divided between his three sons, Gerrit (c.1670-1749), Maus (c.1672- 1759), and Everet (c.1681-1748) (Janatie's husband, Nicholas, was Everet's son).



Adam Van Vranken
Clifton Park resident
and slave owner

Since slaves were property, they were sometimes mentioned in wills. One of Ryckert Van Vranken's sons, Maus (c. 1672-1759), wrote a will in 1759 which gave and bequeathed to his "dear and loving wife Anneka Van Vranken the choice out of all my slaves, the one she chooses shall be at her free disposal." The rest of his estate he left to his wife until her death, at which time it was to be divided among his children.

One of Maus Van Vranken's sons was Adam (1717-1793). Adam inherited his father's Clifton Park farm, and probably a number of slaves. Adam Van Vranken's will of 1793 gave the farm to his eldest son, Maus (1745-1822). He also bequeathed to Maus his "old wench named Dean." However, it was to be understood that any children produced afterwards by Deane would be owned in common by all his children equally, and that Deane's living children would also remain in common with all Adam's children unless bequeathed otherwise. Maus was to divide 25 pounds between his brothers and sister as compensation for "the wench." Adam also bequeathed Maus "one negro boy named Mink."

Adam Van Vranken willed slaves to his other children. Jacob was willed a "negro wench named Kate;" Ryckert, a "negro wench named Jarr;" Adam, a "negro boy named Jack;" Gertruy, a "negro wench named Sarrn."

The Van Vranken's were not the only slaveholding

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family in Clifton Park. The 1790 census tells us that Nathan Garnsey who lived in the Rexford area owned one slave, as did Peter Groom of the Groom Corners area. Both Nicholas and Eldert Vischer, both of Vischer Ferry, each owned one slave (Eldert's home still stands at the end of Ferry Drive). James Pearse of Fort's Ferry, a neighbor of the Van Vrankens owned 4 slaves, while his neighbor, Nicholas Fort owned 3 slaves.

According to the 1800 federal census the enslaved population of Clifton Park increased between 1790 and 1800. Eldert Vischer is now listed with 3 slaves, and his brother, Nanning, who lived in the area now occupied by the Stony Creek Reservoir has acquired 2 slaves since 1790. By far the largest population of slaves in Clifton Park in 1800 was located on the farm lands now encompassed by the Vischer Ferry Historic and Nature Preserve. Slaveholders in that area included: Nicholas Fort, 3 slaves; Derick Bradt, 3 slaves; Jacob Pearse, 3 slaves; Daniel Fort, 2 slaves; Maus Van Vranken, 5 slaves; John Pearse, 1 slave; Adam Van Vranken, 3 slaves; Ryckert Van Vranken, 1 slave; Derick Volwieder, 1 slave; and Everit Van Vranken, 4 slaves.

A neighbor of Eldert Vischer of Vischer Ferry in 1800 was Christopher Miller who owned 3 slaves. An extant bill of sale dated June 24, 1786 indicates that Miller purchased a "negro wench about twenty six years of age named Nann together with a male child about eleven months old named Yap" from Derrickje Van Vranken of Albany for 45 pounds. Derrickje was probably the widow of Abraham Van Vranken (born 1717). They lived in Niskayuna. Perhaps Nann had another child which would account for the 3 slaves that Miller owned in 1800.

The enslaved population of Clifton Park decreased rapidly after 1800. In 1799 New York State passed the Emancipation Act which provided that slave children born after that year were to be freed. A second law in 1817 continued the policy of gradual emancipation by ending slavery effective on July 4, 1827.

In 1778, Nicholas Vischer (1705-1778), the founder of Vischer Ferry, willed his "negro wench Dill" and her youngest child to his wife Annetie. Dill's other children were willed to Nicholas's sons Nanning (1736-1811) and Eldert (1753-1822). Reflecting the 1799 Emancipation Act and the overall movement for the emancipation of slaves, Nanning Vischer freed his "negro wench Bitt" in his will of 1811.

Likewise, Maus Van Vranken (1745-1822) made provisions for the slaves that he received from his father, Adam, in 1793. In his will of 1822, Maus, who was childless, requests that his "old and faithful servant Dean be comfortably and decently maintained and supported" by his brothers Jacob, Richard and Adam. Dean would "have her choice to reside with which of the three brothers she pleases during her natural life." Maus granted to his faithful servant Mink one hundred acres of land situated along the line of the Kayadarosseros patent.

Maus Van Vranken's brother, Adam (1760-1837), owner of the negro boy named Jack (willed to him by his father), and listed as having three slaves in the 1800 census, is the ancestor of many Van Vranken's living in our town today. His son also named Adam (1798-1880) inherited the family farm east of Vischer Ferry, but he was among the first in the family not to inherit any slaves.

What happened to Clifton Park's black residents after emancipation? Some of them, like Mink, who were given or acquired farmland, became farmers. Most however moved to urban centers where they could find employment. Some went to Saratoga Springs where they worked in the large hotels. Those who died in slavery are burried in family cemeteries next to their masters, their graves marked by crude stones. As for their descendants, slaves would sometimes take the surnames of their former masters. The next time you meet a black person named Van Vranken or Vischer you may well consider the circumstances of their ancestors and their little-known role in the history of Clifton Park.

Sources for the article include Federal Census records, especially those for the years 1790, 1800, 1810 and 1820. Other sources include the eighteenth century Wills of the Van Vranken and Vischer Families and a 1786 bill of sale to Christopher Miller for a "negro wench" and her male child, part of the Clifton Park Town History Collection housed in the History Room of the Clifton Park Halfmoon Library. Another useful source was A History of Ca-nas-ta-gi-o-ne by Howard Becker printed by the author in 1953. This publication also located in the History Room of the Clifton Park Halfmoon Library contains transcripts of many original Wills and documents pertaining to the early history of Clifton Park. A few general books on slavery provided some context.

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The Spanish Flu of 1918-1920,

as reported by the *Ballston Spa Daily Journal* and *The Saratogian*

Researched and Prepared by Rick Reynolds, Ballston Town Historian

— Spring, 2020, during the Covid-19 Pandemic —

Historians feel that the Spanish Flu of 1918-1920 came in 3 or 4 waves: spring 1918, the worst in fall 1918, winter of 1918-19 and 1920 (not all agree that this last one was a wave of the flu. More than 675,000 Americans died of influenza. Based on today's population, that would be the equivalent of 2.16 million Americans dying.

Much of the newspaper coverage in the fall of 1918 was about the ending of WWI, not about the epidemic. The October 5, 1918 front page of the Saratogian had a couple of small articles about the epidemic but the headline is about the war.

In researching newspapers, the word "pandemic" was never encountered. In looking at some of the newspapers from other cities in the country, that word was not used either. Although by definition, this was a pandemic, it seems that it was not called by that name for whatever reason.

As you read this, the similarities between what was happening 100 years ago and what is happening in 2020 are strikingly eerie. What have we learned in 100 years????

Chronology of Events According to the *Ballston Spa Daily Journal* and the *Saratogian* Newspapers

Sept. 26, 1918 (*Ballston Journa*l) - To avoid the flu, "avoid needless crowding; influenza is a crowd disease." "The three C's: a clean mouth, a clean skin and clean clothes." Wash your hands and eat!!

Oct. 4, 1918 (*Ballston Journal*) - Scheduled indoor meeting moved outdoors; it was suggested that everyone "avoid public gatherings" because this flu is a "crowd disease." The number of incidences locally are not as bad as what is happening in other parts of the country and the illness that is happening may not even be the same as what is happening all over the country. (NOTE: Their knowledge of these kinds of diseases is not very vast at this point.)

Oct. 5, 1918 (*Saratogian*) - a physician's home in Schuylerville has been retrofitted to be a hospital for influenza patients; Glens Falls closes the schools, theaters, churches, and other places of public gathering

Oct. 7, 1918 (*Ballston Journal*) - This illness is like a "bad cold."

Oct. 7, 1918 (*Saratogian*) - "As a preventative and precautionary measure and because of the fact that many parents deemed it unwise to send their children," Saratoga public schools were closed. In addition, the YMCA and the War Chest office were closed. The city health officer ordered all physicians to report all cases of influenza to the health department. Cases are increasing all over the area. Schenectady also closed the schools, theaters and churches. Gloversville and Albany's cases are increasing.

Oct. 8, 1918 (*Saratogian*)- "Because of the increase in the number of influenza and pneumonia cases in this village (Corinth, NY), the board of health and the board of education decided yesterday afternoon to order closed all moving picture shows, pool rooms and bowling alley and dances. The public schools are closed and also Sunday schools. Churches are allowed to hold one service Sunday morning but no other services. No public gatherings are to be held and no lodge meetings. The public are urged to avoid all crowds and to keep children from gathering in crowds. Avoid anyone who appears to have a cold. Live in the open air and sunshine as much as possible and sleep with bedroom windows open." If someone in the house had the sickness, they are to be isolated in a room by themselves. The more care the public uses at this time the sooner we shall be able to open our churches and places of amusement and the fewer cases of the disease and deaths we shall have.

Oct. 9, 1918 (*Saratogian*) - All funerals in Saratoga will be private and only family and intimate friends will be allowed. All church services are cancelled (morning services had been allowed before). Acting on the advice of Mayor James R. Wait, Dr. Arthur Sautter, city health officer and the board of estimate and apportionment, Commissioner of Public Safety J. Sheldon Frost yesterday afternoon directed the closing of all schools, churches, public meetings in Albany until midnight Saturday, pending development on the influenza epidemic which has now claimed 1,025 victims in Albany."

The state department of health is about to produce a vaccine ready for distribution in 2 weeks. This followed the discovery of pneumonia serum and the fact that the department is manufacturing vaccines consisting of cultures of influenza bacilli. These developments are part of the plan to prevent a serious outbreak of the disease. New York City has already inoculated a large number of people but its value is yet to be determined. Department records as of yesterday show 13,655 cases of flu across New York State.

Oct. 10, 1918 (*Ballston Journal*) - Schools in Ballston Spa closed indefinitely. Kids should not play together. Watch piles of leaves where people might have spit. All small and large gatherings prohibited. Be considerate of doctors.

Oct. 10, 1918 (*Saratogian*) - The NY State Department of Health sent out a memo instructing principals and teachers on how to deal with the flu. Coughing and sneezing as

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Flu

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well as kissing transmit the disease. Students should be instructed not to use the same towels or drinking cups and should be excluded from a classroom if they have any symptoms. Nothing should go into their mouths except food and drink and their own toothbrush. "If ill, go to bed. A former Saratoga resident, now a nurse, offered the following remedy for the flu: "A mustard paste composed of white of one egg stirred thick with mustard and applied to pit of stomach and back of neck alternately for 20 minutes at a time- two, three or four times…… For adult, one teaspoon of compound licorice in cup full of boiling water, taken as hot as possible. In case of fever, one teaspoon spirits of [potassium nitrate, also known as saltpeter] and one teaspoon sugar in glass of water; dose, one teaspoon every half hour. If this treatment is followed in the early stages of the disease and the response is good, it will quickly break up the attack."

Oct. 11, 1918 (*Saratogian*) - Corinth dispels the idea that they have an epidemic but urges caution among the people. However, 2 days later, October 13, the doctor who supposedly provided that information disavows it and says there IS an epidemic in Corinth.

Oct. 12, 1918 (*Saratogian*) - No local church services in the city.

Oct. 14, 1918 (*Ballston Journal*) - Volunteers are needed in homes where there are sick people—to do the routine tasks that need to be done.

Oct. 14, 1918 (*Saratogian*) - Emergency hospital established in the Presbyterian chapel in Ballston Spa.

Oct. 15, 1918 (*Saratogian*) - No let-up in epidemic but many people are refusing to leave their homes to go to the hospital. The hospital is in need of old linen and muslin of any kind (it will be burned after use) as well as screens to be used between beds

Oct. 16, 1918 (*Ballston Journal*) - Epidemic is waning. Grange meetings cancelled indefinitely.

Oct. 17, 1918 (*Saratogian*) - Nationally, the highest mortality rates were recorded in the last week. The Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN is distributing a vaccine in Chicago as a preventative.

Oct. 18, 1918 (*Ballston Journal*) - Ballston Spa Drug Co. suggests remedies for the illness, including "vapo-inhalant." Shake some drops on a handkerchief, inhale at short intervals. Cost: $.25

Oct. 18, 1918 (*Saratogian*)- "In spite of the fact that the Spanish flu is abating in the city, the health authorities are determined to take the utmost precautions and the ban on public funerals, the holding of church services and the sessions of the public schools will probably be maintained for another week."

Oct. 19, 1918 (*Saratogian*) - Many areas are seeing a decrease in cases of the flu but are maintaining or modifying closing orders at the same time. "Generally the progress of the disease seems to be arrested."

Oct. 22, 1918 (*Saratogian*) - The NY State Health Department will collect data about the influenza outbreak. "Had this been done during the great influenza epidemic which began in 1889… health officials would now be enabled to take more effective measures in controlling the present epidemic."

Oct. 24, 1918 (*Saratogian*) - Churches, schools, theaters will reopen this upcoming week.

Oct. 30, 1918 (*Saratogian*) - "Epidemic conditions in this village continue to improve….the attendance at the public schools is improving and by next week is expected to be normal. Services will be resumed at the churches on Sunday."

Nov. 4, 1918 (*Saratogian*) - Schools reopened and attendance was normal but, 2 weeks later (November 18, 1918 Saratogian), the school days times were extended to make up for lost time.

Nov. 18, 1918 (*Saratogian*) - Hadley-Luzerne has a major epidemic.

Dec. 27, 1918 (*Ballston Journal*) - Children under 16 prohibited from Schenectady Theaters because they could be infected by the virus.

Oct. 15, 1919 (*Ballston Journal*) - The flu will come back this coming winter but not as bad as last year, according to the Ballston Journal editorial.

In 2001, the late Dr. Paul Loatman, City of Mechanicville Historian, wrote about that city's experience with the epidemic.

In early October (1918) , with more than 300 cases of the flu reported in Mechanicville, all schools were ordered closed, the planned War Chest giant parade was cancelled, and all funerals had to be held in private. The day these actions were reported in newspapers, October 10, death records reveal that four city residents died of the flu, the average age of the victims: 29 years old. Striking young healthy men and women in their prime with little warning was typical of this epidemic. The elderly and the young-usually the most vulnerable- were paradoxically spared for the most part. Public attention to these grim facts probably became more focused in the next few days. While newspapers reported, "Epidemic Spreading at Ballston Spa," the 32-year-old principal at Stillwater, Alex Bacon, died after a brief bout with the virus. That same week, Fr. Daniel Scalabrella, an Augustinian immigrant priest stationed here, returned on Saturday from a religious retreat at Villanova. He fell ill Sunday afternoon, entered St. Mary's Hospital in Troy that evening, and died the following morning. He was 41 years old, one of three local Catholic priests who died in the epidemic.

The *Saratogian* reported on October 18 that "la grippe," as the flu was called at times, had felled more than 200 people here. Dr. Van Doren, Mechanicville City Health Officer, maintained the ban on school openings and any form of public gatherings, and funerals continued to be held privately. The fact that people were denied the

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comfort and solace of friends and relatives in the hour of their greatest need must have made their mourning especially painful. Of course, things were worse in larger cities like Buffalo where the coffins of the dead were stacked in the streets for want of healthy gravediggers. That city, by the way, opened a municipal coffin factory because of the increased demand for them.

In Mechanicville, eight people died that week from the flu, including six young women, average age 18, facts which may have led the City Council to establish an emergency "influenza hospital" on North Main St. The facility, manned by five nurses and their assistants from Boston, was needed because, as the newspaper reported, "local physicians are working night and day and their efforts are taxed to the utmost to care for all who need them." One physician, Dr. Anthony Mauro, especially active in the Italian immigrant community, was further challenged when his 3l-year-old wife died of influenza. Less than a week after the opening of the temporary hospital on North Main St., St. John's Polish Hall in Riverside also was converted into an "emergency influenza hospital." The illness was particularly virulent in that part of the community.

George Gilman, was from Ballston Spa and a student at Albany Medical College, Class of 1919. He died of disease while treating soldiers with the Spanish Flu in Ellis Hospital just before he was to be called into service.

NEWS OF THE ICE HARVEST in Saratoga County during the 19th.century was important news and was often reported in the *New York Times*. For instance, on March 9, 1890 the following appeared "The freezing weather has revived the ice boom over at Saratoga Lake, which had been almost exhausted. At one point today they were harvesting fifty cakes every three minutes. Round Lake has afforded a big harvest this week of 8 to 10 inches of good quality. At Loughberry Lake stacking is still going on. The ice traffic is again choking up the railroads."

Small pox devastated the Mohawks; slavery restocked their population

By Charles Hogan

The worst epidemics, by far, to ever to affect residents of Saratoga County, happened in the seventeenth century.

Native Americans were using Saratoga County, especially the area around Saratoga Lake, as a spring and summer fishing ground at the time they came into contact with Europeans in the seventeenth century. Completely lacking immunities to Old World diseases, they died in huge numbers. The first European observer of the epidemic reported that when he entered a Mohawk village he "saw nothing but graves." (Van Den Boguert, Narrative of a Journey...1634-5)

Small pox came in two major waves, one in the 1630's and another in the 1660's. One scholar estimates that the Mohawk population decreased from 7,000 to 3,000 during the 1630's. (Kelly Hopkins A New Landscape: Changing Iroquois Settlement 2010).

In fact, more Mohawks died of European diseases in the seventeenth century than there were Mohawks.

How is that possible? The answer relates to another story in this issue of *Gristmill*: slavery. In addition to being the greatest victims of epidemics in Saratoga County history, the Mohawks were also the largest slave owners in local history. During the epidemic period they were capturing thousands and thousands of slaves (from other tribes) and forcing them to become Mohawks.

Slavery was a traditional part of their culture, they would kidnap members of other tribes, to replace Mohawks who been lost in battle. They called these slave raids Mourning Wars, since they were seen as a way of compensating greaving families for their losses. A slave, who agreed to become a good Mohawk, lived and was adopted by the bereaved family; otherwise, he was killed. Before the arrival of the Europeans, with their diseases and their fearsome weapons of war, these were limited affairs, but that changed.

In addition to dying of diseases, the Mohawks, often in alliance with other tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy, were almost continually at war during the seventeenth century, suffering major numbers of casualties.

At first, these wars were just a continuation of pre-European wars, made more deadly by the addition of guns. Then, they became a way to gain European trade goods, including more guns, by driving other tribes off their beaver hunting grounds and trading beaver pelts to the Europeans. Finally, around 1647, the small-sized raids of the Mourning Wars tradition got turned into large scale operations to restock the depleted Mohawk population, with war parties scooping up the women and children of entire tribes. (John Belshaw, Canadian History: Pre-Confederation 2015)

Due to slavery, the Mohawks survive to this day, although more so as a Native American cultural group rather than as actual genetic decendants of pre-contact Mohawks.

"The Last of the Revolutionary War Pensioners" – almost!

The home of Samuel Downing, one of the last living Revolutionary War veterans and a pioneer settler of the Town of Edinburg.

By Priscilla Edwards, Town of Edinburg Historian

In the very front row of the old section of Clarkville Cemetery on the Tennantville Road in the Town of Edinburg lies the resting place of Revolutionary War Veteran Samuel Downing. Due to age and possibly acid rain his gravestone has become almost impossible to read. Sam was 102 years old when he died in 1867 and at that time was believed to be the last of the Revolutionary War pensioners.

Samuel led a rather interesting life in his younger years. He was born November 30, 1764 in the ship building port of Newbury Port, Massachusetts, one of five children born to David and Susanna Beecham Downing. David Downing was a ship carpenter. Samuel seemed to have a bad habit of running away. He first pulled this stunt when he was a small boy and his parents had gone to a nearby town for the day leaving Sam home to play marbles in the street with the other children. A man came by asking the children if anyone would like to learn the spinning trade. Sam announced "he would" and telling the man "his parents wouldn't mind", left with the stranger that afternoon.

Samuel's new employer was one Thomas Aiken residing in Antrim, New Hampshire. He was known there as "Spinning Wheel Thomas". It was a year before Aiken sent a letter to Samuel's parents notifying them as to his whereabouts. In the meantime, they had advertised and searched for him-finally giving up-assuming he had fallen off the dock and drowned.

Sam stayed with the Aikens' for six years, learning the spinning wheel construction trade. His job was to cut, shape and smooth the spokes for the wheel. More than once Sam went into the woods to cry tears of homesickness but he was much too far away to go home by himself. He became unhappy because his employer had not fulfilled promises he had made to provide Sam with clothing and education. He never received a single day of schooling. Once again Sam ran away, this time to join the army and fight in the Revolutionary War. Traveling 18 miles to the nearest enlistment office at Hopkinton, he was turned down because of his size. After telling the recruiting officer the distance he had traveled to join up the officer gave him a letter to a Col. Fifield in Charlestown. The colonel accepted Samuel but Fifield had his haying to finish before leaving, so Sam pitched in, helped with the hay crop and then the two left for war. It was not uncommon for 14/15/16-year-old boys to join the war effort as did Sam. At the age of 15 he enrolled in July 1780 at Hailstown, NH in the regular Continental Army, 2nd New Hampshire Regiment of Captain Derrick under Col. Reed. He was honorably discharged at Newburgh, NY in July 1783.

Samuel was never in any serious battles but instead was on garrison duty in the Mohawk and Hudson Valleys.

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At times he took part in scouting parties against the Tories and Indians.

While in the Revolutionary War Sam spent part of his tour of duty with General George Washington at Yorktown. His company was quartered opposite Washington's headquarters and Sam saw the general every day. In an 1864 interview with some publishers Sam remarked that "Washington never smiled but was a nice man; the soldiers loved him; would have sold their lives for him". Samuel was also stationed with General Benedict Arnold in the Mohawk Valley (before Arnold's fall from grace). Sam remembered stopping at Sir William Johnson's home-Johnson Hall- in Johnstown and "it being big enough to hold an entire regiment". Sam related that when peace was declared in 1783, 13 candles were burned in each soldier's hut-a candle for each of the 13 colonies.

The Downing family was no stranger to wars. Samuel's father, David and future father-in-law, Moses George had fought in the French and Indian Wars; his father, brother Daniel and Moses George also fought together in the Revolutionary War and three grandsons served in the Civil War.

After the war Samuel returned to Antrim, NH. It would appear that during the war his family and another family named George had migrated from Newbury Port, Massachusetts to Antrim. By this time Sam was unfortunately too big to be spanked by his mother or the Aikens' for running away.

Samuel was discharged in 1783 and returned to his home in New Hampshire. With his war pay Samuel purchased 110 acres of farm land in Antrim, NH. Later that same year- 1783- he married Eunice George, a daughter of Moses George that Sam and his father had fought beside during the war.

Samuel and Eunice spent their first eleven years of marriage on their farm in Antrim. Six children were born to them at this time while seven more were born after their move to New York State. Only nine of these thirteen children grew to adulthood. The last three boys born were named for U.S. presidents: Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and James Madison.

After the war politicians and realtors wanted to see more settlement in sparsely settled New York State so word was soon circulated throughout New England that one could live on three days work in New York State as easily as six days work in Antrim. Tall tales, indeed!! A company of twenty men was formed to come to this area of Saratoga County which at that time was still the Town of Providence. (Northfield was not formed until 1801, becoming Edinburgh in 1808.) In 1794 Sam and his brother sold their farms and came to check out the land. The other men in the group backed out at the last minute leaving only the two brothers. Finding such vast wilderness upon their arrival Sam convinced his brother to go back home and buy another farm. Sam had sold his farm for much less than its value and so decided he had to stay in Edinburgh. The land he chose was on what we now know as the King Road with the house lot located on the southwest corner of the Simpson and King Roads intersection. [NO, don't attempt to drive there as nature has once again taken over the area.] The land is very near the Northampton and Hope town lines, located in the Gross Patent. Sam had many hardships and bad encounters with Gross and his land agent, a man named Foster, before he finally gained clear title to his land. It is believed that Sam built the first framed house in town in 1795. All other homes prior to this were of log. Ironically in the 197O's the property owner at the time placed a log cabin on the site of the old house. At the time of moving his family to Edinburgh Sam asked the Clerk of Session of the Presbyterian Church which they attended in Antrim for a certificate which stated "To Whom It May Concern, This may certify that the bearer, Samuel Downing with his wife, have been good members of society; have received the ordinance of baptism for their children in our church; and are recommended to any church or society where Providence is pleased to fix them as persons of good moral character."

Eunice and Sam worked hard to raise their nine surviving children and improve their farm property. James, the youngest, married a neighbor girl, Malinda Arvilla Robinson. They eventually took over the farm, caring for his parents in their later years. Eunice died at the age of 84 years in 1851.

Samuel's health was always good and he needed neither glasses nor a cane until after his 100th birthday. In the fall of 1863 he pulled, trimmed and put 15 bushels of carrots into the cellar for winter use. He always said blessing at the table and attended the Methodist Church. He paid little attention to diet, drinking tea, coffee, hard cider and smoked a pipe. Sam missed out on a formal education although one wonders if he hadn't run away from home he might have had that opportunity. By his own determination he managed to learn enough to read his Bible and handle necessary business transactions. Being civic-minded, he was overseer of highways in his district for many years. He was good natured; very patriotic; and strongly opposed to slavery. Four of his grandsons served in the Civil War. In November 1861 the whole town turned out to celebrate what Sam thought was his 100th birthday. Vital statistics researched since then have proven that Sam was born in 1764 not 1761 making him only 97 at his 100th birthday party! At any rate the party was a huge "Blast". An estimated 1000 friends and neighbors stopped by to wish him well. Former Batcheller resident Gen. George Batcheller gave the address.

There was a 100- gun salute and not to be outdone Sam grabbed his axe and cut down a 5ft. in circumference hemlock tree and a smaller cherry tree. The branches were trimmed from the two trees and given as canes and other souvenirs of the day. [One of the chips is on display at our Nellie Tyrrell museum.] Later that day the axe was

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Pensioner

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sold for $7.50. In 1864 a group of Hartford, CT publishers decided to locate and interview the twelve Revolutionary War (1775-1783) Veterans left on the Army Pension Office List. By the time all twelve were located seven were already dead or dying and five remained to be interviewed. These five were Win. Hutchinson, Pennobscot, Maine; Adam Link, Sulphur Springs, Ohio; Lemuel Cook, Claedon, NY; Alexander Melliner, Adams Basin, NY and Samuel Downing of Edinburgh, NY. A Rev. E.B. Hillard came to Edinburgh to interview Sam.

In 1861 Sam's war pension was $80. Per year. An April 1864 act of Congress increased the pension to $180. On Feb. 27, 1865 the 38th Congress increased the pension to $300. The 39th Congress on Feb. 18, 1867 enacted Chapter 51 entitled "An Act Granting an additional pension to Samuel Downing, one of the last surviving soldiers of the Revolutionary War." This act provided an additional pension of $500 per year from Sept 3, 1865 for the rest of his life.

Oddly enough Sam died on this very day-Feb. 18, 1867- after a fall he took down the cellar stairs. After news of his death became widespread two more Revolutionary War veterans, John Gray and Daniel Frederick Brockman applied for and received pensions for their war services. These men were not on the rolls however on Feb.18,1867, thus making Sam-at the time of his death-the last Revolutionary War pensioner. As I mentioned earlier Sam was confused as to his real birth date. Thanks to some Downing descendants especially a gr, gr, gr, grandson Philip C. Ellsworth, old Sam's birth date has been corrected but in doing so his gravestone is now incorrect. The age date on the stone reads "105 yrs, 2mos, and 18ds." It should read "102 yrs, 2mos, and 18ds". What changes Sam witnessed in those 102 years!

Sources: 1. Long time correspondence with Samuel's 3rd great grandson Philip Ellsworth; 2. Life Magazine May 31, 1948; 3. American Heritage book April 1958; 4 Downing Spirit of 76, 1776-1976, by Downing Families descendants; 5. Edinburg Census Records 1845-1880; 6. Last Men of The Revolution by Rev. E. B. Hillard 1864; 7. Stone Arabia Battle Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution; 8. Various newspaper clippings

Kayaderosseras Patent paid for in "dollars", before adoption of U.S. currency

By Sam McKenzie,
Independent Historian

In 1767 Isaac Low (the brother of Ballston Spa founder Nicholas Low) was becoming involved in the upstate land business with Sir William Johnson, the Crown agent for "Indian" affairs. Isaac petitioned Sir William for the post of his representative for New York City matters. It seems that nothing came of this approach, but soon Isaac was buying more lands in upstate New York, including 6300 acres in the Saratoga County portion of the Kayaderosseras Patent (part of the Ann Bridges share of this land sale). Sir William Johnson was acting on behalf of the Mohawks in the long running dispute with the successors of the original patentees, he and Isaac were involved together in the 1768 negotiations to arrive at a settlement. Isaac was chosen as spokesperson for the successors to the patentees and assisted the eventual settlement of August 1768. The Mohawks agreed to accept immediate payment of $2000 and trusted Isaac to deliver the remaining $3000 of the settlement amount at an early date.

It seems unusual for that time that dollars were used in the transaction with the Mohawks. The official currency to be used in business in the Province of New York was of course the pound sterling. But transactions were legal if the pound (New York Currency) was employed. The latter was heavily discounted versus sterling, at times sinking near to 50% of the value of the premier currency. There was often a shortage of specie in New York which affected business and resulted in the Crown agreeing (from time to time) to the limited issue of the local paper currency. Perhaps the agreement with the Mohawks occurred at such a time.

But the canny Mohawks, feeling that they had been cheated by the Colonists in prior dealings, evidently opted for hard cash. Practically speaking, this would have been essential anyway, in view of the ways the compensation would need to be divided among members of that nation. It is my hypothesis that the available substitute for sterling (possibly even preferred by the Mohawks because it was not British) was the silver dollar. In that era it was not an American currency. In fact, it was Spanish coin of the denomination of eight reals (the "pieces of eight" beloved of pirate tales). It so happened that in the sixteenth century the Holy Roman Empire had issued a new denomination named the "reichs-thaler", later corrupted to "rix-dollar", with essentially the same silver content as the "piece of eight". But by the 18th Century the Spanish coin had become pervasive, particularly in the Americas, from whence its silver content had originated. Somehow, though, the eight real coin had co-opted the name of its German analogue and was known simply as a "dollar".

It is said that the current symbol we use to denote the US Dollar derives from Spanish heraldry, in which the two vertical lines denote the Pillars of Hercules, aka the Straits of Gibraltar.