



# Friends of Saratoga Battlefield

## Newsletter



Gen. Burgoyne October 17, 1777

**Spring Summer 2023**



Saratoga Surrender Site August 2020

**Volume 31 Issue 1**

### **President's Message:**

Dear Reader,

We thank you for supporting the Friends and Saratoga Battlefield. Our service continues and opportunities expand.

We are beginning to plan for the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries of the American Revolution and of the Battles of Saratoga. Allies and alliances include the New York State Military Museum and commemorative organizations.

We particularly think of honoring our veterans and relating their contributions and sacrifices to those of America's First Veterans, those of the Revolutionary War.

This year as last, the Friends will be hosting events at the Battlefield. You will be able to see them here and to plan a visit to the Battlefield: <https://www.nps.gov/sara/>.

Spring will be here soon, and we hope to see you at Saratoga.

Sincerely,

Tim Holmes

President: Friends of Saratoga Battlefield

### **Superintendent's Message**

Despite winter weather desperately hanging on this March, Spring is rapidly approaching. That means changes are coming at Saratoga NHP as the park begins to step up its operations for the new season! The Visitor Center is now open Daily from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. The Tour Road and Surrender Site will soon join the party with their scheduled openings on April 1 (if the weather cooperates!). Some construction remains to be done on the Tour Road Improvement Project, but the impacts are expected to be limited to the immediate areas of work. Exact dates for late-May openings at the Schuyler House and Neilson House will be announced soon. For the most up-to-date information on park operations, as well as events and program schedules, be sure to go to [www.nps.gov/sara/](http://www.nps.gov/sara/)!

Leslie Morlock

Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park

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# The Turning Point of the Revolutionary War

by Brian Mumford, Past President.

During the fall of 1777, while leading the Canadian Campaign south to capture Albany, British General John Burgoyne was defeated at Bemis Heights in Stillwater and forced to begin a retreat back north. He was pursued by American troops commanded by General Horatio Gates who surrounded Burgoyne's troops at old Saratoga (Schuylerville) and put them under siege.

Low on provisions and under constant artillery fire for a week, Burgoyne agreed to surrender, marking the first time in history that a British army surrendered on the battlefield. The surrender by the British convinced France, a longtime enemy of Britain, to enter the war in alliance with America. Ultimately, in 1783 this alliance defeated the British and confirmed the independence of the United States.

Historian Hoffman Nickerson first used the term "turning point" in reference to the surrender at Saratoga in his 1926 book *The Turning Point of the Revolution*. Nickerson stressed that the Saratoga surrender, and not the Saratoga battles, constituted the turning point of the Revolutionary War. Similarly, Park Ranger/Historian Eric Schnitzer makes the point, "It was the surrender at Saratoga, and not its several battles which marked the true 'turning point' of the American Revolutionary War" (Luzader 10).

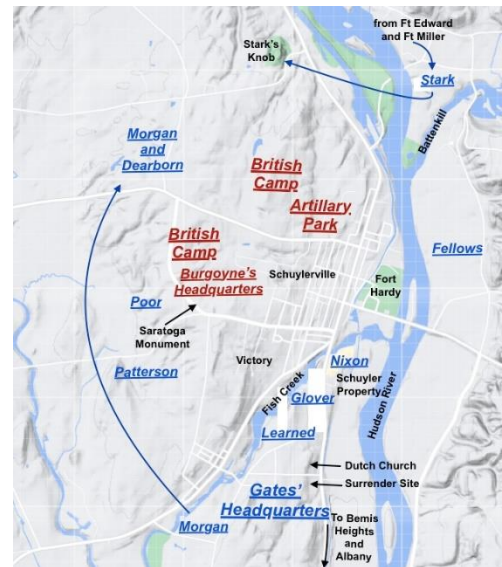
Familiarity with the background and historic consequences of the Saratoga Surrender provides an understanding and appreciation of the Saratoga Surrender Site Memorial Park, which was developed by the Friends of the Saratoga Battlefield and donated to the Saratoga National Historical Park.

## Saratoga Surrender

**Oct 8-10<sup>th</sup>** On Oct 8, 1777, after his campaign to reach Albany was halted at Bemis Heights, British Gen. John Burgoyne began a retreat with 5,000 troops back to Canada. Pausing eight miles north at old Saratoga (now Schuylerville) Burgoyne ordered his troops to establish defense positions on the high ground which runs along the north shore of Fish Creek, as it flows in an easterly direction to empty into the Hudson River.

Gen. Horatio Gates, leading 17,000 troops of the American Northern Army in pursuit of Burgoyne, arrived at Saratoga on Oct 10 where he encamped on the south shore of Fish Creek and ordered his troops to envelop the British troops north of the Creek.

Colonel Daniel Morgan with 800 sharpshooters and General Enoch Poor with 1,400 troops moved to the west and crossed Fish Creek in what today is the Village of Victory. From there they moved north to establish positions to fire on the encamped troops and block any attempt by Burgoyne to move to the west. General John Fellows leading 1,300 New England militias moved to the east side of the Hudson River where he established his artillery to bombard the British across the river and to block any attempt to cross the river. General John Stark arrived at Fort Edward from New Hampshire with a newly recruited militia of 2,000. He crossed the Hudson to erect an artillery battery to block the road north of the British troops at present day Stark's Knob.



The British camps were prime targets for the relentless American artillery fired day and night. The cannons on the east side of the Hudson destroyed the British bateaus carrying provisions on the west shore. Notwithstanding an advantage of superior numbers, positioning, and fire power, Gates showed no sign of ordering an attack. He remained content with plans to force a surrender by means of the siege which was now in place.

**Southern Hudson Status** During the siege, both Burgoyne and Gates were anxiously focused on the status of British forces in the lower Hudson River region south of Albany. They both realized that if the British came up the Hudson from New York City to attack Albany, Gates would be called upon to dispatch a significant portion of his army to defend Albany. This would lessen Gates's military strength and weaken his ability to force Burgoyne's surrender.

Just months before, Major General Sir Henry Clinton had assumed command of the reduced British army that remained in New York City after General William Howe had taken 15,000 troops from New York and sailed south to attack Philadelphia. Howe left Clinton with orders to "make any diversion in favor of General Burgoyne's approaching Albany" (Weddle 295).

While still at Stillwater before the retreat, Burgoyne had sent Clinton a letter urging him to attack Fort Montgomery located just south of West Point and to develop plans to meet Burgoyne at Albany.

Early in October to create such a diversion, Clinton led 3,000 troops from New York City north and captured Fort Montgomery. At that point Clinton, who had no orders to proceed to Albany, returned to New York City. He sent a message to Burgoyne saying, "I sincerely hope this little success may facilitate Your Operation" (Cubbison 317). This message never reached Burgoyne. Burgoyne and Gates, who by then were entrenched at Saratoga, had no confirmed report of the status of the engagements on the southern Hudson River.

**Oct 12<sup>th</sup>** After two days of constant sniper and artillery fire, Burgoyne called a council of war to review the current situation with his generals. They discussed the strength and position of Gates's troops and that additional militia arrived each day. Based upon reports from scouts, it was agreed that there was no means to escape through the surrounding troops. Burgoyne again mentioned his expectation of hearing from Clinton.

**Oct 13<sup>th</sup>** The British remained surrounded and under constant cannonade with no sign of Gates preparing to attack. They were on half rations with just a one-week supply remaining. No word had been received regarding Clinton's effort to create a diversion. During the morning, Burgoyne called a council of war of the three generals on his staff who, after discussion, were unable to agree on a plan.

That afternoon Burgoyne called another council of war and this time gathered all the officers. The council unanimously agreed, "the present Situation justified a Capitulation upon honorable terms" (Weddle 337).

That evening under a white flag Lieutenant Colonel Kingston, Burgoyne's adjutant general, crossed Fish Creek to deliver a message to Gates that Burgoyne desired to send an officer with an important message. Gates sent a response that he would receive the officer at 10:00 the next morning. Gates assigned his chief of staff Colonel James Wilkinson to assist with negotiations.

Burgoyne's background as an inveterate gambler, successful playwright, and sixteen-year member of parliament served him well as a negotiator. His goal was not only to achieve favorable terms of surrender but also to prolong the negotiations in hopes that Clinton would attack Albany which would compel Gates to end the negotiations. At the same time, Gates's goal was to negotiate a treaty as rapidly as possible before Clinton moved against Albany.

**Oct 14<sup>th</sup>** At the assigned time, Kingston crossed Fish Creek where he met Wilkinson who blindfolded him and led him a mile south to Gates's headquarters. Burgoyne's message, which demonstrated his skill as a negotiator, took the high ground by accusing Gates's troops of having "rendered [his] retreat a scene of carnage on both sides," causing Burgoyne to feel "impelled by humanity to spare the lives of brave men upon honorable terms" (Wilkinson 301). With this lofty language he offered to enter into cessation of arms to allow time to discuss terms.

Pursuant to military custom it was for Burgoyne, who was surrendering, to first propose terms of capitulation. Nevertheless, anxious to begin the negotiations, Gates presented Kingston a list of terms, which Kingston carried back to British headquarters.

Burgoyne convened a council of war which unanimously rejected Gates list of seven proposals which amounted to a near unconditional surrender. The two most militarily offensive proposals required the troops to ground their arms while still in their camp and also to surrender as prisoners of war. That evening, sensing that Gates was bluffing with these severe terms, Burgoyne sent a message telling Gates that if he did not intend to drop the two proposals then the cease fire would immediately end. Burgoyne then began to draft a list of counter-proposals which he intended to be so liberal as to result in time consuming negotiations.

**Oct 15<sup>th</sup>** In the morning, Kingston crossed Fish Creek to deliver Burgoyne's rejection of Gates's proposals together with a list of Burgoyne's counter-proposals. The counter-proposals called for Burgoyne's troops to be afforded full honors of war to march out of their camp while flying their flags and carrying their weapons, which were to be laid down at a designated location. The troops were not to remain prisoners, but rather were to be marched to Cambridge where they would receive free passage back to Britain upon the condition that they would not serve again in America during the war.

The same morning, to Burgoyne's surprise, Wilkinson delivered Gates's signed acceptance of each of Burgoyne's proposals, with the condition that the treaty be finalized by two o'clock that day. Gates's accepting without any negotiation and his seeking an immediate response caused Burgoyne to suspect that Gates may have received information that Clinton was moving against Albany. Seeking delay, Burgoyne wrote to Gates asking for time to revise the proposed treaty since "several subordinate articles ...require explanation and precision" (Wilkinson 309). Gates agreed to a review being conducted the next day.

**Oct 16<sup>th</sup>** Burgoyne and Gates each appointed two representative who met at a tent near Schuyler's property. By evening they had delivered to their respective commanders an agreed upon final draft of the treaty ready for signatures.

However, rather than sign the treaty, Burgoyne sought yet another delay by claiming that through oversight they had allowed the document to bear the title of "treaty of capitulation" rather than a "treaty of convention." Burgoyne gave Gates his word that if this edit were made, he would deliver a signed Treaty of Convention. Although the document was not technically a convention, in hopes of finalizing the treaty, Gates conveyed his agreement to the amendment.

Later that night, before Burgoyne signed the treaty, a British spy arrived at Burgoyne's camp and reported a false rumor that Clinton, having captured Fort Montgomery, was now approaching Albany. Burgoyne concluded that this rumor was sufficient reason to terminate negotiations, however his council of war voted that, notwithstanding the recent rumor, as a matter of public trust Burgoyne could not renege on his promise to sign the amended treaty.

Undaunted, Burgoyne tried to avoid signing the treaty by sending a message to Gates falsely accusing him of violating the cessation of arms agreement by sending a significant portion of his force to Albany. Burgoyne proposed sending officers to inspect Gates's army to determine its strength.

Gates, refusing to negotiate this patently false allegation, sent a message to Burgoyne demanding that he "sign or dissolve" the treaty immediately. That evening, after discussion with his officers, Burgoyne signed the Treaty of Convention which was delivered to Gates who also signed that evening.

### **Saratoga Surrender**

The Saratoga Surrender included three separate events.

**Oct 16<sup>th</sup> Surrender** The first event of the surrender occurred during the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup> when "J. Burgoyne, Lieutenant-general" and "Horatio Gates, Major-general" while at their respective headquarters at Saratoga, each signed the Treaty of Convention. The Treaty contains a standard contract phrase which identifies the location and date of the signing. It reads, "Saratoga, Oct. 16th, 1777."

**Oct 17<sup>th</sup> Surrender** The second event of the surrender occurred on the morning of Oct 17 when the British army marched out of their camp carrying their arms. They proceeded to the ruins of Fort Hardy on the shore of the Hudson where they laid down their arms in surrender. Then, as Convention prisoners, they were marched south across Fish Creek, and, passing the location where Burgoyne would be surrendering to Gates, they continued on to Cambridge. Nickerson wrote,

The turning point of the American Revolution was the sunny Friday in October '77, when Burgoyne's men piled arms beside the Hudson (422).

**Also on Oct 17<sup>th</sup>** The third event of the surrender occurred when Burgoyne, together with his officers, crossed Fish Creek and rode to the vicinity of the recently built Dutch Reform Church where he met Gates who was riding north from his headquarters accompanied by his officers. After they dismounted and exchanged greetings, Burgoyne handed Gates his sword in surrender which Gates returned to him. As the Convention prisoners passed by them on their march to Cambridge, Gates invited Burgoyne and his officers to join him for a meal in a tent set up on a nearby hill, currently the Saratoga Surrender Site Memorial Park

### **Significance of Surrender**

For years France and Britain were enemies and fought over colonial possessions. During the French and Indian War, France lost possession of Canada and territory east of the Mississippi to Britain. When the Revolutionary War broke out in Boston in the spring of 1775, France began to secretly support the colonists in the battle against the British by providing artillery, gunpowder, and other supplies, as well as vast sums of money. The clandestine support was critical in supporting Gen. Washington's army through 1777.

The surrender of Britain at Saratoga in October 1777 convinced France to openly recognize the independence of the United States and, by entering into the Treaty of Alliance, to agree to support the United States until the war was won. What had been a covert operation to aid the colonists became an open military alliance with France officially joining the war and bringing its full military and naval might against Britain. The formal alliance with France, which was formed as a result of the turning point of the Revolutionary War, assured the ultimate victory and independence of the United States.

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## ***Benjamin Lincoln Part I***

*By: Vincent Asaro and Robert T. Farley, Friends Members*

Benjamin Lincoln began his life in Hingham, Massachusetts. Born into a prosperous family on January 24, 1733, expectations dictated that Benjamin Lincoln would himself become a prominent citizen of his town. Benjamin's mother was Colonel Lincoln's second marriage, as he was widowed at a younger age.

His great-great grandfather, Thomas Lincoln, a cooper by trade, arrived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630s as part of the great Puritan migration. By the 1680s, as the population of the colony increased, a small circle of families controlled Old Hingham as an oligarchy. Old Hingham was a farming community, as most of the settlers came from Norfolk, England, which was a rural farming community.

Thomas Lincoln prospered as a cooper, a commercial enterprise which provided him with an opportunity to supply Boston with his wares. Eventually, Thomas was able to open a Malt House where he malted barley for brewing beer. By the time of his death in 1691, Thomas Lincoln had built a business that could be passed down to his family, allowing them to become a leading family in the community.

Benjamin Lincoln's father, who was his namesake, also known as Colonel Lincoln, inherited the wealth and the social status that his family acquired over generations. The colonel served his community and his generation with great ability and hard work. He was elected to sixteen terms as selectman, thirty terms as Town Clerk, and twice as a representative to the General Court.

Young Benjamin, as he grew to adulthood, was aware of what was expected of him as his father's son and would inherit not only the family business, but would hold many of the same offices as his father. He would serve diligently just as his father had, fulfilling those expectations with a purpose and with a keen sense of virtue. He proved himself worthy of following in his father's footsteps. The awareness of what was expected of him gave him the ability to develop a network of family and community relationships that had been cultivated over a century of smalltown life.

Life in a small town taught Benjamin about the reciprocal obligations that existed among neighbors and about how to handle the burden created by his family legacy. Living with these pressures meant that in order to excel Benjamin had to somehow eclipse the achievements of his father. He developed a subservient behavior which was an indicator of being raised by a loving family. The stability brought about by his upbringing taught him his obligations not only to those above him, but to those below him. He understood the hierarchical chain of social standing that existed and developed a respect for obedience to the law. Unlimited ambition was subdued by his dutiful regard for his community and for his country. In his private life Benjamin Lincoln embodied all of the characteristics of a colonial gentlemen living in this age. His dress, his simple tastes, and his frugality, which he carried with him throughout his life, reflected the virtues valued among the leaders of the time.

He was also a man of faith, and embraced the concept of "congregational liberalism." He believed that to gain God's grace, daily prayer, attendance at church, and participation in the spiritual life of the community were necessary actions. He practiced these actions throughout his life, even though experience in war and politics might seem contradictory. He would

often be seen in the environment of the military encampment practicing his faith in prayer, and was not afraid to be recognized for his piety. He found great comfort in worship and visited many churches during his military service.

At 5 feet, 9 inches tall, with blue eyes and a light complexion, Benjamin Lincoln suffered from ailments. He had a speech impediment, and suffered from narcolepsy. One contemporary noted that sometimes, in the midst of conversation and when driving his carriage, he would fall asleep. These impediments, one could imagine, might have affected his ability to gain respect or would impact his skill as a leader. This was not the case. He might have provided context for the occasional joke, but many of his friends who were aware of his conditions vigorously defended him.

Benjamin Lincoln was married to Mary Cushing in 1756. By that time he was already serving as town constable and carried out his difficult duties very well. He had also been appointed as an adjutant in the Second Suffolk Reserves, his father's militia unit. These positions established Benjamin Lincoln as an influential spokesman for Hingham.

By 1765 change was coming as the relationship between Britain and her colonies changed and the population of the colonies was becoming increasingly radicalized. The passage of the Stamp Act prompted many to become politicized. Fifty towns in Massachusetts instructed their representatives to oppose the Stamp Tax. It was finally repealed, and in 1766 brought elation to the citizens of Hingham, as was noted by John Adams describing the scene: "Bells were rung, cannons fired, drums beaten, and Landlady Cushing (Benjamin's wife) on the plain, illuminated her house."

As for his politics, Lincoln was a leading Whig in Hingham. One contemporary remarked that he was "sincere and determined, though a temperate Whig". This is a profile that fits the political ideology that existed in Hingham. Lincoln influenced the limits placed on the actions of Hingham's representatives. Lincoln's political moderation and the value he placed on self-control were reflected in his political thinking and his actions. He would have detested some of the inflammatory literature distributed in the city of Boston that would lead to mob action.

In 1772 Lincoln was appointed Lieutenant Colonel of the Second Suffolk Regiment. It was a busy time, and Lincoln had to manage his new position alongside his duties as representative to the General Court, which he was also elected to in 1772, while managing his own personal business affairs. Public and private responsibilities induced him to purchase from Robert Robins a slave named Cato. Although Cato was one of several slaves owned by Lincoln throughout his life, once he saw the condition of slavery as it was practiced in South Carolina and Georgia, his own sentiments about slavery changed. In later life he was unequivocally against slavery. He described it as "this unjustifiable and wicked practice". Cato probably worked side-by-side with Lincoln in his potash factory and malthouse, and most likely lived and ate under the same roof as Lincoln and his family. This fits with a pattern common in New England, which differed drastically from plantation slavery in the South.

In August of 1774 the townspeople of Hingham were moving closer to a full breach with Great Britain. They agreed to a covenant not to import or consume goods imported from Britain. The covenant prohibited anyone living in the town of Hingham to comply. At this time Benjamin Lincoln began to focus on creating 'minute' companies within militia units to respond faster to a possible British threat. He headed a committee responsible for procuring canons, small arms and ammunition, and storing them in secure places.

The siege of Boston began after the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord, and Benjamin Lincoln was poised to be called upon to serve the cause of independence. In June of 1775 Congress appointed George Washington to command the army fighting for independence. Congress struggled with keeping order of 20,000 men, and appointing Washington gave these disorganized groups of men a legal standing under one command. Benjamin Lincoln was tasked with providing vast quantities of supplies that would be needed by this new army. He also served on a committee to outfit ten vessels as privateers that would capture British ships carrying much needed supplies. Lincoln's previous position as a militia officer, and his service on several provincial committees, would make him invaluable in helping state governments with questions of militia organization and supply. He proved to be a willing leader working tirelessly on the logistical issues of the Continental Army and the militia units. Issues such as finding accommodation for prisoners, handling the outbreak of disease such as smallpox, as well as creating policies for compensation for wounds and property damage caused by service to the colonies, and for dealing with loyalists, were all Lincoln's responsibility while Washington struggled to create an army out of a mob of militiamen. Besides these duties, Lincoln was also tasked with trying to solve one of the nagging problems of the Continental Army, securing a dependable supply of gunpowder, and looked for efficient methods to manufacture saltpeter, a major component for the production of gunpowder. By January 1776 the organization of the militia in Massachusetts was complete, and Benjamin Lincoln was recognized by being appointed Brigadier General for Suffolk County. James Warren was appointed major general, but when he declined the appointment due to illness, Benjamin Lincoln was appointed major general.



General Howe's troops were forced to evacuate Boston after the stalemate was broken at Dorchester Heights. Lincoln's men were ordered to be on the ready to guard the coast in case they returned. Howe's forces then went to attack New York City, routing the American forces under Washington's command. Lincoln's troops secured the rear of Washington's army covering his retreat. He did not continue into New Jersey because his men's 3-month enlistments were up and few were convinced to re-enlist. This was a chronic problem faced by Congress concerning militia. Lincoln had an intimate knowledge of the militia system, he was experienced in commanding a militia which included his neighbors and friends and he knew that he had to tread a fine line between the interests of his men and military needs, which was the only way to be successful in command. As a militia officer he knew the advantages of the militia and knew that they could be an effective fighting force, even though at times they could be difficult to manage. Lincoln's actions and his experience enhanced his reputation and soon he would be placed in command over new recruits that would support the Continental Army. His military responsibilities were growing. On his brief return to Hingham, before assuming duties of his new command, he resigned his position of deacon in the First Congregational Church.

As a commander Lincoln's style was the light rein of command. He did so by drafting his orders as "tactful reminders" which provided his subordinates with as much responsibility as they could handle. Six thousand men were promised to Washington by Massachusetts, and Washington was pleased that Lincoln was appointed to command them. Washington wrote Lincoln: "This appointment gives me the highest satisfaction as the proofs you exhibited of your zeal for the service, in the preceding part of this campaign, convinces me, that the command could not have devolved upon a more deserving officer." Washington looked for men of particular virtue as commanders in the Continental Army.

On February 14, 1777, Lincoln and his men arrived at Washington's Headquarters in Morristown, New Jersey. Congress had acted on Washington's recommendation and Benjamin Lincoln was appointed as a Major-General in the Continental Army.

By the end of February Benjamin Lincoln was in command of 3,000 troops in Bound Brook, New Jersey. The cold weather in February and March took its toll. Most of Lincoln's time was occupied with foraging for food and supplies to sustain his army. As spring approached things began to become heated in the opposing camps. Lincoln would soon experience the painful hardships that had to be endured as a commander. On April 13 a British force of 1,000 men led by General Cornwallis attacked Bound Brook. The American pickets guarding the line fled without sounding an alarm. General Lincoln's headquarters were surprised by the approaching British. Lincoln had a small force of 500 men which were in danger of being trapped by the advancing columns of British soldiers. Lincoln had only bad choices and little time to make a choice. He rallied his men and they were able to escape through the fire of British musketry. American losses amounted to 60 killed or captured, and the loss of Lincoln's personal papers. It was unfortunate, but Lincoln's quick thinking managed to avoid disaster. The British then left Bound Brook the next morning and the Americans re-occupied the town. Washington shrugged off the loss, and Nathaniel Greene wrote to John Adams explaining that Lincoln was acquitted from any blame. Lincoln remained in Bound Brook through May and June. The British then abandoned New Jersey for Staten Island after Howe failed to lure Washington out of his secure position on Middlebrook Heights. Howe finally sailed out of Sandy Hook heading south. Washington assumed he was headed toward Philadelphia and Washington followed.

At this time General John Burgoyne's invasion of New York from Canada, which began in June 1777, threatened to divide the United States and isolate New England. General Philip Schuyler, who was in command of the Northern Department of the army, could only retreat in the face of Burgoyne's army. Fort Ticonderoga was evacuated without a fight. Washington explained to Lincoln: "I have this day received two letters from General Schuyler in such a stile, as it convinces me that it is absolutely necessary to send a determined officer to his assistance." He then ordered Lincoln to move as quickly as possible to support the Northern Army. Washington expressed his full confidence in Lincoln, and despite an illness, he went north to aid General Schuyler.

In August of 1776 Benjamin Lincoln left Boston as a militia officer. By August of 1777 Lincoln had proven himself beyond doubt to be a capable leader and one of Washington's most trusted officers. Of equal importance Benjamin Lincoln commanded the loyalty of his men and the dignity and honor of his command. He gained the love and respect not only of his own men, but as one of his contemporaries remarked, the "love and respect of all men," in the main army.

#### **Works Consulted**

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***Part II Benjamin Lincoln at Saratoga* coming in the Fall Winter Newsletter**

**Reminder: The Friends membership process changed In January 2021, from a rolling month annual membership to a calendar year term. No individual membership renewal notices will be sent.**

**Become a Friend of Saratoga Battlefield**

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**Membership renewal and donations may be completed on-line at [www:friendsfsb.org](http://www.friendsfsb.org)**

**Your renewal date will be listed on your 2023 membership card.**

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