



Friends of Saratoga Battlefield

Newsletter



Gen. Burgoyne October 17, 1777

Spring Summer 2025



Saratoga Surrender Site August 2020

Volume 33 Issue 1

President's Message

The Friends were chartered in 1990. At the 35 year mark it is useful to take a glimpse back and to reaffirm our purpose.

Current cooperation with significant historical organizations recalls activity of 10 years ago and more. At the time the Friends initiated with the New York State Military Museum a Speaker Series which earned wide attention. Later this year the Battlefield will be continuing a similarly popular series. (See the Park's website for information.)

The Battlefield and Military Museum Friends groups have begun to joint in honoring American military veterans. A 2024 Veterans Day gathering of Veterans groups was an outstanding event that deserves repetition.

In addition, the Military Museum will enhance its Revolutionary War displays in recognition of the upcoming 250th anniversary of the Battles of Saratoga.

A mission and purpose of The Friends of Saratoga Battlefield remains to advocate on behalf of the Saratoga National Historical Park. We affirm our commitment to alliances, programs and services that:

- Support the Park's leadership and programs in planning, participation and funding
- Conduct outreach to communities and decision makers
- Plan celebrations including the 250th Anniversary of the 1777 Saratoga victory, in 2027
- Continue historical conservation. Friends worked with American Battlefield Trust for the addition of acreage to the Siege Trail in 2024. This is the southern perimeter of 'the Siegfiefield' along Fish Creek in now Schuylerville.
- Ensure that Saratoga National Historical Park continues to serve in its role representing the Turning Point of the Revolutionary War.

We are grateful for the continued support of members and donors in upholding this mission.

Tim Holmes
President

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Superintendent's Message

More and more people are discovering the wonders that are Saratoga National Historical Park. In 2024 our visitation numbers grew by nearly 15,000, officially recording 116,537 visits. Preparations for the busy summer season are underway. We have resumed a seven day a week operation at the visitor center 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. As soon as the snow melts the team will be working to get the tour road ready for vehicular traffic targeting April 1st. Park operations change regularly based on weather, staffing levels, and other factors. To best keep up with what's going on at the park check into the park website regularly: www.nps.gov/sara. If you are a member of the Friends of Saratoga Battlefield, you know the feeling you get from supporting Saratoga National Historical Park. There are many ways to do this, including the most popular: volunteering. Last year, volunteers donated more than 5500 hours of their time to the park! They greeted and oriented visitors, presented information and interpretation, and brought a friendly presence to the trails. Volunteering and service will be a big part of our commemoration for 250 years of the United States and the American Revolution over the next few years and we are excited that the first of these events will be coming up soon. On April 16, from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm, volunteer teams will take part in a Park Day cleanup to help prepare the park for another summer season! Email us at sara_info@nps.gov if you would like to participate. We will also have our usual opportunities in the visitor center, the Schuyler and Neilson Houses, trail ambassadors, and roving battlefield interpreters! Feel free to reach out if you would like more information. Volunteers are an integral part of the SARA team, and we appreciate all the hard work and dedication. We couldn't do it without you!



*FoSB's own Debbie Murphy at the Visitors Center March 2, 2025.
NPS photo*

Leslie Morlock
Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park

German “Hessian” Soldiers at Saratoga

Andrew Kozak, Friends Members and SNHP Volunteer

In the Eighteenth century Germany was not a nation, but a loose confederation of more than 1700 feudal principalities, states, and city- states. These lands were part of the Holy Roman Empire ruled by an emperor selected by a group of “Electors”. The inhabitants of these lands were held in fiefdom and all subjects owed their rulers “homage & service”. They could not (or did not) own land and their dwellings. The rulers of these areas would “rent out” their subjects as soldiers to other foreign powers when they needed revenue for necessary expenses and debt service.

Great Britain in the eighteenth century was involved in many wars in Europe and North America. There were also potential rebellious subjects in Ireland and Scotland to worry about during this time period. Once the American Revolution broke out in the North American colonies in 1775, the British were running short of manpower for the military and went looking to other rulers to provide troops.

First the British asked Catherine the Great of Russia to provide 20,000 Cossacks, but she turned them down flat. The next inquiry was to the Dutch, and they also refused. Since King George III was an Elector of Hanover (this title gave him a vote to select a new Holy Roman Emperor) and his family came from the Duchy of Hanover, the British approached the German rulers for soldiers. There were also previous financial dealings in place for many years with various German states that had previously signed contracts with Great Britain. Six (6) German states provided approximately 30,000 troops for service in North America:

- 1) Braunschweig (aka “Brunswick”)- 4300 troops
- 2) Hesse- Cassel- 17,000 to 20,000 troops
- 3) Hesse- Hanau- 2400 troops
- 4) Waldeck- 1225 troops
- 5) Ansbach- Bayreuth- 2500 troops
- 6) Anhalt- Zerbst- 1300 troops

In 1775 Duke Carl Wilhelm Ferdinand of Brunswick signed a contract with the British government to provide troops for service in North America. The Duke of Brunswick received 7 pounds, 4 schillings, & 4 ½ pence for each soldier provided plus payments for casualties as:

- a) Death- full payment
- b) Wounded- half of full payment

The British also had to pay for other expenses such as arms, supplies, medical care, troop transportation, and wages for civilian employees.

The selected soldiers were integrated into the British Army on a unit basis, not as individuals. Their unit structures and Officers were retained as before with liaison procedures established with the British command structure. Based upon this interpretation, the Germans are not considered true “mercenary” soldiers.

A major problem for the German forces was the language barrier and communicating with the British forces. A mere handful of the German officers could speak English or French. Many European militaries used French as their military language, but in this case both the British & Germans had a very limited number of people fluent in French.

Since the majority of the German troops serving in North America were from the province of Hesse – Cassel, the Americans were calling them all “Hessians” as they did not understand the cultural and geographic divides among these diverse German regions.

The selected contingent of Brunswickers & Hesse- Hanau soldiers arrived in Canada during the summer of 1776 and some were used in Sir Guy Carleton’s 1776 invasion of Lake Champlain and Fort Ticonderoga in upstate New York. It was decided that for the Burgoyne Expedition in 1777, the Brunswick and Hesse- Hanau troops would be used to support this effort. Historians have set their numbers at 3116 total Brunswickers and Hesse- Hanau soldiers. Baron F. von Riedesel was their overall commander, and the forces were organized as follows:

- A) First Brigade (Gen. J. Specht) – Regiments: von Rhetz, von Riedesel, and Specht
- B) Second Brigade (Gen. W. von Gall)- Regiments: Prinz Friedrich & Hesse- Hanau
- C) Advanced Corps (Lt. Col H. von Breymann) –with 1) Jagers {(riflemen} under Maj. Von Barner 2) Dragoons under Lt. Col, Baum 3) Grenadiers under Maj, von Barner
- D) Cannon gunners- Hesse- Hanau (100 men) under Capt. Pausch

Once the initial contingent of Brunswickers was deployed with Burgoyne, an additional 250 replacements were sent from Europe and arrived in Canada in July 1777.

When the Colonists found out that German soldiers were to be deployed in North America, an extensive propaganda campaign was initiated to paint them as vicious Mercenaries coming to inflict violence and mayhem upon the local civilians. It also depicted them as unwilling stooges doing the dirty work of their rulers to enslave the Americans.

German Troops Serving in North America at Saratoga

It was not clear to the Americans how deeply the German troops were committed to the British cause. The Colonists issued a leaflet written in German to induce troops to desert the British and join the American Northern Army. The leaflet promised the following inducements:

- a) Freedom and well treatment
- b) Land
- c) Pension money

Other efforts included sending out agents to the British lines to contact with the German troops, urging them to desert and/ or join the American cause.

As the Burgoyne invasion began to bog down and lose momentum, desertion became a very big problem for the British. The German troops were shocked to find themselves posted to a vast wilderness area with few villages and towns. They were amazed to observe the high standard of living enjoyed by the American colonists compared to the conditions for people in their lands. They also missed things like having baked bread, and whiskey and tobacco rations issued to them,

In early August 1777, Baron von Riedesel advised Burgoyne to consider a raid in the Manchester to Bennington area of the newly proclaimed state of Vermont to capture badly needed supplies and horses. It was decided to send out a joint force (1500 men) of Brunswickers, Loyalists, and Indians to accomplish this mission. After their decisive defeat at Bennington by American Gen, John Stark's militia on August 16, 1777, German morale was in steep decline and plummeted, leading to more desertions,

British Response to the Deserter Problem

In August 1777 Gen. Burgoyne issued decrees to reduce desertions:

- a) 20 dollar reward to anyone who captured & returned a deserter
- b) Up to 1000 lashes could be authorized to punish a deserter
- c) Allowed the Indian forces to kill & scalp a deserter, receive the 20 dollars & sell the scalp
- d) Ordered the execution in the Fort Edward area of a recaptured German grenadier deserter/ turncoat (Musketeer Fasselabend) and required the German troops to witness the event on 8/11/1777

After September 15, 1777, desertions of British & German troops were a daily occurrence.

After the battles at Bennington, Burgoyne's forces continued to move south to the Saratoga area where the stage was set for the final battles in September & October. The German troops participated in both battles and fought valiantly, but their efforts to defeat the American forces were hampered by their losses at Bennington and the massive buildup of the American army. The Germans fought bravely, but they were overwhelmed by the relentless attacks of the American forces led by Gen. Benedict Arnold.

Once the October 7 battle of Bemis Heights was over, the British & Germans were forced to retreat to the village of Old Saratoga where they were surrounded by the Americans and formally surrendered on October 17. The German forces of approximately 2400 men laid down their arms and became part of what was now called Burgoyne's Convention Army.

Once the surrender ceremony was concluded, the German officers and enlisted men were very courteously treated by the long lines of Americans on the sides of the road as they marched by on the way to Albany. The Americans gave respect to the defeated troops and there were no insults or derisions issued. Baron von Riedesel and his family were later greeted and hosted by Gen. Schuyler at his Albany mansion and treated as honored guests.

After the surrender, Gen. von Riedesel assembled his staff to write a letter to the Duke of Brunswick explaining their defeat at Saratoga and why it happened. He focused on the Bennington battle, which Burgoyne blamed him solely for their defeat based upon a flawed battle plan, slow troop movements, and inability to execute the plan. Gen. von Riedesel countered that they had jointly planned the raid, but the passage of time between the proposal of the plan and the go ahead orders had given the Americans plenty of time to muster troops and prepare for any attack. He concluded that the final responsibility anyway lies with the overall Army commanding officer.

Suggested readings:

Baroness von Riedesel (Diary of Lady Riedesel or Letters and Journals Baroness Friederike von Riedesel)
Brunswick army surgeon Dr. J. Wasmus (Journal of J. F. Wasmus)

Works Consulted:

Hessians German Soldiers in the American Revolutionary War by Friederike Baer Oxford University Press
2022

Saratoga Turning Point of America's Revolutionary War by Richard M. Ketchum Holt Paperbacks Henry Holt
and Company 1999

Muskets of the Revolution and Other Colonial Wars by Bill Ahearn Andrew Mowbray Publishers 2005



**Friends of the Saratoga Battlefield
2024 Membership Postcard Photo
Contest Winner**

**Jeannette Sullivan submitted the winning
photo. This is the 2025 membership
postcard.**

**Jeanette received a 2025 Battlefield Level
Membership .**



Friends of Saratoga Battlefield Postcard Photo Contest 2025

Friends of Saratoga Battlefield Member Photo Contest Application and Rules

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail _____ Phone (if no email) _____

Enter your **original** photo of the Saratoga National Historical Park. That includes the Battlefield, the Surrender Site, Schuyler House, and the Saratoga Monument. Submit by the deadline date of August 1, 2025, sending this application and the photo by email attachment to Friendsofsaratoga@gmail.com. Submission is limited to Members of the Friends of the Saratoga Battlefield; membership application information is available at the Friends of Saratoga Battlefield website (Friendsofthesaratogabattlefield.org).

The Board members will review all entries (see Contest rules below) and the top three will be published in the Fall/Winter 2025 Newsletter for membership review and voting (one vote per member). A ballot and instructions for voting and mailing will be included in that Newsletter. Voting will also be available on the Friends of the Saratoga Battlefield website.

The winning entry will be the image used for the 2026 Membership Post Card. The winner and photo will be featured in the Spring/Summer 2026 Newsletter. In addition, the winning member/photographer will receive a Battlefield Club Level 2026 Membership.

Contest Rules

Friends of Saratoga Battlefield ("FOSB") is exclusively running this Photography Contest and Facebook is in no way responsible for or affiliated with said contest. All photos must be original work, taken by the entrants. No third party may own or control any materials the photo contains, and the photo must not infringe upon the trademark, copyright, moral rights, intellectual rights, or rights of privacy of any entity or person. In addition, the photo must be in its original state and cannot be altered in any way, including but not limited to removing, adding, reversing, or distorting subjects within the frame. The contest is void where prohibited or restricted by law.

Submission implies the photographer's approval for publication of photos by FOSB in print and/or electronically. Copyright ownership of the photo remains with the photographer except as stated herein and FOSB shall retain all rights to continue to use said photograph for any purpose relevant to its mission statement.

Entries will be reviewed by the FOSB Board Members and the three finalists will be voted on by FOSB membership. All decisions are final. Submissions will not be accepted once the deadline lapses. The winner will be contacted via the email address provided during entry. If no email address is provided the winner will receive a phone call. If no response is received after 10 [days] business days, a new winner will be selected and the previous winner will forfeit all rights to the prize.



2021



2022



2023



2024



2025

Reminder: No individual membership renewal notices are sent.

**Your renewal date follows your name on the mailing address page of this Newsletter
and on your Annual Membership Card.**

If you are unsure of your membership date email friendsofsaratoga@gmail.com and your last renewal date will be emailed to you.

Become a Friend of Saratoga Battlefield

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

E-mail _____

FRIENDS OF SARATOGA BATTLEFIELD IS A NOT-FOR-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION INCORPORATED UNDER THE N.Y.S
EDUCATION LAW.

Choose your membership level:

- ☐ \$15 Enlisted Personnel
- ☐ \$30 Noncommissioned Officer (Noncom)
- ☐ \$50 Commissioned Officer
- ☐ \$100: Field Grade Officer "Battlefield Club"
- ☐ Other (>\$100 also Battlefield Club)

Make checks payable to: FRIENDS OF
SARATOGA BATTLEFIELD and mail to:

Friends of Saratoga Battlefield
648 Route 32
Stillwater, NY 12170

**Membership renewal and donations may be completed on-line at
www.friendsofthesaratogabattlefield.org.**





**Friends of the Saratoga Battlefield 2024
Membership Postcard Photo Contest Winner**

**Friends of the Saratoga Battlefield
648 Route 32
Stillwater NY 12170**