

This is NewsLetter Issue No. Three ~ For the year 2022

Fort Bedford

In the Bedford County region, the first and foremost fortified structure in use during the American Revolutionary War was actually constructed during the French and Indian War.

The Forbes Expedition, named for General John Forbes, was launched in the early summer of 1758 to capture Fort Duquesne from the French. Fort Duquesne was the southernmost of the fortifications that the French constructed to guard their beaver fur trapping enterprise in the Ohio Valley. It stood at the "Forks of the Ohio" which is what the point of land where the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio Rivers merged was called. The fortification, and the strategic point upon which it stood, was coveted by the English who saw the site as the gateway to the Mississippi Valley. An English trader, William Trent, operated a trading post at the site during the 1740s, so the English felt that the region belonged to

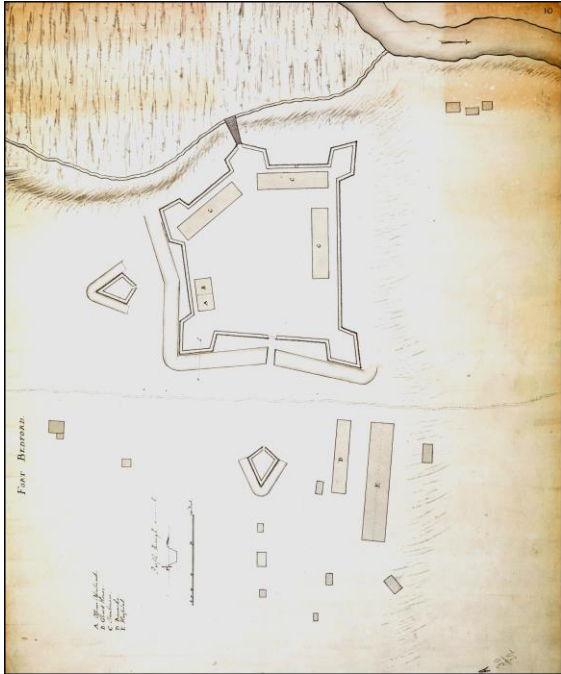
them. English soldiers of the Virginia Colony built Fort Prince George in January and February of 1754, but the French captured it on 18 April 1754. They tore down the



British structure and built their own fort in its place. Following a failed attempt to take the fort by British General Edward Braddock in 1754, a second attempt

was launched in 1758 under the direction of General Forbes.

Despite the name on the label, the 'Forbes Expedition' was led and managed by Colonel Henry Bouquet. General Forbes remained at Carlisle due to illness. The Swiss-born Bouquet brought the British Army westward from Carlisle, cutting a road as he went and building fortified supply depots along the way. The entire system of the road and the forts was named *The Communication*.



By July 1758, the British Army had reached the region just east of 'the Narrows' of the Raystown Branch of the Juniata River where it cuts a gap through Evitts Mountain. Immediately to the west of the gap, Dunnings Creek empties into the Juniata River. The fur trader, John Wray constructed a trading post in the inside angle of the 'V' formed by the merging waterways. He constructed two log buildings, one in which he resided while engaged in his trading business during the summer months and another in which to store his goods to be traded with the Amerindians. Because he surrounded his buildings with a fence, his trading post was known as a 'town' (from the German word *zaun* meaning a group of buildings surrounded by a fence or wall).

Colonel Bouquet rode throughout the region to the west of Ray's 'town' to scout out a good spot to construct another fortified supply depot. He chose a site

on a bluff above the Juniata River about a mile and a half west of the trading post. Being the most prominent of the trading posts in the region (Garrett Pendergass had a trading post at the foot of the small hill chosen by Bouquet), 'Raystown' was the name used by Bouquet to reference the new fort. Although it was never called *Fort Raystown*, the site was often referred to as *'The Fort At Raystown'* or *'The Fort Near Raystown'*.

John Hains was a young man at the time he arrived with the British Army to the region in which Fort Bedford would be constructed. John had been commissioned as a Sergeant in 12 June 1757, and now, a year later, he was serving in Major Joseph Shippen's Company of Foot, part of the Second Battalion of the Pennsylvania Regiment commanded by Lieutenant Colonel James Burd.

On 24 June 1758, John Hains wrote a letter to his parents. He noted that he was at the "*Camp at Raes town*". He told them that "*wee intend to bild a fort here in order for to store provisions and amanision...*"

The construction of Fort Bedford (which incidentally had no actual name attached to it at first) was accomplished by mid-August 1758.

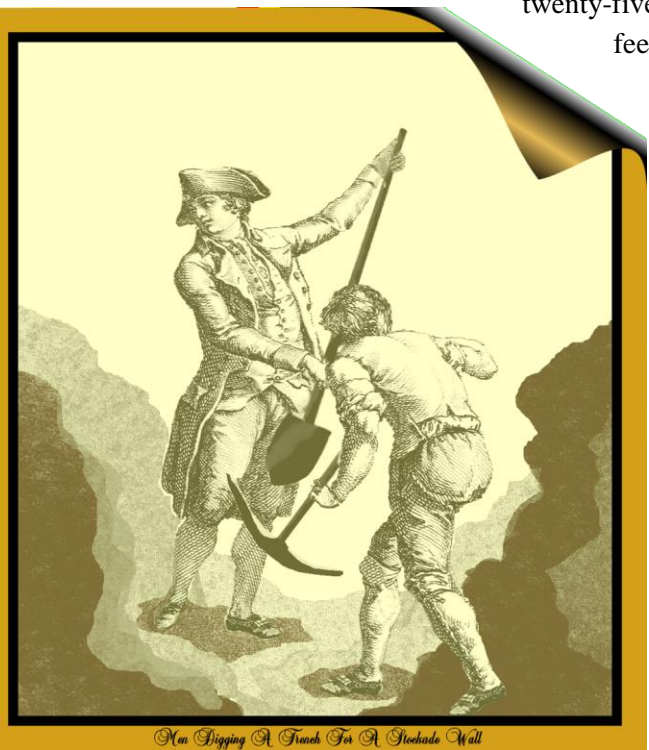
A five-sided structure was designed and laid out on the bluff overlooking the Juniata River. Bastions were laid out at each corner. The outline was then dug out as a 'V' shaped ditch into which logs would be placed upright to form a stockade wall. The stockade wall alone was needed on the north side since the land dropped off sharply to the river. The east wall also would overlook a steep slope. The south and west walls would be on the level of the hill's summit, so the ditch was widened to form a dry moat

The layout and structure of Fort Bedford was no different than any other contemporary provincial fort. The idea was to make the enclosing wall impregnable from the outside, but easily defended from the inside. The construction of a stockade, *i.e.* a fort constructed of upright logs, during the Eighteenth Century, required the services of a skilled ax-man. Trees with relatively straight trunks, measuring at least eighteen feet in length, would be felled, or chopped down. That was simple enough for any man who was strong enough to swing a felling ax. Then each felled tree was cleaned of any and all branches so that the

resulting log would be able to be placed side by side with others as tightly as possible. But it was not simply a matter of standing each felled and cleaned log upright and assuming the work was done. The logs needed to be squared and hewn flat on two opposing sides so that each log would fit snugly together with its neighbors in the wall. Working on the log as he would on one to be used in the construction of a house or barn, an ax-man, using the felling ax or a hatchet, would score the log, *i.e.* he would hew, or cut, a series of deep vertical slashes a few inches apart along the entire length of the log. Then a broad ax would be used to chip out the wood between the slashes. The result would be a somewhat level, flat surface running the length of the log. An adze might be employed to 'smooth out' the marks left in the scoring and chipping of the log if it was intended for a dwelling, but in regard to a fortification, time would probably not have been wasted on that process. Directly opposite the first side, another side would be flattened and straightened by the ax-man. The end of each log which would be considered its 'top' end would be hacked into a point. The squared logs would be stood upright in the V-shaped ditch, flat sides touching one another. Then laths, *i.e.* small thin boards, would be spiked or nailed to two or more upright logs near their tops to hold them together, although the available evidence does not note if that was the case at Fort Bedford. It has been estimated that the fort's stockade wall would have required at least 2,000 such logs. The ground that had been excavated from the ditch was pushed back in against the upright logs' bases and tamped down tight.

Following the completion of the wall, a platform perhaps only six feet wide was constructed against the inside of the wall, running roughly the entire length of the enclosing stockade. This platform would have been perhaps four to five feet off the ground. The platform would allow the fort's garrison to have an elevated vantage point over any attackers through loopholes cut between the logs at points between ten and twelve feet above the exterior ground level. Attackers would not be able to easily poke musket barrels through the loopholes at that height. Swivel guns were mounted to fire through certain of the loopholes.

According to maps of the fort, including the one illustrating this article which was made for General Jeffrey Amherst in the fall of 1758, three log buildings were constructed inside the walls of the stockade. Initially one would think that such buildings would have been used as soldiers' barracks. But the primary purpose of the fort near Raystown was to serve as a protected supply depot during the Expedition. By understanding that, the discovery that the three buildings constructed inside the stockade were intended to serve as storehouses does not seem so unusual. The storehouses would prove to be necessary due to the immense quantity of supplies that the army would need on the expedition. In a letter to General Forbes, Bouquet noted: "*We have storehouses to hold 3 months' provisions for the army, and we shall build some for the baggage, etc.*" The three buildings, at least one of which possibly measured 120 feet in length and twenty-five feet



An Digging A Trench For A Stockade Wall

wide, proved to be inadequate for the army's storage needs over the course of the next year, as was noted in a letter Lieutenant Ourry wrote to Colonel Bouquet. On 24 May 1759, writing from Lancaster, Ourry stated: "*And I beleive, [sic] particularly at Bedford a new Forrage Store will be necessary, and I don't think it can be made in the Fort but might be joining to that which Stands by itself (near the end of the Hospital,*

over against where Col Armstrong lived) that being already a Forrage Store, in the Loft of which I keep Hay. And I believe it would not be amiss to finish the Waggon Houses, which I had begun below Frazer's House as they want very little more than Shingling, & will be very usefull for Sundry uses when completed.

Should be glad of your particular Instructions on these Heads, in the mean time the first thing I shall set them about shall be making a Wright shop, near the Smiths."

[Note: The word 'wright' would refer to a wheelwright or wainwright, and the word 'smiths' would refer to a blacksmith.]

The location of the stockade fort on the small hill overlooking the Juniata River was strategically sound, but access to the river might be necessary. A stockade-walled stairway was constructed from the bastion located in the center of the north wall to the base of the cliff and river's edge. Loopholes were cut into the stockade walls lining the steps, so that anyone approaching along the river bank could be fired upon.

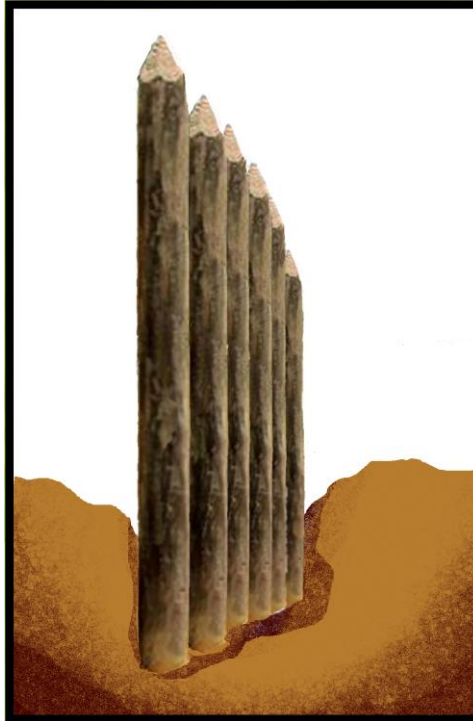
The fort was named 'Fort Bedford' at some time General Stanwix, mentioned the fort and called it by the name of *Fort Bedford* in a letter to Governor Denny dated 13 August 1759. Stanwix has therefore been credited by many early Bedford County historians as having been the person who named the fort. But nearly a full year before Stanwix's letter, in December 1758 a merchant working for the British Army, Adam Hoops, used the name *Fort Bedford* as the dateline in a letter to Colonel Bouquet, who was then at Fort Ligonier. If a merchant with the army used the name, he must have heard the troops using it.

The Forbes Expedition was successful in capturing the Forks of the Ohio, but it did not succeed in capturing Fort Duquesne. Near the 24th of November 1758, as the British advanced toward the fort from Fort Ligonier, the French set fire to the ammunition in the powder magazine, blew it up and

quickly evacuated the site. Fort Bedford had served the expedition well by functioning as a clearinghouse for cattle and other livestock to feed the army.

When the French and Indian War moved north into New England, Fort Bedford continued to be garrisoned to guard over the Pennsylvania frontier.

Fort Bedford was maintained as a British Fort until 1766.



That year marked the end of Pontiac's War, which had erupted in 1763, and the evacuation of all of the British outposts along the Communication. Garrett Pendergass wrote a letter to John Penn, the Provincial Governor of Pennsylvania in October 1766 for recompense because his property had been confiscated by the Proprietors. In that letter he stated: "...since the King's Troops evacuated that Fort..." After 1766, Fort Bedford would have been occupied, if at all, only by American militia.

The fact that Fort Bedford was not garrisoned by British Army troops after 1766 means that the claim by James Smith that he and his Black Boys were the 'first American Rebels to capture a British fort' in 1769 was a fictitious story.

The only source of the so-called 'capture' of Fort Bedford by American rebels is the autobiography of James Smith. No record of the incident was recorded in the papers collected together in the Pennsylvania Archives. No record of the incident was recorded at the Cumberland County Court House. The only source of any information on the incident was written by James

Smith himself, which he published in 1799, thirty years after the incident. He claimed to have executed his capture of the fort on 12 September 1769 ~ three years after the British troops evacuated the fort.

During the year 1769, the Amerindians had made a number of incursions into the region around the three-year-old town of Bedford. As noted by Smith: “*yet, the traders continued carrying goods and warlike stores to them.*” Alarmed at the situation, a number of persons plundered the offending traders’ stores, which they then destroyed. Although their actions were ostensibly for the safety of their fellow Euro~American settlers, the persons who plundered the traders’ goods were arrested. Whether they were justified in attempting to deprive the Amerindians of ammunition was inconsequential in regard to the fact that ordinary citizens were not allowed to take the law into their own hands. The arrested persons were fettered in iron shackles and confined in the guard-house in Fort Bedford. The fact that the arrested persons were confined in the fort is not as significant as it might initially appear. Being held prisoner by red-coated British soldiers wielding bayonet-fixed muskets in a formidable stockade-surrounded fort is the stuff of a dramatic movie. But, as noted, the red-coated British troops had evacuated the fort three years earlier. Activity at the fort, keeping watch for any attack by the Amerindians no doubt came to an end when Pontiac’s War was quelled by Bouquet in 1765, and that is probably why the British army evacuated the fort by the following year. Although James Smith did not state it in so many words in his memoirs, the persons arrested for plundering the traders’ goods would have had to have been confined somewhere. In 1769, the town of Bedford was not a county seat. The ‘county’ was two years away. There was no county gaol or prison at that time. There was, in fact, no borough in 1769; Bedford was simply a small frontier village. The rule of law in the region was enforced by the Cumberland County authorities, such as the sheriff and his deputies. So when James Smith made the statement in his memoirs that “*some of these persons, with others, were apprehended and laid in irons in the guard-house in Fort Bedford...*”, the assumption should not be made that it was because the ‘British army’ was in control, or

even present at the time, but rather because the fort, though in the process of decaying, would have been the most logical building, if not the only ‘public’ building, in which to confine the prisoners. Smith had engaged a friend by the name of William Thompson to gain information on where and how the prisoners were being held. When he and seventeen of the ‘Black Boys’ arrived near the village, Smith met up with Thompson, who informed him that “*the commanding officer had...ordered thirty men upon guard.*” James Smith did not state that the fort was garrisoned by the British Army. By calling him the ‘commanding officer,’ the man heading the provincial authority could have been a sheriff or a provincial militia officer. Also, in regard to this point, the number of men ‘ordered upon guard’ did not necessarily mean that that number of men actually responded for the guard duty. By stating that the ‘commanding officer’ ordered thirty men to guard the prisoners, Smith implied that his little band of eighteen men going up against a superior force of thirty, would be more daring than it might actually have been. At day-break, Thompson told Smith that the gate was finally opened and there were only three sentinels ~ the rest of the guard were ‘*taking a morning dram*’, suggesting that they were off getting drunk. Smith completed his narrative of the event with: “*I then concluded to rush into the fort, and told Thompson to run before me to the arms, we ran with all our might, and as it was a misty morning, the centinels scarcely saw us until we were within the gate, and took possession of the arms. Just as we were entering, two of them discharged their guns, though I do not believe they aimed at us. We then raised a shout, which surprized the town, though some of them were well pleased with the news. We compelled a black-smith to take the irons off the prisoners, and then we left the place.*” How Smith knew that some of the townspeople were ‘well pleased with the news’ is not explained, and as no one felt compelled to record the event other than Smith himself, we will never know. So while Smith and his Black Boys might have truly attacked the fort, it would have been Cumberland County Militia, rather than red-coated British troops, and only three who were in control of the fort at the time. Since Smith and his Black Boys left as quickly as they came, the fort itself

was not really ‘captured’ by American rebels. Being captured would imply that it was taken possession of and held for a period of time. Smith and his men, according to his own words simply rushed in, stole some guns, freed the men who had committed a crime and ran off. The incident didn’t make much of an impression on anyone at the time. It wasn’t even reported by any of the local justices of the peace or the sheriff to the Cumberland County Court. Instead of flouting that “*Fort Bedford was the first British fort to be attacked and captured by American rebels,*” it should more accurately be stated that Fort Bedford was the first already evacuated British fort with no British soldiers present to be attacked and immediately abandoned by a self-appointed vigilante group. But that doesn’t sound very dramatic and noble, so James Smith sort of embellished the tale and laid claim to an honor he really didn’t deserve. The lack of accuracy doesn’t

prevent re-enactors from staging mock attacks on the fort in present-day celebrations, though.

There exist no physical records to prove that Fort Bedford was utilized during the American Revolutionary War. But there is no reason to assume that it was not. The fort, being seventeen years old in 1775, would have been the most appropriate place from which the Bedford County Militia could operate. The Court House consisted only of a large and a small court room and a jail. The Bedford County Lieutenant, such as John Piper between 1777 and 1780, and his subordinate officers would have needed a place to meet and plan activities. They no doubt would have met in one of the buildings within the stockade.

Fort Bedford probably started to deteriorate by the late 1780s. When George Washington and the Federal Army arrived in 1794 to quell the Whiskey Rebellion, the fort was said to be mostly in ruins.



The next meeting of the
Frontier Patriots Chapter
of the Sons of the American Revolution
will be held at Hoss’s restaurant
at Business 220, Bedford, PA
on Saturday, 10 September 2022
starting at 12 Noon.

I remarked, in the last newsletter’s “President’s Comments” on the Chapter’s website ~ frontierpatriots.com . I hope that those of you who are able have visited the website. I only want to mention at this time that the project of updating the listing of Patriots buried in Bedford, Blair, Fulton and Huntingdon Counties (with links to pages containing vital information and images of tombstones and pensions) has been completed. I have also uploaded a pdf version of the book on which I have been working ~ *Depredations on the Pennsylvania Frontier* ~ to the site.



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Frontier Patriots Chapter website: <https://frontierpatriots.com>