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GENERAL KNOX'S ARTILLERY PARK, PLUCKEMIN

BY MAX SCHRABISCH, PATERSON, N. J.*

THERE ARE FEW localities in the State of New Jersey as rich in Revolutionary lore as is the little village of Pluckemin. More than once was it brought into prominence during that period when deeds of momentous consequence were being enacted, deeds that in due time were to change the political aspects of this continent. More than once was it hallowed by the presence of George Washington, that noble spirit who, in the teeth of well-nigh insurmountable obstacles, gallantly fought on, a living inspiration to the patriots to sacrifice their all in an effort to shake off the British yoke and thus obtain that measure of freedom which is the most valuable asset in the life of a nation, the *conditio sine qua non* of all true progress.

It was on the fourth of January, 1777, shortly after the defeat of the English at Princeton, that the Father of his country arrived at Pluckemin. Here he wrote his report to Congress, then at Philadelphia, and left on the evening of the following day, which was Sunday. It is known that Generals Green and Sullivan visited this vicinity, and that the great drill-master of the army, Inspector General Baron von Steuben, had the troops lined up in parade here before the Commander-in-chief. About this time General Lafayette and a large body of French auxiliaries passed through Pluckemin on their way to reinforce the American army. The Pluckemin Academy, a spacious building long ago torn down, was, in 1779, the

*The author of the following article was the State archaeologist of New Jersey for four years, and during that period explored Passaic, Bergen, Sussex, Warren and Hunterdon counties, locating therein about 1,800 Indian camp sites and 60 rock shelters. Prior thereto he was in the employ of the American Museum of Natural History for two seasons. In its "Hudson-Fulton Memorial Volume," the Museum embodied, in a monograph, his researches for that institution, entitled "Indian Rockhouses in Northern Jersey and Southern New York."—EDITOR QUARTERLY.

scene of a brilliant gathering, the occasion being a ball tendered to General Washington and his officers. It is said that in point of splendor this affair eclipsed anything yet witnessed in this section of the country. Lastly, General Knox's little niece, Julia, was interred on Vander Veer's farm, near the churchyard, she having died quite suddenly while on a visit to her uncle.

While Pluckemin is, thus, remarkable for its historical association, all lingering about the War of the Revolution, the most tangible reminder of that critical period is, no doubt, the old "Artillery Park." It was situated less than a mile north-northeast of the village along the foot of Second Watchung Mountain, a short distance south of the point where it reaches its western extremity. Its elevation above sea level is about 220 feet. General Knox was in command of the Camp, at this Park, with a force of 1607 men, divided into 49 companies and equipped with 60 field-pieces composed of mortars, howitzers and some heavy cannon. The tract of land chosen was generally level, extending north due south, with the wooded hillside to the east and gently sloping fields to the west of it. At present much of the Camp is along the edge of the woods; other portions are on the hillside as well as in a strip of woods to the northwest. In the matter of potable water it was well supplied, there being four small streams within easy reach, all of them tributary to the North Branch of the Raritan river.

Although the major portion of the site of the camp is on Grant B. Schley's estate, outlying posts have been noted, both on the Woods farm adjoining it, and near the Buttermilk Falls, on T. M. James's farm, at a point commanding the entrance to the valley between the two Watchung mountains. There are detached posts in the shape of mounds on the Schley estate also; one of these is on the slope bordering a ravine, about 400 yards east of the main encampment; the other about a mile northeast of it, between the quarry and the Raritan river.

It was at the invitation of Mr. Schley, who owns most of the land once occupied by the Camp, that the writer undertook to make a thorough study of this old landmark, the purpose being to restore it as far as possible, and also to secure the remains left behind. During the eleven weeks devoted to the exploration of part of the Camp, many interesting discoveries were made tending to shed some light on the soldiers' mode of living, as well as on the exact position of the structures erected by them. Owing to the limited time allowed for the work only a small portion of the Camp could be examined, i. e., a tract about 450 feet long by about 30 to 80 feet wide. This tract runs north and south along the east slope of the hill; it is quite narrow in the southern portion but widens out to the north.

When the research began there were practically no outward indications serving to disclose the nature of this locality except a group of low tumuli, or mounds. Of these twenty were observed, thirteen of them arranged in a straight line through the southern portion, the remaining seven being scattered irregularly north of it. Each mound averaged about ten feet in diameter and was two feet high. The southerly ones were usually from six to eight feet apart. The excavation of twelve of them invariably revealed a fireplace built near the centre, about a foot below the top. The soil within was discolored by ashes and charcoal and the rocks were fire-stained, that is, burned to the color of bricks. One of the mounds appeared to contain two hearths at right angles to each other. As a rule there were no remains associated with the mounds save a few bones, nails and pieces of chinaware or earthen jars. All the tumuli examined have been restored to their original condition, as far as possible.

Subsequent investigation gave evidence of a variety of traces all due to the activities of camp life. Most important of these were rocks laid quite regularly in the shape of squares and rectangles, and such are presumed to indicate the accurate site of shanties and other buildings. Some of these rock outlines were almost complete and could plainly be distinguished, but only after sweeping the surface and removing the weeds covering them. Others, however, were nearly obliterated, as many of the stones were missing. To identify them with some degree of certainty it became necessary to make use of pick and shovel, to question the subsoil as it were, with a view to settling the problem by means of the remains assumed to be buried there. This proceeded on the theory that remains would naturally be most plentiful within or near the sites. If the pick brought to light considerable debris at spots imperfectly marked, the determination could be accepted as satisfactory, and all that remained to be done was to reconstruct the rock enclosures.

As already stated, none of these outlines could be distinguished at the outset, by reason of the dense vegetation hiding everything from sight. To secure the best results it was deemed advisable to dig trenches extending from mound to mound. Observing the proper care, many of the rock outlines were laid bare, while recovering at the same time the relics occurring within them and near by. It was found that these outlines often consisted of a double row of stones, and were generally close to and east of the mounds. In other words, the shacks adjoined the mounds. An exception to this rule was found only in the northern section of the Camp. In the most southerly section there was a series of at least ten shack-sites all lying in a straight line east of a group of low tumuli and adjoining each other. They were all small, measuring about 8 by 7 feet, in contrast to several large ones in the other section, which were about 15 feet square.

It is quite apparent that the small shacks just alluded to were tenanted by but a single individual, while the larger ones were occupied by several persons.

In this connection it is to be remarked that a certain large site in the northern portion seems to have been a blacksmith shop, where oxen and horses were shod and nails made, for it was here that ox and horse shoes were dug up, along with hundreds of nails, hooks, iron rods, sheet iron and many curiously shaped pieces of iron. Moreover the subsoil was heavily charged with ashes and charcoal, suggestive of heavy fires. As a great many bones were also found, this place may have been a combination of blacksmith shop and kitchen. Two neighboring sites, north and south of it, respectively, appear also to have been used as kitchens, by reason of the profusion of bones unearthed there and the traces of fire which were very evident. No less than twenty-one sites of this description were excavated and subsequently restored, each yielding a varied assortment of remains, generally buried superficially at a depth less than a foot.

Another class of traces connected with the life of the soldiers once quartered here were the refuse heaps. As a matter of fact, bones, oyster shells and other debris were noted in all parts of the camp, that is, as far as it was examined. However, there seemed to be well-defined spots selected for the dumping of garbage and refuse. Three of these were found in the southern section within a few feet of the shanty sites. A layer of rocks was on top of each so that nothing could be seen save, perhaps, an isolated oyster shell or bone partially exposed to view. They were from four to six feet square and contained hundreds of bivalves, as well as bones, scraps of iron, nails and fragments of pottery. There being no sign of an artificial cavity, all this rubbish had evidently been deposited on the surface.

Special attention was paid to the refuse pits, of which four were discovered. Strange as it may seem, none of these could be discovered until a trench was dug, as they were all filled up to the level of the surrounding surface. The largest was fully three feet deep and six feet long by three feet wide. The excavation yielded hundreds of oyster and hard clam shells, along with beef and pig bones, pieces of sheet iron, nails and broken bottles and chinaware. Two of the smaller ones may have been oven sites as, in addition to the usual debris, they contained a deposit of lime mortar and some bricks, that is, material used in the building of ovens. Moreover, both the sides and floor of the pits gave the impression of having once been cemented, and there was unmistakable evidence of fires, as indicated by a thick stratum of ashes and charcoal near the bottom. In view of this we may be justified in assuming that these pits denote the position of ovens, even now remembered by some old people, the super-

structure of which was carted away a long time ago to be used in building culverts. By the same token, ovens may have stood within what is presumed to have been a blacksmith shop, but, more particularly, at the site adjoining it southward, where there was a layer of lime mortar, mixed with soil, a foot deep.

All the pits have been restored and some of their contents, notably shells and bones, thrown back into them. While there was nothing to suggest any of these pits by a depression, however slight, a large number of artificial cavities, all of them conspicuous, was observed both on the slope of the hill to the east and on the level tract of land along its base. They averaged about three feet in depth, but appeared, on examination, to be absolutely devoid of any remains whatever.

Of particular interest was the study of the hearths or fireplaces occurring throughout the whole length of the Camp. Apart from those associated with the mounds by being built into them, a group of ten hearths was observed that was not thus situated. And, indeed, they were either attached to shack-sites or within a few feet of them. To begin with, one of the fireplaces lay against the side of the hill in the southeast corner of the most southerly shack-site explored. It was an extremely crude structure and caved in as soon as the dirt about it was dug away. Another one was in the centre of a row of rocks forming the westerly enclosure of a neighboring shack. It was constructed in the shape of a horseshoe, about two feet wide, with the rocks piled up on top of each other, not above the surface but below it. A fireplace of similar construction was located in a site farther north. It, also, lay in the middle of a row of stones bounding the site to the west. About eighteen feet north of the latter there was a hearth built in the corner of a shack. As before, the stones forming it were completely buried in the soil, excepting the topmost ones, which projected just far enough above the surface to reveal, however faintly, the contour of the hearth.

Two more small fireplaces were discovered in the southern section of the Camp, about twenty-five feet east of a mound and in close proximity to a shack-site. All the remaining ones lay farther north and were roughly identical with those just spoken of, save one between a mound and a bone pit. This consisted of a large V-shaped boulder, which was deeply imbedded in the soil, and could, therefore, not be discerned until after the top layer had been removed. As the shape of this rock suggested a fireplace, an excavation was made in the space enclosed by it, resulting in the discovery of ashes and charcoal about a foot and a half beneath the surface.

To recapitulate, the tell-tale marks of former occupation dealt

with in the foregoing resolve themselves as follows: Mounds, about twenty, twelve of them excavated; shack-sites, exact number unknown, twenty-one restored; three shell heaps; four refuse pits, two of these probably oven-sites; two problematic oven-sites in the northern section of the Camp; ten small fireplaces.

In addition to this there was recovered a great variety of articles traceable to the Revolutionary period, and left by the soldiers then stationed in this vicinity. With the exception of a few bivalves and bones which lay on the surface, all relics were found imbedded in the soil, between the rocks and beneath them to a depth of about a foot. Most numerous of the remains noted were the nails, of which several thousand were dug up, all of them hand-made. As regards the preponderance of nails among the remains of this Camp, we may plausibly account for their occurrence in such quantities by assuming that the soldiers used them for building their barracks and shanties, the boards of which have long ago rotted away, while the more imperishable nails are preserved. In other words, it would seem that the occupants of this bivouac did not live in stone huts, as they sometimes did elsewhere. At the same time, they may have used log cabins also, all traces of which have now vanished. Although dozens of nails were encountered at each of the so-called shack-sites, i. e., in the space within the stone rows presumed to denote their outlines, they were met with in greatest abundance at the spot supposed to have been occupied by a blacksmith shop. This being the case, it was probably the place where they were made.

Within this same site and near it, several iron hooks were dug up, together with a large bolt, an iron ring, scraps of sheet iron, iron staples, a ramrod, a crude saw, a rifle bullet (hand-made), a broken horseshoe and three ox shoes. Speaking of the latter, it is known that during Colonial times much of the artillery was drawn by oxen. Hence, the presence of ox shoes, two for each hoof, at this site. Apart from this, there were unearthed here hundreds of bones, mostly of beef and pig, along with those of fowl and a few oyster shells. However, these same kitchen middings were observed at all the other sites also, albeit in lesser quantity. Other animal remains, identified by the investigator, included the bones of the wild turkey and of the bear, a bear claw and a raccoon jaw. It may be worth mentioning that a human tooth was dug up five inches beneath the surface within the site directly south of the blacksmith shop. This tooth was the second molar of the lower left jaw, and it was perfect but for a cavity below its crown. Being the cause of toothache, we may imagine that it

was pulled by the army surgeon, and dropped on the scene of the operation, to be dug up 140 years afterward.

Curiously shaped pieces of iron of a rather uncertain type and usage came in view both at the blacksmith shop, so-called, and at other places. A fork with very long thin prongs was found near one of the mounds. A cleaver and several clasp-knives, with bone handles, all badly corroded, came from different sites. Disk-shaped pieces of pewter, that is, a mixture of tin and lead, alloyed with some anti-mony, bismuth and copper, were not uncommon. Neither was there a scarcity of broken bottles, fragments of glass, earthen jars and china-ware, the latter mostly of Dutch manufacture. Among the debris there were fragments of clay pipes, such as stems and a bowl ornamented with a human face. There were also half a dozen gun flints, of smoky or milky quartz, and some broken buckles. Oyster and hard clam shells occurred at every site, often in great profusion, and it is evident that these bivalves contributed materially to the soldiers' sustenance.

Among the more interesting curios recovered we may mention rifle bullets, made by hand, grape shot and a single pellet, or small shot, about the size of a pea. The fact that no cannon balls were met with was rather disappointing, all the more so as Revolutionary mementoes of this type have repeatedly been found both at Martinsville and Bound Brook, not many miles distant; that is, at localities where detachments of Washington's army are known to have been cantoned. More than sixty buttons were dug up, most of them military, the others evidently belonging to vests and trousers. The former were about as large as a nickel and variously marked. Thus, a few displayed the initials "D. R." and "U. S. A.;" others exhibited the numbers "4," "29," "53" and "66," and about a score were decorated with a cannon and a flagstaff. These buttons, then, tell an eloquent tale, for they serve to enlighten us about the military units or regiments once stationed here; that is, the composition of the force commanded by General Knox. As regards the other kind of buttons, they were much smaller, about the size of a dime, and made of bone or metal. Some of these were ornamented with tiny crosses or concentric rings.

Three copper coins of equal size, almost as large as a half dollar, came to view in the southern portion of the Camp. Two of these lay within a few inches of each other, near one of the small hearths previously discussed. The first was in a fair state of preservation, showing on its obverse the head of the English King, George the Second, with the words "Georgius II. Rex" around the margin; on its reverse, a figure symbolizing Great Britain, with the word "Britannia" above it,

and the date "1739" at the bottom. The second coin was badly worn and could not be identified. The third coin lay near the centre of a shack, about five inches below the surface. It displayed on its obverse a profile view of King George the Second, and above it the words "Georgius II. Rex;" on the reverse, the coat-of-arms of Ireland, i. e., a harp surmounted by a crown, with the date "1760" at the bottom.

Some mystery attaches to a chunk of dark blue argillite found buried about four inches deep within one of the small shack-sites. This mineral, popularly known as "blue jingler," is not native to Somerset County, but occurs chiefly in the mountainous district north-west and west of Flemington, Hunterdon county. It was extensively quarried by the red men, having been highly prized by them because of the excellent material it furnished, in lieu of flint, quartz and jasper, for the manufacture of arrow heads and spear points.

The argillite culture, once engaged in by the Indians, may be traced far beyond the bounds of Hunterdon county, and, to be sure, a large proportion of the aboriginal artifacts, gathered in Somerset County, were made of that material. As for the piece of argillite found on the shack-site, there can be little doubt that it was dropped at that spot by some roving Indian centuries ago, and dug under when the soldiers came here. Showing no traces of workmanship, it is simply raw material, and may have been brought here from one of the nearby Indian camp sites, the nearest of which was on the east bank of the brook flowing through the Woods farm, some 200 yards south-west of the Knox Camp.



—From Photo. Lent by Mr. L. V. Ludlow, Far Hills.