

1998

## Book Review: The Great Warpath: British Military Sites from Albany to Crown Point by David Starbuck

Charles L. Fisher

Follow this and additional works at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha>

 Part of the [Archaeological Anthropology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Fisher, Charles L. (1998) "Book Review: The Great Warpath: British Military Sites from Albany to Crown Point by David Starbuck," *Northeast Historical Archaeology*: Vol. 27 27, Article 12.  
<https://doi.org/10.22191/neha/vol27/iss1/12> Available at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha/vol27/iss1/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in *Northeast Historical Archaeology* by an authorized editor of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact [ORB@binghamton.edu](mailto:ORB@binghamton.edu).

discipline. Most important, it allows the reader to understand the main issues and challenges facing maritime archaeology at this time. The future of the field will be determined by how the maritime archaeologists of today answer these questions before them.

## References

Senwick, Valerie.

- 1996 Editorial. *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 25(1): 1-3.

Schiffer, Michael B.

- 1987 *Formation Processes of the Archaeological Record*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.

David J. Stewart earned an M.A. from the Nautical Archaeology Program at Texas A&M University, and is currently a Ph.D. student at Boston University.

David J. Stewart  
Department of Archaeology  
Boston University  
675 Commonwealth Avenue  
Boston, MA 02215  
djs1@bu.edu

**THE GREAT WARPATH: BRITISH MILITARY SITES FROM ALBANY TO CROWN POINT** by David Starbuck, 1999, University Press of New England, Hanover, NH, 224 pages, 100 illus., 50 figs., 19.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Charles L. Fisher

The celebration of the American Bicentennial had an enormous effect on historical scholarship of the Revolutionary War. Today, the important historical questions are no longer centered only on battlefield strategies but require investigating larger issues of colonial society (Royster 1979; Kim 1982; Higginbotham 1987). Military sites are products of

past societies and express the ideas of those societies, which are complex and often contradictory. Contemporary archaeologists interested in military sites are aware of the dangers of militarism, excessive nationalism, and the general "drums and guns" history of scholars of previous eras.

Archaeologists have argued that anthropological archaeology can provide new information about armed conflict, military sites, and colonial society through a detailed description of the ordinary soldier involved in these colonial conflicts. The daily life and material conditions of the soldiers; their huts, diet, clothing, camps, and forts have been areas where archaeology has contributed to our current understanding of this period (Poirier 1976; Rutsch and Peters 1977; Fisher 1983; Parrrington, Schenck, and Thibaut 1984; Seidel 1987; Howe 1991). Archaeology has provided information that may confirm or contradict historical accounts, but always results in a richer account of the past.

The archaeological orientation of *The Great Warpath* causes the author to ask a series of questions in the process of telling his story. Readers will find information regarding the different living conditions of officers and their men, the process of adapting European forts to the American landscape, the fit between the ideal, proscribed method and the real, archaeological evidence of camp life, and the construction methods employed in the impermanent military architecture that is largely undocumented through traditional sources.

The interpretation of the multiple meanings of artifacts to the people who made, acquired, used, and discarded them awaits future studies of the sites and collections presented here. The extensive sociological and ethnographic literature on excessive alcohol consumption and the development of work discipline needs to be applied to the large quantities of wine bottle glass found at military sites. The large numbers of these artifacts represent soldiers resistance to authority and the "total institution" of the military. While officer's social drinking was accepted, drinking among the soldiers was discouraged and punished. At the same time, strong drink

was used to reward troops for success or for encouragement during strenuous duties (Jones and Smith 1985).

Other artifacts from military sites evidence soldiers' resistance to authority. In several documented collections, such as Saratoga Battlefield, iron barrel bands were converted into grills. Despite the army's attempt to stop soldiers from frying and broiling meats, the men continued to prepare their meals in the manner they preferred. Excavations conducted by the New York State Museum in 1998 and the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation in the early 1970s at a British Guard House in Albany recovered evidence of wampum production, as well as metal and leather scraps, indicating soldiers were involved in the economy through domestic production. The frequently observed interior finishing nails among the burned ash within hut fireplaces depicts another problem of control within the army and a source of conflict between the army and the local population. Artifacts found on military sites may have been acquired through "midnight marauding" and indicate the tension between the military and civilian society.

The archaeology of the material world of the soldiers of the Revolutionary War confronts one of the most cherished myths of our national origin. The new military historians have pointed out that the myth of the middle class, citizen-soldier standing up against, and defeating, the best army in the world had its origin in the early part of the war (Martin and Lender 1982). As the war dragged on, however, the citizen soldiers remained home and the burden of the war fell upon the working class soldiers who filled the ranks of the Continental Army. *The Great Warpath* is the story of the early years of the American rebellion, up to the battle of Saratoga, where the militia played an important role and became the source of a national myth of origin.

Conflicts within the army resulted from regional and class differences. A well-documented clash at Fort Ticonderoga in 1776 exhibited elements of both when a Massachusetts officer was assaulted by a drunken Pennsylvania officer for maintaining shoemaking

tools in his room, where one of his sons worked (Kaplan 1950-51).

The Hudson River, Lake George, and Lake Champlain corridor was at the center of the European struggle for North American resources in the colonial period. David Starbuck refers to this as the "Great Warpath" due to the large number of military sites from the early conflicts of the 18th century, the Seven Years War, and the American Revolution located within this region. These sites include fortifications, camps, sunken ships, and battlefields, which are the subject of this book written by an archaeologist with the goal of obtaining new information about our collective past, while at the same time concerned with site preservation, public education, and heritage tourism.

David Starbuck has provided us with a lively and interesting summary of his nearly 15 years of excavations on military sites of the 18th century in northeastern New York and Vermont. This book will become the place to begin for everyone who is familiar with the documented history of the region and is ready to gain new information and insights that derive from a different perspective. His story is a highly personal one, told in a narrative that acknowledges the role of woodchucks in archaeological discovery, as well as careful, thorough research by dedicated scholars and volunteers.

The motivation for this book is the author's love for the historic places of the region he considers his home and his growing displeasure with the public's lack of education regarding the significant events that occurred at them. He sets out here to inform new readers and provide new information to those who are familiar with his topic. The advantage, for both types of readers of this volume, is the enthusiasm conveyed in these new investigative adventures at old haunts.

A problem with the orientation of this book to a general readership is in the details, or lack of them. Those specialists who want every tobacco pipe mark, button insignia, or gun maker will be disappointed and will have to search out the specific excavation reports, collections, or await a future volume. This

does not negate the importance of this book and the wealth of information presented.

This book includes more than the title implies. Besides "British military" sites there are others reported here, such as Crown Point and Ticonderoga that were occupied by French, British, and American armies. Mt. Independence was constructed by the Americans, then taken and occupied by the British. The earthworks at Peebles Island were constructed by the Americans on the south side of the Mohawk River. The Woodworth farm and the Schuyler estate at Saratoga may be considered British colonial sites, although it may be more accurate to refer to them as American domestic sites.

The critical role of Native Americans in the colonial wars is acknowledged in this book. They are not well represented in the archaeological remains reported here, except in the injuries observed on the Fort William Henry massacre victims. Intensive study of collections from these sites may identify native occupants, although many were participants in the consumer revolution of the 18th-century. Many natives who fought in the Revolution were Christians who wore European clothes, yet maintained hairstyles, facial tattoos and modified Europeans trade goods into traditional items (Calloway 1995). At the site of Fort Hunter in the Mohawk Valley, a Mohawk house within this 18th century British fort was identified through documentary research, the presence of catlinite bead production, and the absence of flatware from the European ceramic collection (Fisher 1995).

This book contains nine chapters that consist of an introduction to the region, five chapters that describe the authors excavations at specific sites situated between Saratoga and Crown Point, a chapter on Crown Point, a section on underwater archaeology of Lakes Champlain and George, and a conclusion. Text boxes inserted throughout cover additional topics, such as military hospitals and the role of women at military sites. The importance of confronting the rampant looting at military sites is evident in the location of the box addressing "What's Wrong with Treasure-Hunting?" on page 5. A brief chronology of the French and Indian War and the Revolu-

tionary War precede the introduction and a glossary is included in the final pages. A small list of sources for "Further Reading" concludes each chapter. A major contribution of this volume is in the 150 illustrations and figures, including numerous site plans that provide the spatial dimension of camp life.

The author's investigations at the American Headquarters and Schuylers' House at Saratoga National Historical Park are the most archaeologically challenging and provide instructive examples of the methods and problems of military sites archaeology. The author clearly and briefly recounts the battle and its importance to our history. The significance of this event to this story, however, is explained as the creation of an enormous archaeological site that includes campsites, redoubts, farmhouses and two battlefields within the current 3400-acre National Historical Park.

The archaeological and historical importance of this site is reflected in the numerous archaeologists who have worked here since the 1940s for the purpose of locating specific places for public interpretation. An intriguing list of features and remains are presented, but this narrative does not provide the author the room to explore the details and varieties of fortifications that were constructed. Scholars will have to consult the individual reports referenced to see section drawings or plans from these excavations.

I remember the discoveries of the two soldiers in the redoubt trenches during the 1972 investigations and was hoping to see a modern physical analysis of these individuals. The victims of this conflict may tell us a great deal from a detailed study. Similarly, the National Park Service conducted a collection management project at this site in the 1980s and the archaeological collections from these earlier excavations are organized and accessible. The National Park Service's commitment to maintain and preserve these collections will provide a source of new information long after the excavations are completed.

Starbuck was able to initiate professional investigations in the vicinity of the American Headquarters when the Parks Service purchased additional land in 1984. The Woodworth farm was especially interesting to

archaeologists as the location of Gates' headquarters and the field hospital during the battle. The results of field investigations at the hospital site, however, were not as clear as hoped. The identification of the barn was difficult and the absence of medical implements a disappointment.

The difficulty of identifying a short-term military occupation on the Woodworth farm, which existed before and after the famous battle, is discussed along with those features of the farm, such as the cellar of the house, a well, and a stone drain. Archaeological research here has uncovered the material evidence of a Saratoga farm occupied before, during, and after the famous battle. This becomes a physical reminder of the nature of this armed conflict, the relationship between military and civilian aspects of society, and raises questions concerning our need to separate them.

The discussion of archaeology at the Schuyler House continues this theme of domestic sites caught in the conflict. The previous excavations at this site are given due consideration in this account, since they provide the information that may be used to interpret this estate complex. This residence stands in dramatic contrast to the Woodworth farm, exhibiting the class structure of colonial society that is replicated by the military. Despite the lack of specific military items at this site, it has a great deal to say regarding the social structure of the revolutionary society.

In the context of this volume, the investigation of the American Headquarters and the Schuyler House is an excellent demonstration of the archaeologists' responsibility to document and report excavated features, even when they are not obviously the object of the work at hand. In addition, the Woodworth foundation and the "burned building" at the Schuyler House were not excavated completely, so this evidence has not been destroyed, but remains for future investigations and interpretations.

The archaeology of Fort Edward and the nearby Roger's Island may be the most important research described in this book. During the Seven Years War, thousands of soldiers camped in the area of Fort Edward and thou-

sands more passed through in the expeditions against the French to the north. This installation was a major supply depot and military hospital during this period, while the nearby island in the Hudson River served as the primary camp of Roger's Rangers. Along with the significant discoveries of a portion of the fort's outer works reported by Joel Grossman (1990) at the site of the current wastewater treatment facility, *The Great Warpath* documents the first professional excavations at these well known locations.

At Roger's Island Starbuck and his team located and excavated hut sites, dumps, a soldiers' latrine, fire-reddened soil from lead shot casting, a hospital constructed on square vertical posts, and barracks. In the absence of building stone on the island, the Rangers built wooden huts with brick fireplaces about 11 feet square in order to shelter 5 to 10 soldiers. A larger foundation, 16 feet square, was found and interpreted as an officers' building. These remains, along with the numerous artifacts found in association with them, provide the direct evidence of the soldiers' lives that can provide new information about the past. I agree with Starbuck when he explains excavations could continue here for many years, but it is time to conduct detailed artifact, feature, and spatial analyses of the material recovered to date. The island and fort locations should be protected from further excavations unless threatened by development. Similarly, the collection of artifacts and field records must be cared for and protected as the only source for future studies of these sites that have been excavated.

The popular site of Fort William Henry, located on the south end of Lake George, was the subject of extensive archaeological excavations in the 1950s prior to the reconstruction of this fort. Despite the widespread belief that there was no archaeology left at this site, archaeologists in the 1990s were able to discover a very deep trash accumulation from the 18th century, an 18th-century ground surface at the original entrance to the fort, and the burned timbers from the East Barracks. Combined with the new investigation of the burials uncovered in the 1954 work at this site, this study demonstrates the tenacity of the archae-

ological record (and the archaeologist) and the information potential of old collections.

Similarly, recent experiences of archaeologists at Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point have indicated important information may be obtained from careful excavations at reconstructed forts and features. The extent of disturbances from past reconstruction activities cannot be assumed to be as complete as it may appear.

The discussion of the group of important sites around Lake George is a distressing story of site loss through rampant development and active looting. Emergency rescue excavations in 1975 and reported by Feister and Huey (1985) have provided some information on Fort Gage prior to its destruction for a motel. Fort William, according to Starbuck, may be lost before any professional excavations are carried out. Fort George has a somewhat better future since it is within a state-owned park, although this has not stopped artifact seekers from damaging this site. The tourist town of Lake George appears to be in a most advantageous location relative to the wealth of historical and archaeological resources present and the potential economic benefit, yet for some reason it has not carried out a progressive program of interpretation.

Mount Independence, in contrast, has been the subject of a public interpretation program by the state of Vermont. Situated directly across a narrow in Lake Champlain from Fort Ticonderoga, it was constructed to control the waterway and prevent British ships from moving down the lake. Scholars of this period will be grateful that the modern research and collection storage facility at Fort Ticonderoga is pointed out in a text box early in the discussion of Mount Independence. About 30 hut sites were discovered by the archaeologists at the Mount, as well as barracks, fortifications and trash middens. These huts produced a wealth of information regarding the life of these soldiers during the initial years of the revolution. Prior to this volume, my favorite source for the world of the common soldiers at Mount Independence was the copy of the John Calfe powder horn map on my coffee cup. This powder horn, pictured in this book, depicts the soldiers' landscape of huts and houses, as well as the forts and batteries.

The author's treatment of Mount Independence is quite detailed and includes floor plans, excavation and artifact photographs, as well as descriptions of the excavations and finds. The excavations of the well-preserved hospital foundation discovered an unfinished wing to the building, which was not included in the drawings of the hospital found in the Schuyler Papers. A photograph of the unique wine bottle with the inscribed name and year "James Hill 1777" which was excavated from a soldiers hut is included here.

The remains of the massive British fort at Crown Point, a name that follows the earlier French one of Scalp Point, are the subjects of Chapter 7. The ruins' outer works, a dock, lime kilns, villages, huts, as well as those of the earlier French fort, begun in 1734, are visible at this New York State owned site. Several of the archaeology projects carried out by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation are briefly described, but Starbuck notes the real story at this site is in the visitors' abilities to experience the spatial dimensions of the 18th-century military/civilian landscape.

*The Great Warpath* is the result of the water-oriented transportation systems of the colonial period. The importance of the lakes and rivers to the movement of armies resulted in numerous artifacts ending up at the bottoms of these waters. Earlier efforts to recover sunken vessels from this region were generally unsuccessful due to the absence of available financing for preservation treatments of the water saturated wood. Several ships brought up to the surface have been completely lost as a result. The remarkable exception is the *Philadelphia*, constructed in 1776 and raised from Lake Champlain in 1935. This ship is currently on display in the National Museum of American History.

Fortunately, the current archaeologists working on underwater sites in this region are highly professional and preservation oriented. They have been actively locating, recording, and interpreting the wide variety of evidence present beneath the lakes. These scholars have developed several Submerged Heritage Preserves which enable divers to visit specific sites. These underwater parks represent the current resolution to the conflict between pro-

tection, preservation, and interpretation. Unfortunately, all three shipwreck sites have been vandalized and improved monitoring programs are needed (Department of Environmental Conservation 1998).

This volume concludes with a summary of archaeology's contributions to military sites research in the region and archaeologists' responsibilities to interpret and protect these sites. The author believes the problem of the destructive looting of these sites must be addressed through awareness of the importance of these places to everyone. Professionals must weigh the careful management and preservation of these sites against the need to acquire new information about the past. The existence of large scientific collections from these sites now should encourage a conservation ethic among archaeologists in this region. Scholars interested in contributing to our knowledge in this area and inspired by this volume will seek out these collections and continue to investigate the issues presented here.

## REFERENCES

- Calloway, Colin G.  
1995 *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities*. Cambridge University Press, NY.
- Department of Environmental Conservation  
1998 *A Diver's Guide to Lake George: New York's Submerged Heritage Preserves Guide*. Region 5, Ray Brook, New York.
- Feister, Lois M., and Paul R. Huey  
1985 Archaeological Testing at Fort Gage, a Provincial Redoubt of 1758 at Lake George. *The Bulletin and Journal of Archaeology for New York State* 90: 40-59.
- Fisher, Charles L.  
1983 Archaeology at New Windsor Cantonment: Construction and Social Reproduction at a Revolutionary War Encampment. *Northeast Historical Archaeology* 12: 15-23.  
1995 Conflict and Accommodation on the Colonial Frontier. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology, Washington, D.C.
- Grossman, Joel  
1990 *The Excavation, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Transitional Period, Late Woodland Period and Colonial Occupations at the Little Wood Creek Site, Fort Edward, Washington County, New York*, Vol. 1. Prepared for Washington County Sewer Authority by Grossman & Associates, Inc., New York.
- Higginbotham, Don  
1987 The Early American Way of War: Reconnaissance and Appraisal. *The William and Mary Quarterly* 64(2): 230-273.
- Howe, Dennis E.  
1991 The Archeology of a 1776 Cantonment of New Hampshire Regiments. *The New Hampshire Archeologist* 32(1): 1-25.
- Jones, Olive R., and E. Ann Smith  
1985 Glass of the British Military, 1755-1820. *Studies in Archaeology, Architecture and History*. National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Parks Canada, Ottawa.
- Kaplan, Sidney  
1950 Rank and Status Among Massachusetts Continental Officers. *American Historical Review* 56: 318-326.
- Kim, Sung Bok  
1982 The Continental Army and the American People: A Review Essay. *New York History* 63(4): 460-469.
- Martin, James Kirby, and Mark Edward Lender  
1982 *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789*. Harlan Davidson, Inc., Arlington Heights, IL.
- Parrington, Michael, Helen Schenck, and Jacqueline Thibaut  
1984 The Material World of the Revolutionary War Soldier at Valley Forge. In *The Scope of Historical Archaeology*, ed. by David G. Orr and Daniel G. Crozier, 125-162. Temple University Press, Philadelphia.

Poirier, David

- 1976 Camp Reading: Logistics of a Revolutionary War Winter Encampment. *Northeast Historical Archaeology* 5: 40-52.

Royster, Charles

- 1979 *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York.

Rutsch, Edward S., and Kim M. Peters

- 1977 Forty Years of Archaeological Research at Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, New Jersey. *Historical Archaeology* 11: 15-38.

Seidel, John L.

- 1987 *The Archaeology of the American Revolution: A Reappraisal & Case Study at the Continental artillery Cantonment of 1778-1779*, Pluckemin, New Jersey. Ph.D. diss., University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, University of Pennsylvania, MI.

Charles L. Fisher has a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the State University at Albany. He has worked as an archaeologist for the New York State Bureau of Historic Sites and currently at the New York State Museum. Recently, Fisher has been responsible for the discovery and analysis of the archaeological remains within the New York State Department of Transportation's project to reconstruct Pearl Street in Albany.

Charles L. Fisher  
New York State Museum  
Cultural Education Center  
Albany, New York 12230  
Cfisher@mail.nysed.gov