

Commemoration

The eighteenth-century story of Fort Stanwix is important to understand for four reasons. First, the design and location of the fort relied upon the military tactics of European-American armies of the mid-1700s and the geographic importance of the Oneida Carry. Fort Stanwix, to visitors of the twenty-first century, looks different from popular-culture images of forts provided in westerns and on television. Second, the fact that Gansevoort had a flag made and flown over the fort has led to the creation of a local tradition that Fort Stanwix was the first place where the Stars and Stripes flew in battle. This story would be remembered and become an important point of pride for people in Rome. Third, an important historical link exists between Fort Stanwix and Oriskany Battlefield, a state historic site. The two sites have intertwining and complementary pasts. Fourth, American Indians have a long history associated with the fort, both with respect to the outcome of the siege and with regard to treaty negotiations. These four factors continue to have importance to Fort Stanwix National Monument.

Geography determined the placement, design, and success of Fort Stanwix. Built by the British general John Stanwix in 1758, the fort sat on high ground overlooking the Mohawk River. Its strategic importance lay in its command of the short and level portage route between the Mohawk and Wood Creek, linking by water New York City and the Great Lakes. Indians had used the portage for centuries. The English called it the Oneida Carrying Place, or the Great Carry, in recognition of its location in the territory of the Oneida Nation of the Six Nations. In 1755, during the French and Indian Wars, Capt. William Williams of the British forces in America built a series of small forts around the Oneida Carrying Place to prevent its taking by the French. Two years later, the British replaced these smaller forts with the larger Fort Stanwix.¹

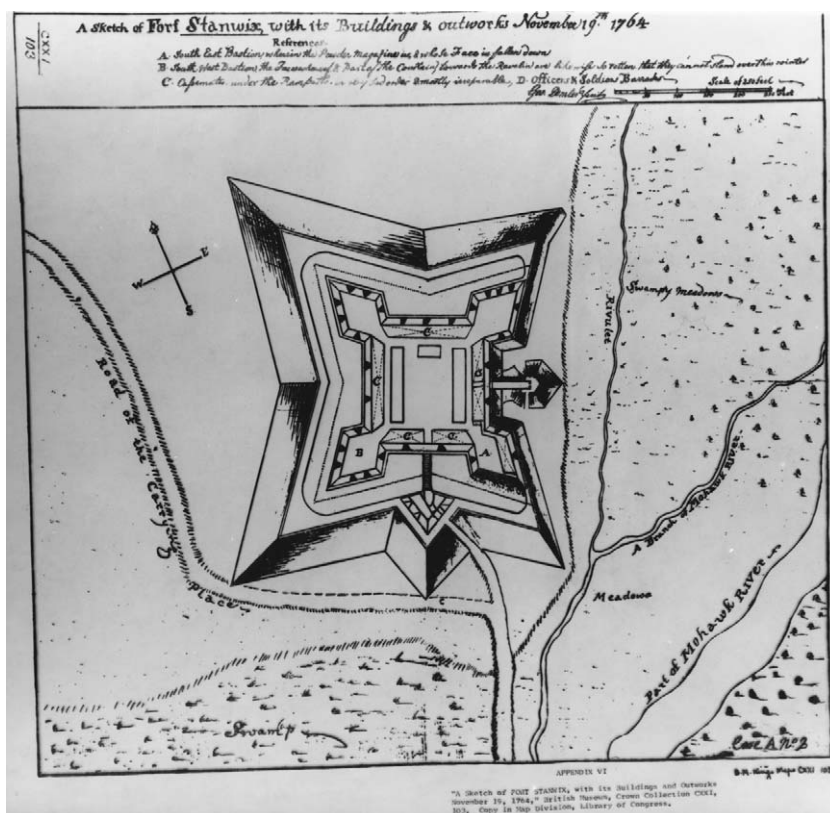


Figure 1. This 1764 sketch shows the orientation and design of Fort Stanwix as a British fort. Courtesy of the National Park Service Historic Photograph Collection, Harpers Ferry Center, West Virginia.

The British never saw action at this new fort during the French and Indian conflict and abandoned it as a military outpost in 1763 after their conquest of Canada. But Fort Stanwix did play an important role in Indian affairs and trading in subsequent years. In 1768, the British colonial government negotiated and signed at the fort a far-reaching treaty with the Six Nations, comprised of the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senecas, and Tuscaroras. This Property Line Treaty or Boundary Line Treaty, also known as the Treaty of Fort Stanwix of 1768, ceded a vast Indian territory east and south of the Allegheny and Ohio rivers to the colonies and allowed for a surge in western settlement. From the Indians' perspective, this treaty was meant to set limits on colonial expansion, especially in Canada.²

NEVER SURRENDERED

By the start of the American Revolution in 1775, the abandoned Fort Stanwix was in near ruins. The American general Philip Schuyler, recognizing the strategic importance of the fort in protecting the Mohawk Valley from British occupation, urged its reconstruction.³ By spring 1777, Gansevoort and his Third New York Regiment had taken over the defensible but still incomplete fort. Supplies and a total of 750 men continued to arrive to strengthen the fort, although by August the need remained for more cannon. Oneidas and Mohawks (the latter from Akwesasne) helped keep the Americans informed of the movements of the British army. Burgoyne was advancing south out of Canada along the Lake Champlain–Hudson River corridor, while St. Leger sought to join him by advancing east from Lake Ontario to Oneida Lake and down the Mohawk River to the Hudson. When St. Leger reached Fort Stanwix on August 2, 1777, he had a force of some twelve hundred men, mostly Indians composed of Mohawks, Senecas, and a small contingent of western or Great Lakes Indians. St. Leger found the fort too strong to assault with the smaller cannon he had brought with him. Instead, he laid siege.⁴

Fort Stanwix held a commanding and imposing position. In the quarter-mile area around the fort lay a clear-cut area that formed an effective field of fire. The fort's artillery had a one-mile range, so anyone in the cleared area was in point-blank range. The fort itself hugged the land, with even the chimneys built low so as not to become easy targets. Despite its low profile, Fort Stanwix commanded the Oneida Carrying Place and the road giving access to the landings on the Mohawk River. St. Leger could not try to bypass the fort and have the American enemy remain in command of the western lands and control communications. St. Leger and his troops set up camp for a siege and, on that same day, sent Gansevoort a proclamation demanding surrender. Gansevoort coldly refused the proclamation, and by nightfall, the fort was surrounded. In defiance to the British demand for surrender and to rally the American troops, Gansevoort had ordered a flag made and raised it on August 3. Local tradition has since identified this flag as the first Stars and Stripes raised in battle.⁵

The siege went on for twenty-one days, from August 3 to the morning of August 23, with both sides firing artillery at each other and some casualties resulting. In response to the siege, Brig. Gen. Nicholas Herkimer mustered his Tryon County militia at Fort Dayton and began marching with some eight hundred troops and sixty allied Oneidas to aid Gansevoort's men. Learning of Herkimer's advance, Loyalist troops with Mohawk and Seneca forces set an ambush in a boggy ravine west of Oriskany Creek. The Loyalists and Indians attacked as the militia marched

across the swampland. Brutal hand-to-hand combat resulted, pitting neighbor against neighbor, even family member against family member. Despite heavy losses, the militia managed to force a retreat of the Loyalists and their Indian allies. Herkimer died ten days later from a wound to his leg. The Battle of Oriskany stands as a reminder of the tenacious spirit of the Patriots in fighting for freedom. The site also serves as a bitter reminder to Six Nations descendants of the time when warriors violated the Great Law. The Great Law, handed down to the Six Nations by the Peacemaker, had enjoined its people from taking up weapons against each other. For the men at Fort Stanwix, the Battle of Oriskany allowed Colonel Willett to raid Loyalist and Indian camps that afternoon, bringing much-needed blankets, weapons, ammunition, and other supplies back to the fort to aid in lasting through the siege.⁶

At no time did St. Leger order his men to storm the fort. Piercing the fort's defenses and invading presented deadly consequences. Fort Stanwix was designed using the then-popular and highly effective French design that kept enemies out and punished any forces that tried to enter the elaborate defenses. If a soldier did try to enter, he would first have to run across the cleared area and up a grassy embankment known as the "glacis." At the top of this slippery hill, the soldier would be even with musketeers lining the fort's walls. If he survived the musket firings, he would have to navigate a sharp drop and then try to scale a palisade fence. The fence posts had sharp points that threatened impalement or at least left the soldier open to further shootings. Further obstacles remained if the soldier survived. A deep ditch on the other side of the fence provided more opportunity for being shot at, and any escape required mounting the banks of the ditch and hurtling over the sharp points of the palisade again. Continuing on, the soldier would have to climb up the inner embankment of the ditch and face the fraise, a palisade of strong, pointed wooden stakes pointing horizontally on the outward slope of the rampart. Getting past these stakes required chopping down a section of the fraise and putting up a ladder at point-blank range. Success at this almost certainly deadly endeavor offered the final challenge of hand-to-hand combat inside the fort. St. Leger understood that a siege was his only viable alternative.⁷

Yet, such a siege did not promise a swift conclusion. Gansevoort had loaded the fort with fresh supplies within moments of St. Leger's arrival, leaving the British commander with the disappointing knowledge that starving the Patriots into surrender would be at least six weeks away. St. Leger also came quickly to understand that his artillery could not breach the walls of the fort. His six-pound cannons made no dent to the fort's grass embankments. He needed his men to dig trenches or "saps" to bring his guns within range. This messy and backbreaking work took

time and demoralized his troops and Indian allies, especially after the bloody battle at Oriskany. St. Leger faced a steady stream of deserters that slowly depleted his force.⁸

Gansevoort was not in as comfortable a position as St. Leger might have believed. Despite additional supplies gained from Willett's raid of the Indian camps, the Patriots had a shortage of black powder. On August 10 under cover of night, he sent Willett and a companion out to meet with Schuyler at Northern Command headquarters. Schuyler already understood the desperate situation at Fort Stanwix, but he had trouble convincing all but one of his officers to provide relief. That one was Benedict Arnold, who used a clever stratagem to fool the British and their Indian allies into thinking that swarms of Patriot troops were descending upon St. Leger. False reports, manufactured by Arnold and delivered to St. Leger's troops by a white man known to the Indians, helped give the Indians allied to the British the push they needed to abandon the British siege. St. Leger had no choice but on August 22 to lift the siege and retreat. Fort Stanwix continued to be garrisoned until 1781. By then, extensive fires had destroyed the guardhouse and barracks, and heavy rains had severely damaged the fort's walls, rendering the fort essentially indefensible. In the 1790s, an emergency blockhouse was built on the ruins, but by the early 1800s, the fort had largely disappeared. Fort Stanwix is remembered today as "the fort that never surrendered."⁹

Fort Stanwix also holds the distinction of being the place where a significant treaty with American Indians was negotiated and signed. Representatives from Britain, the American colonies, and France had negotiated and signed the 1783 Treaty of Paris, ending formal warfare between these forces, but representatives from the powerful Six Nations had not been invited to join in the negotiations. Deadly raids by Indians still allied to Britain continued until U.S. congressional commissioners, with assistance from the Revolutionary War hero the marquis de Lafayette, sealed an agreement. Signed on October 22, 1784, this Treaty of Fort Stanwix returned American prisoners, reconfirmed the borderline of the 1768 Boundary Line Treaty from Fort Stanwix to the Ohio River, and created a western boundary line to Six Nations lands. The 1784 treaty is significant for three reasons. First, the Six Nations ceded its land claims to Ohio and other lands north and west of the 1768 boundary line, thus opening the land to white settlement. Second, the 1784 treaty established an Indian reservation, using the 1768 boundary line as the eastern and southern border. Finally, the 1784 treaty indicates the American attitude toward Indians, in that both American Indian allies and enemies received the same poor treatment. This treaty thus signals the motivation of American negotiators with Indians, with land settlement by whites being of primary interest.¹⁰

“AN EMPORIUM OF COMMERCE”

What happened to Fort Stanwix after the American Revolution is also an important story.¹¹ One of the striking aspects of this post-Revolution story is that people clung to this past, through shared memories passed down through the generations, while also seeking opportunities for the future. Many amazing people and businesses settled in Rome, New York. Their combined history would make Rome notable even without also having a Revolutionary War fort buried beneath the city’s downtown. The juxtaposition of past and future defines Rome and helps to explain the eventual decision to rebuild the fort. Leaders in Rome sought ways to use the city’s past to provide for the future. Managers at Fort Stanwix would also build on the city’s interest in its past to forge new relationships for interpretation and education.

After the signing of the Fort Stanwix Treaty of 1784, Indian attacks diminished. With this threat removed, the state of New York aggressively began disposing of its public lands. Dominick Lynch, a wealthy New York City land speculator originally from Galway, Ireland, appreciated the favorable geographic location of the Oneida Carrying Place for settlement and trade, and in 1786 he bought at auction 697 acres of this land. This would be the seed for a slowly growing but promising community. Many former Continental soldiers, who had served in the Mohawk Valley during the war, also bought lands. They moved their families from Connecticut and other parts of New England to settle the newly available fertile lands.¹² People in the area remembered with pride the story of the fort withstanding the British attack. DeWitt Clinton, traveling through the area in 1810, noted in his journal that “this [Fort Stanwix] and the battle of Oriskany are talked of all over the country. . . .”¹³

Canals encouraged the initial growth of this area. Prior to the signing of the Treaty of Paris, Gen. George Washington had visited Fort Stanwix and discussed the idea of eliminating the portage between the Mohawk River and Wood Creek. This idea came to fruition in 1796 when the Western Inland Lock and Navigation Company opened a two-mile long ditch, navigable by flat-bottomed boats. The company, with assistance from New York State, eventually constructed four locks in Wood Creek and straightened many of its difficult bends. These efforts, along with building locks around the Little Falls of the Mohawk, allowed a steady stream of settlers to pass through the emerging town where Fort Stanwix stood. Their need for supplies helped to ensure the growth of the area.¹⁴

By 1800, Lynch had accumulated 2,000 acres, which he planned to lease, not sell. Many settlers, preferring to buy, chose lands west or north of these holdings, but others chose to lease in Lynchville, and a

tidy town took shape. Lynch laid out the two main thoroughfares of Lynchville: Dominick Street, running east to west, and James Street, after his son, running north to south. These streets anchored the town. He hired the engineer from the Western Inland Lock Company to lay out building lots, linking them with broad streets in a grid pattern. Lynch, a director of the Western Inland Lock Company,¹⁵ also encouraged the building of the original canal. Lynch provided a gristmill and a woolen mill to ensure further the prosperity and attractiveness of his settlement, but many people remained opposed to his leasing of lands. When the time came in 1819 to incorporate the village, residents chose the name of Rome, which had been the name of the township. This choice mirrored the preferences of Americans of the postrevolutionary period, who fancied classical names for their cities and towns and classical architecture for their government buildings and homes.¹⁶

The new village of Rome, resting on the remains of Fort Stanwix, continued to make its mark, taking advantage of its geography. Rome provided the site of the first digging of the Erie Canal, on July 4, 1817, in the swampland roughly parallel to and south of the Western Inland Lock Canal. Rome's townsman Benjamin Wright, known as the "Father of Civil Engineering," served as the chief engineer of the eastern construction

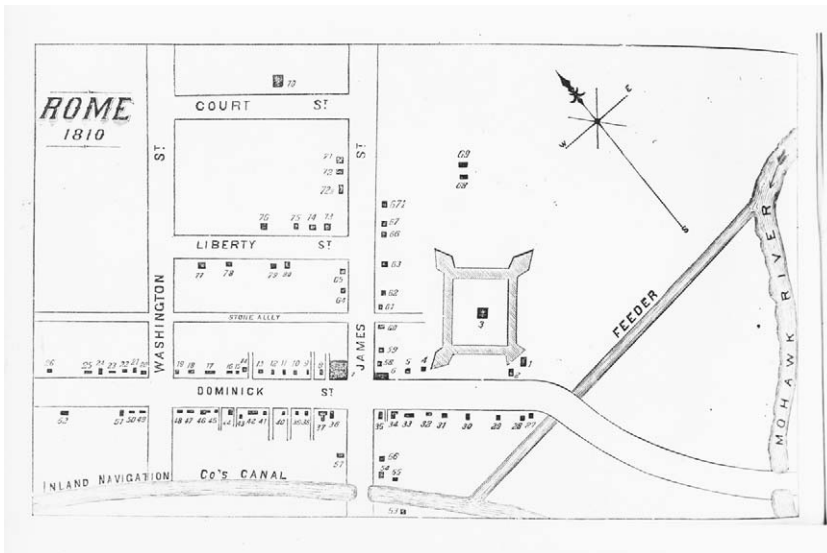


Figure 2. This 1810 map of Rome shows where the remains of Fort Stanwix stood in relation to the streets and buildings of the new village. Courtesy of the National Park Service Historic Photograph Collection, Harpers Ferry Center, West Virginia.

of the canal. Improvements to the canal in 1844 brought it back to the former Inland Lock location, closer to Rome and thus more beneficial to furthering trade in the village. These steady improvements, including railroad service in 1839, helped to make Rome a thriving commercial center. Oneida County, with Rome at the geographic center, gained the distinction of being the largest manufacturing district in the state. An extensive cotton factory, a woolen mill, fourteen sawmills, three gristmills, and four tanneries joined twenty-one stores and an assortment of residential buildings to make Rome the “emporium of commerce” that one traveler in the late eighteenth century had predicted.¹⁷

More opportunities for economic achievement and making history came as the nineteenth century progressed. The Rome dairyman Jesse Williams, with help from his wife, Amanda, and their children, developed a factory system for producing cheese of high quality and taste that made Rome in 1864 the leading cheese market in the world. New York cheddar became world famous, and Williams’s method served as the basis for all subsequent ways of making cheese in America. In November 1936, the National Cheese Institute presented the city of Rome with a bronze memorial commemorating Williams’s innovations.¹⁸

With the Industrial Revolution, Rome expanded its economic base from transportation and agriculture to several different manufacturing endeavors while also incorporating as a city in 1870. Rome Iron Works started in 1866 with the visionary thinking of Addison Day. Day, then superintendent of the Rome, Watertown, and Ogdensburg Railroad, brought the main line of the New York Central into Rome. He then encouraged other potential businesses to settle in Rome. The engineer John B. Jervis, who built the first steam railroads in New York State and devised other innovations to help expand railroads, started the Rome Merchant Iron Mill, later known as the long-standing Rome Iron Mills. Day’s Rome Iron Works had its own success when it evolved into the Rome Brass and Copper Company to take advantage of new markets. An offshoot of this new company became the Rome Manufacturing Company, which in 1936 developed the first copper-bottomed steel utensils for its Revere Ware. These combined achievements made Rome the Copper City; by 1920 it manufactured one-tenth of all copper used in the United States.¹⁹

Other companies in Rome thrived by mass-producing such items as boots and shoes, textiles, and revolvers. The Electric Wire Works, founded by Nicholas Spargo and William J. Doyle, first brought the wire industry to Rome. The Fort Stanwix Canning Company led dozens of small canneries and food processing centers in Rome. When the National Canners’ Association formed in 1907, the membership chose George C. Bailey of Fort Stanwix Canning to be its first president. Rome even

received the touch of the Wizard of Oz, emphasizing the sense of magic and promise in Rome at the turn of the twentieth century. Baum's Castorine Company, moved from Syracuse to Rome in 1903. L. Frank Baum's father had founded the company, and Baum the son had worked selling the firm's line of oils and lubricants. Eventually, Baum and his brothers became owners, but the company failed. Baum, which the town of Chittenango, New York, claims as its native son, went on to greater fame writing the *Wizard of Oz*. More ventures opened in Rome in the early twentieth century, most notably Long-Turney Radiator Company, which made itself famous in the automotive radiator business. Varflex Corporation, started in Rome in 1924, addressed the insulation and fiberglass needs of the new aircraft industry. And, in 1926, Rome Strip Steel Company opened in Rome and soon became New York State's largest producer of cold strip steel.²⁰

REMEMBERING AND CELEBRATING

Rome's growth, with new factories and residences covering up the remains of Fort Stanwix, did not dampen memories of the city's Revolutionary War roots. The marquis de Lafayette, who had assisted in the 1784 Treaty signing, made a special effort to visit the site on his heroic return to the United States in 1824–25.²¹ In 1857, in Rome's first directory, Jay Hatheway, a leading citizen, noted with wistful regret that "the ruthless march of 'improvement' had not been stayed when it laid its destroying hands upon the noble old Fort [Stanwix] and razed it to the ground." Hatheway went on to express a recurring sentiment within Rome: "If that noble relic of 1758 and 1777 had been spared, then so long as the Stars and Stripes float over a nation of free men . . . so long each succeeding year would have increased the interest in a spot so rich in revolutionary lore."²² Such increased interest might one day translate into increased dollars for Rome in the way of tourism, as later advocates would say, leading in the 1970s to fort reconstruction.

When the time came to celebrate the centennial of the siege in 1877, history-minded people in Rome did as many American communities did in commemorating the American Revolution. Local history sites served as places to remind Americans of the past. But as the cultural historians John Bodnar and Michael Kammen have demonstrated, the revolutionary aspects of the American Revolution were necessarily diminished in public speeches and writings. Instead, these commemorative activities sought to strengthen people's dedication to the existing institutions and social order that had resulted from the revolution. At one of the largest of these celebrations, the opening of the 1876 centennial

exposition in Philadelphia, more than four thousand military personnel escorted President Ulysses S. Grant onto the grounds. On Independence Day at the exposition, Civil War veterans paraded against a backdrop of patriotic oratory and a nine-foot working model of George Washington rising from his tomb, presumably reminding Americans of the first president's dedication to the principles of the new government.²³ People in Rome and the surrounding area expressed this same commitment to the stability of the country's social and political orders. In military companies and civil societies, attendees gathered in full ranks on August 6, 1877, at the Oriskany battlefield to honor the sacrifices men had made one hundred years earlier. On the evening of August 22, in commemoration of the lifting of the siege, Rome itself had a general illumination. A citizens committee, dedicated to remembering the events of the Fort Stanwix siege and battle at Oriskany, reminded fellow attendees, "[W]e this day are enjoying the boon which the men of that day, in their patriotic and heroic struggle, gave to their posterity—a free government. . . ."²⁴

Tangible memories of Fort Stanwix continued to surface. In 1897, the Roman jack-of-all-trades Peter Hugunine completed a huge painting of Fort Stanwix, based on historical plans and descriptions of the fort. The painting depicts the August 6 raid commanded by Willett, resulting in the capture of five wagonloads of supplies and the destruction of Loyalist and Indian encampments. Hugunine prominently displays the American flag flying above the fort, following the local tradition that Fort Stanwix first flew the Stars and Stripes in battle. The painting soon disappeared after a viewing at the Oneida County Historical Society in Utica, New York, but Hugunine did produce postcards, which kept the painting's image within memory.²⁵ In 1901, the federal government further memorialized Fort Stanwix by marking the approximate locations of the four bastions with four Civil War-era Parrott guns. Each cannon had an inscribed carriage to remind viewers of the historical significance of the fort site.²⁶

In the aftermath of World War I, communities throughout the United States, but especially in the Northeast and Midwest, hosted huge pageants and civic ceremonies to commemorate the actions of past patriots and ancestors. These events echoed the efforts by President Woodrow Wilson during the war to arouse feelings of loyalty in the nation. Hundreds of local citizens dressed in historical costumes and reenacted the story of a historic event associated with the hosting town or area. These dramatizations usually interpreted history from an evolutionary viewpoint, describing the progressive rise of American civilization from the simple lifestyle of the American Indians, through the steadfast determination and loyalty of the pioneer phase, to the technological success of the day's modern towns and promise of democratic government. For the 300th anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims in Plymouth, Massachu-

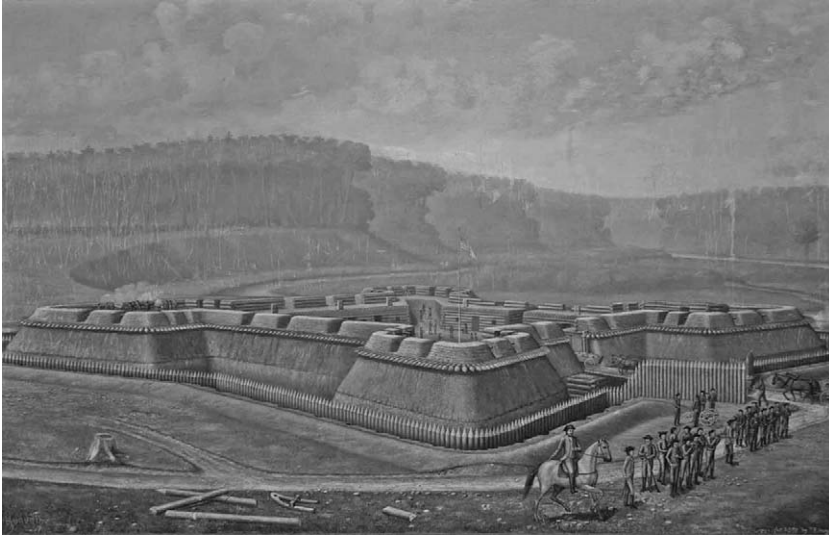


Figure 3. By Peter Hugonine, this 1897 painting depicts Willett's Sortie on August 6, 1777, and prominently shows the Stars and Stripes flying from one of Fort Stanwix's bastions. From the Rome Historical Society's Photographic Collection.

setts, in December 1920, officials organized a pageant known as "The Pilgrim Spirit." Its historical scenes and lighting effects captured the imagination of the more than one hundred thousand spectators. In 1926, Philadelphia staged a celebration of the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. A range of activities, from patriotic gatherings to carnivals, stretched over many months. The federal government joined state and local authorities in the patriotic fervor by funding a large reenactment and pageant at Yorktown in 1931.²⁷

Rome's sesquicentennial celebration of the siege of Fort Stanwix fit within a larger effort funded by the state of New York to remember the 150th anniversary of Burgoyne's ill-fated campaign in New York to slice the colonies in half and demoralize the American troops into surrendering. Planning began as early as 1923 when the state legislature provided an initial \$5,000 appropriation to secure the research and writing of a historical report outlining where Revolutionary War sites were located. William Pierrepont White, president of the Mohawk Valley Historical Association, urged that additional expenditures be made over a ten-year period. He wanted these to be used to mark and preserve sites relating to the colonial, revolutionary, and early state settlement years. White reasoned that these sites should be commemorated "not to reawaken historic[al] prejudices against Great Britain, but because they signalize the stunning, epochal incidents preceding the birth of our great Republic."²⁸

For Rome, White had even bigger plans. With the enthusiastic support of one hundred citizens and Rome Kiwanis Club members, White entered a resolution that called for the acquisition of the Fort Stanwix site, reconstruction of the fort, and erection of a museum building.²⁹ The resolution does not specify what type of reconstruction White envisioned. Did he consider rebuilding the entire fort in its complete size? Did he consider a scaled-down version for the reconstruction, or possibly just part of the fort, such as a bastion? The next chapter will explore the many ways in which planners in Rome would later envision a reconstruction of Fort Stanwix and where to put such a project. White believed that some kind of reconstruction was justified because “[t]his carry between these two streams is surpassed by no other spot on the North American continent in the national importance of the historic events that have taken place since the discovery of the continent by Columbus.”³⁰ Editors of the Rome daily newspaper, the *Sentinel*, used White’s proposal to promote larger dreams. The paper declared in the same pages it reported on White’s resolution that the state’s farmers might obtain up to \$90 million from tourists as they toured the state and visited the newly established historical markers and sites.³¹

White paired with the publisher of the *Rome Daily Sentinel*, Albert Remington Kessinger, to build support for the proposed project of marking historical sites throughout New York and building an endowment. Together, they served on the advisory committee for the New York American Revolution Sesquicentennial Commission and recommended that the entire site of Fort Stanwix be acquired through gift or purchase. Realization of such an idea seemed remote. At the time, the sixteen acres of downtown Rome where Fort Stanwix had stood were covered by numerous commercial establishments, homes, hotels, clubs, and even the newspaper plant for the *Sentinel*. But, Kessinger apparently believed that sacrificing his newspaper plant and other downtown businesses was worth the cost. The potential 90 million tourist dollars with a reconstructed Fort Stanwix and other marked historical sites seemed too enticing. And so, Kessinger encouraged John A. Scott, the *Sentinel*’s editorial writer, to publish regular scholarly articles about Fort Stanwix and write the official sesquicentennial history of Fort Stanwix and Oriskany for the newspaper. The Rome Chamber of Commerce, which had been formed in 1910, also enthusiastically supported the project; its secretary, E. D. Bevitt, served as the executive officer for the campaign. Clearly, White’s proposal struck a chord with many influential Romans.³²

White, Kessinger, Bevitt, and others do not state specifically why they would support having a reconstructed fort and museum built on the original site in downtown Rome. This sacrifice of residences and businesses seems extravagant in light of the mere promise of tourism dollars.

Different reasons probably motivated each supporter. White's vision for honoring the state's heroic past may have guided his thinking. For Kessinger and Rome's business leaders, the realization that Rome's economic promise was turning downward might have made them receptive to White's proposal. Between World War I and 1950, the Rome-Utica area experienced a steady economic decline. This decline would have been in its initial stages by the 1920s, but owners of local businesses would certainly have realized that times were changing. They might have wanted to chart another course for the city, and tourism offered one possibility. In addition, most of Rome's manufacturing businesses did not sit directly on the original Fort Stanwix site. They would not be sacrificed for such a development. Instead, some grand houses and the *Sentinel* plant would be lost. For \$90 million in tourism, such a sacrifice seemed possible for these business leaders.³³

The combined efforts of White and his supporters in Rome and elsewhere achieved modest results. The state legislature responded in 1927 and approved \$150,000 for the celebration of sesquicentennial events in New York, with no less than half that amount to be used for historical markers and monuments. One marker went into the yard of the Rome Club to memorialize Fort Stanwix. The Rome Club, a men's organization, had its meeting space in the grand Barnes-Mudge House that stood where people believed the fort's southwest bastion had been. The state wanted the 150th celebration to recognize the "most conspicuous and important part" New York played in the turning point in the American Revolution and that such celebrations promote the "patriotic education of our citizens. . . ."³⁴ In addition to Fort Stanwix, commemorative celebrations occurred at Bennington, Vermont; at Saratoga; and at Oriskany. In another step toward recognizing the lands associated with Fort Stanwix, the state purchased in 1926 eight acres at the Lower Landing Place on the Mohawk River and a small tract at Spring and Willett streets, where the southeast bastion of the fort had once stood. These lands served to give official notice to the federal government of the state's support.³⁵

For the 1927 sesquicentennial, White and others recognized that a reconstruction of Fort Stanwix on the original site was not feasible. Homes and businesses resided there. But the idea of some kind of reconstruction appealed to the sesquicentennial planners. They chose open farmland at Mohawk Acres to house a fort reconstruction at one-third the original size. This site offered room for the fort and the expected crowds.

Commander Richard E. Byrd opened Rome's August 6, 1927, sesquicentennial ceremonies with a dramatic flyover in a mammoth trimotor airplane. Byrd had recently completed his world-famous aerial trips to the North Pole and across the Atlantic and was readying for his trip to

Antarctica. Under bright, sunny skies, Byrd's plane and another carrying more dignitaries circled and landed in a nearby field. Three observation and three pursuit planes displayed the technological prowess of their machinery with stunt dives, loops, cross-overs, and turns. After more than half an hour of these impressive displays of aerial acrobatics, the six smaller planes landed, and the historical pageant began at Mohawk Acres. Using the progressive view of history popular at the time, the story opened with a re-created view of Indian life before the arrival of Europeans. Episode two introduced Dutch traders to the Indian village, and the third scene brought the British, intent on building forts at the Oneida Carry. When time came for Fort Stanwix to appear, the estimated one hundred thousand onlookers had a treat seeing the smaller replica with earth embankments, log bastions, rough-hewn flag staff, moats, and palisades.³⁶ Constructed under the guidance of Donald White, this replica "created a piece of imagery excelling the best work used in the movie drama."³⁷

Nadine Currie had drilled the seven hundred costumed participants on their various roles. Some children dressed as young Indians and played with crude toys outside teepees. Others represented the three young girls

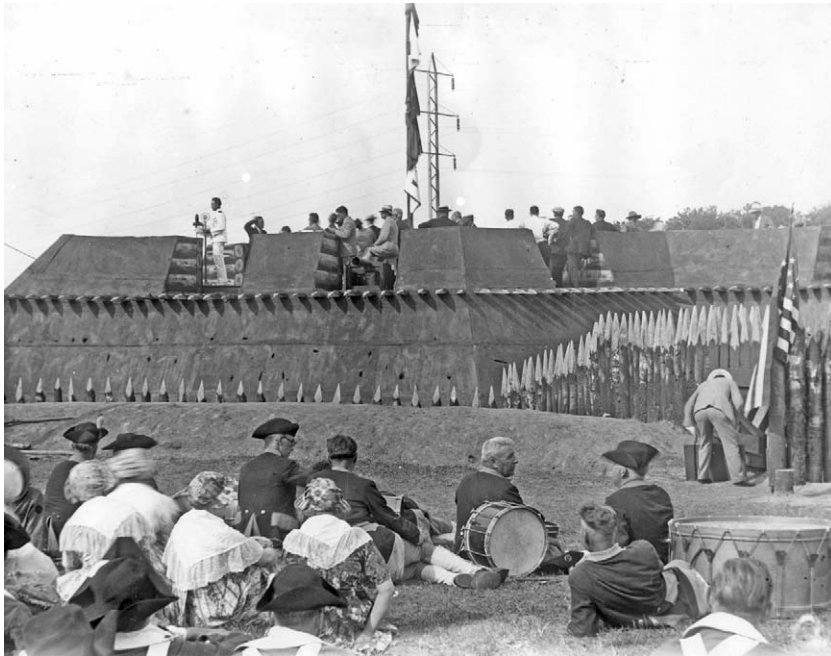


Figure 4. At the 1927 sesquicentennial celebration, reenactors wait their turn to stage the drama of the siege at the one-third-size fort replica. From the Rome Historical Society's Photographic Collection.

who had gone berry picking outside Fort Stanwix at the start of the 1777 siege and were attacked by Indians allied to the British. Women played roles of Indian women preparing meals for their families or as women married to soldiers at the fort. Men dressed as Indian braves, Dutch trappers and traders, Loyalist soldiers, and American troops. The reenactment included unfurling the Stars and Stripes amid cheers and drum beating from the garrison. A restaging of the Battle of Oriskany tied the Mohawk Acres celebration to an earlier one that same day at Oriskany, which had included music and speeches.³⁸ Col. Byrd expressed the feelings of many people who viewed the pageant. In the closing ceremonies, he stated, "I considered it not only my duty but a very great privilege to make a pilgrimage to this sacred spot. The colonel in charge of this fort commanding only about 650 men repulsed an enemy twice as large. The course of history was changed here."³⁹

The *Sentinel* exuberantly recorded the sesquicentennial in a 102-page special edition produced that very same evening. Included with articles and photographs on the pageant and Byrd's appearance was the editorial writer John Scott's retelling of the historical siege and the Battle of Oriskany. The paper's full complement of reporters, including a young Fritz S. Updike (who would go on to be the paper's editor), covered the event. The paper noted not only the special events of the day but also the spiffy look of the city of Rome. "A day of days at the Oneida Carrying Place. Past, present and future rolled into the compass of a few hours. All roads lead to Rome. The city, spic and span in new paint and freshly washed buildings; decked with flags and bunting in great profusion. Bands playing, streets alive with automobiles and pedestrians."⁴⁰ This fresh and welcoming appearance of the city was echoed in the large banner strung across the masthead of the newspaper: "Welcome Friends! Welcome Strangers! On this Greatest of Great Days Fort Stanwix and Oriskany Come Forth from the Distant Past, Reincarnate! May the Memory of this Event be Cherished by You, as Will Your Presence Always be to Our People, a Charming Recollection."⁴¹

The *Sentinel* enthusiastically welcomed visitors and covered the grand sesquicentennial event in large part to promote tourism to Rome and the state. The paper's owner, A. R. Kessinger, had worked doggedly with William Pierrepont White to gain appropriations and legislative mandates from the state to have New York's historical sites shine in the world's eyes. In an illuminating passage hidden within follow-up coverage on Byrd, the paper answers a frequently asked question about running a 102-page special edition and selling it for only ten cents a copy. "Profit was not the object" behind this immediate publication, it said. Instead, the paper admitted, "The developments of Rome's historical richness means much more for the future of Rome, and the way to develop it is

to advertise it.” And, promotion was what the *Sentinel* intended in its sesquicentennial edition. “If Rome can be made a Mecca for visitors by the marking and advertising of its historical places all the people here will profit.” The newspaper emphasized that its vision for tourism was one shared by all: “Everybody who helped to make this great celebration a success was assisting toward that end, as well as cultivating a valuable patriotic spirit.”⁴² This commitment to use the newspaper to promote Rome’s tourism potential, and spread its patriotic spirit, would carry through the twentieth century.

Authenticity, reconstruction, reenactment, and memory together contributed to how the people of Rome commemorated the 150th anniversary of the siege at Fort Stanwix. Without access to the authentic site, planners moved the celebration to available farmland and reconstructed, on a smaller scale than the original, their vision of the fort. That rebuilt fort, with its high walls, would depart in design from the more accurate version eventually reconstructed by the National Park Service. But planners and celebrants sought a tangible reminder that could anchor their reenactment of the people and events of 1777. Shared memories about the importance of the fort to the American Revolutionary War and the powerful desire to reenact that experience as a celebration and teaching tool guided their efforts. These memories included telling stories about Indian life before white settlement and Indian participation in the events of the war, but no evidence points to active Indian guidance or activity in the reenactment. Planners depended upon their vision of Indians, effectively rejecting any Indian memories in shaping the commemorative experience. At the same time, sources do not provide details as to what information planners used to determine the dress and actions of other groups represented in the reenactment. How authentic were the portrayals of soldiers, farmers, women, and children? How did early twentieth-century ideas of the Revolutionary War period determine the production at Mohawk Acres in 1927? For the many onlookers at the reenacted scene, these considerations did not increase or decrease the delight of honoring the past and celebrating the future of their promising city of Rome.

A NATIONAL MONUMENT

Before turning their attention to obtaining federal recognition of Fort Stanwix, A. R. Kessinger and others built on the state’s support of the sesquicentennial celebration to try to expand the state’s commitment to honoring its history. State monies had funded the events in Rome, Oriskany, and other places. Since the state already owned a small parcel

of land where the fort had stood, it seemed logical to pursue further the idea of developing their historical past with state support. To this end, the Rome Chamber of Commerce, under E. D. Bevitt, and the *Sentinel's* Kessinger sought and won support within the state legislature to consider building a state museum in Rome in commemoration of the siege of Fort Stanwix. A committee, with Kessinger serving as one of the appointees, was formed to investigate the feasibility of such an idea. Not surprisingly, finding a suitable location for such a museum building proved difficult. Houses and businesses sat on top of the remains of the famous historical site. One possibility, however, existed at the American Legion post headquarters building, located next to the state parcel at the fort's presumed southeast bastion. This building had originally been the Virgil Draper House. Members of the Legion, expressing their patriotic fervor and commitment to the city's historical past, offered their property to the state for a museum, with the caveat that the Legion could continue meeting under the same roof. The proposed site measured about one hundred by two hundred feet on high ground, and, as the *Sentinel* noted, would be an eye-catching location for visitors entering the city from the east.⁴³

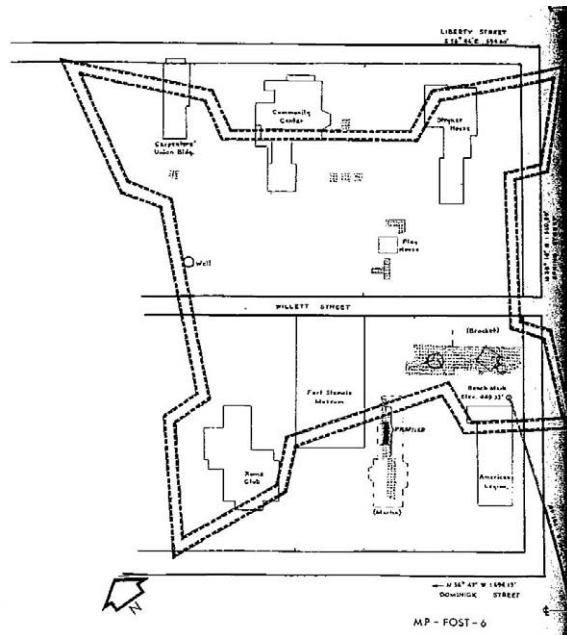


Figure 5. This sketch of Fort Stanwix theorizes where the fort stood in relation to the buildings found on the site in the early 1960s. From the National Park Service 1967 Fort Stanwix Master Plan.

As the plans with the state stalled, grander ideas unfolded. By February 1934, the Rome Chamber of Commerce had spearheaded an effort to have the federal government establish a park or memorial on the site of Fort Stanwix. The National Park Service, in response to this local interest, promised to send an investigator to report on this suggestion. By summer, Sen. Robert F. Wagner (D-NY) and Rep. Frederick J. Sisson (D-NY) had each submitted bills to the U.S. Congress for establishing Fort Stanwix National Monument.⁴⁴ Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes reported favorably on both bills, noting that the proposed legislation protected a battlefield of great importance to American history and was worthy of federal protection. Realizing that concerns over appropriations might hamper such designation, Ickes also stated that the bill “would be in accord with the financial program of the President.”⁴⁵ The Senate acted favorably on the bill, but it stalled in the House.⁴⁶

Exactly how the state museum idea grew into a bill for national monument status is unclear, but Kessinger may have been an important leader in this decision. The *Sentinel* had been a strongly Democratic newspaper since the 1830s, Rome itself had Democratic leanings, and Kessinger’s family had been proud Democrats. His granddaughter Shirley Waters, who later inherited the paper and helped her husband, George Waters, run it, remembered as a little girl that her grandfather often hosted Franklin Delano Roosevelt when he passed through Rome. In these social gatherings, talk of the historic events associated with Fort Stanwix would certainly have surfaced, since Roosevelt had a strong personal interest in history. Conversations could easily have turned into discussions about federal preservation. Roosevelt, aware of the historical value of the proposal, also recognized the political value of supporting the ideas of a Democrat like Kessinger and the city that shared his political leanings. Rome could also find two Democrats among its representatives in Congress, with Wagner in the Senate and the Utica lawyer Frederick Sisson in the House. This combination of support eventually brought success.⁴⁷

In early 1935, Wagner and Sisson submitted new bills of similar language for a Fort Stanwix National Monument. Ickes declared his support once again. On July 29, the Senate, with little debate, passed Wagner’s S. 739, and it went to the House. The House Committee on the Public Lands referred the bill to the whole House.⁴⁸ Two areas of concern surfaced in the House debate on August 14. First, some representatives worried that passing the Fort Stanwix bill would open the Congress to additional requests by states to have the federal government take over the care and maintenance of other historic properties. Rep. Robert Rich (R-PA) argued that in the difficult economic times of the Great Depression facing the nation, many states wanted some relief from bearing the expense of upkeep of their monuments and sites. Passing that

burden to the federal government would be more attractive if bills like the Fort Stanwix one were passed.⁴⁹ Rep. Bertrand Snell (R-NY) echoed Rich's concerns, stating that "we are adopting a policy here which may be detrimental in the future. . . . It may be all right to do that [pass bills for national monuments] at some time, but at the present time when we are trying so hard to get money enough to pay our expenses it seems to me that it is a poor policy. . . ."⁵⁰

Sisson responded to this first set of concerns by reminding his colleagues that S. 739 simply designated Fort Stanwix as a national monument; it did not include the appropriation "of a single penny." He admitted that at some point in the future, Congress might call for an appropriation, but such action first required that the lands held by the state and private individuals be donated to the federal government. According to the language of the bill, national monument status would be granted only after those lands, together with any buildings and other property, had been donated or bought through donated funds. In the meantime, the site would have the federal recognition without the federal protection and costs associated with such protection.⁵¹ For supporters in Rome, such recognition seemed sufficient for the time. They wanted the national monument designation "in order fittingly to observe the anniversary of the battle of Fort Stanwix."⁵² And those supporters believed that their chances were good for having the necessary lands donated. Sisson noted that the people owning land where the fort had stood had gone on record informally through the Rome Chamber of Commerce that they would donate their lands.⁵³

The second concern voiced in the August 14 floor debate involved the connection of the Fort Stanwix bill to the Maverick bill passed earlier that same day. The Maverick bill became the Historic Sites Act of 1935, a wide-ranging law that directed the secretary of the interior to survey historic properties for determining which ones had exceptional value in commemorating or illustrating the history of the nation. The secretary and the National Park Service were authorized to conduct research, restore or maintain historic properties directly or through cooperative agreements, and engage in interpretive activities to educate the public about the historic sites. The law also established the secretary's Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments, composed of outside experts in cultural and natural resources, to review selected properties and to recommend those found nationally significant for designation. One provision of the law allowed for acquisition of historic properties, but with the important restriction that no federal funds could be committed in advance of congressional appropriations.⁵⁴

Some representatives, when reviewing the Fort Stanwix bill, wondered if they needed to decide on S. 739 in light of the recent passage

of the Maverick bill. Verne Chatelain, the first chief of the Park Service's Historical Division, admitted similar ambivalence when pressed by Rep. James Mead (D-NY) on the day of the floor debate. Chatelain admitted that "the place of Fort Stanwix . . . is highly significant"⁵⁵ when considered in connection with the entire Burgoyne campaign of 1777. Yet, when push came to shove, Chatelain told Mead that "in view of the Historic Sites bill, it would not be necessary to obtain passage of the Fort Stanwix bill, but that the Saratoga bill is important."⁵⁶ Members of Congress were not quite sure how to handle such bills as the Fort Stanwix one in light of the Historic Sites Act. Was it necessary to designate areas separately or should that recognition come from the secretary of the interior? Sisson believed that places like Fort Stanwix were "shrines, and we want to forever have them enshrined in the hearts of the American people as national monuments."⁵⁷ Obtaining that designation immediately from Congress was preferable to waiting. Rep. James Mott (R-OR) finally swayed the House. Mott admitted that the Maverick bill was "a very, very bad bill" because, in Mott's mind, it gave the interior secretary "legislative, autocratic power to use the people's money in almost any way he pleases" for historic sites. But Mott steadfastly believed that the Fort Stanwix bill was "a meritorious measure." He said he "would much rather acquire the land through enactment of this bill than have the Secretary of the Interior acquire it under the blanket authority which the Maverick bill gives him."⁵⁸ S. 739 passed the House with 209 yeas, 73 nays, and 147 not voting. President Roosevelt signed the bill into law on August 21, 1935, the same day he signed the Historic Sites Act.

The Fort Stanwix Act, Public Law No. 291 (see appendix 1), provides little indication from Congress about how it wanted the National Park Service to manage the site. The act states that the lands "shall be designated and set apart by proclamation of the President for preservation as a national monument for the benefit and inspiration of the people. . . ." Such language mirrors the language in the 1872 act establishing Yellowstone as the nation's first national park "for the benefit and enjoyment" of the people. Clearly, Congress believed that Fort Stanwix was an inspiring place, resonating with patriotic associations. Sisson emphasized this aspect when he urged recognition so that Romans could celebrate the anniversary of the siege in tandem with the federal designation. Other representatives may have worried about eventual appropriations for running the site once the lands were donated, but even Rep. Rich had admitted that some of the bills under consideration for national monument status that day were worthwhile. Ultimately, patriotism won over fiscal conservatism.⁵⁹

For Fort Stanwix, the true hindrance was the land itself. In its official press release following approval of the law, the Department of the