

# Following the Sullivan Trail

by Joy Lewis

On September 11, 1779, the Continental Army under the command of General John Sullivan arrived at the north end of Honeoye Lake and set up camp. On September 11, 2020, my husband Wayne and I set out to follow the path of the Revolutionary army from Athens, Pennsylvania, to Cuylerville, New York.

After the defeat of the American forces in Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley in the summer of 1778, General Washington ordered a military campaign against the Iroquois of western New York. Allies of the English, the Iroquois were a considerable force impeding the Americans as they struggled to gain control of the territory. For three months in the summer and autumn of 1779, four brigades of the Continental Army under the command of Generals John Sullivan and James Clinton ravaged Indian villages from the Pennsylvania border to Little Beard's Town in present-day Livingston County.

The Daughters of the American Revolution erected several stone monuments in 1929 commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sullivan's Expedition throughout western New York. Each stone erected was fitted with a bronze plaque inscribed: "An expedition against the hostile Indian nations which checked the aggression of the English and Indians on the frontiers of New York and Pennsylvania, extending westward the dominion of the United States." We wanted to find and photograph as many of these memorials as we could.

Others before us had attempted to follow the trail of monuments, so I had some directions, which were barely useful as they were written in the 1950s. You would think that a monolithic stone monument, once planted, would stay planted. But not so. I live in Honeoye and I know that the Sullivan stone in our town has moved at least three times – from its original place at the intersection of Main Street and West Lake Road, to the school yard, to the library grounds, then to its present location in the lawn of the Town Hall. And we were to discover that other towns have moved their monuments from their earliest location. As a consequence we made dozens of wrong turns. In town after town we turned around, then turned around again, backtracked, and sometimes just could not find what we were looking for.

Our plan was to begin in Athens, then to follow as near as we could Sullivan's route northward as he traveled between Cayuga and Seneca Lakes. We set out for Pennsylvania, not taking the most direct route, but a meandering scenic course. We'd barely gone twenty miles before we were bickering over whether or not I'd used the word "left" when I said, "turn here." That dispute settled, we made good time and arrived in Athens in late morning.

Pennsylvania Route 199 is Athens' Main Street. From north to south we found four markers: a sign near the Tioga Point Cemetery, another sign at the Athens Cemetery, a stone marker on the east side of Main Street, and another sign at the corner where Route 199 turns right off South Main. These all pertained to Sullivan's preparation for the coming campaign as he established Fort Sullivan here.

Then we made our way to Route 220-North, which took us to Route 17-West. At Exit 17 was the village of Chemung; a right turn onto County Road 60 brought us to a sign commemorating the "Battle of Chemung." Then reversing direction on CR 60 we found at Lowman a more elaborate stone monument with details of the battle: "August 13, 1779/General Sullivan's Troops were attacked by Indians posted on this ridge/A valorous charge led by Colonel Hubley drove the Indians to the swamp a quarter mile west/The American dead were conveyed to Tioga and buried at Fort Sullivan."

A short distance further west on CR 60 we arrived at Newtown Battlefield State Park. There we found ample photo opportunities. It was a day of intermittent cloudiness, but it cleared enough for us to eat our lunch under the sun at one of the many picnic tables. We explored briefly and found walking trails, picnic facilities, restrooms, and – unexpected joy – a Little Library. There were signs galore pointing out details of the battle which occurred here on August 29, 1779. The pillar which dominates the site bears a plaque explaining the battle "between Continental troops commanded by Major General John Sullivan and a combined force of Tories and Indians under Colonel John Butler and Joseph Brant avenging the massacres of Wyoming and Cherry Valley, destroying the Iroquois confederacy, ending attacks on our settlements, and thereby opening westward the path of civilization."

Back on CR 60 headed west we re-joined Route 17 at Jerusalem Hill Road. Past Elmira we exited onto Route 14-North. In Millport (at the corner of Catherine Street) there's a sign indicating the Military Route. As we neared the outskirts of Montour Falls, we found another stone monument: on the west side of Route 14 at the parking lot for the Catherine Creek Public Fishing Stream.

Then on to Watkins Glen, where we turned onto Route 414-North. Before proceeding further we made a pit stop at the Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream Store. We took Route 414 to 96A, then to 96-North. North of Interlaken we got onto Route 89-North and so came to Canoga. The stone monuments here – there are two – are on the west side of the road as you enter the village, at the corner of Canoga Street. (Of historical interest to no one else but us: my mother-in-law was born in Canoga.)

Continuing north on Route 14 we turned west onto Routes 5 & 20. The monument in Seneca Falls was difficult to find and necessitated much turning around, because I had an idea of where it *should* be, and it was somewhere else. Outside Seneca Falls, Routes 5 & 20 become Cayuga Street. At the intersection of Cayuga and Pine Streets, in a marooned traffic island, sits the stone monument. Once we found this one, the next one in Waterloo was easy to track down. It's in the heart of the village in Lafayette Park, right on Routes 5 & 20.

In Geneva we tracked down another stone. On Route 14-South, about seven miles from the city, you'll find a stone monument at Kashong Point on the east side of the road quite near the corner of Kashong Road. We took a side road west to County Road 6 and headed north to the intersection with CR 4, where there's a monument on the southeast corner. We made our way back to 5 & 20 to Canandaigua. The monument here, on West Lake Road near the entrance to the pier, is quite impressive.

Headed to Honeoye, we followed as near as we could the trail of the Continentals. We took Route 21 to CR 32, through Bristol, and on to Route 20A-West. At the Town Hall in downtown Honeoye we parked and I made Wayne take my picture. On September 11, 1779, the army reached the foot of Honeoye Lake where they encamped. The Indian town they encountered "consisted of eleven houses and corn fields." The men systematically destroyed the homes and corn fields.

The next day the soldiers marched to the foot of Hemlock Lake and we followed their path. Twenty-A West brought us to Hemlock, where we turned south on Route 15A to Hemlock Park – a right hand turn onto Rix Hill Road. The Sullivan Memorial is on the park gatepost. The mill stones decorating the gatepost were donated by area millers when the monument was dedicated in 1929. Two little girls, Geraldine Beam and Marian Reed, daughters of the millers, were given the honor that day to unveil the memorial post.

Continuing their westward march the army made its way to the head of Conesus Lake where they encamped near present-day Foote's Corners; the monument commemorating their campsite is at the intersection of Cole Road and Route 15, north of the village of Conesus. We had only two more sites we wanted to visit: the Ambuscade Park on Gray Road and the Torture Tree in Cuylerville.

Lieutenant Thomas Boyd was the head of a scouting party sent by General Sullivan to discover the location of Little Beard's Town. He led his twenty-six men through the forest, following an Indian trail. After reaching a small Indian settlement near present-day Mount Morris, they turned back toward their camp. But as they crested Groveland Hill they were ambushed by a large force of Indians. Boyd and his men fought bravely, yet they were soon overcome. Most of them were killed, one or two managed to escape, but Lt. Boyd and Sergeant Michael Parker were taken prisoner.

Continuing our quest, Wayne and I made our way from Foote's Corners to West Lake Road (Route 256) at the head of Conesus Lake, then to the site of the ambush on Gray Road. (It is necessary to take Maple Beach Road off West Lake Road, then a left on Barber Hill Road and another left onto Gray Road, as the turning from West Lake Road to Gray Road – the likely route of Sullivan's men – is no longer passable.)

From there we drove back roads to Mount Morris where we picked up Route 36-North. At Route 20A we turned right to the Torture Tree Park a short distance along on the right. Here Boyd and Parker met their grizzly ends, tortured before they were killed. One sign informed us that this memorial commemorated the "Boyd-Parker Torture Tree and Burial Mound. Western Limit Sullivan's Expedition 1779. Seneca Village Little Beard's Town."

And thus ended the Lewis Expedition of September 11, 2020.