Revolution Five: Ottawa County Veterans in the American Revolution

By Linda K. Huber

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About This Series: This is the second of a three-part series on the American Revolution and five veterans from that conflict who are buried in Ottawa County. **Note:** In reviewing published documents, there are variations in birth dates and service dates. Where there were inconsistencies, the author used the best source or most frequent date used.

Part II: Service

Though the total loss of life throughout the conflict is not definitively known, best estimates conclude up to 70,000 died for America, with the largest group being prisoners of war on prison ships. Death from disease was the second largest cause of death. Seriously wounded or disabled is estimated at 25,000. The population at the time of the war was approximately 2.1 million.

Ottawa County has five veterans from the conflict buried in the County: Isaac Ambler, John Clemons, Jr., John Green, Israel Harrington, and Benajah Wolcott. All five served as Privates and very little primary source material from Privates is available. Based on published documents, this narrative attempts to put into context the area of their service and is not necessarily an accurate reflection of where they served or what they may have done in the conflict.

Isaac Ambler was born in Stamford, Fairfield County, Connecticut on August 11, 1756. Stamford is near the southwestern point of Connecticut on Long Island Sound. Its population at the time of the Revolution was overwhelmingly made up of farmers. Families were interrelated due to marriages among ancestors. While a small number were accumulating great wealth through trade, primarily in agricultural goods, most remained tied to the land, and land was a great source of wealth. Craft industries flourished and mills were constructed on the rivers, mostly to serve the needs of the local populace.

Ambler at age 24 enlisted in 1780 and served for two years, first with Capt. Reuben Scofield's Company from March 13, 1780 to January 1781 then with Capt. Isaac Lockwood, Stamford Sea Coast Guards, from January 1, 1781 to January 1782. Records on Scofield and Lockwood reflect service throughout the entire war period. No specific information was found on Lockwood's 'Sea Coast Guards' for the period of Ambler's service, though we might speculate on it. Being in close proximity to New York, Stamford was near British Loyalists (Tories) camps allowing for frequent Tory harassment, looting, and raids against those fighting for independence. George Washington ordered a ring of

forts be constructed to defend the New England colonies from attacks by the New York City British garrison. One was Fort Stamford. Designed by Rufus Putnam, who also designed West Point, the fort was constructed by David Waterbury, was approximately 135 feet wide by 165 feet long and was located alongside the Post Road, the most common route for travel, offering a perfect view of Long Island Sound.

A surviving record of one who served at the fort, Johnathan Rathbum, describes being 'subjected to the usual hardships of military life'. He relates an attack on the fort by the British and spending the night in the woods to avoid the soldiers, "One evening, the orderly sergeants passed around among the men, and with a whisper, commanded us to equip ourselves without noise; and then were marched out of the fort to a woods two miles distant, and ordered to lie down on the frozen ground, where we passed a bitter cold night with only one single blanket and our overcoats to protect us." At its peak, the fort was home to 800 soldiers. Possibly Ambler may have served as one.

John Clemons, Jr. was born in Danvers, Essex County, Massachusetts on June 4, 1763. Danvers is located on the Danvers River near the northeastern coast of Massachusetts. Originally known as Salem Village, it separated to a district in 1752. Salem was one of the most significant seaports in trading commodities, including the Atlantic slave trade. During the war, it became a center for privateering.

Clemons at age 17 enlisted in January 1780 and served one year with Sgt. McCoy from the 15th Regiment under Col. Rufus Putnam, 5th Regiment, Light Infantry.

Rufus Putnam had significant military service and may be best known to Ohioans for his development of lands as part of the Northwest Ordinance territory, specifically approximately one million acres of land north of the Ohio River, between Marietta, Ohio and Huntington, West Virigina. During the war Putnam served under Major General Anthony Wayne in the Corps of Light Infantry commanding the 4th Regiment in the 1779 Battle of Stony Point, New York, and in January 1783 was commissioned a brigadier general.

No specific information was found on activities of McCoy's 15th or Putnam's 5th for the time Clemons served in 1780. What is known for this time is during the winter of 1779-80, the Continental Army suffered greater hardships than they did at Valley Forge. Morale was poor, public support fell away in the long war, the Continental dollar was virtually worthless, the army was plagued with supply problems, desertion was common and mutinies occurred due to the conditions. One of the last major battles between the British and American forces in the northern colonies occurred in June 1780 at the Battle of Connecticut Farms with an attack by British soldiers from the New York City garrison on soldiers in Morristown, New Jersey. With George Washington playing a part, the British met stiff resistance by the Army and forced the British to withdraw.

The other significant event in 1780 was the capture of British Maj. John Andre and his disclosure of Benedict Arnold's treason to turn over control of the fort at West Point to the British. Ironically, one of the last conversations Andre and Arnold had before Andre's capture was at Stony Point, New York, a place of battle where Rufus Putnam, under whom Clemons served, had been engaged the year before. Andre was convicted of espionage and executed by hanging on orders from George Washington. After fleeing to New York, Arnold requested Washington provide safe passage to Arnold's wife, Peggy. Washington granted the request. In 1781 Arnold and his wife left New York for England where Arnold eventually died in 1801 at the age of 60.

John Green was born in 1757 in Lanesborough, Berkshire County, Massachusetts. Lanesborough is situated within two valleys in Berkshire County on the northwestern edge of Massachusetts. One of the first Berkshire communities to be settled, Lanesborough was originally known as "New Framingham". First settled in 1753 it officially incorporated in 1765. The main thoroughfare during Green's time is today's U.S. Route 7 connecting Norwalk, Connecticut with the Canadian-US border.

Green at age 20 enlisted. He would be discharged and re-enlist two additional times serving a total of five years. In 1776 he served with Capt. Nathan Pierce under Col. Seth Warner, a second time in 1777 with Capt. Baldwin Company of Rangers and Capt. Daniel Brown Massachusetts Company, and a third and final time in 1780 with Capt. Hitchcock Company, Colonel Sprout Massachusetts Regiment. The 1780 service was less than the required nine months for inclusion in a pension calculation. His 1832 Revolutionary War Pension Declaration provides a wonderful narrative of his service years. The following summarizes statements made in that declaration.

In his 1776 service he marched from Lanesborough to St. John in the province of Upper Canada and then continued on to Montreal. Engaging with superior British troops, they retreated to St. John. An ensuing outbreak of smallpox killed nearly half of the company. From St. John the company marched to Fort Ticonderoga where Green was discharged. Returning home to Lanesborough, he was part of a group of volunteers sent to Vermont to quell Native American threats to settlers.

In January 1777 Green went to Albany, New York and enlisted under the command of Capt. Baldwin and his company of Volunteer Rangers. After serving a term of three months of garrison duty, he was discharged. He re-enlisted, again under Baldwin, and marched to Fort Constitution located on the east side of the Hudson River. The Fort was abandoned as construction began at Fort West Point on the west side of the Hudson. When his three-month enlistment ended, Green returned home to Lanesborough.

Green and other volunteers went to Burlington, Vermont and enlisted for three-month service under the command of fellow Lanesborougher, Capt. Daniel Brown, with overall army command to General John Stark. In Vermont, he participated in the Battle of Bennington followed by the Battle of Saratoga in Stillwater, New York. Saratoga resulted in British General Burgoyne surrendering his entire army. Historian Edward Morgan has said, "*His (Burgoyne) surrender was a great turning point of the war because it won for Americans the foreign (French) assistance which was the last element needed for victory."* After being discharged, Green returned home.

Enlisting for the final time in 1780 with Capt. Hitchcock Company, Colonel Sprout Massachusetts Regiment, Green marched from Lanesborough to New York, down the Hudson River to West Point, and after receiving reinforcements from different parts of the union crossed the Hudson River. He then marched further down to the Northern part of the State of New Jersey to a place the Indians called 'Toteway Falls', today known as the Great Falls of the Passaic River in the City of Patterson, New Jersey. With no winter engagements, the army was called to storm Staten Island, south of New York, but the attack was abandoned as their guide proved a traitor. In March, the army returned to West Point where Green was discharged.

He returned home to Lanesborough and never again entered the army. For his service, he received a pension of $8 per month.

Green's younger brother, Duty, also served in the American Revolution and was present at the execution of Major Andre, British accomplice of Benedict Arnold.

Israel Harrington was born March 7, 1740 in Smithfield, Providence County, Rhode Island. Incorporated in 1731, it is located at the northeast tip of the state and is named after John Smith, one of the original party of six men led by Roger Williams that formed the first settlement of Rhode Island. Smithfield supported the Revolutionary War effort in seeking freedom from foreign domination. However, strong opposition was voiced relative to unifying into a single nation. Though they declared approval of the July 4, 1776 Declaration of Independence, it was with a stipulation they were not voting for the Constitution. Rhode Island was the last state to ratify the Constitution in 1790 after Congress threatened an embargo.

At age 40, Harrington had very limited service, enlisting March 13, 1780, eventually marching for a period of six days, and discharging October 18, 1780. His service was under Capt. William Gaige Company Militia, Col. Ira Allen Vermont Regiment.

Though born in Rhode Island, best guess on why Harrington served from Vermont is his relocation to Danby, Vermont. History of Danby records place Harrington there after the war. Gaige is placed in Danby during and after the war years. Danby records also reference a possible relative, Thomas Harrington, from Rhode Island. Gaige, like John Green, participated in the Battles of Bennington and Saratoga but those engagements put us too early in the war for Harrington's 1780 enlistment.

Though interesting history, no clues on Harrington's service are found when looking at the service history of Ira Allen, younger brother of Ethan Allen. The Allen brothers were part of the Green Mountain Boys militia established in 1770 within the territory between the British provinces of New York and New Hampshire and was organized to resist attempts by New York to control territory awarded it by the British. Ira was a leading figure in the Vermont Republic 1777 declaration intending itself to be independent of both the British colonies and the newly-founded United States. Vermont was admitted in 1791 as the 14th state.

In 1780, the British attempted to invade New Jersey but were stopped at the Battle of Connecticut Farms. This is considered the last major Revolutionary War engagement in the north as all eyes began to turn to the south. It may be that at the time Harrington enlisted the war was nearing completion and there was little need for his services.

Benajah Wolcott was born in New Haven, New Haven County, Connecticut on April 17, 1762. New Haven is located on the northern shore of Long Island Sound and was one of the first planned cities in the U.S. A year after its founding by English Puritans in 1638, eight streets were laid out creating the 'Nine Square Plan'. It had the first public tree planting program in the U.S. producing a canopy of mature trees, including large elms, that gave the city the nickname 'The Elm City'. Capt. Benedict Arnold hailed from New Haven County and in April 1775 commanded the Second Company, Governor's Foot Guard, breaking into the powder house to arm themselves for a three-day march to Cambridge, Massachusetts. Arnold's subsequent treason must have been particularly disheartening for fellow soldiers from Connecticut, like Wolcott.

Wolcott at age 14 enlisted in 1776 and served about seven years, first with Capt. Jonas Prentice Company (i.e., "The Leather Caps"), under Col. Return Jonathan Meigs Connecticut Regiment commanded by Brig. General Samuel Holden Parsons. At the end of the war, he was discharged by Capt. Buel at West Point, New York. After the Revolution, Wolcott served a period in the New York militia where he became a lieutenant.

Unlike John Green, Wolcott's pension declaration provides no supporting details to his service. Published documents and research on the regiments in which Wolcott served are

the only clues as to what he may have done and in what battles he may have been engaged. Merlin Wolcott, descendant of Benajah's son, William, published a 1984 manuscript titled "Ohio Yankee: Benajah Wolcott, Revolutionary Soldier and Pioneer", parts of which appeared in the Norwalk, Ohio Firelands Historical Society publication, *Firelands Pioneer*. Merlin's manuscript provides historical context to Benajah's service and much of the following narrative is from Merlin's work.

Upon enlisting in 1776, Wolcott's regiment joined the winter quarters at West Point, New York and assisted in constructing permanent fortifications, called 'Meigs Redoubt'. John Green's pension declaration notes that in 1777 he was at Fort Constitution on the east side of the Hudson River opposite West Point. Might both Wolcott and Green been serving on opposite sides of the Hudson River near the same time?

In 1778, Wolcott's regiment encamped with George Washington and his main army at White Plains, New York. In both 1778 and 1779 Wolcott wintered at Redding, Connecticut. The regiment joined operations on the east side of the Hudson River with Maj. Gen. Wm. Heath's wing, Col. Meigs Regiment and other military units under command of Maj. Gen. Anthony Wayne. They attacked Stony Point July 15, 1779 and were described as "an elite corps of light infantry, on a stealthy night attack, a successful operation more notable for demonstrating the proficiency with which the Americans now used the bayonet than for any important strategic gains".

Wintering in 1779 and 1780 at Morristown, New Jersey, nine brigades lived south of town in an area called 'Jockey Hollow'. Over 2,000 acres of trees were cut down and used to build log huts for shelter and fuel for fires. Conditions at Jockey Hollow were worse than Valley Forge, if that is possible. Following is a couple of comments representative of what the soldiers suffered while at Jockey Hollow.

General Nathanael Greene to an Unidentified Person, January 11, 1780

Such weather as we have had, never did I feel. For six or eight days it has been so extremely cold…, the snow it is also very deep, and much drifted. …the army has been cut off from its magazines, [supply storehouses] and been obliged to fast for several days together. We have been alternately out of meat and bread for eight or nine days past, and without either for three or four. The distress of the army has been exceedingly great from the weather, want of clothing and provisions. But the soldiers have borne it with great patience and fortitude. They have displayed a degree of magnanimity under their sufferings which does them the highest honour….

Washington to the Marquis de Lafayette, March 18, 1780

The oldest people now living in this country do not remember so hard a winter as the one we are now emerging from. In a word, the severity of the frost exceeded anything of the kind that had ever been experienced in this climate before.

In 1780 following Benedict Arnold's treason, Col. Meigs Regiment was ordered to move to West Point in anticipation of an advance by the British. Going into winter quarters in 1780 and 1781 near Robinson's Farm, a 'Connecticut Village' was created.

Congress in 1781 consolidated Connecticut Line regiments and Wolcott's Sixth Regiment became the Fourth Regiment under the command of Col. Zebulon Butler. At this time, Washington weighed two attack options, one of which changed the dynamics of the war. Should he attack New York or march against the British in Virginia? Preparing for either alternative, the Connecticut Line marched to Peekskill, New Jersey in June 1781 taking a position at Phillipsburg. Wolcott's Fourth Regiment was under the command of Maj. Gen. Parsons. With the French forces sailing from Chesapeake and not New York, Washington chose the option to march against British Maj. Gen. Charles Cornwallis in Virginia. The Phillipsburg camp disbanded in August, crossed the Hudson River at King's Ferry and began their march south, culminating in the British surrender at Yorktown October 19, 1781.

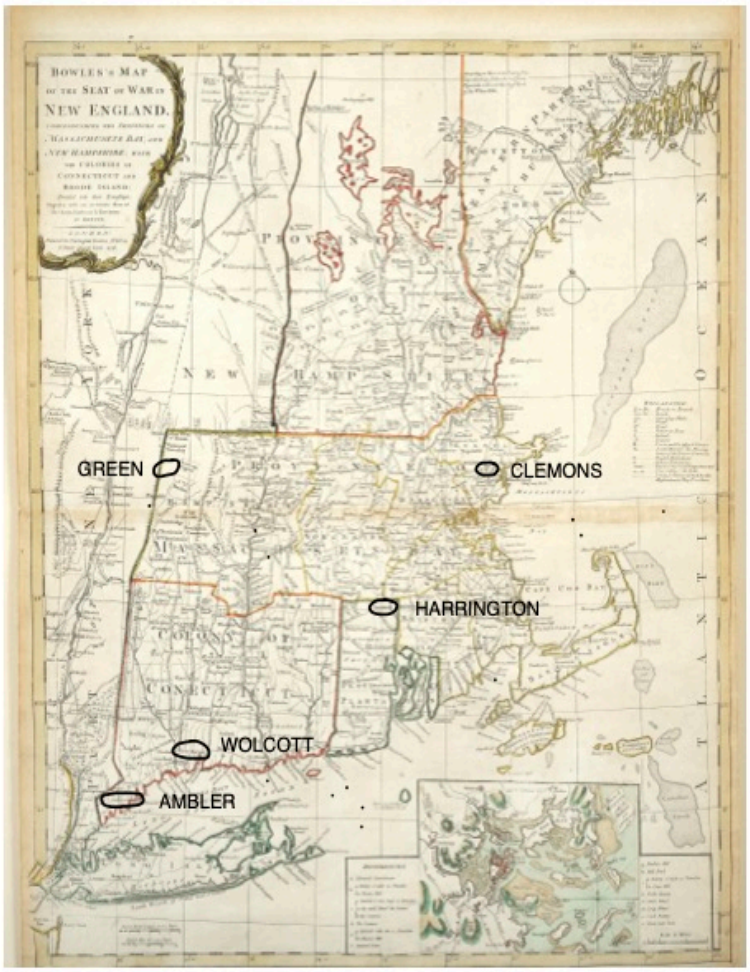
It is unknown whether Wolcott's unit remained with Maj. Gen Heath in holding the Hudson Highlands or moved on to Yorktown with the Light Infantry Corps of the Connecticut Line. If he remained with Heath, he guarded outposts against attacks from New York. Heath's troops went into winter quarters 1781 and 1782 by reoccupying the 'Connecticut Village'.

Another formation reorganization occurred and Wolcott's Fourth Regiment became the Second Brigade of the Connecticut Division. In 1783 marching to West Point, they went into winter quarters for the last time. A new formation was ordered with the Connecticut Brigade under the command of Brig. Gen. David Huntington. Wolcott was in the First Regiment under the command of Col. Butler.

Washington ordered almost all the troops disbanded by mid-June 1783. Wolcott was discharged at West Point.

Wolcott's older brother, William, also served. Enlisting in 1780 at the age of 24, he died of smallpox two years later in the winter quarters at the 'Connecticut Village'. It is unknown if Benajah was present when his brother died.

Part 3: Home, the final installment of this series, discusses the relocation of the Revolution Five to Ottawa County, Ohio.



Revolution Five Places of Birth
Bowles Map of the Seat of War on New England 1776
Library of Congress