

Backward Glances: Patriots and Redcoats -- The Battle of Ridgefield

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Supposedly neutral ground, Upper Salem during the Revolution was anything but, and the war severely tested the mettle of our residents. Some patriot families had loyalist neighbors, and sometimes opposing sides were even under the same roof. British spies were everywhere. Farmers feared for their lives and stock as British cowboys stole animals and raided supplies. Many of our men, young and old, fought and died in the militia, some under the command of North Salem's Thaddeus Crane. But no actual recorded battles were fought on our turf. The closest, near our eastern edge, were the three skirmishes that became known as the Battle of Ridgefield, April 27, 1777.

Next weekend, April 28 - 30, Ridgefield will mark the 240th anniversary of the battle with re-enactments, walking tours, colonial music, period costumes, facsimiles of British and American camps and much more. See

<https://www.battleofridgefield.org/pages/the-battle-of-ridgefield-events>

In the spring of 1777, the British decided to raid and destroy the Continental Army military supply depot in Danbury, CT. Under the command of Major General William Tryon, about 2000 troops came ashore at Compo Beach in today's Westport on April 25 and marched through the night to Danbury. The Connecticut militia, under General David Wooster in New Haven, Gold Selleck Silliman in Fairfield and Benedict Arnold, got wind of the plot and sounded the alarm to rally their troops and the New York militia. Sybil Ludington made her famous Revere-like ride to alert her father's Dutchess County troops.

Wooster and Silliman arrived too late to defend Danbury from looting and burning and so prepared to engage the British as the Redcoats returned to the coast. The first two encounters on the North Salem Road (Route 116) just north and west of Ridgefield bought time for Benedict Arnold (still on our side then) to barricade the road into Ridgefield. It didn't work, and the three encounters resulted in no clear victory for either side, many injuries and deaths, the mortal wounding and subsequent death of General Wooster, the heroics of Benedict Arnold and his subsequent promotion, the severe wounding of North Salem's Thaddeus Crane and the lion's share of the blame for Silliman. All of this will be dramatically re-told in Ridgefield next weekend.

Although not a victory for the patriots, the battle still reflects the commitment and determination of over 1000 farmers-turned-soldiers to stand tall in defense of liberty.

Of special interest to North Saalemites is our favorite son Thaddeus Crane, a farmer who selflessly served the town in myriad capacities for more than 25 years. Having bought farmland and moved here in the 1750s with wife Sarah, in about 1760 he built his

farmhouse, the lovely Town of North Salem Historic Landmark that stands at the intersection of Baxter and Titicus Roads.

Like many of his neighbors, Crane joined the militia to protect hearth and home and to assist the Continental Army when called. He was appointed captain and then major. In the winter of 1776-7, he endured the loss of his son Thaddeus (who died of exposure while serving in the militia) and the death of two other sons and wife Sarah. Instead of giving into grief, he accepted election as a delegate to the NY assembly and then was back home in time to answer the call to Danbury. One wonders when he planted or harvested his crops!

Crane's three companies, including Captain Nathaniel Delavan's 18 North Salem troops, served under Wooster in the pursuit of the British as they marched from Danbury. On North Salem Road, near the spot (at the intersection of Barlow Road) where General Wooster fell, Crane was seriously wounded -- some say a bullet through the hip, others say shoulder and lungs. Either way, he bled profusely -- "He bled his boots out" was the report -- and was eventually carried home to recover.

That was just the beginning of his service to town and country. He returned to the New York Assembly, married widow Lydia Baxter and was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel of the 4th regiment of the Westchester County Militia. When the courthouse in White Plains was burned, the court was moved to the Presbyterian Meeting house in Upper Salem, and Crane was appointed a judge in the County Court of General Sessions. Next he served as Supervisor of Upper Salem and also as a Trustee of the North Salem Academy. We will never know, but probably his favorite moment came when, as a delegate to the State Convention, Crane voted with the majority for the newly drafted Constitution of the United States.

Thaddeus Crane died September 1, 1803. He is buried in June Cemetery with his second wife Lydia.

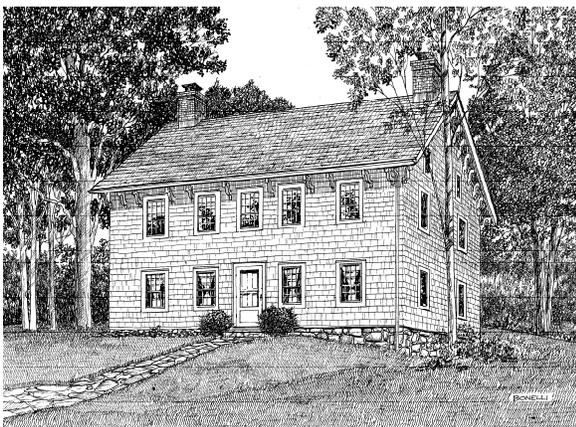


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Thaddeus Crane gravesite at June Cemetery.