

The Story of Mayfield

ERIC CLOSE, TOWN AND VILLAGE HISTORIAN

EIGHTH ISSUE - BRUMAL RETROSPECTIVE - OCTOBER THROUGH DECEMBER 2025



THE HARDWOOD CAMP, BERNHARDT MOUNTAIN

The men are off to the mountains, seemingly to do hard work. Hunting, trapping, felling trees, bucking logs and splitting firewood. Byron Elphee is “tending bar.” Waiting for their drinks, left to right, is Arch Blowers, Ralph Martling, Jay Swears, Gerald McClary, Dan McClary, and Gene McClary. Circa 1942

THE FALL OF 2025

Fall was short, cold, and wet. Winter came in the second week of November, and there was a good, heavy base until a downpour a few days before Christmas exposed the bare ground for the first time in a month. During the full moon on December 4th, the Sacandaga froze. I witnessed the event with my own eyes. One moment, I could see the waves shimmer in the moonlight, a half hour later, it was a sheet of glass. On about December 10th, I saw the first snowmobile traverse the thin ice of the reservoir. About a week later, more dared to venture. When the calendar declared the beginning of winter on December 21, it was over a month too late. Perhaps spring will be a month early in 2026. I suppose that a fool can dream.

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RICE HOMESTEAD, APRIL 1936

Come take a step back in time at
The Rice Homestead! We look
forward to seeing you!

Bob Suits
President,
Mayfield Historical Society
Rice Homestead
328 Riceville Road
Gloversville, NY 12078

MAYFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNOUNCES 2025 EVENTS

MAYFIELD, NY - The Mayfield Historical Society, home of The Rice Homestead at 328 Riceville Road, in Mayfield, New York, has announced its 2025 events.

Starting Monday, April 21, at 6:30 p.m. with Fulton County Historian Samantha Hall-Saladino and Jessica Henry Clements will present "Fashion in the Age of the Suffragists" at the Mayfield Presbyterian Church, 22 N Main Street, Mayfield.

On Saturday, June 14, the 42nd Annual Strawberry Festival with music by Aaron Mittler will take place at The Rice Homestead from 12 to 4 p.m. A "Treasures in the Trunk" sale will also be part of this event, and the historic Rice Homestead is open for tours.

Thursday, July 17, the Annual Ice Cream Social with music by the Musicats Duo will be held at The Rice Homestead from 6 to 8 p.m.

Monday, Aug. 18, David Brooks, Education Director of Schoharie Crossing State Park will present "Strange History from Along the Erie Canal at Schoharie Crossing" at 6:30 p.m. at the Mayfield Presbyterian Church, 22 N Main Street, Mayfield.

The highly anticipated annual Fall Harvest Cruise-In with music by Dan Lynaugh will be Saturday, Oct. 4, from 12 to 4 p.m.

Monday, Oct. 20, Mayfield Town Historian, Eric Close, will present "Sir William Johnson and the Founders of Mayfield" at 6:30 p.m. at the Mayfield Presbyterian Church, 22 N Main Street, Mayfield.

A holiday favorite, the Annual Christmas Open House at The Rice Homestead will be Saturday, Dec. 6 from noon to 4 p.m. A vintage holiday experience with homemade pies, cookies and mulled cider to sample, crackling fires and holiday home tours.

The Rice Homestead's 2025 summer exhibit will be "Echoes of Yesterday - The Clothing Collection of the Mayfield Historical Society." The Rice Homestead is open for tours Wednesdays and Saturdays from noon to 4 p.m. beginning June 14 through Aug. 30. Tours can also be made by appointment.

Many thanks to all the volunteers and public for supporting us. If you would like to get involved, please contact us on Facebook or email – Mayfieldhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Bob Suits, President
"Like" us at
www.facebook.com/ricehomestead/!

EDITOR'S MESSAGE



ERIC CLOSE
MAYFIELD TOWN HISTORIAN

IF YOU ARE NOT ON FACEBOOK, YOU CAN FIND SOME OF MY WORK PUBLISHED ON THE MAYFIELD TOWN WEBSITE. I PUBLISH A WEEKLY MEMORIAL ON THE FACEBOOK PAGE, IN HONOR OF A CITIZEN OF MAYFIELD WHO HAS PASSED AWAY. YOU CAN FIND THESE ON THE HISTORY SECTION OF THE TOWN WEBSITE, UNDER THE LINK OF "[Town Historian's Digital Archives](#)" THE LINK TO THE WEEKLY MEMORIALS CAN BE FOUND AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE.

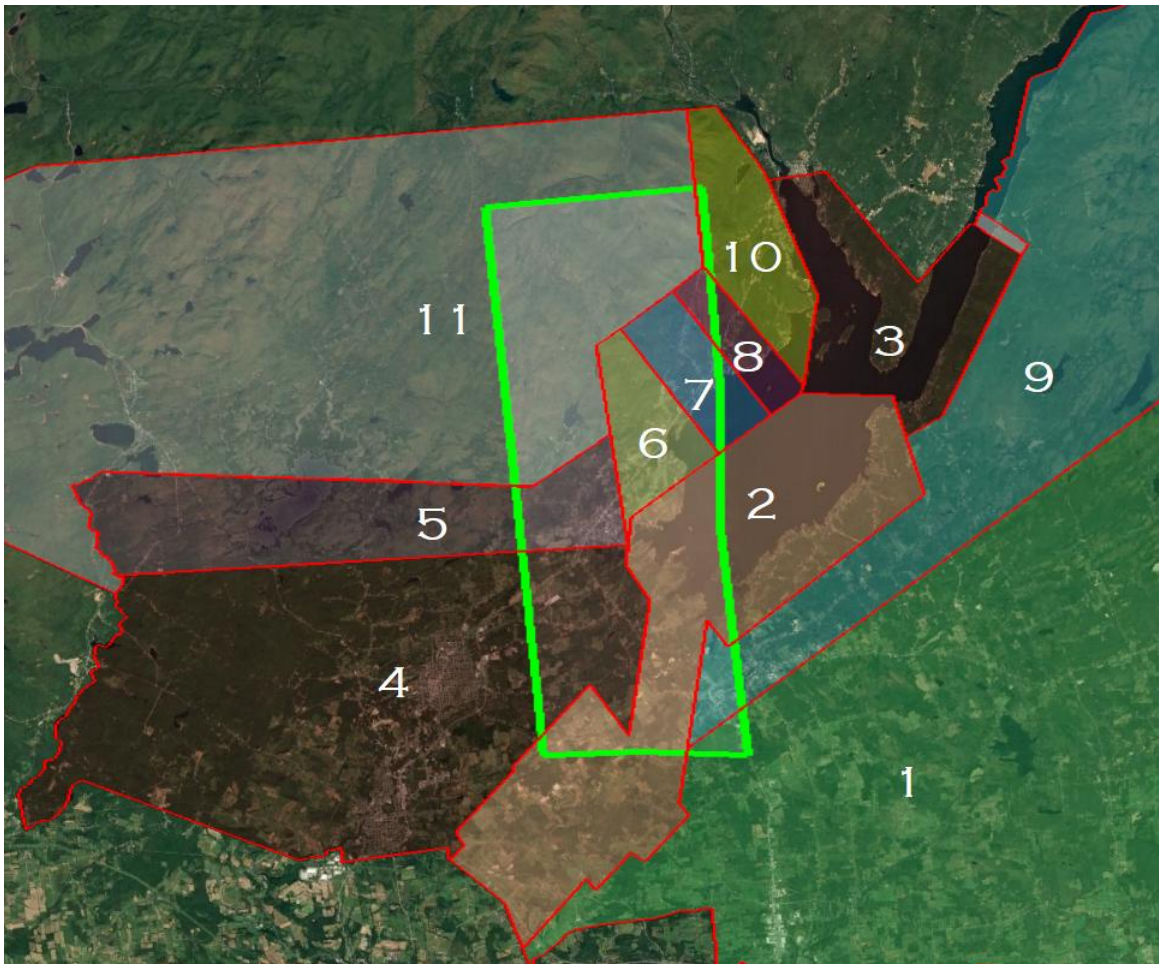
IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO HAVE A FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND HONORED IN THIS MANNER, PLEASE CONTACT ME. – HISTORIAN@MAYFIELDNY.ORG

(518) 774-0703

MAP OF LAND PATENTS

This map shows land patents (numbered 1-9), relative to the Town of Mayfield (outlined in green).

1. Kayaderosseras Patent, (1708);
2. Sacondaga Patent, (1741);
3. Northampton Patent, (1741);
4. Kingsborough Patent, (1753, 1755) ;
5. Preston's [Mayfield] Patent, (1770);
6. Col. Daniel Claus' Patent, (1770);
7. Capt. Normand McLeod's Patent, (1770);
8. Lt. Benjamin Roberts' Patent, (1770);
9. Capt. John Glen, Jr & 44 others' Patent, (1770);
10. Cornelius Haring's Patent, (?);
11. Glen, Bleecker, & Lansing's Patent, (1793)



AMERICA 250

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

December 30, 1775

It has been eight months since the 'shot heard around the world' rang out from Lexington and Concord. Seven months ago, Tryon County Patriots erecting a Liberty Pole were broken up by high-ranking Loyalist officers including Sir John Johnson and Col. Daniel Claus. Six months ago, John Fonda was confronted and attacked by Thomas Hunt, a servant to Alexander White, the outspoken Loyalist Sheriff of Tryon County. It has been five months since John Fonda was broken out of the Johnstown Jail by an angry mob of Patriots, who were fired upon by Sheriff White.

In the summer of 1775, the cauldron of tensions boiled over in Tryon County. After the escape of Sheriff White to Canada, the rolling boil simmered back down quite a bit. The Tryon County Committee of Safety undertook an effort to mitigate the situation without further bloodshed. Sworn testimony was gathered regarding the controversial events that had taken place. By the end of summer, the Committee had fully reorganized the Tryon County Militia.

On the 7th of September, the committee elected John Frey as the new Sheriff of Tryon County, "Whereas it is an unanimous Complaint of all the Freeholders and Inhabitants in our County (only the Tories Excepted) against the Scandalous, dammaging & dangerous Conduct of our late Sheriff, Alexander White, as he has proved Sufficiently himself unworthy of his Office and an enemy in general and in particular to our American Cause." (Meeting Minutes of the Tryon County Committee of Safety)

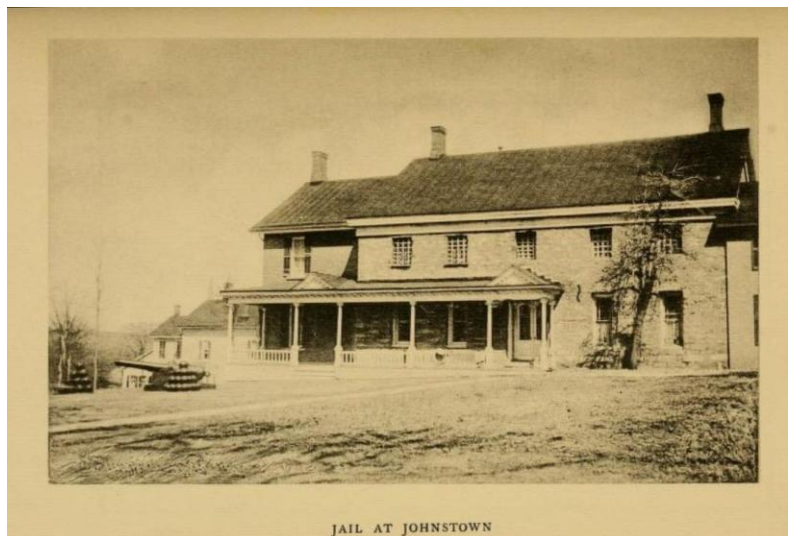
On October 26, the Committee of Safety sent a letter to Sir John Johnson, asking if he would allow his tenants in Johnstown and Kingsborough to form companies in the Militia and stand in defense of the cause of liberty, and whether he would stand for the cause as well. Furthermore, it was asked if he would hinder the committee's use of the County Courthouse and Jail.

Johnson's reply came the next morning, stating he would not object to the usage of the courthouse and jail, as long as he was paid, as their construction was paid for out of his own pocket. However, he would certainly object and oppose to any unlawful uses of the jail. He also explained that tenants were free to do as they wish, but assured they would not join the cause of liberty. Johnson himself expressed he would rather suffer his head being cut off, than raise his hand against the king.

Word had gotten around about Sir John Johnson through correspondence between the Committees of Safety at Tryon, Albany, New York, and others across the colonies. Correspondence told of Johnson's fortified estate, complete with block houses, an arsenal of weaponry and ammunition, with several hundred tenants and Indians willing to fight for the King. Finally, On December 30, 1775, continental congress ordered Gen. Phillip Schuyler to disarm Sir John Johnson and his loyal tenants.

At this time the British Army had a full occupation of Boston, strangling the Patriot uprising. The Continental Army, under command of Gen. Richard Montgomery, forged a campaign to seize the province of Quebec from British control. They sought to liberate the French-speaking Canadiens, and unite for the cause of freedom. However, this campaign was quickly turning into a disaster.

To be continued...



JAIL AT JOHNSTOWN

SIR WILLIAM JOHNSON AND THE FOUNDERS OF MAYFIELD

No single individual had a greater impact on local history than General Sir William Johnson, 1st Baronet, the Sole Agent and Superintendent of Indian affairs of British North America. His influence spread far beyond what is now Fulton County and even the Mohawk Valley.

Johnson began his illustrious career as a fur trader and estate manager along the Mohawk River after emigrating from Ireland in 1737. He earned the Mohawk's trust and was adopted by them as an honorary sachem. He served in New York's colonial assembly, championing a strong alliance between the crown and the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. He was a war hero, finishing his career as Major General of the New York militia above the Highlands. As Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Sir William Johnson may have been the most powerful man in North America. He answered only to the crown and had their blessing to make policy, determine war, and draw treaties. His pen alone opened up western expansion to create much of what became the northern United States. Not only was he a worldly figure at that time, but his hands personally played a role in shaping what would later become the town of Mayfield.

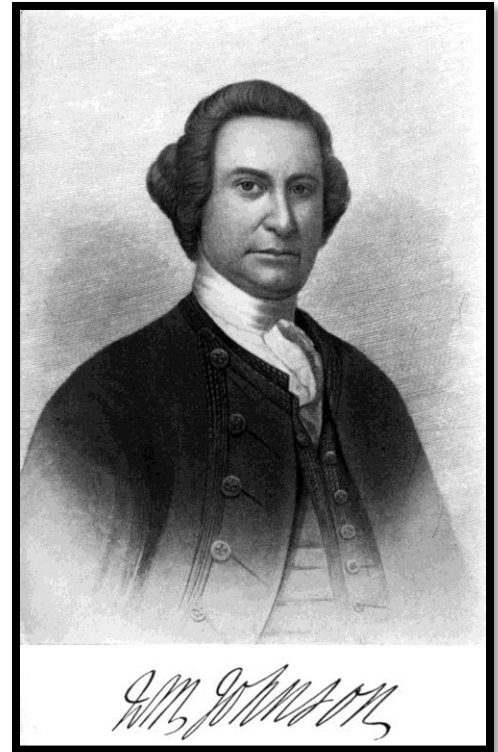
In 1748, the Treaty of Aix-La-Chapelle ended King George's war between England, France, and their respective "Indian" allies, prompting a brief period of peace and land speculation in the Mohawk Valley. Shortly after, Colonel William Johnson built his stone manor on the Mohawk River, now known as Fort Johnson. He, among others, made large land acquisitions on the north side of the Mohawk River with ambitions to clear the wilderness and bring settlers. This brief period of land dreaming was thwarted by the outbreak of the French and Indian War in the summer of 1754.

After his great victory at the Battle of Lake George in 1755, William Johnson was granted a Baronetcy and a significant cash prize. He subsequently acquired vast tracts of land, including two contiguous lots known as the Stevens Purchase and the Stewart Purchase. Situated a few miles north of the Mohawk River and a few miles to the southwest of the Sacondaga River, these two tracts were consolidated by Johnson to create the Kingsborough Patent. At nearly 50,000 acres, this area covers all of what is presently Gloversville and Johnstown, extending a few miles to the west, north, and east.

Despite the relentless threat of attack, Johnson settled about 100 families on the Kingsborough Patent during the heat of the French and Indian War. He furnished the survival of his tenants from his own pocket, and when not engaged in military campaigns, He lived among them at a cabin in the woods. After the 1759 campaign, Johnson finally began construction of a fortification on the forks of the Sacondaga Creek, which, after completion in the spring of 1760, was named "Castle Cumberland." This fort served to protect the Mohawk Valley and all of Johnson's settlements from a northern attack.

The defeat of the French at Montreal in the summer of 1760 brought the end of the French and Indian War. At that point, General Sir William Johnson set his sights on expanding his vast estate and establishing settlers. This effort was greatly aided by a gift of 80,000 acres by the Mohawks of Canajoharie that December. This gift of land is presently a large section of Herkimer County, north of the Mohawk River and between the West and East Canada Creeks. Johnson made several more land purchases in the 1760s.

The first European settlers of what became the town of Mayfield were German immigrants who came from Philadelphia on invitation from Sir William Johnson near or at the end of the French and Indian War. This



first group of settlers populated this heavy wilderness about six miles east of Johnson's new city of "John's Town," where he was building his new baronial estate: Johnson Hall. This new German settlement was located on a crossroad of trails between Johnstown, Tribes Hill, and the Sacandaga Valley. Contemporary records called this place "New Philadelphia," but it has more commonly been referred to as "Philadelphia Bush."

About the same time that settlers took to Philadelphia Bush, others settled upon the meadowlands about six miles to the northeast. This area was a vast grassland bounded on the north and east by an impenetrable ~10,000-acre swamp which the



Mohawks called "Sacondaga." This swamp was later called the "vlaie" by the Dutch settlers. "Vlaie" and "Sacondaga" basically have the same meaning in their respective languages, the latter translating to "drowned lands." Today, this area is known as Munsonville, and mostly lies beneath the Sacandaga Reservoir.

Philadelphia Bush and the settlement on the Sacondaga Meadows were located on the Sacondaga Patent, a 28,000-acre tract of land granted to some affluent Albany families in 1741. Initially, none of the land was owned by Johnson. So, all of these initial settlers on the Sacondaga patent were squatters until obtaining leases from the patentees, or until the lands were purchased by Johnson himself.

In 1767, Johnson purchased about 8,700 acres from Henry Holland and Edward Clark, two of the original lot owners of the Sacondaga Patent, as well as the neighboring Northampton Patent. Subsequently, Johnson undertook settlement on the Northampton Patent, with Godfrey Shew being among a group of settlers who located at "Fish House" on the Sacandaga River.

Johnson's lots were scattered across the Sacondaga Patent, so his lands there were not contiguous. This fact frustrated Johnson, as the Sacondaga, and more famously the Kayaderosseras Patent, were guilefully obtained from the Mohawks before his involvement in Indian Affairs. Both tracts were located upon celebrated Mohawk hunting grounds, and it appears that, at the very least, there was a misunderstanding in the exact scope of what land was to be purchased by the colonists.

Since the Kayaderosseras Patent was first granted in 1708, it posed as a great source of tension between the Colony and the Six Nations. Very little to no settlement took place upon it until after the boundaries were finally agreed upon in 1768. This new opportunity for settlement also let to more opportunities. The Kayaderosseras dispute lasted for 60 years until it was finally settled by the diplomatic grace of Sir William Johnson. It seems as though the Baronet spent much of his career fixing the mistakes of other unqualified or incompetent agents.

Also in 1768, Johnson purchased approximately 85,000 more acres from the Mohawk Nation. This included lands north of the Kingsborough and Sacondaga patents, as well as residual lands between Sacondaga and Kayaderosseras. Finally, as a result of all of the land disputes, Johnson began petitioning for the creation of a new County to avoid such problems in the future.

In 1770, five contiguous tracts of land were patented to the agents of Sir William Johnson. Over the course of his career, Johnson had numerous loyal partisans, whom he rewarded by granting these lands in their name. Captain John Glen, Jr, was a trusted business associate of Sir William, who also served under him in the militia and Department of Indian Affairs. Capt. Glen was among a list of 45 men granted a tract of 45,000 acres situated between the Sacondaga and Kayaderosseras Patents.

Also among this list of Patentees was Capt. Jelles Fonda, a prominent merchant and son of Douw Fonda, the latter being a dear friend and fatherly figure to Sir William during his early years in the Mohawk Valley. A

settlement was started on Fonda's lot in the "Glen & 44 Others Patent." Its first settler removed to there from Philadelphia Bush, and this was the family of Henry Stoner. By 1775, about a half-dozen families located to this vicinity, and in homage to Capt. Fonda, the area became known as Fonda's Bush. Eventually, after the establishment of a post office there in 1804, this became the village of Broadalbin. The name of "Fonda's Bush" was still used into the end of the 19th century.

Colonel Daniel Claus was not only the son-in-law of Sir William, but also served faithfully under him in the militia and the Indian Department. He was granted a tract of roughly 4,000 acres. Captain Normand McLeod was granted 3,000 acres, and Lieutenant Benjamin Roberts received a 2,000-acre grant. Capt. McLeod and Lt. Roberts were both loyal servants to Johnson in the Indian Department for over 20 years.

Lieutenant Achilles Preston, who also served under Johnson, was among a group of 15 to whom a 15,000-acre tract was granted in June of 1770. This section was situated north of the Kingsborough Patent and spanned from the Caroga Creek, eastward toward the Sacondaga, and was initially called "Preston's Patent."

By the summer of 1770, "Johnson's Bush" was expanding quickly. His new city of Johnstown was thriving with the recent construction of a free school, Episcopal Church, and Masonic Lodge. Not only was this area being populated by immigrants from Germany, Ireland, and Scotland, but also by New Englanders and old Dutch Colonial families. Sir William Johnson built a summer retreat on the former site of Castle Cumberland at the

confluence of the Mayfield and Kenneyto Creeks. He then built a carriage road from Johnson Hall to his new summer home, which he named "The Mount Joy Pleasure Hall."

From Johnson Hall, this new road was surveyed, and at each mile, a tree was marked. At the Six Mile tree in Philadelphia Bush, the road was met by the road from Tribes Hill. Johnson's carriage road continued from Philadelphia Bush to the northeast, a total of 14 miles to what became known as "Summer House Point."



The "Nine-mile tree" became a significant landmark after the war in the newly created town of Mayfield. But its prominence was also noted in colonial times due to its nine-mile equidistance between Fish House, Fort Johnson, and Johnson Hall.

Not only did this new road allow Johnson to partake of his Summer Hall without having to traverse a rugged wilderness trail, but it also opened up the area to ambitious settlers with their ox-carts.

On March 24, 1772, Tryon County was created, and Johnson subsequently built the Jail and Courthouse at the new county seat of Johnstown. With his loyal friends appointed to the leadership roles, Johnson finally had control of his territory.

Johnson began facilitating the settlement of the patent granted to Achilles Preston and 14 others. For this action, Johnson hired a firm believed to have been called the "Mayfield Company." Shortly after, this tract of land became known as the Mayfield Patent. The first settlers were believed to have located on the present site of the Mayfield Village in the spring of 1772. Much of the patent was mountainous, and therefore the settlement was confined to its Southeast corner. This fact became the source of a vicious dispute between land speculators and agents of Sir William Johnson.

Although Johnson was a ferociously busy man, he still took the time to personally tend to the matters of disputes among his settlements. There are surviving letters that detail the disputes in both Philadelphia Bush and Mayfield.

However, since the French and Indian War, Johnson's health began a long and steady decline. He was wounded in the Battle of Lake George in 1755. A bullet lodged in his thigh was believed to have been the first nail that would seal his coffin 19 years later. For years, he suffered debilitating bouts of joint and muscle pain, which he heavily medicated with alcohol, among other things. Also not contributing to Good health was a very, very long list of sexual partners since coming to the frontier.

Sir William Johnson died on the 11th of July in 1774. He was addressing sachems of the Six Nations at Johnson Hall, and after delivering a fiery speech, retired to a chair in his Hall where he "expired without a groan." At the time of his death, there was no man more respected or beloved by such a mass than him. It is often written that there was no greater man in his time or place. Given his complex character, fathering countless children with many partners, and the extensive use of slaves, this subject could be a very long topic of debate.

Sir William's Baronial Estate was inherited by his son, Sir John Johnson, 2nd Baronet. At the time of his succession, Philadelphia Bush was the largest settlement northeast of Johnstown, with as many as 15 families. Beginning with Stoner, Fonda's bush had grown to host about eight or nine families. A half-dozen families were living at Fish House, and about a dozen were living upon the Sacondaga Meadows and the Vlaie. The settlement on the Mayfield and Claus patents dwindled down to just eight families in 1774.

These settlers knew very little of the fires that roared on the horizon, which would soon completely engulf them, their neighbors, and their entire way of life.

SPECIAL THANKS

THANK YOU TO CHRIS WARNER, SUPERINTENDANT OF HIGHWAYS for repairing this historical marker on mountain road. The post rusted through and the marker fell over. Mr. Warner promptly made the fix and got

this monument of local history standing proudly once again. Thank you to Lori Bumpus and Ed Lent for informing me of the condition of this piece of our local infrastructure.



Photo courtesy of
Howard C. Ohlhous,
hmdb.org

THE LEGEND OF NICHOLAS DENNIE

In the frigid nights of late autumn, the full moon shines brightly in all its splendid glory. The trees are bereft of their leaves, and below, the lunar glow illuminates the hallowed grounds of Dennie Hollow.

The Hollow can be an eerie place. The howls of the coyote are a familiar greeting to one trudging outside at night. It is no such place to venture alone during the witching hour, as the heavy fog conceals the ghosts of many tragedies, mysteries, and dark old Legends.

Countless bright and full moons have come and gone since the hollow was first cleared from the wilderness. A lot has changed over the last 250 years, but one thing that has remained is the unsettling feeling that often hangs low in the mists of the hollow.

Decades after the Revolutionary War, there was talk of an old man wandering in the woods, with a shovel in hand, digging... looking for something. Perhaps he was looking for his mind, people surely thought, as the first impression was that he undoubtedly had lost it.

The story, told in the following lines, is the combination of both reputable, well-documented history as well as oral legend. The old tale survives the test of time only because it was passed down by Nathan Tyrrell, who spent his entire life in Mayfield, except for three years serving with the 115th New York Volunteers in the Civil War.

Tyrrell made his home in these mountains. As a matter of fact, the mountains were his lifeblood, as the hilltop upon which he was born bears his family's name. He was close with his neighbors and knew them all very well, as they relied on each other for survival in an isolated section of town.

Among his community was a man who will forever remain nameless, perhaps for purposes of discretion, or due to Mr Tyrrell's aged memory. Regardless, this unnamed man was said to have lived on the hillside just above Dennie Hollow. He spent a few years in the woods with this "digging madman," and knew exactly who he was, and exactly what he was searching for.

The two men operated in absolute secrecy due to the fear of what their findings might cause. The madman's true name was Nicholas Dennie, and he was searching for a very dark secret.

Dennie Hollow is a well-known place in the town of Mayfield. It earned its name due to the mid-1800s industrial pursuits of Henry Dennie, a farmer, stone quarry operator, and lime burner. He operated a successful business, which was carried on by his sons, Edwin and Dennis Dennie, into the early 1900s. As a matter of legend, Edwin Dennie's ghost is believed to have been seen wandering about the hollow in the century since his death--but that is a story for another time.

Dennis and Edwin, the Dennie brothers, were just children when their 92-year-old grandfather Nicholas died in 1845. Nicholas Dennie was a towering figure of legend and lore in Mayfield's history. He settled in Mayfield as a young man when it was still a wilderness and fought in the Revolutionary War--serving right here on this very frontier.

Dennie may have been a veteran of the war, but he did not draw a veteran's pension like some of his neighboring contemporaries, such as Oliver Rice, Hezekiah Tyrrell, or Isaac Bemis. That is because Nicholas Dennie served in the King's Royal Regiment of New York under Col. Sir John Johnson, 2nd Baronet. He was a loyalist, or rather, as the above-named pensioners would have likely called him, "a damned Tory."

On the eve of our Great American Revolution, Mayfield was a mere wilderness traversed by old Indian trails. Only a handful of settlers were breaking ground at crude log cabins scattered about the woods. Life on the frontier was arduous. Self-sufficiency was paramount to survival. They depended on what little crops they could grow, harvest, and preserve. The men worked in the fields, took care of livestock, and hunted. The women had to tend the gardens, manage the food stores, and fashion clothing from raw materials. Every single possession was earned through blood, sweat, and tears.

Barent Dennie was a widower who removed his family from the Hudson Valley at that time and came to this frontier, among them were his sons Jacob and Nicholas. When the war finally broke out in 1775, a shockwave from the Shot Heard 'Round the World rippled all the way to Tryon County, where the Loyalist

influence of Sir John Johnson stood fiercely over the cause of independence. It soon became a struggle of neighbor vs. neighbor as all the residents of this area were drawn into an unforgiving frontier War.

Hostilities between Loyalists and Patriots and Tryon County worsened as the War escalated in Massachusetts. Sir John Johnson began stockpiling an arsenal to arm his loyal tenants in the event of war spreading to the Mohawk Valley. Amidst the rising tensions in January of 1776, General Schuyler confiscated Sir John Johnson's arsenal and placed him on parole.

However, by that May, Johnson violated the terms of his parole, and General Schuyler ordered his arrest. Upon receiving word of his impending doom, Johnson buried all of his valuables and made his flight to Canada with nearly 200 of his loyal tenants. His relocation to Canada was a means of safety to avoid capture and imprisonment. Upon reaching Canada after a harrowing three-week-long journey through the wilderness, Johnson established the King's Royal Regiment of New York.

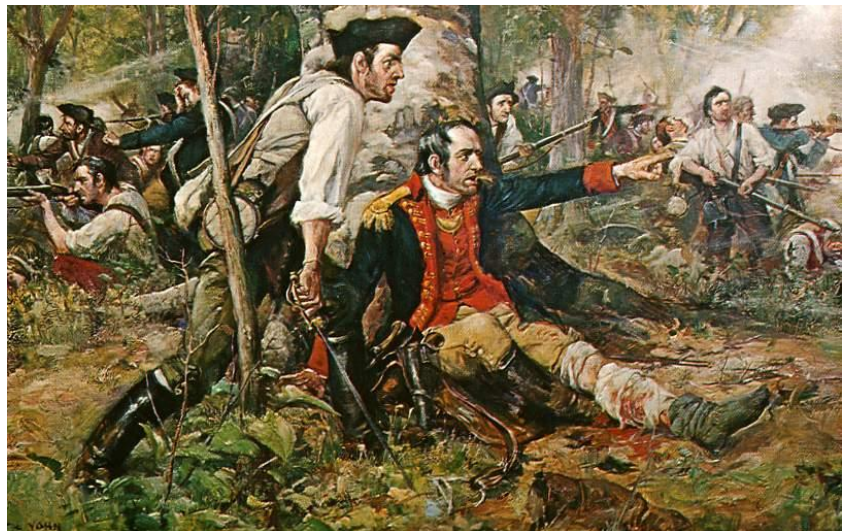
In Mayfield, what few settlers remained following land disputes and the outbreak of war made their intentions clear. Some joined the Tryon County militia to fight for independence, while others who were "tinctured with Toryism" made their escape to Canada. Many loyalists were known to have left the town of Mayfield, as many of the settlers of Philadelphia Bush went to Canada with the Johnsons.

In March of 1777, the Dunham family settled in Mayfield, relocating from Connecticut ahead of the encroaching War. The farm they established was next West from the Dennie's homestead. A couple of the Dunham boys, John and Ebenezer, enlisted in the militia, joining in the ranks of Mayfield's own Lt. Solomon Woodworth, his brother Sgt. Selah Woodworth, Cpl. Amasa Stevens, and Private Henry Kelly. Not only were these men Patriot soldiers, but they were also protectors and defenders of their families, each other, and the settlement they worked so hard to create.

Two hundred miles to the north in Montreal, the membership rolls of Colonel Sir John Johnson's Royal regiment added two names on May 6th of 1777: Jacob and Nicholas Dennie. They apparently made their flight to Canada that spring with a couple of others from Philadelphia Bush.

That summer, Colonel Johnson's Royal Regiment set out under the leadership of General St. Leger as a part of General John Burgoyne's great campaign to divide and conquer the colony of New York. The Loyalists under General St Leger forged a successful campaign to the headwaters of the Mohawk Valley, defeating the Patriots in the bloody Battle of Oriskany on August 6th. However, the loyalists retreated during the famous siege of Fort Stanwix, which thwarted Colonel Sir John Johnson's hopes of fighting for possession of his home at Johnstown and the surrounding estates.

Colonel Johnson and General St Leger returned behind the lines to reinforce General Burgoyne's forces, who were ultimately defeated that fall at the Battle of Saratoga. The surviving and uncaptured loyalists retreated to the safety of Canada.



General Herkimer at the Battle of Oriskany

Following the British campaign of 1777, the newly formed state of New York began arresting suspected loyalists. They were tried, imprisoned, and many of them were sentenced to death. Among these loyalists was Nicholas Dennie, who was tried in absentia, was convicted as an enemy of the state. His record of condemnation reads:

"BE IT REMEMBERED, that the fourteenth of June in the Fifth year of the Independence of the State of New York, the Jurors of the people of this state, for the Body of the County of TRYON, did upon their oath present, that Nicholas Denny late of Mayfield in the County of Tryon, Blacksmith, on the fifteenth day of July in the year of our Lord one Thousand seven hundred and seventy eight, at the the Mohawk District in the County of Tryon,

with force & Arms he did adhere to the Enemies of this State, against the Peace of the People of the State of New York and their Dignity."

At that point, his capture likely meant he would have had to face his fate at the gallows.

From the haven in Canada, Sir John Johnson launched several raids onto the frontier, hoping the Patriots would abandon their settlements and the loyalists could return to their homes in Tryon County. But after George Washington ordered General Sullivan to destroy and eradicate all enemy Iroquois settlements in New York, these raids became less feasible. Several more invasions of the frontier were undertaken by Johnson in 1780 and 1781. The constant and brutal attacks destroyed most of the settlements or left them abandoned. However, the surrender of General Cornwallis at Yorktown also surrendered Sir John Johnson's hopes of reclaiming the Mohawk Valley. He and his loyal tenants spent the rest of their lives in Canada, having to start over from scratch.

After the war, Nicholas Dennie and his brother Jacob were settled in a part of Canada which was named "New Johnstown," due to all of the displaced loyal tenants of the Johnsons. For the loss of their possessions in the war, the Dennie brothers were both awarded a farm in the Royal Township #3, called Osnabruck. However, by 1784, they both abandoned their lots.

The Dennies shortly thereafter returned to Mayfield to find very little remaining of what they had left behind. They were probably surprised to find their father's house still standing. The loyalists spared it due to the two sons in their ranks, and it was likely spared by the patriots due to the fact that, after the 1780 raid, the remaining patriotic settlers abandoned the frontier settlements to take refuge at Fort Johnstown.

Perhaps the Dennie brothers returned an account of their father's illness, as his last will and testament was drawn up that year. Jacob moved to Sammonsville shortly after, but Nicholas remained on his father's homestead and continued the trade of farming and operated a blacksmith forge. He joined the membership of the Dutch Reformed Church at Mayfield around 1800, likely after making peace with his former neighbors. He married and had several children. After a son took over the homestead, Nicholas moved down into the hollow, in the house lately owned by Bert and Dorothy Warner. He was said to have spent his final years living in a shack on what is now the Handy Road. He lived and died as an esteemed elder of this community, but there were rumors about him, whispers given with watchful glances, about the things he did during "the times that tried men's souls."

After the war, Dennie's neighbor, Ebenezer Dunham, had to rebuild his family home after it was raided and later burned. Early in the spring of 1779, a party of Mohawks left Canada, heading south to the Mohawk Valley. In the early part of April, they arrived at Fort Hunter, and upon retrieving their families, embarked on their return journey to Canada. On the 11th of that month, they passed through the trail in Mayfield and came upon an appetizing sight: Jacob Dunham and his son Samuel clearing brush from a field. They were said to have had their muskets very close by, as the threat of attack always loomed in the air. Mind you, this was only a few months after the attack in Cherry Valley, at which entire families were brutally slaughtered. It had also been nearly a year since a raid on the Sacondaga Patent killed Henry Kelly and destroyed Mayfield's gristmill—a raid in which Dennie was rumored to have taken part.

The warriors emerged from the woods, and before the Dunhams could scramble to their muskets, they were shot, tomahawked, and scalped. The gunfire alerted Mrs. Dunham and her two remaining sons, who fled the house, and they escaped into the woods to the safety of Fort Johnstown.

A lot has been said over the years about the raid against the Dunham family. Some have speculated that the raid was orchestrated and carried out by Nicholas Dennie. Legend claims that he was there and guided the warriors in the slaughter of his former neighbors. We will never know what truly happened, but there were certainly suspicions.

Upon arriving at Fort Johnstown, Mrs. Dunham reported the events, claiming the attack was carried out by Indians. Lt. Solomon Woodworth tracked down this party of warriors and came upon a sole member, who, after refusing to expose the whereabouts of his counterparts, Woodworth raised his gun and shot him. Lt. Woodworth virulently despised the Tories, and if there was any evidence that Dennie, or any of his loyalist counterparts took part in the raid, Woodworth would have stopped at nothing to kill them with his bare hands, even if that mean chasing them for 50 miles or more.

However, it is known that the Tories trained the Indians to hate the patriots, or "the damned cursèd rebels," and to dispose of them cruelly and viciously. I posit that if Dennie was involved with the raid, it was

from afar. I think it is possible that he could have sent that party of Mohawks to raid the Dunhams, but this is wild speculation.

In May of 1780, Colonel Sir John Johnson left Canada with a force of over 500 of his loyalist soldiers and Mohawk warriors. The purpose of this mission was to terrorize the remaining patriots, collect any remaining loyalists, and recover Johnson's papers and valuables, which he buried at Johnson Hall before evading capture in May of 1776.

The regiment traveled for a few weeks. First, by navigating up the Champlain valley to Lake George and over the carrying place to the Hudson River. Finally, they ventured up the Sacandaga valley, reaching Mayfield late at night on May 21st. The force split up into small raiding parties, with many of the Tories disguised in full Mohawk war paint.

In Mayfield, Amasa Stephens was dragged from his bed around midnight, murdered, and then mutilated. The same happened to his wife's father and brother, a few miles east of Johnstown. The bloodthirsty Tories and their Mohawk brethren crawled across the Eastern edge of Tryon County, taking prisoners, plundering homes, and torching as many as 100 farms.

Nicholas Dennie was said to have been among the large force that made a rendezvous at the home of outspoken Patriot leader Sampson Sammons. The loyalists emerged from the woods, taking the family as prisoners. The raiders plundered the house, took their horses, and burned the Sammons place to the ground.

This force of loyalists, led by Colonel Sir John Johnson himself, then continued to Johnson Hall, where he collected his papers and valuables. At that time, the scrambling Tryon County militia began to organize in the midst of the chaos. Shots were reported to have been fired at the Loyalists as they fled into the woods north of Johnstown.

According to old man Tyrrell's legend, Nicholas Dennie, with about a half dozen Mohawks, split off from the main force to raid some of the Patriot homes. The Indians were not interested in collecting anything we would perceive as valuable, such as blankets, beads, or trinkets. This left all of the jewelry, silver, and gold coins for Dennie to collect. He collected them in an iron kettle, and upon the grand Loyalist retreat, the party escaped into the woods, also allegedly carrying a small brass cannon.

Dennie's party was then pursued by a band of patriot militia to the north of Johnstown and traversed the "wild trail" with their spoils. However, the weight of their luggage slowed them down, and the militia was closing in on their position. So the party had to make a choice: leave behind their treasure and escape, or get caught. The latter choice, for Dennie, meant his imprisonment and likely execution.

The party came to a clearing, known to them as "the hog yard." At the base of a very large tree, a hole was dug, and the brass Cannon, along with Dennie's iron kettle, was there deposited and buried. Much lighter on their feet, the party hastened their escape from the grasp of the approaching militia and toward the safety of Canada.

It was said to have been long after the end of the war...long after he'd had his children, undertaken his business, and lived a useful life when Dennie took to the woods with his shovel. The landscape had changed drastically since that fateful day in 1780 when he buried that iron kettle full of gold and silver coins. None of the landmarks were familiar to him, but when time and discretion allowed, he searched and searched, but in vain.

Unable to unearth his long-lost spoils and ravaged by the passage of time, old man Dennie took a friend into his confidence, and the two men scoured the woods. Dennie and his new confidant were said to have searched for the kettle for another few years. But finally, old Mr. Dennie grew too advanced in his years and infirmities to continue the search. He lived out his final years in the shack above Dennie Hollow. He died on the first day of June, 1845, in the 92nd year of his age.

We will likely never know the true story as it happened. These events of the Revolutionary War have been passed down through generations, warped by time, exaggeration, and sensationalism. The heart of the story could be true, but who can say about the details? In reality, the treasure—if it even existed—could be buried anywhere between Johnstown and Canada along any number of long-forgotten trails. It has been 180 years since the death of Nicholas Dennie, and over 100 years since the last person who knew him died. But his legend is alive and well in Dennie Hollow.