

# PATRIOTS' DAY CELEBRATION



Hillside Cemetery  
165 Ridgefield Road, Wilton CT

## **Patriots' Day Celebration Hillside Cemetery**

Welcome to Hillside Cemetery, established in 1818 and resting place to many Revolutionary War veterans and founding families of Wilton.

**What is Patriots' Day?** Let's travel back to the American Revolution. On April 19, 1775, the Battles of Lexington and Concord kicked off the colonists' fight for independence from Great Britain. Just two months after Parliament declared Massachusetts to be in a state of rebellion, the brave residents of the colony took up arms and went to battle for independence—eventually leading to the creation of the United States of America. The first battles in this war were fought in the areas of Lexington and Concord, near Boston, Massachusetts, on April 19, 1775.

### **What was Wilton's role during the Revolutionary War?**

A surprisingly large number of over 300 men from Wilton served in military units under Captain Samuel Comstock and Major General Israel Putnam. The War came to Wilton briefly in 1777 when the British had to retreat through the village of Wilton after their invasion of Danbury. Although several houses were set afire, none were destroyed.

Today, almost 250 years later, we are gathered here at this memorial site to remember that we are one nation with one flag. We are all proud to be Americans that live in a free society made up of many people, many races, from many occupations. The freedoms we enjoy today have not come without a price. Lying here before us are the original Patriots who gave their lives so that we can live in freedom. The United States of America was founded on the ideals of Freedom, Justice and Equality. Our Nation stands as a shining beacon of liberty to the world. We thank those who gave their lives to start our country.

## WILTON'S PATRIOTS

### **Hillside Cemetery**

Ebenezer Abbott  
Moses Betts  
Daniel Birchard  
Joseph Birchard  
Thomas Cole  
Benajah Strong Comstock  
Capt. Samuel Comstock  
Eber Dudley  
Moses Gregory  
Daniel Hurlbutt  
Thaddeus Mead II  
Jonathan Middlebrook  
Summers Middlebrook  
Thaddeus Sterling  
Isaac Stuart  
Phineas St. John  
Enoch Tuttle  
Daniel Westcott

### **St. Matthew's Cemetery**

Daniel Betts IV  
Samuel Betts IV  
Rev. Levi Dikeman  
Daniel Jackson  
Justus Keeler  
Clapp Rockwell II  
Abel Whitlock  
Nathan Williams

### **Sharp Hill Cemetery**

Isaac Arnold  
Azor Belden  
John Chapman  
Deodate Gaylord  
Nathan Gilbert  
Capt. Abraham Gregory  
Ebenezer Gregory  
Ezra Gregory  
Jehiel Gregory  
John Grumman  
Ezekiel Hawley  
Nathan Hubbell  
Zadock Hubbell  
Alvin Hyatt  
Matthew Marvin  
Asahel Raymond III  
Zadock Raymond  
John Stuart  
Capt. Joseph Sturgis

### **Comstock Cemetery**

David Dunning III  
Thaddeus Keeler  
Matthew Mead  
James Morgan  
Samuel Olmstead  
John Rockwell III  
David Whitlock  
Samuel Middlebrook

## **Wilton's Colorful Revolutionary History**

*Written by Christopher Burns, Wilton Bulletin*

*July 4, 2013, Updated: June 12, 2019*

There was little goodwill towards one's enemies following the Revolutionary War in the parish of Wilton. The war had divided the town (and even a family) into two camps: the loyalist Tories, and a group we now call Patriots. "There were many Tories in Wilton," former First Selectmen Bob Russell said recently in discussing the tenor of the late 18th Century here, "but it was not as bad as other towns in the area," as most of the town's residents were supporters of the revolution. He continued to say that Ridgefield had a "real Tory problem" and that Newtown was "the worst" in the area. A history maven, Mr. Russell is the author of a history of the town entitled *Wilton, Connecticut*.

Rather than remain in a town dominated by citizens in support of independence, many Tories chose to leave for the duration of the war. Job Burlock, a noted Tory sympathizer and dedicated subject of King George, had left Wilton at the onset of the Revolution for Long Island — an area known for its dedication to the crown, Mr. Russell said. Little is known about Mr. Burlock "except that he was married and had either two or three children," Mr. Russell said, and that he returned to Wilton briefly after the war. When he arrived back in Wilton following the end of the Revolution, Mr. Russell said he returned to the home he either owned, or rented, demanding to retrieve property he had left behind. "When he came back after the war," Mr. Russell said, "someone shot him on his doorstep." No one in Wilton was ever charged with his murder, and little information about it exists today. It may represent the oldest cold-case murder in Wilton history. "There might have been other incidents," Mr. Russell said. "There were hard feelings much like after the Civil War."

### **Betts Brothers**

Even families were divided by the war, he said. The Betts and Deforest brothers fought on opposite sides of the Revolution. "The most avid of British supporters joined the British army. 'The Prince of Wales Regiment' was made up entirely of Americans who had volunteered to fight against their countrymen," Mr. Russell's town history reads. "From Wilton, it included Captain Ephraim Deforest and Jared Betts." As for the Betts brothers, Jared operated as a regional guide for General William Tryon — a British noble whose destructive raids on Danbury and Norwalk were infamous. He led the general through the area towards Danbury and was involved in guiding during the Battle of Ridgefield. In a cruel twist of fate, his brother Nathan Betts IV was a patriot soldier involved in the Battle of Ridgefield. He was killed during Gen. Tryon's return from Danbury, the same return that his brother was guiding, Mr. Russell said.

## Tryon's Raid

Gen. Tryon's first raid in 1777 remains the most damaging wartime event to occur in the Wilton area. Gen. Tryon landed for the first time at Compo Beach in 1777, and marched nearly unopposed to Danbury, where he and his men consumed a large amount of rum, and set the town ablaze, Mr. Russell said. With the exception of a skirmish with about 50 militiamen on the Post Road, the only opposition Gen. Tryon received was in the form of an either courageous or insane horseman at the top of Hoyts Hill, in Bethel. "Tryon was confronted on Hoyts Hill by a presumably insane horseman," a history of Danbury as it is told by notes compiled by James Bailey in 1896 reads, "who appeared on the crest, waving a sword, and conducting himself very much as if he was in command of a considerable army in the act of climbing the opposite side of the hill. The British commander halted his force and sent out skirmishers to reconnoiter (sic), when it was discovered that the stranger was alone, and instead of leading on an enthusiastic army to almost certain victory, was making the best of his way back to Danbury." On his return towards Wilton, Gen. Tryon was confronted by Continental and militia troops in Ridgefield. Continental troops were trained soldiers, while militia troops were "farmers with muskets," Mr. Russell noted. The Wilton Militia, led by Lt. Seth Abbott, took part in the stand at Ridgefield under the command of Gen. Benedict Arnold (not yet a traitor) and Gen. David Wooster — who would be mortally wounded in the battle. Gen. Tryon's forces outnumbered the Patriots 3 to 1, Mr. Russell said, and he was victorious.

## Grandmother Gregory

It was after this event that the Rev. John G. Davenport would record, in a poem, the story of Grandmother Gregory, a 60-year-old woman who openly disparaged British soldiers as they stole goods from Wilton homes. "At the intersection of Ridgefield Road with Belden Hill, the troops entered the house of Daniel Gregory and were greeted by Daniel's aged mother," Mr. Russell's history reads. The woman "shook a poker at them 'to show which side I am on,'" local legend reads. The poem was written as follows:

"Words fail to tell of the fear and dismay  
Which swept the small village of Wilton that day  
When the enemy's army marched into the street  
And our own valiant soldiers were forced to retreat  
When who in the midst of it all should appear  
But Grandmother Gregory, feeble and seer.  
She faced the invaders that marched through the land  
Shaking the poker she held in her hand.  
'How foolish!' her friends cried, provoked it is true,  
Grandmother, what did you think you could do?  
Replied our townswoman of days that are gone,  
'I wanted to show them which side I was on.'

## **King George's Statue**

One of the most famous Revolutionary events that involved Wilton was the transfer of a lead statue of King George from Manhattan, where it had allegedly been pulled down by the Sons of Liberty, to Litchfield, where there were proper facilities to melt it down into bullets. It arrived in Wilton at some point in mid-July 1776, Mr. Russell said, after the Declaration of Independence was read in New York City. When it came to town, it arrived aboard a horse-drawn wagon whose operators stopped at Clapp Raymond's Tavern, a building that still stands as the Fitch House at the Wilton Historical Society. During the night, people whom Mr. Russell assumes were Tory sympathizers stole a large portion of the lead statue from the wagon. No one at the tavern noticed that any of the pieces had been stolen when they delivered the statue to Litchfield. "At Litchfield," Mr. Russell's history reads, "General Oliver Wolcott erected a shed in his orchard and supervised a group of family members and neighbors in casting 42,088 bullets. This count was meticulously recorded in a document that has survived." What no one noticed at the time, Mr. Russell said, was that the amount of lead used to cast the statue of King George should have produced two times the number of bullets that were obtained from it. For nearly 50 years, the theft of King George's lead went unknown. But, in 1822, the first piece of the statue stolen by Tories in Wilton was found in the parish's fields. LeGrand Sturges was working for William Comstock near the Clapp Raymond Tavern when he unearthed a 75-pound piece of lead in the shape of a saddle. As of 2004, 420 pounds of the statue had been found in Wilton. Some 2,100 pounds of the lead were used to make bullets, and 50 pounds (of King George's famously swollen head) were sent back to England. This leaves, in Mr. Russell's estimation, nearly 1,400 pounds yet to be unearthed. "More could still await discovery under Wilton soil," Mr. Russell wrote.

## **Gen. Israel Putnam**

Many Wiltonians served under a colorful Connecticut man, Major Gen. Israel Putnam. Most famous for his "don't shoot until you see the whites of their eyes," order at Bunker Hill, Gen. Putnam commanded Wilton residents at the fortification of New York in 1776, and at his encampment in Redding in 1778. He also courageously defended Greenwich from Gen. Tryon's second raid in 1779, where he and 150 soldiers stalled nearly 1,500 British troops until reinforcements could arrive. It was here that Gen. Putnam made his famous "Putnam's Leap," commanding his horse down a staircase, surviving an act deemed suicidal by those who witnessed it. Mr. Russell said Gen. Putnam was one of the most colorful characters of the American Revolution. As a young soldier during the French and Indian War, he was stationed in a town whose livestock was plagued by attack by a wolf, legend says. "No one else would confront the wolf," Mr. Russell said, "so Putnam said, 'I will.' He killed the wolf barehanded," the legend says. "He was just that kind of guy."

## The Great Chain

Some Wilton soldiers also assisted in the laying of a gigantic chain across the Hudson River, which was intended to stop the British from achieving full control over the vital supply line. “At the time, the British strategy was to cut the country in half,” Mr. Russell said. “In 1776, they took New York City, and figured ‘if we can possess the whole river, then we can take the whole country.’” Seeking to prevent this, a company of Patriots, were commissioned to fashion a chain with links that weighed nearly 130 pounds each. Five Wilton men were involved in its construction. The furnaces used to create the chain required fires to be fed an acre of forest each day, Mr. Russell said, and many of the men were given the task of chopping wood constantly. When it was completed, the chain was so well made that it was never challenged by a British ship. “In total, 51 Revolutionary veterans are buried in Wilton,” Mr. Russell’s history reads. “For a parish of only 200 families, and 1,100 total residents, Wilton’s participation in the Revolution was remarkable.”



**Hillside Cemetery**  
**Drum Hill Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution**  
**American Legion, James B. Whipple Post 86**

**Hillside Cemetery**

For over two centuries, Hillside Cemetery has served as the final resting place for Wilton's veterans, founding families, and residents. Deeded to the Wilton Congregational Church in 1818, it is the town's largest and most notable community cemetery welcoming families of all faiths. Conveniently located at 165 Ridgefield Road in Wilton Connecticut, Hillside Cemetery connects visitors with the rich tapestry of the town's history. The cemetery also serves as a tribute to the service and sacrifice of Revolutionary, Civil, World War II, Iraqi and Afghanistan war veterans, and is home to the Wilton Memorial Day ceremony following the parade. To learn more about Hillside Cemetery contact Pamela Brown at [pam@wiltoncongregational.org](mailto:pam@wiltoncongregational.org)

**Drum Hill Chapter, DAR**

The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), founded in 1890 is a non-profit, non-political volunteer women's service organization, dedicated to promoting patriotism, preserving American history and historical properties, and securing America's future through better education for our children. The Drum Hill Chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution was organized in 1957 in Wilton, CT and is named after an area of land that was used for keeping drums in good repair in order to summon residents to assemble. To learn more about Drum Hill contact Lee Ann Schneider at [leeanntom@gmail.com](mailto:leeanntom@gmail.com)

**American Legion, James B. Whipple Post 86**

Post 86 stands as a proud veteran's sanctuary and meeting place. The Legion is active in many endeavors, including Homes for the Brave, Kick for Nick, Female Soldiers, Forgotten Heroes, Memorial Day, Flag Day and Veterans Day; a Flag retirement ceremony, Flag etiquette classes; The American Legion Oratorical Contest and Boys & Girls State; providing a Color Guard for various events including funerals, dedications and various ceremonies. To learn more about the American Legion contact Paul Niche at [legionpost86@gmail.com](mailto:legionpost86@gmail.com).

