

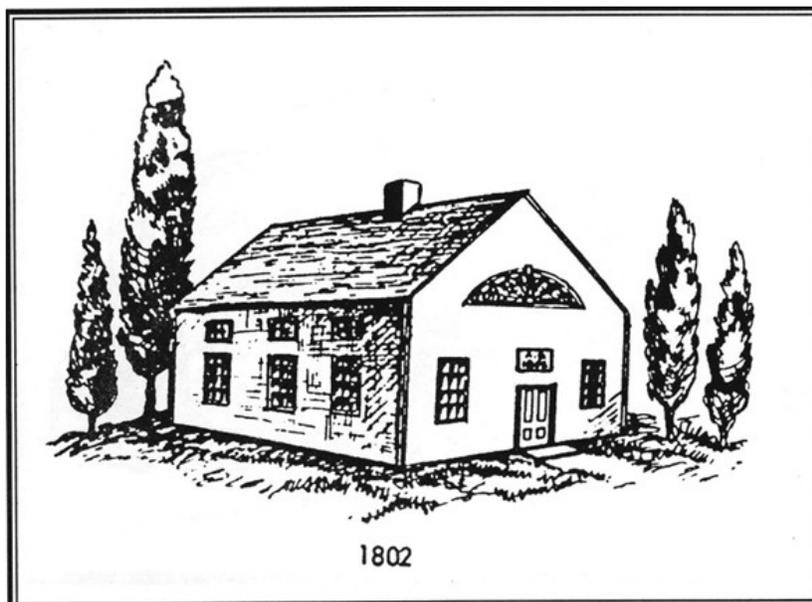
The Colonie Historical Oracle

Quarterly Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie

Volume 11, No. 4

October - December 2015

The Forgotten Burial Ground of the West Watervliet or Union Methodist Church



The Original Church of the West or Union Methodist Church
From the History of the Newtonville Methodist Church

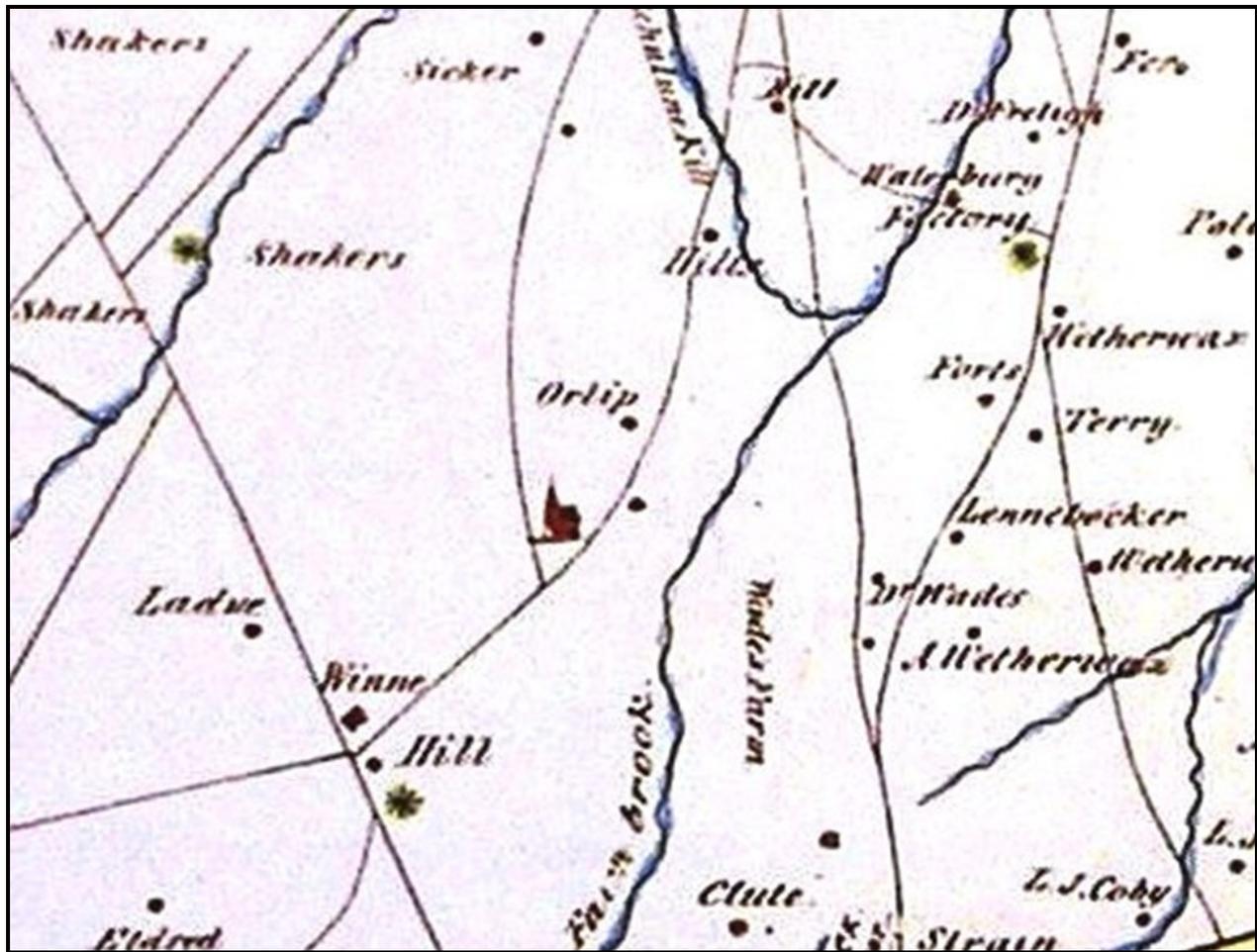
By Kevin Franklin, Historian, Town of Colonie

The First Church Described:

Tucked behind a collection of 1960's and 1970's era "muscle cars" and the Albany International Airport fence in back of the home(s) of the Little family at the dead end of Old Niskayuna Road sits one of the largest and mostly forgotten cemeteries containing the final resting place of nearly 100 of Colonie's earlier settlers. Names such as Hills, Mulford, Levings, Damp, VanVranken, Tooper, and others are buried within. Many of these names can be found on a map of the VanRensselaer tenant farms of the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. Many of the burials were infants or children, but a small number of men recognized for their various military services to our Country are included.

"On January 31st of 1799 a meeting of eight men was held at the home of Samuel Hills in South Watervliet, and within a week they decided to build a church, 28' x 28' square feet on the south corner of the lot at the fork of Sicker and Old Niskayuna Roads. Simultaneously they made provisions for the layout of a burial ground."

Note: (The Sicker Road used to run to the left off the Old Niskayuna Road a short distance west of where Wade Road intersects with Old Niskayuna. Both the Sicker and Old Niskayuna Roads were eventually cut off by expansions of the runways of the Albany County Airport.)



A map of roads, streams and locations of the old Town of Watervliet in 1850 by Garret Witbeck showing the Old Methodist Church at Sicker and Old Niskayuna Roads. Wade Road had not yet been built between the Wade's of Forts Ferry Road at Rt. 7 and Old Niskayuna Road.

The last issue of the *Historical Oracle* mentioned the gravestone of Frederick Damp, a Revolutionary War Soldier who was buried in this old cemetery. Many years ago some descendant of Damp removed his gravestone with the intent of "restoring it" but all good intentions aside, the fellow died and Damps' gravestone sat out of state for several decades before other family members decided it should be returned. Because the only information they had was that Damp had been buried someplace in the old Town of Watervliet, they decided to turn the gravestone over to the Watervliet Historical Society where it presently being protected. The re-discovery of Damp's headstone led to renewed interest in the Old Methodist Church burial ground.

Besides Frederick Damp's military service, there were at least two other men identified with military titles buried in this old cemetery. One was Major James Montgomery, who died in June 1824 at 48 years of age, and another named Captain Andrew McDowell who died Jan. 8, 1855 at 75 years of age and to whom the remainder of this newsletter will be dedicated to.

Welcome New Members!

The Historical Society of the Town of Colonie would like to welcome our newest members: Nancy & Ray Lyon; Nancy Johnson; Angelica Trzepacz; and Mick Della Valle.

Welcome aboard!

Captain Andrew McDowell: 1779-1855

If Captain Andrew McDowell were alive today, he would be amazed at the site and the roar of the jet aircraft coming and going from the nearby Albany International Airport. He would have been more familiar with the roar of the cannons of his artillery unit. The shrieking of spinning tires that once came from the powerful muscle cars collected on the back lot of the Little family property could not have been as hair raising as the shrieks of attacking Native American Indians McDowell and his men once faced.

Before writing this article (as with any article in the Historical Society's Newsletters) I wanted to be sure I was writing about the correct Andrew McDowell and that information about him was accurate. Sometimes military records and other historic records can be spotty at best. I reached out to Dr. Gary M. Gibson, PhD, Naval Historian for the War of 1812, and to Dr. Paul Huey, PhD, for their opinions on the background of Andrew McDowell.

Dr. Gibson cited information found in a book called: *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army* by Francis B. Heitman. Only one Andrew McDowell was listed under the War of 1812 and his information indicated that he enlisted in New Hampshire with the rank of Private in 1805 and eventually made Sergeant in the Light Artillery and later Captain by 1812. He resigned in December 1822 and had died by 1829. If the date of death information in Heitman's book was correct, perhaps I was looking at the wrong Captain Andrew McDowell.

I wrote back to Dr. Gibson about my concern and he related that although Heitman's book is generally mostly accurate, he has found discrepancies in the data including death dates of soldiers, so he felt perhaps that the Captain Andrew McDowell buried in the Old Methodist Cemetery was likely the same individual listed in the book. In fact, at the bottom of the title page of the book it reads: "*This is the unofficial work of a private compiler purchased and published by direction of Congress.*" So, reading between those lines clearly bolsters Mr. Gibson's statement about the book not always being 100% accurate.

Dr. Paul Huey found information that Andrew McDowell was born in New Hampshire in 1779. This date alone corresponds with the age at death of the Captain Andrew McDowell in the Old Methodist Cemetery who died at 75 years of age in 1855. The fact that McDowell was born in New Hampshire further supports the information that he enlisted in the US Army at New Hampshire.

Dr. Huey also found the 1850 Census Records indicated Andrew O. McDowell and his wife Hannah

(also of New Hampshire) lived in the old Town of Watervliet. The 1850 census indicated that McDowell owned property in Watervliet valued at \$1,300.00 but Dr. Huey could not find any deeds to back that up. Hannah McDowell died Nov. 30, 1863 at 84 yrs. of age and is buried beside her husband. Most information now confirms I have the right Captain Andrew McDowell affiliated with an event occurring during the war of 1812.

The other bit of information that Mr. Gibson sent me was an entry in the Army 3rd Artillery Orderly Book about their journey to Sacket's Harbor which read:

Nov. 9, 1812

"6 O'clock in the morn proceeded from Snyders in Watervlette; [sic] Col. Macomb, Cap. Crane & myself remaining until about Sun rise, & upon hearing that a British Officer was a few miles distant, proceeded to see him, after a few moments conversation, took breakfast & Col. Macomb & Capt. Crane immediately followed the troops, ordering Lt. Pierce to remain with Capt. McDowell until the arrival of Capt. Levenworth who was on a Mission to Albany ---- Capt. Levenworth returned from Albany about one O'clock ---- The troops passed through the city of Skenectady [sic] about 8 O'clock crossed the bridge & then took breakfast ---- After refreshments the troops proceeded in their march & arrived at Groats Inn in Amsterdam about sun setting & encamped on the bank of the Mohawk ---- No remarkable occurrences taking place."

The first battle of Sackets Harbor, NY, located on the eastern shore of Lake Ontario, occurred on July 19, 1812. The group of soldiers including Capt. McDowell must have been heading to the Niagara Frontier in preparation for the following season's events of 1813. The second battle of Sackets Harbor took place in May, 1813. During the War of 1812, thousands of American soldiers were stationed at Sackets Harbor. The Niagara Frontier had become quite dangerous with raids and skirmishes taking place with frequency between British and their Canadian and Indian allies and American forces.

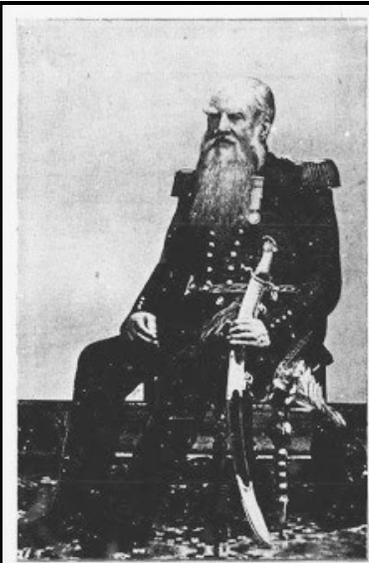
One British Officer in particular had been quite successful in raiding and capturing American soldiers and supplies including at least two cannon and several wagons of war supplies. He had become a thorn in the side of the American commander, Gen. John Boyd. The British officer was Lt. James FitzGibbon.



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James FitzGibbon
James FitzGibbon

**Lt. James FitzGibbon
in old age**

American forces left Fort George at night with the intent of secrecy in order to surprise FitzGibbon. Night travel lessened their chance of being discovered. It was known that Fitzgibbon had taken refuge in a fortified stone house called De-Cew's, some twenty miles away from Queenstown, south of Fort George, and a short distance from Beaver Dams. American Lt. Charles Boerstler was chosen to lead this force which consisted of about 550 U.S. Army and Militia and a company of light artillary.

Captain Andrew McDowell would be commanding the American artillary unit consisting of one 12 lb. and one 6 lb. fieldpiece.

The American forces under Lt. Col. Charles Boerstler marched to Queenston and secured that small settlement by posting guards at all known roads and paths hoping to keep their presence there (and their intentions

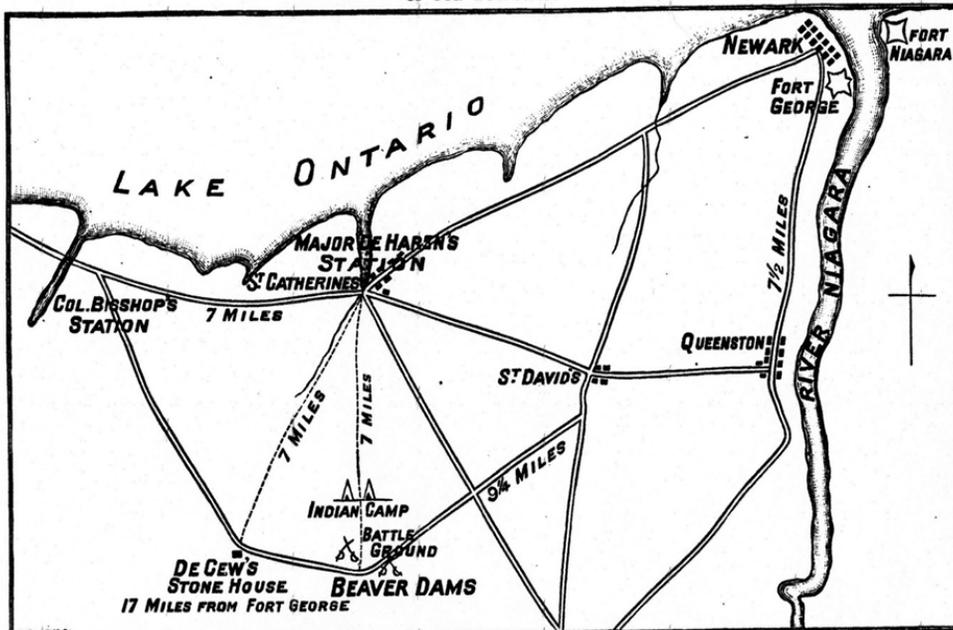
of capturing British Lt. FitzGibbon) undetected. Residents were not allowed to leave. Boerstler's instructions were to use McDowell's artillary field pieces to batter down the stone house of De-Cew's if necessary in order to capture FitzGibbon.

Lt. Col. Boerstler and another un-named officer were billeted in the home of a Canadian Sympathizer named Secord. In the book: *(The Fight in the Beech Woods – A study in Canadian History by Ernest Cruikshank)* best describes the Secord family:

"Among the few remaining inhabitants of Queenston was James Secord, a Sergeant of the Lincoln Militia (Canadian) and still almost helpless from wounds received in the battle of the 13th of October. Thirty six years before, when a child of only three years old, he had accompanied his mother in her flight through the wilderness of the Susquehanna Valley with four other homeless women and many children to escape the fury of a band of ruffians who called themselves "Sons of Liberty." After enduring frightful hardships for nearly a month, they finally arrived at Fort Niagara almost naked and starving. Subsequently his father and several elder brothers had enlisted in Butlers Rangers and forfeited their lands by their loyalty. The memory of the wrongs and sufferings of his family still rankled in his breast and caused him to regard the people of the United States literally as personal enemies. The parents of his wife (Laura Ingersoll Secord) had likewise been refugee loyalists, and she was equally warm and unfaltering in her patriotism."

Lt. Col. Boerstler and another American Army officer took over the Secord home after arriving at Queenston. The American Officers (perhaps over a few drinks) began to talk about their plan to capture the British Lt. FitzGibbon and how they would make their way to De-Cew's. Laura Secord overheard their plans and in the morning under the guise of going out with a bucket to gather milk from the family cow, she quickly disappeared and began a journey through the wilderness with the intent of warning FitzGibbon. Miles away she stumbled into an Indian encampment fearful for her life. Not being able to speak the Indian language she somehow convinced their Chief that she must see FitzGibbon and the Indians took her to see him.

DIAGRAM to show the relative positions, distances, etc., attached by the court to the proceedings in the case of Col. Boerstler.



From Niles' Weekly Register. Battle of the Beaver Dams.

Map area of the Battle of Beaver Dams, Canada, June 24, 1813

FitzGibbon was now aware of the impending American plan and immediately began preparations to address it. *“Mrs. Secord had scarcely finished relating her story to FitzGibbon when his Indian Scouts came in shrieking the death cry.”* as they had apparently encountered some of Boerstler’s advance guards who shot and killed one of the Indians.



Laura Secord

“The locals referred to the area as the Beech Woods.”

Lt. FitzGibbon conferred with a local fur trader and an Officer of the Canadian Militia named Dominique Ducharme who was keenly familiar with the route that Boerstler’s men would probably use which was a narrow path *“just wide enough to allow a heavy wagon and artillery to travel upon. The road was also bounded on either side by many places with deep gullies and bordered on either side by an almost continuous wall of trees and thick underbrush.”*

The Ambush!

Ducharme chose a spot where one of the ravines or gullies was the widest and deepest and stationed his Indians up along both sides of the ravine overlooking the road below. The stage was set. The Indians were in a vengeful mood because of the immediate death of one of their own by Boerstler’s advance guards and when Boerstler’s men entered the ambush area, they opened fire on the unsuspecting Americans killing several and wounding others including Lt. Col. Boerstler himself.

A group of shrieking Indian Chiefs and warriors sprang toward Captain McDowell’s artillery. The men were just able to bring their cannon to bear and fired rounds of canister shot or grapeshot as it was also called, instantly killing five Chiefs and badly wounding a young Indian Boy.

Boerstler tried to lead his men out of this gully but was repulsed by the Indians. Boerstler was wounded twice in his thigh and many of his men were dazed and out of ammunition. Dense smoke from the guns settled in the low area of the ravine making it hard for Boerstler’s men to see their targets. Numbers of regular British soldiers now arrived and were positioned on both sides of the embankments. The situation was turning from bad to worse.

After about an hour of fighting, British Officer Lt. James FitzGibbon presented a white flag of truce and approached the American Line. FitzGibbon had an idea of the approximate number of men in Boerstler’s group from the information provided to him earlier by Laura Secord, but Boerstler did not know how many Indians and British Soldiers accompanied FitzGibbon. FitzGibbon knew he had Boerstler and his men pinned down with no escape route possible and used a ruse that his forces greatly outnumbered that of Boerstler’s (which they in fact did not) and admonished Boerstler to surrender. Boerstler at first refused saying he would not surrender his army to an enemy force of unknown numbers and the battle continued.

The Americans were exhausted from their forced march of about 10 hours from Fort George under arms, and from the battle of the ambush. They were nearly out of ammunition including the 2 artillery pieces having only a round or two left to fire. Lt. Fitzgibbon approached the American line again with his demand that they surrender or he would not be able to secure their safety from the Indians who were now even more furious from the loss of five of their Chiefs and others to McDowell’s canister shot. Boerstler and his officers quickly determined that their situation was hopeless and the better part of valor was to come to terms of surrender with FitzGibbon in order to prevent his men from being slaughtered by the furious Indians.

Recollections from a British Soldier’s Diary:

Another side of this story is told in the diary of a young British Officer named Lt. John DeCouteur of His Majesty’s 104th (New Brunswick) Regiment of Foot in a book titled, *“Merry Hearts Make Light Days”* by Donald E. Graves:



Lt. John De-Couteur

June 24, 1813:

“About half an hour before day break, an Indian brought me a message from their Chief intimating that a strong force of the Enemy with Guns and Cavalry were moving upon us by De-Cew’s. I instantly ordered the turnout as silently as possible and ran into Major De-Haren who desired the men to be formed instantly.”

The Indians had all gone off after their own mode of warfare acting quite independently ---- We had moved after them in a run towards the Beech Woods."

"Presently we heard one rapid, yet steady roll of musquetry then a terrific Yell which sounded high above a roll of Artillery & small arms."

(This may have been when McDowell's artillery killed the five Indian Chiefs.)

"The Major ordered me to gallop on and see how the affair stood, then return to bring the Light Division up to the best position. In a quarter of an hour I got to the scene of action ---- some round shot came plunging along the road but the Indian yells were awful and ringing all around an extensive clearing ---- they concealed and lying down along the edges of the wood, the American force in the clearing in Line with Guns on the Right and their Cavalry in reserve. The 49th Regiment I perceived to be to the Right of the Americans turning it. To these I rode when immediately, a flag of truce was sent in with an offer to surrender to a British force." (Up until this point, most of the fighting against the Americans had been done by the Indians.)

FitzGibbon wished them to surrender to him but the American Officer said he would not to so small a force. (The book has a notation that the officer was most likely Capt. Andrew McDowell. The next sentence seems that Lt. Le-Couteur was present at the meeting with McDowell and, related the following): I observed that the Light Division Seven hundred men under Major De-Haren was here ---- (The American Officer's reply was): "The moment they are here and can protect us from the Indians, we will surrender."

Some of the American horsemen made a dash through the woods and the Indian lines and were able to escape, but the majority of the American Army was on foot and surrounded. It was at this point that Captain Andrew McDowell was advised by Col. Boerstler to barter with the British for the best terms of surrender that could be had. Meanwhile Lt. De-Couteur recalled:

"The Indians were very savage ---- one tomahawked an American close to me during the parley ---- they would have destroyed them all but for us. All the dead were scalped. Their heads divested of the scalp looked white and clean, some as if they had been washed ---- I got a capital black horse for a charger on this occasion, saddle & Bridle & Pistols and all."

The terms of surrender or "Articles of Capitulation" drawn up between the British Commander Major De-Haren and Captain McDowell acting for Lt. Col. Boerstler were as follows:

Particulars of the capitulation made between Captain McDowell on the part of Lieutenant-Colonel Boerstler, of the United States Army and Major De-Haren of his Britannic Majesty's Canadian Regiment, on the part of Lieutenant-Colonel Bishop, commanding the advance of the British, respecting the forces under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Boerstler:

Article 1. --- That Lieutenant-Colonel Boerstler and his forces under his command shall surrender prisoners of war.

Article 2. --- That the officers shall retain their arms, horses and baggage.

Article 3. --- That the non-commissioned officers and soldiers shall lay down their arms at the head of the British column and shall become prisoners of war.

Article 4. --- That the militia and volunteers with Lieutenant Colonel Boerstler shall be permitted to return to the United States on Parole."

Parole meant that the men were not to return to the battle and if caught again by the British, the penalty would be most severe. The article of surrender drawn up by McDowell apparently did not include himself as eligible to be paroled and he was kept prisoner according to Army records. Lt. Le-Couteur recounted the surrender of Lt. Col. Boerstler which most likely included McDowell as being one of the Field Officers:

"Major De-Haren gave me charge of the American Commanding officer Colonel Boerstler, and the Field Officers. Our division was drawn up in a line and presented arms to him as he rode by--- (Boerstler had lost much blood by this time from his two bullet wounds to his thigh and was quite light headed)--- He admired the men greatly: 'What fine smart well-disciplined Young Men.' Then, as he passed the Indians and saw numbers of his poor men scalped, he first asked: 'Oh! What are those? What is that?' I made no answer but turned my head for I felt for him."

The heroic effort of Laura Secord to warn her British Canadian friends and allies of the American's intent to capture FitzGibbon are remembered to this day in Canada and her image appears on a Canadian Postage Stamp:



Laura Secord
Stamp

Captain Andrew McDowell:

A short biography of information (various sources)

1. Andrew McDowell seems to have been born on March 26, 1779 in the Township of Winchester, Cheshire Co., New Hampshire. His parents were Andrew & Levina McDowell.
2. Andrew McDowell joins the U.S. Army in May 1805 at the age of 26. His commission is "forwarded" by April 17, 1809 and was promoted to Lieutenant on April 20, 1809. He is appointed Captain, Light Artillery, April 1812.
3. By November 9, 1812 Captain McDowell and his 3rd Artillery Unit are accompanying a force of U.S. soldiers and various militias through what is now the Town of Colonie and crossing the Mohawk at Schenectady and proceeding to Amsterdam, N.Y. where the force turned northward toward Lake Ontario and the "Niagara Frontier."
4. McDowell and his light artillery participate in several conflicts around Lake Ontario in early 1813, but on June 24, 1813, while accompanying a force of about 550 U.S. Soldiers and various militia members under the command of Lt. Col. Charles Boerstler, they are ambushed by a much smaller number of Canadian or "northern" Indians and some British Soldiers and Canadian Militia at what became known as: "The Battle of Beaver Dams." Boerstler was seriously wounded. The British commander (FitzGibbon) proposed a truce with the Americans saying they (Americans) were vastly outnumbered. Initially the Americans refused to surrender but remained trapped in a gully surrounded by hills on each side covered with dense brush and trees and on which both sides were lined with Canadian forces picking off the Americans. The Americans were already exhausted by their 10 hour night march and several hours of fighting. Their ammunition was nearly depleted. FitzGibbon again proposed a truce at which this time Lt. Col. Boerstler, now weak from loss of blood conceded, and ordered Captain McDowell to draw up the best terms possible with the British so that the Americans would not be slaughtered by the Indians. Over 500 men were taken captive by the British. American Volunteers (Militia), would be given the chance of parole with the promise not to return to hostilities, but many regular Army personnel including McDowell would be taken as prisoners of war.
5. According to "*The Records of Men in the U.S. Army prior to the peace established with Great Britain*" Capt. McDowell was sent to England as a prisoner of war. McDowell may not have been offered parole or if he was offered parole with the promise of not to return to hostilities, his dignity and position as a newly appointed Captain of Artillery was something he was not willing to do, so he was kept as a prisoner until the end of the war.

6. It would appear that after McDowell was returned to the States he was sent to Fort Trumbull in Connecticut as his name appears there in the census of 1820. A document of Military Affairs dated May 14, 1821 lists four regiments of artillery. Artillery units under the first regiment all had Captains listed as commanders including forts in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and the Harbor of New York, and finally Fort Trumbull in Connecticut with Captain McDowell in charge.

7. *The Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army* by Heitman, indicates that McDowell resigned from the Army on December 1, 1822, but also states that he had died by 1829. This is incorrect. Army Pension Records show that Captain Andrew McDowell did resign from the Army in 1822 but continued to receive \$15 per month pension up until January 8, 1855 when he is recorded as dying. This date exactly corresponds with the date of death of Capt. Andrew McDowell in the records of the Old Methodist Church Burial Ground.

8. By the Census of 1830, Andrew McDowell's name appears in Greenbush, Rensselaer Co. The Census of 1850 lists Andrew McDowell and his wife Hannah living in the Township of Watervliet. (Colonie). An advertisement for stoves published in the Cabinet newspaper of Schenectady, N.Y. on October 21, 1851 lists Andrew McDowell as one of many satisfied customers!

9. Andrew McDowell's name appeared at Watervliet in the 1850 Census and his name pops up in an 1851 advertisement as residing at Niskayuna, I am leading toward Andrew and his wife Hannah residing somewhere to the west and possibly east of the present Albany International Airport, quite possibly in what is now Colonie but affiliating himself more closely with Niskayuna.

The Old Methodist Cemetery has only about a dozen or so gravestones left standing. Many gravestones were leaning so badly that they interfered with mowing and were pulled from the ground and stacked beneath a stand of trees in the cemetery where they remain to this day. It is my hope to try and identify exactly where all of the gravestones belong in this historic old cemetery including that of Andrew and Hannah McDowell.

Acknowledgements: My thanks to Dr. Gary M. Gibson, Ph.D., Naval Historian and Sackets Harbor resident for his expertise on the War of 1812. Also; Dr. Paul Huey, Ph.D. archaeologist & historian, and Daniel K. Franklin for their assistance in researching the timeline affiliated with Captain Andrew McDowell, US Army, Ret.

Yes, I would like to become a member of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie, New York, Inc. in the classification I have checked or renew my membership as noted.

My annual dues payment in the amount of \$ _____ is enclosed.

Classification	Annual Dues	Classification	Annual Dues	Classification	Annual Dues
<input type="checkbox"/> Students and Senior Citizens . .	\$10.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	\$100—\$250
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	12.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Business	50.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$250.00 & Up

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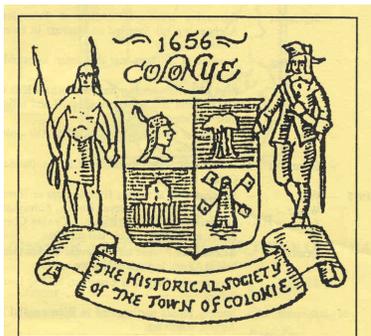
Please mail to Membership Chairperson c/o Historical Society, Memorial Town Hall, Newtonville, N. Y. 12128-0508

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**THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF THE TOWN OF COLONIE**

Kevin Franklin: Town Historian

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Historical Society Founded 1971

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Support the Society's efforts to stimulate an appreciation of the historical heritage of your community. Join Now!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

In writing this newsletter our Town Historian, Kevin Franklin, continues to impress and amaze. During the course of his many hours researching written records and speaking with a myriad of informed individuals, his enthusiasm spilled over in several conversations he had with me on the topic of Capt. Andrew McDowell. If not for Kevin's digging and recording the results of his efforts, this historical information may have been lost for future generations. Thank you, Kevin, for preserving yet another piece of Colonie history!

Our January membership meeting is set for Sunday, January 31st at 2 p.m. at the William K. Sanford Town Library. Our speaker, Dr. Bruce W. Dearstyne, shall present a program titled, "The Spirit of New York." Dr. Dearstyne earned a B.A. in History from Hartwick College, and a PhD in History from Syracuse University. He's taught New York History at SUNY Potsdam and SUNY Albany. Bruce will have copies of his book for sale after the meeting. We hope to see you there!

Mark Bodnar, President