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The Neilson Farm in 1846

THE JOHN NEILSON HOUSE

A GUIDE TO THE FURNISHINGS

"The love of country reigns triumphant
in the heart of every true patriot."

Charles Neilson, 1851

The home of John and Lydia Neilson is the only structure left standing from the time of the Battles of Saratoga in 1777. In 1775 John Neilson built a log house on land that had he leased. To this modest place he brought his new bride, Lydia. Sometime between 1775 and 1776 John Neilson built the small frame house we see today.

The National Park Service made extensive archeological, architectural and historical studies of the house in 1958 and 1959. Their findings led them to move the house from the spot where it had been placed by the New York Conservation Department in 1927, to its original location in 1960. While it had been painted white until this time, studies revealed that the original color was the red you see today and you would have seen in 1777.

The house consists of a main room heated by a fireplace, a small back room or leanto, and an attic. The walls were lined with unburned brick "nogging" (used to fill the cracks which served as a form of insulation). The walls were then covered by hand sawn clapboards. The rooms were whitewashed.

John Neilson was on the American side, and at the time of the battles he was a Sergeant. He would later become a Captain. When it became clear that this would be the site of a battle, Lydia went home to her mother, who lived in the Stillwater area. It is believed that in doing so, she would have taken the important and valuable things from the house.

It is hard to imagine the small Neilson house as a home to three Generals, Arnold, Poor, and Paterson yet the records indicate they were here.

As you look into the main room, you see it set up at mid-day. To your front is a large Dutch Hutch table set with maps, quill pens, a sander, a decanter, some wine glasses, clay pipes, forks and tin plates, cups. The table dates from the 1770's, and while the Neilson's were not Dutch, many of the people living in this area were, so the idea that they would have a table like this is likely.

The items on the table are reproductions. Near the table is a small wooden foot stool dating from the 1770's. The chair and bench are also reproductions.

To the left of the door is a large barrel circa 1770. A broom made of twigs, the straw hat and cape hanging on the pegs on west wall are reproductions. Near to the staircase is a large wooden officer's trunk with the name "E. Poor" painted on the side. Although this is a reproduction, General Enoch Poor and the other generals would have had similar types of trunks.

Along the left wall is a reproduction folding officer's table with a pewter inkwell, quill pens, a candlestick, a pipe various letters and a glass decanter. These are also reproductions.

Next to the table are a reproduction cot, a foot locker, and a pair of leather boots. The jackboot, used for helping you take off your boots, is an original 18th century item.

A reproduction leather document case sits on top of the foot locker.

To your right is the fire place. A number of 18th century items are located here. Two large wooden bowls sit on top of the fire place. These were hand carved in 1760-70 from butternut wood burls. The fire place tongs, skillet, waffle iron toaster and unusual wooden bucket covered with tared rope are all examples of Colonial kitchen equipment. The ceramic bottle once held Dutch gin from Amsterdam, Holland.

On the north wall, to your far right, looking through the door, is a large pine secretary with brass fittings circa 1770. It has two drawers, seven pigeon holes three shelves on top and two below. The ceramic pieces are Williamsburg reproductions. The tin plates, cups and cutlery are also current reproductions.

To the left of the secretary is the door leading to the small room or leanto. A carpenters bench can be seen through the door. Food and supplies would have been kept here because the room had no heat and was cool.

The rest of the objects in the house, including the rope bed, are

all reproductions of items known to be in use at the time of the Battles of Saratoga.

The attic probably used as sleeping quarters for officer's servants. It is used as a storage area and not open to the public.

The Neilson House remained in the Neilson family until 1926. At that time it was part of a much larger house that had been built around it. The newer house was totally demolished by New York State. It was restored in time for the opening of this park in 1927, the 150th Anniversary of the Battles. The fourteen original colonial objects in the house today were bought by George O. Slingerland, first Superintendent of the park and his friend, Adolph Ochs, publisher of the New York Times.

Of John and Lydia Neilson, we know that he was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey in 1753. He came up the Hudson and worked on the Abner Quiterfield farm, near Stillwater, New York where he met and married Lydia, his employers daughter. At the time of the Battles, he was 24 and she was 19. They had one son, Henry, born October 16, 1799, when Lydia was 41 years old. Captain John Neilson died in 1834 and Lydia in 1824. They are both buried in the Stillwater Cemetery.

The Neilson House is opened Wednesday through Sunday during the summer months and for special encampments which are held around