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FISHKILL

Military Supply Hub of the American Revolution

1776-1783

“...the principal depot
of Washington’s army,
where there are magazines,
hospitals, workshops, etc.,
which form a town of
themselves...”

-Thomas Anburey 1778

Friends of the Fishkill Supply Depot

www.fishkillsupplydepot.org

A Historical Overview

Cover Image: Spencer Collection, New York Public Library.
“View from Fishkill looking to West Point”
The New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1820.



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Fishkill

Distribution Hub on the Hudson



George Washington, Commander in Chief of the Continental Army, visited Fishkill on numerous occasions.



General William Howe, Commander in Chief of the British Army in North America until April 1778.



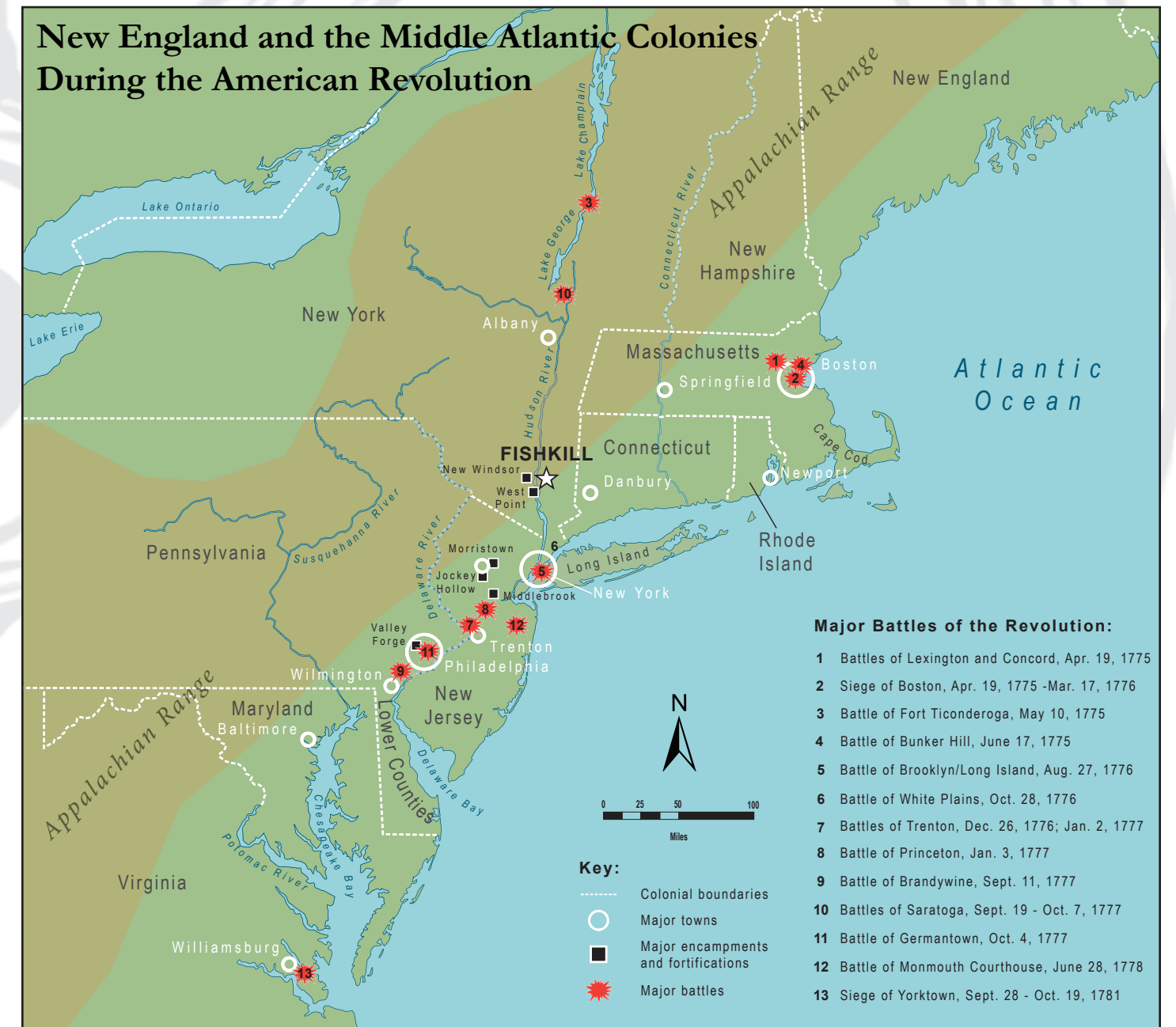
Governor George Clinton presided over New York's Provincial Congress and state militia from Fishkill during the Revolution.

On July 9, 1776, New York's Provincial Congress met at White Plains creating the State of New York and accepting the Declaration of Independence. Among the Provincial Congress's first official acts as a new state was to support the establishment of a military depot at Fishkill under the direction of George Clinton, New York's first Governor and Brigadier General of militia. Over the next seven years, Fishkill supplied New York's militia and the Continental Army with livestock and food, cared for wounded soldiers, housed British and Tory prisoners, and crafted an amazing variety of materiel from tents to boats – all essential to the American quest for independence.

The timing of Fishkill's establishment as a military depot coincided with the movement of the main theater of war from New England to the Middle Atlantic region. In March 1776, the British army evacuated Boston after nearly a year of stalemated conflict with American patriots, most notably at the Battles of Concord and Bunker Hill. British General William Howe decamped with the goal of capturing the more centrally located and Loyalist-leaning seaport of New York City. In June and July 1776, at the same time that the American colonists were learning of their new Declaration of Independence, some 500 British ships and 35,000 men – the largest armed force to be seen in America until the Civil War – appeared in New York harbor and on Staten Island. The British quickly triumphed over an ill-equipped and poorly trained American army at the Battle of Long Island on August 27. General George Washington was forced to evacuate New York City. Fortunately, his army successfully executed a strategic retreat, the first of many over the next few months.

Some 50 miles upriver from New York City, the mountainous Hudson Highlands provided a natural defense against a potential British advance up the Hudson River toward Albany. A critical bend in the river at West Point was fortified by the Americans beginning in 1775. Nearby Fishkill, on the east side of the river just north of a gap through the Highlands through which the main New York-Albany Post Road passed, had long been a prominent location at the southern end of the broad and fertile Mid-Hudson Valley. It also lay at a crossroads where the Post Road intersected an important east-west route connecting a landing on the Hudson River, known as Fishkill Landing, with Danbury, Connecticut and the rest of New England. Fishkill was perfectly positioned for the gathering of men and supplies from both the Hudson Valley and New England.

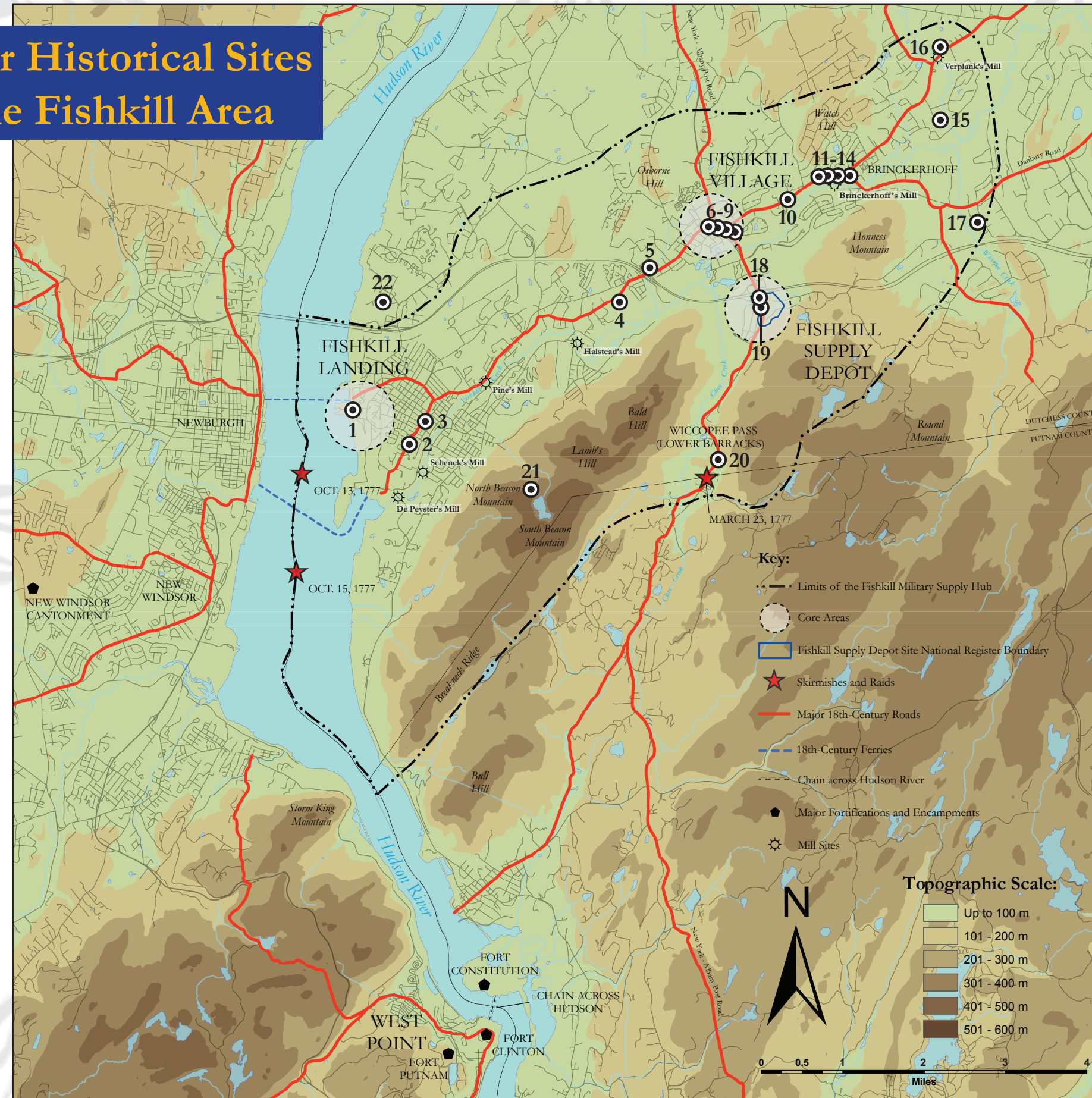
In 1777, the British hatched a scheme to capture not only Fishkill but the vital Hudson Valley, which, if successful, would sever New England from the Mid-Atlantic and paralyze the American cause. The main invasion force, under General John Burgoyne, would push south down the Lake Champlain corridor from Canada while General Howe's troops in New York advanced up the Hudson. In a series of missteps, Burgoyne overestimated the progress his army could make through the forests of northern New York, and Howe deliberately embarked with the main British army for an attack on Philadelphia, presuming there would be enough time to come back to New York and strike up the Hudson to meet up



Fishkill in its regional Revolutionary War context.

Revolutionary War Historical Sites and Markers in the Fishkill Area

1. **Fishkill Landing** - key location where military supplies were shipped across the Hudson River (marker)
2. **George Washington Bronze Bust** - erected in 1999 in honor of the bicentennial of the death of George Washington (monument)
3. **Madam Brett Homestead** - meeting place and lodgings for officers, soldiers and politicians during the Revolution (house with marker)
4. **Home of Hendrick Kip** - served as Baron Von Steuben's headquarters around 1777 (house with marker)
5. **Washington's Sword** - site of cutler John Bailey's forge where a sword was made for George Washington (marker)
6. **Enoch Crosby** - American spy confined at the First Reformed Church after mock trial; Crosby was then allowed to escape (church with marker)
7. **Dutch Church** - First Reformed Church was used by the New York Provincial Congress in late 1776 and early 1777; later used as a prison (church with marker)
8. **Trinity Church** - New York Provincial Congress met here in September 1776; also used as a hospital (marker)
9. **Samuel Loudon** - site of printing shop of Samuel Loudon, publisher of the "New-York Packet" and printer of the New York State constitution (marker)
10. **First Academy** - served as a military hospital in 1777 (marker)



11. **Fishkill Tea Party** - on August 26, 1776 a hundred women forced storekeeper Abram Brinckerhoff to sell them tea at the lawful price of six shillings per pound (marker)
12. **Star Mills** - site of Abram Brinckerhoff's gristmill; burned in 1777 but rebuilt; a major supplier of flour to American troops (marker)
13. **Marquis de Lafayette** - Lafayette was sick for several weeks in 1778 at the nearby house of Abram Brinckerhoff (monument)
14. **Middle Church** - Presbyterian Church used as a military hospital during the Revolution (monument)
15. **Brinckerhoff-Van Voorhees House** - home of Colonel John Brinckerhoff where George Washington was an occasional guest (house with marker)
16. **Griffen's Tavern** - frequented by George Washington, John Jay, the Marquis de Lafayette and other American and French soldiers during the Revolution (ruins with marker)
17. **Judge Jay's House** - site of house where Judge John Jay resided in 1777-78 (unmarked site)
18. **Van Wyck Homestead** - officers' headquarters for the Fishkill Supply Depot from 1776 to 1783 (house with marker)
19. **In Grateful Remembrance ...** - memorial to soldiers who died at Fishkill; relocated from its original site at the military cemetery (monument)
20. **Three Batteries** - redoubts and barracks that guarded Wicoppee Pass; a military hospital was also located near here (marker)
21. **Mount Beacon** - New York militia manned beacons and lit signal fires to warn of enemy approaches (unmarked site and trail)
22. **Mount Gulian** - in 1783 the Verplanck House served as Baron Von Steuben's headquarters and was where the Society of the Cincinnati first organized (house with marker)

The Links in the Supply Chain



First Reformed Church of Fishkill, used by the New York Provincial Congress and also served as a prison during the Revolution (Library of Congress).

Fishkill village and Fishkill Landing were already well established at the war's outset. The provincial government made its home in the buildings of the village for six months in late 1776 and early 1777, first in the Trinity Episcopal Church and then in the somewhat larger Dutch Reformed Church. These and other churches were subsequently used for holding prisoners and as hospitals. The local academy, run by Dr. Chauncey Graham, was also converted to a hospital. Other buildings in the village served as lodgings for military officers and government officials, while local shops and stores helped cater to the army's needs. Jacobus Cooper's metalworking shop, for example, was pressed into service as an armory; Mary Bloodgood's hat shop was requisitioned as a guardhouse. An important addition to the village during the war was Samuel Loudon's print shop, relocated here from New York City, where the patriot newspaper *The New-York Packet*, and *American Advertiser* was published.

However, by far the biggest effect of the war on Fishkill was the establishment in late 1776, and the operation for close to seven years, of a military supply depot along the Post Road heading south out of the village on the opposite side of Fishkill Creek. This facility was maintained with some difficulty, expanding and contracting with the ebb and flow of hostilities, and beset by disputes over wages and shortages of labor, raw materials, equipment and provisions. Yet the scale and complexity of the depot was impressive, causing Thomas Anburey, one of the British prisoners taken at Saratoga who was shepherded through Fishkill in late November 1778, to remark that "this place has been the principal depot of Washington's army, where there are magazines, hospitals, workshops, etc., which form a town of themselves." Anburey went on to note that "[n]ear the magazines [storehouses] are some well-constructed barracks, with a prison, surrounded with lofty pallisadoes."



Van Wyck Homestead, now the headquarters of the Fishkill Historical Society, served as officers' quarters during the Revolutionary War.

Outside of the depot and village were other important components of the Fishkill supply system. At Fishkill Landing there were more storehouses for forage, flour, bread, clothing and weapons, more sheds for wagons, and workshops for boatbuilding and boat repair. In the fall of 1779, a major program of boatbuilding took place in anticipation of a joint American-French expedition against New York. Quartermaster General Nathanael Greene estimated no less than 100,000 boards were required at West Point and Fishkill Landing, and high-paid Philadelphia carpenters were imported to assist with the boatbuilding work.



State Historical Marker for Fishkill Landing.



Detail from one of four maps of the Fishkill area surveyed by American cartographer Robert Erskine in 1778 (New-York Historical Society).

Three miles south of the village along the Post Road, nestled in the Wiccopee Pass, was the location of the Lower Barracks, built in the fall of 1776 to house 2,000 soldiers and later apparently used as a hospital. Redoubts were also constructed on either side of the road to assist in defending the pass. Beacons erected on the crest of the ridge west of the pass were a vital part of the military communications network, signaling the approach of the enemy. Hay and livestock were gathered into the military storehouses and stables from farms along Fishkill Creek and in neighboring valleys. Local trees were felled and sawn for fuel and lumber. Mills along Fishkill Creek, notably Schenck's and Brinckerhoff's, produced flour and feed for army consumption. For seven tense years, the entire economy of the Fishkill area was geared to support the American military presence.



Thomas Mifflin
Quartermaster General
1775-77



Nathanael Greene
Quartermaster General
1778-80



Thomas Pickering
Quartermaster General
1780-85



Samuel Hodgdon
Commissary General
of Military Stores
1781-83

Officers and Artificers

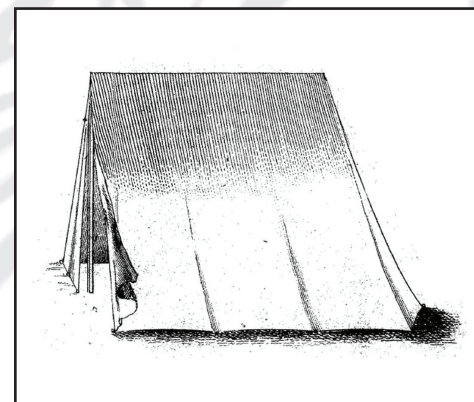
Working in concert with General George Washington and Governor George Clinton of New York, a series of Quartermaster Generals (Thomas Mifflin, Stephen Moylan, Nathanael Greene and Timothy Pickering) and Commissary Generals of Military Stores (Benjamin Flower and Samuel Hodgdon) orchestrated the operations of the Fishkill Supply Depot and related facilities in the village and at the landing. These senior officers delegated the day-to-day supply duties to a Deputy Quartermaster General, Colonel Hugh Hughes (1776-78 and 1780-82) and Colonel Udny Hay (1778-80), and a Deputy Commissary of Military Stores, John Ruddock (1777-82). It was Hughes, Hay and Ruddock who dealt with the formidable challenge of servicing the army, usually with limited resources and a discontented labor force, all the while under threat of British attack. A wealth of military paperwork survives documenting this activity.



Wheelwright at work.

At the other end of the spectrum, a range of workers buckled down to the tasks of making and repairing weapons, tools, equipment, clothing and buildings; gathering in provisions for troops and forage for livestock; and transporting soldiers, animals, raw materials and supplies in and out of the Fishkill hub. Among the most essential workers were the artificers – carpenters, masons, wheelwrights, armorers, blacksmiths, saddlers and shipwrights, for whom compensation was frequently an issue. In January 1779 the Fishkill carpenters and wheelwrights petitioned Quartermaster General Greene for better wages setting off a dispute that simmered throughout the year. In March 1781 General Knox drew Congress's attention to the fact that the Fishkill armorers had not been paid for two years.

Every imaginable item of supply was handled at Fishkill. Among the most critical were ordnance, muskets, bayonets, powder and shot; tools such as axes, shovels, sledgehammers and crowbars; tents; pots and camp kettles; blankets, shirts and shoes; hay, corn, flour, bread and salt; and wagons, sleds and boats.



A typical soldiers' tent of the Revolutionary War era.

In Grateful Remembrance of the Brave Men...



Daughters of the American Revolution monument to the Fishkill war dead in its original location alongside Route 9.

a military cemetery located toward the southern end of the depot on the east side of the New York-Albany Post Road (modern Route 9).

Ongoing research into Revolutionary War archives has so far documented close to 90 individual soldiers by name who died in Fishkill during the war years. Private John Chowning of the 5th Virginia Regiment, for example, enlisted on April 21, 1777. He was a hospital patient in Fishkill in January of 1779 and died there on February 18 of the same year. He may reasonably be assumed to have been buried in the cemetery near the depot. Interments from several of the various colonies/states are believed to be represented at the cemetery, along with a few burials of Canadian, French and German soldiers.

The whereabouts of the cemetery has been passed down by local tradition and was marked in 1897 by a monument erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution (this monument was later relocated to the nearby Van Wyck Homestead property). In recent years, ground penetrating radar and archaeological investigations have helped to delineate the cemetery more precisely. Graves were pinpointed, but left in place, through excavations in 2007 and 2013. A reasonable estimate suggests that the cemetery once contained – and likely still contains – scores, if not hundreds, of burials. This is one of the nation's pre-eminent resting places of those who made the ultimate sacrifice during the Revolutionary War.



Fishkill military cemetery in 2013.