



The Backbone

A publication of the Backbone Ridge History Group of
Schuyler, Seneca, and Tompkins Counties

B E C A U S E H I S T O R Y M A T T E R S

SPECIAL EDITION

President's Note

BY ALLAN BUDDLE

A CHALLENGE FOR THE BACKBONE RIDGE HISTORY GROUP

Picture for a moment a farm on the Backbone Ridge in springtime. Spring is almost here and along with spring comes renewal of life of all descriptions and faith that the seed of the newly planted crop will germinate and grow.

Surely you have noticed that this issue of the *Backbone* is somewhat different. The purpose, with history as a background, is to introduce (plant) a “new idea” (crop if you will), that we have faith will germinate and grow into a modern tool for presenting historic information about the Backbone Ridge.

Thank you to Mark Brown for putting us in touch with Sylvia Hasenkopf who has provided a very informative review of the creation of the Military Tract which provided Land Bounty Rights as compensation to Revolutionary Soldiers for their service. Sylvia's article follows.

Robert Kibbee, former Map Librarian at Cornell University, has focused on the Military Lots in two of the twenty eight Military townships, Hector and Ovid, some of each making up the geographic area known locally as the Backbone Ridge. Bob has made reference to additional information about the Military Tract available on the Seneca County Historian's page of the Seneca County website. In his article which also follows, Bob shares interesting facts about the naming of the Military townships, the Surveys that defined the Military Lots, the process of Balloting, Settlement by mostly other than those granted the Patents, and the Legacy of a redefined landscape.

Bob concluded his article with a Challenge that you can read and which the Backbone Ridge History Group eagerly accepts.



REVOLUTIONARY WAR LAND BOUNTY RIGHTS - THE MILITARY TRACT IN NEW YORK STATE

By SYLVIA HASENKOPF

I have been often asked about Revolutionary War bounty lands in the State of New York. Many people assume that some of these lands were located in the southern tier of New York State – not so.

New York State did set aside land for bounty land rights, but it was located in central New York State. How and why this happened is an interesting story and crucial to understanding who ultimately received land in the Military Tract.

On September 16, 1776 each state was asked to furnish a quota of men according to its population. In total, eighty-eight battalions were mustered in. Delaware and Georgia each provided one battalion, Rhode Island two battalions, New York and New Jersey four battalions, South Carolina six battalions, Connecticut and Maryland eight battalions, North Carolina nine battalions, Pennsylvania twelve battalions and Massachusetts and Virginia fifteen battalions. Each battalion comprised around 300 men. These men became the nucleus of the Continental Army.

In time New York State provided another battalion, the 5th Regiment. In addition, militias were raised in every county within the State.

Recognizing that few men were interested or willing to be separated from their family, businesses and farms, as well as suffer the privations and hardship of war, Congress offered land to those who enlisted.

“That Congress make provision for granting lands in the following proportions to the officers and soldiers who shall so engage in the service, and continue therein to the close of the war, or until discharged by Congress, and to the representatives of such officers and soldiers as shall be slain by the enemy.”

Although the lands were to be provided by the United States, the expense of procuring the lands was to be borne by each of the states, in the same proportion as other expenses incurred during the war. Every state was to provide “arms, clothing and every necessary for its quota of troops....the expense of clothing to be deducted from the pay of soldiers, as usual.”

Each Colonel was to receive 500 acres, also called one “Right”, each Lieutenant-Colonel 450 acres, each Major 400 acres, each Captain 300 acres, each Lieutenant 200 acres, each Ensign 150 acres and each non-commissioned officer and soldier 100 acres.

On August 12, 1780, Congress passed an Act which allowed a Major-General to claim 1,100 acres and a Brigadier-General 860 acres.

By 1781, New York State had enlisted only half of the quota of men as established by Congress. They needed to sweeten the pot and indeed they did. As an additional incentive, the state legislature authorized an additional 500 acres per soldier, if the soldier enlisted for three years service.

(continued on page 3)

REVOLUTIONARY WAR LAND BOUNTY RIGHTS - THE MILITARY TRACT IN NEW YORK STATE

By SYLVIA HASENKOPF
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2)

The five Regiments supplied by New York State needed to be refilled from time to time, as men died or deserted. The state's Militia, who were "classes" of fifteen men each, provided the necessary manpower to fill the regimental ranks. When additional soldiers were needed for the "Line" – one of the five regiments – each "class" was required to furnish a man, fully armed and equipped within nine days. If there was no volunteer, the commanding officer had to draft one of his soldiers by lot. By 1780, every militia regiment was again divided into "classes", this time with thirty-five soldiers each. When soldiers were required for the Line, these Militia regiments were required to supply the necessary men within fifteen days. In turn they would receive a money bounty, sometimes as high as £80. Failure to do so resulted in severe penalties to the Militia Regiment. Fines, forfeiture of land and imprisonment were some of the penalties the men within the class would endure for failure to supply their allotted number of Line soldiers.

By 1782, an act was passed providing that any "class" or any person who furnished an able-bodied man for the Line who would serve for "three years or during the war" would be entitled to 600 acres; or 350 acres for a two year enlistment. Any "class" or person who supplied this new recruit within twenty days from the date of the notification would receive an additional 200 acres extra.

Like the other states, New York State had been suffering from a shortage of actual currency. Bartering land in exchange for service was their only bargaining chip. Land was what many people sought, so it was an effective tool for recruitment.

New York State was the fifth state to set aside land as a Military reserve. On March 20, 1781, the New York State legislature authorized a military tract be established and on July 25, 1782 the approximate boundaries of the Military Tract were established.

On March 27, 1783, with the Revolutionary War essentially on its last legs, the Assembly of the State of New York authorized additional bounty lands.

"This legislature will by law provide that the Major-Generals and Brigadier-Generals now serving in the line of the army of the United States, and being citizens of this state; and the officers, non-commissioned officers and privates of the two regiments of infantry commanded by Colonels Van Schaick and Van Cortlandt; such officers of the regiment of artillery commanded by Col. Lamb, and of the corps of sappers and miners, as were, when they entered the service, inhabitants of this state; such of the non-commissioned officers and privates of said last mentioned two corps as are credited to this state as part of the troops thereof; all officers deranged by any acts of Congress subsequent to the 16th day of September, 1776; all officers recommended by Congress as persons whose depreciation on pay ought to be made good by this state, and who may hold military commissions in the line of the army at the close of the war; and the Reverend John Mason and John Gano."

Major-Generals were to receive 5500 acres, Brigadier-Generals 4250 acres, Colonels 2500 acres, Lieutenant-Colonels 2250 acres, Majors 2000 acres, Captains and Regimental Surgeons 1500 acres, Chaplains Rev. Jon Mason and John Gano 2000 acres each, each Subaltern and Surgeon's Mate 1000 acres and every non-commissioned officer and private 500 acres.

(continued on page 4)

REVOLUTIONARY WAR LAND BOUNTY RIGHTS - THE MILITARY TRACT IN NEW YORK STATE

By SYLVIA HASENKOPF
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

On May 11, 1784, the New York State Legislature passed “an Act for granting certain lands promised to be given as Bounty Lands, by Laws of this State, and for other purposes herein mentioned.” Commissioners were appointed, who would assume the responsibility of granting the bounty lands. Philip Schuyler was initially appointed, but two days later Simeon De Witt succeeded him as Surveyor-General.

The “Old Military Tract” located in northern New York was laid out, but ultimately found to be “substandard”. The hunt for a new tract of land began and eventually, in 1789, the “New Military Tract” in central New York State was established.

Simeon De Witt was charged with establishing the 600 acre lots within the Military Tract. Each township was to contain 100 lots. In actuality each parcel was 640 acres (10 miles by 10 miles) and 40 acres within each parcel were ostensibly to be used for boundary roads. Unless bounded on one side by water, each parcel was to be laid out as near as possible to a square. Ninety-four lots in each Town were to be deeded to holders of military bounty lands Patents. The remaining six lots were to be used for public purposes, such as schools and churches.

In addition, the cost to survey these lands was significant. Twenty surveyors worked diligently to complete the necessary survey, which would facilitate the distribution of the land. In order to pay for the survey a 50 acre lot was set aside from each 600 acre lot. These 50 acre lots were situated at the corner of a lot, which in turn, abutted the corners of three adjoining 600 acre parcels and when viewed together formed a cohesive 200 acre parcel. In order to claim this last 50 acre parcel within their 600 acre parcel, each patentee had to compensate the State for the service of surveyors by providing a survey fee of 48 shillings. If the patentee failed to pay the surveyor fee within two years of claiming his land, then he forfeited the 50 acre parcel to the State, who, in turn, could sell the land at public auction.

The Military Tract comprised approximately 1.8 million acres and today covers the counties of Cayuga, Onondaga, Cortland and Seneca and parts of Oswego, Tompkins, Schuyler and Wayne counties.

Twenty-eight towns were established. Originally they were numbered 1 through 28, however they were later given mostly classical Greek and Roman names, with a few English authors thrown in for good measure.

They were: Lysander (Spartan naval commander), Hannibal (Carthaginian general), Cato (Roman statesman), Brutus (Roman surname – slayer of Julius Caesar), Camillus (Roman hero), Cicero (Roman orator and philosopher), Manlius (Roman family name), Aurelius (Roman emperor), Marcellus (Plebian Roman family name), Pompey (Roman commander who fought Julius Caesar), Romulus (One of legendary founders of Rome), Scipio (Roman general who defeated Hannibal), Sempromius (Roman name), Tully (Another name for Marcus Tullius Cicero), Fabius (Roman family name), Ovid (Latin poet), Milton (English poet), Locke (English philosopher), Homer (Greek poet), Solon (Athenian statesman), Hector (Trojan hero slain by Achilles), Ulysses (Latin name for the Greek

(continued on page 5)

REVOLUTIONARY WAR LAND BOUNTY RIGHTS - THE MILITARY TRACT IN NEW YORK STATE

BY SYLVIA HASENKOPF
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4)

Odysseus who figured prominently in Homer's Iliad and Odyssey), Dryden (English poet), Virgil (Roman poet), Cincinnatus (Roman farmer and ruler), Junius (Pen name for English political author), Galen (Roman physician) and Sterling (source of name in dispute). See map on pg. 7.

Much speculation arose regarding the author of these classical names, and eventually it was agreed that Robert Harpur, who was Deputy Secretary for the State of New York and Secretary of the Land Board at the time, was the culprit.

In 1790 the New York State Legislature established the procedures for allocating lands to veterans who applied for them by a specified date.

By 1791 lots were drawn and patents were awarded to bounty land claimants. But not everyone wanted to go into the wilds of central New York. Some soldiers were distrustful of the process, others were illiterate and yet others chose to stay where they had been living since the war had concluded. Many sold their land bounty rights to land speculators and others were simply swindled out of their claims. Some parcels were sold multiple times, creating much confusion. Record keeping by the government was poor.

The Patentees had to pay a stipulated sum and they had to settle on their lands within seven years. The deadline to settle on the Military Tract for Patentees was 1799.

The first balloting took place on July 3, 1790. Eventually soldiers from the 1st and 2nd New York Regiments, the New York Regiment of Artillery commanded by Col. John Lamb, the Corps of Sappers and Miners, Commissioned Officers and the Dead of the above mentioned Regiments were awarded Patents.

We are fortunate that the "Balloting Book and other documents relating to Military Bounty Lands in the State of New York" was compiled and printed by Packard & Van Benthuyzen of Albany in 1825. This book provides a detailed list of the soldiers who were awarded Patents to land in the Military Tract. It identifies the Regiment and Company in which the men served, the amount of land they were entitled to, their rank and if they were killed while serving, the date and at times the location of their death.

And finally, it also identifies the lot within the respective Town that their Patent was awarded.

How did this affect the average man who served in the American Revolution?

If the Revolutionary War soldier had enlisted for a period of three years in one of the five regimental battalions that were mentioned above, or was in a militia unit with land bounty rights in New York State, and was called up to the "Line", he would have been entitled to a Patent for the specific acres according to his rank. Whether he received this Patent would largely depend on whether he applied for the Patent, and once received, whether he retained it - assuming he did not sell the Patent to land speculators or others.

(continued on page 6)

REVOLUTIONARY WAR LAND BOUNTY RIGHTS - THE MILITARY TRACT IN NEW YORK STATE

By SYLVIA HASENKOPF
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

There was one other way, in which someone could receive land bounty rights. Slave owners who delivered an able bodied slave to one of the five regiments, were entitled to 500 acres – one land bounty right. If the slave served his three years and survived, he was free.

The New York State Library has a number of documents and volumes pertaining to the granting of these land bounty rights in their collection. Although some have been damaged and are in very fragile condition because of the Capitol Fire of 1911, others are available to the general public for their review.

If your Revolutionary ancestor came from another state, they would not have been entitled to Land Bounty Rights in New York State.

Editors Note: Sylvia Hasenkopf of North River Research is a New York State historian and genealogist with more than 20 years experience.

THE BACKBONE RIDGE IN THE MILITARY TOWNSHIPS

BY ROBERT KIBBEE

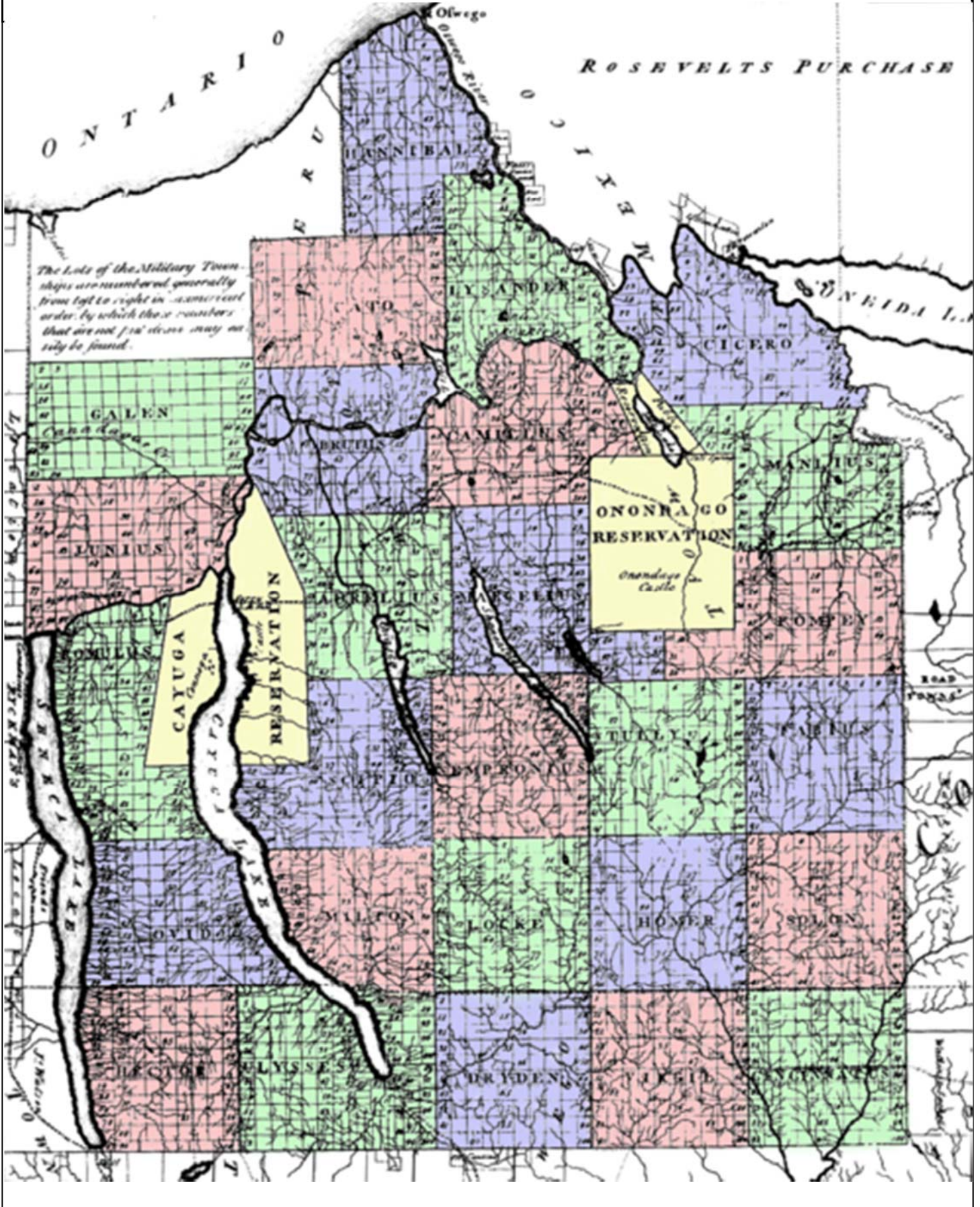
Sylvia Hasenkopf provided an overview of the creation of The New Military Tract in central New York . This article is a follow-up to hers. It attempts to look more closely at the land survey and distribution as it affected the area now known as the Backbone Ridge. You'll need her article as background or another excellent overview of the history and process of the distribution by the Seneca County Historian, Walt Gable, which is available online from the Seneca Historian's website. In addition to the historical background, Walt provides some information about the local distribution in Seneca County and in Ovid in particular.

As both authors note, the New Military Tract, taken from the Iroquois nation through some sub-legal maneuvering, was divided originally into 25 townships; three more were added later to accommodate all the enlistees who claimed a lot. The area known as the Backbone Ridge is in two of these townships. When they were surveyed they were merely numbered: Twp. 16 and Twp. 21. These were later named Ovid and Hector, respectively. Ovid was named for the Roman poet, Publius Ovidius Naso and Hector was named for the Trojan hero of the Greek epic, *The Iliad*.

The classical names were applied soon after the survey. There is a surprising amount of curiosity about the names and what seems to be an overwhelming desire to affix "blame" for them, although it's hard to see what, truly, is blameworthy. The critical fact is that the names, like the survey grid itself, almost completely obliterated whatever Iroquois presence there was on the landscape. On the Backbone Ridge itself this presence had been very light—the trail from Queen Catherine's Town to the top of Cayuga Lake was perhaps the only imprint that survived the Sullivan campaign and the

(continued on page 8)

Source: The Balloting Book and Other Documents Relating to Military Bounty Lands in the State of New York, 1825



THE BACKBONE RIDGE IN THE MILITARY TOWNSHIPS
By ROBERT KIBBEE
 (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6)

survey. It could even be said that the grid obliterated the landscape itself, because in establishing the township and lot boundaries, there was no consideration whatsoever of the underlying topography--the rivers, streams and hills (excluding the lake shores) -- that would normally form boundaries in an historical landscape.

The Surveys

The surveys were carried out by a team trained and supervised by Simeon DeWitt, the Surveyor General of New York. The lead surveyor for a township had his own team of workers who carried the chains, etc. Hector was surveyed in 1790 by Thomas (Sherman in the notes) Nicholson "under the direction of" Abraham Hardenbaugh and Moses DeWitt. Moses was Simeon DeWitt's nephew. Both men eventually became wealthy leveraging their knowledge of the Military Tract into successful land speculation.

The Ovid survey, completed in 1791, is not signed but from the surveyor's notes we know that the surveyor was Thomas Cuddeback. The Ovid survey is a much less ambitious effort than the one done of Hector. The streams and creeks depicted on the Hector survey are missing from Ovid, which makes it quite a bit less informative. On the other hand, Nicholson, while surveying Hector, usually provided notes for each junction, but often didn't record other information along the line, while Cuddeback's notations for Ovid are more detailed. The numbers are the chain lengths from the starting point.

Examples of surveyor notes for Ovid:

Lot 90: east bounds beginning at the southwest corner at a white ash stake..hard maple tree marked headed north.

31 brook

50 brook

63 run

76/84 corner. The land this line passes through is middling good, timber black ash. black birch and somewhat wet.



The survey for lots in Ovid considered part of the Backbone Ridge.

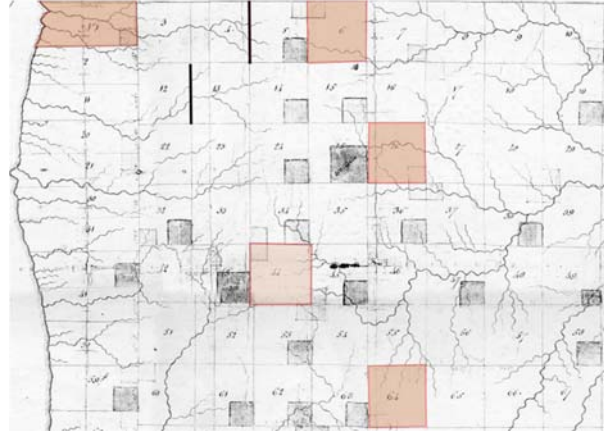
The darkened squares are lots set aside for "literature and the gospel." The hollow squares in the southeast corners of some lots indicate land set aside for "State's hundreds." The dark line indicates the line described in the sample note.

(continued on page 9)

BY ROBERT KIBBEE
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8)

Surveyor notes for Hector:

*“Lot 12 E bounds: Good land bearing maple, elm, ash and hickory” and then 4 E bounds:
“Good land producing beech, maple, elm, oak and hickory.”*



The survey for lots in Hector considered part of the Backbone Ridge.

The darkened squares are lots set aside for “literature and the gospel.” The hollow squares in the southeast corners of some lots indicate land set aside for “State’s hundreds.” The smaller hollow squares in 5 and 6 are “Survey fifties.” The dark line indicates the line described in the sample of the surveyor’s notes. The Backbone Ridge History Group identified 65 lots/ballotees in the Hector portion of the Backbone Ridge and 36 in the Ovid portion.

The minimal notes are a little disappointing—evidently crossing the Sawmill Creek ravine wasn’t worth noting--but there is substantial information about forest cover and land suitability. We have to remember that land distribution was the purpose of the survey. The survey notes are available on microfilm at the State Library and, for this area only, at the Cornell University Library. They are difficult to use and copy, so we are very lucky to have the transcribed notes (from the originals, not the microfilm) provided by Peter Marks and Sana Gardescu . The notes were transcribed in an epic data acquisitions effort by Peter who read them aloud while his wife typed the text on an IBM selectric. Peter and Sana used the notes to reconstruct the forest ecology of the area in 1790. See Marks, Peter.L. and Sana Gardescu, *Late Eighteenth Century Vegetation of Central and Western New York State on the Basis of Original Land Survey Records*. 1992

Ballotting

Once the land was surveyed it was distributed by lot or “ballot.” The soldier or his widow or estate needed to claim his place on the distribution list by application. These were pretty carefully vetted to prevent fraudulent claims. When the list was completed the soldiers’ names were put into one jar and the Township lot numbers in another and they were drawn together. The process went through several refinements as it progressed. The outcome was that a random lot was assigned to each soldier, or in the case of officers, multiple lots.

The original assignments were preserved and published somewhat later in “The Ballotting Book,” which Hasenkopf and Gable refer to. This is now available online. The Backbone Ridge History Group identified 65 lots/ballotees in the Hector portion of the Backbone Ridge and 36 in the Ovid portion, too many to list here, but I did list the ballotees for the border lots to give you an idea.

(continued on page 10)

THE BACKBONE RIDGE IN THE MILITARY TOWNSHIPS

BY ROBERT KIBBEE
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9)

Twp	Lot	Ballotee
Ovid	89	Henry M'Henry
Ovid	90	Isaac Sherwood, Lt.
Ovid	91	John English
Ovid	92	Thomas Hoskins
Ovid	93	Jacob Cline
Ovid	94	Christian Wallis- er
Ovid	95	Christopher K. Bedner
Ovid	96	James Rankin
Hector	1	<i>Reserved for Gospel</i>
Hector	2	Aaron Osburn
Hector	3	James Reiley
Hector	4	Thomas Coshal
Hector	5	Hugh Fothergill
Hector	6	<i>Reserved for Gospel</i>
Hector	7	Daniel Niven, Capt.
Hector	8	Sebastian Bau- man, Maj.
Hector	9	Richard Smith

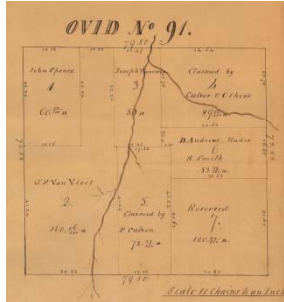
Soldiers did not acquire the entire 640 acres that were surveyed. In fact they were only entitled to 600 acres. Forty acres around the perimeters of the lots were set aside for roads and other improvements. If the soldier had received a 100 acre land bonus from the government (at that point the Continental Congress) in an earlier attempt to encourage enlistment during the course of the Revolutionary war, he was required to "return" 100 acres of his New Military Tract land to New York State, an early attempt to forestall "double-dipping." New York then sold that land through the land office. These 100 acre parcels we known as "state's hundreds." The soldier was also required to pay for the survey. Since few soldiers had the liquid assets to pay the surveying fee, they were required to surrender 50 acres to the state for that payment. These "survey fifties" were often joined at the corners of the lots into 100-200 acre parcels which New York state would also sell. These set-asides are indicated on the township maps above. You can see that the person receiving lot 5 in Hector had given up a "state's hundred" and a "survey fifty," so he actually he actually received 450 acres. The lots set aside for "gospel and literature" were sold by towns when they were finally organized as political units and the proceeds went to support of schools and churches. These and the other state properties were in high demand because they offered a clear title to the land which was not true of the balloted properties.

(continued on page 11)

BY ROBERT KIBBEE
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10)

Settlement

Very few of the original ballotees actually settled their land. For example, of all the ballotees in the Backbone Ridge section of Ovid, only Sylvanus Travis, who settled lot 68, was the original claimant. The patents were often sold to neighbors, land speculators or simply abandoned. Primitive record keeping made the process challenging and there were instances of outright fraud. Eventually a commission had to be set up to sort out all the conflicting claims.



A resurvey of Ovid 91 to resolve conflicting claims.

Legacy

The Military Tract survey and land distribution redefined the landscape of Central New York. The townships that had been defined by the legislature to aid in land distribution, morphed over their first thirty years into political geographies. Again, flying in the face of the landscape, the township of Ovid became the Town of Ovid and eventually the towns of Ovid, Lodi and Covert all carved out along lot boundaries. Hector is one of the few survey townships to retain its original boundaries (there was a little adjustment down near Watkins). In the most basic way the survey imposed a visible grid of lots and roads that remain today, even on the sometimes challenging topography of the Backbone Ridge. Villages and hamlets such as Lodi, Interlaken, Townsendville and Searsburg grew from the busier corners on the grid, where the more settled lots came together and farms and dwellings clustered around a church or mill. Many smaller settlements—"corners" came and went. Looking at an aerial view or satellite image of the area today, the lot boundaries are obvious, and hidden in the hedgerows and field boundaries it is still possible to pick out the outlines of some "State's Hundreds" and "Survey Fifties."

Challenges and Opportunities for a New History of The New Military Tract

New and better access to data, powerful mapping programs and the Web's broad canvas delivered over a high-speed internet give historians amazing tools to interpret and present new versions of the human historical geography. For the Backbone Ridge the potential is great for new interpretation and presentation. The survey notes coupled with interactive mapping of the surveys themselves will allow us to recreate the landscape of 1790, trace its development over time and compare it side by side with today's landscapes. The records of landownership can now be easily attached to the historical lots. Old maps, new maps and information from many sources will provide a scaffold for displaying the entire range of the lives lived on the Backbone Ridge in their historical context. The Backbone Ridge History group is developing a project to make that happen. Stay tuned.

Backbone Ridge History Group
PO Box 62
Trumansburg, NY 14886

*****PLEASE NOTE CHANGE IN PO BOX NUMBER FROM 64 TO 62*****

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Trustee meetings are held at 3:00 pm on the third Monday of each month, preceded by a work session at 1:00 pm at the Backbone Ridge History Research Center at the intersection of Route 96A and SR 414 in the Village of Lodi.

Printing of this newsletter was supported by the Nelson B. Delavan Foundation.

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REMINDER:

Please renew your membership today.

In order to keep costs down, we will no longer continue mailing newsletters to those that have not renewed.

For an individual or family, please send a check for \$10 for a one year membership, made out to the Backbone Ridge History Group and mailed to PO Box 62, Trumansburg, NY 14886. Please be sure we have your current mailing address.

