

## Fort Rensselaer Chronicles

This chronological study details the military activities, which took place during the life of Fort Rensselaer/Fort Plain from its inception August 7, 1780 to its closure in 1800. The study includes letters, orders and other documents written at the fort as well as receipts, letters and reports from other locations, which directly reflect upon Fort Rensselaer's activities.

Most historians who have studied and written about the American Revolution in the Mohawk Valley have disregarded or glossed over the Fort Rensselaer story due to the confusing nature of the material. Fort Rensselaer, which we believe began life under the name Fort Plain as early as 1779, adopted the Fort Rensselaer name on or around August 7, 1780 just 5 days after the Canajoharie District raid by Joseph Brant.

This accumulation of historical data is meant to demonstrate that Fort Rensselaer acted as a central military hub and military depot for the Western Mohawk Frontier and was an important center of military activity in the Mohawk Valley during the time periods outlined below. Records indicate that the fort became a supply depot for military hardware and food provisions as well as a base of operations for General Robert Van Rensselaer of the Tryon County Militia, Colonel Marinus Willett of the NYS Levies, Colonel Benjamin Tupper of the 10<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts and Colonel George Reid of the 2<sup>nd</sup> New Hampshire Regiment.

According to pension records the fort contained services essential to its role as a military depot including a bakery for the production of hard bread<sup>1</sup>, a hospital which treated battle wounds, small pox and other diseases<sup>2</sup>, a blacksmith operation, a gunsmith, a fife & drum corps and a river front landing complete with ferry operation to the north side of the Mohawk River. Pension records also indicate that carpenters were employed as sleigh and barrel makers. Teamsters transported grain to the fort for flour production at nearby mills<sup>3</sup>. Cattle were herded to the fort to feed local refugees as well as to supply the other forts in the region<sup>4</sup>. The metamorphosis from frontier outpost to military headquarters and supply depot occurred gradually over the last 3 years of the war and produced a military complex which would remain active after the war through the remainder of the century.

Note:

The "Fort Rensselaer Chronicles" are by no means complete and will be continually updated as new material becomes available. Check dates for recent activity.

## Chronology of Fort Rensselaer Documents

Date	Item	Source
Aug 7, 1780	Rev. J. Daniel Gros signed a receipt for a barrel of flour provided by Lawrence Gros and another by Deobald Dygert "for the temporary relief of the poor distressed families of Canajoharry District ..." subscribed at "Fort Rensselaer". <sup>5</sup>	New York State Archives, Legislative Papers, Box 11, mss #2128. (per Wayne Lenig)
Sept 4, 1780	General Van Rensselaer makes his report from Ft Rensselaer to the Governor on the situation in the Mohawk Valley	Clinton Papers Vol VI, Pg 169
Sept 11, 1780	From General Van Rensselaer, First Troop return from Ft Rensselaer. Harper's info incomplete <sup>6</sup>	Clinton Papers Vol VI, Pg 212
Sept 14, 1780	From James Moore ADC to Samuel Van Nette Receipt dated "Fort Rensselaer September 14, 1780 for 1,544 lbs of fresh beef and 77 lbs of fresh pork for the use of the garrison at Fort Rensselaer. It was sent to Anthony Van Veghten, Assistant State Agent at Conajohary." <sup>7</sup>	The document is catalogued under Misc Manuscripts: James Moore at NY Historical Society, Central Park West, NY, NY
Sept 17, 1780	Assistant Deputy Quarter Master Henry Glen writes to Col William Malcom with advice on supplies and trustworthy individuals in Tryon County. He list "Col. Cloyd in Ft. Plank" and "Rev. Gross in Ft. Rensselaer".	Glen-Yates Papers, NYS Historical Association Library, Cooperstown, N.Y.
Sept 25, 1780	"I am adding something to the expense of this little fort -- it the only thing that Keeps the inhabitants dry & there must be something to cover a few troops in Winter and to hold their provisions -- a few boards which we impress & nails is all the charge" <sup>8</sup>	Col William Malcom's Military Correspondence written at Fort Ranselaer
Sept 28, 1780	An order for Colonel Henry Frey to deliver 12 bushels of grain to John Moyer for the use of Col. Malcom's brigade. Subscribed at "Fort Ranchler".	New-York Historical Society Library, "Misc Manuscripts: Fort Rensselaer".
Oct 3, 1780	Colonel W. Malcom to Gov. G. Clinton notes that Malcom marched from "Fort Renslaer" on Sept. 27 with Col. Harper's Regiment under command of Major Hughes to Fort Stanwix. Malcom returned to "Fort Renslaer" on October 3 as the letter is headed at that location.	New-York Historical Society Library, "Miscellaneous Manuscripts: William Malcom"
Oct 3, 1780	Malcom writes to Gen'l Washington with same report as above	Washington Papers
Oct 11, 1780	The Pennsylvania <i>Gazette</i> dated October 11, 1780 contains the following note of interest: "An account from the northward says Colonel Malcom on the 25th ultimo was at Fort Rensselaer on his way to Fort Schuyler with a relief for the present garrison."	Effner, William B., <i>Warfare in the Mohawk Valley</i> , Schenectady, 1948, p. 3.
Oct 13, 1780	"Return of the 1st Regiment of New York Levies Commanded by Colonel William Malcom" lists Capt Cantine, Capt Livingston, 3 Lts, 1 adjutant, QM, Sgt Major, Q.M. Sgt, Fife Major, 10 sgts., 4 drum & fife, 122 rank and file fit for duty and 3 sick at "Ft Rensselaer".	Senate House Manuscripts, folder 2751, doc. 3648, Senate House New York State Historic Site, Kingston, N.Y.

Date	Item	Source
Oct 14, 1780	Inhabitants of Schenectady to Gov. G. Clinton - Col. Wemple has orders from Gen Ten Broeck to send 70 Schenectady militiamen to "Fort Rensselaer".	letter quoted in Greg, Arthur, <i>Old Hellebergh</i> , 1936, 19-20; also <i>Clinton Papers</i> , 6, 333-334..
Oct 15, 1780	George Herkimer to Colonel Dubois at "Fort Rensselaer" [captured document].	<i>Haldimand Collection</i> , 1888, 875 (B. 182, 285).
Oct 16, 1780	H. Glen to Colonel Gordon. Report of firing heard at "Fort Rensselaer" [captured document].	<i>Haldimand Collection</i> , 1888, 875 (B.182, 283)
Oct 18, 1780	Brigade Major Jacob Boeker to Colonel J. Brown - "Col Daboy" orders Colonel Brown to march for the Mohawk River from his station at Stone Arabia at daybreak. Headed "Fort Renselear" [captured document].	Haldimand Collection, 1888, 652 (B.158, 168).
Oct 19, 1780	Lt Joseph Driskill files report from Ft Rensselaer listing ordinance & stores captured from Sir John Johnson	Clinton Papers Vol VI, Pg 323
Oct 21, 1780	<i>Fort Rensselaer Oct<sup>r</sup> 21 1780</i> Dear Sir I embrace this first Moment of Leisure to acquaint you that we are all safe and have escaped the Burning -- . . . The Night when the enemy laid at the Nose <del>H<sup>r</sup></del> at 12 OClock I got my wife&ca. in a Waggon and bro <sup>t</sup> them here this Morning I sent her back – Major Christopher P. Yates of the Canajoharie District	From Henry Glen Papers, NYSHA.
Nov 6, 1780	"Crossed the river at Mr. Walradt's to Fort Plains ... Took quarters at Mr. George Crouses." John Barr Diary, this is the part that was not published in Lauber.	A transcription was available in 2009 at <a href="http://www.rootsweb.com/sunygreen2/john-barr_1780.htm">http://www.rootsweb.com/sunygreen2/john-barr_1780.htm</a>
Nov 6, 1780	Fred Weissenfels writes from Ft Rensselaer ordering a horse for an Express Rider	Bollen Collection
Nov 6, 1780	Fred Weissenfels writes from Ft Rensselaer to Governor Clinton asking for new apparel for his men, officers and himself	Clinton Papers Vol VI, Pg 388
Nov 15, 1780	Fred Weissenfels writes from Ft Rensselaer that he will be marching for Ft Schuyler in AM	Clinton Papers Vol VI, Pg 414
July 6, 1781	Willett writes to Washington that he has set his quarters at Ft Rensselaer on account of its central position. <sup>9</sup>	Washington Papers
July 6, 1781	Villefranche arrives @ Ft Ranceler to design new blockhouse. Only 2 stories completed when he leaves in October	Washington Papers
July 13, 1781	Marinus Willett files report from Ft Rensselaer with General Washington on Battle of New Dorlach	Washington Papers
July 15, 1781	Col Willett reports to the Governor from Ft Rensselaer on depredations near Schoharie	Clinton Papers Vol VII, Pg 78
Aug 7, 1781	@Ft Rensselaer Daniel V Den Burgh & Andrew Buckley engaged as sleigh makers, Henry Acker to furnish flour barrels	Willett's Letter Book @ NYS Museum
Aug 19, 1781	Col Willett reports to the Governor from Ft Rensselaer on his pursuit of the enemy without success	Clinton Papers Vol VII, Pg 230
Sept 2, 1781	Willett writes Governor from Ft Rensselaer regarding 3 year levies and a raid on Cobleskill	Clinton Papers Vol VII, Pg 288

Date	Item	Source
Sept 7, 1781	Fort Rensselaer "By accounts this moment received the enemy appear to be in Considerable force at the German flats I wish you to March your regiment this way with as much expedition as possible & as much Provision as they can furnish themselves with - without being detained "	Willett's Letter Book @ NYS Museum
Sept 14, 1781	Willett writes of three traitors from Turloch visiting Fort Rensselaer & confesses to having no patience for them	Willett's Letter Book @ NYS Museum
Sept 22, 1781	Willett writes Governor from Ft Rensselaer regarding concerning problems enlisting 3 year men	Clinton Papers Vol VII, Pg 350
Oct 6, 1781	Willett to Gen Stark from Ft Rensselaer I have, for the present, fixed Major Logan, with his detachment, at Johnstown, and directed him to keep guards at Fort Hunter, and at Veeder's mills, in Caghnawaga. Johnstown is the best place to Caghnawaga, and is an additional protection to Stony Araby.	Memoir and Official Correspondence of Gen. John Stark, Caleb Stark, Concord, NH 1860, pp 263-264.
Oct 22, 1781	Willett writes Governor from Ft Rensselaer suggesting the necessity of appointing a Major to Muster the new Levies	Clinton Papers Vol VII, Pg 434
Nov 2, 1781	Willett reports defeat of Ross at Johnson Hall & death of Walter Butler	Clinton Papers Vol VII, Pg 472
Nov 2, 1781	Willett congratulates his men on their performance at Johnstown Battle with particular thanks to each of the Militia Regiments	Willett's Letter Book @ NYS Museum
Nov 4, 1781	Willett files a report of casualties at Johnson Hall and congratulates his troops on their success	Clinton Papers Vol VII, Pg 481
Nov 7, 1781	Willett write to Governor from Ft Rensselaer that he would have done better had his scouts been more vigilant	Clinton Papers Vol VII, Pg 487
Nov 16, 1781	Col Willett sends the Governor a return of damage done by the enemy in Tryon County and suggests snowshoes for the troops	Clinton Papers Vol VII, Pg 504
Feb 26, 1782	Villefranche files a report from West Point detailing his work at Ft Rensselaer	Washington Papers
April 30, 1782	Schuyler contracts with William Duer to keep a thirty day supply of salt meat for 400 men on hand at Ft Rensselaer	Washington Papers
May 3, 1782	Schuyler informs Washington of supply contract for Ft Rensselaer supply depot. Mentions need to finish blockhouse <sup>10</sup>	Washington Papers
July 2, 1782	Reid writes to Gen Washington asking that all troops be collected at <b>Fort Plain or Ransler</b> to improve discipline	Washington Papers
July 17, 1782	Willett writes to Clinton concerning the need for hard bread and salt provisions in order to pursue the enemy, cites that German Flatts was recently raided by a force of 500	Washington Papers
July 21, 1782	Willett writes to Washington concerned about their policy in dealing fairly with the Indians, mentions their recent ride together to Saratoga	Washington Papers
Aug 3, 1782	Col Reid writes to Washington "Col' Willett is gone to <b>Fort Ransler or Plain</b> "	Washington Papers
Aug 21, 1782	Willett writes to Washington from Ft Rensselaer complaining about infringement on his command authority by Col Reid	Washington Papers
Sept 20, 1782	General Stirling orders all military stores @ Fort Plank, Fort Willett & Fort Paris moved to Fort Rensselaer <sup>11</sup>	Washington Papers

Date	Item	Source
Sept 20, 1782	General Stirling orders Willett to assume command of Fort's Herkimer, Dayton, Rensselaer and Schoharie, Reid to take post at Ft Hunter & Johnstown Fort	Washington Papers
Sept 21, 1782	General Stirling assembles a list of all 26 Mohawk River Posts including Ft Rensselaer & Fort Plank (No Ft Plain)	Washington Papers
Oct 22, 1782	"Some confusion and inconveniences have arisen from some of our posts being called by a variety of names particularly at Canajohary, where the fort and works originally called Fort Rensselaer has by some since been called Fort Plain. In order such inconvenience for the future that post with its appendages is by all persons belonging to the army within this department and all those operating with it either in the military or civil branches in all their reports, returns and letters on business to be called Fort Rensselaer and no other."	By General Stirling from the Historical Society of PA
Oct 23, 1782	"the blockhouse which is an excellent one is projected by Major Ville France is just under Cover and in defensible order against any force which I believe will come against it this Winter"	From General Stirling to General Washington on Ft Rensselaer (in the Washington Papers)
Nov 8, 1782	"We do hereby, In pursuance of an act entitled an act to amend an act, entitled an act to accommodate the inhabitants of the frontier, with habitations and other purposes therein mentioned, passed the 22d of March, 1781 -Grant unto William Seeber, Peter Adams, George Garlock and Henry Smith, license and liberty to cut and remove wood or timber from the lands of John Laile (or Lail), George Kraus, John Fatterle, John Plaikert, Wellem (William) Fenck, George Ekar, John Walrath and Henry Walrath, lying contiguous to Fort Plain, being a place of defense, for fuel, fencing and timber for the use of the first above mentioned persons. "Given under our hands at Canajoharie, this 8th day of November, 1782. Christian Nellis, M. Willett, Commissioners." <sup>12</sup>	The Story of Old Fort Plain by Nelson Greene & The Frontiersmen of New York by Jephtha Simms Originally drawn up in on March 22, 1781 and later modified in Nov of 1782. It is in the handwriting of Squire Nellis and was signed by Col. Willett. In the handwriting of the latter, Willett crossed off the word "Plain" and interlined the name "Rensselaer."
Nov 27, 1782	Fort Rensselaer Letter from Pliny Moore to his father, Nodiah Moore	Microfilm Reel 78, Rev War Rolls 1775-1783, National Archives, Washington, D. C.
Dec 29, 1782	Willett writes to Washington from Ft. Rensselaer discussing the Oswego Mission	Washington Papers
Jan 22, 1783	Washington write to William Duer to stress that at least a month's provisions for 100 men must be kept at Ft's Herkimer and Rensselaer at all times	Washington Papers
Feb 7, 1783	Willett signs receipt from Nicholas Quackenbush for a sleighload of supplies delivered to Ft Rensselaer for use on the mission to Oswego	Bollen Collection
Feb 24, 1783	This fort is situated on a height about half a mile from the river, which affords a beautiful prospect of the country around, and shows you at one view, as far as the eye will carry, fine fields like those of Bottle Hill	Letter written at Ft Rensselaer by Major A. Thompson to his brother in New Jersey

Date	Item	Source
Mar 22, 1783	Capt. J. Pearsee, Willett's brother-in-law writes from Ft Rensselaer concerning a land bounty he is purchasing from Christopher Nulls	Bollen Collection
May 27, 1783	Col Willett employed a carpenter to erect the building [of] a block House and other works at Fort Rensselaer, and promised him a dollar and a half a day. He was employed 156 days and last Thursday brought me Col Willett's certificate of his service amounting to 234 dollars. But the wages being high, and finding him willing to have them reduced to what he agreed was usually allowed in that part of the Country by private people, viz one dollar per day, I chose to make him immediate payment. He was obliged. and 78 dollars were saved to the public.	From Timothy Pickering, Quartermaster Genrl To Robert Morris, Finance Department Papers of Robert Morris 1781-84 May 5 – Dec 31, 1783 Vol 8
July 28, 1783	George Washington arrives at Ft Rensselaer, proceeds on to visit Ft Schuyler & Otsego Lake before returning a second time to Ft Rensselaer	Washington Papers & Journal of Count Francesco Dal Verme
Aug 3, 1783	Washington writes to General de Steuben from Ft. Rensselaer to introduce Cassaty and his mission to Detroit	Washington Papers
Aug 6, 1783	Washington reports to Congress that he has hired James Cassaty at Ft Rensselaer to go to Detroit	Washington Papers
Aug 15, 1783	Major General Henry Knox reports to Washington an inventory of cannon & stores at remaining forts in the Mohawk Valley including Ft Rensselaer	Washington Papers
Jan 10, 1786	Return sent to Henry Knox from West Point including Sergt Hudson's inventory return from Ft Rensselaer	Papers of the War Department
Aug 22, 1786	Bill from John Lipe Senior for timber, wood & possession of land for Fort Rensselaer Blockhouse 150 pounds <sup>13</sup>	FP Museum Collection
Dec 16, 1793	Return of Military Stores at Ft. Rensselaer	Papers of the War Department
Sept 8, 1794	Barnhardt Hudson writes to Samuel Hodgdon concerning the filing of future returns from Ft Rensselaer	Papers of the War Department
Nov 2, 1794	Barnhardt Hudson files return of military stores at Ft Rensselaer	Papers of the War Department
1796	Ft Rensselaer lists 67 men in garrison for purposes of food ration contract	Papers of the War Department
Feb 4, 1796	Pay receipt from War Dept records for \$172.00 pay due to Barnhardt Hudson, Storekeeper, Ft Rensselaer for 1795	Papers of the War Department
Feb 6, 1797	Pay receipt from War Dept records for \$172.00 pay due to Barnhardt Hudson, Storekeeper, Ft Rensselaer for 1796	Papers of the War Department
Feb 14, 1798	Orders to dispose of Military Stores at Ft. Rensselaer	Papers of the War Department
May 4, 1798	Orders received at Ft Rensselaer to ship cannons to Governors Island in New York Harbor	Papers of the War Department
Jan 25, 1799	Samuel Hodgdon write to Sec of War concerning previous orders to close Ft Rensselaer	Papers of the War Department
Feb 15, 1799	Pay receipt from War Dept records for \$172.00 pay due to Barnhardt Hudson, Storekeeper, Ft Rensselaer for 1798	Papers of the War Department
July 12, 1800	Pay receipt from War Dept records for \$172.00 pay due to Barnhardt Hudson, Storekeeper, Ft Rensselaer for 1799	Papers of the War Department

## Conclusions

Fort Rensselaer was a significant military outpost with a long record of service. Members of the 4th New York Regiment built the original fort during the winter of 1778-79 for the protection of the local citizens<sup>14</sup>. Militia General Robert Van Rensselaer commandeered the post shortly after Joseph Brant raided the Canajoharie District on August 2, 1780 and the post was renamed Fort Rensselaer. During the Revolutionary War the fort was garrisoned at various times by three separate groups; Tryon County Militia, NYS Levies under Col Marinus Willett and Continental Army Units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> New Hampshire Regiment under Col's Benjamin Tupper and George Reid. In August of 1782 General William Alexander Stirling was sent to the Albany area to oversee operations on the Mohawk Frontier and coordinate the efforts of the several groups operating there. There is some evidence that the fort began under the name Fort Plain perhaps as early as 1778 when it was first constructed. Disagreements between officers of the Tryon County Militia and General Robert Van Rensselaer over the handling of the battles at Stone Arabia and Klock's Field caused a rift which resulted in the officers stubborn refusal to honor the "Fort Rensselaer" moniker. The original name of "Fort Plain" became the standard everyday reference to the fort.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Pension record of John Betsinger #R 20582 who worked in the bake house at Fort Plain

<sup>2</sup> Pension application of Abraham Wohleben #R.17772

<sup>3</sup> Pension application of Joseph Nellis #S1407, Conrad Kilts #S13658 & Lodowick Moyer #S.11115

<sup>4</sup> Pension application of Peter Wolever, W. 19659

<sup>5</sup> This is the earliest mention of Ft. Rensselaer to date. It may very well be that Van Rensselaer marched immediately from Ft Schuyler to Ft Plain upon hearing of the Aug 2<sup>nd</sup> Canajoharie raid and began establishing his HQ there at that time

<sup>6</sup> This is General Van Rensselaer's first troop return from Fort Rensselaer and signals the beginning of the fort under that name. Note that Harper is not cooperating and has not turned in the information for his regimental return

<sup>7</sup> This order for supplies from Fort Plank moves food to Fort Rensselaer to feed the newly arrived troops there. The large quantity of provisions may also indicate that Fort Plain was getting little use prior to Van Rensselaer's arrival

<sup>8</sup> Malcom writes of improvements being made to the fort (Fort Ranselaer) only weeks after their arrival.

<sup>9</sup> This mention of the Fort Rensselaer's "central position" is also found in Col Tupper and Col Reid's letters the following year when they believed they were writing about Fort Plain

<sup>10</sup> Schuyler develops this contract to solve the supply problems that were keeping troops from going out the previous year. It had the approval of General Washington and Financier, Robert Morris both.

<sup>11</sup> General Stirling is ordered to Albany to take command of the area and put the Mohawk Valley situation in order. As the danger of a final invasion passes Stirling begins to close and consolidate posts

<sup>12</sup> This instrument was drawn up in the handwriting of Squire Nellis and taken to Col. Willett to sign. In the handwriting of the latter and with the ink of his signature, Willett crossed off the word "Plain" and interlined the name "Rensselaer."

<sup>13</sup> This bill apparently wasn't paid but that doesn't mean it wasn't authentic. In 1786 the states were struggling with war debt and may not have wanted to pay the bill on a Federal installation, which was still in operation.

<sup>14</sup> Orderly Books of the 4<sup>th</sup> New York Regiment Pgs 53-61 and Pension Record of Elias Van Bunschoten, S11593, U.S. National Archives