

## Independence Day Thoughts

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Much of this column comes from a talk Katharine T. Terwilliger gave at a meeting of the *Friends of the Ellenville Public Library & Museum* on June 18, 1975. Miss Terwilliger was chairman of the Town of Wawarsing's celebration of America's Bicentennial and used the approaching anniversary frequently in her popular programs.

Miss Terwilliger spoke, as usual, from notes, but KT – a popular nickname and her chosen signature for personal notes – always prepared a rough draft of her comments so that she could check the “flow” of her presentation and her timing. As the beneficiary of many of her personal notes, the author of this column frequently accesses the unpublished Terwilliger papers for data. So, 30 years later, Katharine T. Terwilliger again shares her thoughts about Independence Day, the American flag, and the Declaration of Independence.

Tom Bennett was a very gifted young man, a resident of the Ellenville area who prepared an artistic portrayal of our national colors for a *Friends of the Library* bookmark. KT used this Bicentennial tribute to reflect on the beginning of our flag and a bit about life in the Town of Wawarsing as the flag was coming into being.

It is unfortunate that flags seem to have been invented to identify sides in battle. Then came the time when countries used them to establish their sovereignty on a new continent, such as ours. The Vikings came to North America some 500 years before Columbus. This continent saw the Spanish flag, the Dutch, the fleur-de-lis of France, the Swedish flag, and the English, among others, during the 300 years between the discovery of America and the establishment of the United States.

The word “flag” is said to come from the Anglo-Saxon word “flegan,” meaning “to fly in the wind.” Few hearts remain unmoved by the sight of our flag flying in the wind.

At first the colonies used the British flag, but as they began to trade, each colony wanted a distinctive flag. Soon there were many designs sailing from this country.

The flag used at the Battles of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, shows an arm in mail coming out of a cloud. The words, in Latin, mean “Conquer or Die.” The colors of this, our oldest flag, were red, white, blue, and yellow. Much later Emerson would speak of it: “By the rude bridge which arched the flood Their flag to April's breeze unfurled.”

Two months later, at the Battle of Bunker Hill, the Pine Tree Flag was carried. Thus we see one state, Massachusetts, with at least two flags.

In 1775, when Lexington and Concord were fought, there was no Ellenville, and there would be no settlement until many years after the war was over. Wawarsing and Napanoch had been settled hamlets for almost seventy-five years. Our whole area was in the Town of Rochester then.

Our men had always belonged to the Militia and had received the rudiments of military training.

The French and Indian Wars were hardly noticed here, although there had been a few minor raids by the Indians in the Town of Mamakating. Tradition says the Brodhead house in Leurenkill was the place where people gathered for protection.

Our most popular legend came out of the French and Indian Wars, the legend of **Sam's Point**. During the French and Indian Wars, a young man by the name of Samuel Gonsalus lived in the Town of Mamakating. As a trapper, he



was often in the woods. He would sometimes hear of a raid the Indians were planning, so he would rush home and give the warning, thus avoiding bloodshed. One day when he was setting his traps on the Mountain, some Indians came upon him unawares. He ran, they after him. He ran as far as there was any ground to run on. When that gave out, he jumped from a high rocky precipice. The Indians assumed he had jumped to his death and left. As soon as he was sure they were out of the way, Sam climbed down from the tree that had broken his fall and went home, where he lived many years longer. Ever since, the spot from which he jumped has been called **Sam's Point**.

Even though the major battles of the French and Indian Wars had not bothered residents of the Town of Wawarsing, their effect would be felt by all the colonies. When the wars ended in 1763, England was very heavily in debt, and taxes were levied to pay that debt. Beginning with the hated Stamp Tax in 1765, the colonists were burdened with repressive taxes and “No taxation without representation” was the cry that rang out.

Colonial leaders began to emerge; the Sons of Liberty pushed for independence from England. Committees of Correspondence were formed to exchange views and news with other colonies and within each colony. Messengers on horseback delivered broadsides and leaflets, and it is sure that news was shared by word of mouth. Residents of this area were certainly aware of current developments. News of Lexington and Concord probably took ten days or more to reach Ulster County.

Not everyone hated England. The Loyalists, or Tories, were particularly numerous in New York State, and the Town of Rochester had its share. The General Assembly of New York was predominantly Tory.

Soon this area, like the rest of what would be New York State, was drawn into renewed agitation against England. The Provincial Congress, then New York's legislative body, asked that every inhabitant and freeholder (not really every... just MEN) sign articles expressing facts that people here were very much united against raising revenue by taxation without having the opportunity to share in the decision-making process. Some 300 men in the Town of Rochester signed these Articles.

Within a few weeks of Lexington and Concord, Washington was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Army. The *Ulster County Militia* was reorganized and soon the Town of Rochester had four regiments. In January 1776, as Commander-in-Chief, Washington raised an adaptation of the British red ensign. Over the red field of the British were placed six white stripes, thus making thirteen stripes to indicate the thirteen colonies. The crosses of St. George and St. Andrew, placed in the position of our stars today, was retained. This flag proved that, in January 1776, we still felt some loyalty to England.

Apparently each state, while feeling some loyalty to