

THE BATTLE OF THE BEUKENDAAL

July 18, 1748

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FOREWORD

This July 18th marks the 200th anniversary of the Battle of the Beukendaal. This historic event has been included as a part of Schenectady's sesqui-centennial celebration which also occurs this year.

It must be remembered that there is a close relationship between our Town of Glenville and the City of Schenectady. Glenville was the Fourth Ward of Schenectady until April 14, 1820, when it was organized as a town. The early settlers of our town were members of the old Dutch families of Schenectady. Our history and traditions are closely related. It was Alexander Lindsay Glen, the founder of Scotia, who tried to warn Schenectadians the day before the fateful massacre and burning of the town in 1690. On the following day he saved the lives of numerous persons by claiming them as his relatives. Because of a former kindness to French prisoners among the Mohawks, the French promised Glen they would spare all of his relatives in the town. He was finally stopped when they became skeptical of the number of persons he pointed out as relatives.

Glenville was repaid this kindness nearly sixty years later when Schenectady responded to the call for aid to repulse the invading Indians at Beukendaal.

This paper was planned to give an account of the Battle of the Beukendaal, so everyone may become acquainted with the location and story of the battle. The facts and traditions contained in this paper were gleaned from the early published histories of the town and ~~country~~ ^{county} which are now out of print and difficult to locate.

DONALD A. KEEFER

June 1948

Glenville, N. Y.

THE BATTLE OF THE BEUKENDAAL

THE Battle of the Beukendaal was a part of the Old French War which was declared by Louis XV of France, on March 15, 1744, and accepted by England on March 29th. It was called the "Old French War" to distinguish it from the French and English War of 1753. The principal cause of this conflict was the attempt on the part of both England and France to secure control of a vast domain in the New World. Between the years 1745 and 1748, raiding bands of French and their Indian allies sallying from Fort Frederick, French stronghold located at Crown Point on Lake Champlain, had terrorized the outlying farms of New York frontier settlements as far south as Saratoga and Schenectady, raid after raid, until most of them were abandoned by their owners.

On the night of November 28, 1745, the flourishing hamlet of Saratoga, now called Schuylerville, was invaded by a force of four hundred French and two hundred and twenty Indians. The destruction of the unprotected village was complete. In the slight resistance made, a dozen men were killed. The rest, over one hundred, were taken prisoner to Canada. The fort, four mills, and all the houses were burned, and all the crops for miles around destroyed. From here the invaders crossed the Hudson River and repeated their performance at the fort and town of Hoosick with equal success.

Another account tells how in the summer of 1746, about three miles west of Schenectady, a farmer named Simon Groot was pursued from a field in which he was at work by a French and Indian raiding party. As he attempted to ford the river to safety he was shot and killed. The enemy then descended upon his farm, there murdering and scalping his younger brother, and taking another prisoner. They plundered and set fire to the buildings and killed all their cattle. Old French war reports relate many other accounts of the shocking barbarities practiced by the French and their savage Indian allies on the virtually unprotected New York frontier.

In May, 1748, both sides had become tired of the war and a preliminary peace was signed at Aix-la-Chapelle, the news of which, however, did not reach this country in time to prevent the Battle of the Beukendaal, which took place in the present Town of Glenville. It was in July, 1748, the Dutch settlers of Schenectady met with the severest loss

they had suffered at any time since the massacre and burning of the town by the French and Indians in 1690. This event is generally called "The Beukendaal Massacre." It was far from being a massacre, but as one writer states, "a stand-up, hand-to-hand fight" between the colonists and a large band of Canadian Indians, perhaps under the leadership of a French officer.

The name "Beukendaal" means "Beechdale," the fight having started in a little dale well filled with beech trees. Beukendaal is located about two miles west of the village of Scotia, on the Sacandaga Road, just north of Hardin's Crossing. The site can be identified by two markers, the first standing on the left, or west side of Sacandaga Road, points out the site of the DeGraff house, where the Schenectady men finally took refuge, when the attack of the Indians became too strong. The marker reads as follows:

BEUKENDAAL, 1748
DUTCH WORD MEANING
BEECHDALE. DEGRAFF HOUSE
WHERE 40 SCHENECTADY
MILITIA FOUGHT OFF FRENCH
INDIAN RAIDING PARTY

This house was deserted at the time of the battle, its owner Abraham DeGraff, with his son William, having been taken captive to Canada in the fall of 1746. This Abraham DeGraff, born in 1688, was the oldest son of Claas Andriese DeGraff, who came to Schenectady in 1688. Soon after his arrival he purchased what was then and is now called the "Hoek Farm," situated on the north bank of the Mohawk River in the present Town of Glenville. From the Fly leaf of the ancient DeGraff family Bible are translated the following entries:

1746, Oct. 30, Abraham DeGraaf and his son Willem were taken captive to Canada.

1747, June 12, Abraham DeGraaf died at Quebec, in Canada, and was buried there.

1748, July 18, Nicolaas DeGraaf and 20 others were murdered at Poopendal (Beukendaal) by the savage Indians.

There have been several different accounts written of the battle in our published local histories and they vary much in details, but in the essentials all agree. A brief letter to Sir William Johnson written by Albert Van Slyck, July 21, 1748, three days after the affair, is the account of the battle we have by one who was in the fight. This ancient letter, found in Sir William Johnson's manuscripts, gives us details that would have otherwise been lost to history. From tradition and the clear account given in Van Slyck's letter we can get a fairly accurate picture of what happened at this historic event.

It was on the 18th day of July, 1748, that a party of men had gathered together at a farm near the Mohawk River, a little over a mile west of Schenectady, called the Maalwyck to raise the frame of a barn. Three men, Dirk Van Vorst, Captian Daniel Toll, and a negro named Rykert, a slave belonging to Toll, left the group at the Maalwyck to hunt for their horses which had strayed off. Not long after the men at the barn heard firing towards the north, the direction that had been taken by Toll and Van Vorst. Alarmed at this a slave was immediately sent to the fort in Schenectady with a message of warning. There was then a company of Connecticut militia stationed at Schenectady under the command of Captain Benjamin Stoddert. This body of men, under the leadership of Lieutenant John Darling, Captain Stoddert being absent, was at once ordered to go to the Beukendaal, the point from which the sound of firing was correctly judged to have come. This company numbered over sixty and was accompanied by five or six men of the town.

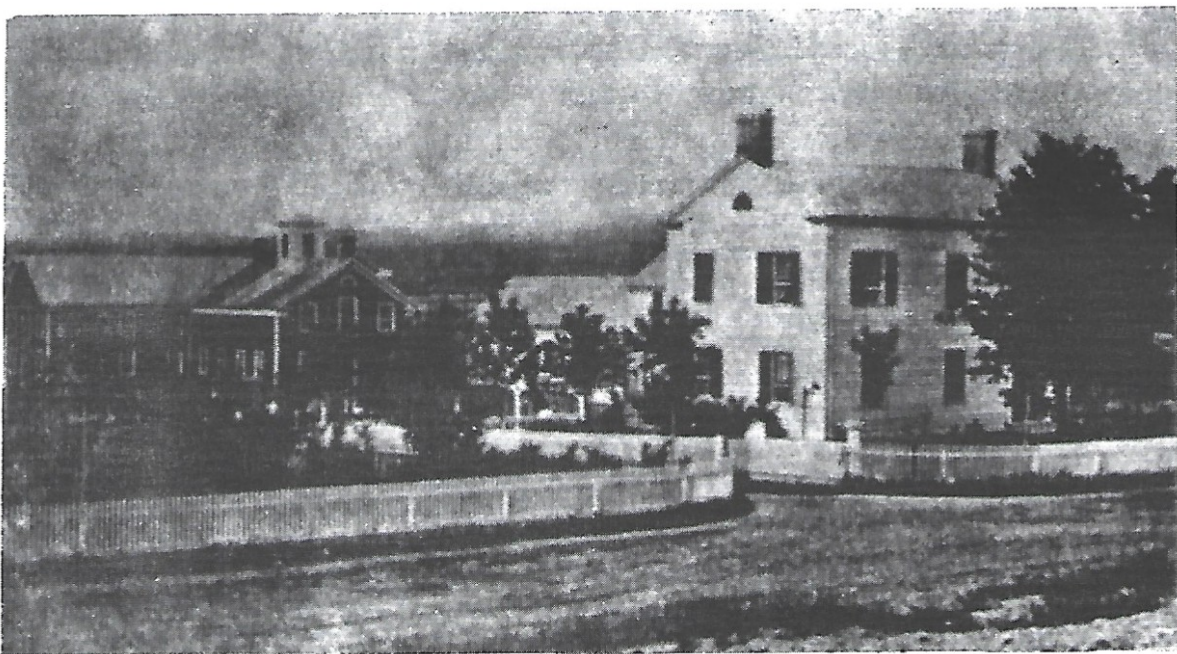


Photo. by C. M. Vander Veer
E. Goude.
THE MAALWYCK FARM
511 MOHAWK AVENUE, SCOTIA, N. Y.

from Schenectady, headed by Jacob Glen and Albert Van Slyck. When the enemy saw this last reinforcement coming into sight they lost no time in retreating up the old path leading northward to the Sacandaga country, leaving their dead where they had fallen.

When the battle was over, down on the little flat of the Kleykuil or along its wooded sides lay the bodies of twelve citizens of Schenectady, seven Connecticut soldiers with their commander Lieutenant Darling and an unrecorded number of Indians. The bodies of the whites were taken by large wagons back to Schenectady to be claimed by their bereaved families. They were laid out in rows on the floor of Abraham Mabee's large barn, which stood on Church Street near the Dutch Reformed Church.

There is a story told about Adam Conde, formerly High Constable of Albany, who was among the slain. As the wagons passed through the streets, Conde's wife, watching the mournful procession, saw the arm of one of the slain hanging over the side of a wagon. On its hand she saw and recognized a ring belonging to her husband, and knew for the first that he was among those who gave their lives.

The news of the battle reached Albany in the evening of the same day and by midnight one hundred men and two hundred friendly Indians were on the march for Beukendaal, but arriving too late they served no purpose other than to show their willingness to meet an emergency of this kind.

After the war Governor Clinton sent Captain Stoddert to Montreal to arrange for the exchange of prisoners. With Captain Anthony Van Schaick he went into the Indian country to recover the captives. Their efforts met with little success and they left Canada on June 28th, 1750, with only twenty-four former prisoners. Included among them were John Vrooman, Peter Vosburgh, Albert Vedder and Francis Connor.

The following are the only known names of those who participated in the Battle of the Beukendaal:

Killed—John A. Bradt, Adam Conde, Nicholas DeGraff, Jacob Glen, Jr., John Marinus, Capt. Daniel Toll, Daniel Van Antwerp, Frans Van Der Bogart, Jr., Adrian Van Slyck, Cornelius Viele, Jr., Peter Vrooman, Lt. John Darling and seven of his men.

Wounded Robinson, Dirk Van Vorst, Reyer Wemple, Wilson and probably many others.

Missing (Prisoners)—Frank Connor, Lewis Groot, John Phelps, Isaac Truax, Albert J. Vedder, Harman Veeder, John S. Vrooman and six soldiers.

P. J. Van der Vaer
Jan. 1st 1957