

CITY ISLAND

Its History and Growth

By ALFRED FORDHAM

By reference to my last article, you will recall that, with the commencement of the Revolutionary War in 1776, the plans of Benjamin Palmer, for the development of City Island as a seaport and commercial centre, came to an end for the reason that City Island and its inhabitants were raided and plundered from the beginning to the end of that conflict.

It is recorded on the pages of history of that period that, on August 27, 1776, three British Naval Vessels came to anchor in Eastchester Bay, off the southrely end of City Island, and proceeded to send raiding parties to City Island and the settlements at Throggs Neck to plunder and destroy the property of the residents.

It is also recorded that the raiders were driven from City Island by troops of Colonel Graham's Regiment, who had been ferried across Eastchester Bay to City Island, and, in their retreat back aboard ship, the British took one of the residents of City Island as a prisoner of war together with fourteen cattle with them.

Other raids were made from time to time until the close of the war and, during all of that time, City Island and vicinity was a "no man's land", with frequent raids by the British who were driven off by the Colonists, and it may be safely stated that City Island was "in the middle of things" during that period.

You will recall, from your studies of the History of The United States of America and it's founding as a free and independent government "of the people, for the people" residing therein as citizens, that when General George Washington withdrew his forces from Long Island and crossed the East River to Manhattan Island, his withdrawal was up Manhattan Island and northward into the open country of Westchester County.

During his withdrawal, his troops fought many delaying actions along the way in order to hold the British until Washington's main body of troops could be gotten into the open country of Westchester County and also in order to cause Lord Howe, and his forces, to pursue the Colonial Troops and lengthen and extend his supply line until Howe and his forces could be drawn into battle at Whiteplains, on October 28, 1776, and be defeated and forced to give up his "Westchester Campaign" and pull back into New York.

From your recollection of the facts learned in your study of the history of this period, especially relating to the events following General Washington's withdrawal from Long Island into Westchester County, it is plainly seen that Washington had a definite plan on his part, namely to harass the enemy, fight delaying actions, then fall back in order to get the British, under Lord Howe, in pursuit, thereby extending his line of supply, and finally when the terrain was right, attack, defeat and rout him and send him hurrying back to New York.

One of these delaying actions, planned by General Washington, was fought in what is now called Pelham Bay Park, on "Pells Neck" and was called the "Battle of Pell's Point", it's local was at "Glover's Rock".

I will not attempt to describe it in detail except to say that the British, under Lord Howe, and their Hessian Mercenary Soldiers, under Baron Knyphausen, landed on Rodman's Neck with the intention of proceeding along the road, from Samuel Rodman's house to the "Kings High Road, in order to cut off General Washington's withdrawal into Westchester County.

Meanwhile, General Washinton had ordered that an outpost be set up on Rodman's Neck, along the roadway leading to the "King's High Road", and placed Colonel John Glover and his "Marblehead fishermen" at this important point which was located at what is now called "Glover's Rock", and which is located at the left hand side of the roadway leading out from Orchard Beach.

At this point, On October 18, 1776, "Colonel John Glover, with 770 patriot fishermen from Marblehead", who had ferried General Washington's troops across the East River from Long Island, engaged the enemy as they came down the road and stopped them on their march and continued to fight a delaying action until they had fallen back to a prepared position at about where the "King's High Road", now called Boston Post Road, crosses the Hutchinson River.

Students of military matters count the "Battle of Pell's Point" as being one of the most important engagements in the Revolutionary War for the reason that Howe's troops and Knyphausen's Hessian Mercenary troops, numbering in all 14,000 men, were prevented from cutting off Washington's withdrawal of his troops from Manhattan Island to the open country of Westchester County and the subsequent defeat of the British at the battle of White-plains on October 28, 1776 in a matter of 10 days after the landing at Rodman's Neck.

Had Colonel Glover, and his stalwart men not held firm and stalled the British, then the "War for Independence" might well have been lost at the battle of "Pell's Point", and I state, as a former army officer and student of military tactics and strategy,

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that the planning of General George Washington and his staff in this campaign around New York was conducted skilfully and masterly in that the various elements of his command withdraw in good order, always maintaining pressure on the enemy so as to goad him on in his desire to meet and destroy the colonists, thereby extending his lines of communications and causing the enemy to expend his supplies of ammunition, food and men and causing an unsure mental attitude in the minds of the troops of the enemy, until the time came to attack, defeat and rout the enemy as General Washington and his troops did to the British at the Battle of White-plains.

It is recorded that Colonel Glover's casualties amounted to 18, while the British and Hessian losses were 1,000 and that the battle of "Pell's Point" was one of the bloodiest of that war.

All during the war, the British controlled Long Island Sound and the East River and City Island was frequently overrun by the British raiders who were driven off by the "Patriots".

Several observation posts were set up, to observe the movements of the British Fleet as it moved about in Long Island Sound, on City Island and in this vicinity, one of which was located on "Hannock's Hill".

"Hannock's Hill" was a rock promontory, jutting out from the main land in the area of Orchard Beach, and from it a clear view was had out into Long Island Sound, to observe the British Fleet.

During all of the war years, Benjamin Palmer resided at City Island. His losses were great, and at the close of the war, because of it and his advanced age and the fact that the facilities in the Port of New York drew the ships to it for loading and discharging cargo, his dream of a seaport at City Island ended and City Island and its residents bound up their wounds, put their house in order and went back to tilling the soil and following the maritime pursuits until the early part of the 19th century, when industry again moved in and City Island became a thriving fishing village and seaport town.

That story will be developed in a later article.

**MATERIALS SUBMITTED
BY JORGE SANTIAGO**