

# First Annual Conference on the American Revolution in the Mohawk Valley

The First Annual Conference on the American Revolution in the Mohawk was met with great success. Over 160 people attended the conference during the weekend of May 1<sup>st</sup> through 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015. Conference attendees were treated to a Meet & Greet Reception included a presentation on Revolutionary War Fort Plain, six Author/Historian presentations, and a guided bus tour of Mohawk Country. Overall, 167 individuals attended the conference/bus tour from 13 states and 2 provinces of Canada. **The Second Annual Conference will take place on June 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016;** further details will be released in the coming months.

We would like to thank the authors/historians, the many sponsors, the area organizations and businesses, and those who volunteered their time to make this event a great success. Thank you to the following presenters; Todd Braisted, Don Hagist, Jack Kelly, James Kirby Martin, Bruce Venter, Glenn Williams and Wayne Lenig. Thank you to our sponsors; the Montgomery Department of Economic Development, Patriot Federal Bank, Westholme Publishing, and the Journal of the American Revolution.

Thank you to Fulton-Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce for the gift bags filled with local goodies given to each attendee. Thank you to the Microtel of Johnstown for providing rooms to those who needed weekend accommodations. Thank you to our local Bed and Breakfast establishments; the White Rose Bed and Breakfast (Fort Plain), the Pineapple House (Canajoharie), and the Lotus Center (Fort Plain). Thank you to the Arkell Museum for providing the perfect conference room setting and for helping with set-up and keeping the coffee good and hot. Thank you to Brown's Coach of Amsterdam for providing two buses and drivers who kept the bus tour running smoothly and safely.

Thank you to Panera Bread of Amsterdam for the boxed lunches provided to attendees during the Conference portion of the event. Thank you to the Ayres Bakery (Fort Plain) for providing a lunch option during the bus tour and refreshments for the Meet and Greet Reception. Thank you to the Table (Fort Plain) who provided a colonial themed dinner for our fundraiser. Chef Aaron served Prime Rib with Yorkshire Pudding or Maple Glazed Chicken with Native Vegetables; and for dessert was a Molasses Corn Pudding.

Thank you to the Erie Station (Fort Plain) and the Dome 49 (Fort Plain) for providing food and drink to the crowd of hungry and thirsty conference attendees. Thank you to Lee Publications (Palatine Bridge) and Ship and Copy (Amsterdam) for providing the high quality printing of all conference materials. Thank you to the Wine and Liquor Shop of Malta and Town and Country Meet and Cheese (Amsterdam) for providing the refreshments for the Meet & Greet Reception.

Thank you and much appreciation goes to the volunteers; the Friends of Fort Plain who helped clean the Museum, assemble attendee folders, and helped throughout the entire weekend with many job tasks. Thank you to the six "Mohawk Country" association historic site; Fort Klock, Isaac Paris House (Fort Plain Chapter DAR Home), Nellis Tavern, Palatine Church, Stone Arabia Church and Van Alstyne Homestead who were all gracious enough to have their building(s) and grounds ready for both bus tours.

The last and a great big thank you to all of the 160 plus attendees, without all of you, the conference would not have been the big success that it was, Thank you! If we forgot to mention anyone above, we sincerely apologize, and truly thank you.

Mark Burdick, a conference attendee, is a member of the Binghamton Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution. Mark wrote this excellent and comprehensive article that appeared in the Chapter's SArticles, July 2015 newsletter. Mark did a great job capturing the event, including many fun and enlightening details. Please give the Binghamton Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution a "like" on Facebook and show them your support. Below is Mark's article verbatim as it appeared in the SArticle:

## **Conference on the American Revolution in the Mohawk Valley**

Mark Burdick



*The first weekend of May was a gorgeous one in Montgomery County, New York. That's where the Fort Plain Museum played host to the "First Annual Conference on the American Revolution in the Mohawk Valley". Not only was the weather fantastic, but the Conference was also a rousing success on all counts. Around 150 people of all ages gathered to hear*

*the Museum's six guest authors/historians discuss fascinating topics that all had connections to the frontier region that was often referred to as the "Breadbasket of the Revolution".*

*The registered crowd was too big for the original venue at the Museum in Fort Plain, so the conference was moved to its backup location at the Arkell Museum in nearby Canajoharie. That's where the guest experts "showed their stuff" – Bruce Venter on Lake George's Diamond Island, James Martin on the Oneida Indians, Todd Braisted on patriot deserter Edward McMichael, Don Hagist on photographed veterans' stories, Glenn Williams on irregular warfare and the Iroquois campaign, and Jack Kelly on the plight of the amateur soldiers during and after the war. Each speaker had about 45-60 minutes to present their research & findings, and then respond to questions from the audience. The end result was one very full and interesting day.*



*I had the good fortune of being able to share the whole weekend with my parents, the two people responsible for piquing my interest in both history and genealogy while I was still in grade school. So seeing high school and middle school aged students attending the Saturday talks, probably with their parents, was encouraging...and made me smile. On Sunday, there was a bus tour of "Mohawk Country" (another fascinating, sunny day that deserves and will get its own, future "SARticles" feature), and I felt almost like I was back on one of our family's "historical vacations".*

*The Fort Plain Museum's Board of Trustees did an outstanding job as hosts, and given the success of their first one, the Board has already announced its "Second Annual Conference on the American Revolution", to be held on June 10th through the 12th, 2016.*

### **Fort Plain – Wayne Lenig**

*On Friday evening, Fort Plain Museum Trustee Wayne Lenig warmed up those attendees who had arrived early (to meet and greet the authors) with a history of Fort Plain. As some of the crowd wandered around the museum, housed in the upstairs floors of the David Lipe homestead, others gathered in the basement for Wayne's talk.*

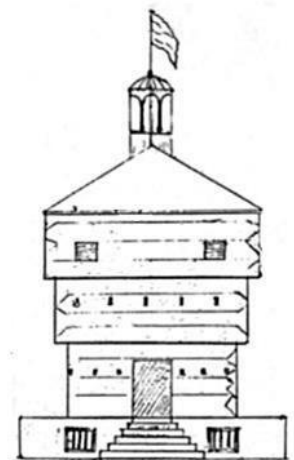


*Wayne's father, amateur Iroquoian archaeologist Donald J. Lenig, introduced him to field work as a pre-teen. Wayne is currently a Research Associate in archaeology at the NY State Museum. Before he retired from his job with NY State as a statistical analyst, Wayne was an adjunct professor in Anthropology with SUNY. He has undergraduate degrees in History and Anthropology, and did graduate work in Museum Studies.*



*Lenig spent an hour discussing the history of uncovering and re-discovering Fort Plain, starting in 1961 – that's when he began to help his father, who had been appointed curator, start exploratory archaeological work at the site. Wayne then gave an overview of the fort's published "historical record", a record which quickly proves contradictory...and is mostly unsupported by footnotes. Lenig's proposition: Use archaeology as the starting point.*

*Wayne went over some of the older and more recent on-site digs at the top of the hill behind the museum, showing photos of the excavations and various unearthed and in-situ artifacts – items like grapeshot, 3, 6 & 9 lb shot, buttons, gun parts and artillery implements. He also showed how the archaeology helped to pinpoint*





the location of the fort – its blacksmith shop, earthen trench works, stockade, barracks buildings, dining hall, officers' quarters, sentry boxes and blockhouse. The team also unearthed Iroquois artifacts on the site from other eras. Lenig also discussed, through review of primary source materials, the questions of when Fort Plain was built (evidence suggests late winter/early spring of 1779, not 1776), how Fort Plain and Fort Rensselaer were related (they were one and the same), and whether or not Fort Plank and Fort Plain were the same fort (they were not). On the latter point, Wayne presented what seemed a pretty convincing argument, but not everyone agrees on that point.

### **Diamond Island – Bruce Venter**



Kicking off the conference on Saturday was [Bruce Venter](#), president of [America's History, LLC](#), a tour and conference company that offers tours of Revolutionary War battlefields and historic sites and that holds a nationally recognized conference on the American Revolution. Venter is the author of [“The Battle of Hubbardton: The Rear Guard Action that Saved America”](#).

Bruce has a summer home on [Lake George](#) with a clear view of [Diamond Island](#) from its porch, so his presentation [“Colonel John Brown and the Battle of Diamond Island on Lake George”](#) was apropos. It was also apropos because [Brown](#) was killed on October 19, 1780 at the [Battle of Stone Arabia](#), located just a few miles from [Fort Plain](#) on the opposite side of the [Mohawk River](#), and is buried there. In September 1777, [General John Burgoyne](#) was fighting an American army under [General Horatio Gates](#) command just south of [Lake George](#) near [Saratoga](#). The goal of the [British campaign](#) was to arrive in [Albany](#) and split the rebelling colonies in two. Burgoyne's supply line, which stretched far back and into [Canada](#), had depots at [Fort George](#), on [Diamond Island](#) (three miles down the lake) and at [Fort Ticonderoga](#) on the southern end of [Lake Champlain](#).



[Colonel John Brown](#) led several hundred men in an unsuccessful attempt to re-take [Fort Ticonderoga](#), which he had helped [Ethan Allen](#) and [Benedict Arnold](#) take two years earlier, then in a naval battle against two companies of [British regulars](#) on [Diamond Island](#). [Brown](#) was forced to retreat, as the British held the island, but [Burgoyne](#) never forgot the attack on his rear, and it was part of his explanation to London officials why he



surrendered a month later to the Americans. Bruce said there is no historical marker on the island noting the Revolutionary War action, so he began writing and speaking on it to bring some attention to the island's exciting history.

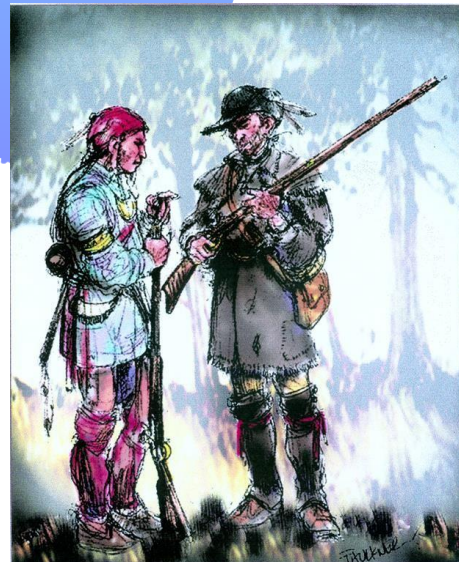
Venter was an entertaining speaker who was well acquainted with other attendees and speakers at the conference. He amused the audience with many personal references as well as the story of [Colonel Brown's](#) prediction that his former Commanding Officer, [Benedict Arnold](#), would sacrifice his country for money... somewhat to the chagrin of his biographer and speaker to follow, [James Kirby Martin](#).

### **Forgotten Allies, the Oneida Indians and the American Revolution – Jim Martin**



Next up was [Jim Martin](#), a co-author of [“Forgotten Allies, the Oneida Indians and the American Revolution”](#). Martin teaches history at the [University of Houston](#). His teaching interests include early American history through the [Revolution](#) and American military history through the [Civil War](#). His research interests focus on military, social, and political aspects of early American history, especially the [Revolutionary](#) period and beyond. Jim has appeared and advised on programs aired by the [History Channel](#), and he has begun serving as an historian adviser for the [Oneida Indian Nation of New York](#). As implied by the previous speaker, he also authored a well-received book on [Benedict Arnold](#) with the subtitle [“An American Warrior Reconsidered”](#).

Jim told the story of how the [Oneida](#) came to be the only of the original five [Haudenosaunee](#) Nations to side with the rebels during the [American Revolution](#) (of the newer, six Nations, the [Tuscarora](#) did as well). It is a complex, violent, tribal story with fierce and competing loyalties that ended in the breakup of the once powerful [Iroquois Confederacy](#). Jim maintained that the [Oneida's](#) story also portrays the courage and willpower of an [Indian nation](#) that fought as allies with all the determination of the [rebellious British Colonies](#), who risked not only their lives but also their land and culture, only to be wiped from America's collective historical memory



within a few short decades.

Martin offered some poignant insights into the culture and population of the [Oneida](#) and how it changed over the course of two hundred years of interaction with European-American





colonists – the so-called “[Columbian Exchange](#)”...particularly of disease and alcohol. The [Iroquois](#) first tried to remain neutral parties in the dispute, as rebel leaders had urged them to do, but as the [British](#) and [Loyalists](#) (particularly the Johnson family – [Sir William](#), his son [Sir John](#) and nephew [Guy](#)) continued to provide [muskets](#) and alcohol to the [Mohawks](#), they were drawn further into the fray on the side of the [British](#).

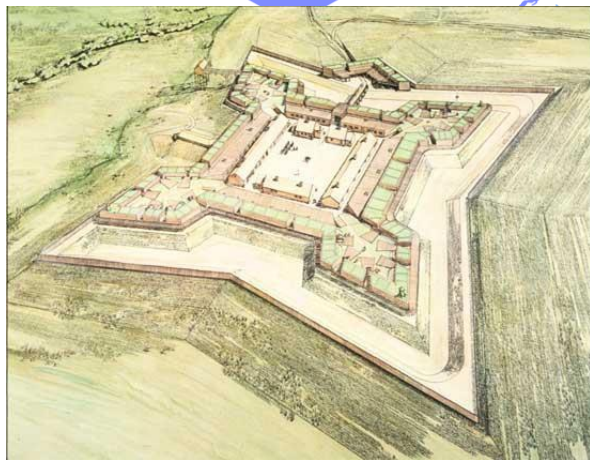
The final straw came in 1777, during the [Burgoyne campaign](#). [Barry St. Leger's](#) diversionary force that included [Iroquois](#) under [Joseph Brant](#) invaded the [Mohawk Valley](#) via [Oneida country](#). The [Siege of Fort Stanwix](#), on the far western end of the valley, and the [Battle of Oriskany](#) were the result. About 100 [Oneida](#) wound up allying with the rebels at [Oriskany](#) because of the expedition through their territory, beginning a civil war among the [Six Nations](#). The [1783 Treaty of Paris](#) that ended the war included peace agreements between all nations involved in it...but there were no provisions for the [Iroquois](#).

### **The Revolutionary War Adventures of Lt. Edward McMichael – Todd Braisted**



[Todd Braisted](#) was the last speaker of the morning session. Braisted, who hails from New Jersey, has been on television shows like “[Who Do You Think You Are](#)”, “[Finding Your Roots](#)” and “[History Detectives](#)”. Todd’s books and articles focus on the research he’s done on [Loyalist military personnel](#), infrastructure and campaigns throughout North America. Todd is also a Fellow in the [Company of Military Historians](#) and an Honorary Vice President of the [United Empire Loyalist Association of Canada](#).

Braisted’s presentation was on the “adventures” of [Edward McMichael](#), a Lieutenant from [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania](#) who belonged to the [3rd New Jersey Regiment](#) of [Continental](#)s under Colonel [Elias Dayton](#) that was stationed at [Fort Schuyler](#) (formerly [Fort Stanwix](#)) when he [deserted](#) and joined the [British](#). Todd has done many lectures, but confessed that this was one of his most difficult to put together. [McMichael](#) left an interesting trail of documentation that took him all over the newly independent United States, put him in contact with many leading figures on both sides of the conflict, and provided all the twists and turns of a good espionage novel.



Some past historians have used records which confused him with someone named [William](#), which imply that he was killed by Indians, but Braisted noted evidence to the contrary. One of McMichael’s final actions before deserting in August of 1776 was reporting on [British activity at Oswego](#) – a report

that eventually got to [General George Washington](#). Upon deserting, he joined up with [Sir John Johnson](#) in [Canada](#) as a Private in [The King's Royal Regiment](#), whose home he had recently raided as a [Continental](#). Unhappy with his demotion from Lieutenant, he was asked to take a dispatch from [General Burgoyne](#) to [General Howe](#) in [New York City](#), where [Howe](#) commissioned him as a Lieutenant in the [Corps of Guides & Pioneers](#).

The [Guides & Pioneers](#) was a unique corps raised in [New York City](#). The regiment served in detachment strength at many [outposts](#) throughout [New York](#) as well as in several forays and campaigns. Many, including McMichael, were on the [Philadelphia Campaign of 1777](#). Officers in the unit acted as [engineers & surveyors](#). The term "[pioneer](#)" is an 18th Century word for military laborer. That stint didn't suit McMichael, either so he tried being a [wagonmaster](#). He resigned from that as well.

McMichael later tried his hand in the wood-cutting corps and even raised a company of [Riflemen](#) in NJ. He was briefly recaptured by the [Continental Army](#), but saved himself once again by convincing them that he could provide reconnaissance from behind enemy lines.

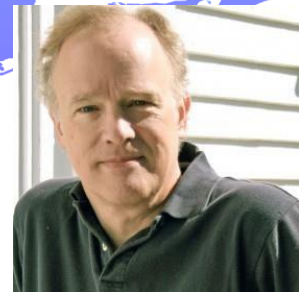


It was a complicated story that Todd obviously had fun researching and providing an animated narrative for, and some of the attendees wouldn't be surprised to see a published paper from him on this topic in the

near future.

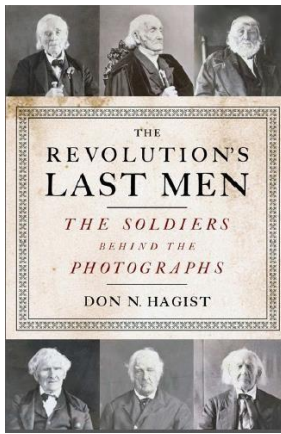
### **The Revolution's Last Men: The Soldiers behind the Photographs – Don Hagist**

After lunch, attendees were treated to a talk by [Don Hagist](#) on his latest book, ["The Revolution's Last Men: The Soldiers behind the Photographs"](#). Hagist, who is an engineering consultant living in [Providence, RI](#), typically researches, writes and maintains a [blog on the common British soldier](#) involved in the conflict, so this was a different topic for him. Don is editor of the online ["Journal of the American Revolution"](#), and has published a number of articles in



academic journals. In addition to ["Last Men"](#), he has also edited, annotated and published a number of first-hand accounts of the American Revolution, including [personal narratives by British Common Soldiers](#), a British army orderly book containing the [general orders given in Rhode Island](#), and a selection of [advertisements for female runaways in American newspapers](#) of the period. He even writes humor material for cartoonists.

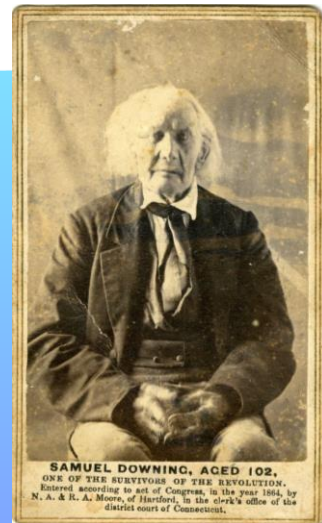




Don spoke of [Connecticut](#) artist [Nelson Augustus Moore](#), who, as the [American Civil War](#) was drawing to a close in 1864, had taken photographs of six veterans of the war that had originally formed the nation “four score and seven years” earlier. Soon after, [Elias Brewster Hillard](#) saw the resulting calling or “visiting” cards (“[Carte de Visites](#)” – CDVs) and was intrigued and inspired enough that he determined he would interview them all and write their stories to go with their pictures. Hagist argued that Hillard hoped to make these pensioners heroes to inspire a nation that was still fighting a

war within itself.

Don noted that Hillard was not an historian or journalist – he was a Reverend. He took down whatever the veterans had told him. The end result eventually became “[The Last Men of the Revolution](#)”, a book of both the photos and the biographies....the latter of which were all flawed in one way or another. After the passage of so many years, and so many retellings, facts had gotten blurred, and there were obvious inconsistencies that Hillard made no effort to reconcile. As Hagist reasoned, who was Hillard to question these revered men? Their stories were their stories....it was more about patriotism, parable, and those fascinating photos with the eyes you could stare into and consider what they had seen.



Hagist wanted to rectify this. He started with the [1818, 1820, 1832 & 1855 pension and bounty land records](#), and was not surprised to find these records as contradictory and fragmented as the stories compiled from the interviews...if they were legible at all. What

Don really needed was contemporary accounts – muster rolls and journals and the like – which he did locate. The end result of Don’s work is a book that presents not only his new research (with extensive footnotes), but also the pension records and the [original text of the 1864 book](#), all laid out for comparison. Also included are an interesting set of drawings intended to depict how these men might have looked in their youth, dressed and [accounted](#) for the period and according to their story, using current research on military artifacts and material culture.



Hagist’s book is the real story of six real men: [Daniel Waldo](#), [Lemuel Cook](#), [Alexander Milliner](#), [William Hutchings](#), [Adam Link](#), and [Samuel Downing](#) (who was stationed at Fort Plain from

1782 to the end of the war).



## George Washington's Campaign Against the Iroquois – Glenn Williams

The mid-afternoon session brought another [Haudenosaunee](#) topic, "Revenge and Reprisal: Irregular Warfare and the Iroquois Campaign" from author [Glenn F. Williams](#), Major (Retired), USA. Williams now works as a senior historian with the [U.S. Army Center of Military History](#) at [Fort McNair](#), Washington, D.C. He has written many journal and magazine articles, and has authored several books, including the recent ["Dunmore's War: The Last Conflict of America's Colonial Era"](#), ["U.S.S. Constellation: A Short History of the Last All-Sail Warship Built by the U.S. Navy"](#) and the award-winning ["Year of the Hangman: George Washington's Campaign Against the Iroquois"](#), the book upon which his talk was based.



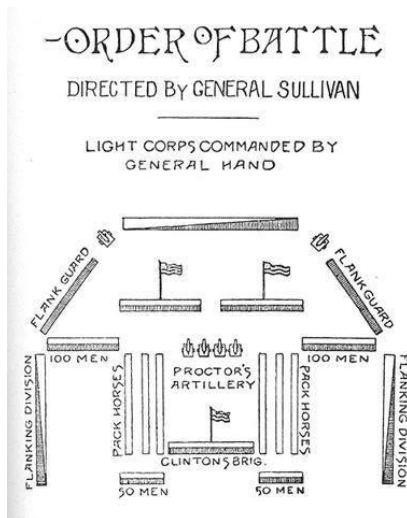
Williams used his own "[Irregular Warfare and the Iroquois Campaign](#)" label for his presentation because he felt it was more accurate than his editor's somewhat misleading "Year of the Hangman" book title, which implies it covers events of 1777.

Glenn discussed how the [British had devised a strategy](#) (which did start more or less in 1777) that turned its attention to the [western frontiers of New York and Pennsylvania](#). [The Crown](#) enlisted [provincial rangers](#), [Loyalists](#) and [Iroquois](#) allies to wage a brutal backwoods operation in support of [Burgoyne's campaign](#) to split the colonies in two by going down the [Hudson](#) from [Canada](#). The [irregulars'](#) goal was to divert the attention of the [Continental Army](#), inhibit recruiting, occupy the militia and hinder logistics.

Williams listed the British attacks, directed by [Sir John Johnson](#), [Colonel John Butler](#) and [Mohawk](#) leader [Joseph Brant](#), in order: [Cobleskill](#) in May, [Springfield](#) and [Andrustown](#) as well as [Wyoming](#) and [Lackawack](#) in July, [German Flats](#) in September, [Peenpack](#) in October and [Cherry Valley](#) in November. These efforts destroyed rebel settlements and farms across hundreds of miles of frontier. Williams then listed the American reprisals – [Shamokin](#), [Tioga](#), [Unadilla](#) and [Onaquaga](#). It wasn't enough.

Following the 1778 "massacres" at the settlements of [Wyoming, PA](#) and (especially) [Cherry Valley, NY](#), the [Continental Congress](#) was forced to ask that [General George Washington](#) do something that would divert the attention of the British, increase their expenses, and provide some relief to the frontiers for the 1779 season.



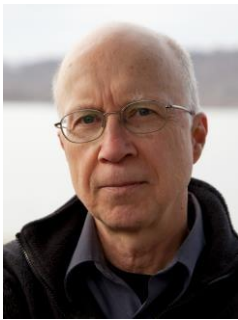


In response, [Washington](#) devised a multi-pronged attack “to not merely overrun, but destroy” the [Iroquois](#) and their political and military influence while encouraging friendly [Oneida](#) and [Tuscarora](#) to support the resistance. It was one of the largest coordinated actions in the war – [Brodhead](#) would go up the [Allegheny](#) from [Fort Pitt](#), [Sullivan](#) would go up the [Susquehanna](#) from [Wyoming](#), and [Clinton](#) would go up the [Mohawk](#) from [Schenectady](#), portage 20 miles from Canajoharie to Otsego Lake, then go down the North Branch of the [Susquehanna](#) from its source, joining up with [Sullivan](#) in [Tioga](#) to invade the [Finger Lakes region](#). All would use “irregular” tactics of their own in a scorched earth operation.

Though not all agree, in Williams’ estimation, it worked. The British were not able to provision the [Iroquois](#) as they had promised, large numbers of [loyalists](#) fled to [Canada](#), and [Crown](#) forces decided to seek victory in the south. The [Iroquois](#) never really recovered.



### **Band of Giants: The Amateur Soldiers Who Won Our Independence – Jack Kelly**



In the final session of the conference, [Jack Kelly](#) talked about the plight of both officers and common soldiers of the American side of the conflict, as he summarized his book, “Band of Giants: The Amateur Soldiers Who Won America’s Independence”. Kelly, a journalist and historian, is the author of five novels and many works of nonfiction, including the critically acclaimed history “Gunpowder: Alchemy, Bombards & Pyrotechnics” and articles for “American Heritage Magazine”. “Giants” has also garnered praise since its late 2014 release from the likes of [Anthony Zinni](#),

General (Retired), USMC, former commander in chief of the [U.S. Central Command](#). Kelly has also appeared on [The History Channel](#).

Reviews discuss Jack’s book as the story of American fighters in the context of a narrative, which takes the reader from man to man in a quick-reading style that flows like a novel. It shows the main “characters” – leaders who were really civilians in uniform ([merchants](#), [mechanics](#), [farmers](#) and [fishermen](#)) – facing decisions and responding to situations that make them seem even more real to the reader...like the amateur soldiers they were leading. Kelly’s presentation seemed to take on a somewhat different angle than the book, though.

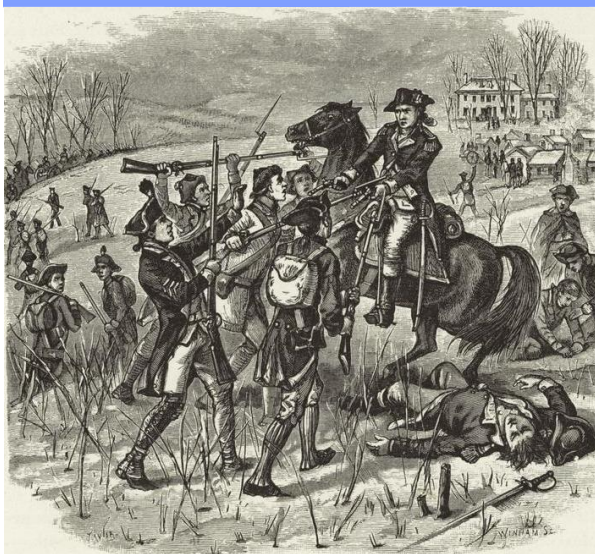


Jack's talk focused more on the environment of anxiety throughout the country, both during and after the war, about the divided populace, and especially about the seemingly continuous setbacks, [lack of supplies \(food, shoes, blankets and pay\)](#), and terrible physical hardships that the troops endured....and overcame. Yet somehow, these "[amateurs](#)" triumphed.



When the fighting and suffering finally ended after eight years, there were [no massive celebrations](#). As Kelly put it, the government was actually afraid of the troops, not only because people were sensitive to a [standing army](#), but also because of promises that the [Congress](#) had made to the [army](#)...and broken. Many veterans were broke – some were forced to beg, some to sell their [muskets](#), and many to sell their [bounty land](#) certificates to [speculators](#) at steep discounts. [Pensioners](#) were looked upon as beggars of sorts, and early [pensioners](#) did, in fact, have to show need. Kelly explained that this post-war suffering was really nothing more than a continuation of what many of these former soldiers had experienced during the war. He [quoted Joseph Plumb Martin](#) at several points.

Jack discussed how, after 1776, the army struggled to attract recruits – how it had to pay bonuses to get people to join, which in turn attracted more "[ne'er-do-wells](#)", paid substitutes and slaves. This "lower class" of soldiers came to be looked down upon, which seemed to give [Congress](#) even less incentive to pay them...but it did not matter much: the bonuses that were paid were in depressed [Continental dollars](#). There were [mutinies](#) organized and [uprisings](#) put down.



In January 1781, the [Pennsylvania line rebelled](#), demanding changes in their conditions. They refused to defect to the British, though, despite being enticed by [General Sir Henry Clinton](#), and when promised satisfactory resolution, many soldiers returned to the [Continental Army](#). The [New Jersey Line](#) was inspired to do the same thing later that month. [Washington](#) decided he could not let [mutiny](#) become a standard for the [army](#), and decided to take harsh measures to [quell](#) the trend - several soldiers were executed for [treason](#), bringing back order to their units.



Two years later came the most famous “near mutiny”, the [Newburgh Conspiracy](#) of March, 1783, which involved officers near the highest ranks in the [Continental Army](#). The plot was in response to [Congressional](#) action taken a year earlier to stop army pay as a cost saving measure, the argument being that when the war ended, the debt would be made up through [pensions and bounty land](#). [Washington's “Newburgh Address”](#) put an end to that conspiracy.

Kelly argued that [Lafayette's 1824 visit](#) seemed to be the turning point. Enthusiasm before and during his visit, and his remarks while on tour around the country sparked an outpouring of interest in the war for independence and its veterans finally began to see well deserved an long overdue public expressions of thankfulness and adulation...it just came 40 years late...and too late for many...

