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Old Number Four: Yesterday and Today

by James Duane Squires*

In an article in the *New York Times* for Sunday, July 27, 1958, Joseph L. Wheeler describes how "amateur historian-archaeologists" in Vermont are now working in charting the course of four one-time colonial or Revolutionary highways. One of these, he points out, is the Crown Point Road, which ran from the Connecticut River near Old Number Four to Chimney Point, Vermont, adjacent to the Crown Point Fort. Because of plans now under way to restore Old Number Four, this particular colonial highway is of special interest to us today. It is of this fort and of this highway that I write in this essay.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, during the lull between Queen Anne's War (1710-1713) and King George's War (1744-1748), the colony of Massachusetts determined to build four frontier forts to guard the western part of the Bay Colony from Indian forays out of Canada. There were located in the modern New Hampshire towns of Chesterfield, Westmoreland, Walpole, and Charlestown, but were then called by the serial number No. One, No. Two, No. Three, and No. Four. Number Four was at present-day Charlestown, and was the final jumping-off point for the wilderness lying between the colonies in New England and the French settlements in Canada. In 1740, by royal decree these four forts were transferred to the jurisdiction of New Hampshire. In that year King George II made the present northern boundary of Massachusetts the definitive line between the two colonies.

Old Fort Number Four was built close to the Connecticut River and covered an area of three-quarters of an acre on a site on the main street of the present village. Archaeological excavations in 1957 definitely established the site of the old fortification, and brought to light a number of relics of the eighteenth century. It was composed of thirteen houses joined together to make a quadrangle. As a further protection on three sides—the west, north, and east—a stockade was built. This was made of logs a foot in diameter and about twelve feet high above ground. This was the fort which under Captain Phineas Stevens withstood an attack of several hundred French and Indians in April, 1747. This was the base which was a key point in military operations through modern Vermont during the French and Indian War, 1754-1763.

In the early campaigns of that war the normal route for New England troops going to the areas around Lake George and Lake Champlain was across Massachusetts, over the Berkshire Hills to Albany, and thence north to Fort Edward and the fighting zone. For Massachusetts soldiers this meant a long tramp

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around two sides of a triangle. New Hampshire regiments usually went to Old Number Four, thence down the river to Massachusetts, and then over the hills to the west. This meant marching or boating along three sides of a quadrilateral. However necessary this might have been in the early years of the war, after the French had lost Fort Ticonderoga, and Crown Point, a more direct road from New Hampshire to Crown Point was obviously desirable.

On July 27, 1759, the fleur-de-lis flag was pulled down at Ticonderoga, and the Union Jack went up. A few days later the same situation came about at Crown Point. General Amherst, the British commander, thereafter determined to begin construction of a military road from his new bastion at Crown Point to the Connecticut River opposite Old Number Four, some eighty-seven miles away. The preliminary orders were issued to Captain John Stark of Rogers Rangers on August 8. Stark promptly set out to make a survey across modern Vermont. In the great central wilderness of the Green Mountains he and his men found not even a pathway or a blazed trail. Stark reported his findings to Amherst on September 9. The general approved the recommended route and on October 26 sent out Major Zadok Hawks and Captain Stark with 250 men and "proper Tools" to begin construction from the western end.

The two officers and their axmen started at Chimney Point and laid out the road through Addison, Bridport, and Shoreham in a southeasterly direction. In Shoreham the road changed its direction to east by south. Crossing portions of Orwell, Whiting, and Sudbury, it came out on Otter Creek in the northwestern part of Brandon. From thence it went to the village of Fowler in Pittsford. From Pittsford it turned to the southeast through Rutland and into Clarendon. The Green Mountains were approached near the village of East Clarendon. The road climbed steeply to Shrewsbury and thence to Mount Holly. From this region the road turned toward Patch Pond and Lake Amherst. It is, of course, obvious that not all this could possibly have been finished in the autumn of 1759. The roadmakers were low in provisions and in morale, and were paid off at Old Number Four on November 16. Probably the first few miles only were at all adequately done, the rest being merely roughed out and blazed.

In the spring of 1760 Colonel John Goffe of the New Hampshire militia with 800 men was assigned the task of completing the road from the eastern end. By the middle of June most of the regiment had assembled at Old Number Four. The men, their animals, and materials crossed the Connecticut two miles above the fort at Wentworth's Ferry. Here they built a blockhouse for protection and storage of equipment. The road, beginning at this blockhouse on the western bank of the river, ran for about eleven miles northwesterly through Springfield and Weathersfield. From that town it crossed into Cavendish, keeping to the hills away from the Black River. At "Twenty-Mile Camp" in Cavendish, Colonel Goffe set up his headquarters for the final section of the road work.

Beyond Cavendish the new construction went through Ludlow and into Plymouth. In that town it descended toward Echo Lake and thence went to Lake

Amherst. Here the builders reached the end of construction by the working party of 1759. No Indians had been seen during the course of the work, but Colonel Goffe was always alert. On July 28, men, wagons, and cattle began passing over the new road; and on July 31 the advance contingents of these reached Crown Point. The highway was now open, and for the first time in colonial history there was a direct route from New Hampshire across modern Vermont. Old Number Four was the anchor point on the east, and Crown Point the terminus on the west.

Seventeen years later Old Number Four was again prominent in military affairs. This time it was the rendezvous for General John Stark and his New Hampshire troops marching to Bennington. Stark and his men left the Fort on August 3, and moved by the old road for part of their way across Vermont. On August 7 the force reached Peru, and on August 8 the general and his 1,000 men camped in Manchester. Throughout this crossing all supplies, reinforcements, and equipment were forwarded to Stark from his operational base at Old Number Four.

These are some of the reasons why modern Americans are interested in the restoration of this important colonial and Revolutionary Fort. About ten years ago certain persons in Charlestown, New Hampshire, incorporated the Old Number Four Associates. Since then much has been done. A competent architect has been secured, and careful plans for the restoration of the Fort have been made. A new site has been secured, the old one now being in the heart of the present village. But the new site is in every way comparable to the original location, and is even closer to Wentworth's Ferry than was the fort two hundred years ago. Many groups in New Hampshire have endorsed the restoration effort: the State Planning and Development Commission, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Sons of the American Revolution, the New Hampshire Federation of Women's Clubs, the Society of Colonial Wars, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and numerous local clubs and historical societies.

The estimated cost of the restoration of Old Number Four is \$200,000. This amount will buy the land, build the thirteen houses, erect the stockade, and permit some operating capital for the first year or so. The first logs for the stockade were donated by Dartmouth College, and set in place in July, 1958. A great pageant, telling the story of Old Number Four, drew many people to the site on August 15 and August 16, and awakened in them a new understanding of the place and function of the old Fort in colonial and Revolutionary history.

Many Vermonters have sensed the significance of this program of restoration. Vrest Orton, Chairman of the Vermont Historic Sites Commission, has written to the Associates as follows:

The Commission feels, and we have emphasized this in our report to the General Assembly of Vermont, that there is a new and significant point of view toward the historic site mission in the states. It is this: Geography, we say, attracts people; History holds them. Good luck and all the success you so well deserve.

Prominent citizens of the Green Mountain State who live along the Connecticut River have served, and are now serving, as officers and directors of the Old Number Four Associates.

Such places as Williamsburg, Shelburne, Old Sturbridge, and others show clearly that restorations of historic sites and areas can charm and inspire modern Americans. It is believed that the restoration of Old Number Four in exactly its original form will have the same effect upon thousands of people, not only in Vermont and New Hampshire but also among our visitors. Perhaps by the time that we celebrate the bicentennial of the completion of the Crown Point Road in 1960, the old Fort will be ready for inspection. From the same place that Colonel Goffe and General Stark "took off" two hundred years ago, contemporary Americans may begin a trip across the scenic roads of Vermont.
