

BLOODY BATTLE at FORT BULL

REGULATED as 725-ACRE TRACT

IS PLACED ON AUCTION BLOCK

Only Woman and Four Men Escaped French Slaughter of Garrison in 1756; Legend Sent Hundreds Seeking Brass Cannon Filled With Gold, Never Found

Another chapter will be written in the story of Fort Bull, cherished spot of history and legend, following a public auction at the Rome courthouse Sept. 22 at 12:15 o'clock. For the Fort Bull farm, a few miles west of Rome, is included in 725 acres of land to be sold that day as the result of foreclosure proceedings.

FORT MET DRAMATIC END IN 1756

No historical group is planning to purchase the site, when bidding opens next Thursday, as far as can be learned. The state was offered an option on the land in 1927 but did not take it up.

Today the farm stands with adjoining acres, a seemingly endless expanse of land, giving little hint except for a marker of the glory and fury that was once its lot. In pioneer times the fortification marked the dry-season head of navigation for batteaux or boats that traveled over Wood Creek. In 1756 the fort met a dramatic end when the French came from Oswegatchie (now Ogdensburg) with 367 men under Lieutenant DeLery and surprised and destroyed it, killing all the garrison of 60, except one woman and four men who escaped.

Since that bloody page was written, the story of Fort Bull has been less exciting but none the less fascinating. Souvenir hunters at one time frequented the place and many of them reported the discovery of hand grenades and cannon balls. At another period in its history Fort Bull was overrun with treasure hunters, drawn there by the legend that a brass cannon filled with gold and was buried in Wood Creek on the occasion of the slaughter of 1756. The buried treasure tale is believed to have originated in the fact that on the day the fort was stormed 15 loaded batteaux, scheduled to start for Oswego, were stove in and the cargoes sunk in the stream.

In Spotlight Recently

A few years ago Fort Bull again became the "cynosure of neighboring eyes," but this time for a reason neither historical nor legendary. On an examination given to candidates for the post of policeman, one of the questions asked how many feet there were between the marker at Fort Bull and the road. Thirty-six locals tried the examination, but only one was even close. He had it down to a fraction of an inch.

The location of the Fort Bull farm, as described in the legal notice announcing the auction sale, is "between the abandoned Erie Canal and the Rome and Rathbonsville road," covering "approximately 470 acres, with two sets of farm buildings and usually operated as two farms."

In French and Indian war days Fort Bull was a star-shaped fortification

occupied by English troops. It was built to guard the lower Wood Creek landing for the Oneida carrying place.

Was Trading Post

Early inhabitants came from Albany up the Mohawk River to present East Whitesboro St., Rome, where they encountered a marsh about four miles long and around which they were compelled to draw their boats. Before the advent of the white man in this section, the Indians had a well beaten trail from the river to the creek, and early settlers soon widened this into a road. The end of the water route up the Mohawk was guarded first by Fort Williams and later by Fort Stanwix, and at the western end of the carrying place Fort Newport and Bull erected to protect the white men from Indian deprivations and at the same time, to serve as shelters for boatmen.

Wood Creek was a much larger stream in those days than at present; deep enough in wet season and wide enough for the passage of boats of considerable size down the creek into Oneida Lake and from there to the western frontier of the state. In dry season dams across the creek at Fort Newport and again at Fort Bull were manipulated to float the batteaux.

Unlike many others in the state, Fort Bull was not built on an eminence but on level ground in a clearing. Surrounding it was the forest and swam.

The French force, commanded by DeLery, came down from the St. Lawrence in 1756. They were 15 days on the trip, two days without provisions. Deep snows made their journey difficult. The party, comprising French Canadians and Indians, arrived on the road to the carrying place early on the morning of March 27. Of the entire force, it was reported that 26th took part in the attack.

The fort was constructed of heavy pickets 15 to 18 feet above ground, doubled inside to a man's height. The deep moat was supposed to make the fort almost impregnable. It was equipped with hand grenades by Sir William Johnson.

In addition to the loaded batteaux ready to depart, were sleighs loaded with additional cargo. Ten men in charge of the sleighs were captured by the Indians and the foodstuffs distributed. The timely seizure of food encouraged the invaders, who were almost famished, and strengthened them in the prosecution of their enterprise.

Negro Escaped

A negro, who escaped capture, hurried to Fort Williams and gave the alarm. Lieut. DeLery ordered an attack at once, but the Indians were unwilling to follow him. Those who did not take part in the assault guarded the provisions and acted as scouts to give warning in case a force from Fort Williams appeared.

DeLery ordered the Indians to advance quietly and, if possible, to seize the guard at the sally port without firing a shot. But the Indians, when a short distance from the fort gave a war cry, which aroused the garrison. Though DeLery ordered his men forward with the utmost speed, the warning gave the English troops time to close the gates in face of the enemy.

Surrender was demanded, but in reply the commander of the defenders threw a lighted grenade among the French troops. Men were at once assigned to cut down the gate, which was accomplished in about an hour. Meanwhile, French and Indians

gained possession of the portholes and were firing at the English through them.

Batteaux Sunk

When the gate was battered down, the French and Indians rushed in with cries of triumph and commenced the slaughter. All but five were killed. The survivors included a woman and the Negro who escaped to Fort Williams.

The French then proceeded to throw barrels of powder and cannon balls into Wood Creek. One of the magazines caught fire and exploded, wounding a Frenchman and one Indian. A sortie made by a relief force from Fort Williams was repulsed by the French rear guard.

Bombs, grenades and ammunition amounting to 40,000 pounds was thrown into the creek, DeLery reported and the batteaux were sunk. A large quantity of provisions were thrown into the water. What was not thus destroyed was consumed by fire. Thirty horses were captured and taken on the return trip, during which the French again suffered for lack of food.

After St. Leger raised the siege of Fort Stanwix in 1777 he used the ruins of Fort Bull as a rendezvous for his British expedition. The ditch and some other features of the fort are still well preserved although largely overgrown by trees and shrubbery.