



## INDEPENDENCE DAY OF AMERICA

In honor of the Semiquincentennial of the United States of America  
**the Woodstock Historical Society**  
is pleased to share an article about Woodstock's role in the American Revolution,  
an excerpt from a new book on Woodstock's history being published this fall.

### *Woodstock Takes A Stand*

by Charlene Perkins Cutler

Woodstock celebrates Independence Day with fireworks, parades, the East Woodstock Fourth of July Jubilee, and picnics. Perhaps in the middle of the festivities, one can reflect on the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the Revolutionary War (1775-1783)- both outcomes of the unbearable taxes and duties imposed by the English Parliament.

Discontent with English rule began as early as 1740 in Woodstock. Most commerce was done by trading goods and services as there was little coinage in the colonies. It was England's practice to keep gold and silver coins in the homeland, and Parliament had issued regulations against exporting bullion or coin. To have a more convenient system with which to transact business, the General Court of Massachusetts Bay Colony set up a land bank that issued paper notes against 20-year mortgages on land. It was an extremely popular system that increased the amount of land owned and it worked. Speculation and politicization caused the paper currency to become inflated. A Parliamentary act ended the Land Bank.

The Colonial Governor Belcher enforced the new restriction by forbidding the officers of militias and tradesmen from passing the notes. Lawyers who accepted the notes in their business were excluded from appearing in court. Militia officers who continued to use the paper currency were threatened with dismissal. Woodstock was divided. Fifty-three people petitioned the town to allow the use of paper money and the town responded, "No person to serve the town that will not accept Land Bank notes." Judge John Chandler, although sympathetic to the dissenters' position, was required to enforce the Governor's directives. "Woodstock's persistence in making legal tender of the obnoxious Land Bank notes in the face of the Governor and Civil authority of Massachusetts Bay Colony was an evident 'product' of the independent and 'mobbish' principles against which she had been warned by Judge Chandler" (Lamed ↗)

90-1). As a result, three militia companies resigned their commissions, and no representative was sent to participate in the General Court.

Numerous and unbearable legislative actions by Parliamentary plagued the colonies: the Sugar Act, 1764 (taxed imports of textiles, wine, coffee, sugar), the Currency Act, 1764 (devalued Colonial paper money), the Stamp Act, 1765 (placed duties on newspapers, legal and commercial documents), the Quartering Act, 1765 (listed circumstances under which colonists must provide food and lodging for British troops), the Townsend Act, 1767 (placed duties on English imports to colonies - china, glass, lead, paint, paper and tea), and the Tea Act, 1773 (gave exclusive rights to distribute tea to the East India Co.).

In response to the repeated suppression of liberties, the town of Windham (Connecticut) encouraged the use of American made goods or those purchased from Europe. They also passed an agreement at the town meeting on December 7, 1767, to create a committee of correspondence to

### THE LIBERTY TREE

Planted in 1646, the Liberty Tree was a large elm tree located in a popular meeting spot for the people of Boston in the 1760s. It grew on a major route of travel. The Sons of Liberty would meet there and plan protests against the unfair English taxes. In 1765, there was a protest against the Stamp Act and an effigy of Andrew Oliver, the stamp collector, was burned and beheaded; his home was also attacked. A marker was placed near the tree that read "This tree was planted in the year 1646 and pruned by the order of the Sons of Liberty, February 14, 1766." The site gained such importance that a Liberty Pole and a flag were also erected there. During the Siege of Boston in 1775, Loyalists and British soldiers cut down and burned the Liberty Tree. It became a symbol of the Revolution. Elms and Liberty Poles were planted throughout the colonies, especially in New England, to show solidarity with Boston and as an act of defiance (Maloy).



communicate with their counterparts from other towns. In a Woodstock town meeting the citizens rejected all imported goods except "Bibles, pins and needles, gun powder, flint, steel, apothecary drugs, spices, and window glass" (Lamed ↻ 156).

The spirit of patriotism was strong in Woodstock. The local militia drilled and paraded. In May of 1773, *The Norwich Packet* reported that "a great military parade at Woodstock was accompanied by a mock fight under the direction of Cap't. Samuel McClellan." The pretend battle consisted of neighbors dressed as Native Americans seizing children and running off, to be vigorously pursued by McClellan and his men" (Lamed ↻ 156).

The people in Woodstock had kept close ties with Roxbury and Boston's ardent patriots. After the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773, Parliament acted in response and on March 31, 1774, passed the Boston Port Act, closing the harbor to all trade and shipping effective June 1, 1774, until payment was made for the tea that was destroyed. Woodstock was indignant. At a June 21<sup>st</sup> town meeting a resolution was adopted which included recognizing the sovereignty of the king while asserting that colonists were entitled to the same rights as all English subjects. As the town had become part of the Connecticut Colony in 1749, the resolution continued that the only lawful representative of freemen was those elected to the General Assembly which had the only right to govern the citizens from authority granted by royal charter. It stated that "no harbor or port can be closed without subverting the right and liberties of the King's subjects." Woodstock further stated that its citizens "engage to contribute our utmost exertions in defense of our American liberties and privileges and stand by our brethren" (Lamed ↻ 159).

The Boston Port Act led to the siege of Boston. On August 15, 1774, Woodstock unanimously

voted to send aid to relieve the suffering of Bostonians. A meeting was held by all the town committees of correspondence for Windham and New London Counties who all pledged to come to Boston's aid. By December 20<sup>th</sup> Woodstock voted to purchase arms and other military supplies, while the local militia continued to drill.

News arrived of the Lexington Alarm, April 20, 1775. Under the leadership of Capt. Samuel McClellan, Woodstock sent 140 men (five companies) and "a troop of horse" to support the Lexington Alarm, April 19, 1775, part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Connecticut Regiment under General Israel Putnam. Woodstockians continued to serve at Bunker Hill and in other battles. They were considered militia men, or "minute men."



*The Battle of Bunkers Hill, June 17, 1775, painted by Jonathan Trumbull in 1786. Courtesy of the Yale University Art Gallery.*

Brigadier General Wadsworth requested that "Woodstock send the companies under their command to New York by water and land; all men be outfitted with good anns, bayonets, cartouche boxes, blankets and knapsacks (Lamed ⇨ 166)." On July 4<sup>th</sup> 1776, Captains Lyon and Bacon departed Woodstock with their men. Dr. Holmes and several other men were taken captive; Levi Child, Amasa Carpenter and Amasa Lyon were the first casualties from Woodstock and lie in unmarked graves in New York.

The selectmen and correspondence committee continued public affairs without town meetings in 1776. Troop enlistment was organized by a military committee, composed of Ebenezer Paine, Col. Samuel McClellan, and Capt. Elisha Child. Another committee was formed to see to the maintenance of the families of non-commissioned officers and soldiers. In total, 503 families sent men to fight in the American Revolution during its eight years.

Woodstock also sent its minister. The Rev. Abiel Leonard departed with the militia in 1775, serving for six months. During that time, his sermons on special occasions were well received and noted by George Washington. He also published a nine-page pamphlet, *A Prayer Composed for the Benefit of the Soldiers in the American Army to Assist them in their Private Devotions*. Shortly afterwards, both Generals Washington and Putnam wrote to the Woodstock congregation requesting that they once again allow their beloved pastor to minister to the needs of the army. Rev. Leonard reenlisted twice. He never returned to his church. He became ill after a primitively administered smallpox inoculation and died August 14, 1777 (Bowen 146-50).

Woodstock provided messengers, food and supplies to support the army. Ebenezer Smith was one of two Connecticut men engaged by the General Assembly to carry news in a circuit from Woodstock to Windham, Lebanon, Hartford, and Fairfield, and back again; the carriers met in Hartford every Saturday. By 1777, with the war becoming more intense, Woodstockians were melting down their pewter housewares to make musket balls. Cloth was being crafted into tents. They made saddles and harnesses, even wooden cartridge boxes. Salt-Petre (sodium nitrate) was harvested from soil and sent to the army to preserve meat. The town gave whatever was required (Bowen 146). "No Tory dared to peep or mutter at Woodstock (Larned ↯ 187).

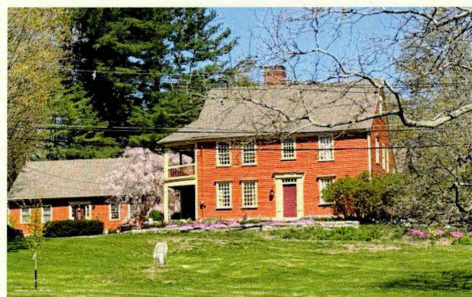
There were significant losses and disappointments over the next three years. By May of 1780, the war had moved south but its impacts were still felt in northern communities like Woodstock. Quotas were filled with replacements; 24 men enlisted for three years at £36 each, paid £12 per year. Residents were taxed £4 to cover the expenses of recruits in 1779. Peace was declared in 1783 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris.

The Connecticut Society of the Sons of the American Revolution had a grave marking ceremony in Woodstock on April 26, 2026, at the Woodstock Hill Cemetery. Those remembered were Brigadier General Samuel McClellan, Captain Benjamin Lyon, Sr., Dr. David Holmes, Jr., Private John Flynn, and Captain Ephraim Manning, II. The bells of the Hill Church rang thirteen times in honor of the 13 American colonies. As part of Woodstock's celebration of the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, a Liberty Tree was installed on the South Woodstock Common.

Woodstock made significant sacrifices for American independence. The town is still notable today for that same spirit of self-determination.

## SAMUEL & RACHAEL

Samuel Ewing McClellan was born in Worcester January 4, 1730, the son of immigrants from Kirendbright on the Firth of Solway in Scotland. He was a merchant and farmer. McClellan married Rachael Abbe of Windham in 1766, and they were the parents of eight children. The Siege of Boston forced him to close his store.



McClellan took part in a committee to transport food from Woodstock to Boston in 1774. As a member of the Committee of Correspondence, he commanded a troop of horse from Woodstock, Pomfret and Killingly and five companies of militia in response to the Lexington Alarm in 1775. McClellan became a Brigadier General in the Continental Army.

Rachael brought "weak saplings by her own hand from her early home in Windham" and transplanted them in front of the McClellan's house. They were known thereafter as the McClellan Elms symbolic of the Tree of Liberty" (Larned ↯ 163).

Bowen, Clarence Winthrop. *The History of Woodstock, Connecticut*. Norwood, Massachusetts: The Plimpton Press, 1926.

Larned ↯; Ellen D. *History of Woodstock*. Woodstock, Connecticut: Citizens for Prudent Spending, 2000.

Maloy, Mark. "The Boston Liberty Tree." American Battlefields Trust. <https://www.battlefields.org>. (accessed April 8, 2026).