

Bolton: Historic Tales

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List of Contents: Preface / Part I The Dawn of Bolton / Part II Promiscuous Bolton / Part III Revolutionary Bolton / Part IV The Cathedrals of Bolton / Part V Civil War Bolton / Part VI The Belles of Bolton / Part VII Renaissance Bolton

Preface

I would never have had the opportunity to write this book were it not for the Army Corps of Engineers' proposal to put a highway through the centers of Bolton and Andover, Connecticut. Almost as an afterthought of a \$20 million highway study, they decided to include input from the communities that were affected. I was selected to be the Bolton Economic Development Commission representative on the ad hoc committee that the Department of Transportation (DOT) created.

The concept of heritage preservation-based tourism was new, but we could see that the concept was successfully applied in Massachusetts in the 1970s. At the time, Bolton had only one house on the National Register of Historic Places, with no historical society or other group representing heritage. Our town municipal historian had been the DOT's top Connecticut road and highway historian, and he taught me what he knew about the roads and highways in and around Bolton. However, he was planning to move, so he asked me to represent him at the meetings.

We created an Intercommunity Historic Resources Committee, and at the very first meeting in Andover, Lorraine Busque loaned me her book on the French campaigns during the American Revolution. Everyone had believed the important Revolutionary War encampments in Bolton were not going to be affected. As soon as I saw the French map of Camp Five, I knew the real campsite was half a mile north of where the local maps showed it to be, and it was near the center of town on the farm that the proposed highway would split in two.

To establish the correct location, I placed the French map of Camp Five next to a topographical map of the site and presented it to the DOT ad hoc committee. While those representing state heritage agreed that it was probably true, they said it would take a long and expensive study to prove it. I had lived in East Hartford and remembered that while I was on the East Hartford Town Council, the French Revolutionary War Camp Six was being paved over, and no one came forward to defend it. So we took a more active approach to defend this central part of Bolton's heritage. My wife (the Bolton town clerk) and I wrote and presented the evidence directly to the French ambassador in Washington, D.C., and to the French consul in New York City, and asked them (if they agreed) to bring this fact to the attention of Connecticut Governor Rowland, to whom the DOT and the Historic Preservation Commission reported.

To our surprise, they both wrote back within a few weeks and said they had done it. The oldest running U.S. newspaper, the Hartford Courant, carried headlines saying that the French government asked for the preservation of the Franco-American Revolutionary War site. I gave a

copy of the map to Richard Rose, the farmer who owned Camp Five. A few weeks later, he asked me to tell the Bolton Economic Development Commission that he would like to preserve the farm heritage and would be willing to sell the farm to the town. I was appointed Bolton municipal historian right about then. From that point on, interest and knowledge about our heritage began to snowball. I had the opportunity to submit the first draft description for a Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route (W3R) study for a state bill.

Representative Pamela Sawyer's legislation for the study of W3R passed. The Connecticut study and archaeological digs verified the location of Camp Five and all the other Connecticut Revolutionary War campsites along the W3R. We held a well-attended meeting in September 1998, where the report on the archaeological discoveries was discussed and we circulated two volunteer lists. After the meeting, we immediately held short meetings to create the Bolton Historical Society and the Friends of the Rose Farm to advocate the purchase of the Rose Farm.

The Connecticut Society of the Sons of the American Revolution provided a website to keep all the Revolutionary Road newsletters I was writing. I was also writing articles for newspapers and for the Bolton Community News, and many of the articles were going on the Bolton Community News website. State Representative Pamela Sawyer came back from a vacation trip to England and was excited because the actor who portrayed George Washington's father at their original English estate knew that she was the Connecticut legislator who introduced the Connecticut W3R study bill. He was one of our worldwide newsletter readers.

The Governor's Francophone Commission and the French veterans group, *Le Souvenir Française*, were soon involved, and I provided a list of active and higher-placed W3R newsletter subscribers in the nine states along the Revolutionary Route. The first national W3R organization was born in December 1999. In early 2000, at a packed Bolton town meeting, 97 percent voted to purchase the historic farm with the Revolutionary War military encampments. A little later in 2000, Democratic State Central Committee member Patricia Morianos arranged a meeting in Bolton to discuss possible W3R federal legislation with our freshman congressman, John B Larson. He agreed, and introduced and championed the national study bill to define the interstate route and make a recommendation on the viability of creating a Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail (W3R NHT). The bill passed both houses of Congress unanimously, and the National Park Service (NPS) completed their study in 2007. The study recommended that the W3R NHT be designated by Congress. The bill is up for a vote this year.