

**Col. Willett**  
**Of the**  
**Mohawk Valley**

**Presented by**  
**C. Reed**

## **COL. Marenus Willett**

It takes a long time to correctly focus the men and events of History.

But sufficient time has now elapsed so that the bank of the Delaware, the plains of Saratoga, the forest glades of Oriskany, grow dear to us with the lapse of years.

They will be ever viewed as classic ground by every lover of civic liberty.

We know today, after unprejudiced study of the War for Independence, that there were only two generals involved. Upon the American side, capable handling, large bodies of troops, and with them conducting a campaign to a successful conclusion.

They were Gen. George Washington and Gen. Nathaniel Green.

The two Generals who best could lead a forlorn hope, and inspire their troops to heroic deeds were Anthony Wayne and Daniel Morgan.

The two men, who were the most illustrious [partisan] officers and leaders of irregular soldiers were Frances Marion of South Carolina, and Marenus Willett of our own state of New York.

New York has been the strategic point in all wars for the control of this continent.

Unroll a map of our country and you will readily see that New York, was the Keystone to the Arch, with which the 13 colonies were held together.

To Col. Marenus Willett is due a large measure of the credit of preserving New York to the Patriot cause.

The more than heroic struggle of Herkimer and his farmer soldiers at Oriskany, the sortie of Col. Willett at Ft. Stanwix, which prevented St. Ledger from sending reinforcements to his weakening forces at Oriskany, led to the abandonment of the Siege of St. Stanwix, and eliminated the right wing of Burgoin's army from any further participation in that campaign.

With the retreat of St. Ledger's army from the Mohawk Valley, Burgoin's whole scheme of campaign collapsed like a stack of cardboard, and it led to his ultimate surrender.

Until his surrender, no nation would recognize the agents of the Continental Congress.

It opened the way to the treasury of France. It started across the ocean; arms, ammunition, and clothing, for a sadly destitute Continental Army.

Upon the Plain of Marathon Greece, 500 years before the birth of Christ, 900 Greeks, practically destroyed a Persian Army of 60000 men who were striving to enslave their country, and today the name of Marathon is familiar to nearly every school child in our land.

On the field of Oriskany, when that heroic band of 850 men had shrunk under the stress of battle to 150 men fit for duty, and still unconquered, above the British army from the field, they hardly knew themselves, that they had won a great victory.

In the country at large, it was viewed as a woodland skirmish with the Indians.

The early historians of the war, devoted less than one page to the battle of Oriskany and Willett sortie at Ft. Stanwix. But these two battles, which should always be treated in unison, one with the other, started a train of events, that day that only culminated upon the field of Yorktown and when sufficient time had elapsed, will be looked upon as the American Marathon.

Mareus Willett, was born July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1740 on Long Island, of English parents. His great grandfather came from England in 1682, and settled in Plymouth Colony, near the boundary of Rhode Island, and was an influential man in the Colony.

Edward Willett, the father of Mareus, was a farmer. Sheriff of Queens County, and lived near Jamaica; and at this homestead Mareus Willett was born and grew to manhood.

When 18 years of age he enlisted in a Colonial Regiment for service in the French and Indian War, received a Lieutenant commission. He served under Sir William Johnsen in the attack on Ft. Ticonderoga.

He also served under Gen. Bradstreet in the expedition against Ft.

Frontenac(?). Of the officers associated with Col. Willett in this expedition, who served under Gen. Bradstreet, were many who afterward attained high rank in the Continental Army. There were Gen. Philip Schuyler, Nathaniel Woodhul, Horatio Gates, Col. Cehar Clinton, Commander at Ft. Herkimer and his two sons, Jamie Clinton, a captain 22 years old and his brother George, then nineteen years old and afterwards for 25 years, Governor of New York State.

Ft. Frontenac (?) and garrison was capture after a siege of three days, and was the greatest blow, infiltrated on the French in America.

This expedition practically closed the French and Indian war. The colonial troops were largely disbanded. Willett returning to his home at new York.

In 1765 Great Britain organized a scheme, that was destined later to cause her a world of trouble, an also trouble to a multitude of the inhabitants of the Colonies. She passed a Stamp act with the design of forcing the sale of said stamp to the American colonist.

The stamp Act did not look good to the people and the more they considered it, the less they like it and they decided they would have nothing to do with them, when the young men of New York learned that the stamps were lodged in a fort, garrisoned by British troops they formed an organization called the Sons of Liberty.

The English government little realized that they had been educating a lot of boys in this country, during her French and Indian war, in the art of warfare and adept pupils, they found themselves to be. For they later administered to the so called Mother Country, a good sound drubbing.

Mareus Willett, then 25 years old was one of the first to join the Sons of Liberty. With him were Alexander Hamilton, Charles Lamb, Aaron Burr, George Clinton, and many more, whose names were afterwards to inscribed high upon a scroll of fame.

On Sunday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1775, rumors spread the streets of New York, of the conflict between the People and British troops, at Lexington and Concord.

The same spirit which caused Israel Putnam to unhitch his team in the field, leave plow in furrow, mount his horse, and speed to the scene of conflict, also seemed to animate the Sons of Liberty, Willett among the number.

It was his timely action, that prevented the shipment of arms and ammunition from the arsenal in New York to the British in Boston. By order of Congress was to raise four regiments of troops. Willett joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment with the rank of Captain, and rendered efficient service around New York until he joined Gen. Montgomery's expedition to Canada and served all through that memorable campaign although unsuccessful. It was a great training school for the Continental Army.

Every officer or soldier, who served through it to the end, could truly be ranked as a veteran.

They faced old, starvation and superior numbers. They endured hardship, that could only be borne by men of heroic mold.

Upon Willett's return from Canada, he was detached at Ft. Stanwix, second in command under Gen. Gansevert.

He was largely instrumental in putting the Fort in condition for defense before the arrival of Gen. St. Ledger, with his besieging army.

On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1777, Gen. St. Ledger appeared before Ft. Stanwix with an array of 1800 men, about 900 of whom were Indians under command of Col. Brant. As soon as the artillery was mounted, demand was sent to the fort to surrender. Promising mercy if surrendered, extermination if refused. Instead of the expected white flag, in token of surrender, there was seen raised above the ramparts of the fort, a flag of strange device, hereto totally unknown to the enemy, or the world.

They endured their hardship for about 10 days when they held a council.

They told St. Ledger, no blankets, no camp kettles, no fire water, no plunder.

We vamoose.

On the following morning, they left in a body for their homes.

Col. Willett was detailed with 229 to make a sortie, which he promptly did, forcing the enemy from their entrenchments, capturing a number of prisoners, 5 battle flags, all of Sir John Johnsons private jafers, and 21 wagon loads of camp equipage and supplies, stripping the Indian camp clean, leaving only their empty tents standing.

Did Washington detach and send some of the tried veterans of Monmouth, Germantown and Brandywine? Did he send some of the celebrated light

infantry, drilled by Anthony Wayne, and who won the plaudits of the world in the storming of Stony Point? No, he sent none of these; he sent Col. Marenur Willett.

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The truly heroic deeds if men gain added luster with the lapse of years.

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The northwestern corner of Pennsylvania was known as "The Triangle" and was disputed territory when Gen. Irvine started his efforts to secure it for that state in order that a good harbor and port on Lake Erie thus be secured. The original north line of Pennsylvania began at the corner of New Jersey established in the Delaware River in latitude 41 deg 40 min (since found to be in latitude 41 deg. 20 min.) and ran up the Delaware to latitude 42 deg., thence west to Lake Erie. On survey this line was found to strike the lake near the present Ohio line, a little east of Conneaut, O., Samuel Holland for New York and David Rittenhouse for Pennsylvania were appointed to run this line, Nov. 8, 1774, but the Revolutionary was prevented any work being done. In 1785 and 1786 the line was run, the survey was certified Oct. 12, 1786, by James Clinton and Simeon Dewitt for New York and Andrew Ellicott for Pennsylvania. They finished the first ninety miles, to the west side of the south branch of Tioga river, in 1786, marking every mile with a stone or other monument.

Their axmen cut a path through the woods from 33 to 49 feet wide, and it took the whole season to get over the 90 miles.

The transit they used was one bought in London in 1760 by Benjamin Franklin, and it was also used in running Mason and Dixon's line, the south boundary of Pennsylvania. It weighed, with its accompanying drafting tables, over half a ton! It is now in the state library at Harrisburg.

"In 1787 Andrew Ellicott and Andrew Porter for Pennsylvania, and Abraham Hardenburgh and William W. Morris for New York, ran the remainder of the line, finishing in October at Lake Erie. The survey along the south line of Chautauqua County was made in August and September.

An astronomical station was established in Kiantone, and it was found that they were 2000 feet from the 42<sup>nd</sup> degree line. Corrections were made as far east as the error was found, and a monument was placed on 42 deg. In the south line of Kiantone. The rest of the line was then surveyed without difficulty.

While at Kiantone Mr. Hardenburgh drew a map of the region, on which the configuration of Chautauqua Lake is quite correctly delineated. On that map the old French road from Lake Erie to Chautauqua is marked as "an old

wagon road made by the French.”, adjusted, and found 50 contain 207,187 acres.

“The good-natured way in which the kings of England granted lands in North America to favorites was the cause of serious conflicts in the early settlement of Western New York and Pennsylvania. King Charles in 1628 granted a charter to the Massachusetts Bay Company, covering all the land between 3 miles south of the Charles river and 3 miles north of the Merrimac, westward to the Pacific ocean.

New England was granted to the Plymouth Colony by James I, and gave part of their grant to the Massachusetts Bay Company. New York was granted by Charles II to the Duke of York and Albany, and he also gave New Jersey to Berkeley and Carteret. The New York charter extended north to Canada, but the west bounds were not stated.

Massachusetts got another charter in 1691 from William and Mary. With the exception of the New York grant, all charters extended to the Pacific. So Massachusetts and New York both claimed the Triangle.

William Penn's grant from Charles II, in 1682, covered all the west end of Pennsylvania from the "Tiadaghton" creek, a previous patent covering the eastern part of the state. Penn promptly set about extinguishing the Indian titles to the land, and he wrote a letter, June 23, 1682, to the "Emperor of Canada", asking for a conference. At Fort Stanwix, N.Y., (now Rome), a treaty was finally reached, covering all the northwestern part of Pennsylvania, in 1784, and five years later, at Fort Harmar, at the mouth of the Muskingum, another treaty was made covering all the land north of the Alleghany and west of the Conewango.

The line ran up the Conewango to Chautauqua lake, thence up the middle of the lake over to Lake Erie. The Indian chief who made the bargain reserved all the fish in his half of Chautauqua lake! The Indians were paid \$4000 in money and \$1000 more in goods.

Complanter's speech is given in the "History of the Region of Pennsylvania north of the Ohio river and west of the Alleghany" by Hon. Daniel Agnew, LL.D. Chief Justice of Pennsylvania, 1887.

By 1791 New York, Massachusetts, the Holland Land Company and the Six Nations had their land claims adjusted. Robert Morris had bought all west of Seneca Lake, and the Holland Land Company all the rest to the Niagara Mile Strip, and when Pennsylvania put the Triangle into the market, also bought considerable areas in that section.

To assist in the war of the Revolution, or rather in paying back wages to the soldiers in that war, New York ceded her claim to any lands west of the present bounds of the state March 1, 1781; Virginia in March 1784; Massachusetts; April 19, 1785, and Connecticut Sept. 13, 1786. May 30, 1800, the Western Reserve was ceded by Connecticut. The east line of the Triangle was run by Andrew Ellicott, beginning in January, 1790, running due south from the west end of Lake Ontario to the parallel of 42 deg. North latitude. He ran till he reached Lake Erie; then took a "set-off" to the Niagara river; thence south until he could set back without getting into the lake.

By astronomical observation he found the desired meridian, and ran thence south to the Pennsylvania line. He set a monument on the lakeshore, properly engraved, but the wearing away of the banks of the lake was likely

to wash away the monument, and so the legislature of New York enacted a law providing for placing a new monument. This was set back 440 feet from the Lake and was engraved on it the latitude, 42 deg. 15 min. 50.9" and longitude 79 deg. 45 min. 54.4 " compass variation of 2 deg. 35 min. This new monument was set in 1869. The work was done under the supervision of the Board of Regents of New York. Among the commissioners erecting the new monument was Gov. George W. Patterson, of Westfield.

By D. A. A. Nichols, Westfield, N. Y.

Wichita Falls

The northwestern corner of Pennsylvania was known as 'The Triangle' and was disputed territory when Gen. Irvine started his efforts to secure it for that state in order that a good harbor and port on Lake Erie could thus be secured. The original north line of Pennsylvania began at the corner of New Jersey established in the Delaware river in latitude  $41^{\circ}40'$  (since found to be in latitude  $41^{\circ}20'$ ) and ran up the Delaware to latitude  $42^{\circ}$ , thence west to Lake Erie. On survey this line was found to strike the lake near the present Ohio line, a little east of Conneaut, O. Samuel Holland for New York and David Rittenhouse for Pennsylvania were appointed to run this line, Nov. 8, 1774, but the Revolutionary war prevented any work being done. In 1785 and 1786 the line was run, and the survey was certified Oct. 12, 1786, by James Clinton and Simeon Hewitt for New York and Andrew Ellicott for Pennsylvania. They finished the first ninety miles, to the west side of the south branch of Tioga river, in 1786, marking every mile with a stone or other monument.

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*W. M. M. S.*  
*A.*  
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"After Gen. Irvine's success in getting the Triangle for Pennsylvania, the bargain was closed by the state paying the general government \$151,640, Sept. 4, 1788. The lands in the Triangle were then put into the market as fast as they were surveyed, but the Indian troubles kept settlers from entering upon the lands. Warrants for 400 acres or less were offered to settlers who would clear and plant two acres every year for five years, on each 100 acres taken up, and a dwelling built and occupied, but the danger of losing their scalps kept settlers away, and only here and there was a clearing made. At Erie, and Waterford, on the old French road, and at Colt's Station, were the only ones of note. The majority of warrants issued went to state officials, who had selected what they thought were the best. The state set off a strip eight miles long and 3 miles wide, including the bay and island at Erie, <sup>to</sup> the general government, afterwards giving 100 acres on the Point, and 60 acres at the shore end, in place of the long strip; also a few acres where the light-house was to stand, and the fort and its buildings. Settlers began to come into Erie, and it was quite a rendezvous for shipping engaged in the coasting trade. The price of lands outside of Erie was fixed at  $\$ 7 10^4$  per 100 acres, six per cent being allowed for roads and highways.

"The first road made in the Triangle was along the old French portage, but was full of stumps and rocks, and in some places was

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eight or ten rods wide, all well cut up by ruts. The next road was made from the mouth of the 16 mile creek to Colt's Station, where Col. Colt had a large clearing. This was made in 1797. This road, and the one from Erie to Waterford, was kept cut up by the wagons loaded with Syracuse salt, which came by way of Niagara to Erie, and thence was distributed all over the Ohio valley. At Erie, every Saturday afternoon up to 1810, every man had to go out and dig stumps out of the streets. And after every bacchanalian revel citizens who were overcome had to dig three stumps each. The ordinance requiring this was not repealed until June, 1846. The Connecticut Company built eighteen miles of road west of Buffalo, in October, 1805. The first white child born in the Triangle was William W. Reed, son of John C. Reed, and grandson of Col. Seth Reed, one of the first settlers in Erie. The child was born February 20, 1797. He was for a long time a merchant in Ashtabula, O., but moved to Erie some years before he died, Sept. 9, 1851. The first Fourth of July celebration in the Triangle was July 4, 1797. Col. Colt stated that the land company of which he was then agent entertained about 75 people with "good fare and sundry toasts suitable to the occasion." The earliest churches were at Northeast and Fairview. Meetings in Erie were held in a vacant room on the corner of French and Fifth streets. The first church building was at Colt's Station in the deep woods, and it is related that an itinerant minister who had been engaged to preach on a certain Sunday wandered all day in the woods unable to find the church and his waiting congregation.

"Such is the history of the acquisition and settlement of the famous "Triangle." Disputed territory, it has passed from state to state without the bloodshed, wrangling, bitter strife and contention.

which have attended the history of Alsace-Lorraine, the fated border-land between France and Germany. And its acquisition by Pennsylvania leaves behind no bitter memories to rankle in resentful breasts, and suggest retaliatory measures in some distant future. Peaceful negotiation, concession and purchase have accomplished in modern times what once would have been brought about by violence. We see that states may arise like a coral reef, instead of being swept into existence by volcanic fire and earthquake shock.

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