



## BOULDER MARKS PLACE OF FIGHT

Exercises on field of Battle of Rhode Island

ADDRESS BY MR. SHEFFIELD

Under Auspices of William Ellery and Colonel Barton Chapters

Yesterday the 132<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the First Battle of Rhode Island was fittingly observed by the unveiling of a large granite boulder in the ?????????? where the first skirmish took place. It was through the united efforts of the William Ellery Chapter of Newport and the Colonel William Barton Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, that this attractive monument has been placed on the spot where so many brave men fell. The exercises took place at 4 o'clock – the 3:20 car from Newport taking out a large number. Some came in automobiles, others in carriages and when all had assembled there were fully 100 or more people on the ground.

Through the courtesy of the Rev. Mr. Loucks (sp?), of the Christian Church, benches were provided for the people. These were placed in the rear of the monument directly facing the Main road. MR. Wheeler Weston saw to it that the seats were properly placed and that all were made comfortable.

### THE MONUMENT

The boulder is at the southeast corner of the yard of the Christian Church of Portsmouth, and as it is in a very conspicuous place it will attract the attention of passersby. The daughters in charge of the erection of the stone desired to get a boulder from the adjoining fields and set it up, but as no suitable boulder was found they secured a magnificent specimen of Westerly granite instead.

The boulder stands about ?????? feet high and is about five feet long. The front is the only part finished off and polished; the rest being left just rough cut. Before the exercise began Mr. Thomas Lawton planted some sprigs of English ivy at the base of the boulder and some day will be seen all over (?) the boulder except the face covered with that beautiful plant.

Promptly at 4 o'clock Hon. William Paine Sheffield, after being introduced by the chairman of the committee, Mrs. Thomas A Lawton began his address. It was a very interesting and somewhat stirring description of the battle and the events that led up to it and it held the attention of those present from beginning to end. It had evidently been carefully prepared and will prove a valuable paper. Said Mr. Sheffield:

### MR. SHEFFIELD'S ADDRESS

Here on this very spot on August 29, 1778, occurred the commencement of the Battle of Rhode Island. The main army of the Americans was some three miles away toward Butts Hill and behind the walls of this very field Colonel Hunt (sp?) B. Livingston with a light corps, consisting of Colonel Jackson's detachment and a detachment from the Continental Army were stationed. Colonel Campbell in command of the 22<sup>nd</sup> British Regiment was following the retreating American Army along the East

road, when about seven in the morning reached this corner, he was in apparent uncertainty as to which direction the retreating force had taken and divided his regiment: one-half continuing on the East road towards Quaker Hill and the other half turning to the left into Union street to take the Middle Road. Here they fell into an ambuscade. The pickets from Colonel Livingston's light corps "sprung from behind the walls of this field and poured a storm of bullets upon the bewildered enemy, reloaded and repeated the desolating fire before the British could recover from the shock." A ter-

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rible slaughter ensued. Nearly one-quarter of the 22<sup>nd</sup> regiment was stretched upon the field. Two Hessian regiments were hurried to the relief of their comrades and General Sullivan ordered a regiment to support Colonel Livingston and at the same time sent orders to him to retire to the main army in the best order he could. Colonel Livingston kept up a retreating fire upon the enemy and retired in excellent order to the main army.

#### LEADING TO THE BATTLE

To properly understand the spirited action, which the William Ellery and Colonel Barton Chapters of the D.A.R. are commemorating today on its 132<sup>nd</sup> anniversary by erecting this fitting memorial; it is necessary to recall some of the familiar events which led up to the Battle of Rhode Island.

These events are typical of the manner in which the Revolutionary war was waged and show the difficulties under which our fathers fought and the circumstances which served to prolong the conflict.

Lafayette, on his visit to Rhode Island in 1824 told the late Mr. Zachariah Allen as he rode with him in a carriage across the border from Connecticut (referring to the Rhode Island Campaign of 1778) "In this state I have experienced more sudden and extreme alternations of hopes and disappointments than during all the vicissitudes of the American war."

Just as would probably happen in any foreign war with the United States today, Great Britain at the outbreak of the Revolution saw the strategic importance of holding that wonderful body of water, Narragansett Bay in any plan to subjugate America. Pursuant to that plan on December 2, 1776, Sir Peter Parker with seven line of battleships and four frigates, with 10 (?) transports and 6000 troops appeared off the Rhode Island coast: took possession of Newport, and the British forces remained in control of Narragansett Bay threatening Boston and New England until in October 1779, the scene of war changed from Rhode Island to the south. During that time no serious attempt was made by the British to carry war into the adjoining mainland. But the rested content in their safe and agreeable base, drawing heavily their supplies with an iron hand from the surrounding country. Several times the Americans made efforts to raise a force adequate in numbers to dislodge the British, but in the absence of a fleet to attack the strong fortifications thrown up about Newport nothing had really been done.

#### GENERAL SPENCER'S IDEA

In October, 1777, General Spencer gathered an army of 9000 men to land on the island from Tiverton and drive General Pigot and about 8000(?) men (then comprising the army of occupation) from Narragansett Bay. But the difficulties of transportation of so large a force across the Seacowett river, with a severe storm, so discouraged the American forces that the hastily gathered militia seemed to fade away, as it was so accustomed to do at critical times.

However, with the arrival of the French fleet under Admiral De Estaing in this country, it seemed an opportune time to drive the enemy from Rhode Island. General Sullivan who had succeeded General Spencer, after his failure, then had only 14,000 men in the field; while the British under General Pigot had been reinforced to 7000 men. Major General Greene and Brigadier General Oliver came from the Continental Army followed by the Marquis do Lafayette. Varnum's and Glover's continental brigades and two companies of artillery followed from White Plains. With these and new recruits Sullivan's army, mostly militia, was brought up to 10,000 men finally it crossed from Tiverton to the island. In the meantime, the French fleet had left Sandy Hook and appeared off Newport on July 27. One of the enemy thus describes the appearance their appearance "Towards noon 16 stately warships were distinguished and as it was a beautiful clear day all who could spare the time were gazing eagerly out from Brenton's Neck or from the Cliffs upon the noble spectacle as it approached." The ships lay in an arc from Point Judith on the northeast coast of Narragansett to Brenton's Neck. "Thus the harbor was completely blocked in. They were noble vessels which rocked majestically on the water; 12 ships of the line and four frigates."

#### A CLASH AT SEA

On August 8 the fleet came into the outer harbor and Pigot in haste withdrew his troops from Fogland Ferry, Windmill Hill and Quaker Hill to "Bannister's Heights" and manned the forts extending from Tonomy (or Dominic) Hill to Easton's beach at Bath road. The American army had already crossed Howland's Ferry and advance toward Newport. It seemed to the British in the town that they could not long hold out against both fleet and army. But there was one of those sudden changes in the situation which happened so often in this campaign. The British fleet of 36 vessels in all appeared in the offing and the French admiral following the best traditions of naval warfare started out to meet the British fleet on the open sea in spite of the protection of his American allies.

#### DEVASTATING TEMPEST

From the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> raged that terrible tempest of August 1778, accompanied for two days with floods of rain which injured the French fleet and beat down the tents of the army and exposed them to much suffering. The American army continued to advance and instead of approaching Newport by the Main road at the One Mile Corner where the British lines were strongly fortified with abattis and there were 10 principal redoubts dominated by that on Tonomy Hill, began to fortify Honeyman Hill on the 17<sup>th</sup> opened fire from their batteries constructed there and by the 15<sup>th</sup> (?) began a general bombardment of the defences of the town which was distressing to the troops bivouac in their forts and about the town. At this time, if there had been any co-operation by a substantial naval force on the water side the town would have been taken. But the French fleet which in the evening of the 20<sup>th</sup>(?) had returned to its anchoring ground off Point Judith in a somewhat disabled condition, on the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup> sailed to Boston. This caused one of those disagreements between the allies which the Marquis of Lafayette long remembered and which he was unable to prevent even by his ride to Boston. A captured inhabitant of Jamestown reported to the British in Newport "that the French fleet had been badly damaged by the late storm and its commander had expected on his return to find the harbor of Newport open and the town occupied by the Americans." The American officers protested against the withdrawal of the French as it seemed even with the shattered fleet that the fall of Newport and the end of the campaign could be soon accomplished. This protest made the French Minister Gerard in his dispatch to Count do Vergemeas (sp?) (to) exclaim "unfortunately this country is peopled with swelled heads." (Malheureusement ce pays est peoplé de têtes exaltées.)

## GENERAL SULLIVAN RETREATS

Then happened what happened so often in this revolutionary war to the discouragement of Washington and his generals. All but one of the British outworks had been carried and it was General Sullivan's intention to storm the main works. But recruits stimulated by the presence of the French fleet assumed that everything was at an end when it sailed for Boston and they faded away. Only 1400 effective troops remained, less in numbers than the enemy and General Sullivan determined to retreat to the fortified hills at the north end of the island and await the return of the French fleet from Boston.

In the evening 28<sup>th</sup> the retreat was commenced and by 2 o'clock that night the main body of the army was at Butts Hill. When the British opened fire on the American batteries opposite them in the early dawn of August 27(?) they were surprised that no response was made and they then learned of the American retreat.

To Captain Von Maisburg (sp?) in charge of the advance guard, General Pigot sitting in a carriage at the "Irish Redoubt" called out: "The enemy are in retreat. Follow them by the West road attack their rear and harass them as much as possible." This detachment composed of regiments of the Auspach and Bayreuth with field pieces pressed after the Americans on the West road and met the American force at the Redwood estate at the top of the hill near Lawton's Valley, and drove in the pickets, stormed with bayonet some heights occupied by a small detachment which retreated and they followed until they came upon the main body of the right wing of the American army beyond Turkey Hill upon what they called "Barrington Hill." Here they were checked and awaited reinforcements.

## VALOR OF COLORED TROOPS

In the meantime, the Light Infantry and the Grenadiers pressed forward by the East road until they struck the American line near where we are standing today.

The spirited attack at this point, the slaughter of so many of the enemy and the orderly retreat of the Americans when the reinforcements came up did much to contribute to the final success of the day. When the reinforced detachment which came by the East road finally struck the American army at Butts Hill the American left charged up on them and drove them back on the Quaker Hill, which was practically the situation of the battle on the American left wing at the close of the day.

It was on the American right wing, however, that the real battle took place. By 10 o'clock the British ships had come up the bay to join the land forces in the attempt to turn the American right. Between 10 o'clock and noon was the most desperate fighting. The Hessian troops charged again and again the American line with determined valor and again and again the Continental line, with the Colonial troops and the newly enlisted colored troops under Major Ward repulsed them with an equally determined valor. For nine hours after marching from Newport in the early dawn, the enemy fought down the slope at Anthony's Hill and, up the other slope, the Hessian columns and the British infantry twice charged upon the forces led by Major General Greene, consisting of the four brigades of Varnum, Cornell, Glover and Colonel Christopher Green. One of the Hessian officers has thus described the battle: "Some of our artillery also came up and at once opened fire against the enemy's guns. Hessians now rushed up the hill under heavy fire in order to take the redoubt. Here they experienced a more obstinate resistance than they expected. They found large bodies of troops behind the works and at its sides, chiefly wild looking men in their shirt sleeves and among them many negroes.' A third time with added ranks and the fury of despair the enemy rushed to the assault. On this final charge,

when the strength of the Americans were well nigh spent, two continental battalions were thrown forward by General Sullivan and at the critical moment the desperate charge with the bayonets of Colonel Jackson's regiment led by the gallant Lieutenant Colonel Henry B. Livingston won the day. The black regiment of slaves emancipated for the occasion under Colonel Christopher Green, (the hero of Red Bank) and Major Ward materially contributed to the victory, posted in a grove in the valley where they could not be dislodged. Eye witnesses have said that 60 were dead on one spot and 30 Hessians buried in one grave. Sometime ago searching the title deeds of property on the Portsmouth records, I came across a boundary of land near "Coal Mine" on a small brook, running into the bay near Corey's lane described as "Bloody Creek." It must have been here that was the greatest slaughter of the brave Hessians and here must have been where the black slaves earned their right to freedom by their valor. Thus for over a century the records have borne witness to the terrible slaughter of those brave Germans who at the command of their king had crossed the ocean and fought at had been trained to fight, in a cause which did not concern them. After the battle the Hessian colonel who led those charges applied for a change of command because he had dared not lead his regiment into battle again for fear they would shoot him for the great losses he had made them suffer. It was 4 o'clock that the British and Hessians were driven back still fighting to Turkey Hill and the Battle of Rhode Island was won. It was followed on the night of August 30<sup>th</sup> by the skillful withdrawal of all our troops to the main land, made necessary by the return of the British fleet with reinforcements. We have here the story of the Revolutionary war which was often repeated on other occasions. A divided country, for there were regiments of loyalists in this battle on the British side. Want of co-operation, between the Colonial forces and their French allies, which caused to Lafayette "more ????? and extreme alterations of hopes and disappointments" than he had before experienced." The want of training in the militia force, good for defense behind breastworks, Sullivan did not attempt with his undisciplined forces to assault the defences of Newport without a co-operating fleet. Yet with all its failings leavened by the Continental line "these wild looking men in their shirt sleeves could, behind their breastworks repulse again and again the best trained soldiers of Europe (as the regiment of Auspach all six feet high and their terrible losses witnessed) and finally in a desperate charge this same untrained militia drove the enemy in the open up Turkey Hill and remained masters of the battlefield.

#### THE LESSON: THE PROFIT

To hold up to the children of this age and to hold up to the numbers of industrious natives of every country on the globe who press to avail themselves of our citizenship, the priceless sacrifices that were made by our fathers for liberty and to inspire them to make equal sacrifices in peace or in war to preserve that liberty and to hand it down to their and our children is indeed a noble work. That work falls in a great degree upon the women of our country and upon our patriotic societies. The William Ellery Chapter and the Colonel William Barton Chapter of the D.A.R. in marking this scene of patriotic valor, and in recalling these glorious deeds done to secure independence and liberty are doing a work in which they should have the gratitude and support of the community. The patriotic daughters are showing a devotion to the country which is worthy of their patriotic fathers and make us believe that the republic which was thus founded and with the memories thus perpetuated shall stand forever.

#### THE UNVEILING

Just before he concluded his speaking he signaled to the young patriots who were to pull the ribbons of the flag to take their places which they did. Mr. Sheffield asked the people to move so as to face the

boulder. When all was ready the two representatives of the daughters were given the signal and the monument was exposed.

On the face of it is cut the following inscription: "In memory of those patriots who fought here in the first skirmish of the Battle of Rhode Island, August 29, 1778. Erected by the William Ellery and Colonel William Barton Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution."

As soon as the flag was drawn all the members of the chapters gathered around the monument and sang the Star Bangled Banner under the leadership of Miss Hazel Ward of Newport. What an inspiring scene it was. There was nothing then to remind one of the strife which had taken place on that spot so long ago, everything seemed so peaceful. The unveiling ended the exercise and after brief inspection of the monument the spectators started for home.

Most of the spectators were women, a greater part of whom were members of the officiating chapters. Of the chapters, Mrs. Thomas A. Lawton, who was chairman of the committee, and Mrs. J. Alton Barker, regent of the William Ellery Chapter, and Miss Phoebe Coggeshall, of the Colonel William Barton Chapter had general charge.

The two little Americans who had the honor of unveiling the monument were Miss Frances Thurston representing the Colonel William Barton Chapter and Master Harold Barker, representing the William Ellery Chapter. Theirs was an honor which comes but seldom to our boys and girls.