

## **“Holland’s Fort Humphrey Survives as Just a Footnote in History”**

By Ralph Dibble

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At a recent meeting, called to discuss plans for Erie County’s bicentennial celebration, someone mentioned the Town of Holland’s Fort Humphrey. The response consisted of an assortment of blank stares, mixed with a few quizzical expressions.

A little investigation shows that Fort Humphrey may be a nearly forgotten footnote in Erie County’s history. But it existed all right – a symbol of early Western New Yorkers’ fears after the British burning of Buffalo on December 30, 1813.

Furthermore, one area historian thinks other towns had counterparts to Fort Humphrey at that time, forts whose memory virtually disappeared into the mists of their past.

Miss Norma Fisher, former historian of the Town of Holland, says there is a persistent legend that the town’s early settlers could see the flames of burning Buffalo as they stood atop Vermont Hill.

She thinks this may be pure legend. But it’s certain that Holland’s early settlers quickly heard about Buffalo’s destruction and decided to take action in case the British and their Indian allies decided to push inland.

Holland’s first three settlers in 1807 were Arthur Humphrey, Abner Currier and Jared Scott. By 1813, they had been joined by other settlers, most of them from Vermont and some of them veterans of the Revolutionary War.

Most of the settlers lived along what was known as Humphrey Road, which ran from the present Route 16 up to the crest of what the former Vermonters had dubbed Vermont Hill, a name that still persists.

A marker along Route 16 commemorates Fort Humphrey, but there is no physical evidence of the old fortification and no one is even sure just where it stood.

Farmers used to talk about an old well they believed had been dug to provide water for the fortification. It must have been quite a project for its time.

Roy Nagle, Niagara Frontier historian, says records show it covered an acre of land and 600 to 700 logs were hewn for a barricade that extended three feet below ground level and close enough to provide good cover.

Loopholes were cut into the fortification to provide firing places for muskets and rifles.

The battle-wise veterans of the Revolutionary War considered it a strong enough fortification to repel a moderately sized force, as long as the attackers did not have artillery support.

An 1884 account refers to the Humphrey farm as the “Fort Farm.” Mr. Nagle’s records show that Arthur Humphrey was Holland’s first supervisor. A son, James M. Humphrey, was a leading Buffalo attorney, who served in Congress in the 1880’s.

Old Fort Humphrey’s only physical reminder is the historical plaque along the east side of Route 16, two miles north of the hamlet of Holland.

There aren’t even plaques to recall other town forts. But Miss Fisher is sure they existed.