

In 1926, in preparation for the 150th anniversary of the battles, New York State bought the Neilson farm and three other farms here to make a state historic preserve. The newer parts of the house were removed, and the original, one-room house was moved about 30 yards south.

In 1939, New York transferred the “battlefield park” to the National Park Service, which in 1959, returned the house to its original location. The Neilson House had returned home.

The Neilson House, Today

Saratoga National Historical Park presents the Neilson House as it was used during the Battles of Saratoga. It is furnished to simulate a working, mid-level headquarters in September and October of 1777.

As you stand near the house, or on the porch, consider what these walls have witnessed — the wonderings, the fears, the concerns, the struggles, and the hopes and dreams of a young family, and of an infant nation.



Why the Fenceposts?

As you approach the house and look around, you'll see a number of white marker posts in the ground. These posts show the location of fortified lines on the battlefield. By visually “connecting the dots,” you can imagine where the wooden walls once stood.

American lines are noted with blue tops on the white posts. British lines, visible later on the tour, have red tops.



Saratoga National Historical Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Neilson House

Home of John and Lydia Neilson,
and Mid-Level American Headquarters
during the Battles of Saratoga

“On the summit of the height, three fourths of a mile northwest of Bemis’s, [John Neilson] owned a clearing of a few acres when the war broke out, and he had ...a small dwelling... thereon. The dwelling ...is still there.”

—Benson Lossing, 1848

For more information

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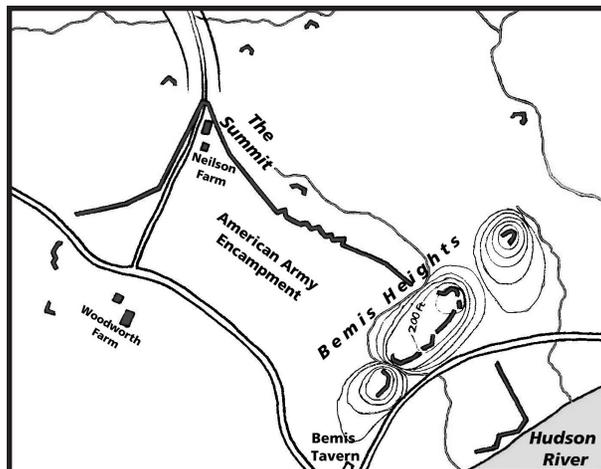
A young and ambitious John Neilson came to this area in 1772 from just outside Elizabeth, NJ. He went to work in the village of Stillwater, two miles south of this house, on the farm of Abner Quitterfield (behind you as you stand facing the front of the house). Only three years later, in 1775, he leased 150 acres of land here, and “married the boss’s daughter,” Lydia. Within a year or two, they built this small house on the lot he had leased.

But some time in 1777, they faced devastating news: a British army was invading southward from Canada into New York. Their route would take them basically through the Neilsons’ back yard.

Fortifying the High Ground

John took Lydia and their possessions to the safety of her parents’ home in Stillwater. He then exchanged his home for a tent, serving with his local militia regiment—some of whom would be encamped nearby.

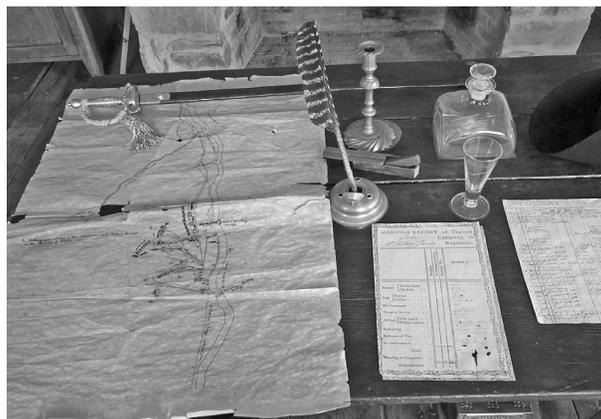
On September 12th, 1777, American army officers moved into his empty house. About 10 miles north, British forces steadily descended the Hudson River Valley as American forces hastily built menacing defenses $\frac{3}{4}$ mile east on Bemis Heights—a ridge of bluffs overlooking the Hudson. Cannons on these heights, and fortifications on the flood plain below, would command the river valley. The British choices were few: retreat, run the gauntlet (suicidal), or go around. Knowing the terrain would force the British to move



inland to the west, the Americans also built a long, “L” shaped fortified wall. From Bemis Heights, it ran northwest to a point just north of Neilson’s house, on what was then called “The Summit,” and then south and west another $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. Such a massive barrier would surely thwart the British plans—or so the Americans hoped.

Use of the House

The American army used this house as a mid-level headquarters. Ephraim Woodworth’s house, $\frac{1}{4}$ mile south of Neilson’s, was the main headquarters for the American army.



Who were the “strangers” staying in Neilson’s house? The only account from the time of the battles says General Enoch Poor of New Hampshire and General Benedict Arnold of Connecticut were quartered here. Several later accounts tell slightly different stories. They agree on Poor’s presence, but then say either General Ebenezer Learned of Massachusetts or Colonel Daniel Morgan of Virginia were here with Poor.

After the Battles

Fighting came within about one mile of this house, but never made it to the American lines. As Gates’ army moved on, though, they left behind a farm in near-ruins.

John and Lydia returned shortly after the army’s departure, and began restoring the farm. Their crops had been ravaged, and their fields torn up. John filed a damage claim in May 1778, in the amount of £100 (36 times a soldier’s annual salary), but he was never reimbursed.

The Neilsons continued with their family life as well, eventually having eight children. As the family grew, a small house would no longer do. Some time before 1830, they built a larger, two-story house that incorporated the original one.

By the 1890’s, they had pushed back the original part of the house and added a carriage barn, creating a larger “L” shaped building.