



---

## *The Weekly Historical Note*

By Nicolas Reynolds  
August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009


### *The Oneida Carrying Place*

In the old days traveling by land was a slow process. As a result, travelers often used boats, canoes, or other water vessels to swiftly get them around large tracts of land. In the Oneida homelands of New York and after centuries of commerce, a prominent trade route developed that connected the Atlantic coast with lake Ontario.

“For thousands of years the ancient trail that connects the Mohawk River and Wood Creek served as a vital link of people traveling between the Atlantic Ocean and Lake Ontario. Travelers used this well-worn route through Oneida Indian territory to carry trade goods and news...When Europeans arrived they called this trail the Oneida Carrying Place and inaugurated a significant period in American history—a period when nations fought for control of not only the Oneida Carrying Place, but the Mohawk Valley, the homelands of the Six Nations Confederacy, and the rich resources of North America as well.”

The six mile stretch of land between the Mohawk River and Wood Creek is known as a portage. A portage is where travelers carried their goods and canoes over ground in order to connect with another water route or to bypass waterfalls, rapids, or long detours.

Although its origins are not exactly clear, it is believed that sometime during the 1760s a small village called Oriska appeared near Fort Stanwix. Fort Stanwix had been destroyed and rebuilt over the years by the British and French, but most recently was built near the conclusion of the Seven Years War (a.k.a. the French and Indian War). Both Fort Stanwix and Oriska were located at the Oneida Carrying Place Portage. The villagers of Oriska profited from travelers by “selling foodstuffs, hauling goods over the portage, and even trading a bit to supplement their income.” From time to time, visitors documented the village on their periodic visits. One person noted that the village had “Seven Indian Huts,” and it is believed that around ninety people lived there, half of which were Oneida.



---



Fort Stanwix was an important strategic location throughout the American Revolution and was located at the portage between Wood Creek and the Mohawk River. The village of Oriska was close to the Fort and was destroyed by Iroquois that fought alongside the British during the war.

During the American Revolution the Oneida fought alongside the American Colonists in several important battles. In 1777 the British launched St. Leger's campaign, a military campaign that failed in part due to efforts of the Oneida warriors. As a result, Iroquois that had been fighting alongside the British retaliated and raided Oriska. "With no men present to defend the castle, women, children, and the elderly fled to the woods. According to [Daniel] Claus, the pro-British Indians 'burnt their houses, destroyed their [fields], crops, [and] killed and carried away their Cattle.'"

"As the Oneidas sifted through ashes and charred remains looking for personal valuables that might have survived, they grew increasingly angry. Not only had they endured an invasion and lost the lives of some of their kin, but now this act of sheer vindictiveness had converted dozens of them into homeless and propertyless refugees." For the Oneida of Oriska, and the local Colonists that suffered from the battles waged in 1777, the resolve to continue to fight only deepened.

**Sources:**

Image: <http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/e-resources/ebooks/records/efh4968.html>

(After opening the page, click "View PDF Version.").

Glatthaar, Joseph T. and James Kirby Martin, *Forgotten Allies: The Oneida Indians and the American Revolution*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 48-49, 176-177.