



**HISTORICAL
ARCHAEOLOGY
OF THE
REVOLUTIONARY
WAR ENCAMPMENTS
OF
WASHINGTON'S ARMY**

EDITED BY
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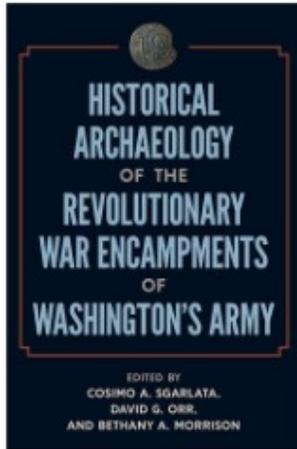
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Historical Archaeology of the Revolutionary War Encampments of Washington's Army

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Reviewed by Daniel J. Joyce, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and University of Wisconsin-Parkside.

This is a long overdue book. Battlefield or conflict archaeology is only about 40 years old and in recent years has started to look at military encampments. While battlefield archaeology can enlighten and clarify the happenings of a brief moment in time, encampments can tell us more about the life and work of soldiering while preparing for that momentary battle. The material remains left as evidence of their having been in a winter camp for up to six months tells us much about the everyday lives of everyday soldiers. They were not the great men; they were the anonymous soldiers of our revolutionary army.

The book is the result of a Society for American Archaeology meeting joint session in 2011. It is an interdisciplinary look at several encampments of the American Revolution. We all “know” that the British were “stupid” and walked shoulder to shoulder into enemy fire; how horrifically hard and to the point of death life was at Valley Forge in the winter of 1777–78; and how the Americans hid behind trees and killed their enemy. What we do not know is that these myths are untrue. Mythology about the American Revolution was being written before it even ended. It is old and the result of the victors telling the story. Historians have been sorting this out for generations, and now archaeologists are here to fill in the gaps in that history. The sad truth is that most Americans know little about the American Revolution. It is also sad that until recently archaeologists knew little as well due to a lack of attention. Four chapters of the book are about archaeology of that American icon Valley Forge, and another three chapters are about encampments in Connecticut. The book itself is largely archaeology, but there are also chapters on experimental archaeology, ethnohistory, and a combination of deep historical research using maps and ground truthing via archaeology.

The preface is written by the late David Starbuck, a military archaeologist largely of the French and Indian War. His insights into conflict archaeology are deep and his points well made. It is not to be missed. Next, in the introduction is a detailed summary of each upcoming chapter to whet one’s appetite.

Chapter 1 (Catts and Balicki) starts with locating the target area of the firing range at Valley Forge. A well thought-out metal detector survey strategy reveals the impact area and indicates that, despite a shortage of ammunition, the soldiers at Valley Forge practiced with their muskets and rifles as von Steuben suggested. At Valley Forge, the Continental army became a real army under von Steuben's training and drill. Finding the range is a metaphor for our army becoming a professional one that could take on the vaulted British Army head-to-head.

Chapter 2 (Blondino) looks at the upper class at Valley Forge via George Washington's log cabin dining (and conference) room. The structure is long gone; only the stone Pott's farmhouse (Washington's headquarters) still stands. Other outbuildings are gone as well. Using ground penetrating radar and archaeology, the cabin was located and gives us a look at the accommodations of the highest class at Valley Forge.

In chapter 3 (West-Rosenthal), the author investigates a brigade camp at Valley Forge and finds out that camp life was more complicated than one thinks. A camp kitchen area reveals many artifacts and details of life camp life. There is evidence of weapons, clothing, and equipment, as well as the manufacture and repair of artifacts. Pewter uniform buttons with "USA" on them were cast on-site too. Ammunition caliber speaks to the types of weapons on-site, while the discard of 30 bayonets indicates a weapons turnover and a standardization of calibers when French alliance weapons became more available. Very telling are the number of forbidden dice made from flattened musket balls.

Chapter 4 (Steele, Campana, and Orr) is the last about Valley Forge and the most detailed. Here is archaeology at its best, showing a broad range of activities and a camp that was extensive and complex. Weapon, uniform, and equipment repair is obvious. British buttons were found, indicating the re-tailoring of captured British uniforms, a practice previously referred to in historic texts only. Now there is hard evidence. The expected alcohol bottles were excavated, as well as faunal remains of beef and pork. This is a better diet than starving, even if the beef was from old animals. Those remains were disposed of in a sanitary manner, as ordered by Washington, to keep disease down. Analyzing features and their artifacts shows that many activities took place in the "quiet" winter camp. An interesting note is that few of the ubiquitous pipes were found. Perhaps tobacco was in shorter supply than food.

Chapter 5 (Grubel) recounts an experimental archaeology project during which five huts were constructed at Morristown, New Jersey. Historical records were located indicating which tools were issued to the First and Second Pennsylvania Brigades. Using these tools and knowledge about woodworking at the time, the researchers built an authentic cabin. The author found that this process was difficult, and the results served to correct unchallenged conjecture about building huts at a winter camp.

Chapter 6 (Morrison and Sgarlata) documents excavations at a relatively undisturbed camp in Connecticut. Initially on private land, after four seasons of archaeological work the camp is now protected. This endeavor is a wonderful

example of successfully working with landowners and preserving a historic site. Too many sites of this period are not protected and are being damaged by development. Once again, metal detectors were used to initially locate sites within a large area. On-site, partially standing chimneys are visible after almost 250 years. Again, this chapter provided more details of camp life, camp layout, cabin construction, and the like.

Chapter 7 (Weinstein, Hassan, and Mauro) is an ethnohistorical account of the contributions of women, people of African descent, and American Indians at the camps. Little or only briefly discussed in traditional histories, they are an important part of the story of the American Revolution. But how can we see them archaeologically? Here the authors use pension records to find out more about these individuals' experiences during the war and personalize the otherwise sometimes sterile history of the revolution. It is an important and well-addressed issue.

Chapter 8 (Harper) is history and archaeology combined. It explores Rochambeau's French Expeditionary Force's route using French engineer maps as an initial guide to the force's one-night camps and defines how they could be identified archaeologically. The work showed that the maps are unerringly accurate, and several camps were identified by metal detector and when tested were shown to be from the French Expeditionary Force.

Chapter 9 (Cruson) takes us back to Connecticut for the excavation of two huts. These were shown to have been constructed differently. The limitations of the tools used, combined with prior hut-building experience, local tradition, and the landscape, influenced the construction. These two different huts are postulated to have belonged to two different brigades, one of Canadian volunteers and one from New Hampshire. It is postulated that this may be the origin of differences in hut form.

In his conclusion, Sgarlata reviews the chapters and their findings but more importantly sees this research as the beginning of a new perspective that should be followed further. Here, he contends, there are new "threads of research and methodological perspectives that should be pursued further." He notes that there is a paucity of resources, with many being threatened. This is bottom-up archaeology concentrating largely on the anonymous people who founded our nation. One of the best illustrations of many of the chapters is how useful metal detectors can be in identifying and surveying potential site areas more quickly and efficiently than traditional shovel tests, which have been shown to be wholly inadequate when tested side by side. Metal detectors are a must for working on large historical sites.

The book is well edited and flows easily from one chapter to another. My real criticism is the cost. At \$100, it is too costly for many private libraries. As usual, there are not enough illustrations and large period maps reduced to half a page are barely legible. There are some errors in the narratives, but they are minor and do not affect the results. All in all, the book is captivating, well written, and deftly edited and should be on the bookshelf of those interested in the American Revolution.