



Fairfield Museum

EXPLORE *the past*, IMAGINE *the future*
370 Beach Road, Fairfield, CT | 203-259-1598
www.fairfieldhistory.org

American Revolution & Colonial Life Programs **Pre and Post Lesson Plans & Activities**

The Battle of Ridgefield: April 27, 1777

- The Battle of Ridgefield was **the only inland battle fought in Connecticut** during the Revolutionary War.
- **Captain Benedict Arnold** was the main commander for the battle as the British marched upon a weak Colonial Army. Arnold's defenses kept the British at bay until the larger army could come later.
- **Brigadier General Gold Selleck Silliman of Fairfield** was also involved in the battle. In the primary source letter below, he sends word to General Wooster that they need reinforcements.
- **Silliman's 2nd wife, Mary Silliman**, writes to her parents after the battle, relieved that her husband and son were unharmed. Although her parents are only a few towns away, she is unable to travel the distance.
- Another primary source is a silhouette of **Lieutenant Colonel Abraham Gould of Fairfield**, who died during the battle.

At the Fairfield Museum:

- Students will view a painted portrait of Mary Silliman in the galleries.
- Students will see the grave marker for General Gold Selleck Silliman, his first wife, and a few of his children.
- Students will also see the grave marker of Lieutenant Colonel Abraham Gould.



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A brief synopsis – The Battle of Fairfield:

General Tryon of the British army thought that he would be warmly received by the people of Ridgefield after taking out a Colonial supply post just days earlier. Tryon, to his dismay, learned that the town was being barricaded by none other than **General Benedict Arnold**. Arnold set up man made defenses throughout the town hoping to slow down Tryon's army in retreat. Arnold was successful as Tryon's army continued to be harassed by General Wooten at the back and his own from the front. Wooten continued to attack and take prisoners in the wooded area before Ridgefield until he was killed five days after being shot in an attack.

Arnold's continued defense of the village was destroyed shortly thereafter as the British pummeled the city with their larger numbers and artillery. Arnold would retreat on horse only for his horse to be shot nine times and it fell on top of him in the street. Arnold shot an oncoming soldier before getting out from under his horse and retreated. Tryon's army was successful until a massive Colonial Army marched in and destroyed what was left of the occupying British Army. Tryon was defeated and the British would never again attack inland in Connecticut.

Twelve American soldiers died and more were wounded. British casualties were far fewer. Arnold would be known more for his actions later in the war but his stand at Ridgefield was important to the future of American soldiers in Connecticut. Ridgefield still celebrates and remembers the history of the battle and even has a British cannon ball still embedded in the Keeler Tavern preserved.

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Additional Resources:

Teaching with Primary Sources – Teacher Guide

<https://www.fairfieldhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/TeachingwithPrimarySources.pdf>

Keeler Tavern Museum, Ridgefield, CT

<http://www.keelertavernmuseum.org/history-research/battle-of-ridgefield/>

CT History: Battle of Ridgefield

<https://connecticuthistory.org/battle-at-ridgefield-today-in-history/>

About the Keeler Tavern

<http://chambersarchitects.com/blog/keeler-tavern-battle-ridgefield-ct/>



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Silliman to Wooster Letter Transcription

Fairfield April 25th 1777

Honrd Sir,

We are alarmed by [24?] ships off Compo Point. 40 or 50 boats are manned in order to land a Number unknown. We are in great Necessity of help, if you can afford us any assistance, pray send forward as fast as possible.

Immediate help may be of Great Service, I hope Sir you will think the Matter of such Importance as to exert your Power and Vigilance for our Salvation. This moment Mr. Ripley informs me that 200 or 300 are actually landed at Compo hill. Pray Sir, afford us your Presence & Assistance without Delay. I am Sir your most obedient humble Servant,

G. S. Silliman, Brigd Gen

Major Gen. Wooster,

Note. Written on the back of the letter recd.-[Sine] sealing this. Another Mefsenger comes from Compo & says that a 1000 men are landed & that the boats are constantly going & coming.

G..S.. Silliman, Brigd Gen

Primary Source from the Fairfield Museum's Collections
MS 47, Silliman Family Papers

Fairfield April 25th 1777 —

Hon^d Sir,

We are alarmed by 2^d Ships off Compo Point 40 or 50 boats are manned in order to land a Number unknown, We are in great Necessity of help, if You can afford us any Assistance, pray send forward as fast as possible, Immediate help may be of Great service, hope Sir, You will think the Matter of such Importance as to exert your Power & Vigilance for our Salvation, this Moment Mr Ripley informs us that 200 or 300 are actually landed at Compo hill, Pray Sir, afford us Your Presence & Assistance without ^{the least} Delay, I am Sir your most obedient humble Servant,

Major Gen^l Wooster.

G: S: Silliman, Brig^d Gen^l

I am your very humble servant
David Wooster, Major Gen^l
to Gen^l Wooster.

Note, Written on the back of the letter recd. —

Since sealing this, Another Messenger comes from Compo & says that a 1000 Men are landed & that the boats are constantly going & coming

G: S: Silliman, Brig^d Gen^l

True Copy.

Sir I apprehend ~~I apprehend~~ it best you forward this immediately to the Governor, as there may be greater Danger from the western Forces than the ^{Force} here, You are desired to order your Brigade to hold themselves in Readiness to march at a Minutes Warning



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Letter from Mary Silliman to her Parents, May 1, 1777

Fairfield, May 1 - Rejoice and Bless God with me, my dear Parents ... for my dear Husband and dear Son live, and not a hair of their heads have been touched by any of the Instruments of death they have been surrounded with, and we are all once more at our own house and well, while others are mourning over their dead. Yesterday Abraham Gold was buried here - a solemn scene!

O my dear parents I see no prospect of coming to see you at present. I long to hear from you. Josie and John have done everything for my comfort that dear children would do in our plight. They with Billy send their duty and love. Pray unto the next Post after you receive this. I am very well though have been much fatigued ... Your very affectionate and dutiful daughter, Mary Silliman

Stratford Ferry Milford Side Apr. 29, 1777

P.S. Our Cause is dearer than all other engagements

My dear Hon^d Parents,

As many have done before us, it now comes to our turn to flee before our Enemies. The 25th Inst intelligence came to my dear Partner that a formidable Fleet were making this way just as he set down to dinner ^(at head quarters in Town) from the westward. he went up on an eminence and saw them close in with the Shore against the place called Rumfo about two miles from Mr. Ripleys. he immediately sent orders to his own Reg^t, and his orders to the Generals, Wardsworth and Woolcoat to lend him what assistance they could.

About 5 o'clock P.M. the enemy landed, before any force could be collected to oppose them. Mr. Silliman sent forward all he could get under the command of Col^l. Semmon and ran home to prepare to go him self. got home about 10 o'clock P.M. had just laid him down to get a moments rest when he was called by express, and informed that the enemy drove our people; he went to their assistance immediately, and I have not seen him since. about 7 in the same morning, he sent Drille home to tell

Primary Source from the Fairfield Museum's Collections
MS 47, Silliman Family Papers



This silhouette portrait of Lt. Col. Abraham Gould of Fairfield was painted just seventeen days before he was killed at the Battle of Ridgefield, on April 27, 1777.

Gould was brought back to Fairfield laid over his horse. His grave is marked in the Old Burying Ground.

Primary Source from the Fairfield Museum's Collections
Ink Silhouette Portrait of Abraham Gould, 1777
Attributed to Frederick Chapman
Gift of Annie B. Jennings

The Battle of Ridgefield by *Keith M. Jones*

At the outbreak of Revolution, Ridgefield, Connecticut consisted of only about fifty dwellings, for most of the community's 1,700 residents were scattered in outlying farms that dotted twenty-three square miles. On April 27, 1777, the full fury of Revolution arrived at the head of Town Street, as the village became host to Connecticut's only inland battle of the eight-year war.

Shortly before noon, American Generals Benedict Arnold and Gold Selleck Silliman (**of Fairfield**) arrived with about five hundred men – hastily mustered Fairfield County militia – old men and patriotic farm boys. They were greeted by Colonel Philip Burr Bradley and a handful of Continental troops of his Ridgefield-based 5th Connecticut Line, together with a company of Continentals from nearby Salem, New York under Captain Samuel Lawrence, plus a few dozen raw recruits raised by Captain Ebenezer Jones of the recently formed 1st Ridgefield Militia.

Under Arnold's command the little army erected a barricade of timbers, carts, carriages, stones and earth at the northern end of Town Street and waited for the British column advancing southward from Danbury. After burning the Colonial supply depot in nearby Danbury, 1,900 British troops under **General William Tryon** were in trouble. Expecting much of the countryside to rise up in support of the Crown, Tryon had two days earlier disembarked 1,500 handpicked regulars, a six-piece artillery unit, and a small mounted contingent of resplendently-garbed elite mounted dragoons from a fleet of 26 ships.

Tryon's force was augmented by a 300-man regiment of Loyalist irregulars, drawn from Long Island and Fairfield County, known as the Prince of Wales Provincial Volunteers. Because he truly believed that his army would be warmly received if it refrained from looting and pillage, Tryon excluded the unruly Hessian mercenaries from his expedition.

But General Tryon had miscalculated! Like a swarm of angry hornets, **American forces were closing on Danbury from all directions**. Twelve hundred Continentals under General McDougall were marching from Peekskill. Four Hundred and seventy-strong, the Dutchess County New York militia under Colonel Ludington was in motion, and contingents from as far as Litchfield, Wallingford and New Haven were also on the way. What's more, Colonel Jedidiah Huntington with fifty Continentals, and Major Nehemiah Beardsley with 150 men of the 16th Connecticut Militia regiment lurked in the Danbury hills. Worst of all, **Tryon learned that Major General David Wooster, together with Arnold and Silliman, was at Bethel in his rear with another 700 militia**.

At 2:00am in the morning of April 27th, Tryon roused his troops and began retreat to the awaiting ships at Compo Beach.

To avoid Wooster's force, the British army veered south from Danbury, marched through Ridgebury, and headed for Ridgefield. Hoping to delay Tryon until overwhelming reinforcements arrived, Wooster split his force, sending the main body with Arnold and Silliman to Ridgefield, while personally harassing the British rear with the remainder. Collectively the three engagements that followed became known as the **Battle of Ridgefield**. With the element of surprise, Wooster swooped out the woods about three miles north of Ridgefield and crashed into Tryon's rear guard as it paused briefly for breakfast. Killing at least two redcoats, Wooster took about fifteen prisoners in this first engagement, then vanished back into the trees.

An hour later, Wooster struck again, but this time the British were ready, having positioned three artillery pieces in the rear. Rallying his men, the 67-year-old David Wooster was mortally wounded about two miles from Ridgefield center (a marker still graces the site) and his inexperienced militia dissolved in confusion. Wooster died five days later in Danbury, but his sacrifice had purchased precious time for Arnold to prepare a defensive position at Ridgefield.

Fife and drum blaring, colors rippling in the breeze, and bayonets gleaming, the British Column arrived in martial splendor at the base of Arnold's barricade sometime after noon. Following an artillery barrage of the

barricade, Tryon dispatched flanking parties to test both sides of the American position. Having anticipated this move, General Silliman posted forces at either flank that blunted these initial thrusts.

Outnumbering the Patriots by more than three to one, Tryon advanced on all three fronts, hurling a 600-man column under covering artillery fire against the barricade itself. Superior numbers and disciplined tactics carried the day for the Crown forces, but not without cost – at least sixteen were killed and thirty wounded. After breaching the barricade and smashing both flanks, the British pursued their American adversary in a running battle the length of Town Street, and seized the town.

With twelve dead and double that number wounded, the Americans withdrew under Benedict Arnold's personal direction. Positioned between his men and the advancing enemy, the heroic Arnold was fired upon by an entire platoon of redcoats. Hit by nine separate musket balls, his horse collapsed, pinning the General to the ground.

After dispatching an advancing soldier (some reports say two), by pistol, Arnold worked free of the unfortunate horse and fled to a pre-arranged rendezvous where the next day he was again unhorsed in combat. After encamping for the night just south of the village, the British departed next morning, leaving six houses and the Episcopal Church (a Patriot supply depot) in flames. Although Tryon's Danbury raid and Ridgefield action were clear British successes, the retreat was a near thing, for within six hours thousands of American soldiers poured into the area. **Never again would the British mount an inland expedition in Connecticut.**