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## Book Reviews

**"THE MOST ADVANTAGEOUS SITUATION IN THE HIGHLANDS": AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY OF FORT MONTGOMERY STATE HISTORIC SITE**, edited by Charles L. Fisher, 2004, New York State Museum, Cultural Resource Survey Program Series No. 2, Albany, 182 pages, \$24.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Christopher T. Espenshade

Fort Montgomery in Orange County, New York, played an important role in the Revolutionary War. Charles Fisher and many contributors—Gregory Smith, Lois Feister, Nancy Davis, Christina Rieth, Jennifer Bollen, Beth Horton, J. Scott Cardinal, and Lihau Whelan—likewise played an important role in completing the analysis and reporting of archaeological work at the fort from 1910–1971. The report is well organized, well written, and well illustrated. It represents a valuable contribution to the literature of Revolutionary War archaeology.

Fort Montgomery was occupied by American troops from early 1776 to October 1777, and briefly by British troops in October 1777. The fort sat high on a bluff overlooking the confluence of the Hudson River and Popolopen Creek, was constructed to control river traffic, and included a boom and chain across the Hudson. The extensive earthwork featured a grand battery of six 32-pounder cannons, as well as other smaller batteries and redoubts. The fort was well protected on its backside by low, marshy ground. Although ultimately lost to the British, the fort played a key role in delaying the British advance and in changing the tide of the war.

The report includes: an introductory chapter; a discussion of how the various areas were excavated and analyzed; area-specific chapters on the Main Barracks, the L-shaped Barracks, the Storehouse, the North Redoubt, the Grand Battery, the Bakehouse, the Guardhouse, the Soldier's Necessary, and the Powder Magazine; chapters on the recovered artifacts and the zooarchaeological material; and a final summary. The appendices include a discussion of the artifact distribution mapping, and artifact summary tables by functional groups and excavation area.

The volume is well illustrated, with a nice combination of historic maps, field drawings, and distribution maps. The artifacts have

apparently undergone electrolysis and are clean and recognizable. A few of the artifact plates have illegible scales, but that is an acceptable fault given the excavation and publication record of Fort Montgomery. The excellent field photographs and drawings by John Mead attest to the quality of his fieldwork.

A minor weakness of the report is the first two chapters. The introduction quickly jumps past the natural and cultural setting of Fort Montgomery, and assumes that all readers have a deep knowledge of the Revolutionary War. The location map is overly generalized, and does not place the fort relative to major troop movements, battles, and cantonments. Likewise, throughout the report, the Fort Montgomery findings are compared with those from other Revolutionary War sites, without providing a time span and location for those sites. However, for most users of this volume, this will not be a problem.

In each of the excavated area chapters, the excavation history, structural remains (if present), and recovered artifacts are presented, and the overall data are interpreted. The area-by-area presentation is a sensible approach. It is easy to imagine teaching a course in military archaeology by walking students through the site using this volume as a guide. Readers can maintain their spatial orientation by referring to the highlighted location on the 1776 map provided with most chapters. Rather than having to flip back to original figure, the reader knows immediately, for example, where the storehouse stood.

The conclusion/summary section of the report is not extensive, but key findings and inferences are identified. These key conclusions include:

- Fort Montgomery "was planned and constructed to be a major, permanent fortification" (p. 155);
- "The barracks were kept clean and trash removed to specific places where it was buried on a daily basis along with butchering waste" (p. 155);
- Status differences between the officers and enlisted men were obvious in architecture and in artifacts linked to foodways;
- There was "an absence of a standard weapon within the fort" (p. 156).

The strength of the Fort Montgomery report is the extensiveness of the excavations and analyses, coupled with a strong archival

record. Archaeological investigations are all too frequently hindered by Section 106 defined project areas, or by the limited capabilities of a university field school over a few seasons. Even when Revolutionary War sites are examined, it is rare to get a full look at diverse site features/areas. The Fort Montgomery study offers such comprehensiveness.

The recent publications of the New York State Museum underline their commitment to analyze and publish earlier research efforts. The Museum is to be commended for their overall efforts. The Fort Montgomery volume presents important information that otherwise would never have been known to our discipline. I strongly recommend the volume for military sites archaeologists and students of the Revolutionary War.

Chris Espenshade holds an MA in anthropology from the University of Florida, and has over 20 years of experience in the archaeology of the eastern U.S. His specialties include military archaeology, sites of the African diaspora, and ceramic technology. Chris serves as Principal Investigator and branch manager of the North Carolina office of New South Associates.

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