



Monument  
*Major Nicholas Stoner*  
*Dedicated August 21, 1929*  
Caroga Recreation Park  
Caroga Lake, N.Y.



# *PROGRAM*

*Dedication of a Monument  
to Major Nicholas Stoner  
at Caroga Recreation Park  
— August 21st, 1929 —*

Music by Elks Band, Gloversville, N. Y.

## *Chairman*

Asa B. Peake, Chairman Board of Supervisors of Fulton County

## *Invocation*

Rev. Walter Shaver, Pastor M. E. Church, North Bush-Caroga

## *Unveiling of Monument*

by Henry Stoner Gage, 3rd and Helen Gage  
Descendants of Major Stoner in the sixth generation

Salute by the Spirit of '76

Address by Dr. Alexander C. Flick, State Historian

Salute by Boy Scouts of Fulton County

Acceptance of care of Monument on behalf of the town of Caroga  
Hon. Eberly Hutchinson

## *Singing*

America - Audience

## *Benediction*

Rev. Peter Winkelman, Pastor St. Barbara's Chapel, Caroga Lake



# Major Nicholas Stoner

Paper read before the Johnstown Historical Society by Cyrus Durey

EVERY large or small community, both of civilized and barbarous men, has its traditional heroes. The memories of some one person or other, who in his time stood out sharply from his fellows, is preserved by them in tradition or by the written word, often with fantastic embellishments of his person or his acts. Among them he becomes a demigod, fitted for worship by rude people or for emulation by others. The gods of the ancient world originated thus. Reverence for the past and its principal actors who, in the passage of time, became heroic figures to posterity is, therefore, universal.

We Americans revere the historic Washington, and can hardly realize that he possessed human frailties. We Fulton County people look back on Sir William Johnson in much the same way. The men and women who, under the direction and chaperonage of Johnson, commenced the labor of converting the savage wilderness into what is now Fulton county with its cities, villages, farms and homes, are collectively remembered with a kindred respect, their foibles or shortcomings forgotten. Few of these men stand out from the rest with clarity.

Among those who do, is Major Nicholas Stoner, a pioneer's son, a patriot soldier in his youth and middle age, and a lifelong hunter and trapper. The story of his life, stretching over more than ninety years, seemed worthy of preservation to "Simms," the historian of the Mohawk Valley, and he preserved it in the "Trappers of New York." Stoner was born on the Jersey seacoast, and brought here as a youngster by his father, who settled at Broadalbin under Johnson's patronage several years before the war and was probably the first settler in that town.

## Had Deadly Accuracy

The boy learned when half-grown to shoot with deadly accuracy the wild animals that abounded in the surrounding forests so that the family might eat, while the land was being cleared and crops grown, for in those days supplies could not be imported and food must be procured in the woods. Besides he did his share of the clearing and seeding and cropping.

After the war of the Revolution had opened and the fear of the Indians forced the straggling settlers like the Stoners to gather around the protecting forts of Mayfield and Johnstown, the Stoners going to the latter place, all three, the father and the two sons, Nicholas but fifteen years old, enlisted in the army in 1777 and served during the war. Nicholas was always eager to par-

ticipate in any activity within reach and soon passed from the position of drummer boy to which he had been assigned, into the ranks. He was with Arnold at the battle of Saratoga when the General took a bit in his teeth and made his fight without orders, and also at Oriskany. He was in the Rhode Island Campaign, at Valley Forge, at the capture of Major Andre at West Point, and at Yorktown.

The war being about to close, the father returned a few months in advance of the boys, and having taken his wife on to a vacant farm, the Quilhot farm at Albany Bush, was killed and scalped by the Indians there, leaving to the boys a justifiable hatred of the Indian and his barbarous cruelty.

When Nicholas returned (he was Nick to everybody), he soon married the girl he left behind when he went to war, Anna Mason, of Johnstown, and started into pioneering work as his father had done before him. The courtship of the Stoners has been beautifully related by Chambers in his "Little Red Foot." He purchased from the State, which had confiscated the Johnson lands, a hundred acres of wilderness, now the Fulton County Poor Farm. But Stoner's expertness with the gun and the ease with which he could track the wilderness and capture its wild animals lured him into hunting and trapping the beaver and the otter, the sale of which furs made that occupation more profitable as well as more congenial than clearing and farming the land.

He selected for his field the string of lakes from Caroga to Piseco, which territory was Indian land until its sale by the state in 1794. Stoner sold the place he had first bought that he might be nearer his trapping route, built a cabin in what is now the Town of Caroga, on fifty acres of land just east of the John Gage place, where his daughter, Mary, who married William Mills, was born. After marriage, she lived the rest of her life at the old Mills place on the Peck Creek. Besides this daughter and another who died young, he had four sons. Stoner lived there until 1794, when he built a house on the Glasgow road near Pines Rest.

The proof of Stoner's occupancy of the Pines Rest Cabin comes from the official description of the highway leading to Stratford, which in the Caughnewaga district records reads: "Commencing at the house of Reuben Brookins, (now the house of Stephen Fuller), and running thence northwesterly across lot No. 56, following the old Indian path past the house of Nicholas Stoner." This record was in 1796. Later, about 1820, he



purchased the farm at Caroga Lake, already cleared by James McClelland (now occupied by the Vrooman Hotel, numerous cottages and the Mrs. Willett place and there lived until 1838, when he sold the property for hotel purposes. The proposed monument will be but a few rods away and will overlook Stoner's home of forty years. This sesquicentennial year of the crushing of the Six Nations by General Sullivan is an appropriate time for the erection of a monument to this man. The State Department of Education, recognizing this fact, is aiding in the expense.

During all of these years he had been an active trapper and a hunter of those wild animals on which there was a bounty, except for the interval of three years which he spent in the army during the War of 1812.

When the war opened, he was in the militia in which General Dodge, of Johnstown, was a general, enlisted, and was at Sackett's Harbor and at Plattsburgh. He was officially the Drum Major but more often was Dodge's Chief of Scouts. He was active in the militia before and after that war, being an officer, and participated in every general training day in Montgomery and often in neighboring counties. He was the personal friend of General Dodge, of Daniel Cady and General Cochrane as well as J. Fennimore Cooper, who, it is believed, took him as the original Leather Stocking in his works. He and Green White, a noted Otsego County trapper, were often partners in trapping.

In addition to his hunting and trapping, he did the work of the ordinary backwoods farmer and also filled many minor offices of the town and county.

He was Deputy Sheriff, Constable, Highway Commissioner and Assessor of the Town of Bleecker until it was divided and the part in which he lived became the Town of Caroga, when we find him serving that Town in the same capacities.

His morals were those of the time. He was a fun-loving person enjoying a practical joke and yet had a dignified personality. Deception was outside his understanding. He liked folks, men and women, and yet elected to spend a good part of his life in the solitudes of the woods. What he considered right he aggressively did, whether approved or not by anyone else.

His dramatic killing of his father's Indian murderer is intensely interesting. He was in Johnstown on one of his infrequent visits. On entering the public room of the inn kept by Von Clair, the present home of County Clerk Cross, he found several Indian hunters who had come down from the wilderness to dispose of their furs and had become intoxicated, having completed their sales and received their money. They were boasting, each to the other of his own prowess, as Indians when intoxicated always will, and as men of other races often do. One was pointing to his tomahawk handle marked with notches and describing what each notch represented. "And this," he said in the Mohawk tongue, which Stoner spoke with ease, "is for old Henry Stoner." As the fact reached Nick's understanding that his father's murderer stood before him boasting in his intoxication of that murder, he in righteous indignation grabbed the red-hot andiron from the fireplace and struck the murderer with it, without doubt causing his death, although the body was removed by the other Indians.

At the time this act was held to be praiseworthy. He was not called to account for it by the law, although lodged in jail for a few hours, when he was released by the sheriff on demand of the entire town, voiced at the front door of the jail. Today such an act would be condemned. But the horrors of Indian warfare were still a vivid memory to all and the Old Testament law of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" was often the rule of conduct. Individual acts frequently avenged individual wrongs instead of awaiting the slow-moving law. Such has been the fact in all new countries.

Stoner's habits were those of the time, incredibly industrious through life, with only an occasional day at militia training, at court or market trips to Johnstown, when tradition says that the old hero considerably enjoyed stimulants, as custom permitted when meeting his friends and old companions in arms, which only happened on these rare occasions.

In his old age he built a house at Newkirk, where Garrett A. Newkirk had established a busy community and there he spent the last half dozen years of his life, enjoying a pension from the country for his services in two wars and delighting, as all old folks do, in recounting stories of his youth and middle age, when he had been extraordinarily active.

All those who knew him liked him, admired him and tried to make his last days pleasant. When he died in 1853, his funeral was held at Johnstown and the procession which followed him to his grave in the Kingsborough cemetery, was said to be the largest procession that the county had seen up to that time.

He was buried there and not in Caroga, to give every one the opportunity to pay their last respects to one of the last surviving soldiers of the Revolutionary War resident in the county, and to this personally attractive old pioneer and woodsman, who belonged to the entire county and not to Caroga alone.

He was one of the many thousands who made the country. The names of most of them have been long forgotten. His memory now stands as one of them, typical of the rest but remembered because the salient points of his life were recorded in book form and he was perhaps a little more intelligent, a little more active, and a little more adventurous than the rest, knowing no fear. The story of his life was interesting enough to give "Simms's" book a phenomenal sale for those days, running into three editions. Since that time the community has accepted him and his work as indicative of the life in this section when America was in the making.

The generations succeeding the publication of the book have had a glimpse of that life through it, and we, especially of this town of which he was one of the first, if not the first white resident, will continue to honor him with reverence and appreciation and in doing so will honor the memory of those others now nearly forgotten who did their share in the making of America.

The erection of a lasting monument, now under way, will not magnify his deeds or those others who served their country in its making, but will recall them to coming generations and point to emulation by posterity in the different environments of today and of the future.