

May 18
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THE BATTLE OF TURNERS FALLS

Massasoit, chief of the Wampanoags, who for forty years had been a steadfast friend and ally of the Pilgrims, died about 1661, leaving two sons, Wamsutta and Metacom, known to the English as Alexander and Philip. Alexander succeeded his father as head of the tribe but soon came to an untimely death for which Philip accused the English of being responsible. He long sought an opportunity to avenge his brother's death but had been chief thirteen years before his plans were completed.

In June, 1675, with his forces organized, Philip struck--sacking villages, burning houses and slaying people. The first Massachusetts village to be attacked was Swansey and then the villages at Dartmouth, Middleborough, Tauton and Mendon followed. He then struck the village of Brookfield in August and shifted to the Connecticut River Valley where, in the attack at Hatfield, he was driven off. He later struck at Deerfield and Hadley on September first and the following day at Northfield. September eleventh was the day of the Bloody Brook Massacre. The gravity of the situation was viewed with increasing alarm by the settlers. Various commands were sent into the field to contact and bring to battle the enemy but the attempts were unsuccessful until early in May of 1676 when a captive of the Indians, a young man by the name of Thomas Reed, managed to escape while encamped at Peskeumscot Falls, now known as Turners Falls, and returned safely to Hadley with the information that the Indians were encamped at the falls, fishing for salmon and shad to replenish their supplies. He also gave the valuable information regarding the careless way in which the Indians maintained guards and patrols. The Indians considered themselves well protected from attack. Several hundred of the main force were encamped on the righthand side of the river, now known as Stoughton's farm in Gill, which the present road to Mt. Hermon now bisects. Minor groups were encamped on Smead's Island a mile below the falls and another on the left bank of the river.

After waiting for help from Connecticut which did not arrive and with the information of the position and whereabouts of the Indians, one hundred and sixty men, nearly all mounted, assembled in Hatfield under command of Captain William Turner of Boston and accompanied by Captain Samuel Holyoke of Springfield and Ensign Lyman of Northampton. On the evening of May 18, 1676, led by skillful guides, Waite and Hinckley, the English set out on a memorable march for the falls about twenty miles distant--memorable for its material, for its good and bad fortune, and for the results achieved. English hearts were beating hard, and harder yet beat the hearts of women who prayed for their safe return. After fervent prayer by the chaplain, Reverend John Russell, and a tearful God speed from friends, the cavalcade passed out from Hatfield streets. They followed the Pocumtuck path through the fatal swamp at Bloody Brook and Deerfield Village, already destroyed. Benjamin Waite, one of the guides, led them away from the usual ford across the Pocumtuck, now known as the Deerfield River and they crossed that stream near the Red Rocks now a favorite swimming and fishing place thus escaping the sharp ears of the Indians, who hearing the party cross at the ford, attributed the sounds to deer or moose. Northward they marched hoping at each stop to gain an opportunity to even the score they owed to their savage enemy. Tired and drenched by a shower, before the break of day they arrived upon the high plain near Falls River just north of Factory Village where they dismounted. They had reached their objective point undiscovered. Here, leaving their horses in care of a few soldiers, Turner and his men forded Falls River and forcing their way through the brush and undergrowth near the present Stoughton farm, they found themselves in close proximity to their sleeping foe. Save the tremendous roar of the falling water, no sound was heard and with palpitating hearts the English crept to the wigwams, some even thrusting the muzzles of their guns inside the very doors.

Fortune was favorable to the English this particular morning. The previous evening these Indians, elated by the success of their raids, had indulged in one of their grand orgies. They had feasted royally on recently killed cows, on fresh milk and the salmon abounding in the river. Gorged to their fill and feeling entirely secure from any attack by the despised English, they had entered their wigwams and were soon in heavy slumber. Stillness brooded over the largest encampment. Not even a sentinel stirred. At the first gray of dawn Captain Turner gave the signal to strike. So stealthily was all this accomplished that the sleeping Indians were first awokened by the flash and roar of English muskets fired at them.

Some were killed outright, some were cut down under the shelving rocks of the river bank where they had fled for shelter; some fled toward the river shrieking "Mohawk" "Mohawk" thinking themselves attacked by their most dreaded foe; some leaped into their canoes and were shot by the English; some attempting to swim were carried over the falls to their death.

One hundred Indians were left dead on the ground. One hundred and forty passed down the falls, ^{only} none of whom escaped drowning. Wigwams were burned, the camp destroyed. The total loss to the Indians was about three hundred among whom were some of their principal chiefs.

Turner, who had lost but one of his men, unfortunately killed by a soldier who thought him an Indian, returned toward the horses.

The Indians of the two smaller encampments now joined the fight advancing on the left and rear of the English. They were met by Captain Holyoke who kept them back. However, the Indians continued their attack. One of the captured Indians told the English that King Phillip was approaching with one thousand Indians. This caused a panic, the command breaking up into three parties under different leaders and retreating in disorder.

Captain Turner, urged by Jonathan Wells, "the boy hero of Deerfield" to protect the rear guard was reported to have said, "Better save some than lose all."

The most disastrous part of the disorderly retreat was through what later became Greenfield. Captain Turner, being enfeebled by a previous sickness, was unable to act with his usual vigor and with difficulty reached Green River. Exhausted by the night march and the battle, he could barely manage to sit on his terrified horse. As he forded Green River near Nash's Mills he fell from his horse and died having been shot in the thigh and back by the enemy now close by.

There was no time to stop and care for his body. The soldiers pressed on, hotly pursued by the Indians who were familiar with the locality and terrain. Captain Holyoke was now in command and continued the retreat through the meadows and on to Hatfield with a loss of thirty-eight men. The Indians gave up the pursuit at the southern end of Deerfield meadow.

In 1905 the Old Home Week Association of Greenfield invited the Pioneer Valley Memorial Association to hold its Field Day meeting at Greenfield and to take charge of the dedication of the Captain William Turner monument. This meeting was held Wednesday July 26, 1905 and was a very notable event.

To mark the spot as nearly as possible where Captain Turner was killed, a large granite boulder weighing over three tons, was placed on the site by the people of Greenfield. On this, the Society of Colonial Wars of Massachusetts had caused a bronze tablet to be placed. This is the inscript on.

Captain William Turner of Boston
a soldier in King Philip's War
was mortally wounded
while crossing this Pukcommeagon River
and fell on the west bank May 19, 1676

on the Retreat after the "Falls Fight"
at Peskeompskut (Turners Falls) .

Forty men of his command fell that day .
Captain Samuel Molyoke with the survivors
fought their way back to Hatfield.

To commemorate their patriotism and sacrifice
This memorial is dedicated July 26, 1905

by

The Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association
This Tablet is placed by the Society of Colonial
Wars in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts upon
the stone erected by the Greenfield Ole Home Week
Association

In closing it is only appropriate that a poem relative to the
"Falls Fight" by Mr. Canning should be quoted:

"The rifles with their brazen throats arouse
The frightened savage from his morning drowse,
Struck dumb with horror and a sense of shame,
Not knowing who they were or whence they came,
They fled precipitate in every way,
(Like some great armies of a later day)
With shout of "Mohawk" "Mohawk" loud and shrill.
Some hid in shelving rocks upon the hill,
While others in the river jumped and tried
To reach the shore upon the other side.
'Twas useless toil; for by the current borne,
Their bodies on the rocks were bruised and torn
As o'er the falls they went."