

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Oriskany Battlefield

AND/OR COMMON

Oriskany Battlefield

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

State Route 69

\_\_NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Oriskany

 VICINITY OF

31

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

New York

36

Oneida

65

**3 CLASSIFICATION****CATEGORY** DISTRICT BUILDING(S) STRUCTURE SITE OBJECT**OWNERSHIP** PUBLIC PRIVATE BOTH**PUBLIC ACQUISITION** IN PROCESS BEING CONSIDERED**STATUS** OCCUPIED UNOCCUPIED WORK IN PROGRESS**ACCESSIBLE** YES: RESTRICTED YES: UNRESTRICTED NO**PRESENT USE** AGRICULTURE COMMERCIAL EDUCATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL MILITARY MUSEUM PARK PRIVATE RESIDENCE RELIGIOUS SCIENTIFIC TRANSPORTATION OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

State of New York, Division of Parks and Recreation

STREET &amp; NUMBER

South Swan Street Building

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Albany

\_\_ VICINITY OF

New York

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Oneida County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Utica

New York

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

None

DATE

 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Oriskany Battlefield is located on the southwestern slope of the Mohawk River Valley, one and three quarters miles west of Oriskany, on State Route 69.

The Revolutionary road used by Merkimer and his troops ran roughly parallel to Route 69 as it passes along the battlefield, at a distance of 170' to the north. Although no evidence of the historic road exists, its approximate location has been indicated by State markers. The battleground was thickly forested at the time of the battle, but the land has long since been cleared, and except for some second growth beech and oak trees in and below the ravine, the battlefield is kept as a lawn. The ravine itself is roughly thirty five feet deep with moderately steep sides. When Route 69 was constructed, the middle of the ravine was filled to carry the road. Otherwise, Battle Brook still follows the same course down the cut, and the floor of the ravine is generally marshy. The undulating land on either side of the ravine slopes down gently to the north for approximately 650' from Route 69, when the drop to the valley floor becomes more precipitous.

The State park consists of eight-seven acres of land, with approximately 1550' of frontage on Route 69, which extends roughly from a point just east of the Unknown Soldier Memorial to a point just west of the entrance road and parking lot. Within the State park are three structures; two single story garages or workshops on Route 69 just west of the ravine, and the visitors center, a small two story structure just north of the Oriskany Battle Monument obelisk. Aside from these buildings there are a collection of markers, which include the obelisk, and three stone markers grouped around it, a stone slab marking the approximate site of the beech tree under which Herkimer directed his troops during the battle, just west of the ravine, and the Unknown Soldier Memorial, which is located on the eastern crest of the ravine. There is a parking lot located south of the obelisk as well.

Across Route 69, which measure the approximate southern extent of the battlefield, is a farm house was a cluster of outbuildings. On either the east or west side of the park are private residences, and to the north, the park extends well beyond the northern limit of the battlefield almost to the Mohawk River.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES August 6, 1777

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Battle of Oriskany, August 6, 1777, was a small but bloody engagement between American militiamen attempting to relieve besieged Fort Stanwix, and a combined force of Loyalists and Indians. Although the patriot force failed to raise the siege, the unseasoned militia bore the full brunt of a savage ambush and showed both courage and determination to stand in defense of their homes.

The Oriskany Battlefield, presently contained in a state park, has suffered relatively little intrusion. Although the forest which cover the battleground has been cleared and is replaced by well-tended parkland, Battle Brook and the marshy ravine where the ambush occurred are still readily recognizable. The park, located on State Route 69, five miles east of Rome, New York, contains a monument to the Tryon militia, as well as markers indicating the course of the battle.

### History

The proposed British campaign of 1777 called for a three-pronged invasion of New York with Albany as the central objective. General Burgoyne was to lead the main body down the Hudson Valley, General Howe was to move up the Hudson from New York City, and Lieutenant Colonel Barry St. Leger was to head east from Oswego, through the Mohawk Valley to Albany.

St. Leger's expedition set out from Oswego on July 26, 1777. His regular British and German troops had been augmented by Loyalists from the Mohawk Valley, under the command of Sir John Johnson and Colonel John Butler, and Indians of the Six Nations, under Joseph Brant. The combined force proceeded east rapidly, to attack the major obstacle to the invasion, Fort Stanwix, on the present site of the city of Rome.

St. Leger reached the fort on the second of August, only to find that it was too strong and too heavily manned for him to risk a direct assault. Consequently, he positioned his troops for a siege.

Meanwhile, the patriots of Tryon County had learned of the invasion and were mustering at Fort Dayton, some thirty miles below Fort Stanwix. The commander of the militia was to be General Nicholas Herkimer, one of the most prominent settlers in the Mohawk Valley. The assembled force, which totalled 800 volunteers and some sixty Oneida scouts, set out to relieve the beleaguered garrison on the fourth of August. In advance, Herkimer sent runners to alert the fort's commander, Peter Gansevoort, and to arrange for a sortie from the fort in conjunction with the militia's attack. Gansevoort was to signal for the attack with three cannon shots.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Hoffman Nickerson, The Turning Point of the Revolution (Boston, 1928).  
 Christopher Ward, The War of the Revolution, 2 vols. (New York, 1952), vol 2.  
 , The American Revolution in New York: Its Political, Social and Economic Significance (New York State Division of Archives and History, Albany, 1926).

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 70 acres  
 UTM REFERENCES

A	1,8	47,0	47,0	4,77,9	4,1,0	B	1,8	47,0	1,2,0	4,7	79	0,2,0
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING		
C	1,8	46,9	5,1,0	4,7	7,9	D	1,8	46,9	0,9,0	4,7	7,9	7,8,0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION (See USGS Map)

Beginning at Point B on the northern curb of State Route 69, 250' south of the Unknown Soldier Memorial, proceed northeast in a straight line to the 450' contour line. Thence proceed northwest along said contour for 2400', thence proceed southwest in a straight line to the northern curb of Route 69, and thence southeast along said curb to the point of origin. These boundaries enclose the heart of the Oriskany Battlefield. The enclosed structures do not contribute to the national significance of the landmark.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Richard Greenwood, Historian, Landmark Review Task Force

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey

DATE

1/20/76

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street, NW

TELEPHONE

523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington,

STATE

DC

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL     

STATE     

LOCAL     

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

*Handwritten:* Certified according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. Nov 23, 1962. George J. Tunney. July 21, 1978.

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

*Handwritten:* 1/20/78

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
 ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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On the morning of the sixth, as Herkimer drew within striking distance, he held a council of war. Although the general advised that they wait for Gansevoort's signal, the more impetuous younger officers urged that they attack immediately. Herkimer finally acquiesced and set off on the road to Fort Stanwix. He rode at the head of the main column of 600 men which was followed by the wagon train and the 200 men of the rear guard.

Having learned of Herkimer's advance, St. Leger dispatched a detachment of Loyalists and the entire contingent of Indians, numbering approximately 900 braves, to intercept the relief column before it reached the fort. The spot chosen for the ambush was six miles east of the fort, near the village of Oriskany, where the road passed through a ravine. A small, marshy stream, now called Battle Brook, flowed through the ravine, where it was crossed by a narrow corduroy road. The steep sides of the ravine, and the surrounding slopes were heavily wooded. The British positioned themselves in an elongated circle, centered around the ravine, and open on the eastern end. The ambushers were to hold their fire until the entire column had entered the trap, when the gap at the eastern end would be closed and the column surrounded.

As the attackers were already in position as the militia approached, preliminary scouting would have warned the Americans of the ambush, but no such scouting was done. The column entered the ravine and Herkimer had already crossed it and was on the opposite side when the Indians prematurely attacked the rear of the column. The rear guard had not yet entered the trap and so escaped to the east, with some Indians in pursuit. The rest of the column however was quickly hemmed in and fired upon from all directions by well concealed enemy. Herkimer himself was wounded in the leg at the first fire, but nonetheless coolly organized his panicked men into an irregular circle so that they could return their fire on all sides. This was the sort of warfare which the Indians excelled in, and in the heavy forest growth, they frequently dashed in to tomahawk a soldier who was trying to reload his gun. The unseasoned troops withstood forty-five minutes of this fierce attack, until a sudden downpour brought a temporary halt in the engagement. Herkimer took advantage of the lull by reorganizing his troops on the hillside west of the ravine, where he paired his men, so that one might cover the other while he was reloading. After an hour of rain, the sky cleared and the battle was rejoined. As it continued though, the Indians, who had sustained severe losses, began to lose interest in the costly battle. A second detachment of Loyalists arrived, who reversed their coats

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and sought to approach the enemy as fellow patriots. The ruse was discovered however and a fierce hand to hand combat ensued. With no immediate victory in sight, the Indians chose to withdraw, and the Loyalists were forced to join them and return to their camp. The militia were too battered to pursue. Instead they gathered their wounded and returned to Fort Dayton.

Although the relief column had failed to reach Fort Stanwix, the second part of Herkimer's plan had been carried out successfully. A large sortie was made by the fort's garrison, which succeeded in striking the British camps and destroying most of what they did not carry back into the fort. The siege was not lifted until the end of August, when St. Leger, once again deserted by his Indian allies, was forced to flee before a relief column headed by Benedict Arnold.

Although the Battle of Oriskany could not be termed an American victory, it was perhaps the fiercest engagement of the war, and the Americans gave as well as they got. An estimated 150 to 200 militia men were killed, among whom was General Herkimer, who died after the battle, and of the British force, approximately 100 to 150 were killed. However, the drain on St. Leger's resources and the knowledge that the Mohawk Valley contained patriots will to stand and fight for their homes were definite factors in the subsequent failure of the British invasion of the Mohawk valley.