

A History of the Graham Massacre

In order to develop the historical facts pertaining to the Graham Massacre, I felt it was important to become familiar with the people and circumstances that had an impact on that tragic event. It was necessary to first examine the groups of people that had played a role in the Massacre so that I could determine their contribution to its overall outcome. In doing this I hope to make it easier to understand what had happened so long ago. I started with the Indian tribes and will proceed with the people and events that helped shape this period of time.

PART ONE: Those who fought with the British

The Indians

When Henry Hudson sailed up the river which bore his name, he found the land was populated by people who still lived in the stone age. Using the resources that were available to them such as stone, animal skins, shells, wood, and bark they were able to build a society that provided them with food, shelter, and clothing as well as the means to hunt and fish. Robert Juet who was a mate on Henry Hudson's ship the Half Moon wrote that these people "were found to be a very loving people and we were well used". These Indians it is believed belonged to either the Esopus and Mohican Tribes. They taught the settlers how to raise Indian corn, beans, squash, and pumpkins, as well as how to hunt, fish and trap beaver. The Indians soon learned to admire the things that the Settlers had such as mirrors, steel knives, iron and brass kettles, woolen cloth, iron nails, glass beads and rum. They also found out that they could barter for these items with the two commodities that they had so much of, land and furs. These two items would eventually bring about misunderstandings between the settlers and the Indians. The Indians had no concept of private land ownership. They interpreted their selling of land as the right of the colonist to use it for hunting, fishing, and to live on, without the right to permanent ownership. In 1665 Richard Nicolls, the First English Governor of New York State, signed a treaty with the Esopus Indians which forced them to live outside the land that they had sold to the Europeans. To add to this already muddy mix, England's Queen Ann ordered that all lands in the new world that were not occupied by the Indians became lands owned by the Crown. These new lands she used to reward people who had served England in times of war or had served her in other ways that benefited the Kingdom. Also, she felt that hilly and mountainous lands such as the Catskill's and the Adirondack's were of little value and should be given to the wealthy who could develop them in ways that could bring income to the Crown. Some of these families were the Livingston's and the Hardenberg's. The French were at this time developing inroads into the western boundaries of New York. In order to prevent this, she also agreed to pay the Indians a pence for each French scalp that they took, a practice that would be repeated during the Revolutionary War. Suddenly The land that the Indians sold were filled with surveyors who broke up the land into parcels to be sold to settlers. To late the Indians realized their hunting grounds were gone. This is a fact that the English kings did not overlook. In this Royalty saw an opportunity to use the Indians to help defend its western border against the French, who were making inroads into its English land claims during the French and Indian war. The Crown convinced them that they would restore the Indian ownership of these lands if they would help drive the French out, a deal that they eagerly accepted. This convinced the Esopus that the English were truly their friends and partners, a relationship that remained throughout the Revolutionary War.

The Indians taught the settler their cures that they had developed over the centuries for illnesses using parts of plants and of natural healing practices as well as the best ways to hunt and fish in this new land. The settlers taught the Indians their farming methods and how to build strong houses that would withstand the cold winters of the North East. They developed a peaceful relationship that combined both worlds that was advantages to both groups of people. The Indians and Settlers developed a relationship so close that many of these groups intermarried. Many of their descendants still live in the Hudson Valley to this day. The settlers if sick or injured would ask for the help of an Indian doctor before they would trust their own Physician but their relationship was about to take a sharp change. The supply of furs started to decline as the beaver became scarce due to over hunting and trapping. About the same time the fad that brought about the need for beaver furs went out of style in Europe. The Indians lost their source of income all that was left to barter was their land. The Indians were beginning to be pushed further and further west as they watched their hunting grounds disappearing at an ever-faster rate, as greedy land speculators and Indian representatives as well as the British Royalty who saw an opportunity to gain income badly needed to boost their treasuries was not over looked.

Dissatisfied with the control being exerted by a king thousands of miles away, the colonies began to rebel. The king of England seeing this opportunity again made a pact with the Indian Tribes to grant them a permanent land grant if they would help him bring the rebellious colonies under his control. To enrich the pot, they guaranteed again a pence for every scalp that would be taken from a settler, and more if it came from an officer who participated in the rebellion. Due to the dissatisfaction that the Indians felt toward the settlers with their land dealings, in 1777 The majority of the Iroquois and some of the Esopus accepted this proposition. Joseph Brant, an Indian who was educated in England and had returned to his tribe took on the responsibility of coordinating the raids.

Tories

The Tories were a pro-British group of people that had migrated to the English Colonies, prior to and during the Revolutionary War. They were loyal to the English Monarchy and supported their cause throughout the war. They consisted of three or more groups that the English government could count upon to fight for its cause. The first group were English emigrants that did not want to become separated from their mother country and would rather fight the colonists then live under the colonist rule. The second group were the German Palatines who migrated to England following the years of war between the English and the French, which left their countryside in the middle Rhine Region of Germany impoverished. About 13,000 of these refugees immigrated to England. After many efforts to place these people in Ireland and various other of the English possessions failed, the Crown decided to send about 3,000 of the Palatines to the colonies. Queen Ann promised them free land if they could help build supplies for her Navy as well as help her defend British interests here during the French and Indian War. Although this plan to help build supplies failed the Germans who were here decided to stay. They settled throughout the Hudson Valley and were very loyal the English cause. When The war for Independence broke out, they were quite willing to fight for the British. The third group who joined the ranks of the Tories were the displaced Scottish who emigrated to the Colonies after they lost the land that they had rented from large wealthy land owners in Scotland, when these land owners decided to convert their rented land into hunting grounds or sheep herding ranges. This caused hard feelings and suspicion between the emigrants and the large land owners here in the colonies, the English crown promised those people that if they helped defeat the Colonists they would be given sections of the landowner's land along the Hudson. Many of these people supported the Colonies though and fought on the Colonists side.

During the day the Tories lived among the settlers as neighbors and friends, but at night they would paint their faces and dress like Indians so that they would not be recognized by their neighbors as they attacked them and burned their homes and farms. If an Indian found an infant among the families that they were attacking they would spare the child and place it in an area where it could later be found. If a Tory found where the child was hidden, they would slaughter the child. The Indians in many cases were more civilized than the Tories.

PART TWO: Those who Fought alongside the Colonists

Colonel John Cantine

Colonel John Cantine was placed in charge of Fort Honk near Wawarsing in Ulster County in the spring of 1778 when Colonel Pawling retired from that position. He was important to Governor George Clinton and General George Washington by keeping them advised as to the activities and movements of the Indian tribes and Tory forces as well as the best routes to follow for their troupe movements in this area. He was born in Marletown in Ulster County New York in 1735 and died near the town of Caroline in 1808 in Tompkins County New York the son of Peter Cantine who was a member of the Cantine political family.

Governor George Clinton

Governor George Clinton was born in Little Britain New York in 1739 and died in 1812. During the Revolutionary War he served as a Brigadier General where he fought the British Forces throughout the Hudson Valley region. He became New York State's first Governor in 1777 and served in that office until 1795. During Governor George Clinton's tenure he along with General George Washington and with the aid of Colonel John Cantine helped plan and initiate the overall defense of Ulster County and the western wilderness area of New York State.

Abraham Van Campen

Abraham Van Campen had been mentioned a couple of times within the various narratives concerning the Graham Massacre. He was born in Kingston New York on February 22, 1736, and died May of 1811. He was the brother of Moses Van Campen born in 1743 who was an Indian fighter. I could not find any accounts of Abraham's experiences with the Indians, but living on the frontier with a pioneer family I am sure there were many occasions where he was able to hone his hunting and trapping skills and was well aware of the various Indian tribes that lived around him.

John Graham

James Eldridge Quinland as printed in his account of the Graham Massacre states that "little is known of Graham and his antecedents" yet while looking through the various accounts I found stored in the boxes of papers when I started as Historian an Email written by one of his descendants asking for information about his Ancestor John Graham who died September 5 1778 in the Chestnut Woods Massacre writing for any information about his ancestor. He stated that "their research indicates John Graham was born in 1712 at Shawangunk, NY to Robert Graham and Anna/Antie (Garrett) Graham. John Graham married Catherine Westbrook in Kingston Ulster County NY on 19 March, 1732."

“Records also indicate John’s father Robert Graham was born in 1685, possibly at Fermanagh North Ireland and died September, 29 1766 in Ulster NY.” They had nine children. If this account is accurate, Acting Lieutenant John Graham would have been around 66 years old when he Died. A statement that is made in their account that points to the authenticity of this narrative is that the author explains that in their family’s historical research they found that John Graham was not listed as a lieutenant in the area militia’s. John Graham who served at the rank of Sergeant never was raised to the rank of lieutenant except on the morning of the massacre when he was given an apparent temporary field commission. The title that he was given was as an acting Lieutenant which he held until his death, about eight to ten hours later.

The Fort at Honk (Hunk) Hill

The history of Fort Honk is at best confusing. To explain the Fort I must first talk about its relationship to the Sunset Trail. This Indian Trail started at the Roundout Creek in Wawarsing and followed more or less West to present day Curry where it intersected the Pepacton Brook and then turned in a westerly direction and intersected the Neversink River at Halls Mills. Crossing the Neversink the trail roughly followed the Hunter Road into Willowemoc to Brown’s Settlement where it crossed the Mongoup creek than on to Onteorato, to the Beaverkill than to Shin Creek at Lew Beach. The Trail got its name from the ability that an Indian could run its distance in one day starting at sun up at Wawarsing and could reach the present-day area of Lew Beach by sundown.

The original Fort that was built to defend the local residents of Napanoch and Wawarsing was to be built at Leckawack (Lackawack). Although its original location has never been located by Historians, it is common belief that the site is under the Roundout Reservoir. Both the forts at Leckawack and Honk Hill set purposely near the Sunset Trail so that the Indian movement could be monitored. In August of 1778 Colonel Cantine informed Governor Clinton “I have changed my post from Leckawack to Hunk hill, finding it much more convenient for keeping out scouts, and patrolling parties” since the “woods on both side of the Lackawack are Exceedingly Rof (rough) so it is impossible to keep our scouts at any distance”. He further reported that he had one hundred and thirty men at Honk. Governor Clinton replied “I have no objections to your changing of your station from Lackawack to Honk provided it is most conducive to the safety of the frontier inhabitants which is the principal objective I have in view, tho my judgment would lead me to a post still further West than Lacquwack (at the junction of the Susquehana and Chemung) as most likely to affect it.” This last part clearly puts into question if both gentlemen were looking at the same map. Some sources put the Fort at Honk hill just north of the Honk Hill Falls while some place it nearer to what is today route 209. The fort at Honk was reportedly built of logs and rock. As soon as the war ended Fort Honk was abandoned and fell into ruin. The timbers and building material were used by the local inhabitants in the construction of their own buildings and thus the fort disappeared from site. To this day nobody knows exactly where it stood.

Part Three

The Narratives of the Graham Massacre and how they differed.

There are six versions of the Graham Massacre that I have found so far. Each of them varies in different ways. Some of the differences are minor and some are major. Five of the stories depend on earlier published accounts, while one was written within a couple of days after the Massacre.

A very important point should be made at this time, and that is the important role of the story teller. The story teller held an important position within the community of mankind regardless of the period of time, or their race or culture. They served in the place of our modern-day newscasters as the means by which stories and events that were taking place at that time could be told to the people as they had happened or were happening. They served as an important source of the news of the day. Most of our past events were kept alive by the retelling of an important story. But over time the correctness of the story changed by degrees, until it was hard to differentiate between what was real and what was not. After each generation of retelling the story, it became less and less a resemblance of the original version. This is an important point to keep in mind when reviewing each account. Irregardless of the differences that this process of remembering and retelling of the events of the past had, it was that retelling which kept that event alive. Without it many valuable parts of our past such as the Graham Massacre would have been over time, sadly forgotten and we would be so much the poorer for it.

The first three accounts were printed between the years of 1816 and and 1873. Each has its points of agreement and disagreement. Each building their story on the others as time passed. The first account was written around 1816 by Abraham Garrett Bevier and printed and sold in the offices of Bradbury and Wills Publishers in 1816, at No. 3 Fulton Street, New York and titled "The Indians, or Narratives of massacres and depredations on the in Wawasink and its vicinity during the American Revolution." Narrative 2 Page 20.

The order of events taken from the Narrative. This Account involved three settlers named Shurker, Baker, and Miller who lived in the vicinity of Pine Bush sometime around 1777 or 1778. It was suspected by a neighbor that Shurker was thought to be a Tory by one of his neighbors who was a Whig, and after confronting him Shurker denied being one and gave in a statement his strong allegiance to the Whig cause. This was overheard by a Tory neighbor who in turn informed the Indians. The Indians struck at dawn and burned much of the property of the settlers Shurker, baker and Miller. Upon hearing the alarm sounded at Pine Bush, Captain Benjamin Kortrite mustered his men and took pursuit during which time they found Shurker and Miller both dead and no site of baker, who was never found and assumed captured by the Indians. They followed the Indians until they come to the Vernooy creek. Because of a lack of provisions, they had to turn back.

A troop strength of two or three hundred soldiers was reported to be stationed at fort Honk in Naponoch at that time. It was at that time decided by an officer at that fort to send an expedition of troupes to try and head off the Indians near Chestnut Woods (now called Grahamsville), in what was to eventually become Sullivan County. The officer called for volunteers and Lieutenant John Graham stepped forward. When asked how many men he wanted to take with him? His reply was no more than "his honor" would give him, which was eighteen Privates, with one Sergeant and a Corporal. This was considered a Lieutenants guard. He marched immediately and reached the place in advance of the enemy. His men were all raw recruits and were not used to Indian warfare. He placed his men at the foot of a steep mountain. The only good marksman was Abraham Van Campen, which Graham sent to obtain fresh venison. The Indians came before Van Campen returned. The Indians saw the soldiers and sent a scout ahead, while placing the rest of their scouts across the river on the opposite side "waiting with their fingers on the triggers of their guns". Graham was kneeling to get a drink from the river when he spotted the Indian. He ordered his men to fire after the Indian fell to the ground. The Indians returned a quick fire, killing most of Grahams men. Van Campen and two other men survived to tell the story. A force of three hundred men was sent to bury the dead as soon as they were able to make preparations. They found the men all scalped and relieved of all their personal possessions. They buried

them in three separate trenches. The name of Chestnut Woods was renamed Grahamsville in honor of Lieutenant John Graham.

The second account is brief but adds details not in the other accounts. This account is from the pension application of Andrew Gillespie in 1832. Appendix F Participants in the Massacre at Chestnut Woods. “Persons listed on the Andrew Gillespie application as participants in the incident, 6 September 1778.

<u>NAME</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>REGIMENT</u>	
01. Graham, John	Lieut.	2 nd Ulster/3rd Ulster	Killed
02. Sempler, Robert	Private	3 rd Ulster	killed
03. Embler, Adam	private	not listed	killed
04. Sair John	Private	1 st Orange/4th Orange	killed
05. McCue, James	Private	4 th Ulster/3rd Ulster	killed
06. Shaw, Moses	Private	4 th Ulster/5th NY Line	killed
07. Consaul, David	Private	2 nd Albany	killed
08. Van Amberg	Private	3 rd NY line	killed
09. Scott Adam	private	not listed	killed
10. Crawford, Alexander	Private	2 nd Ulster	killed
11. Gillespie, Andrew	Private	not listed	survived
12. Ivory, Jacobus	Private	2 nd NY Line	survived
13. Coulter, John	Private	4 th Ulster/3rd /Levies	survived
14. Van Kueren, Simeon	Private	Not listed	survived
15. Rynehart, Jacob	Private	Not listed	survived
16. Manse, Christopher	Private	Dutchess Co. Exempts	survived

“John Graham, Sargeant, and eighteen men of whom I was one went out to the Lackawana Woods in the month of September were met by a party of Indians supposed to be forty or fifty in number. Graham and nine men were killed, among whom were Robert Sempler, Adam Embler, John Sair, James McCue, Moses Shaw, Daniel Consaul, Abraham VanAmburg, Andrew Scott, and Alexander Crawford. The rest of the party escaped. Jacobus Ivory was shot in the mouth and in one arm but made the escape. John Coulter, Simeon Van Kueren, Jacob Rynehart, Chrisropher Manse, were among those who escaped. We were discharged in December on Christmas day.” A note at the end of this account stated “I am skeptical about old Andrews memory since he gave this information when he was 69 years old and had a pension riding on its acceptance”

The third account was found in the “History of Sullivan County” written by James Eldridge Quinlan Published in 1873. The raid on the Pine Bush area I found was very much the same as the account written by Abraham Garret Bevier in the “The Indians, or Narratives of Massacre and Depredations on the frontier in Wawasink and its Vicinity During the American Revolution,” Published in 1816 in New York. The Account of Captain Benjamin Kortrite and his troupe’s pursuit of the Indians were generally the same, but included a defense by his descendants that he fell back upon reaching the vernooy creek because his rations were exhausted. Quinlan states that “if this were the case the food provided for his company must have been scanty indeed”. Other accounts records that Captain Benjamin Kortrite and his men had just returned from chasing a tribe of Indians in another area and upon hearing of the massacre in pine bush immediately rode off toward Vernooy creek in an attempt to head off the Indians that attacked Pine Bush subsequently his provisions had to be low, sense he would not have had time to freshen his supplies. In Quinlans History of Sullivan County it is also

stated that at this time there were several hundred troupes stationed at a fort at Honk Hill. In a letter dated August of 1778 less than four weeks before the Massacre, Colonel Canteen had written Governor George Clinton that he had one hundred thirty men then at Hunk a far cry from the several hundred troupes claimed in Quinlans History of Sullivan County.

Next according to the same source, "Their commander, on learning what had occurred, at once resolved to dispatch a part of his men to intercept the savages at the Chestnut Woods, about thirteen miles from Napanoch. Volunteers were called for, when an officer named John Graham stepped forward, and offered to go with a sergeant's guard, consisting of eighteen privates and a sergeant and corporal". But during the Revolutionary War, a sergeant's guard was a military detail whose function was common security, maintaining camp order, or protecting lower class assets or locations. They were a fundamental part of military life and were to be used for the protection of various camp posts, not for specific individuals. They could be used by the most high-ranking officers, when they were used for this purpose, they were known as the Life Guard. General George Washington was the only officer that was authorized to have such a detail. These men had to meet vary vigorous and exact qualifications and training. His life guard were credited with saving his life on a number of occasions.

This dialogue also mentioned that among those that went on this expedition was an expert Indian fighter by the name of Abraham Van Campen, who was sent to procure venison for the men.

"When Graham reached the Chestnut Woods, he had seen nothing of the enemy", "he camped in a valley where the chestnut Brook entered the Papacton creek. Near the residence of the late Neil Benson. (where the new town barn is located today). "At this place, the hills form a triangle, with a space of near level ground at the junction of of the two streams, and narrow gorges leading north, east and west." With out his knowing the Indians and Tories had occupied the elevation on every side. One of the Indians "approached the whites by the usual path and drew their fire. As he came into sight, Graham was drinking from the brook. When he arose to his feet,he saw the red man and ordered his men to fire. The Indian fell upon his face, the balls whistled over his head, he jumped to his feet and disappeared in the brush, as a murderous valley was poured upon Graham and his friends from every side. Two besides Van Campen escaped". It is suggested that The Indian fighter Colonel Brandt was the commander of the Indians that day. This possibility cannot be proven. Colonel Brandt kept good record of all of his raids but the Battle of Chestnut Woods was never found in any of his reports to the English forces.

It is reported in this account that "it was necessary to send a Force of three hundred men to bury the dead".

The last three accounts were all based on a single account published after 1900 by the State of New York, after the private papers of George Clinton, the First Governor of New York State were released by the family as appendix "N", Third Annual Report of The State Historian. VOLUME IV, Page 16 and entitled EXITING TIMES ON THE DELAWARE FRONTIER. (No. 1749)

Colonel Cantine's Report to Governor Clinton of an encounter between settlers and Indians.

Marbletown 9th Sept. 1778.

Sir, The Day after I came from Paghkataghkan to this place, I received Intelligence that the enemy had burnt three barns or Barracks, Viz. Of Andries Shurker, Peter Miller, and Jacob Baker, The two first they have killed and scalped, Baker and a boy of Miller are not found, therefore think they have taken them along. I came to Hunk last Saturday at two O'Clock After Noon, as the

Mischief had been committed that morning about Break of Day. Capt. Telford with the advice of Neighbors had ordered a party to go upon Pappacton Road, and waylay them, when they should return under the Command of John Graham, who acted in the station of a Lieut. The party consisted of fourteen; they went up the Road about Seventeen miles, it being then late in the afternoon, they intended to stay there, as there was no Tract. From whence they conclude they were ahead of them if they intend to return that way. But what could have induced them to choose a place so disadvantageous to themselves I cannot account for. The place in my opinion was neither calculated for Defence, or to save a Retreat. They had been there about half an hour, and heard the Enemy coming. An Indian came about thirty Yards before the rest, and when he came opposite to them, he perceived them as they were in no way properly concealed. The Indian on seeing them squatted, and then Abraham Van Campen Shot at him. Several of the others came within forty Yards of our men, who then discharg'd their pieces upon them, but believe, did little or no Execution, at least I could see no Signs thereof; It appears to me that the greater part of our men then endeavoured to make their Escape, but the Enemy was between them and the Inhabitants, & our Men between them and the Indian Country, or else probably the greater Part of both parties would have fled. In justice to Mr. Graham and Ens'n McBride, I must say they were the last who left the Ground, as I am informed. They were obliged to go up a Hill as steep as the roof of a house, which was just back of them. Had the Enemy pursued with Vigour, I have reason to believe from the situation of the ground, that few of them would have escaped. Mr. Graham, Robert Temple and Adam Ambler were Killed and scalped in the Fray, the remainder are all safe returned. The Enemy consisted as near as I can learn between seventeen and twenty-four. When I found that Mr. Graham's Party was so small and not provided with Provisions to pursue them far, I immediately ordered five Days provisions to be made ready for fifty-two Men, which was the whole fit for such a Journey, who march'd early the Morning following Under the Command of Capt. Clark, to pursue them as far as where the Middaghs Live, unless apprised of a superior Number of the Enemy to be there, for which purpose I directed them to send a Spy to that Place when they should come to Pappacton."

I have found two accounts of the Graham Massacre written after the records of Colonel Cantine were made public in early 1900. The first written by Inez George Gridley then the Town of Neversink Historian dated October 3, 1968. in the Evening News, Monticello NY, and one written by David S. Brenner in the Sullivan County Democrat, Dated August 18, 1977. I am adding both newspaper articles to this research to give a more resent perspective to this subject.

In the Evening News, October 3rd. 1968 Inez Gridley wrote in the column "Footnotes to Local History," the article titled "The Graham Massacre," which follows, "Accounts of the ambush of John Graham for whom Grahamsville was named and his men at Chestnut Woods on September 7, 1778 vary. An article in "Old Ulster", dated April 1913, tells how Sergeant John Graham. Who acted in the station of Lieutenant was sent with a detachment of either fourteen or seventeen men up the Pepacton road to intercept the enemy after the famous raid on Pine Bush. At the Chestnut Woods ambush, Graham, Robert Temple, and Adam Ambler were killed and scalped. The rest returned safely to the fort at Honk Falls. This has been called the Massacre at Grahamsville. The article continued with the statement that Grahams widow and five children were provided for in an appropriation by the State of New York, the receipt for which was still in existence when the article was written."

This last account was written by David S. Brenner and appeared in the August 18, 1977 issue of the Sullivan County Democrat under the heading of Grahamsville Lore.

"Grahamsville, September 5, 1778" "John Graham's story is typical of the heroic saga of the ambush and ambushed which took place not only in the French and Indian Wars but also during the Revolutionary War....." "The Indian and Tory raid on Pine Bush (an Orange County settlement not far from Warwarsing), received immediate retaliation from Captain Telford at Fort Honk (Napanoch), who asked for volunteers

John Graham, the first sarjint, was assigned as acting Lieutenant to lead the volunteers a sergeant's guard, consisting of 18 privates, one corporal and a sergeant, together with Abraham Van Campen, an expert Indian fighter, as a guide.Graham forced marched his men the 17 miles to Chestnut Woods on short rations and light equipment, and set his ambush most skillfully at the point where the Indians would have to pass. To quote Colonel Cantine, in a letter to Governor Clinton, "at this place the hills form a triangle, with a space of nearly level ground at the junction of streams, and narrow gorges [sic] leading North, East and West." This is where the water way trails used by the Indians leads to a short cut to their North West villages; This spot is where Pepacton Brook enters into Chestnut Creek and is known as Chestnut Woods. "It is a well-known turn off point for the Indians and Tories rushing home with their scalps & booty _____ and Graham and his men were waiting _____ with the exception of Guide Van Campen who had gone "venison Hunting".

"A hot battle ensued _____" "Mr. Graham, Robert Temple and Adam Ambler were killed and scalped in the Fray. The Remainder are all safely returned". This is followed by the recounting of the dedication ceremony of the monument, which stands today at the confluence of the Pepacton Creek and the Chestnut Creek in what was known as Unionville. The account also contains a copy of Colonel Cantine's report of the incident to Governor George Clinton, dated Marbletown, 9th Sept, 1778.

My findings

After many months of research, I found a number of points which needed to have a further dialogue. I will list them in no particular order

(1) The date that the Massacre occurred was different in many of the accounts. I first found and down loaded the calender on line for the year 1778. Using Colonel Cantines account in which he notes his time of arrival at Hunk as last Saturday, using the date on the calender when he arrived at Marbletown to make out his report as the 9th of September, the Saturday prior was on the 5th of September, 1778.

(2) “The Sergeant’s Guard was a term used during the Revolutionary War to designate a group of soldiers who were responsible for guarding the baggage and supplies”. During this period of time a “Sergeants Guard was a standard military detail whose function was general security, maintaining camp order, or protecting specific, lower tier assets or locations. They were a part of daily military life and were authorized as a regular detail for various command echelons and posts, not for specific individuals except the most high-ranking officers.” This guard position “consisted of eighteen privates, a sergeant, and a corporal, these soldiers were assigned to guard duty, and George Washington’s personal body guards.” They were also known as a Life Guard. Each soldier was specifically trained to be part of this detail and were not chosen randomly. Since Sergeant Grahams troops consisted of raw, untested soldiers, it is very unlikely that he had a sergeant’s guard available to him.

I do not believe that the circumstances that Sergeant Graham was faced with warranted such a specific detail, subsequently was not likely part of his group.

(3) In Colonel Cantines Letter to Governor Clinton Dated the 9th of September, 1778, he mentioned that he had just returned from Paghkataghan. My research placed that location at Margretville New York. Also, he ordered Captain Clark to pursue the Indians as far as where the Middaghs lived, which is in present day Hardenburgh, New York. In Elf Evers book, he places that spot at the mouth of the Beaverkill River at a clearing on the farm leased from Robert Livingston to John and Jacob Middagh.

(4) After examining six accounts that explained what had happened at the Chestnut creek Massacre, all but one pretty much followed a narrative that was repeated over and over again but with various modifications from the original telling. Considering the period of time, this progression of the story was expected. A good rule to follow when researching an event of this nature is to look at the earliest dated account that was written, and if possible, an official account. The problem in this case was that the official account was not made public until after 1900. Colonel Cantine’s account was among the papers that were stored by the descendants of Governor Clinton. This account was made public around 1900 by the New York State Historian in its annual report.

(5) Abraham Van Campen is mentioned in many of the accounts as going with Lieutenant John Graham to Chestnut Woods. Many of the stories tell of his being sent to hunt venison at the time of the massacre, but colonel Cantine wrote “the Indian on seeing them squatted and then Abraham Van Campen shot at him.” placing Van Campen at the site of the Massacre.

(6) Who was Captain Telford? I searched the Militia Rosters for that period of time and could not find him listed in any of them, although “he with the advice of neighbors had ordered a party to go upon the Papacton Road, and waylay them” (the Indians and Tories). Another question come to mind, who were the neighbors who had enough influence to advise an army officer on what the direction his course of action should take in handling this situation? You should keep in mind that the Tories kept their identity secret, and lived among the colonists, unknown to them.

(7) Lieutenant Graham felt that they had gotten ahead of the Indians, so he ordered his men to make camp and wait. He waited about half an hour and heard the Indians coming. Two questions come to mind. If Abraham Van Campen had been an expert Indian fighter, he should have had advised Lieutenant Graham to have his men properly conceal themselves. The second question also follows, since the raid on Pine Bush happened around day break that morning and the Indians left the scene quite early how did Graham’s men get ahead of them, without making contact earlier on, or were the Indians already advised of their plan and allowed Grahams party to get ahead of them? Of course this is all food for thought.

(8) Colonel Cantine wrote “Several of the others came within forty yards of our men, who then discharged their pieces upon them, but believe did little or no Execution, at least I could see no signs thereof; it appears that the greater part of our men then endeavoured to make their escape, but the enemy was between them and the inhabitants, & our men between them, and the Indian country”. It appears by this that Colonel Cantine had visited the battle site the next day, and only follows that the bodies of the three fallen men would have been taken back with them for burial. Another question comes to mind here. Who were the Inhabitants that were behind the Indians? It would be beyond me to imagine a group of local inhabitants who would follow a hostile force into a battle for any reason.

The Summery. “Three dead, all others safe returned”

The accounts written about the Graham Massacre are not about what was done wrong, but about what was done right. Imagine that if those who told the many stories about the Massacre had not written or told their narratives to family members and all others who would listen? What would have happened to the memory of this important event. It probably would have been designated to the ranking of a footnote to history, or forgotten altogether. Each of these story tellers knew that something important had happened. They circled around this happening, not knowing exactly what was the missing piece of information. Each person in turn would add or change a detail to see if it would satisfy their need for completeness. Colonel John Cantine I believe illuminated that detail and gave full body to what was the exceptional importance that needed to be highlighted in all of their narratives. That morning raw recruits and a pair of officers volunteered to travel the trail to Chestnut Woods, not knowing what would be their fate. When the battle ensued, these officers knowing that their men had no chance of surviving what was about to happen, chose to do the unthinkable. They ran up a steep mountain, as steep as a roof, toward Indian country, knowing that the Enemy would pursue them because the British would pay more for an officer’s scalp than that of a recruit, giving their soldiers the needed time to escape. I believe that Sargeant John Graham, Robert Temple and Adam Ambler, gave their lives so that their men could escape.

This act of self-sacrifice and love for your fellow men, has over the years become a characteristic of the Great people who live in these Catskill Mountains, Sullivan County, and The Town of Neversink. A proud people who do not hesitate to answer the call for help whenever a neighbor or stranger is in trouble. The story of the Graham Massacre is the story of all of us who live in these beautiful hills. That day, September 5, 1778, Hero’s marched up that trail through the woods to Chestnut Creek, not in search of fame, but instead to follow the orders of their commanding officer as so many has had to do to protect our freedom since that autumn day. Our freedoms are born on the backs of those who unselfishly stand ready to aid all in need and protect these liberties that we enjoy today. We owe a lot to all of our Heroes.

Roger H Edwards, Town of Neversink Historian

List of References

The Catskills	Alf Evers	Indians and Tories
The Indians or Narratives	Abraham G. Bevier	Graham Massacre account Narrative II, Page 20
The Revolutionary War Service Record of Andrew Gillespie		

September 5 th 1832

History of Sullivan County, By James Eldridge Quinlan
1873.

Public Papers of George Clinton, First Governor of New York State
Volume IV, Page 16, [No 1749] EXCITING TIMES ON THE DELAWARE FRONTIER

How Graham Was Ambushed, David S. Brenner, Sullivan County Democrat, August 18, 1977, Page 2A

Footnotes to Local History, inez George Gridley, Historian Town of Neversink, The Graham Massacre,
Evening News Monticello NY, October 3rd, 1968.

Email, Lieut Graham 1712-1778, Dated October 28, 2021 Town of Neversink Records.

Colchester Historical Society The Sun Trail.

Gazetteer of the State of New York, By J.H. French Published 1859

Descendants of Robert Graham, Ancestry Family Trees.

Years and the People, by Bill Winters

Reprint from Old Ulster, 1907The Fort at Lackawack

Reprint from Ellenville Journal April 27, 1939

August, 1778, Letter from Colonel Cantine to Governor George Clinton, describing troupe strength.

Wikipedia: German Palatines

Indian commerce with early English Colonists and the early United States

Computer AI: 1778 Calendar

Date of Clinton Public Papers release

What was the sergeants guard?

British payment to Indian Tribes, during the Revolutionary War

King George III, role in involving the Indians in the Revolutionary War

Length of Queen Ann's reign

Family Search research: Andrew Van Campen

Moses Van Campen

Lieutenant John Graham

Revolutionary War Journal, General George Washington's Body Guard & Life Guard
by Harry Schenawolf, November 5, 2013

