

Saratoga Monument rededicated
JIM KINNEY, The Saratogian
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VICTORY -- Saara Johanson was a 9-year-old fourth-grader learning about the American Revolution when she asked a simple question:

'Why can't I go up in the Saratoga Monument? What's wrong with it?' she recalled Monday. 'I lived right across the street.'

She wrote a letter to then-village Mayor Bruce Cornell. He passed it on to the late U.S. Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan and U.S. Rep. Gerald Solomon, R-Queensbury.

Solomon, who died in 2001, secured \$3 million in federal funds for the building's refurbishment.

Johanson, now a 20-year-old junior at Brandeis University in Boston, joined Cornell on Monday and cut the ribbon on the rededicated monument.

'It just looks so great,' she said. 'I would always hear stories from people who were able to get inside. I just wanted to be able to see it, and now everyone can.'

Freda Solomon, the congressman's widow, was there Monday.

'He would be so happy to be here because it meant so much to him,' she said. 'I'm sorry he can't be, but I'm happy to be here in his absence.'

The National Park Service opened the 155-foot granite tower to visitors in May 2002. Monday's dedication was in honor of the completion of visitor amenities at the site, said Saratoga National Park Superintendent Frank Dean. That includes \$360,000 worth of restrooms, parking lots, landscaping and signage.

'It means two things: Tourism and teaching history,' said Duane Booth of Stephentown, a member of the Saratoga Battle Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution.

Town of Saratoga Supervisor Thomas Wood said that the monument was built as a history lesson people could walk through. Low relief sculptures on the inside of the monument tell the story of the battle.

'It's got some things wrong,' said retired park ranger Dick Beresford. 'They've got Mrs. Schuyler burning her cornfields there. She really didn't do that.'

Built in 1877 at a cost of \$112,000, the monument has had problems with water leaking in through the walls from the beginning. It was closed intermittently over the years, was open from 1981 to 1987, then closed again until 2002.

Beresford said he heard tourists complain for years about not being able to go inside.

Once visitors climb the 188 steps, they can look out over the landscape where the Battles of Saratoga were fought in the fall of 1777.

Members of the Sons, Daughters or Children of the Revolution must trace their lineage back to someone who helped the patriot cause. One member at the ceremony Monday, Harry Taylor of Albany, had an ancestor named Isaac Van Wie at Saratoga.

'He was here with Gen. Gates when Burgoyne surrendered,' Taylor said.

That event, which drew the French into the war on the side of the colonists, happened Oct. 17, 1777, after both battles were fought on land south of the village. Modern-day Fort Hardy Park is the site where the British laid down their arms.

The last British encampment was just south of the monument on a 23-acre site now called Victory Woods. The Park Service has \$600,000 in federal money to cut vegetation from that property and open it to the public, Dean said. It will be connected to the monument by a trail.

'You can still see the battlements,' he said. 'It's a great piece of property.'

He expects it to be open in 2007.

The battlefield proper in Stillwater gets about 300,000 visitors a year, he said. The monument and the Schuyler House in Schuylerville each get about 50,000 annually, which he'd like to see increase.

'The new tour road will have an exit onto Route 4 sending people up into the village,' he said.

U.S. Rep. John Sweeney, who was at Monday's event, said he set aside \$1.5 million for improvements to the park in the new Department of the Interior bill that is before the Senate.

Both the Schuyler House and the Saratoga Monument will be open from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday; then, they will be closed until May.

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