

## Only Old Buttons

I walk over a historic piece of Stone Arabia soil, the site of Fort Paris. I'm alone and all is silent except for the wind as it blows across this hilltop. Lying there before me in the soil, a button appears. The button is a reminder of the trying times when this site had held its place in history for but a few years. As the fertile soil released its grip on the button stirring questions emerged. Nimble fingers rubbed the soil which clung to the button after two centuries. The finder searched for characteristics or markings which would help answer the questions of the button's past. A bold USA appeared to tell the story that it was one of the first American uniform buttons. A fastener from a coat belonging to a soldier who was engaged in a conflict to create a new nation. Other buttons emerge. All held a secret past which they could not reveal. Was the touch of fingers to the buttons many years ago driven by fear, hate, or apprehension of freedom yet unwon? Could it have held a feeling of pain, vanity, sadness or lust?

Some buttons bore the members of British military regiments. Some were puzzling since their regiments were not known to have ever been at Fort Paris. Two bore the bold figures 53 and 47. Both regiments surrendered at Saratoga in the battle there in 1777 which helped to change America's future. Stone Arabia men were there also. Were these buttons carried home by our men as souvenirs as soldiers have done through the centuries, then to be lost here on this hilltop? Was the button bearing the letters PSR for Pennsylvania State Regiment dropped by one of Morgan's famous riflemen? Were the small buttons from the clothing of a terrified little girl who was urged forward by her parents to the safety of Fort Paris as she carried her most valuable possession, her cat?

Pairs of cufflinks emerged from the ground along with other buttons of more fancy pattern which lead the finder to realize that the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in Stone Arabia was not as drab a period as some people think. One can only guess at the answers to these questions. The answer to whose clothing once bore these fasteners has vanished along with the mist of time. Was one of them from the uniform of Col. John Brown whose body was borne back to Fort Paris on the fateful day when he was killed in Stone Arabia Battle on October 19, 1780? Were some of the buttons those which were fastened in haste as Col. Brown and his men prepared to march out of Fort Paris to their meeting with destiny? Did the shank on the button break at that moment, causing it to fall to the earth where it would remain for over 200 years? Did some of the buttons come from the uniform of Jacob Valentine who was killed on this site when he took part in a mutiny in November 1779? Were some of the buttons from the clothing of Anne Eve Getman who was scalped, taken to Fort Paris, and survived to live for many years?

Our imagination can only add to the unanswered questions associated with those reminders of the past. The greatest question remains: are these small bits of the past just old buttons?

Skip Barshied, Stone Arabia, 2007