

Let us imagine that today is October 19, 1780

Let us imagine that today is October 19, 1780. Our house is a good one built nearly 50 years ago. Our farm is the pride of our farmer father. The crop of wheat, peas and corn was particularly good this year. Our barn is full to overflowing. What might our name be?

I could be Nellis, Saltsman, Gramps, Fox, Kilts, Brower, or one of many others. We live on an exposed frontier at a place called Stone Arabia in New York's Mohawk Valley. For over four long years we have lived with danger and fear. We have watched the destruction of our neighboring communities. The smoke and fire could be seen in past months as the houses and barns near Fort Plain across the river were destroyed. Over a year ago Tilleborough was destroyed. That was not far to the north of us. Our brothers and sisters cried as they heard of the destruction of our neighbor settlements and of the loss of life of settlers, some of which were our friends or relatives. Food would be scarce since the cattle and produce were destroyed.

Let us return to the first daylight hour of October 19, 1780. We were aware of the voices of our parents and others also throughout the night. We might have crept from our warm beds in the rooms over the kitchen to hear the terrifying words that raiders were near. Our fathers and mothers knew of the destruction of the Schoharie Valley to the east of us. They were all too aware that Tory and Indian were camped near the river at a place called Keaters Rift near the noses. The fog lay thick this morning along the river but a few of our neighbors on horseback were near the road that leads to our community. They will give us warning if the raiders seem to be coming this way. Now we hear the hoof beats of running horses and the loud voices of the men yelling at us to get to the fort to save our lives. The neighborhood fort called Fort Paris had been built four years before and now it would help save our families. Mother might ask what we can take with us. But there is no time to save much. Just no time. We pick up a few prized possessions and the deed box.

When we reach the fort some of our neighbors from further away are already there. Our militia, actually our older brothers and sometimes our fathers, had been stationed at the fort along with Colonel John Brown's Massachusetts men for several months. We see Col Brown on a small black horse as he leads his men toward the river in an effort to defeat the raiders and save the Stone Arabia settlement. We all listen and watch, hoping that we all were safe and our militia would be able to protect us. Now we hear musket shots at first scattered and then in volleys. There are men running toward the fort. We are told that others are fleeing in other directions for Col Brown is killed and other men also killed. Browns battalion is defeated. Now from our high point at the fort we can see burning houses and barns. Our own house and barn are visible as they disappear in flames. The two churches, so near the fort, are now burning. We can hear the shouts of the raiders. Our settlement lies in ashes but except for Brown and some forty soldiers who were killed most of our settlers' lives are saved. Winter is nearly upon us and times will be hard but just as the settlement had been built in the wilderness 50 years before, it would rise from the ashes.