

# American and Local Heritage to Be Highlighted in Encampment at Penn State



A recent reenactment of colonial days

by Joe Savrock (November 2009)

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. – An 18th Century-style encampment is planned at the Penn State Arboretum to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the discovery of local landmarks by Captain James Potter.

The encampment, scheduled for Dec. 4–5, is being organized by David Saxe, associate professor of social studies/citizenship education. Students in Saxe’s Heritage Interpretation class will present historical sketches from the colonial days.

The project, funded by the Apgar Foundation, is titled “Heritage Education Interpretation: Captain James Potter, Pennsylvania’s Forest Wars, and the Beginning of the American Nation.”

The encampment will take place amid the backdrop of the Arboretum’s 42-acre Hartley Woodlot, which has withstood development in the centuries following Potter’s pioneering activities. The early influx of settlers to the region led to eventual development and deforestation of large chunks of land. However, the Hartley Woodlot was untouched, and today it remains as an unspoiled representation of the past. The woodlot, according to Saxe, “features a number of old-growth trees, some dating to the 18th century.”

Potter is widely credited with the discovery of Mount Nittany, as well as Nittany Valley, Penns Valley, and other locales throughout the Centre County region. He is the namesake of the village of Potters Mills and General Potter’s Highway (Rt. 322) in Centre County.

Potter was an officer in the Pennsylvania Provincial (British) militia. He was considered to be a hero of the French and Indian War as well as the Revolutionary War, serving as one of George Washington’s generals in the Philadelphia campaigns and at Valley Forge. Potter was a member of the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention that drafted Pennsylvania’s First Constitution; later, he served as the Commonwealth’s vice president (lieutenant governor). Potter’s grandson, Andrew Gregg Curtin, was Pennsylvania’s governor during the Civil War era.

Saxe also organized several trips earlier this semester for his students, whom he dubs “The 1st

Battalion of the Penn State Regiment of Foot”:

- Fort Necessity National Battlefield, Bushy Run Battlefield, and Fort Ligonier on Oct. 2, to attend a special workshop on the French and Indian War presented by interpretative staff from the National Park Service;
- Fort Ticonderoga, N.Y., on Oct. 16–18, to participate in a living history encampment and special interpretative program.

On Dec. 25, Saxe is scheduled to participate in a special crossing of the Delaware River. The event will be a reenactment of Potter—then a colonel—accompanying Gen. George Washington during the Continental Army’s surprise attack on Trenton, N.J.