

Sgt. Benjamin Waite Narratives

The Death of Sgt. Benjamin Waite

Sgt. Benjamin Waite was slain defending Deerfield during the French and Indian attack in February of 1704 | by [Bud Miner](#)

Deerfield, Massachusetts 1704

Almost three decades have passed and “Pocumtuck” is no more. But a new village has arisen on the old site. Shunning the former Indian name, the English settlers now call the place Deerfield. By 1704 the town has grown to 260 people. The size of the town suggests stability. Yet like its predecessors, Deerfield lies alone and exposed on the frontier. There are still no English settlements west of Deerfield for fifty miles, until one reaches the Hudson River and New York. Nor are there English towns north of Deerfield at all. To the east, too, lies forty miles of wilderness.

As in 1664 and 1675, the late summer of 1703 has been a time of great anxiety. Activities of late spring have once again brought forth those fears. In May, early conflict known as Queen Anne’s War, New York Governor, Lord Cornbury, sent word that French soldiers and allied Indians from Canada were heading for Deerfield and the Connecticut valley. As of September, a stressful summer had passed peacefully. Then in October, a small Indian force struck, capturing two Deerfield men. Tension heightens; the town strengthens its fortifications; the Massachusetts General Court sends soldiers to help protect the town. As of December, all is quiet. The cold and snow now promise further respite, for in 1704, wars are not fought in depths of winter.

But now the quiet of the winter is about to be shattered. Two hours before dawn on the fateful leap year morning of February 29, 1704, Deerfield’s inhabitants lie asleep inside the town’s palisade. The Indian threat remains, all the town’s residents, including twenty Massachusetts soldiers, just arrived from Boston, sleep in the dozen houses inside the fort. The other thirty or so houses outside the palisade lie empty. A watchman is assigned to patrol the town through the night. In the predawn hours, he proves unfaithful to his duty. The breach of faith soon proves fatal.

Two miles north of town, just across the Deerfield River, lies a military force of 200 to 300 French and Indians. These men have traveled close to three hundred miles to reach this spot. Now they are ready to attack. Silently they cross the river and traverse two miles of open farmland toward the sleeping town. They are able to move quietly, for the deep snow dampens all sound. Winter aids the force in another way as well. Heavy drifts have piled snow against the walls of the fort, drifts so high, that the attackers can easily scale the walls. Without a night watch to contend with, the warriors quickly move inside. The signal comes, a cry rings out, and the attack begins.

Although the townspeople fight back bravely, the French and Indian force is too strong and their advantage is too great. Even the reinforcements who charge up from Hadley and Hatfield cannot turn the tide. At battle’s end, the survivors grimly assess the town’s losses. Forty-seven English men, women, and children lie dead; another 109 have been captured. In all three-fifths of the town’s people are gone. Almost half the houses have been burned.

Prior to this, on 19 September 1677, Deerfield and Hatfield had been attacked by a band of Indians and Benjamin’s wife Martha, and three children, Mary, Martha, and Sarah had been taken to Canada. While in Canada, Martha gave birth to another baby girl, which was named Canada. (*In 1696, Canada Waite married Joseph Smith. One of their descendants started Smith’s College in Northampton, MA.*) Benjamin Waite was able to negotiate the release of his family after an audience with Gov. Frontenac. They were escorted back to Albany, New York, under guard by French soldiers.

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A Second Narrative on Sgt. Benjamin Waite

submitted by [Becky Turner](#), 7808 Co. Rd. P29, Blair, Nebraska 68008

Benjamin Waite, one of first settlers of Hatfield, Hampshire Co., Massachusetts. 1668. On June 8, 1670 he married Mary Leonard (daughter of John and Sarah Heald Leonard; he of Staffordshire Co, England. Proprietor in Springfield, Mass. 1638). Mary was born 1649 in Springfield, MA

Benjamin's wife, Mary, and their children Mary, age 6, Martha, age 4 and Sarah, age two, were captured by Indians during raid on Hatfield, September 19, 1677, and carried off to Canada. Mary Waite was pregnant with their fourth child. Benjamin went to Canada to rescue them. Daughter, Canada, born January 1678, before Benjamin could pay the ransom. Family returned to Hatfield. Lived there until 1704, when he was killed in Indian raid at Deerfield, Mass.

Children:

Mary, born 1672, married Ebenezer Wells 1690

Martha, born 1673

Sarah, born 1675, married John Belding

Canada, born 1678, married Joseph Smith 1696

John, born 1680, married Mary Belding 1702, daughter of Daniel

Joseph, born 1682, died young

Jeremiah, born 1684, married Mary Graves, 1706

Joseph, born 1688, married Hannah Billings 1713

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