

## Researcher to shed light on African American's contribution at Battle of Sackets Harbor during the War of 1812

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By



David Lassman / The Post-Standard

Alton Tallmadge (center) was given a party recently for his 100th birthday. He's a former Solvay H.S. basketball coach and science teacher who had a state championship team in 1942 and 1943. Here he talks over old times and looks at photos with some of his former players. They are from left; Bob Himpler, Michael Gasapo, (Alton) , Frank Armani, and Ed Alexander.

We know that African Americans played an increasingly important role in American wars throughout our history, right from the man named Crispus Attucks, who was killed in Boston in 1770 at the beginning of the Revolutionary War.

We know less about blacks in the War of 1812 but this lack is being filled by new research during the current 200th anniversary of that war. One of the researchers is Matthew Mac Vittie, assistant curator of history at Onondaga Historical Association. He once worked for the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

Matt's focus is an African American farmer and free black named Julius Terry (or Torry, as the last name appears in some accounts). Julius lived near

Sackets Harbor.

He was a volunteer and part of a gun crew at the first Battle of Sackets Harbor, according to research by Matt and Dr. Gary Gibson of the Sackets Harbor Battlefield Alliance. It's said Julius Terry was there for the first shot of the War of 1812.

Matt Mac Vittie says most blacks at Sackets Harbor during the War of 1812 "were actually slaves, who were in a sense 'rented' to the U.S. Government." The owners collected money for each slave. He estimates that 375 black seamen were stationed at Sackets Harbor. Were they free blacks as opposed to slaves?

"The only record known to exist of a free black man serving at Sackets Harbor is that of Julius Terry," Matt explains.

Terry owned a lot in the surrounding Town of Hounsfield and is listed as a Navy pensioner (ordinary seaman getting \$5 a month) and in federal census reports as owner of 100 acres, worth \$3,480, with three horses, three cows, 14

sheep and two swine.

After that first battle, Matt found that Julius "went down the St. Lawrence (river) as part of the crew of the armed schooner, Julia, to protect schooners trapped at Ogdensburg."

Julius, who was born in Connecticut, died about 1851.

His plot in Sackets Harbor Cemetery has been located by researchers. It is unmarked and ripe for a monument. Matt says the Daughters of 1812 are working to get a marker through the Veterans Administration.

### **Big fish tales**

I've had interesting feedback about last week's item on a huge, embalmed whale which was displayed along the Erie Canal, including at Syracuse's State Fair, in the 1891. Dennis Brady of Baldwinsville had a more recent sighting.

Dennis says a dead whale was shown in the parking lot behind the Sears store on South Salina Street in the late 1960s or early 1970s. He saw it.

"I was about 10 or 12 years old," according to Dennis. "The whale was in a refrigerated trailer in the parking lot of the store. You had to walk up a set of steps and look down at it."

Dennis says he doesn't know what he expected but the whale let the young lad down. "I was a little disappointed by it," he explained.

The man who got me into this whale hunt is Dr. Al Falcone. This was what the "Falcone boys" saw about 1930:

"My father had a fruit market on lower James Street across from the Alhambra (arena). Directly behind the store was a New York Central railroad spur running down Canal Street.

"One day a boxcar was parked there and contained a large whale...We walked around the boardwalk looking down at this huge whale and exited by some rear steps. Naturally, one cannot forget such an experience."

### **Educator honored**

Alton Tallmadge, retired high school principal and sports coach, recently observed his 100th birthday with a surprise party thrown by some of his old pals at Solvay High School, where he taught and coached basketball in the 1940s.

Al organized the first high school lacrosse team in Central New York, and outfitted the team with used equipment from SU's coach, Roy Simmons Sr. He'd played lacrosse while attending the university. In 1970, he retired as principal at West Genesee High School.

### **Help!**

Pat Mulcahey has a pen he'd like to return to its owner. It's a memorial pen for Robert Stryker, the Army soldier who received the Medal of Honor for bravery during the Vietnam conflict. Robert's buried in Throopsville, south of Auburn.

Pat (488-7781) says he got the pen from Harris Dry Cleaners when he picked up suits he left for cleaning. The pen was in a pocket. He'd like to return it. I wrote about the hero in 2011.

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