

# Long Islanders learn of local role in Revolutionary War

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By TED PHILLIPS [ted.phillips@newsday.com](mailto:ted.phillips@newsday.com)



David Clemens, left, of Centerport, dressed in a Lottery Coat like those worn in 1778, and Bob Winowitch of Lake Grove, wearing a 1775 officer's outfit, talk outside after a lecture series about the Revolutionary War at the Long Island Museum in Stony Brook, Saturday, Nov. 15, 2014. Photo Credit: Ed Betz

Long Islanders played a revolutionary role in the war that won the country, historians said Saturday.

A daylong symposium at the Long Island Museum, "Long Island in the American Revolution," brought together historians

and buffs who share an interest the seven years of hardship endured during the war.

The event was the Stony Brook museum's biggest in connection with its exhibition looking at Long Island's role in all the country's wars.

"You don't have to have a degree in history to take an interest in something that happened right in your back yard," said Joshua Ruff, the museum's director of collections and interpretation. "There is so much to this story."

The AMC television series "Turn" about the Culper Spy Ring in Setauket has brought renewed attention in Long Island's role in the conflict, but Ruff said the show reflects a rising tide of interest that includes new books from some of the five authors and historians who spoke Saturday.

George Washington and his troops retreated from Long Island after defeat at the Battle of Brooklyn in 1776. British troops occupied New York City and Long Island during the war and, historians said Saturday, the abuse endured by locals led many to the Patriot side.

"Suffolk and all of Long Island was under martial law longer than any other part of the colonies during the entire American Revolution," John Staudt, history professor at Hofstra University, told the audience of more than 100.

"Although those who remained in eastern Long Island initially tried to appease the British, rebellious behavior began to resurface as British officers and soldiers committed outright murder of the civilians that lived here."

Hofstra professor Natalie Naylor, said women played crucial roles in the war, including making goods that otherwise would have been purchased from the British, and they endured hardships, too.

"Few Long Island women escaped suffering during the war years," Naylor said. "Many became widows, and some themselves were victims, others had their household goods stolen and homes and property destroyed. They resisted British demands at great cost."

The restive population in the city and on the island and the constant threat that Washington would attack aided the revolution by pinning down British troops that might otherwise have fought the rebels.

Barnet Schecter, author of "The Battle for New York: The City at the Heart of the American Revolution" said most people think the battle of Yorktown, Virginia, ended the war.

"It's actually the moment when the [New York] city in 1783 is peacefully turned over to the Americans as the British evacuate on Nov. 25 and Washington is able to re-enter the city that he strived to capture for seven years," Schecter said.

The exhibition, Long Island at War, runs through Dec. 28.