

# The Law Park Cannons

Presentation given by Howard Dale  
Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical  
Society.

19 November 2022, 2:00 pm

Vescio Community Center

# Introduction

- Who am I
  - Howard Dale
  - Apart from nine years in the 1990s have lived in the US since 1974, last 24 years in Briarcliff Manor
  - Worked at the UN (specifically UNICEF) for 38 Years
  - Recently Started to volunteer at the Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical Society (BMSHS)
  - Interested in history in general, local history and military history
- What I'm not
  - Expert in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Artillery
  - Came across the story of 'The Lost Cannons of Law Park' in the BMSHS and thought it would be a story worth telling

**ON WITH THE SHOW**

“Dented, scratched and battle-scarred, bronze green from a century and a half of warlike years in France, Haiti and Cuba, two elaborate old bronze cannons, one at least of which was once the property of the tyrant, Jacques I, Emperor of Haiti stand today on a peaceful lawn in Briarcliff Manor, awaiting the ceremonial day when the American Legion will move them to their final pedestal of honor in Law Memorial Park.”

“Cannon at Briarcliff built before the Revolution” in Ossining  
Citizen Register, Saturday, January 27, 1934.

# Cannon in Ossining's Nelson Park



*“A genuine Hudson River artifact, it was cast at the West Point Foundry in Cold Spring, served in the Civil War, was partly buried at the Newburgh waterfront, relocated to Fort Ontario at Oswego, and brought to Ossining in the 1980s by Peter Carpenter (a high school boy scout at the time) to replace a World War I Cannon...” (Rob Yasinsac)*

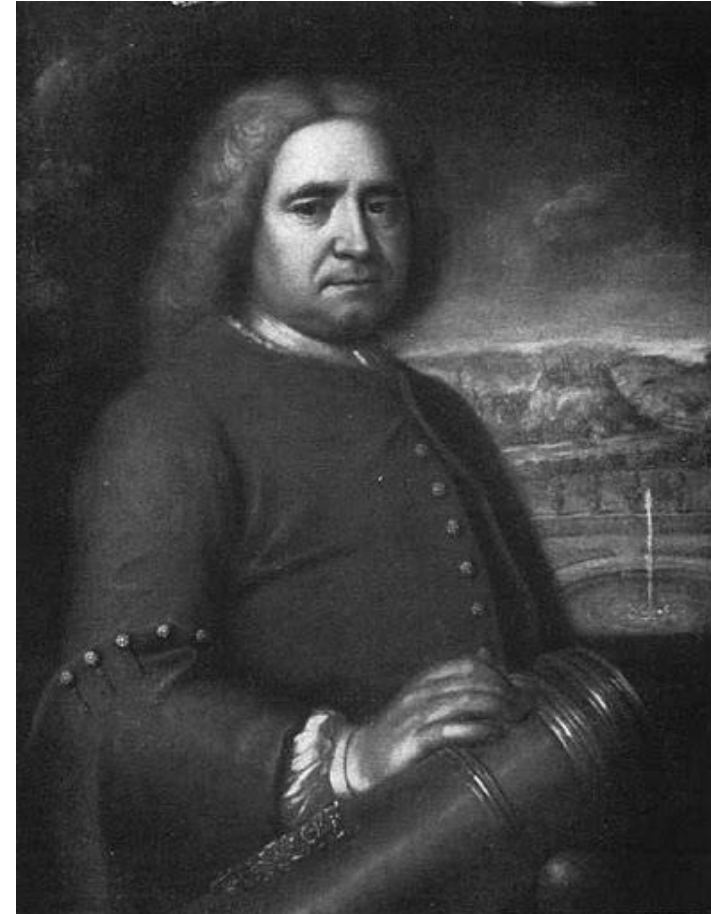
# 18th Century 4 Pounder Cannon (*Le Pénétrant*)





# Jean Maritz I (1680 - 1743)

- In 1704 Maritz designed and built a water-powered horizontal cannon-boring machine in the foundry in Geneva.
- Vast improvement over previous methods, which involved founding the cannon around a clay core, which was removed after founding, leading to imprecision and shifting of the core, and therefore poor performance



# Two Systems

- Two major systems of artillery for the French Army during the timeframe when these guns were cast:
  - Valliere
  - Gribeauval System.
- We're pretty confident that the Law Park Cannons are of the Valliere Type.



# Jean-Florent de Vallière (1667 - 1759)

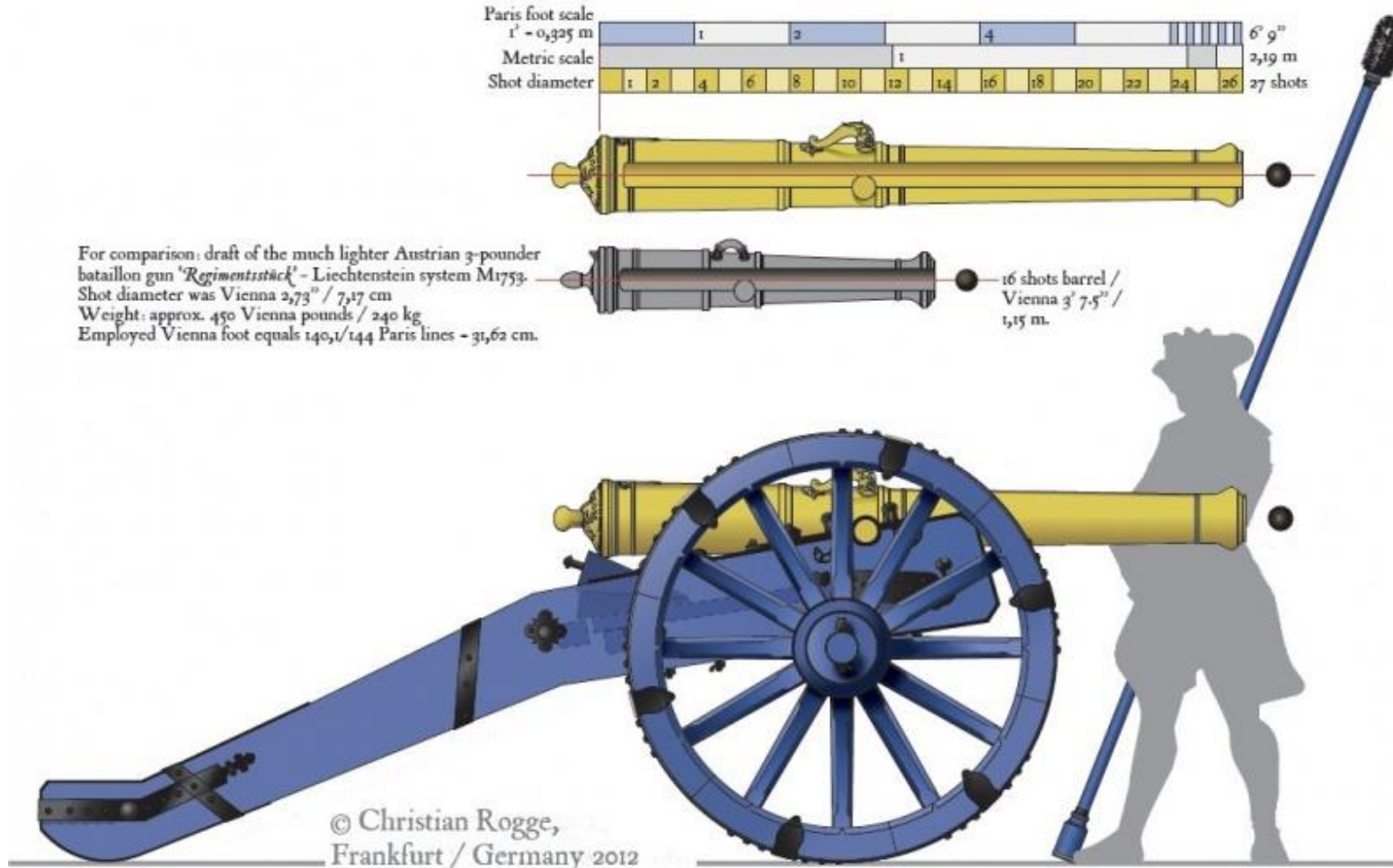
- Colonel and inspector of artillery from 1720
- Lieutenant-General in 1732: a significant figure in the development of French artillery.
- From 1726 - 1747 was Director-General of the Manufacture of Arms in France.
- De Vallière recruited Maritz I into French service and in 1732, the first Maritz cannon boring machine was operational in the foundry at Lyon, boring out the Model 1732 system equipment. These standardized pieces became known as the “Vallière System”.



- Each French brass gun had a unique name. This 4-pounder field gun is named "La Perilleuse", which means "The Dangerous One" in English.
- The symbols on the cannons allowed gunners to identify the size by a simple glance at the breech:
- Face in a sunburst = 4-Pounder
- Monkey head = 8-Pounder
- Rooster head = 12-Pounder
- Medusa head = 16 Pounder
- Bacchus head = 24 Pounder



# French 4-pdr field cannon – Vallière System



American Revolutionary War Period 4lb Solid – Solid  
Shot Cannonball, ca. 1770s





# ***Surrender of General Burgoyne*** by John Trumbull, 1822



Depicted at center are General John Burgoyne surrendering to General Horatio Gates, who refused to take his sword.

The painting hangs in the United States Capitol Rotunda.

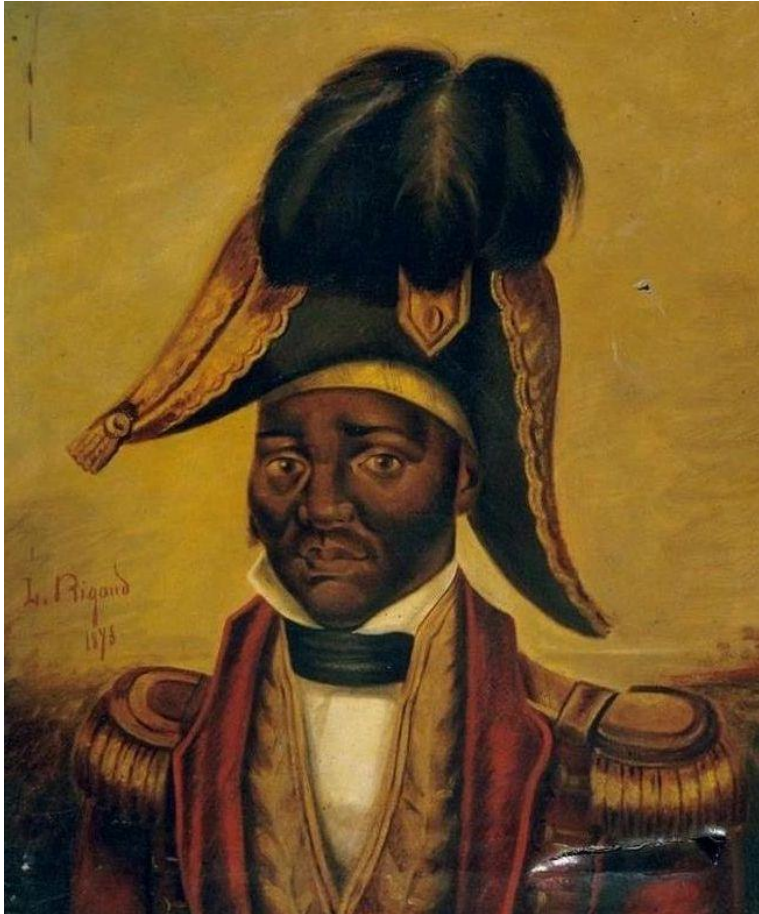
The painting shows General Daniel Morgan in front of a de Vallière 4-pounder.

# The Two Cannons. Part 1: L'éclair

- The Maker of Light
- Bears the date of 1773
- 8 feet long, bronze
- Inscription (translated) reading “Presented to Jacques I, Emperor of Haiti, 1804 by Messrs (sic) Lewis Trires.
- Made in Douai, France by J. Berenger
- Elaborately embossed

# Jean-Jacques Dessalines

(20 September 1758 – 17 October 1806)



- Was a leader of the Haitian Revolution and the first ruler of an independent Haiti under the 1805 constitution. Under Dessalines, Haiti became the first country in the Americas to permanently abolish slavery. Initially regarded as governor-general, Dessalines was later named Emperor of Haiti as Jacques I (1804–1806) by generals of the Haitian Revolution Army and ruled in that capacity until being assassinated in 1806.
- Dessalines served as an officer in the French army when the colony was fending off Spanish and British incursions. Later he rose to become a commander in the revolt against France



## The Two Cannons. Part 2: Le Brullion

- The Confusion Maker.
- Made in Belgium in the town of St. Hubert
- 8ft long
- Bronze with handles in the form of a phoenix
- Much engraved and embossed on its upper surface, three fleurs-de-Lys
- Bears the name “Le Duc Du Maine” and “De St. Hubert Fecit AO 1763”

# Duc du Maine

- Louis-Auguste de Bourbon, duc du Maine (31 March 1670 – 14 May 1736)
- Illegitimate son of Louis XIV and his official mistress, Madame de Montespan.
- The king's favourite son, he was the founder of the semi-royal House of Bourbon-Maine named after his title and his surname.



# How did they get to Briarcliff Manor?

- Not entirely clear if they originally came directly from France or via the French forces engaged in the Revolutionary War
- Mr. Benjamin Lissberger acquired them in Havana, Cuba at the close of the Spanish-American War (1898) when they were auctioned off by the government. During the Spanish-American War they stood in Morro Castle, Havana, Cuba.
- He gave them to Mr. U.T. Hungerford, a brass manufacturer of Briarcliff Manor who after some time gave them to...
- Mr. William E. Donavin of the Briarcliff Post of the American Legion, which in turn gave them to the Law Memorial Park in 1934, where they stood on cement pedestals until around 1942 when.....????

# U.T. Hungerford



- Born 1832. Died 1926.
- *Hardware Dealers' Magazine* summed up the industry's estimation of the man saying "Because of his prominence and years of uninterrupted service in his chosen field, Mr. Hungerford is by many called the 'Dean of the Brass and Copper Industry.'"
- His home "Hohensichtlich" built in the 1890s, was a prime location overlooking the Hudson River from a high point on the hill.

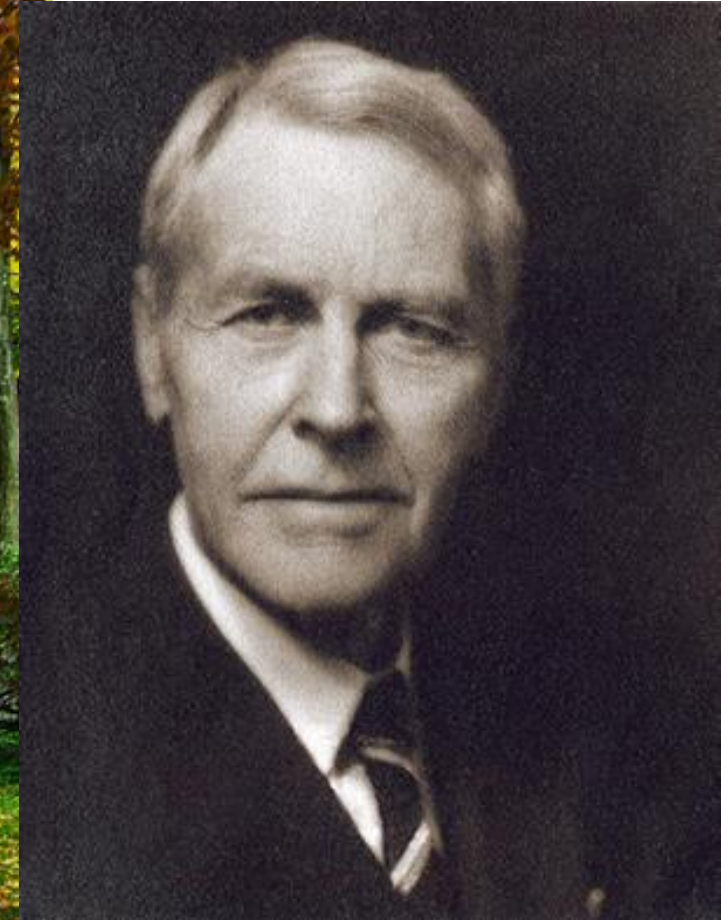
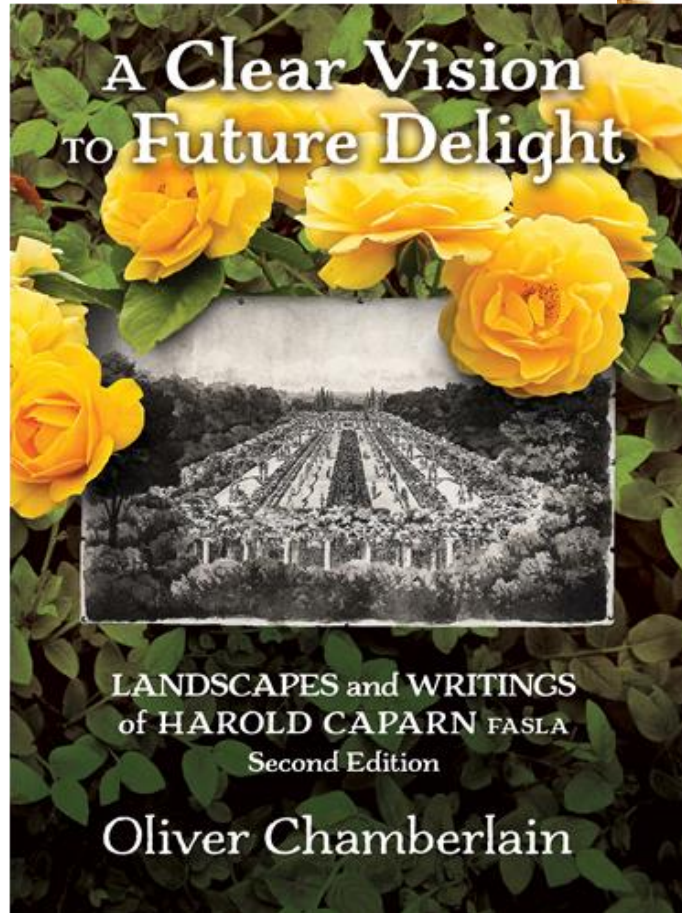


# U.T. Hungerford's "Hohensichtlich"





# A Digression: Harold Caparn



# What happened to them?

- “These two cannon were contributed to the Government call for scrap, from which to make ammunition for the World War in 1942. There was a national request for all possible scrap metal and Briarcliff contributed several tons, these two cannon being in that contribution of metal.”
- “Giving these as scrap for War uses, shows the extraordinary need felt for such materiel as a military necessity in making from such material new guns, tanks, airplanes etc.”

From one of the scrapbooks of early Briarcliff Manor – undated.



# Another View

“The WWII scrap drive was one of the most ill-conceived and screwed up programs, from the perspective of historic preservation, one could imagine. It was “feel good” propaganda, intended to get people personally connected with the war effort. To that extent it probably succeeded, but much of the metal collected was too impure to be really suitable for WWII munition purposes and so was not used. In the process, a lot of good cannon were lost. Most of the WWI captures went to scrap and obviously 18th century pieces as well. At least these two weren’t Continental Army guns. Eventually, Roosevelt ordered a stop to historic pieces going to scrap but the damage was already done. Some brass founders refused to melt some of the guns down, and I know of one or two from West Point that still survive because of that. But we lost some good pieces from the collection. That’s what happens when you let mass hysteria take over.”

Jensen, Les CIV USA IMCOM  
Curator of Arms and Armor at United States Military Academy

# Hagerstown, Maryland Cannon



# Hagerstown, Maryland Cannon

This bronze cannon was made at Douai France in 1751, by Berenger the great gun manufacturer, for the House of the Bourbons. After many travels and vicissitudes, it was discovered mounted in defense of Fort Morro Santiago, Cuba. Upon the surrender of Santiago, it passed into the possession of the United States and was taken to Governors Island N.Y. It was assigned by the Secretary of War to Hagerstown and has been mounted there to commemorate the patriotism and courage of all the volunteers from Washington County who entered the Army and Navy of the U.S. in the American - Spanish War, 1897-1898.

**THANK YOU!**