

WALLOOMSACK REVIEW

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The *Walloomsack Review* is a publication of the Bennington Museum. Its purpose is to present a wide range of articles about the history and culture of Vermont and neighboring New York and Massachusetts. We invite submission of scholarly articles and of books to be reviewed. For author guidelines and submission deadlines please contact co-editor Tyler Resch at tresch@benningtonmuseum.org.

The *Walloomsack Review* is generously underwritten
by Robert and Cora May Howe

On the Front cover:

The Munro-Hawkins House in Shaftsbury 1807-1809.
Photo courtesy of Kevin Bushee.

On back cover:

View of area near the Bennington Battlefield in this
circa 1900 Griswold postcard, article on page 37.
Author Michael Gabriel's collection

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Editors' Notes

The cover photograph of this issue, which depicts the Palladian-windowed Munro-Hawkins house in Shaftsbury, introduces a narrative about Oliver Abel and some of his fellow carpenter-artisans who had worked on the iconic Old First Church in Bennington, built in 1805-6. Details are described about several other buildings of distinction, both locally and in Connecticut and Massachusetts. The story is one of early elegant architectural detail and involved a good deal of research on the part of Tracy Baker-White, who also wrote the article in our Autumn 2014 edition about the life and work of builder Hiram Waters. For this research she was assisted by Katy Riley, whose genealogical skills helped to define the relationships among some of the builders.

Ben Z. Rose presents a most electrifying story that sheds new light on the history of slavery in New England, though this time there is a positive outcome. The Stockbridge slave known as Mum Bett won her freedom through a judicial process on the basis of equality and not, as in most cases, linked to abusive treatment. The article offers rich detail of 18th-century life in prominent Western Massachusetts households where there were slaves.

Speculative origins of the Mormon church, as reported by Jon Mathewson, are focused on a few towns in western Rutland County. These details add to the larger story of the Mormon church, which has so much to do with Vermont. Brigham Young was born in Whitingham in 1801, where there is a commemorative monument, though his family did not remain there for long. And the prophet Joseph Smith was born in Sharon in 1805.

A diversity of subject matter is covered in the books reviewed in this issue. Our authority on the Battle of Bennington, Mike Gabriel, gives especially high marks to the new account of the Battle of Hubbardton, the only Revolutionary War battle to take place on Vermont soil. He also presents new scholarly speculation about a near-forgotten aspect of the Battle of Bennington.

A lengthy account of the life of Robert Rogers, in a book called *War on the Run*, also offers insight into the way the so-called French and Indian wars became, in a very few years, transformed into the American Revolution. It becomes clear how the British expended so much treasure on their battles with the French for domination of the North American continent that they tried to make the American colonists pay for it.

Archaeologist Victor Rolando reviews a new book that adds to some extraordinary research on Vermont's copper industry, which traces to 1829 and witnessed many boom and bust years for the towns of Strafford, Vershire, and Ely in eastern Vermont.

Contributors

Ben Z. Rose, an enthusiast of early American history, is the author of *John Stark: Maverick General* (which was reviewed in *Walloomsack Review*) and *Mother of Freedom: Mum Bett and the Roots of Abolition*. He lives in Lincoln, Mass., and can be reached at benzrose@msn.com.

Jon Mathewson began working with public and private collections soon after receiving his master's degree in history twenty-six years ago. He is the curator at the Dorset Historical Society's Bley House Museum and lives in Middletown Springs, the focus of his article on early Mormon tracings.

Tracy Baker-White is an artist and educator who lives in Williamstown, Mass. She has been curator of education and arts administrator at the San Antonio Museum of Art, the Southwest school of Art, and the Corcoran College of Art & Design. She is a champion of unknown artists, and has published several essays on the self-taught visionary Charles A.A. Dellschau.

Michael P. Gabriel is a professor of history at Kutztown University in Pennsylvania and has become a leading authority on the Battles of Bennington and Saratoga. He has written several articles for the *Walloomsack Review* including "Prisoners at the Bennington Meeting House," (Vol. VII) and "A Forgotten Cattle Skirmish preceded the Battle of Bennington," (Vol. V). He is the author of *The Bennington Battle: Soldiers & Civilians*, published in 2012 by History Press.

Victor Rolando is the author of *Two Hundred Years of Soot and Sweat: The History and Archeology of Vermont's Iron, Charcoal, and Lime Industries*, and is a past president of the Vermont Archaeological Society. He has led many field tours of industrial archaeological sites in Vermont.

Tyler Resch, co-editor of this journal and research librarian at the Bennington Museum, writes a biweekly newspaper column that revisits books, past and present, about Vermont history; it appears weekends on VTDigger, a statewide online newspaper.

Katy Riley was the assistant librarian this past spring in the Bennington Museum's research library.

Bennington's "Masterworkman," Oliver Abel Jr.

Tracy Baker-White

Photographs by the author unless otherwise noted

In 1804, when the leaders of the First Congregational Church advertised for builders to erect a new meetinghouse, they were doing just as half-a-dozen other villages up and down the north-south corridor from Connecticut to Vermont had. Bennington planned to build a stylish new church with Palladian windows and Federal-style details for their congregation to honor the glory of God.

The earliest and most influential church of this type in the region was Charles Bulfinch's church in Pittsfield, Mass. (1793-94), which served as the model for other communities. Richmond followed in 1795, then Williamstown (1798), Lee (1800), Salisbury, Conn. (1800), Washington, Mass. (1801-2), South Canaan, Conn. (1802-04), and Lenox (1804-06). Builders used pattern books and copied one another freely, adapting designs to suit their needs and budgets. Villages in southern Vermont were also beginning to build new Federal-style meetinghouses. In 1802, Asher Benjamin (who had published a design for such a church in 1797) built a church in Windsor, Mass., and in 1804, Elisha Scott began building a similar structure for the Baptists of Poultney, Vt.

According to an advertisement in the *Vermont Gazette* on February 14, 1804, Bennington's new meetinghouse was to be 70 by 52 feet, with a porch, cupola and tower.¹ Proposals were to include the masonry, underpinning, glazing, covering, and finishing, as well as the "necessary superintendence of the master workman and his assistants in putting said frame up."² The committee ultimately hired Lavius Fillmore and Oliver Abel Jr. to do the job — both men from Connecticut, but with established connections to the community.



*Details of dentils on fireplace mantel,
Joshua Munro House
Photo courtesy of Kevin Bushee*

Fillmore was the nephew of church member Nathaniel Fillmore, and Abel the younger cousin of Thomas Abel, who had served on the building committee. With them came Asa Hyde, a younger cousin of Abel's.³ Hyde also had connections to early Bennington settlers through the Hyde and Bingham families.⁴

According to tradition, Fillmore was the designer, Oliver Abel the master carpenter, and Hyde the carver. The Reverend Isaac Jennings, pastor of the church during the centennial celebration in 1906, wrote, "It is presumed Mr. Philemore [was] in charge of the mason work and Mr. Abel [served] as builder-in-chief."⁵ At age 37, Fillmore was the oldest and most experienced of the three. He had already built churches in East Haddam, Middletown, and Norwich, and knew how to plan a church. Abel was 31 years old and presumably in the prime of his career as a master carpenter. Hyde was the youngest, at only 21, and had probably just completed his training as an apprentice and journeyman.

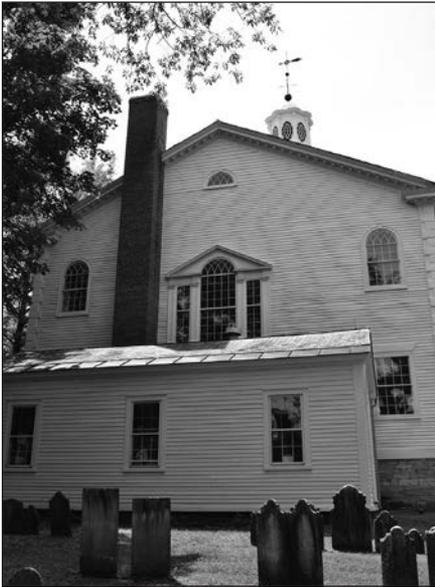
The builders came from three adjacent communities in southeast Connecticut known for early adoption of federal forms: Fillmore from Franklin, Abel from Lebanon, and Hyde from Lisbon. These towns were only 15 to 20 miles northeast of New London, where Lebanon-based builder Isaac Fitch had built a grand and important Federal-style courthouse in 1784.⁶ After the First Baptist Church in Providence, Fitch's New London Courthouse was likely the most advanced building of its type in the region. It included trend-setting Federal-style details such as the triple-arched Palladian window, corner quoins, and modillioned cornices. In 1784, Governor Jonathan Trumbull called Fitch "the best architect within the compass of my Acquaintance -- his natural genius for the business is very extraordinary -- and he is well acquainted with books of Architecture, works by rule, is industrious and oversees & directs workmen beyond any man among us --"⁷ Fitch's probate records show that he owned a copy of Gibbs's *Architecture* and a book called *Lectures on Architecture*.⁸

It may be significant that Isaac Fitch's family had ties to Oliver Abel.⁹ Fitch lived in Abel's hometown of Lebanon, and Abel was tangentially related to Fitch. Abel was a first cousin once removed to Fitch's twelve older half siblings and he was 18 years old when Fitch died prematurely in 1791 at the age of 57. In a town of only 3,600 people, given the family connection to the Fitches, it is reasonable to assume that Oliver Abel knew Isaac Fitch personally, and perhaps apprenticed with him. But even if he had not formally trained with Fitch, he would have known Fitch's groundbreaking work in New London.

Fillmore also had ample experience with the new Federal style of classical detailing. In 1794, he built a meetinghouse for the town of East Haddam, while William Spratt simultaneously built a house for Gen. Epaphroditus

Champion in the same town.¹⁰ Fillmore's East Haddam Church included an octagonal ceiling set on groin vaults and a pulpit set beneath a Palladian window. The precedent for these details probably came from Charles Bulfinch's Hollis Street Church in Boston, which in turn had been designed after Christopher Wren's St. Stephen Walbrook in London.¹¹ Fillmore went on to build two more churches in Middletown and Norwich after his work in East Haddam.

By 1804, when Fillmore, Abel, and Hyde collaborated on the First Church in Bennington, they brought a broad knowledge of Connecticut Federal style, the pedigree of skilled craftsmen, and enough experience to pull it off. The collaboration proved to be an iconic version of the Federal meetinghouse with Palladian windows, groined elliptical ceiling, fluted columns, corner quoins, modillioned cornices, tiered open cupola, and spectacular fanlights. The proportions are light and vertical, and the detailing delicate.



Closed pediment over Palladian window, rear wall, First Church, Old Bennington, Vt.

The Joshua Munro House, Shaftsbury, 1807-1809

By the time the First Church Bennington was finished and dedicated on January 1, 1806, Lavius Fillmore was already in negotiations to build a similar structure for Middlebury.¹² He promptly moved north to work on this next project, but Abel and the younger Asa Hyde stayed in Bennington, becoming active members of the community.

A year after completion of the church, Joshua Munro, a wealthy wheat farmer and businessman in nearby Shaftsbury, started building a high-style Federal mansion. Tradition

has it that Munro did much of the work himself, but his ledger of accounts reveals that he actually employed skilled craftsmen to do much of the work.¹³ Munro's overall concept for the house was probably based on local models, including the General David Robinson house in Bennington (1795), and the Daniel Day (1798) and Samuel Sloan (1802) houses in nearby Williamstown. He may have seen Asher Benjamin's houses in Windsor, or the William Coleman House in Greenfield. Or perhaps he had traveled to Connecticut and



Triple arched Palladian window, David Robinson House, Old Bennington, Vt.

seen the numerous other grand new mansions being built there by wealthy businessmen and lawyers.

Munro's project began in spring of 1807, when the ground thawed. He started making payments to David Buck of Arlington, and two assistants (Henry Gray and Caleb Sherman) in April for "work on my house frame." His ledger of accounts shows payments for framing, hewing, and building the house, and at the end of the summer, it appears that this crew's work was done. Beginning in August, and continuing for the next two years Munro paid Oliver Abel and his men at least \$560 for work "dun by the jobe & by contract." This large sum was broken into many payments, some in cash and some in goods. Payments were made directly to Abel, and also to Abel's workmen – Asa Hide (Hyde) and Jonathan Wheat.¹⁴ Other men mentioned in Abel's employ were John Shanks, John Simes, and Charles Bull. Munro figured his accounts in pounds, shillings, and pence, but also gives dollar amounts. His carpenters were paid "six shillings a day, the equivalent of a dollar in the 'new' money."¹⁵

Abel's men would have added the Palladian window, the trim on the façade and all of the classical detailing, reflecting the same skill and finesse that were employed in Bennington's First Church. The central stairway of the Munro house goes up the right side of the front hall with gentle risers and tread to a short landing just before the top. Two additional steps go up on each side. The last two steps go to the center hallway on the left, and a back bedroom on the right. The cellar of the house contains a fireplace and large cauldron used for boiling soap.¹⁶

Munro's house has an unusual and lovely vaulted ceiling in the upper center hall, reminiscent of the groined arches of the First Church. The parlor mantles include bands of dentils with drill marks creating decorative patterns.

Similar details are found in the doorway caps and crown molding. The exterior detailing is exceptional with garlanded frieze boards, a beautiful fanlight, carved trim, and modillions.

There has been much speculation about Fillmore's involvement in the design of Munro's house, but Munro's ledger apparently shows no payments to Fillmore for plans work done on the house. It seems more likely that Abel worked with Munro to design the details of the house and simply used elements of design that were also used on the church. The beautiful architectural details such as the drilled dentil work and trim were probably the contribution of Asa Hyde, the church carver who ultimately married Oliver Abel's adopted daughter, Abigail Mumford Hazen.¹⁷

Closed Palladian Pediment

The Palladian window on the façade of Munro's house has a completely closed pediment above the central arch. This closed pediment directly links Munro's house to Abel and Fillmore's work on the churches in both Bennington and Middlebury. Open pediments above the three-part Palladian motif come from classical models, and occur occasionally in Federal structures -- a prominent example was incorporated at George Washington's Mt. Vernon. The fully closed variation of this motif is unusual, however, and may be unique to Abel and Fillmore's works. Bennington's First Church has the conventional open pediment over the Palladian triplet on the front facade, but the rear Palladian window over the pulpit has a closed pediment over the central arch. The Middlebury Church also has a closed pediment Palladian arrangement on the front façade.

Other contemporary buildings in the Bennington and Shaftsbury area during this period also have Palladian windows, but they are of a different style, with three arches at the top instead of a single arch and two rectangular sidelights. The Robinson and Galusha houses are early examples of this. The triple-arched Palladian window relates back to the eastern Connecticut work of Isaac Fitch, who included it on the New London Courthouse. Builder Thomas Gibbs of Canterbury then included similar windows in the John Clark (1802), William Moore, (1803) and Elisha Payne (1805) houses, not far from Abel and Fillmore's hometowns.

The Robinson and Galusha houses both predate the arrival of Fillmore and Abel by a decade. Perhaps the tripled arches in these two houses were added as renovations after the arrival of the Connecticut builders. Galusha's house was originally built in 1783 but renovated in 1805.¹⁸ Or, perhaps there was another earlier builder from eastern Connecticut using the same idiom. It has been suggested that Thomas Abel, Oliver's older cousin, may have

been a builder, though there is no confirmation of this. The Hinsdill house in Bennington also has the triple-arched Palladian window, and was built around the same time as the Munro and Norton houses.

Captain John Norton's House, 1809-1811

In March 1809, three months before settling his accounts with Munro, Oliver Abel advertised for three journeymen carpenters and two apprentices in the business of house joining and carpentry.¹⁹ He must have already contracted his next project – a house for Captain John Norton on the south side of Bennington. Norton's ledger shows payments to Abel starting in June, in-kind, over two years totaling approximately \$350. Although Norton's ledger gives less detailed information than Munro's, luckily the diaries of Benjamin and Hiram Harwood, who lived next door, fill in the details.

On June 15, 1809, Captain Norton invited his near neighbors from the Harwood farm to assist "at the raising of his house." Due to foul weather, the raising was put off until the following day. Benjamin Harwood attended the raising on the 16th and wrote:

. . . went to Capt. Norton's raising, which was finish'd with 3 cheers about sun-set. I am unhappy to state that the principal workman of Mr. Abel, John Shoals a sprightly young



*Captain John Norton House,
Bennington, Vt.*



*Details of dentils on fireplace mantel,
Captain John Norton House*

man of 23 or 24 years of age, was so unfortunate as he was entering the (n) tennon of a girt between the beams of the garret as to meet with the fol'g. [following] accident – the tennon slipp'd out while he was on the stick and fell to the floor of the 2d loft . . . Considering the position in which he lay – lengthwise of the stick with his feet next to the end which first struck the floor & the weight of the timber – it is surprising that he was not hurt much more than he appears to be. Mr. Abel was masterworkman – the frame has no braces in it – Plank are (instituted) substituted – both for studs and braces – lth. [length] 42 & 26 bdth [breadth].²⁰

Since Captain John Norton and his wife Lucretia had been living on their farm for fourteen years, one wonders why they waited until 1809 to raise this new house. The pressure of an expanding family is one obvious reason: the Nortons had nine children. In 1808, their oldest son, Luman, married Lydia Loomis, and the newlyweds continued living in Norton's original house. Within a year, a first grandchild, Julius, was born – only three years after the birth of the Captain and Lucretia's youngest child, Norman. The house must have seemed very full, with infants, toddlers and children of all ages – three generations living together.

The growing success of his pottery business also afforded Captain John Norton the resources to build a bigger and more prestigious house. Other upper-class citizens of Bennington and Williamstown had been building stylish homes as symbols of wealth and social status, and they all displayed the beautiful Federal details that Norton included – such as Palladian windows, detailed fanlights, and decorative dentils along the eaves.

The Norton home has a rear cellar that was probably the underpinning for the original homestead. It now supports an ell in the back. The larger cellar under the front section of the house supports the house that Abel built in 1809. This newer cellar, like that of the Munro house, has a fireplace and large cauldron – convenient for making soap and washing laundry. Several of the beams are still sheathed in bark, as they were the day the trees were felled.

Other architectural details that link the Norton and Munro houses include the closed-pediment Palladian window and treatment of the front entrance. Norton's house was more modest in scale and detailing, but the fireplace in the front parlor has drilled dentils that form a decorative border. The arrangement of the front stairway is also similar, though it rises on the left side of the front hall. Like Munro's, it has a generous, straight run up to a short landing, then two steps up on each side – to the center hall on one side, and directly into a back bedroom on the other. Norton's house does not have the vaulted ceiling, though it probably did have pilasters on the front façade

that were removed during a repair in the early twentieth century. The fanlight over the front door was replaced as well, and the central arched window in the Palladian arrangement was altered. There is also evidence of original quoins at the corners of the house.

Hiram Harwood gives another nice bit of detail about the interior of Norton's house as it was being finished. On May 8, 1811, he wrote:

Visited Cap't. Norton's shop — conversed with Mr. Luman and his brother John — Saw the inside of part of Cap't N's house which had just been painted in a grand style. In viewing those walls, my friend Henry Mellen participated with me [in] the pleasure resulting from so pleasing a sight.²¹

Harwood was clearly impressed with this paint job. Merely whitewashed walls would probably not have elicited such praise, though paint was a newly available commodity in Bennington around 1800.²² It is more likely that the walls had been painted with murals in the tradition of the itinerant landscape painters who frequented New England during this period.

Hiram Harwood visited the Nortons often to socialize with the younger members of the family. In the spring of 1811 he wrote a detailed description of an evening of music and games in the newly built Norton house:

I was about to go home, but Mr. Luman [Norton's oldest son] who had once before given me a call, came to the door and again invited me into his apartment. Locke, Mellen and I marched along in and took seats. Mr. Elisha Smith, who I had not seen before in many months, was taking a game of chess with Mr. John Norton, Jun'r. Several tunes were blown out. . . Cap't Norton called us up into his room, where I had the pleasure of seeing him encircled by his numerous and respectable family . . . Enjoyed no small degree of pleasure in playing several pieces of music in which I was join'd sometimes by Mr. Luman with his flute, and by his sister, Lucretia, whose soft and melodious voice gave all the beauties and graces which belonged to our concert . . .²³

Though only in his early twenties, Hiram Harwood admired his neighbor, Captain Norton, as a cultured man, saying: "I love to see a man sit down quietly in the bosom of an enlightened and industrious family at night after discharging his duty to himself and them, in his particular vocation — where he enjoys the only happiness this sublunary world can afford . . ." ²⁴



Luman Norton House, Bennington, Vt.



*Details of dentils on fireplace mantel,
Luman Norton House*

Luman Norton's House, 1817

When Captain Norton's second son, John, married Percis Smith in 1814, additional pressure would have been put on the living space for the family, prompting the building of Luman's grand house next door in 1817. The Nortons again selected Oliver Abel to do the job. Norton's choice of Abel as a builder was based on his demonstrated skill and ability, but it is also interesting to note that Captain Norton, Oliver Abel, and Asa Hyde were also acquainted through membership in the Freemasons of Vermont.²⁵

The raising of Luman's house is mentioned in Harwood's diary over a period of months. Erastus Montague, the mason, began his work on the cellar April 13, 1817, and the raising was on May 9:

P.M. all hands went to L. Norton's raising. Through misunderstanding between Oliver Abel & D. Taft, his head carpenter at this building, the front part only (42 x 26) was raised – Being in height two stories. The kitchen and wood-house were raised next day. Ephraim Smith Esq., he attended among others and appeared in an unusual strain of playful gaiety and good humor died very suddenly about 8 in the evening in an apoplectic fit – Sixty years of age in April last.²⁶

Originally the house was built to exactly the same dimensions as Luman's father's house next door, 42 x 26 feet. It was later renovated and expanded in the rear. The closed pedimented Palladian window was again



*Griffin Hall, Williams College,
Williamstown, Mass.*

Detail of entrance to Griffin Hall

chosen for the front façade, as it appeared on Captain John Norton's house, Joshua Munro's house, and the churches in Bennington and Middlebury. The carpenters also used decorative patterns of dentils on the fireplace mantles.

It is likely that Abel worked from pattern books such as Asher Benjamin's *Country Builder's Assistant* of 1797 or the *Rudiments of Architecture*, 1814. He may have also had a copy of Owen Biddle's *Young Carpenter's Assistant* of 1805. The fanlight over the front door of Luman Norton's house is strikingly similar to designs published by both Biddle and Benjamin.²⁷



Epilogue

Oliver Abel remained in Bennington through the mid-1830s. He continued building, but also engaged in other moneymaking schemes, including a cider mill, wool carding mill, and retail business called Abel and Lord, a joint venture with his brother-in-law, Lynds Lord.²⁸ He built a large

brick building at Williams College known as Griffin Hall in 1827-1828 with Edward Savage.²⁹ This building was originally called the Chapel, but it also included classrooms. It is known for its lovely interior woodwork, seventeen-paneled front fanlight, Palladian window, and gold-domed cupola. Lavius Fillmore remained in Middlebury for the rest of his life.

Oliver Abel undoubtedly built other structures in Bennington and nearby communities but no records of this work have been uncovered. He was evidently still in Bennington in 1835, when his house appears on the Joseph Hinsdill map of Bennington. In 1836, during a national economic recession, Oliver Abel moved to Pomfret, N.Y., near Buffalo, where Thomas Abel's children had settled in the 1810s. Abel overhauled a mill in Fredonia, N.Y., but lost it in a court case soon thereafter.³⁰ Oliver and Mary Abel then moved back east to Piermont, N.Y., on the Hudson River where Mary's financially successful youngest brother Eleazer Lord was starting a railroad. Oliver Abel is reported to have died accidentally in Piermont in 1841. Nine years later, at the time of the 1850 census, Mary Lord was still living in Piermont with her brother. She died in 1855, at the age of 76.³¹ □

Many thanks to Katy Riley of the Bennington Museum library for assisting me in tracing the genealogies of the Abel, Fitch, and Hyde families.

1 The history of the First Church, Bennington, is well documented in "Architectural Elegance, Lavius Fillmore's Refinement of the New England Meetinghouse." Glenn Andres, *Walloomsac Review*, Volume II, October 2009, p. 21.

2 *Vermont Gazette*, Volume I, No. 46, printed by Anthony Haswell & Co, Bennington, February 14, 1804.

3 The relationship between the Hyde and Abel families is complicated, as they intermarried at several different instances. The earliest of these intermarriages was Experience Abel, who married John Hyde. Robert Abell, *The Abell Family in America*, Tuttle Publishing, Rutland, VT, p. 58.

4 Asa Hyde was a great grandson of William Hyde through the lines of Samuel and John. Other descendants of the Samuel Hyde in Bennington included Asahel and Elijah, sons of Jacob. Samuel Hyde's sister, Hester, married into the Bingham family and moved to Bennington around the time of the Revolution. *Hyde Genealogy or the Descendants in the Female as well as the Male Lines from William Hyde of Norwich*, by Rueben H. Walworth, J. Munsell, Albany, 1864, pp. 143 and 203. See https://archive.org/stream/hydegenealogyord01walw/hydegenealogyord01walw_djvu.txt.

5 *The One Hundred year Old Meetinghouse of the Church of Christ in Bennington, Vermont, Being a Record of the Centennial of the Same Held in the Meetinghouse August the 19th and 20th, 1906*. Prepared by the Rev. Isaac Jennings, D.D., minister of the church, printed at the Riverside Press, Cambridge, MA, 1907, p. 29.

6 William Lamson Warren. *Isaac Fitch of Lebanon, Connecticut, Master Joiner, 1734-1791*. The Antiquarian & Landmarks Society, Inc., Hartford, CT, 1978, p.1.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., p. 71.

9 Fitch's father's first wife, Anne Abel, bore twelve children. His second

wife and (mother of Isaac) was Mindwell Higley Tisdale. Oliver Abel was a first cousin of the first twelve children, but not blood related to Isaac Fitch himself. See family background in Warren, pp. 1-2 and *The Abell Family in America*, p 62.

10 Spratt was a joiner trained in England who had declared allegiance to America after the Revolution, and who had just built elaborate houses with Palladian windows for Julius Deming in Litchfield, and Zena Cowles in Farmington.

11 Andres, p. 23.

12 Ibid., p. 27.

13 Many thanks to Beth Belluardo, a direct descendant of Joshua Munro, who shared his ledger information with me.

14 Ibid.

15 Herbert Wheaton Congdon. *Old Vermont Houses*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1946, p. 48-50.

16 Historic American Buildings Survey, Munro Hawkins House description, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/master/pnp/habshaer/vt/vt0000/vt0007/data/vt0007data.pdf>.

17 <http://www.genealogy.com/ftm/h/a/z/Walter-E-Hazen-CO/GENE3-0051.html>

18 Glenn Andres, and Curtis B. Johnson. *Buildings of Vermont*. University of Virginia Press, Society of Architectural Historians, Charlottesville, VA, 2014, p. 39.

19 Advertisement in *The World*, a Bennington newspaper published between 1807 and 1809. *Vermont Newspaper Abstracts, 1783-1816*, by Marsha Hoffman Rising, CG, CGL, FASG. The New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston, 2001, p. 329.

20 *Benjamin and Hiram Harwood Diaries*, Bennington Museum, June 16, 1809.

21 Harwood Diaries, 5/8/11.

22 Correspondence with Jane Griswold Radocchia, May 16, 2015.

23 Harwood Diaries, March 16, 1811.

24 Harwood Diaries, October 4, 1811.

25 *Early Records of the Grand Lodge of the State of Vermont*, pp. 43, 129.

26 Harwood Diaries, 5/9/17.

27 Asher Benjamin. *Rudiments of Architecture*, 1814, Boston, p. 26, and Owen Biddle, *A Young Carpenter's Assistant Improved and Enlarged Edition*, M'Carty & Davis, Philadelphia, 1833, p. 23 at Internet Archive online. archive.org/details/improvedenlarged00bidd. Thanks to Jane Griswold Radocchia for directing me to the Biddle reference.

28 Oliver Abel was said to have operated a cider brandy distillery. He advertised as a woolen factory in 1812, and as a part of a firm called Abell and Lord in 1817, in conjunction with Lynds Lord, his brother-in-law. He later advertised again as a contractor in the *Vermont Gazette*, November 7, 1826. Individual files at the Bennington Museum library.

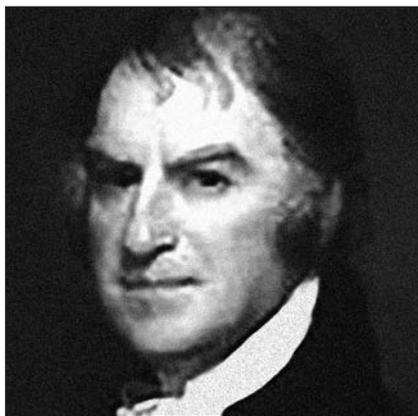
29 Williams College Book of Corporation, No. 2. This ledger of expenses is in the special collections of the archives, Sawyer Library, Williams College, Williamstown, MA.

30 This information is available in the Chautauqua County records online, www.app.co.chautauqua.NY.US/hist_struct/Pomfret/ID387Xtrastory21CanadawayPomfret.pdf.

31 *Ibid. wf*



*Mum Bett, who became
Elizabeth Freeman*



Theodore Sedgwick

Slavery in Early New England

Stockbridge Slave Mum Bett and Her Appeal for Freedom

Ben Z. Rose

With the 150-year commemoration of the Civil War still fresh in their minds, students across America will return to school this fall to learn of the events that led to the beginning of the abolitionist movement and the earliest efforts to end slavery. One of the most gratifying aspects about living in New England is knowing that the movement to end slavery arose from this region, and that many who sacrificed their lives in the Civil War did so in an attempt to abolish the South's "peculiar institution."

The institution of slavery, of course, was by no means peculiar to the South. While conducting research on *John Stark: Maverick General*, my biography of the hero of Bennington and Bunker Hill, I discovered the story of Mum Bett, a slave from western Massachusetts who gained her freedom in 1781, eighty years before the outbreak of the Civil War. Mum Bett's court case is the first in which a slave gained her freedom based on the principle of general equality, rather than by proving physical abuse or wrongful enslavement, as others had done. Mum Bett's appeal for freedom therefore provides much insight into the earliest attempts to end slavery, as well as the courage and perseverance required to overturn an established way

of life. Mum Bett's story is also an important reminder that before slavery could be abolished in the South, it needed to be uprooted in the North.

The history of slavery in New England has come to light reluctantly in recent years. Several of the region's Ivy League schools, for example, have been forced to acknowledge that their benefactors gained significant wealth from the slave trade. A brief overview of slavery in New England is therefore essential to understanding the significance of Mum Bett and her freedom suit.

In the years leading up to the Revolutionary War, New Englanders were far more dependent on slave labor than many historians might concede. Africans stripped from the shores of their homeland became artisans and sailors in the region's rum-making and maritime industries. Later, blacks became house servants, soldiers, and field hands, and symbols of success among the lawyers, ministers and merchants who owned them.

Slavery began in New England when a certain Captain William Pierce of Boston traveled to the West Indies in 1638 and traded several Pequot Indians for "salt, cotton, tobacco and negroes . . ." ¹ Bay Colony traders later made the longer and far more dangerous journey to Africa in search of slaves. New England seamen later brought slaves all the way from the remote island of Madagascar, near the tip of the East African coast. Massachusetts gave slavery legal sanction in 1641, and laws evolved later to make it possible for the children of slaves to be kept in captivity. Slavery was to be limited only to those who were "lawful captives taken in just warres, and such strangers as willfully sell themselves or are sold to us." ²

The imprecision of the law left much to interpretation, and if it was unclear as to who could be seized and held in bondage, the law was silent about how long slaves could be kept in captivity. The Puritans of New England looked to the Bible for guidance on this matter. They noted that the ancient Israelites, in accordance with Jewish law, freed their servants after six years. Rhode Island became the only colony in New England to impose a limit on how long blacks were to be enslaved. A statute passed in 1652 fixed the term at ten years. Importantly, laws were never passed to ensure perpetual servitude. Yet many slave owners, by custom, assumed they had such rights.

As an institution and a way of life, slavery continued to evolve in the New England colonies over the next hundred years. In the first-ever census taken in the colony of Massachusetts in 1754, authorities counted 4,489 African slaves for tax purposes. Since the census takers were instructed to omit children under the age of 15, the actual number of slaves could have been much larger, given both the low life expectancy of the era as well as the feeling that the data gathered could be utilized against the population. ³

New England's newspapers advertised slaves for sale in much the same way that cars and trucks are listed today, and African slaves were sold at auction alongside farm animals and fine china. So it was that the *New Hampshire Gazette* alerted the public that at 2 p.m. on Tuesday, the 22nd of April, 1767, in the home of a certain Thomas Beck,

*“ONE yoke of OXEN, several steers; Cows; Sheep; 1 good Horse; several Calves; with sundry other Things, Wearing apparel &c. ALSO a likely Negro GIRL” were available for purchase.*⁴

During the sixty-three year period between 1719 and 1781, nearly two thousand Africans were advertised for sale in the pages of the *Boston Gazette*.⁵ An ad printed in the *New England Weekly Journal* in 1732—which evokes a heartbreaking scene from the recent movie *12 Years a Slave* – stated simply: “likely negro woman about 19 years and a child of about six months of age to be sold together or apart.”⁶ Slave owners later began to remove their own names from such ads, for fear that their slaves would learn of their intent to sell them, which, in turn, might persuade them to run away.

Yet unlike in the South, slaves in New England had rights in courts of law, as the Puritans sought to ensure that their slaves “shall have the liberties and Christian usages which the law of G-d established in Israell concerning such persons doth morally require.”⁷ Slaves and their advocates therefore looked to the courts as a venue through which to pursue their freedom. Many slaves could and did take their owners to court for physical abuse, for a defect in title of ownership, for renegeing on promises made for their freedom, or for wrongful enslavement. As a result, slaves testified in court on their own behalf, and on behalf of others. They could also testify against their white masters or other white citizens in courts of law. After having witnessed the trial of Jenny Slew, a woman of mixed race who ultimately prevailed against her owner in a case awarding damages for wrongful enslavement, John Adams, later the author of Massachusetts’ first Constitution, and the nation’s second president, noted in his diary on November 5, 1765:

*“Attended Court; heard the trial of an action of trespass, brought by a mulatto woman, for damages, for restoring her of her liberty. This is called suing for liberty; the first action that ever I knew of the sort, though I have heard there have been many.”*⁸

Sheffield Lives

Mum Bett’s story takes place in the western Massachusetts towns of

Sheffield and Great Barrington, which are today a part of Berkshire County. Sheffield, located in the southwest corner of Massachusetts, developed a distinct flavor of its own, as its earliest settlers were a mix of Dutch settlers from the neighboring Hudson Valley region of New York, Puritans who came from the eastern towns of Massachusetts, and people of African descent, some of whom had gained their freedom, some of whom had lived across the border in New York and fled their masters, and some of whom were enslaved.⁹ John Ashley settled in Sheffield in 1730, several years after graduating from Yale College, and quickly became Sheffield's leading citizen. He ran a sawmill, a gristmill, a cider mill, a general store, and a 50-acre farm. He also owned three black men, John, Zack, and Harry, who lived in a separate section of his home. The men may have been purchased in slave markets in Hartford, Connecticut, some forty miles to the southeast of Sheffield, or in Albany, some forty miles to its west.

Though Mum Bett would develop a reputation as “a woman who was all humbleness on the surface but iron underneath,”¹⁰ the most basic aspects of her ancestry remain a mystery, including her birth date, family heritage, and the African tribe of her origin. Her only heirlooms were a silk shawl once owned by her father and a short gown that belonged to her mother. It is not entirely clear how the Ashleys came to own Bett and her sister. One theory suggests Mum Bett and Lizzie became the property of Ashley's wife, Hannah, upon the death of her father in 1758. The theory finds support in the tenth paragraph of Pieter Hogeboom's will, where he wrote: “I bequeath to all my children . . . all my negroes and negresses, big and little, young and old, all my horses and cattle and furthermore all my movable goods from the largest to the smallest that may be found after my death, to each his just tenth part.”¹¹ While Hannah is named as one of her father's ten beneficiaries, the names of his slaves are omitted, leading us to wonder whether Mum Bett and her sister really were inherited by Hannah or came to the Ashley household by some other means.

Another possibility, supported by an Ashley descendent, is that Mum Bett and her sister were purchased at the Albany slave market.¹² The only certainty is that Mum Bett and her sister Lizzie became Hannah Ashley's personal property. Mum Bett and Lizzie served at the personal whim of their mistress. They performed physical labor as well as the many maidservant tasks involved in helping to raise four children. All indications are that Mum Bett became an indispensable servant to Hannah Ashley, who was the most powerful woman in town. There, at her beck and call, Mum Bett performed her duties with personal dignity and soon became well known throughout the town for her talent, wit, and fortitude, and in particular her talent as a skilled midwife.

Originally reluctant to take up arms against the Royal government, Ashley emerged as a member of the Patriot camp in the early 1770s. Town leaders gathered in his home to discuss measures that might be taken to protest against the Royal government, which culminated in the Sheffield Resolves, a formal list of grievances written by Sheffield's leaders. Though they could not read or write, Mum Bett and her sister Lizzie listened to the men discuss how they planned to wrestle their rights away from a king who lived across the sea.

One of those who attended the sessions was Theodore Sedgwick, an ambitious 27-year-old attorney who entered Yale College at the age of 15 in the winter of 1761 at a time when less than one percent of the Colonial population pursued higher education. Mum Bett must have noted Sedgwick's passion for the Patriot cause, and wondered whether he would agree that the liberty they sought for themselves ought to include her as well. Mum Bett must have made a favorable impression on the young lawyer with a deep-seated ambition to advance his own career. Neither one realized at the time just how much their future would come to depend upon the other.

Awakening

As the colonies collided on a course of rebellion against the British government, some New Englanders began to see the link between slave ownership and the slave trade. There were others who perceived the injustice of slavery to be incompatible with the struggle for American independence. In 1765, the year of the infamous Stamp Act, a representative from Worcester, a town located some eighty miles to the east of Sheffield, was told to "use his influence to obtain a law to put an end to that unchristian and impolitic practice of making slaves of the human species."¹³

Closer to Mum Bett's home, Massachusetts legislators gathered in the autumn of 1777 to begin debate over a constitution for the state. One of the key issues was whether blacks and Indians should be eligible to vote. Ultimately, lawmakers settled on a constitution that included Article V, that allowed "every male inhabitant of any town in this State, being free, and twenty-one years of age," to vote — "excepting Negroes, Indians and molattoes."¹⁴ Before being put to a vote for the towns of Massachusetts to decide, a certain Dr. Gordon, who served as chaplain to both houses of the legislature, voiced his opposition to the provision:

*"The complexion of the 5th Article is blacker than that of any African; and if not altered, will be an everlasting reproach upon the present inhabitants; and evidence to the world, that they mean their own rights only, and not those of mankind, in their cry for liberty."*¹⁵

Gordon was later dismissed from his office, due in part to his having “rashly reflected upon the General Court.” Several towns to the east of Sheffield weighed in on the subject, including Westminster, whose members roundly rejected the constitution, based on Article V, as did its neighbor Sutton, whose citizens noted “the already accumulated Load of guilt lying upon the Land in Supporting the Slave Trade” By a nearly five to one vote, the constitution of 1778 was rejected.¹⁶

Two years later, lawmakers made progress in search of a new constitution, which included a clause, drafted by John Adams, which held that, “All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential and unalienable rights; among which may be reckoned the right of enjoying, and defending their lives and liberties; that of acquiring, possessing, and protecting property; in fine, that of seeking and obtaining their safety and happiness.”¹⁷ This version of the Massachusetts Constitution was ratified in June of 1780 and became effective on October 25, 1780. Though it fell short of specifically providing general equality for the colony’s black and Indian citizens, the fact that it omitted restrictions on their personal liberty created an optimism over the prospects for freedom for all of the state’s inhabitants.

As to what inspired Mum Bett to file suit against her master in court, we can only speculate. Catherine Maria Sedgwick, the daughter of Theodore Sedgwick, recalled that a pattern of abuse existed in the Ashley household, and that Mum Bett often bore the brunt of Hannah Ashley’s quick temper. Catherine, who would later become one of America’s first celebrated female authors, wrote that Mum Bett had several times crossed Hannah Ashley, including an episode in which Mum Bett helped a young woman who had been the victim of incest obtain a meeting with John Ashley, then a judge. In the story relayed by Mum Bett to Catherine Sedgwick, Mum Bett comforted the injured girl, despite having to deal with a volatile Hannah Ashley, who showed no empathy for the girl and her plight, and over the forceful objection of Mum Bett, tried to eject her from the house. Sedgwick wrote that there was “no foul thing she did not call the child.”¹⁸ But Mum Bett prevailed in this instance, and as she explained to Catherine Sedgwick, “When I set my foot down, I kept it down.”¹⁹

In another instance, Hannah Ashley threatened Mum Bett’s sister with a hot kitchen shovel, and Mum Bett suffered a blow to her arm as she struggled to protect her sister. Catherine writes that Mum Bett wore the scar from the incident as a badge of honor, and that she was only too happy to point Hannah Ashley’s friends in her direction, when they asked what had caused it.

It is known that Mum Bett likely overheard the discussions of freedom

around the time of the Sheffield Resolves, as Ashley and his colleagues, including Sedgwick, met in his home. It is also possible that the words were reinforced at the time of the passage of the Constitution in 1780. Such documents were often read aloud in public, and it is likely that it became a topic of conversation at the time. It also appears plausible that Mum Bett approached a sympathetic Theodore Sedgwick with the idea of gaining her freedom. A French traveler to the United States, a certain Francois-Alexandre-Frederic duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, visited New England about fifteen years after Mum Bett's court case, and spent time in the home of Theodore Sedgwick. In his book, *Travels Through the United States of North America*, first published in London in 1799, he recalled that "some negroes, prompted by private suggestion, maintained that they were not slaves; they found advocates, among whom was Mr. Sedgwick."²⁰

The Trial

Theodore Sedgwick soon realized that winning Mum Bett's freedom would be no simple task. By law, and through custom and tradition, slavery had existed in Massachusetts for more than a hundred years. Sedgwick knew, moreover, that he would be taking on John Ashley, a former judge, his mentor, a client – as the court records demonstrate leading up to the trial – and also the most powerful citizen of Sheffield. It was certain that he would choose experienced counsel to help him.

Though Theodore Sedgwick, then 35 years old, had no reason to doubt his own expertise, he turned to Tapping Reeve, a legal scholar who lived in Litchfield, Connecticut, located just over the state's southwestern border. Reeve grew up on Long Island, New York. His father, Abner, a Presbyterian minister, preached his last sermon in Brattleboro, Vermont, at the age of 85.²¹ After graduating first in his class from the College of New Jersey, later renamed Princeton, the younger Reeve quickly acquired a reputation as a talented attorney. He began teaching law from a bedroom in his home to supplement his income during the Revolutionary War.

One of the first challenges facing the team was whether any woman – black or white – could file a suit on her own, and be recognized in a court of law. Sedgwick and Reeve wanted to ensure their suit would not be dismissed on procedural grounds. Mum Bett may have suggested the remedy: she knew of another slave named Brom, who was owned by John Ashley's son. Sedgwick and Reeve added him as a co-plaintiff to the suit. Perhaps they reasoned that a man and woman acting together would have a better chance of gaining their freedom than a woman acting alone. This leads to speculation as to whether there may have been a closer relationship between

Brom and Bett. The court record, however, clearly identifies Bett as a “spinster” and Brom as a “laborer.” Adding Brom had another benefit, for it enabled the team to add John Ashley’s son as a co-defendant, thus ensuring that there would be no excuse to delay the trial in the event that the senior Ashley, who at the time was 71 years of age, declined to appear before the court.

Mum Bett was not the first slave of John Ashley’s to file a suit against him in search of freedom. Attorneys for Zack Mullen, another slave of Ashley’s, had filed a suit on the basis of “trespass,” a legal term that implied physical harm had been done to him. For unknown reasons, Mullen’s case had been postponed several times.²² Perhaps Bett and Brom would benefit from the knowledge that other slaves of John Ashley had been mistreated.

This would have been considered an important trial. The presence of the region’s most distinguished legal minds, the postponement of the Zach Mullen trial, and the timing of the trial – less than a year after the passage of the state’s constitution – suggest that Reeve and Sedgwick intended to test the document’s “free and equal” clause.²³

Brom and Bett vs. J. Ashley, Esq. commenced in May of 1781 when Sedgwick and Reeve issued a writ of replevin, a civil procedure under English common law to recover improperly gained property. The decision to issue the writ was another indication that the basis of the legal argument centered around a larger cause than mere physical abuse or a defect in title relating to ownership. The court clerk delivered the writ to John Ashley and his son, who were warned that unless Brom and Bett “were taken by our special command, or by the command of our Chief Justice, or for Homicide, or for any other just cause,” that they must be delivered to the court.²⁴

John Ashley, however, “did not permit a delivery of the aforesaid Brom and Bett to be made because he asserted that the said Brom and Bett were his Servants for Life, thereby claiming a right of servitude . . .”²⁵ The Ashleys refused to comply with several court orders over the next few months. But they did finally relent and agreed to a court date, which was set for August 21, some three months after the first court order was issued. All eyes turned to the county courthouse, which stood at the junction of Main and Castle streets in the middle of Great Barrington. The courthouse was, according to town historian Charles Taylor, “destitute of architectural pretention or ornament, save a semi-circular window in its eastern gable and some little carved wood work about the front door.”²⁶ Through a curious quirk in its construction, the building overflowed onto the town’s main street.²⁷ Thus, Mum Bett’s fate would be determined by a group of Berkshire farmers in a simple, unpainted, wooden edifice that measured 30

by 40 feet, and stood a mere story and a half tall.

The trial log for *Brom & Bett versus J. Ashley, Esq.* is housed in the Massachusetts state archives next to the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, and reveals only the facts of the case and, regrettably, neither the line of reasoning advanced by Sedgwick and Reeve, nor the basis on which the judge and jury made their decision. Nonetheless, Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, in his previously cited *Travels Through the United States of North America*, recalls that Sedgwick's argument was two-fold: first, that the laws of Massachusetts never gave slavery legal sanction; and second, that even if they had been interpreted in such a way as to make slavery permissible, any such laws were obviated by the state Constitution of 1780, which held that all men are free and equal. Thus any laws enacted prior to this new document were to be considered null and void.²⁸

It is known for sure that Sedgwick and Reeve convinced the jury that Mum Bett and Brom could not be considered Ashley's property for life, and that they had been, in fact, illegally detained in bondage. The jury awarded Brom and Bett "thirty shillings lawful Silver Money Damages And the Costs of this Suit Taxed at five pounds fourteen Shillings and four pence like Money."²⁹

Ashley and his son immediately filed an appeal. Reflecting further on their prospects for success, they decided a short time later to "confess judgment" and abide by the court's decision. Clearly, their enthusiasm to appeal the verdict had to be influenced by the shift of popular opinion away from the practice of slavery. Although the Constitution of Massachusetts was never amended to prohibit slavery, and no law was passed to prevent its practice, the prevailing sentiment within Massachusetts shifted against it, and by most accounts slavery withered away in the state over the next decade.

Though it would be many years before momentum would gather for a nationwide debate over the practice of slavery, the actions taken by Mum Bett, Theodore Sedgwick, and Tapping Reeve in a small county courthouse in 1781, would become an important precursor to the abolitionist movement, and evidence that even if state legislators were reluctant to move forward to bring an end to slavery, the civil courts of New England could be an important catalyst to advance the cause of freedom.

Postscript on the Main Characters

Following her successful appeal for freedom Mum Bett changed her name to Elizabeth Freeman. She went to work in the Sedgwick home as a governess, and helped to raise Sedgwick's children as his wife struggled through the anguish of depression. Mum Bett also raised her own family,

though details on her private life remain sketchy since she left no personal journal or written letters. Court records indicate she purchased her own home in Stockbridge, from which she could view Monument Mountain.

Theodore Sedgwick became a U.S. senator from Massachusetts, as well as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, eventually becoming the fifth speaker of the House. He later served on the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.

Tapping Reeve, Sedgwick's co-counsel, created the Litchfield Law School in 1784, arguably America's first formal school of law. Its alumni include two vice presidents, three U.S. Supreme Court justices, and 28 U.S. senators. Reeve later became a member of Connecticut's Supreme Court, eventually becoming its chief justice. □

- 1 Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, 17.
- 2 Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color*, 62.
- 3 Moore, *Slavery in Massachusetts*, 50. Writing in 1866, the year after the end of America's Civil War, historian Moore observed: "Some recalled the numbering of Israel by David, and perhaps all were jealous of the possible designs of the Government in England in obtaining accurate information of their numbers and resources. It is a curious fact that the first census in Massachusetts was a census of negro slaves."
- 4 Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, 72.
- 5 Deroschers, "Slave for Sale Ads," 623–4.
- 6 Deroschers, "Slave for Sale Ads," 634.
- 7 Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color*, 62.
- 8 Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America*, 228.
- 9 Miller, *Early Life in Sheffield*, 11–12.
- 10 Nash, *Forgotten Fifth*, 20.
- 11 Graham, "The Life and Times of Elizabeth Freeman," 5.
- 12 Drew, *If They Close the Door*, 31.
- 13 Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America*, 220.
- 14 Moore, *Slavery in Massachusetts*, 191.
- 15 Moore, *Slavery in Massachusetts*, 193.
- 16 Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color*, 89.
- 17 Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color*, 90.
- 18 Catharine Maria Sedgwick, "Slavery in New England," 2.
- 19 Catharine Maria Sedgwick, "Slavery in New England," 2.
- 20 Liancourt, *Travels Through the United States of North America, Volume III*, 326.
- 21 Swanson, "Tapping Reeve," 8.
- 22 Zilversmith, "Mumbet: Folklore and Fact," 11.
- 23 Zilversmith, "Mumbet: Folklore and Fact," 11.
- 24 Brom and Bett Vs. J. Ashley, Esq., court transcript.
- 25 Brom and Bett Vs. J. Ashley, Esq., court transcript.
- 26 Taylor, *History of Great Barrington*, 288.
- 27 Taylor, *History of Great Barrington*, 288.
- 28 Swan, "The Slave Who Sued for Freedom;" Moore, *Notes on Slavery in Massachusetts*, 210–211.
- 29 Brom and Bett Vs. J. Ashley, Esq., court transcript.

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The Mormon church had its origins in this cluster of towns in western Rutland County.

A Case of Early Religious Fervor in Vermont

A ‘Backstory’ for the Creation of the Mormon Church

Jon Mathewson

In what is possibly the most remote section of Wells, a town on Vermont’s western border, on a dirt road cut through a ravine in the woods surrounded by steep hills, is found a manufactured home. There are no visible neighbors. Beside the road in front of the home a nicely cared-for historic marker commemorates the birthplace of Oliver Cowdery, who transcribed the *Book of Mormon* from Joseph Smith’s dictation.

The original house is long gone, and it is hard to imagine that for a few years this place was the focal point of money-digging and religious fervor. Some regard it as a short-lived historical curiosity while others claim that the frenzy continues just as feverishly to this day.

A series of events not far away in Middletown, from the late 1780s to the specific date of January 14, 1801, remains an oft-discussed topic of local historians. The events also have been of interest nationally because some historians have regarded them as the “back story” for the creation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, or Mormons. While

there certainly are connections between the two, the story is a little more complicated.

The Middletown story is sometimes referred to as “the Wood scrape,” or “the money diggers.” The former name derives from the first family of the story, the Woods, and “scrape,” which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as “An embarrassing or awkward predicament or situation, usually one into which a person is brought by his own imprudence and thoughtlessness.” It is possible that there was a conscious pun, because the “scrape” consisted of digging, or scraping, in the forest, or the woods. The latter term “the money diggers,” comes from the obsessive search for hidden or buried money.

The story was first (cryptically) mentioned by the Reverend Sylvanus Haynes’s article titled “A Brief Narrative of the Late Work of God in Middletown, Vermont,” which appeared in the May 1804 issue of *The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine*. The next reference came in Ovid Miner’s article “The Rodsmen” in the May 7, 1828, issue of *The Vermont American*. Both articles appeared before the creation of the Mormon Church, and so could not mention that church.

The next article about “the Wood scrape” appeared in Barnes Frisbie’s 1867 *History of Middletown*. In it, Frisbie used a great deal of ink linking “the Wood scrape” with the origins of Mormonism in language deeply prejudicial against the church. He expanded on the history of the Wood scrape in his seven-part series in the *Poultney Bulletin* in April and May 1869. Daniel Dorchester addressed the issue in 1879 with “The Counterfeiter Wingate and the Genesis of Mormonism (St. John’s Rod)” in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*. In 1888 Arthur Deming mentioned the Wood scrape in *Naked Truths About Mormonism*. The Wood scrape has remained a mainstay of anti-Mormon writings ever since.

There are five parts to this story. The first, which as been only slightly mentioned, has to do with Nathaniel Wood’s involvement with the religious group in Norwich, Connecticut., known as the Newent Separates before they migrated to Bennington, Vermont, in 1761. The second has to do with Reverend Nathaniel Wood’s move to Middletown and his controversies with the Congregational Church, which led to his excommunication and setting up his own worship services. The third part of the story is about a ne’er-do-well named Wingate, also known as Winchell, or Wallace, who convinced some people in the Middletown area that they could find lost gold by “dowsing for money.” The fourth part is the combination of Reverend Wood’s followers and Winchell’s divining rod, and the belief that the world was to be destroyed on January 14, 1801. The fifth sees the Wood family and their followers migrating to western New York, where some set up their

own town, Woodville, and the son of a follower co-founding the Church of Latter Day Saints.

What is missing from all of this is the voice of people directly involved. The oldest writers, Oliver Cowdery and Ovid Miner, at best, could only reference what they had been told. Sylvanus Haynes was too vague to derive any useful information. The closest thing we have to a follower of Wood explaining himself is the poem of a Mormon visiting Woodville. Without a written record of their beliefs we cannot really say what those beliefs were. Without knowing those beliefs, we cannot say to what they were a precursor. If anything, they were adopted from the Newent Separates, and passed on, in diluted or altered form, to the Mormons. But even that is unfounded speculation.

In the Newent parish of Norwich, beginning around 1749, a group dedicated to founding “The New Israel” in America was persecuted by the colonial authorities, as were groups with similar views in Hardwick and Sunderland, Massachusetts. These three religious groups, known as “Separates,” settled together in Bennington in the New Hampshire Grants, a frontier town. While they tried to settle together they discovered that they had many differences that could not be reconciled, and so separated, so to speak.

Some of the Newent Separates also settled in Poultney, where that



This historic marker, in a remote corner of Wells, honors the birthplace of Oliver Cowdery, who transcribed the Book of Mormon from Joseph Smith's dictation.

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town's published history, by J. Joslin, Barnes Frisbie, and F. Ruggles, wrote that the town's first settled minister, Ithamar Hibbard (1727?-1802) had moved from Bennington with his own congregation. It is likely that Hibbard was a young leader of Separates. The families who came with him, including Nathaniel Wood, settled in remote parts of Poultney, Tinmouth, and Wells in the 1770s. Then in 1784 the remoteness of the region prompted the Vermont General Assembly to create a new town, Middletown. Soon after, a meetinghouse was built for use by the town's Congregationalists and Baptists. In 1785 Hibbard married Nathaniel Wood's daughter, Hannah

(1764-1844).

Nathaniel Wood and his family were active in the Middletown Congregational Church, and Wood tried to run the church along Separate lines. He met stiff opposition, notably from Jonathan Brewster, who was not a Separate but who had known Wood in Norwich. Contention ruled the church from its founding in 1784 until Wood was finally excommunicated in 1789 for “persisting in contention, and saying in convention that he wished for a council; and when the church, by their committee, proposed to have a council to settle the matter, he utterly refused.” After that, Wood led services in the homes of his sons, and over the next decade seems to have had a small but significant following.



Oliver Cowdery

Then in 1799 a mysterious figure known as “Justus Winchell” showed up in a remote area near the border of Wells and Middletown. He stayed with William Cowdery and his family, and was later rumored to have been known also as “Wingate,” who was fleeing a counterfeiting charge on the other side of the Green Mountains. He persuaded some people in Wells that errant Spaniards had left a stash of gold in the area and that a divining rod he possessed could find said treasure. He just needed strong men to dig for the gold and share in the profits. He found many men willing to dig.

The question that often arises here is “why?” Why did Winchell conduct this fraud and what was in it for him? One answer is that he really believed there was buried gold and that he would share in the wealth when it was found. Another is that he was deliberately deceiving the people of Wells and hoped to get something out of them. The most obvious payment he received was free room and board and a position of authority. This, at that place and time, may have been enough.

After digging for much of 1799 in Wells and Poultney, Winchell moved to Middletown. He met Reverend Nathaniel Wood, who soon began to see mystical qualities in Winchell’s divining rod – that it could divine who was a true believer. It was also around this time that Wood began to preach the apocalypse: that the world would end with a cataclysmic earthquake on January 14, 1801.

In 1828 Ovid Miner wrote, “[They] pretended to have been informed by the Almighty, that they were descendants of the ancient Jews and were, with their connexions (sic) to be put in possession of the land some miles around: the way for which was to be providentially prepared by the destruction of their fellow-townsmen.”

Later in his article Miner wrote, “The scene of carnage which was to

ensue had been much dwelt upon; and the ninth and eleventh chapters of the Book of Ezekiel (frequently made the subject of discourses at their meetings), were declared to have special reference to the coming catastrophe.”

The Book of Ezekiel appears in the Old Testament, and the King James version translates the salient first seven verses of Chapter 9 as follows:

(1) He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, “Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand.”

(2) And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer’s inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brasen altar.

(3) And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer’s inkhorn by his side;

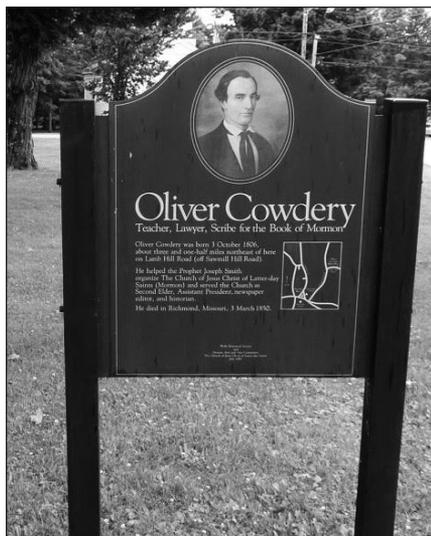
(4) And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.

(5) And to the others he said in mine hearing, “Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity:

(6) Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary.” Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house.

(7) And he said unto them, “Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye forth.” And they went forth, and slew in the city.

Miner continues: “At 9 o’clock, the military were under arms, and a sergeant’s guard was posted on each of the four streets diverging from the village. In a short time, six Rodsmen, fantastically dressed, and equipped according to the direction they supposed had given them, (Ezekiel ix, 2), were observed rapidly approaching. After being hailed by the guard, they were fired upon, when they turned and fled. About midnight, the same men



Closeup of the Cowdery historic marker.

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approached the village in another direction – were again hailed, fired upon, and dispersed. Thus ended the strange drama.”

In the following years, the Woods and their followers left town, bought farms in western New York and appeared to be thriving. Many of them settled in the Jefferson County town of Ellisburgh and founded the village of Woodville. Others settled in other towns. William Cowdery, who had housed Winchell in Wells, eventually moved to Poughkeepsie, and then his family, including son Oliver, born in 1804, moved to Palmyra, Wayne County, where Joseph Smith (1805-1844) experienced the visions

that led to the founding of the Church of Latter Day Saints.

Detractors of the Mormon Church have made comparisons between the Wood scrape and Mormonism, most notably that both had to do with a “New Israel,” the existence of a lost tribe of Jews in the New World, and the discovery of lost gold. The existence of a direct link quickly dissipates upon analysis of the context from which both religions emerged.

Poughkeepsie in the late 1700s through the 1820s was a vibrant town. It housed the state’s first public library (later the “infidel books” were burned and the library closed). Freed slave and abolitionist author Jeffrey Brace was a Poughkeepsie farmer. Horace Greeley apprenticed at the *Northern Spectator* newspaper, published out of the general store where future *New York Times* co-founder George Jones worked. In 1823 Congregational minister Ethan Smith published his book *Views of the Hebrews*. Oliver Cowdery’s family were members of Smith’s church, and some have credited the book as a precursor to *The Book of Mormon*. Former Poughkeepsie resident William Miller was convinced, by 1822, that the second coming of Christ was due in 1843, thus setting in motion the founding of the Adventist Church. It was this intellectual fervor from which Oliver Cowdery emerged before moving to the “Burned Over District” of western New York at the height of the Second Great Awakening.

While many connections can be made with the zeitgeist of Poughkeepsie and the creation of new religions, this can be only because we are looking at the past backwards through a telescope. The case for the Wood scrape

leading directly toward the founding of the Mormon Church is skewed, and it can be manipulated in other directions as well. For instance, take these four facts: Joseph Smith came from the “Upper Valley,” a region in the central eastern part of Vermont and western New Hampshire. Justus Winchell came from the Upper Valley. A mysterious Mormon-precursor text was written in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, by Solomon Spaulding, who graduated from Dartmouth College, which is in the Upper Valley. Poultney minister Ethan Smith was also a graduate of Dartmouth College. (Spaulding and Smith were graduates of the classes of 1785 and 1790, respectively.) One could conclude that events in the Upper Valley led to the creation of the Church of Latter Day Saints.

In the study of history, all kinds of loose connections and conjectures can be made. What is important to remember is to ask if the actual participants in historical events saw those connections, or even realized they were directly connected at all with strangers who happened to live nearby. As T. D. Seymour Bassett put it in his work on religion in Vermont *The Gods of the Hills* (2000), “What still needs study is why the conditions that produced Joseph Smith did not produce many followers in Vermont. Were there too many alternate paths from the same backwoods base?” □

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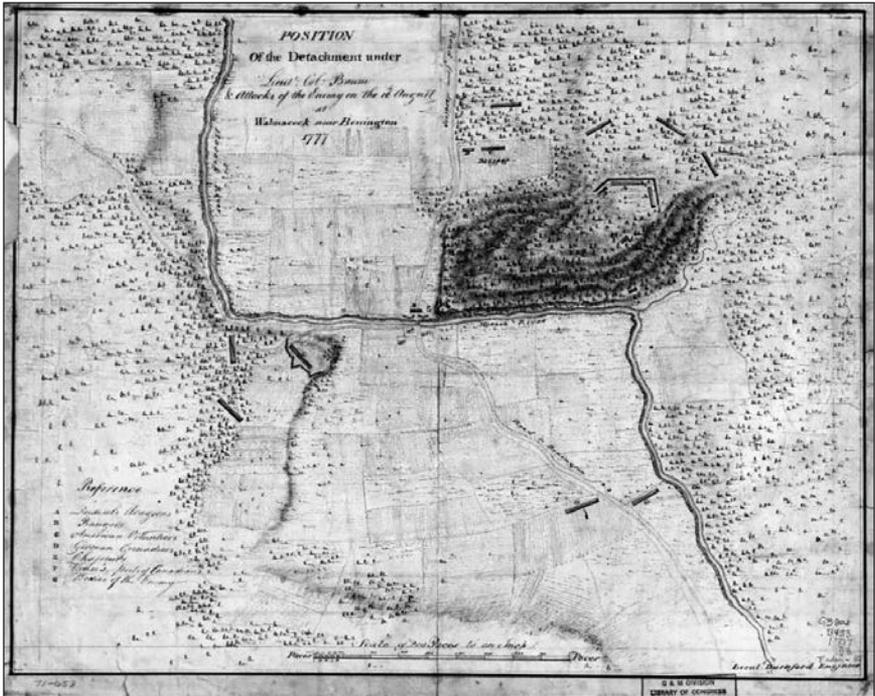
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Lieutenant Desmaretz Durnford's map of the Bennington Battlefield reveals the area's terrain and forest. Note that the map is oriented with north to the right side.
Library of Congress

The Sound of Silence:

Investigating an Acoustic Shadow at the Battle of Bennington

Michael P. Gabriel, Ph.D. ¹

“I must positively declare, that neither during the march, nor even after I reached the Mill I did not hear a single shot fired, either from small arms or Cannon.”² Lieutenant-Colonel Heinrich Breyman penned these words in a report detailing his unsuccessful attempt to rescue Lieutenant-Colonel Friedrich Baum’s command at the Battle of Bennington on August 16, 1777. As a result, General John Stark’s American militia virtually annihilated Baum’s force near the small settlement of Walloomsac, New York, five miles northwest of Bennington, Vermont, and mortally

wounded its commander. Stark's men then defeated Breymann's troops, drove them from the field, and captured his two six-pounder cannons. This sealed the victory that laid the foundation for the British surrender at Saratoga two months later.

Military officers and historians have examined the causes of Breymann's failure at Bennington ever since that hot August day 236 years ago on the banks of the Walloomsac River, and they continue to do so to this day. Ten days after the battle, British General John Burgoyne, who initially dispatched Baum to Bennington to procure livestock and wagons, issued his findings. He attributed Breymann's inability to reach Baum to "bad weather, bad Roads, tired horses and other impediments."³ More recently some historians have suggested that Breymann purposely dallied on his march toward Bennington because of a "Fatal Pique" that existed between him and Baum. Breymann, the third most-senior German officer in Burgoyne's army, may have resented Baum's receiving an independent command, even though Breymann outranked him. To support their claim, these historians note that Breymann took thirty-two hours to cover twenty-four miles, a fact that numerous members of Burgoyne's army noticed. German troops typically marched approximately two and one-half miles each hour during the American Revolutionary War. Beyond this, Breymann's command took only twenty-one hours to cover the same distance, when it retreated from the battlefield on the night of August 16.⁴ A key component of this argument is a rumor that circulated through Burgoyne's camp after the battle. While on the march, Breymann was supposedly heard to say "We will let them get warm before we reach them," when he heard the firing from Stark's attack on Baum.⁵ Indeed, Breymann's statement quoted above sounds as if it was specifically included in his report to counter this rumor.

This article offers another possible explanation for Breymann's failure, one at which the German officer himself hinted. Breymann may not have heard the firing from Baum's defeat because of an acoustic shadow. Somewhat of a "catch-all term," an acoustic shadow is a zone of silence caused by unusual atmospheric conditions and other factors that prevent the normal transmission of sound waves. As a result, those near an event, such as a battle, cannot hear it, while others farther away or in a different direction can. Such phenomena have been recorded since 1666 at the Four-Day Battle in the English Channel and possibly even as early as 1480 when the Ottoman Turks attacked Rhodes. Acoustic shadows occurred repeatedly during the American Civil War at such engagements as Fort Donelson, Perryville, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg. Each of these last four battles involved far more soldiers and artillery pieces than what fought at Bennington, yet commanders could not hear the firing just a few miles

away. Dr. Charles D. Ross, a physics professor at Longwood University, has identified several different causes for acoustic shadows. These include the absorption of sound waves by foliage and topography and/or their refraction (bending) by differences in air temperature or by wind shear.⁶ A number of these conditions existed as Breymann marched towards Baum's position five miles from Bennington.

Breymann left the Fort Miller, New York, area on the morning of August 15, and generally proceeded southeast through Cambridge. Approximately four miles from Baum's position, he turned almost due east as he approached the Walloomsac River. Topographic maps reveal that Breymann advanced down a narrow valley on this final leg of his march. Several nine hundred-foot mountains towered on his left, while he followed the meandering Walloomsac to his right.⁷ These mountains could have blocked the sounds coming from Stark's attack and helped create an acoustic shadow.

Beyond this, heavy forests with full summer foliage covered much of this sparsely settled area. The Durnford map of the battlefield, drawn by a British engineer captured at the engagement, reveals large expanses of forests broken by agricultural fields.⁸ The accounts of soldiers on both sides further confirm the presence of forests. On August 12 as Baum's command departed on its fateful mission, Julius Wasmus, a *Braunschweig* company surgeon, wrote "[w]e set out at 6 o'clock in the morning and marched up a mountain on our left and into the woods." Over the next four days Wasmus made repeated references to forests. Both the "enemy" and Native Americans hid behind trees before and during the battle, while "the Tories and a few Englishmen had to lay out a small entrenchment with big trees at our left wing." At the height of the American attack on August 16, Wasmus took refuge behind "a very big oak tree" and treated wounded soldiers. Similarly, American militiamen John Austin and Silas Walbridge recounted "marching round through the woods" into Baum's rear and then "firing from behind logs, trees &c." Meanwhile, Lieutenant John Orr "passed through the wood and cornfield" to attack a Loyalist breastwork on the far side of the Walloomsac.⁹ As with the case of the mountains, the thick summer foliage of these forests could have absorbed some of the sound waves produced by the battle and contributed to an acoustic shadow.

A final factor that could have resulted in an acoustic shadow was high temperatures, which have a tendency "to refract sound waves upward sharply," away from people on the ground.¹⁰ Ample evidence exists that mid-August 1777 was especially hot and humid in northeastern New York. On August 11, a British soldier serving with Burgoyne recorded a violent thunderstorm with heavy winds and rain that drove the men from their



A monument marks the spot of Baum's skirmish with American militia at San-coick on August 14. After securing the mill at Sancoick, Baum proceeded two miles east to Walloomsac, where he met Stark's command and entrenched. Baum then sent word to Burgoyne and waited for Breymann's relief column. Author's collection

tents. This storm so frightened the army's horses that they "tore down the small sheds formed to keep the heat of the sun from them." Three days later the "cruel" heat caused heavy straggling among Burgoyne's German troops, as they "were in danger of suffocating on the march." August 15 saw more heavy rain that not only slowed Breymann's march, but also postponed Stark's attack on Baum until the following afternoon. Amasa Ives, one of Stark's soldiers, recalled the blistering heat on the day of the battle and others remembered being hot and thirsty. As Breymann's battered command returned to Burgoyne's main camp on August 17, one officer described them as "quite exhausted by the fighting, the heat of the day, and the forced marches." This devastating heat and humidity continued, with some British officers claiming that it was worse than what they had experienced in India.¹¹

Having established that the conditions for an acoustic shadow existed on the afternoon of August 16, the question arises if Stark and Baum's engagement would have been loud enough for Breymann to hear it? The answer is certainly yes. Stark's command numbered over 2,000, while Baum's initial force of approximately 760 had grown to around 1,100 with

the arrival of local Loyalists. Therefore, approximately three thousand men armed with muskets and rifles participated in this opening phase of the Battle of Bennington, and the Germans also possessed two three-pounder cannons. Additionally, Baum's dragoons fired volleys, which would have produced loud crashes of musketry.¹²

Several witnesses attested to the loudness of this action. Stark, a veteran of the French and Indian War, Bunker Hill, and Princeton, wrote that the two-hour contest "was the hottest engagement I have ever witnessed, resembling a continual clap of thunder." Levi Beardsley, whose grandfather owned much of the land on which the battle was fought, recorded his family's recollections. "My father, who was very near the scene of action, and could hear every gun, used to compare the incessant reports with the constant snapping of hemlock brush when exposed to fire. In the midst of all the din of small arms, the field pieces were admirably served, and kept booming away at the advancing Americans."¹³ Additionally, two brothers, Solomon and Jacob Safford, heard the firing from the first engagement several miles east of the battlefield. Solomon, who remained behind guarding the Bennington militia's camp, recalled that the heavy firing only lasted a short time. This contradicts Stark as to the engagement's length, but Solomon did hear the fighting. Orderly sergeant Jacob Safford and Seth Warner's Green Mountain Boy Regiment arrived near Bennington around midnight on August 15 after a forced march from Manchester, Vermont, through heavy rain. After spending the next morning resting and refitting, the Green Mountain Boys resumed their march to Walloomsac. About three miles west of Bennington, Jacob heard firing. This grew markedly louder as they approached the site of Stark and Baum's engagement, and he saw wounded soldiers moving to the rear.¹⁴

Interestingly, some accounts suggest that the battle was heard in other places, possibly fifty to sixty miles away. Many years later, Sarah McCoy McNish of Salem, New York, approximately eighteen miles north of the battlefield, recalled her father standing on a stump and listening to the cannon fire. Similarly, the cannon reports were reputedly heard in Williamstown, Massachusetts, seventeen miles to the southeast. Levi Skinner, a New York militia ranger, claimed that, "the enemy were between our company and the Americans," and that he could hear the firing "*part of the time*" (emphasis added). Sounds of the battle were also supposedly heard as far away as Chesterfield and Charlestown, New Hampshire, fifty and sixty miles east and northeast of the battlefield, respectively.¹⁵ None of the several journals kept by British and German soldiers serving with Burgoyne's main army near Fort Miller, twenty-five miles northwest, indicate that the sound traveled there.¹⁶

Some questions exist about the accounts in the preceding paragraph, however. In each case, it remains unclear whether the people heard the first engagement between Stark and Baum or the second one involving Breymann or both. The only one that almost definitely included at least the fight with Baum is the account from Charlestown, which Abner Sanger, a New Hampshire Loyalist, recorded. Sanger and several others spent August 16 harvesting wheat, and he wrote in his journal, "Fair and warm.... Cannon are heard all the afternoon toward the westward." If indeed this was the firing from Bennington, it lasted over an extended time, suggesting the sounds of both engagements carried there. From Sanger's account one can infer that the sound waves may have covered such a great distance by refracting to the ground, where they were reflected or "bounced," back into the atmosphere. This process could have repeated multiple times, allowing the sound waves to travel much farther than normal. This phenomenon occurred during the Civil War a number of times, most notably at Gaines's Mill, where the cannonading was heard up to 140 miles away.¹⁷

Skinner's and Sanger's accounts indicate that unusual atmospheric conditions may have existed at the time of Stark's battle with Baum, approximately 3 p.m.. In Skinner's case, he heard the sound of battle only intermittently, while Sanger recorded it at a great distance. Stark's, Beardsley's, and the Saffords' accounts reveal that people heard the first battle up to several miles away. What evidence, then, exists that Breymann could not hear it? First, it is important to note that those who heard the firing from the first engagement were either on the battlefield itself or located east of it. Interestingly, this phenomenon of people east of the battle hearing the firing continued during Breymann's stage of the action. Many Americans who participated in the first engagement, such as Jesse Field and Silas Walbridge, were rounding up prisoners, tending to the wounded, or searching for loot as Breymann arrived in the area. They learned of Breymann's presence by the sound of him skirmishing with some of their comrades and driving them back toward Walloomsac. Surgeon Wasmus, captured in the first engagement, recalled, "[i]t was past 5 o'clock when we heard cannon and volley firing in the direction of Sancoik. This was the Breymann Corps that had been designated for our aid but unfortunately had now arrived too late. All the enemy ran there from the battlefield and all the prisoners who had assembled here at the bridge were quickly led away."¹⁸ Thus, the sound of both phases of the Battle of Bennington seemed to carry very well to the east, but Breymann approached the area from the west, as noted above.

Beyond this, the actions of Breymann and several others are inconsistent with someone who anticipates battle. At 2 p.m. on August 16,

while still on the march, Breymann received a message from Philip Skene to send him twenty men. A former British officer who had settled at the tip of South Bay on Lake Champlain, Skene served as an unofficial advisor to Burgoyne, who assigned him to Baum's command. Earlier that day, Skene traveled two miles west from Baum's camp to the mill at Sancoick to hurry up Breymann's command, which was known to be on its way. Baum had arrived at the mill two days earlier, skirmished with American militia, and then left a small Loyalist detachment there as he continued on toward Bennington. Skene requested the additional troops from Breymann to secure the mill from the Americans, but why he did so then remains unclear. Perhaps some of the Loyalists had seen one of the flanking columns that Stark sent into Baum's rear, or perhaps Skene heard nearby skirmishing and anticipated an attack on the mill. Regardless, Breymann responded by sending him sixty grenadiers and chasseurs and twenty jägers led by Captain Gottlieb Joachim von Gleissenberg. The German lieutenant-colonel also attempted to speed up his own march but a broken wagon stymied this. Breymann arrived at Sancoick around 4:30p.m. and he "found the advanced Guard in possession of it and *all quiet*" (emphasis added). Breymann briefly spoke with Skene and then proceeded on toward Baum, taking only minimal precautions, as will be discussed below. After marching about one thousand yards, Breymann's men came under fire, at which point he deployed his troops and two field pieces. If Breymann had previously heard firing from the first engagement, presumably he would have sent out his advanced guard or skirmishers. This would have allowed him to gather intelligence and prevent him from marching into an ambush, which nearly happened. That Breymann, a veteran combat officer, did not take more precautions suggests that he believed that they were unnecessary, probably because he had not heard any firing.¹⁹

Skene's actions also suggest that he did not anticipate an attack, further indicating that he had not heard heavy gunfire. In a letter to the Earl of Dartmouth two weeks after the Battle of Bennington, Skene described his actions that afternoon. "[A]bout 4 o'clock in the Afternoon, Major Bernar [Ferdinand Albrecht von Barner] pressed forward to the Mills at Sancoick, with the Light troops [the eighty men Breymann sent], and intended to March on, Until I begged he would be Cool and wait for the Detachment; he accordingly halted and Lt. Col. Brymer [Breymann] came up."²⁰ At this point, Stark had already begun his attack on Baum, but Skene did not seem to be aware of this. He did not urge the recently arrived troops to advance nor did he send word for Breymann to hurry.

Skene continued: "about this time a Volunteer of the Provincials came in, and said Lt. Baum's party was cut off; I own I wanted faith to believe

him, Especially when Capt. Campbell arrived and said he believed things were not so bad, that he with a party of Indians, was ordered to Attack the Rebels in their Rear but having gotten between two forces; he got off, with the Indians he had with him."²¹ Once again, Skene did not learn of the battle by its sound, but from a Loyalist who had fled, and even then the former British officer did not believe him. Soon after that, Captain Colin Campbell, a British officer serving with the Native Americans in Burgoyne's army, arrived saying that the situation was not serious. If Skene's account is accurate, it suggests that Campbell also did not know the dire circumstances that Baum faced. Skene again continued, this time with an almost comical description of the opening shots of the second phase of the Battle of Bennington.

Lt. Col. Brymer [Breymann] then asked me if I would March on with him, I answered Yes, and put myself at the Head of the party; he ordered Six Chesseurs in front as an advanced guard, and advanced himself; when we marched about 1000 yards, I saw the Rebels at the end of a Worms fence extending to the Eastward, while we were marching on the road due South. I was in doubt whether they were Rebels, or Loyalists, as they had the same Signals of white feathers, or paper in their hats, however to be Certain I Galloped up to them, at the Distance of 100 Yards and desired them to halt; some did, I then asked them if they were for King George; they immediately presented and fired Confusedly, hit my horse but Missed me; the Chesseurs advanced near Enough to Return their fire and begin the Action.²²

Note that neither Breymann nor Skene appeared to be in any great hurry, and the German officer only deployed six soldiers as an advanced guard, hardly a force prepared to meet the enemy. Beyond this Skene's foolhardy attempt to determine the identity of the men behind the fence was not the action of someone who expected a volley of musketry.

Two final accounts of the situation at the Sancoick mill are worth examination. The first is that of Captain Colin Campbell. Writing to Skene over a year after the battle, Campbell provides a very different version, but he says nothing about the sound of battle.

Campbell claimed that he initially he met Breymann one or one and one-half miles *west* of Sancoick, not at the mill, as Skene stated. He then went on:

[I] informed him in as good French as I was Master of, that

Colonel Baum was attacked, mentioned the Hour & Minutes I remember my taking the liberty to advise the Officer who rid at the head of the Advanced Guard, to order his Men [to] lay down their Knapsacks, and that he would not have any distance to march before he would meet with the Rebels. This was conversation that past before we came to Rancelly's Mills, when we fell in with you, what past particularly betwixt you I cannot at this distance of time remember, this I recollect however, that you desired the party might halt, and get some Drink for a little time, saying the Men appeared jaded and Fatigued. . . .²³

Campbell's account raises a number of interesting points. First, Campbell could not speak with Breymann directly, but rather had to use French. This begs the question as to how well the German officers – both Breymann and the one leading the advanced guard – understood him. Historians have raised the issue of the polyglot nature of both Baum's command and Burgoyne's army as a whole, and this might be an example of where it created problems.²⁴ Additionally, if Campbell met Breymann west of Sancoick, this would put the time between 3 and 4 p.m. at which point the battle between Stark and Baum was still occurring. Campbell, however, did not mention the obvious sound of battle as a reason for Breymann to quicken his pace. Finally, according to Campbell's account Skene also apparently did not see the need to hurry. In fact, he suggested that Breymann's column pause because his soldiers appeared tired. All this again suggests that perhaps these men could not hear the sound of the first stage of the Battle of Bennington.

A final witness left a short account of the events at the Sancoick mill that hot afternoon, and he also fails to mention the sounds of gunfire. Peter Rosenbarica, a Hoosick, New York, Loyalist, had joined Burgoyne's army when it arrived at Fort Edward on July 26, and he subsequently participated in Baum's expedition to Bennington. One of the men whom Baum left at the mill when he passed there on August 14, Rosenbarica "[r]emained at said mill until after the Bennington Battle – then Hearing of the Defeat – and finding the army Retreating back Your Memorialist in Company with Capt. John Riter [Ruiter] Immediately Repaired through the woods to Hosick aforesaid to his family. . . ."²⁵

As with Campbell's account, Rosenbarica's raises a number of questions and possibilities. Although he used the word "hearing," the context suggests that someone told him of the defeat, rather than him hearing the battle *per se*. This is yet another circumstantial clue that the sound of the battle did not reach the mill or Breymann. The army's subsequent retreat seemingly verified what Rosenbarica had been told, and he then fled with Captain

Ruiter, another New York Loyalist. If Rosenbarica did not hear the battle itself, who told him about the defeat and when? Although no definitive answer exists, it is possible to speculate that the information came from Ruiter himself, who fought alongside Baum at Bennington.²⁶ Breymann's column did not contain Loyalists, and Baum's command was virtually destroyed by Stark. Therefore, Ruiter must have fled back to the mill after Baum's defeat, not Breymann's. Perhaps Ruiter was the "Volunteer of the Provincials" to whom Skene referred but dismissed as unreliable. The former British officer may not have believed the "Volunteer's" account of Baum's situation, but his fellow Loyalists and neighbors probably did. Rosenbarica and Ruiter may have left immediately or perhaps they stayed at the mill until Breymann's shattered command retreated as darkness fell. In either case, they wisely did not stay at the mill to await an American pursuit.

One last piece of evidence supports the contention that Breymann may not have heard Baum's defeat because of an acoustic shadow. Six hundred and sixty-four officers and men composed Breymann's relief column, and they encountered others, including Campbell and Skene near Sancoick.²⁷ Presumably, Breymann hearing the firing and doing nothing to intervene would have produced more of an uproar than a rumor recorded in a British soldier's journal. It seems likely that either Burgoyne and/or Major General Friedrich Riedesel, who commanded his German auxiliary troops, would have learned of this and acted on the information, but no evidence exists that they did so. Burgoyne wrote a long private letter to British Secretary of State for the Colonies Lord George Germain on August 20 complaining about Baum's inability to obey orders and Breymann's slowness, but he never questioned the latter's professional conduct.²⁸ No evidence exists that Riedesel questioned it either. Instead, Breymann remained in command of his Grenadier Battalion at both Freeman's Farm, on September 19, and Bemis Heights, on October 7, where he was killed.

Admittedly, the lack of evidence that other soldiers heard Breymann say he was purposely delaying his rescue of Baum does not acquit him of the charge. Still, this article has presented a case that on August 16, 1777, Breymann did not hear the firing from the opening phase of the Battle of Bennington because of an acoustic shadow. Not only did the conditions for such an atmospheric anomaly exist that day but some witnesses, such as Sanger and Skinner, reported seemingly unusual acoustics.

Additionally, the testimonies of four others at the Sancoick mill further support this theory. One – a German officer – denied hearing the firing, and the other three – a British officer, a former one, and a Loyalist – failed to mention it. This silence along the Walloomsac River had far reaching consequences that opened the door to American independence. □

- 1 A version of this article first appeared as “‘I did not hear a single shot fired’: A Reevaluation of Lieutenant-Colonel Heinrich Breymann’s March to Bennington,” in *The Hessians: The Journal of the Johannes Schwalm Historical Association* 16 (2013): 37-42.
- 2 “Account of an Affair which Happened near Walloon Creek, August 16, 1777,” No. 43 (6.16/22b), British Records Relating to America in Microfilm, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA.
- 3 John Burgoyne, *Orderly Book of Lieut. Gen. John Burgoyne, from his Entry into the State of New York until his Surrender at Saratoga, 16th Oct., 1777*, ed. E. B. O’Callaghan (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1860), 83.
- 4 For the fullest examination of Breymann purposely delaying his march, see Michael R. Gadue, “‘Fatal Pique’: The Failure of LTC Breymann to Relieve LTC Baum at Bennington, August 16, 1777, A Case of *Braunschweig Dishonor*,” *The Hessians: Journal of the Johannes Schwalm Historical Association* 12 (2009): 44–56; also Richard M. Ketchum, *Saratoga: Turning Point of America’s Revolutionary War* (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 1997), 302-303, 314-315, 510.
- 5 Quoted in Horatio Rogers, ed. *Hadden’s Journal and Orderly Book: A Journal Kept in Canada and Upon Burgoyne’s Campaign in 1776 and 1777, by James M. Hadden; also Orders Kept by Him and Issued by Sir Guy Carleton, John Burgoyne, and William Phillips, in 1776, 1777 and 1778, with an Explanatory Chapter and Notes* (1884. Reprint, Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 136.
- 6 Shotgun’s Home of the American Civil War, “Definitions of Civil War Terms,” <http://www.civilwarhome.com/terms.htm> (accessed April 2, 2013); Charles Ross, “Ssh! Battle in Progress!” *Civil War Times Illustrated* 35 (December 1996): 56-62. <http://web.esbscohost.com> (accessed August 21, 2007); Charles D. Ross, *Civil War Acoustic Shadows* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Books, 2001), especially 7-35. The author would like to thank Dr. Charles D. Ross for sharing his knowledge of acoustic shadows and for his interest in this article.
- 7 For a series of topographic maps showing Breymann’s advance toward the battlefield, see Philip Lord Jr.’s outstanding *War Over Walloomscoick: Land Use and Settlement Pattern on the Bennington Battlefield—1777* (Albany: The University of the State of New York, 1989), 11-12.
- 8 Lieutenant Desmaretz Durnford’s map of the Bennington Battlefield, The Library of Congress, g3802b ar117700, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3802b.ar117700>.
- 9 Helga Doblin, trans., *An Eyewitness Account of the American Revolution and New England Life: The Journal of J.F. Wasmus, German Company Surgeon, 1776–1783* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 69-71; National Archives, Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files (2670 reels; hereafter cited as Pension Records), Austin, John S22094; Silas Walbridge Statement, October 10, 1833, Hall Park McCullough Collection, Bennington Museum, Bennington, VT; Orr quoted in Peter P. Woodbury, Thomas Savage and William Patten, *History of Bedford, New-Hampshire, Being Statistics, Compiled on the Occasion of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Town, May 19, 1850* (Boston, MA: Alfred Mudge, 1851), 256.
- 10 Ross, *Acoustic Shadows*, 16-23; Charles D. Ross, e-mail message to author, April 3, 2013 (quote).
- 11 James Phinney Baxter, ed., *The British Invasion from the North: The Campaigns of Generals Carleton and Burgoyne from Canada, 1776-1777, with the Journal of Lieut. William Digby, of the 53rd or Shropshire Regiment of Foot* (Albany, NY: Joel Munsell’s Sons, 1887), 248; Ray W. Pettengill, trans., Letters from America, 1776-1779: Being Letters of Brunswick, Hessian, and Waldeck Officers with the British Armies During the Revolution (1924. Reprint, Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1964), 87, 90; Helga Doblin, trans., *The Specht Journal: A Military Journal of the Burgoyne Campaign* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 67; Pension Records, Ives, Amasa S23277; Captain Jacob Safford’s Statement, 1828, Hall Park McCullough Collection, Bennington Museum, Bennington, VT; Charlotte S. J. Epping, trans., *Journal of Du Roi the Elder: Lieutenant and Adjutant, in the Service of the Duke of Brunswick, 1776-1778* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1911), 127.

12 Michael P. Gabriel, *The Battle of Bennington: Soldiers and Civilians* (Charlestown, SC: The History Press, 2012), 18, 22-24; for the dragoons firing by volley see Doblin, *Wasmus*, 71.

13 John Stark to Horatio Gates, August 23, 1777, in Caleb Stark, *Memoir and Official Correspondence of Gen. John Stark, with Notices of Several Other Officers of the Revolution. Also a Biography of Capt. Phineas Stevens, and of Col. Robert Rogers, with an Account of His Services in America During the "Seven Years' War"* (1877; Reprint, Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1999), 130; Levi Beardsley, *Reminiscences: Personal and Other Incidents; Early Settlement of Otsego County; Notices and Anecdotes of Public Men; Judicial, Legal and Legislative Matters; Field Sports; Dissertations and Discussions* (New York: Charles Vinten, 1852), 573. Native Americans captured and briefly held Beardsley's father and uncle until one of Baum's officers secured their release.

14 Solomon Safford's Statement, October 1833, and Captain Jacob Safford's Statement, 1828, Hall Park McCullough Collection, Bennington Museum, Bennington, VT.

15 Winston Adler, ed., *Their Own Voices: Oral Accounts of Early Settlers in Washington County, New York* (Interlaken, NY: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1983), 65; John Spargo, *The Bennington Battle Monument: Its History and Its Meaning* (Rutland, VT: The Tuttle Co., 1925), 71; Pension Records, Skinner, Levi S14470; Oran E. Randall, *History of Chesterfield, Cheshire County, N.H.* (Brattleboro, VT: D. Leonard), 1882; Lois K. Stabler, ed., *Very Poor and of a Lo Make: The Journal of Abner Sanger* (Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall, 1986), 152, n.5. Cannons reports, which create lower frequency sound waves of about ten feet, travel farther than those of rifles, which have a frequency of around one foot. Ross, *Acoustic Shadows*, 15-16.

16 Baxter, 249-250; Rogers, 118-119; S. Sydney Bradford, ed. "Lord Francis Napier's Journal of the Burgoyne Campaign." *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 57 (December 1962): 308-309; Doblin, *Specht*, 67- 68; Thomas M. Barker, trans., "The Battles of Saratoga and the Kinderhook Tea Party: The Campaign Diary of a Junior Officer of Baron Riedesel's Musketeer Regiment in the 1777 British Invasion of New York" *The Hessians: Journal of the Johannes Schwalm Historical Association* 9 (2006): 33; Henry J. Retzer, trans., "Journal of the Hessen-Hanau Erbprinzip Infantry Regiment – June to August 1777 Kept by Chaplain Philipp Theobald", *The Hessians: Journal of the Johannes Schwalm Historical Association* 7 (2001): 42.

17 Stabler, 152; Ross, "Battle in Progress," paragraph 17, and *Acoustic Shadows*, 23-26. Ross notes that such "bouncing" usually occurs to the west, not the east, in hot weather, but not always.

18 Jesse Fields Statement [c. 1823] and Silas Walbridge Statement, October 10, 1833, Hall Park McCullough Collection, Bennington Museum, Bennington, VT; Doblin, *Wasmus*, 73.

19 "Account of an Affair which Happened near Walloon Creek"; for Skene see Doris Begor Mortin, *Philip Skene of Skenesborough* (Granville, NY: The Grastoff Press, 1959). Chasseurs were light infantrymen who received special training and equipment to allow for greater mobility.

20 Colonel Philip Skene to the Earl of Dartmouth, August 30, 1777, in Benjamin Franklin Steven, *B.F. Stevens's Facsimiles of Manuscripts in European Archives Relating to America, 1773-1783, with Descriptions, Editorial Notes, Collations, References, and Translations*, Vol. 18 (Wilmington, DE: Mellifont Press, Inc., 1970), no. 1665.

21 Stevens, no. 1665.

22 Stevens, no. 1665.

23 Colin Campbell to Philip Skene, September 1, 1778, George Germain Papers – William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

- 24 Thomas M. Barker, "Braunschweigers, Hessians and Tories in the Battle of Bennington (16 August 1777): The American 'Revolution' as a Civil War," *The Hessians: Journal of the Johannes Schwalm Historical Association* 10 (2007): 24-26; Michael R. Gadue, "Lieutenant Colonel Friedrich S. Baum, Officer Commanding, the Bennington Expedition: A Figure Little Known to History," *The Hessians: Journal of the Johannes Schwalm Historical Association* 11 (2008): 37-54.
- 25 Great Britain, Audit Office, Papers of the American Loyalist Claims Commission, 1780-1835 (hereafter cited AO 13), Peter Rosenbarica, AO 13/24/408-409.
- 26 "Memorial of John Ruiter" AO13/15/310-313.
- 27 Doblin, Specht, 135.
- 28 John Burgoyne to Lord George Germain, August 20, 1777 (Private) in John Burgoyne, *A State of the Expedition from Canada, as Laid before the House of Commons, by Lieutenant-General Burgoyne, and Verified by Evidence; with a Collection of Authentic Documents, and an Addition of Many Circumstances Which were Prevented from Appearing before the House by the Prorogation of Parliament* (London: J. Almon, 1780), xxiv-xxv.

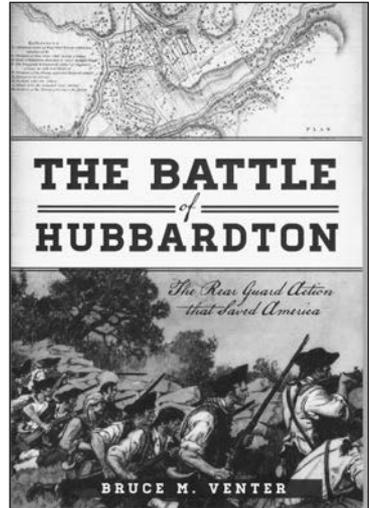
The American Revolutionary Battle on Vermont Territory

THE BATTLE OF HUBBARDTON

Reviewed by Michael P. Gabriel

“**T**his fierce fought rear guard action may have lasted scant hours, but the valor of those hours saved the northern Continental army and, perhaps, the American cause”. This is how Bruce M. Venter characterizes the Battle of Hubbardton, July 7, 1777, and this theme reoccurs throughout the text. Highly laudatory of Seth Warner’s performance in this “bloody slugfest” and equally critical of British brigadier Simon Fraser, the author provides a thorough and highly analytical account of the only Revolutionary War engagement fought in Vermont.

One of the book’s strengths is the author’s ability to place Hubbardton into the broader context of the Saratoga Campaign. He provides a clear overview of General John Burgoyne’s overall strategy, and then devotes two chapters chronicling the British advance up Lake Champlain and American General Arthur St. Clair’s subsequent decision to evacuate Fort Ticonderoga and Mount Independence on the night of July 5-6. Venter does an especially good job explaining that Mount Defiance’s lack of a water supply, coupled with the Americans’ limited resources, caused St. Clair to leave this dominating height undefended. This allowed Burgoyne to place artillery atop the mountain, rendering the American position untenable. While part of St. Clair’s forces fled by water toward South Bay, the rest retreated overland toward Castleton, Vermont. Venter briefly covers the destruction of the American shipping at modern-day Whitehall, New York, but spends most of the next ten chapters on Fraser’s aggressive – almost



reckless – pursuit of the Americans and the ensuing fight at Hubbardton.

The author argues that Fraser, jealous of command, sought to keep German General Friedrich von Riedesel, who outranked him, away from the action. In his haste, Fraser left behind his surgeons and extra provisions, and he had the Germans encamp several miles to the rear. These actions cost Fraser's troops dearly on the morning of July 7, when they caught up to the stubborn American rearguard commanded by Colonel Seth Warner. Drawing a sharp contrast with Fraser, Venter claims that Warner made the best of a difficult situation, despite suffering heavier casualties and ultimately losing the battle. Although his command was exhausted from its long retreat and included hundreds of sick and straggling soldiers, Warner held Fraser at bay for several hours, and even launched a counterattack that nearly won the battle. Venter offers new insights into this counterattack, speculating that it may have included a large scouting party that Warner was expecting to return that morning. Only the arrival of German reinforcements, who turned his right flank, prompted Warner to finally retire. Still, the American colonel had bloodied Fraser's command, slowed the British pursuit, and allowed St. Clair to escape to Fort Edward. This gave the colonists the opportunity to regroup and ultimately defeat Burgoyne at Saratoga that fall. The author suggests that had Fraser and Riedesel caught the dispirited main body of the northern Continental Army on the road to Castleton, none of this would have been possible.

A quick perusal of this book reveals that Venter possesses a strong command of the major American, British, and German primary and secondary sources on this battle. He has also walked the battlefield many times, which gives him insights that cannot be found in a library. Equipped with this knowledge the author deftly addresses a number of the questions and controversies associated with Hubbardton. Incorporating the latest scholarship, he repeatedly casts doubts on Thomas Anburey's accounts. Anburey, a British volunteer who participated in the Saratoga Campaign, wrote an often-cited memoir, which has recently been shown to be both plagiarized and fanciful. Examining the terrain, Venter concludes that British grenadiers did not scale Mount Zion, while trying to cut the Castleton road, despite the claims of other historians. He also convincingly argues that a close and careful reading of the sources demonstrates that Colonel Ebenezer Francis of the Eleventh Massachusetts Regiment fell late in the battle rather than during the final retreat. In fact, the author claims that Francis's death helped cause the collapse of the American position on Monument Hill.

Venter designed his work to replace John Williams's out-of-print *The Battle of Hubbardton: The American Rebels Stem the Tide* – the long-time

standard study of this engagement – and he succeeds admirably. This new book is liberally sprinkled with illustrations and photographs, many from the author's own collection, which provide a strong visual element. The author has also included six detailed maps of the various stages of the battle, including one by a German engineer drawn just hours after the engagement ended. Finally, the book is filled with new insights and perspectives on the Battle of Hubbardton that will make it an important study for many years to come. □

The Battle of Hubbardton: The Rear Guard Action that Saved America; by Bruce M. Venter; Charleston, S.C., The History Press, 2015, paper, 386 pp.

A New Take on Rogers' Rangers and British Control of North America

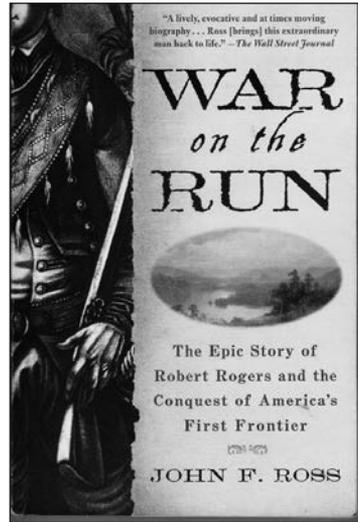
Reviewed by Tyler Resch

This history of the Seven Years War (1755-1763) and biography of Robert Rogers and his Rangers is a challenge to read. Much of the subject matter is so bloody, so full of fear, scalplings, torture, starvation, sadism, and awesomely severe wilderness and weather conditions, that full reader persistence is required. It also ventures into frequent tangential forays – allusions, analogies, interpretations – that often distract from the footnoted documentation.

On the positive side, the author, who was executive editor of *American Heritage* and of *Smithsonian Magazine*, has hiked and kayaked many of the sites and trails that were first trod by Rogers, the so-called godfather of today's elite special military forces. Thus the reader is offered a witnessed first-person description of the geography and topography of the region of Lakes George and Champlain and mid-18th century fortifications built by the French and English, later including Detroit, Michilimackinac, and South and North Carolina.

Fort Ticonderoga, located on that critical peninsula of Lake Champlain, figures prominently – built as Carillon by the French, who defended it against the British, then lost it to them, only to be captured some twenty year later by Ethan Allen, retaken by the Brits, then finally to become a New York State tourist attraction.

A larger view of this book's scope is that of the intense guerrilla-like warfare between the French and English for control of the North American continent, focused heavily on the wild Northern Frontier and Hudson River corridor. This is the story of the Seven Years War, the final chapter of the so-called French and Indian Wars. The even grander picture is that of England as the budding world power that became the empire upon which "the sun never set," with branches in India, Asia, and elsewhere. This was also the war whose conclusion created conditions that suddenly opened Vermont to



settlement.

A powerful subtext is the virtual biography of Robert Rogers (1731-1795), whose intrepid Rangers, separate from British regulars, fought with notable self-sufficiency, stealth, courage, and camouflage. Rogers's leadership abilities are a steady theme, his ability to see what others could not see in the vast topography of aboriginal America.

The ultimate tragedy of Rogers, who fought with skill and fury for British domination of North America, was that he remained loyal even after the colonists' rebellion broke out in 1775, only to see the British ultimately defeated by their own excesses. John Stark, his New Hampshire colleague in many tough fights, saw the light and became an American patriot.

The British victory over the French was at a huge cost. To repay those debts the Brits chose to impose such extraordinary tax pressures on their American colonists that in the end they lost it all in the American Revolution – ultimately with assistance from the French.

After you have read the first 350 pages of *War on the Run* and you have checked out the English defeat by Pontiac at Detroit in the War of Bloody Brook, you are finally finished with wilderness warfare. Then the book assumes a different ambience with a colorful description of quaint London of 1765, where Rogers visited and had his two manuscripts published. One became *A Concise Account of North America: containing a description of the several British colonies on that continent*. Most of his reportage is available commercially in *The Annotated and Illustrated Journals of Major Robert Rogers*, published by Purple Mountain Press in 2002.

After 400 pages, Rogers's denouement gradually takes place as he clashes with George Washington, gets arrested for treason, escapes from jail, exposes Nathan Hale's espionage, then bounces across the Atlantic and back in a vain effort to recoup expenses he had incurred earlier. His final years were largely undocumented but were probably times of dissipation.

War on the Run offers helpful features for the reader. I made frequent reference to several maps, a list of *dramatis personae*, a brief chronology, a list of Rogers's own 28 rules of engagement, a generous bibliography, abundant footnotes, and a detailed index. But, as noted, in between footnotes that anchor occasional sources, there are long passages of rumination and interpretation that can be tedious as well as informative. □

War on the Run: The Epic Story of Rogers Rogers and the Conquest of America's First Frontier, by John F. Ross, published 2009 by Bantam Books. Paperback, 548 pp.

History of the Elizabeth Copper Mine

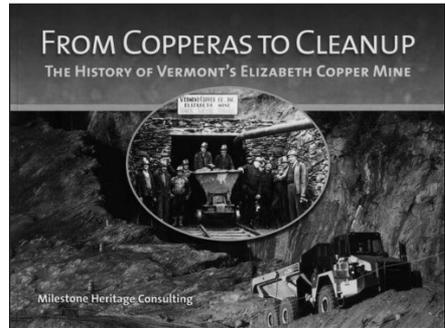
Reviewed by Victor Rolando

When two observant men noticed rusty stains in the snow while tapping sugar maples in the spring of 1793, it triggered a series of events that lasted into the middle of the twentieth century, and to some degree still continues as this review is written. The place was a nondescript hill – soon to be called Copperas Hill – in southeastern Strafford, Orange County, Vermont. The Revolutionary War had ended with the Treaty of Paris a scant 10 years before, and while the loser, Great Britain, was in the opening throes of another revolution, the Industrial Revolution, industrial technology in South Strafford was still a generation away.

South Strafford lies near the southeast corner of the town of Strafford, about nine straight-line miles northwest of downtown White River Junction (twice that via best road). The copperas and copper mining areas are about two miles south-easterly up Mine Road from South Strafford. Some of the early mining property extended eastward into Thetford and southward into Sharon and Norwich in Windsor County. No railroad ever connected to the mining area, but a good road (today's Route 132) provided easy access to a railroad depot at nearby Pompanoosuc Station along the Connecticut River. Thus it was that a viable sulfide ore deposit was discovered and exploited, giving birth to a major copperas and copper industry in this remote corner of Vermont.

Industrial historian Matt Kierstead has done a magnificent job in writing this well-organized and understandable short book. In the first of three major sections he introduces contextual geology and historical information needed by readers to appreciate the complex individual technologies that resulted in the production of copperas (ferrous sulfate) and copper in the world, the Western Hemisphere, the U.S. in general, and specifically at Strafford.

The middle section, comprising half of the book, describes where the ores were found at Strafford, the various technologies employed to extract and refine them, and how the end products of these processes at Strafford were used in an increasingly technology-driven nineteenth-century America.



It also describes who the investors with deep pockets were, their motivations for being in the copperas business, the ups and downs of international trading and national economic challenges, and the series of various chemical and mining company responses and local mining technological improvements. When Strafford's copperas era ended in 1882, mainly due to its obsolete technology and new copperas sources, it was the largest and longest-operating copperas producer of its kind in the U.S.

Copper mining and smelting at Strafford began in 1829 at Furnace Flat and went through its own roller-coaster challenges, successes, and disappointments. Vastly overshadowing its smaller sister's copperas business, employment reached a high of 220 workers with an annual payroll exceeding \$1 million. It was the country's nineteenth-largest copper producer in 1953 (final year of the Korean War), mined from about five miles of tunnels that are estimated to have provided enough ore to have made over 100 million pounds of copper (50,000 tons). Although the two World Wars plus the Korean War proved profitable, copper production succumbed in 1958.

All the mining and extraction processes produced another end product: industrial waste. How this aspect of the industry was attended to and resolved is the subject of the last section of – and the main reason for – the book. In 2001 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency designated the mining sites as one of the largest Superfund sites in New England. Cleanup was completed in 2013. As the land was being reclaimed, the archeological survey of the site documented the remaining surface and accessible subsurface features, as described and illustrated in the book.

More than 100 photographs, maps, and sketches grace the book's pages, from Daguerreotypes to halftones to modern color prints (all captioned) that accompany the text – the next best thing to having been there. Four full-page Historic American Engineering Record drawings of the Elizabeth Mine area, produced in 2003, depict the mining areas from various viewpoints, including an oblique translucent view of the subsurface mining workings, and an ore-processing flow chart.

The author's writing style is crisp and concise: no excessive or repetitive discussions; every word counts. Two pages list sources consulted (no footnotes or in-text references). Slick, no-expense-spared paper stock and a printed spine all for \$15 postage-paid in the continental U.S. See www.milestoneheritage.com for further information about book and author. □

From Copperas to Cleanup: The History of Vermont's Elizabeth Copper Mine, by Matthew A. Kierstead. Milestone Heritage Consulting, Beacon, N.Y. 12542, 2014, ii+61pp, 109 photos, 3 maps, biblio, 8½ by 11, \$15 (soft cover).

When They Made Chisels in Chiselville

Reviewed by Katy Riley

T*he History of Chiselville:
A Village in Sunderland,
Vermont,* by James F.

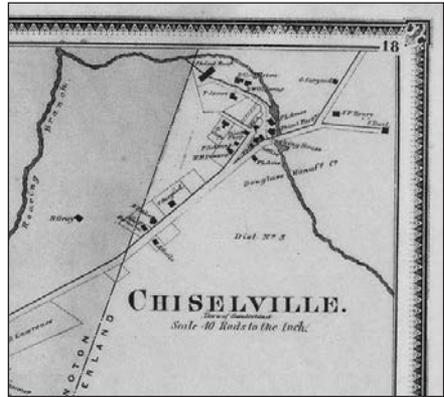
Hayden is a well-written and well-documented 34-page booklet that describes the existence and decline of a long-defunct factory set aside the gorge of the Roaring Branch near one of Bennington County's five covered bridges.

The author is the great-great-grandson of one of the chiselworks founders, Paul Shuffleton. Both his great-grandfathers, Dan Hayden and George Burt, also worked there. His grandfather, William F. Hayden, a professional photographer at the turn of the twentieth century, documented many details of life in Arlington, Sunderland, and a declining Chiselville.

In 1807 the chiselworks site originally held a dam, a bark mill, and tannery, which were all gone by 1849 when it was purchased by Edward Tracy, who then sold the old tannery land to Royal Irish, a Bennington entrepreneur. His partner, Paul Shuffleton, and two investors, Asahel and Ira Mosher, financed the conversion of the property to fit it out as a squareworks.

In 1853, Irish, with Olin Scott, then 21 years old, built an overshot waterwheel fourteen feet in diameter, twelve feet wide, with three circular rims, each containing eight spokes, suspended from two sections with twenty large buckets affixed. Irish and Shuffleton with two partners in 1854 converted a farmhouse for skilled millwrights, machinists, and carpenters to build the dam, waterwheel, and shafting. Then in 1855 Shuffleton and Irish sold their interests to N.R. Douglass and the Bottom brothers of Shaftsbury, who converted the original squareworks into a chisel manufacturing business.

Hayden describes a life of hard work and fortitude as the mill workers walked from their family farms on footpaths that resembled spokes of a wheel. The chiselworks expanded to a shop that was four stories high and 250 feet long aside an upper dam, while a lower dam was built a few



years later to provide power to another shop. The 1860 census discloses that the chiselworks employed about a dozen workers from Arlington and Sunderland. In that same year the chisel business prospered when a second large shop and additional buildings were constructed under new ownership of Oakes Ames of Boston, a prominent capitalist and Congressman from Massachusetts.

The author pauses to describe the importance of adding percentages of carbon to wrought iron to produce steel hard enough to maintain an edge yet soft enough to be honed. Unfortunately, Hayden reports finding no documents that tell which proprietary process produced these edge tools. Chiselville's chisels enjoyed a good reputation for holding an edge.

More detail follows about the manufacture of edge-making tools, which were fired in a charcoal-fueled furnace to a red "bloom," then forged to rough shape by trip hammers that weighed between 50 and 100 pounds. Grinders and polishers completed the task, and the product was shipped to customers with a handle turned at the shop or left bare. Author Hayden includes an account by Ken Hawley, the late tool collector and historian, about the manufacture of light edge tools such as wood chisels, drawing knives, and plane irons of the era.

Business was booming as the 1870 federal census recorded that the chisel business had some fifty employees. By 1876 much of the work was shifted to the Ames Augur Works in Seymour, Connecticut, and several employees followed. In 1878 Paul Shuffleton purchased what was left of the enterprise and changed its name to the Arlington Edge Tool Company.

Hayden's epilogue notes that the Hale Company, known locally as "the chairworks," succeeded the chiselworks as the mainstay of employment in the 1880s. It was located on the banks of Warm Brook about a mile south of Chiselville, and lasted well into the twentieth century. □

The History of Chiselville: A Village in Sunderland, Vermont, by James F. Hayden, self-published by the author, 2015.

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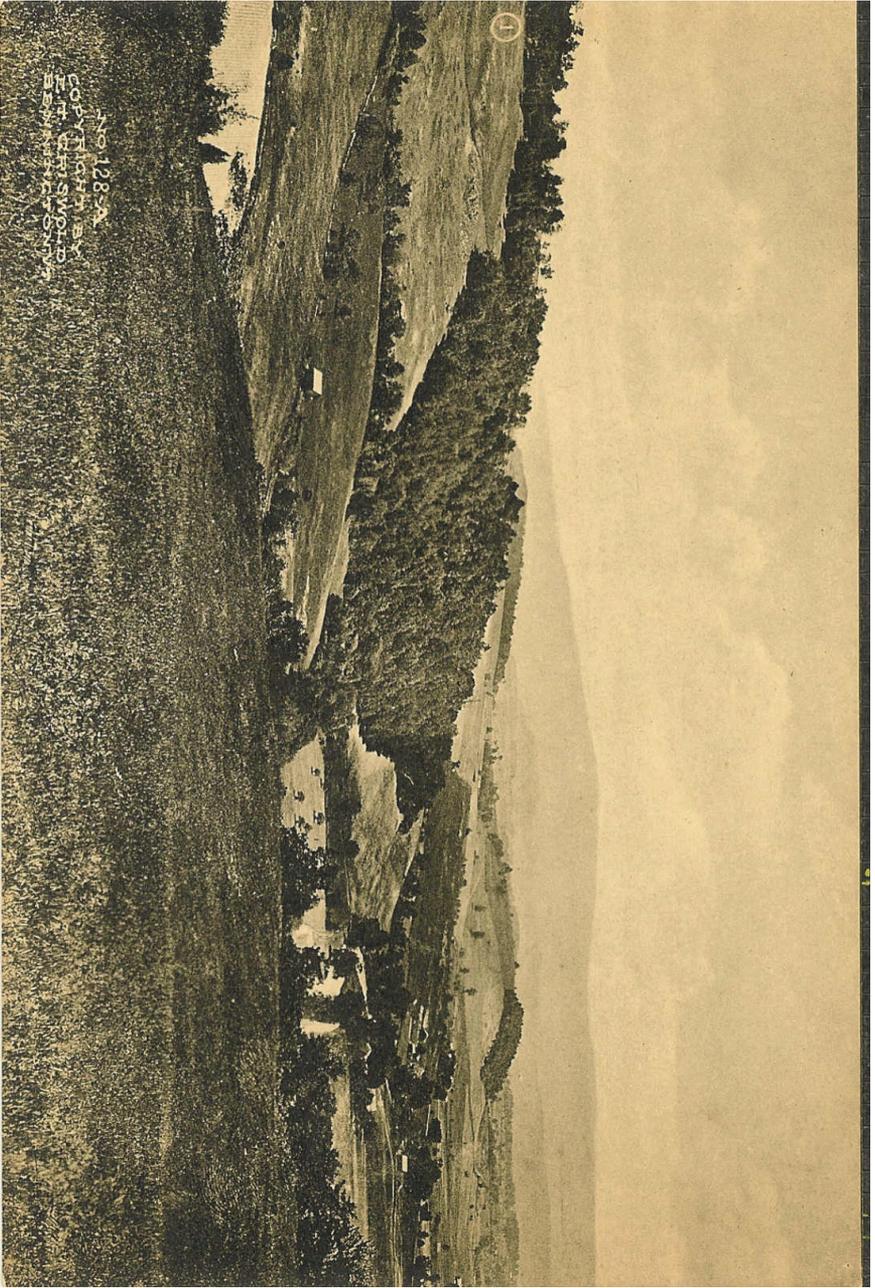
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