

1-1-2013

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Recommended Citation

Soucier, Daniel S.. "“News of Provisions Ahead”: Accommodation in a Wilderness Borderland during the American Invasion of Quebec, 1775." *Maine History* 47, 1 (2013): 42-67.

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Benedict Arnold led an invasion of Quebec during the first year of the Revolutionary War. Arnold was an ardent Patriot in the early years of the war, but later became the most famous American turncoat of the era. Maine Historical Society Collections.

“NEWS OF PROVISIONS AHEAD”: ACCOMMODATION IN A WILDERNESS BORDERLAND DURING THE AMERICAN INVASION OF QUEBEC, 1775¹

BY DANIEL S. SOUCIER

Soon after the American Revolutionary War began, Colonel Benedict Arnold led an American invasion force from Maine into Quebec in an effort to capture the British province. The trek through the wilderness of western Maine did not go smoothly. This territory was a unique borderland area that was not inhabited by colonists as a frontier society, but instead remained a largely unsettled region still under the control of the Wabanakis. On the northern periphery of this borderland the Quebecois and Wabanakis supplied Arnold and his men with provisions, aid, and intelligence. It was the assistance of French habitants and Wabanakis in Quebec that saved the mission. Historians who have written about Arnold's march through this borderland region have tended to view it as simply a heroic feat by the American force. Yet, both the natural and human environment of this borderland region played a significant role in the expedition's near failure to escape the Maine wilderness and ultimately its success in reaching Quebec City. The author is a graduate student at the University in Maine, focusing on the environmental history of the American Revolution. He is the secretary of the Environmental Studies Coalition at the University of Maine, co-editor of the Khronikos blog and journal, and the webmaster of the Northeastern Atlantic Canada Environmental History Forum.

THE FEARS of armed conflict between the American colonies and Britain became a reality on April 19, 1775, when British forces set forth on a march to Concord, Massachusetts, intent on capturing armament stores located in the town. As the gunman on Lexington Green fired the famous shot heard round the world, the flintlock of his firearm sparked a chain of events that would eventually lead to American independence. By the time the war began, Benedict Arnold had built

a dedicated entourage of Patriots in his hometown of New Haven, Connecticut. In the winter of 1774, Arnold and over sixty other men established a local militia company in New Haven. Because of his merchant business, Arnold was a well-respected member of the community. His standing in the community and his reputation as a resolute proponent of the rights of American colonists compelled the men of the company to elect him as their captain. When word of the fighting at Lexington and Concord reached Arnold in Connecticut, he assembled his militia company, and they set forth to join their Patriot brethren in Massachusetts.

Once there, Arnold utilized his social network through both Patriot and Masonic channels to obtain a commission as a colonel in the Massachusetts service. His primary objective was to embark on a mission to capture Fort Ticonderoga in New York and secure the artillery stored there by the British. This task was of great importance to many Patriot leaders as there were strong suspicions of a British plan to invade the colonies from British North America (modern-day Canada).² During Arnold's tenure in the Lake Champlain region, he thought often about the threat of invasion from British North America. The intelligence reports he received combined with the daily command situation on the ground to add validity to these fears. Arnold, proactive in his military strategy, conceived a plan for the Patriot force to swiftly attack Montreal and Quebec. This plan had two objectives: to eliminate the British threat to the north and to secure the French and Indian populations of Quebec as allies.³

While Arnold was seizing the artillery in the Lake Champlain region, the Second Continental Congress convened and created an army of regulars, printed paper currency to support this professional army, and designated George Washington as the commander of the Patriot force. On June 27, 1775, after careful consideration of an operational plan sent by Arnold, Congress decided to send an invading force into Canada with the intent of capturing Quebec City and bringing the rest of Quebec into the Revolution as the fourteenth rebellious colony. This invasion was to be launched from the Patriot-held forts on Lake Champlain and led by General Phillip Schuyler of New York, an influential veteran of the Seven Years' War. His political standing and geographic proximity made him the rational and pragmatic choice to lead the expedition.⁴

Although Arnold was disappointed that he was not chosen to lead the invasion of Canada from the Champlain region, he did not abandon hope for personal involvement in the mission. Instead, he devised a plan

for a secondary invading force that would leave the Patriot stronghold at Cambridge, Massachusetts, and travel to Canada through the wilderness of Maine, down the Chaudière River in Canada to the capital city of Quebec. General Washington was convinced that a two-pronged invasion of Canada would force Canadian Governor Guy Carleton to abandon either Montreal or Quebec, leaving the other defenseless. Arnold's expedition set sail for the Maine wilderness on September 19, 1775.

Most historians who have written about the Arnold expedition have either dismissed his trek through Maine as a relatively minor aspect of the larger mission to capture Quebec City or have celebrated the march solely for Arnold's great leadership and courage. The Maine landscape, its people, and the people of frontier Canada are generally seen as largely incidental. Historian James Leamon, for example, has written:

Overall Arnold's expedition made little impact on Maine, which merely represented territory to be crossed en route to the objective. Quebec was not a major concern for Maine, and few of its residents participated in the campaign. Arnold's march is remembered today chiefly as an example of inspired leadership and heroic endurance, all the more poignant in the awareness of its futility.⁵

The march through Maine has often been considered, as one of Arnold's biographers put it, "one of the hardest marches in the annals of war."⁶ The prevailing narrative supports Leamon's argument that there was little historical significance to Arnold's march through the wilds of Maine, other than the men made it through to Quebec.

However, the Maine wilderness was not simply a backdrop for the expedition to Quebec. The rugged territory of western Maine through which Arnold and his men trekked should be regarded as both a resource that supplied food, shelter, maintenance equipment, and other necessities, as well as an obstacle that governed the strategic decisions of military commanders.⁷ This landscape traveled by Arnold and his men – through western Maine into the Chaudière River Valley in Quebec – was not a frontier region at the edge of an empire but instead a "howling wilderness" that was situated between two competing powers, each with its own ideology concerning the fate of British North America. This wilderness region was not inhabited by colonists as a frontier society, but instead remained an unsettled region still under the control of the Wabanakis.⁸ On the northern periphery of this borderland, the Quebecois and Wabanakis supplied Arnold and his men with provisions, aid, and intelligence, despite the fact that the British authorities in Quebec in-

structed them not to do so. Throughout the march from Maine to Quebec, Arnold's force was at the mercy of both the natural environment and the human settlements of this borderland region; each could serve as obstacle and as aide to the mission's survival.

Arnold and his troops assembled at Fort Western – located in modern-day Augusta – in late September 1775. The objective of this force was to reach Quebec by traveling up and alongside the Kennebec River through the Maine wilderness, then portage over the Great Carrying Place to the Dead River, which they would also ascend. From there, they would travel over the Height of Land to the Chaudière River, which eventually flows into the St. Lawrence River, less than five miles from the fortifications at Quebec.⁹ Before commencing this journey, Arnold organized the men into four main divisions. The first was comprised of Captain Daniel Morgan and his backwoods riflemen who “wore coarse hunting shirts, animal hide leggings over their woolen trousers, short coats and moccasins.”¹⁰ These men were to serve as scouts and trailblazers for the expedition. The second and third divisions were comprised of infantry, led by Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Greene and Major Jonathan Return Meigs, respectively. The fourth division, or rear guard, was led by Colonel Roger Enos, and would carry the bulk of the provisions as it would be traveling upon a beaten trail following the three other groups of soldiers.¹¹ Arnold sent these divisions one day's journey apart to prevent the whole expedition from becoming ensnared in the obstacles and portages that lay in wait. Arnold himself would travel in a birch bark canoe paddled by Indian guides to move swiftly from the rear guard to the scouting party and back to check on progress and to manage difficulties.¹²

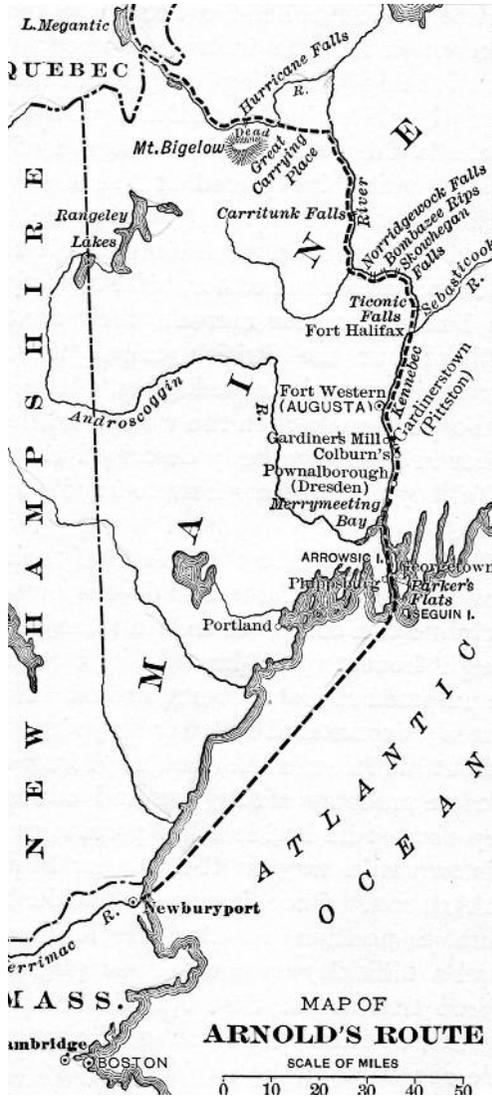
There were two main goals that Patriot leaders hoped the Arnold expedition would accomplish. First, it would remove the threat of attack – whether real or imagined – posed by the British and Mohawk forces to the north by giving control of fortifications such as Montreal and Quebec to General Washington. Additionally, the Patriot commander would gain control of the St. Lawrence waterway, which provided water-based access to a majority of inland British North America. Second, with control of Canada, the Continental forces could gain a valuable ally in the eighty thousand Quebecois who had a long history of conflict with the British.¹³ Arnold himself argued that control of Quebec and the rest of Canada would provide America with “an inexhaustible granary” and would furthermore, “cut the British from the lucrative fur trade.”¹⁴ Patriot leaders hoped that victory in Quebec would give them a decisive

advantage in their quest for home rule, whether achieved through independence or reconciliation.

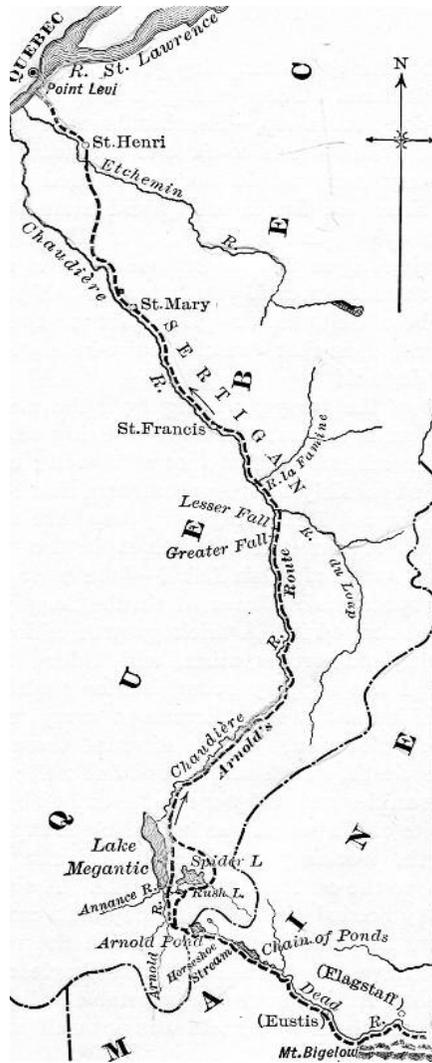
Although there were not many soldiers from the District of Maine who participated in the invasion of Quebec, a few Mainers played critical roles in helping the expedition make it through the “howling wilderness” of Maine. Pittston resident and shipbuilder Reuben Colburn was contracted to build 200 shallow, flat-bottomed boats called bateaux for forty shillings per vessel. In addition, Colburn and approximately two dozen of his carpenters were hired to accompany Arnold’s men to the Dead River to repair these crafts as needed.¹⁵ The day before arriving at Colburn’s shipyard, much to Arnold’s surprise, Maine patriot Samuel McCobb and twenty volunteers excitedly met and applauded Arnold, who graciously allowed them to join the ranks.¹⁶ Two other Mainers, John Getchell and Jeremiah Horne of Vassalboro, both of whom had experience traveling the waterways and woodland trails in the region, served as guides for Arnold and his men.¹⁷ In addition to these volunteers, several Indians served as guides, messengers, and, in one case, as an anonymous helper who left a map crafted from a bark scroll for Arnold’s lost troops. Although these Mainers numbered less than five percent of the total expedition, most were instrumental in the success of the Patriot force as they trekked through the wilderness of Maine.

As historian George Stanley has noted, “Arnold’s expedition was not striking off into the unknown.”¹⁸ The route up the Kennebec River over the Height of Land to the Chaudière River was a well-known wilderness highway for small French and Indian expeditions throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In fact, Arnold utilized the map and journal of British engineer John Montessor, who travelled the same route in 1761 during the French and Indian War. However, in the past, it had only been accomplished with small mobile forces consisting of light birch bark canoes.¹⁹ The boats crafted by Reuben Colburn for the expedition, however, were not light. Due to the urgency of the order, Colburn had to fabricate the bateaux out of green wood, which made them extraordinarily heavy. Estimated to weigh approximately four hundred pounds each, one historian has noted that they appeared to have been “an attempt to marry the traditional Maine logging boat with a lighter craft designed for speed and portability.”²⁰

In addition to portaging with the bateaux, the men also had to transport their supplies and implements of war. For a force of over 1,100 men this required them to “fight their way through with guns and armament, barrels of flour and pork, cooking kits, tents, oars, poles, and carpenters’



Map of the route taken by Arnold's force through Maine. Arnold and his men embarked from Fort Western in present-day Augusta, traveled up the Kennebec River past present-day Skowhegan, and then followed the Dead River through western Maine to the Chaudière River in southern Quebec. From Justin H. Smith, *Our Struggle for the Fourteenth Colony: Canada and the American Revolution*, vol. 1 (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1907), p. 512.



Map of the route taken by Arnold's force through Quebec. Arnold and his men followed the Chaudière River most of the way towards Quebec City before breaking away and heading toward the St. Lawrence River and their ultimate destination. From Justin H. Smith, *Our Struggle for the Fourteenth Colony: Canada and the American Revolution*, vol. 1 (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1907), p. 582.

supplies, including barrels of nails.”²¹ Contrary to the previous successful small expeditions through this wilderness highway, Arnold’s model was based on the methods of the traditional European war machine, which would later prove to be problematic in the wilds of Maine. Historian Robert Middlekauff has argued that “Arnold’s optimism” about the journey through the Maine wilderness “was equaled only by his ignorance of the geography of the Northeast.” To the detriment of his expeditionary force, Arnold “thought that he had only 180 miles to travel; in reality he had 350 that would take him forty-five days to cover.”²² Furthermore, Arnold greatly underestimated the agency of the Maine wilderness in his expedition.

As Historian Geoffrey Plank has illustrated, soldiers serving in a war often “kept diaries during their period of service because they expected their military service” and their surroundings “to be extraordinary.”²³ The war diaries of the men in Arnold’s expedition were rife with commentary pertaining to the wilderness environment that surrounded them. The men catalogued flora and fauna, described their surroundings in romantically aesthetic terms, and highlighted the role of the wilderness as both a provider and as an obstacle. Throughout their journey, the agency of the land was paramount.

Environmental historian William Cronon has argued that explorers arriving in the New World catalogued and listed “natural products which were of potential use to a European way of life” as a means to understand nature through a process of commodification. Cronon explained that “little sense of ecological relationships emerges from such a list. One could not use it to describe what the forest actually looked like or how these trees interacted with one another. Instead, its purpose was to detail resources for the interest of future undertakings.”²⁴ The men of Arnold’s expedition responded to their new environment in the wilds of Maine in the same fashion. Dr. Isaac Senter noted in his journal that “the spruce, cedar and hemlock were the chief growth of the earth, and these were in tolerable plenty, almost impenetrably so in many places.”²⁵ Return Meigs listed “the timber” as containing “butternut, beech, hemlock, white pine red cedar, &c.”²⁶ Benedict Arnold himself wrote that the land was “in general fertile & tolerably well wooded with some Oak, Elm, Ash, Beech Maple, Pine, Hemlock, &c.”²⁷ Fauna were also methodically listed as well, “Salmon and Trouts – river full of Fish – Plenty of Beaver minks and Otter – very Good Land both Sides of the river.”²⁸

This systematic listing was juxtaposed by depictions of the wilderness as providing a visual aesthetic that brought hope to a landscape full of despair and suffering. Arnold described his surroundings on October

14, as “very beautiful & noble” with “a high chain of mountains encircling the Pond, which is deep, clear & fine water, over which a forked mountain which exceeds the rest in height bear N. west, & covered with Snow, in contrast with the others adds greatly to the beauty of the scene.”²⁹ Arnold’s depiction of the wilderness aesthetic was not surprising as it could have likely been shaped by trying to impress his superior, General Washington, who was receiving copies of his journal. However, a pattern emerged from several other soldiers. Meigs was smitten by the little joys nature provided noting that the “rocks are polished curiously in some places.”³⁰ Most surprising was Dr. Senter, whose company divided the last remaining provisions on October 28. Three days later, though starving and in peril, he noted that “the Chaudière is beautiful, and formed a very agreeable ascent.”³¹

In addition to providing Arnold and his men with a curious world of aesthetic wonder, the near virgin wilderness of Maine was a source of food and forage. Arnold noted that his soldiers “caught a prodigious number of fine salmon trout, nothing being more common than a man’s taking 8 or 10 Doz in one hours time, which generally weigh half a pound a piece.”³² He also noted that he saw “Plenty of Moose and other game on the [Kennebec] River.”³³ Indeed, Meigs confirmed Arnold’s entry concerning game, mentioning that by October 13 his “men have killed four moose, which is excellent meat.”³⁴ The expedition members were also able to supplement their provisions by hunting birds such as woodcocks, hawks, and partridge.³⁵ Moreover, when Captain Henry Dearborn “was Seized with a Violent Head-Ach and fever” the wilderness bestowed upon him “herbs in the woods,” which were crafted into “Tea” for his relief.³⁶ Equally important as food and medicine, nature provided a combination of roots, birch bark, and tree pitch, which could be utilized by the expeditionary force, whenever necessary, to repair their birch bark canoes.³⁷

Although nature provided the troops with food and forage, the untamed Maine wilderness and its climate were also major obstacles to the expedition. It rained heavily for three consecutive days, from October 19-21, as the men were on the Dead River. In retrospect it is likely the men suffered through the rains of a Caribbean hurricane that had traveled along the east coast to Maine. One evening, in the midst of this rain, Arnold and his men camped in for the evening and were awoken at approximately four o’clock in the morning when the river had risen “8 feet perpendicular in 9 hours,” flooding their campsite, clothes, blankets, and provisions.³⁸

The harsh fall weather caused fish and wildlife to become very

scarce. By the final days of October, the men in the expedition were desperate for provisions. One soldier noted in his journal that "his comrades shot a robin and a ferret" for sustenance.³⁹ On October 28, Arnold, realizing that the overextension of his supply line created the dire situation which was taking hold of the expedition, pushed forward with a small party, hoping to secure food and provisions for his men. He was concerned though, "that a trap might be sprung" upon arriving "at the settlements with the wilderness at their backs."⁴⁰ The only other option, however, was to let his force starve in the wilderness between Maine and Quebec. From this point forward, the success of the mission, as well as the lives of the troops, rested in the hands of the French and Wabanaki inhabitants of the Beauce region of Quebec.

On the evening of October 30, Arnold and his small foraging party arrived at the first Canadian settlement in Beauce-Sartigan, Quebec, where he relayed a message to the Quebecois peoples from General George Washington requesting assistance for the troops.⁴¹ In this message, Washington asked the inhabitants of Quebec, "as friends and brothers, to supply the army with the provisions it needed, for the cause of liberty was the cause of every good citizen, whatever his ancestry or religion."⁴² The inhabitants obliged Washington's request for assistance and Arnold procured supplies for his men including oxen, sheep, coarse oatmeal, two horses, and "500 lbs. of flour," which were sent back into the wilderness under the supervision of "Lt. Church, Mr. Barrin and 8 Frenchmen."⁴³ Despite Washington's friendly letter, the leadership in the thirteen colonies did not have a change of heart concerning the Catholic faith or their concern about their "papist" neighbors to the north. Instead, they adopted a pragmatic approach towards the Quebecois because they understood that the landscape and people of Quebec Province could play an instrumental role in gaining home rule or independence from England.⁴⁴ The acceptance of Washington's letter by the inhabitants of Quebec was the first step in the process of accommodation between the Yankee Protestants and the French Catholics.

Although the laborious journey through the wilderness was now over for Arnold himself, it was during the final days in the wilds, as October turned to November, in which his men experienced the most intense tortures of the expedition.⁴⁵ Throughout the journey, water had seeped and splashed into the bateaux and rotted a great portion of the food stores, including the bread, peas, and salted meat.⁴⁶ Additionally, many bateaux had capsized and splintered on the rocks and rapids of the rivers causing a great loss of provisions. The defection of Colonel Roger Enos and his

company of rear guard on October 24 exacerbated matters. Enos and his men broke Arnold's orders and retreated back to Cambridge, choosing self-preservation over the threat of starvation in the wilderness. Enos' defection cost Arnold not only approximately three hundred soldiers but also a preponderance of the remaining provisions.⁴⁷ By the end of the month, food was scarce. On October 30, twenty-four-year-old Captain Henry Dearborn noted that "some Companies had but one pint of Flour for Each Man and no Meat at all."⁴⁸ John Joseph Henry, who was sixteen years of age at the time of the march, recounted that the men had made "a good fire, but no food." He felt that "the world had lost its charm." Faced with the possibility of starvation in the isolated wilderness he stated that his "privatations in every way were such as to produce a willingness to die."⁴⁹ Henry surely was not the only soldier to consider taking his own life at this stage of the journey.

With little to sustain them, the men resorted to boiling, cooking, and eating anything they had in their possession. They consumed hair grease, shoes, cartridge boxes, soap, candles, lip balm, and anything they could obtain from the wilderness, including a squirrel's head.⁵⁰ On November 1, Dearborn wrote in his journal that "Capt. Goodrich's Company kill'd my Dog, and another dog, and Eat them."⁵¹ "The distressed soldiers eat" these, he continued, "with good appetite," relishing "even the feet and skins."⁵² Commenting on the incident, Dr. Isaac Senter noted that the "poor animal was instantly devoured, without leaving any vestige of the sacrifice."⁵³ Another soldier remarked that he ate "part of the hind quarter of a dog for supper." He added: "we are in a pitiful condition."⁵⁴ The officers realized the grave situation and issued orders for every man to take care of himself, practice self-preservation, and move onward to the Canadian settlements. As they left their fallen companions, the starving called out asking if they planned to "leave us to perish in this wilderness?" This greatly affected Private George Morison who recalled in his journal that "never will that heart-piercing interrogatory forsake my memory."⁵⁵

The distress felt in the wilderness was not isolated to men only, as at least two wives and an Indian woman, Jacatacqua, – the companion of a young Aaron Burr – had joined the men on their expedition.⁵⁶ Though these women were not greatly discussed in the diaries, Abner Stocking recalled with sorrow the struggle of one of the wives and her husband:

My heart was ready to burst and my eyes to overflow with tears when I witnessed distress which I could not relieve. The circumstances of a young Dutchman, and his wife, who followed him through this fatigu-

ing march, particularly excited my sensibility. They appeared to be much interested in each other's welfare and unwilling to be separated, but the husband, exhausted with fatigue and hunger fell a victim to the king of terrors. His affectionate wife tarried by him until he died, while the rest of the company proceeded on their way. Having no implements with which she could bury him she covered him with leaves, and then took his gun and other implements and left him with a heavy heart. After traveling 20 miles she came up with us.⁵⁷

This story exemplifies what historian James Axtell has written about warfare in colonial America: "in the tangled forests and tumbling rivers of eastern America, bulky European war machines broke down."⁵⁸ The soldiers of the expedition were in such dire straits that they heeded their officers' call to try to save their own lives despite the suffering of those around them. The loyalty, courage, and strength displayed by the unnamed wife of the Dutchman exceeded that of her husband's brothers in arms. Not only did she remain behind but, without provisions, carried both of their remaining gear and his gun twenty miles before catching up with the rest of the company.

Arnold and his small detachment were, on the other hand, faring much better at this time. On November 1, John Pierce, engineer and surveyor for the march, recorded that he "dined with the Indians" and "Slept between two Frenchmen in a French house."⁵⁹ He also purchased twenty pounds of butter for the troops. Pierce and Arnold both noted that the inhabitants of the French settlements were "very friendly"⁶⁰ and that they were "Treated very Kindly this Night," though Pierce did note that it was "very odd to hear them at their Devotion."⁶¹

Washington had the foresight to understand that verbal abuses of the Quebecois by Arnold and his men would be rapidly disseminated throughout the larger Catholic community in North America, and might hinder Arnold's march and the greater war effort. Thus he issued strict orders to Arnold to ban anti-Catholic rhetoric from his men. Colonel Arnold was to administer "punishment for every infraction of these instructions."⁶² Arnold made sure that everything was done in his power to instill confidence in the French people of Quebec that his force was not an invading force but, instead, a liberating force that offered both the prospect of home rule and freedom from British tyranny. Historian Charles Metzger noted that Arnold "seized every occasion to proclaim that the Americans would respect the persons, property, and religion of the Canadians."⁶³

On November 2, Dearborn had only marched four miles when he

met the Frenchmen sent by Arnold with the provisions. This surreal sight, he wrote, "Caus^d the Tears to Start from my Eyes."⁶⁴ Shortly after, when the men of the rifle company arrived, the reactions from the other men were similar; many noted that it was the most joyful sight they had seen in their entire lives. Others stared at one another in disbelief, "doubting our senses."⁶⁵ Those who had the strength cheered a "feeble huzza of joy."⁶⁶ Almost immediately, livestock was killed and prepared for the fire. However, most of the emaciated soldiers, in their famished condition, were unable to wait and consumed their bounty straight from the butcher's blade.⁶⁷ This metamorphosis from starvation to nourishment was best described by Private George Morison, who exclaimed that "this sudden change was like a transition from death to life."⁶⁸ They ate small rations of beef and coarse oatmeal, and yet believed they had "feasted sumptuously."⁶⁹ While the soldiers were dividing rations and eating their newly found provisions, several Indian women came to their relief in canoes selling small cakes "for a shilling each, and quickly devoured."⁷⁰ Furthermore, the Frenchmen continued upriver to rescue those who had fallen and were ground-ridden due to famine and fatigue. Private Morison noted that the French "gave them bread and saved them from death, [and] placed them on horses" to be brought up with the others at camp.⁷¹

Meanwhile, back in the French settlements, some of the men were beginning to trickle out of their wilderness prison, arriving in scattered and dispersed groups. Private James Melvin came to the first house he had seen in several weeks and purchased boiled rice from the Indians he met.⁷² Unfamiliar with the relationship between the French and the Indians, the close living proximity surprised many of the troops as they came out of the wilderness expecting "a region full of French settlers." Instead, in several of the first communities the American troops reached, the Native population far outnumbered the French.⁷³

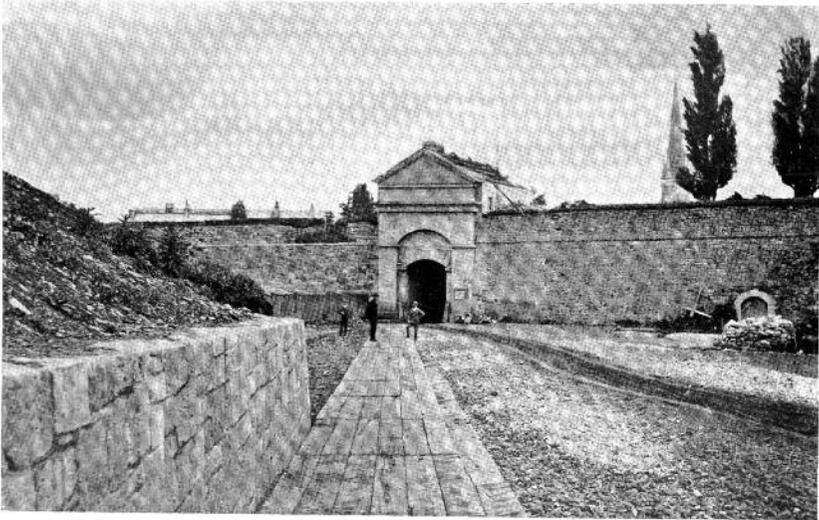
Arnold continued to massage relations with the French and Indians, hoping to convince them to join his forces. Most had presumed that the Indian-controlled wilderness was impenetrable by such a large force. Impressed by the bravery of Arnold and his men, the Wabanakis joined him and his officers in a ceremonial meeting.⁷⁴ One soldier noted that they were "joined by about seventy or eighty Indians, all finely ornamented in their way with broaches, bracelets, and other trinkets, and their faces painted."⁷⁵ The Indians addressed Arnold as the Dark Eagle and they agreed to join forces with him. One of their leaders exclaimed "that the brave men who had come through the woods must have



Knowing that prejudice against French-speakers and Catholics was common among Americans, General George Washington issued an order to Arnold to prevent his men from insulting the habitants of Quebec. The order was obeyed, and the habitants of southern Quebec helped Arnold's men recover from their arduous trek through western Maine. From Henry E. Chambers, *A Higher History of the United States* (New York and New Orleans: University Publishing Company, 1898), p. 211.

pleased the Great Father and must therefore conquer their foes" – the British.⁷⁶ Though their journey had been incredibly arduous and caused some of the troops to return to Cambridge, it was the trials experienced in the wilderness that earned Arnold and his men the respect of the French and Indian populations of Quebec. Additionally, Arnold offered wages and provisions to those who would enlist.⁷⁷ As a result, the expedition gained over fifty new members, as well as their canoes for transportation.⁷⁸

The budding relationship between Arnold and the Quebecois inhabitants proved very useful for his military objectives. When Arnold initially arrived in Quebec he heard reports that the habitants in the parish of Point-Levis had been ordered by Governor Guy Carleton to take up arms against Arnold and his force. He also learned that the British had destroyed or removed all the boats of the habitants in the area to prevent him from crossing the St. Lawrence River into Quebec City.⁷⁹ One French inhabitant, Jacques Parent, went ahead of Arnold and read General Washington's message to the Quebecois people, reaching as far as the parish of Sainte-Marie-de-Beauce by November 2.⁸⁰ Arnold and his



Quebec City was one of the few cities in North America built within the protective confines of stone walls. The St. Louis Gate is pictured here in the nineteenth century. On December 31, 1775, in the Battle of Quebec, American forces failed to capture the walled upper part of the city. It was the first major defeat for the Patriot forces in the Revolutionary War. From John Codman II, *Arnold's Expedition to Quebec* (New York: MacMillan, 1902), opposite p. 294.

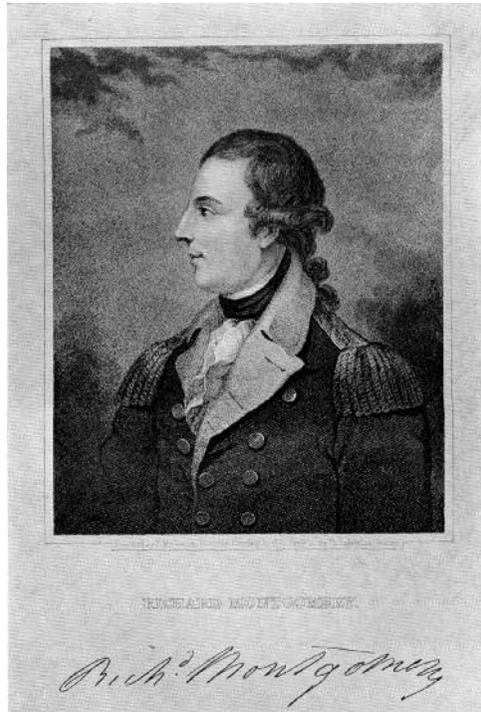
men had certainly made a good impression on the Quebecois whom they met, and word of their mission spread through the townsfolk in the region. Upon entering a parish, John Pierce noted that “when it was discovered who we were the Bells in the mass house were Set to ringing & C.” in celebration.⁸¹

On November 3, the remaining bulk of Arnold's force entered the frontier villages of the French and Indians who had recently received Arnold and his small provision-seeking force warmly. It was a turning point in the expedition, as the entire force had finally completed the trek through the Maine wilderness. The inhabitants immediately began feeding those who were starving and administering aid to those who were ill.⁸² Many of the soldiers noted that the French people had received the expedition with kindness and hospitality. They supplied the men with provisions and hired themselves out to ferry the men to the place where they were to meet Arnold. Abner Stocking recalled that the French “seemed moved with pity for us and to greatly admire our patriotism and resolution, in encountering such hardships for the good of our country.”⁸³ The Natives also aided the expedition by not only providing

food and transportation but also traveling into the wilderness to help stragglers and those who were too famished to continue. The compassion of the French Catholics became apparent to the Protestant Yankees when they came upon a member of the expedition who had perished before breaking free of the wilderness. They treated his body with the care and ritual, as though he were one of their own. "This real Catholicism toward the remains of one we loved, made a deep and wide breach upon" sixteen-year-old John Henry's "early prejudices" against Catholics.⁸⁴

The hospitality given by these French Catholics was very surprising to many of the men in the expedition. In the eighteenth century, most Protestants condemned the Catholic "papists" as being controlled by Satan himself, through his Anti-Christ pawn, the Pope. Additionally, in the eyes of the Patriots, the French colonists in Quebec were partial to both the social and economic systems of feudal France, and had little use for the representative government of the English.⁸⁵ After crossing into Quebec, one soldier, seemingly in disbelief, noted that "the people are all French and Indians, but they are exceedingly kind to us."⁸⁶ Many of Arnold's men had a similar reaction to the hospitality of the French colonists and Wabanaki of Quebec, especially those who had also served in the French and Indian War, which had ended just over a decade earlier. In fact, it was possible that some of the French and Wabanaki men in the villages in which Arnold's men were so warmly received had served in the prior conflict as well.⁸⁷

One historian has claimed that "the need of succor for the exhausted troops and so charitable the response of the peasant that the religious issue was immediately and automatically voided."⁸⁸ Although the writings of several of the expedition members prove this to be exaggerated, the hospitable reception and tender care provided by the Quebecois certainly bridged the gap of cultural understanding. Indeed, the agonizing expedition through the wilderness of Maine caused these soldiers to be more tolerant of the French and Native religion and culture. The expedition's provisions began to be restored as bread, milk, eggs, potatoes, and turkeys were purchased from the inhabitants. They even purchased luxury items such as sugar, rum, and brandy. The nourishment provided by the French became a double-edged sword, however, for some in the expedition, after being so long without food. They gorged themselves on potatoes, beef, bread, and vegetables. John Henry described one man as attempting to "defy death for the mere enjoyment of present gratification." Unfortunately, this soldier "died two days later."⁸⁹



As Arnold and his men invaded Quebec from the east, General Richard Montgomery led another contingent of American soldiers into Canada from the west. Montgomery and his men captured Montreal and later met Arnold's force to lay siege to Quebec City in December 1775. Montgomery was killed during the unsuccessful attempt to take Quebec's capital city. From John Codman II, *Arnold's Expedition to Quebec* (New York: MacMillan, 1902), opposite p. 180.

As the expedition moved further into the Beauce territory toward the parishes of Gilbert and Sainte Marie, and as the soldiers' hunger subsided, some began to question the good will of the Quebecois in providing provisions and transportation services. Henry Dearborn commented that "the Inhabitants appear to be very kind, but ask a very Great price for their Victuals."⁹⁰ Abner Stocking echoed these sentiments, stating that, because the French were "knowing [of] our need of their articles, some of them would extort from us an extravagant price."⁹¹ Several other soldiers made similar observations in their journals and historians have often highlighted such comments in order to show that the habitants took advantage of expedition members. In a well-known Canadian history textbook, for example, the authors noted that if "American sol-

diers were willing to pay good prices for supplies, the habitants sympathized with them.”⁹² Historian James Kirby Martin, in his biography of Arnold, contended that “although the habitants enthusiastically welcome Les Bostonnais, as they called the soldiers, they also charged dearly for whatever supplies the detachment needed.” However, “Arnold did not complain; he was anxious to gain the habitant’s confidence and allegiance.”⁹³

Although some of his men complained about the inflated prices charged by the Quebecois, Arnold did not. He merely noted in his diary, “we have been very kindly received by the inhabitants who appear very friendly, and willing to supply us with provisions.”⁹⁴ As a merchant who often traded with people in Quebec, Arnold likely realized that the inhabitants in the hinterland had very limited food stores and supplies of provisions, which typically would have to last them until the following year’s harvest. With winter approaching, the Quebecois would not have had enough food in their stores to feed both their families and communities for the winter as well as Arnold’s starving force. They charged heavily inflated rates because it would take a large, possibly community-wide trip to an urban trading center to obtain the supplies they lost. Supporting this argument, the soldiers in Arnold’s force had made similar complaints in their diaries about the peripheral settlers on the Upper Kennebec.⁹⁵ In other words, the Quebecois people were not attempting to price gouge the expeditionary force because they were Anglo-Americans, but instead were looking for a fair trade price for their goods considering the season, much like the American inhabitants of the Upper Kennebec.

The accommodation between the Patriots and the French inhabitants did not end at religion, trade, and transportation. The American soldiers also interacted with the inhabitants on a social level as well. Some men went out looking for a good time. On November 4, Dr. Isaac Senter and another expedition member, for example, “visited an old peasant’s house, where was a merry old woman at her loom, and two or three fine young girls.”⁹⁶ Upon learning that her guests were Americans, the old woman “sung a French song to the tune of Yankee Doodle Dandy. [We] laughed heartily” and “made ourselves very happy,” Senter’s companion noted.⁹⁷ Quebecois women also graced the pages of Moses Kimball’s and Private Caleb Haskell’s diaries as well. On the following evening, November 5, Kimball recorded that they “stop’d at a clever old Frenchman’s house where they gave us rum & bread & butter, as much as we wanted. There was two pretty girls at the same house. Stayed till the next day.”⁹⁸ Haskell wrote that he was “put up at a house where we

were kindly received. Here we found a woman who could speak English.”⁹⁹ None of the soldiers mentioned having a sexual encounter with a Quebecois woman, but that does not mean that none occurred. Certainly the American men were interested and happy to have seen young beautiful women after six weeks in the “howling wilderness” between Fort Western and the Chaudière River Valley. This mixing of the sexes between the Patriot soldiers and the female inhabitants served as a means to shatter social and cultural barriers between the Anglo-Americans and French habitants, which facilitated further accommodation and acceptance between the two groups.

As his force approached the fortifications of Quebec City, Arnold’s French allies in Quebec helped him again, this time with reconnaissance work. On November 8, Arnold wrote to General Richard Montgomery, who had taken command of the western prong of the invasion of Canada when General Schuyler became ill. In this letter, Arnold reported that the French habitants had alerted him to the presence of “two frigates and several small armed vessels lying before Quebec, and a large ship or two lately arrived from Boston.”¹⁰⁰ This clearly provided both General Montgomery and Colonel Arnold with sensitive intelligence about the fortifications at Quebec before their arrival. In addition to military intelligence, Arnold was able to enlist several “Canadian mechanics” in the “making of scaling ladders and lannuts, &C” as well as shoes for those who had lost theirs on the trek through the wilderness.¹⁰¹ These items were to be crucial in the siege of Quebec.

As Arnold and his men continued on toward Quebec City, several men were left behind due to illness or injury. John Joseph Henry, for example, came down with a high fever and was incredibly ill after eating too much following his arduous journey through the woods. Arnold gave him two silver dollars and called across the river to one of the French inhabitants to come across with his canoe and pick up Henry. The man carried Henry into his house, where Henry slept for two days. Henry was unable to eat anything, as gorging was the cause of his symptoms. On the third day of his convalescence, Henry was able to rise out of bed and his hostess, the peasant’s wife, set a place for him at the breakfast table. Ready to set back out on the trail, Henry offered the peasant man the two silver dollars that Arnold had given him. The man refused with “disdain in his countenance, intimating to me that he had merely obeyed the dictates of religion and humanity.”

The man then insisted on transporting Henry forty-some miles to aid him in catching up with the expedition. When offered the two dollars again, the man refused, stating that Henry may need them for food,



Although Arnold's expedition to capture Quebec City in 1775 ended in failure, the rebelling American colonists ultimately defeated the British and gained independence. General George Washington accepted the final surrender of British forces in Yorktown, Virginia, in October 1781. Maine Historical Society Collections.

lodging, or supplies before he was able to meet with the rest of his detachment.¹⁰² When Henry had first entered the villages of Quebec he "expected there could be little other than barbarity." Instead, he "found civilized men, in a comfortable state, enjoying all the benefits arising from the institutions of a civil society."¹⁰³ The generosity of this humble Quebecois family to lodge, feed, and transport Henry without remittance was illustrative of the relationship that had formed between Arnold, his men, and the Quebecois people.

Additionally, it was not assured that the men in Arnold's expedition would obey orders to be kind and respect the inhabitants of the Beauce region. After the disastrous trek through the wilderness, the warm reception given to the Patriot force by people in the small French parishes changed the Patriots' feelings towards both the society and the culture of the Quebecois and Wabanaki peoples. Historian Thomas Desjardin pronounced that it "created a warm bond between the Americans and the

French hosts.”¹⁰⁴ The Patriots, Quebecois, and Indians decided to engage in economic, social, and cultural accommodation.

Although Arnold and his men were able to conquer the Maine wilderness and achieve a state of accommodation with the Quebecois and Wabanakis of the Beauce region, the mission to capture Quebec was a failure. Arnold had underestimated the fortifications of the city as well as the willingness of its inhabitants to defend it. The merchants of Quebec, regardless of their ideological alliances, realized that a war between colony and empire would destroy their trade business and thus their lives.¹⁰⁵ Clearly, the autonomous reaction of these residents of Quebec was to protect their self interest while tucked safely behind the walls of the city where they did not fear Arnold's invading force and thus had no use for accommodation.

After his defeat at Quebec, Arnold gained both fame and infamy during the course of America's war for independence. Eventually, Arnold became a general in the Continental Army. His military exploits were commended and his service to the American war effort was thought of as invaluable, especially his leadership on the ground during the battle at Saratoga, New York, in the fall of 1777.¹⁰⁶ However, despite entering the war effort in 1775 as one of the richest merchants in Connecticut, Arnold described being in a state of poverty in 1779. Because the Continental Congress failed to accept Arnold's expense reports due to shoddy record keeping, he funded most of the invasion of Canada with his own money.¹⁰⁷ As a result of his economic situation and his poor political standing, Arnold decided to betray his Patriot brethren and joined the British for ten thousand dollars in gold and a commission as a brigadier general in the British Army.¹⁰⁸ Had Arnold not changed sides, it is likely that he would have become one of the most celebrated war heroes and leaders in American history.

Viewing Arnold's expedition into the wilderness of Maine through the lenses of both environmental and borderlands history provides insight into what has been previously characterized as merely a heroic and impressive show of endurance and leadership. The wilds of Maine provided not only food, medicine, and supplies for the expedition, but also visual aesthetics – the picturesque beauty of the environment and the wonders of the natural world – which served as nourishment for both the troops' bodies and minds. Yet, despite being a great provider for the expedition, the bountiful wilds of Maine could not provide enough support for the traditional European war machine to allow it to overcome the obstacles rendered by this same wilderness.

The trials and tribulations experienced during the march endowed Arnold with the respect and admiration of the Quebecois and Indian peoples of the Beauce region. Had it not been for the unique properties of this wilderness borderland it is unlikely that Arnold would have been immediately received warmly by the local population. If the French and Wabanakis had people decided to obey the issuance of martial law by Governor Guy Carlton, and met Arnold and his men with force instead of food, it is likely that “Arnold’s army could have been annihilated while still scattered and starving” in the wilderness.¹⁰⁹ The reaction to General Washington’s written request for food and aid was not assured by any means.

Borderlands historians Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron have contended that frontier regions like the Maine-Quebec borderlands in the eighteenth century were often “the site of intense imperial rivalry and of particularly fluid relations between indigenous peoples and European interlopers – in other words, these were borderlands.”¹¹⁰ The Native peoples provided aid to the Americans, thus continuing their borderland narrative of playing off one non-Native power against the other. The Quebecois showed that they had no loyalty to their British colonial masters but instead maintained their traditional position of neutrality, Christian goodwill, and accommodation in the face of the struggle between the Patriots and the British. The reactions of the Natives from the Wabanaki territory and the Frenchmen from southern Quebec showed that this region truly was a borderland region.

NOTES

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