The Part Played by New Hampshire in the Revolution

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The story of the part which New Hampshire played in the Revolution is one of intense interest, as in this colony was made the first armed attack on the British forces, and was adopted the first written constitution of any of the colonies providing for representative popular government, while several of the first vessels designed, armed and equipped to prey on British commerce and meet the ships of the British navy in open conflict were built and fitted out in Portsmouth.

The record of the other colonies is glorious, but that of our own state stands pre-eminent. The Revolution was precipitated by the attempt of Great Britten to recover from the colonies by means of various taxes and duties, a part of the cost of the French and Indian wars and of the maintenance in America of a considerable standing army.

The story of the Boston "Tea Party", staged in late 1775 as a protest against the unjust taxes levied by the British government, is a familiar one. Here in New Hampshire we held a party of a different type. Early in 1774, 27 chests of tea were brought to Portsmouth and stored in the custom house. On the second day after, a town meeting was held and a committee appointed to take whatever steps might be necessary. As a result, the tea was reloaded and taken to Halifax. A little later, 30 more chests arrived, consigned to a Mr. Parry. A town meeting was immediately called at which Mr. Parry agreed not to attempt to land the tea and the captain of the vessel promised to take that cargo also to Halifax. No other attempts to force the taxed tea on the people were made.

Anticipating trouble with the colonies, the British government in 1774 passed a law prohibiting the exportation to them of gun powder and arms. When the news reached Boston Paul Revere, who made a second and more famous ride before the fight at Lexington, was sent to Portsmouth with the tidings. Revere also reported that a

British vessel was bringing re-enforcements to Fort William and Mary, which, commanding Portsmouth harbor and held by a small garrison, was known to contain a considerable amount of munitions.

The patriots of Portsmouth decided they must have that powder and a hastily gathered force under the leadership of John Langdon, on December 14, 1774, the day after Revere's arrival, attacked and captured the fort, being fired upon by its defenders. 103 barrels of powder were removed and sent to neighboring towns for safe keeping. A large part of it was taken in boats up the Durham river, through channels cut in the ice, and stored under the pulpit of the Durham church. Some was taken to the home of Major John Demerit in Madbury who hauled it with an ox-team, the next spring, to the camp of the patriots outside of Boston. This constituted the larger part of the powder that was used at the battle of Bunker Hill. Still later, another portion was taken to the camp at Winter Hill and used in the siege of Boston.

The news of the assault on the fort quickly spread and the next morning forty men from Durham arrived, led by John Sullivan, then a member of the colonial congress. The Durham men again took possession of the fort and removed the cannon, 15 four pounders and one nine pounder, and all the small arms.

This event is particularly note worthy as being the first armed attack by the colonials on British forces, ante-dating the fight at Lexington by 4 months.

The day after the removal of the guns the British frigate Scarborough and sloop of war Cansean arrived bringing 100 soldiers to the fort. Finding two vessels loaded with provisions in the harbor, the British seized and took them to Boston where the food was used by the British soldiers. At a later date the colonials captured a battery at Jerry's Point and a twenty-four and thirty-two pounders were removed by the patriots for the use of the army.

When the Lexington alarm was sounded by Paul Revere on his second notable ride, groups of men from all the towns in the southern part of the colony hurriedly started for the scene of action, many on that very 19th of April. Asa Davis of Hudson, plowing with his oxen, did not even stop to unyoke them. John Stark of Manchester was at work in his saw mill when the news reached him. He shut down his mill, hurried home, mounted his horse and rode to Cambridge, the gathering point of the patriots. The next day, Stark who had served as an officer in Rogers Rangers in the French and

Indian war, was given a commission as colonel by Massachusetts, and in less than two hours he recruited eight hundred men.

The New Hampshire provincial congress voted to raise three regiments, naming as colonels, Stark, Enoch Poor, and James Reed, with Nathaniel Folsom as general in command.

Then came the battle of Bunker Hill. More than half of the Americans in that fight were New Hampshire men under Stark and Reed, although many of our men had joined Massachusetts regiments, including 59 from Hollis under Capt. Dow. Stark's men held the rail fence below the redoubt and covered the retreat of the men on the hill, being the last to withdraw from the battle ground. Stark later told General Wilkinson that in front of his regiment, "The dead lay as thick as sheep in a fold." Londonderry is proud of the fact that seventy of her men under Captain George Reed were in this battle. Many of our soldiers at once joined the forces in Cambridge which under the leadership of General Washington proceeded to invest Boston, being under the direct command of General John Sullivan. Sullivan was perhaps New Hampshire's most prominent man in the military as well as in the civil doings of the Revolution. After the attack on Fort William and Mary he was proclaimed a traitor by the British, a reward was offered for his capture and word was sent to him that, if taken, he would be hung.

After the evacuation of Boston, Sullivan, with Stark and many New Hampshire men, accompanied General Washington to New Jersey. At the battle of Trenton, Sullivan commanded the right wing of the army with Stark's brigade in the advance guard. Early in 1776 Sullivan, with Stark and the New Hampshire men, was sent to the rescue of General Arnold who was retreating from Montreal which had been captured the preceding fall. Arnold's men were met to the northward of Lake Champlain and Sullivan accomplished his task despite an extremely severe epidemic of small pox which, with other diseases carried off nearly one-third of his New Hampshire troops. He later commanded the expedition against Newport, which failed, owing to the withdrawal of the blockading French fleet. In 1779 he was completely successful in an expedition against the Indians, with their British and Tory allies, in central New York, General Poor, with a brigade of New Hampshire troops, serving under him. For his many services, General Sullivan received the thanks of congress.

Early in 1777, Burgoyne with his large British army began his march southward, along Lake Champlain, intending to cut off New England from the other colonies.

The Vermont assembly, in despair, sent a message to New Hampshire that unless it received immediate aid it must submit to the enemy. The New Hampshire legislature was not in session, but hurriedly summoned, it assembled in three days. With no money in the treasury and none to be borrowed, with men hesitating to enlist, the outlook was gloomy in the extreme. A day of fasting and prayer was revently observed. It was then that John Langdon, speaker of the house, who had led the first assault on Fort William and Mary, made that famous speech, I have three thousand dollars in hard money; my plate I will pledge for as much more. I have seventy hogsheads of Tobago rum which shall be sold for the most they will bring. These are at the service of the state. If we succeed, I shall be renumerated. If not, they will be of no use to me. We can raise a brigade and our friend Stark may safely be entrusted with the command and we will check Burgoyne."

Langdon's proposal was accepted. A messenger was sent to Stark, who, after the battle of Trenton, disgruntled by the promotion over him of officers who were his juniors, had resigned his commission and returned to his Manchester farm. Stark at once rode to Exeter, appeared before the legislature, and agreed to raise and command a brigade. Col. Gordon Hutchins was a member of the assembly from Concord. When the decision was made at Exeter, Col. Hutchins mounted his horse and traveling all night, reached Concord on Sunday before the close of public worship. Dismounting at the meeting house door, he walked up the aisle of the North Church where the Rev. Timothy Walker was preaching. Mr. Walker paused in his sermon and said, "Col. Hutchins, are you the bearer of any messages?" "Yes", replied the Colonel. "General Burgoyne with his army is on his march to Albany. General Stark has offered to take command of the New Hampshire men, and if we all turn out we can cut off Burgoyne's march." Whereupon the Rev. Mr. Walker said, "My hearers, those of you who are willing to go had better leave at once." At which all of the men in the meeting house rose and went out. Many enlisted before they went home. Phineas Eastman said, "I cannot go for I have no shoes." To which Samuel Thompson, a shoemaker, replied, "Don't be troubled about that for you shall have a pair before morning." And they were ready. That night was spent in preparation and a company was ready to start the next day.

The men, as fast as enrolled, marched to Charlestown, just above Keene, and from there to Bennington. They suffered greatly from hunger and it is of record that

one small party among whom was Jonathan Marsh of Hudson, killed, skinned and cooked a rattle snake which they ate and pronounced “a sweet morsel.”

The battle of Bennington and that of Bunker Hill were the most significant of any fought in the war. Bennington, with the succeeding conflicts up to and including the battle of Saratoga, is one of the list included in the world famous Creasy’s Fifteen Decisive Battles of the world”. Creasy, an English historian, has this to say: “No military event can be said to have exercised more important influence on the future of mankind than the complete defeat of Burgoyne’s expedition in 1777.” And at Bennington the commanding general was Stark. Of the soldiers 70% were from New Hampshire, a small detachment from western Massachusetts under the command of Rev. Thomas Allen and the rest were Col. Warner’s Vermont troops. It is said that 165 of our men who were at Bennington had served at Bunker Hill. The glory of the victory over Burgoyne is shared by all the northern colonies, but the share of New Hampshire is the greatest of all. Stark continued to serve through the war returning to his farm late in 1783. Born in that part of Londonderry, which is now Derry, he spent nearly all his life in his Manchester home. The last survivor of the Revolutionary generals, he died May 8, 1822, in his ninety fourth year.

New Hampshire men served under Washington in every one of his campaigns. During the terrible winter at Valley Forge they were under the direct command of General Poor.

Alexander Scammell of Durham, one of the ablest young men of the colony, deserves special mention, though perhaps not more so than hundreds of others whose stories have never been told. A graduate of Harvard, he studied law in the office of John Sullivan in Durham. Tradition says he pulled down the British flag at the capture of Fort William and Mary. He was a major at Bunker Hill and served in the siege of Boston. He was colonel of the first New Hampshire regiment in the campaign against Burgoyne. After the battle of Monmouth, General Washington said of him, “The man who inspired us all to do our full duty was Alexander Scammell.” Attracted by his courage and ability, Washington gave him a position on his staff and as his special aide he was in the same boat with Washington in that famous crossing, through the ice, of the Delaware. But Scammell yearned for more active service and, after repeated requests, was given command of a New Hampshire regiment in the final campaign against the army of Cornwallis. He did valiant service in the field during the closing weeks of warfare but

was killed in action. Lafayette, when he re-visited the United States in 1825, gave the toast: “Here’s to the memory of Scammell of Yorktown.”

Let us bear in mind that the population of New Hampshire in 1775 was only 82,200. During the war the colony furnished 18,289 soldiers, over 22% of the entire population, men, women and children. If a like proportion of the people of our nation had enlisted in the world war, we should have had over 26,000,000 men under arms.

The story of the part played by New Hampshire men on the sea is scarcely less stirring than the tale of their deeds on land. More than a dozen armed vessels, privateers, sailed from Portsmouth, capturing many British ships. The Hampden, Captain Pickering, of 400 tons and carrying 22 guns chased a British vessel all one night. The morning showed her to be a boat of 800 tons, carrying 34 guns. A terrific action, at close range, ensued. After two and one-half hours, her captain killed, twenty of her crew killed or wounded, her heavy shot all used, her rigging and sails cut to pieces, the Hampden drew off having only her forsail left. The enemy, a complete wreck, her hull riddled, is believed to have sunk. Cooper calls this the severest fight, on see, of the Revolution.

Of the regular navy, the Raleigh of 32 guns, and the Ranger were built at Portsmouth. John Paul Jones, by far the greatest naval figure of the Revolution supervised the outfitting of the Ranger, living in Portsmouth while this was being done. In 1777, Jones, with a crew of New Hampshire men, took the Ranger across the Atlantic and captured several vessels in British waters, including a man-of-war. While under the command of Jones the Ranger received the first salute ever given to the stars and stripes by a foreign nation.

The best-known naval conflict of the war was that of the Bon Homme Richard, under Jones, with the British vessel Serapis. The fight continued from seven in the evening for nearly three hours when the Serapis surrendered. Half the men on each ship were killed or wounded. Of particular interest to us is the fact that many of the New Hampshire men who had served on the Ranger were members of the crew of the Bon Homme Richard, having followed the fortunes of their valiant commander.

No comment on the deeds of our people is needed other than that contained in a letter written by George Washington to Meshech Weare who was at the head of the civil government of the colony during the entire period of the war: “The spirited and

particular exertions of the State of New Hampshire to fulfill the objects which we have in view cannot but meet the warmest applause of every lover of his country. It has mine in a high degree, but not more than it deserves."

Generals Greene, Schuyler, and our John Stark were prominent in the military affairs of the colonies though not in civil life. John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, were great men in their own sphere but were no leaders of armies. John Sullivan, however, was statesman as well as warrior. His military record we have passed in review. His civic achievements were no less notable. He was a delegate from New Hampshire to the Continental Congress of 1774 and was the first named member of a committee appointed to draw up a declaration of rights. On this subject President John Adams wrote as follows in his diary: "The Committee on Violation of Rights reported a set of articles which were drawn by Mr. John Sullivan of New Hampshire: and these declarations, which are printed in the journals of Congress for 1774, were two years afterwards recapitulated in the Declaration of Independence on the Fourth of July 1776," So we see that the ideas and sentiments of our great statesman and soldier are preserved in that famous Declaration, though the exact wording is the work of others.

On December 21, 1775, when in the trenches around Boston, Sullivan wrote his friend Adams an impassioned letter urging a declaration of independence; "Why in God's name, is it not done?" he exclaimed. "Why do we call ourselves freemen, and act the part of timid slaves?" Poor health forcing him from the army after four and a half years of service, Sullivan again represented his state in the congress of 1780. He was president of New Hampshire in 1787 and again in 1789. In the latter year Washington appointed his Judge of the U.S. District Court of New Hampshire.

I will not weary you be even mentioning the many other responsible positions held by him, but I cannot refrain from quoting from a letter written to him by George Washington: "I flatter myself it is unnecessary for me to repeat to you how high a place you hold in my esteem. The confidence you have experienced and the manner in which you have been employed on several occasions testify to the value I set upon your military qualifications and the regret I must feel that circumstances that deprived the army of your services. The pleasure I shall always take in an interchange of good officers, in whatever station you may hereafter by placed, will be the best confirmation of the personal regard with which I have been, and am, your obedient servant, George Washington."

In May 1775, the New Hampshire assemble sent an official letter to the Continental Congress recommending a Declaration of Independence. As this letter evoked no action, a little more than a year later, on June 11, 1776, the assembly passed a resolution providing for the appointment of a committee "to make a draft of a declaration of this General Assembly for Independence of the United States on Great Britain." Four days later, on June 15th, such a draft was reported and unanimously adopted, preceding the Declaration adopted by the representatives of the colonies in Philadelphia by nearly three weeks. It is worthy of note that the words "United States" appear in this resolution, although it was not until the 19th of September that Congress resolved that the designation :United Colonies" should be dropped and that the new nation should be styled "The United States". What a wonderful list of men served our state during these dark days: Meshech Weare, sage counsellor and wise leader in civic affairs; John Langdon, patriotic merchant and ship builder, never found wanting in any emergency; Josiah Bartlett and Matthew Thornton, physicians both, signers of the Declaration of Independence, serving well their state in many capacities; John Sullivan, in whose praise enough can never be said; Stark, magnetic leader of men, yet, like Cincinnatus of old, well content to return to his farm; Scammell, gallant soldier, one of the most vivid figures of his time; and,, making possible the achievements of these men, hundreds and thousands, making others whose names are forgotten but who, each one, did his part as well as did Sullivan, Langdon and Stark.

Let us, then, remember: New Hampshire was the first colony to establish independent self-government upon a constitutional basis; and was the first to make an open attack on the military forces of Great Britain; she was the first to suggest a Declaration of Independence, and, finally, in the two pivotal battles of the war, Bunker Hill and Bennington she furnished the majority of the men engaged, as well as their peerless leader, General John Stark.

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