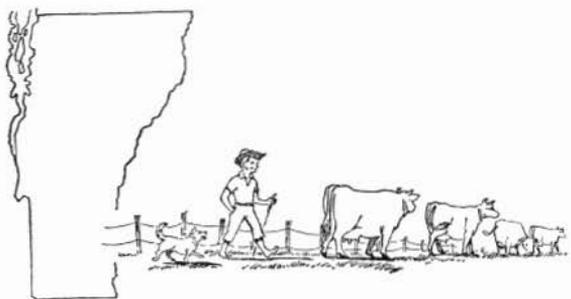


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Exciting times in Orleans County . . .

Smuggling in 1813-1814:
A Personal Reminiscence

(Editor's note: This is a transcript of an unsigned handwritten account, dated January, 1868, that was given to the Vermont Historical Society by Charles E. Tuttle of Rutland, Vt.)

DURING the war of 1812 there were many persons in this County who were engaged in smuggling—sometimes into—and at other times out of Canada, so that it required the strictest vigilance on the part of the government officials to guard the few roads that led across the frontier. It is a historical fact that a large majority of the people of New England were adverse to the declaration of war and this accounts for the fact that very many of the inhabitants along the border were engaged in the illegal traffic in articles that were contraband of war. There seems to have been a combination of parties in various towns—a sort of protective union—for the purpose of smuggling.

These men made roads from inland towns at great distances from the boundary, through the dense forrests—and along the mountain ridges for the sole purpose of carrying on this contraband business. The old road that led from Albany Center down across the river by where Hiram Chaffee now lives—and thence along on the mountain to where Mr. Fisher now resides in Lowell—and on through Coventry Gore and Duncansborough (now Newport) to Potton in Canada was one of these old smuggling thoroughfares. At this time the Canadian towns could not supply the British Army with their rations of beef—and beef cattle were always eagerly received by parties on the other side of

the line—and for which they were ready to pay a good price in gold—so that when these men succeeded in getting a drove of cattle across the line, the price received for these made the business the most lucrative in a pecuniary point of view of any that could be entered into in this then wooden portion of our Country.

Many of the American ports were blockaded—so that no foreign merchandise could not be landed—while the duties put on by government made many things so high that the opportunity of making a good thing—by smuggling from Canada—could not be avoided. These men would congregate together and hitch on the long team—as they called it—often having fifteen-twenty and sometimes fifty teams in one company—in this way they emerged from the solitary roads and went strong handed through the frontier towns and then separated into smaller squads—and dispersed themselves throughout New England—where the good bargains which could be made by purchasing their merchandise brought them plenty of customers who were ready to take the goods—ask no questions—and keep their own counsel.

Many a rough and tumble fight—many a seizure—many a flight—many a defeat—and many a victory transpired in our County during those exciting times—and—occasionally some poor fellow received his quietus—and was hidden in the thick bushes—or covered with the snow until the victors found leisure to put them where they would “stay put” as the old saying was.

The goods and merchandise which came from Canada was smuggled in winter when the swamps and rivers were frozen and when the deep snows could be made into a hard road over the roughest ground—the supplies of beef cattle were taken in during the summer when they could get their sustenance from the leaves of the forrest. Men will always run great risks—when great profits are expected to be realized—and many an individual lost his all while engaged in these unlawful speculations—the accumulations of years of industry and toil were sometimes gobbled by the ruthless hands of justice wielded by the active custom house officials, while others more fortunate laid the foundation of future wealth and prosperity while engaged in this nefarious traffic. Before the war had been waged one year there were two furious parties in every frontier town—one the federalists who were always ready to aid and lend a helping hand to the smugglers—the other the republicans who were the government party and were always ready to turn out and help the officers. The consequence was—that the smugglers were obliged to go in large parties so as to fight their way if found necessary—and the business became somewhat lawful—because they carried it on with

a strong hand—and might often makes right—whether legal or not.

Sometimes one party would take property belonging to the other—and this again would be taken by a third party and in fact the only way that anything could be saved which had once been in the hands of smugglers was to consume it—or—to keep it secreted.

It was enough for one party to learn of any goods—or cattle—belonging to the other—they immediately mustered their largest force and made an attack, though usually they preferred to make their captures by stealth—or strategy—but they did not scruple to beat a fellow's brains out if he stood in the way of their plans.

On the part of the smugglers, they neglected all their business except smuggling—and that they made a specialty. They had signed each others paper during the war—and when the peace was restored they were run through the debtors hatchel and cleaned out. Many of them were confined in jail while their effects were sold under the hammer of the auctioneer—their families made destitute—and were often turned out of the towns in which they resided by the orders of the selectmen.

On the part of those who were not engaged in smuggling they learned to take whatever they could find that was liable to seizure by the Custom House Officials—and appropriate it to their own use. In this way they often succeeded in getting a good haul of merchandise or cattle—without putting in any capital or running any risk except getting their heads broke—and these were the men who made what money there was made in the business. They were robbers—of those they considered to be enemies of our country—it was an unfortunate state of affairs—and a time when the passions of men were worked into a frenzy such as has not often been seen.

Sometime in the month of September 1814 a messenger came down from Craftsbury with intelligence that a large drove of cattle had been driven up the old Hazen road. There was at the time a regular understanding between certain citizens of this town that they would make an effort to capture every drove that was headed towards Canada. John Kellam—as soon as the news reached him—took his gun and started to call out the smuggler haters; his brother Ben, then only 14 years of age—learning that something was up—ran away from home and followed John—determined to see the fun; and Jesse Rolf—Abraham Gale—Ezekiel and John Little—John Woodman—Samuel Marvin—Joshua Taylor—Jos. Kidder and one or two others started on the enterprise to take the cattle. The company came together at Kidder's chose Ezekiel Little captain—fortified their courage by imbibing a liberal portion of whiskey and resolved to take the beeves if they had to follow them to Quebec.

They were in hopes to head off the drove in Troy before they reached the line—but when they came to the falls of the Missisquoi at North Troy, they found that they were some two or three hours too late and the drove already over the line. A consultation was held—when it was decided to follow over the trail and watch for a favorable opportunity to run the drive back across the boundary. It was now about ten o'clock at night—the moon was verging on towards its full—the long shadows of the forrest trees made many a phantom spectre as these weary men trudged along towards the boundary line in the awful solemn stillness of that autumnal night. There was danger of going into an ambushade—of arousing the enemy—and being taken prisoners and carried to Quebec in which event they would be obliged to wait the regular routine of exchanges before [they] could expect to see their families again.

The company had been exceedingly hilarious during the day—had calculated upon an easy victory—some of them had even made offers for single shares of the profits—but when they found that they must go into the enemy's country where there were a company of British Regulars stationed—with whom it would have been the extreme of folly for our few friends to have thought of contending—when they thought of these facts it is no wonder that our friends chose to make that march in silence—a silence which was only broken by the ejaculations of little John Little as he trudged along by the side of Ezekiel looking up at his great burly frame as he led the company on through those solitary Potton woods on that eventful night; Gad, Zeke—we'll have em fore mornin, Zeke—what d'ya say to that Zeke—hay—Zeke hay—we'll have em fore mornin Zeke—hay—what d'ya say to that Zeke—hay—Zeke hay—hay. Gad—. Sh— Sh—, issues from the Captain's lips in a whisper so audible that it might have been heard half a mile; the company went on and silence again reigned supreme.

When—about a mile and a half from the line the road came out on one of those terraces which abound in that vicinity along the borders of the intervals which skirt the river—and there—just below them upon the meadow were the cattle quietly grazing in the moonlight—and beyond the meadow rolled the dark waters of the Missisquoi—on the opposite side of which stood the long buildings of Deacon Skinner—from the windows of which flashed the bright lights kept burning by the joyous smugglers who were carousing and making merry over their extraordinary good luck in getting the drove into Canada. The company were frightened at the prospect of getting the drove so easy—and it was some time before they could muster courage to go down and drive the cattle into the woods.

Finally John Little—Ben Kellam and Samuel Marvin were sent

down to drive off the brutes while the others watched the performance from the brow of the hill. They succeeded in getting the drove out of the field without awakening the suspicions of the enemy. When they got into the woods they forced the drove along at the point of the bayonet—eager to put as great a distance between themselves and Potton as was possible before daylight. When morning dawned they found that instead of coming towards Irasburgh, that they had missed the direction and were away up in Jay. They changed their course—put two men half a mile in the rear to guard against a surprise—and pushed on towards home. About four o'clock in the afternoon, the drove came thundering along down on this side of the mountain by where Albert Webster now lives—and were only halted when they arrived at Kidder's. There they were distributed among the party—and each man took his own and went his way. The most of the cattle were killed as soon as the several parties reached their homes—this was done to save them as it would have been a tiresome trial to have watched over them. Joseph Kidder kept a black steer and made an ox of him—he was known here many years as the black smuggler.

Samuel Marvin sold his share—except one ox which he through fear of his being recaptured took into the house with his family—but the great brute was too heavy for Marvin's floor and broke through into the cellar when he was slaughtered the next day.

Joshua Taylor kept his a few days and started to drive them south and sell them—but the smugglers recaptured them and he lost his share of the profits.

On the whole the affair was considered an excellent joke—a just punishment to the smugglers—and a capital speculation.

This is only one of the very many exploits of our early townsmen—all of which should be written and compiled for the use of some future historian who may consider them of sufficient interest to publish.