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Vermont and the Slavery Question
Financing Ethan Allen Vermont Letters. *A Series*
The Great Seal of Vermont The Bookshelf
The One Hundredth Annual Meeting

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VERMONT LETTERS. A SERIES

In this department from time to time letters will be printed which will range from casual comments on mere items of daily living long ago to accounts of historical and stirring events as seen by those forgotten historians, average men and women who were a part of what they saw and heard. Many of the letters will not be important in an historical sense; they will merely touch upon "the little things, the beloved and tender and funny and familiar things" which "beckon across gulfs of death and change with a magic poignancy, the old things that our dead leaders and forefathers loved, viva adhuc et desiderio pulciora." In this old state where family memories go back more than a century there are many such letters, and we shall be glad to see some of them. Careful copies will be satisfactory for our purpose. Editor.

1. In March 1864 General Grant was appointed general-in-chief of the Union armies, and the long struggle of the Wilderness campaign was to begin. The manner in which Vermont responded to the call for troops that preceded the campaigns of that memorable year is shown in this brief note sent to Senator Solomon Foot of Vermont by Secretary Stanton. The original holograph letter is in the possession of Mr. E. S. Marsh of Brandon, Vermont.

*War Department
Washington City,
Jany 7 1864*

Dear sir

Please accept my thanks for the pleasing intelligence conveyed in your note in respect to the patriotic & prompt action of your State in supporting their own government against treason & rebellion by filling up their quota of troops.

Yours truly

Edwin M. Stanton

2. Jonathan Stevens was probably in Panton when word came that a British force of about 10,000 men, most of them Wellington's

veterans, under Sir George Prevost and a naval force of sixteen vessels were on their way from the North to attack Plattsburg, which was the headquarters in the War of 1812 of the American army on the northern frontier. The British plans called for an invasion of New York. The American vessels, fourteen in number, held to their anchorage in Plattsburg bay under Commodore Thomas Macdonough. On September 11th, the British naval commander, Captain George Downie, expecting the British land force to drive the American fleet from its anchorage, attacked. He was killed within fifteen minutes, and two hours later his fleet surrendered. The land forces were having troubles of their own, and in the end the British forces abandoned their plan and retreated. What a Vermont "Yankey" did, saw, heard, and felt on that long ago September day is told in this letter he wrote to his brother one hundred and twenty-six years ago. The manuscript letter is in the Vermont Historical Society's collections. Our text is a faithful copy other than in the periods which have been entered with a view to making the letter more readable.

Dear Brother

With A weak & trembling hand I once more take pen in hand to inform you my family are well. as for myself I am on the recovery from a terrible fit of sickness which confined me to my bed for five weeks and for three weeks since am scarcely Able to walk to the nearest neighbours. I have Escaped with Life if no relapse occurs which was more than was Expected by those About me for some time. I am informed that Zebulon has receivd A Letter from you Desiring to be informed wither our family were Amongst the Vermont Volunteers at the investment of Plattsburgh: they were. The men like a Christian turned the other side of his neck to his Enemy. they were Generous Enough to spare it for that time. my four oldest sons were there and in the Action and tis said behavd well. three of them returned covered with British Equipment which they took from the hands of the Vanquished. I must give you a short history of my own campaign as the Governor would take no Active part to turn out the Militia to Assist Gen. McComb tho repeatedly requested. Gen. McComb had twice desired him to call out the militia set-

ting fourth the consequence of Loosing so fine a park of
 Artillery and such Large Quantity of Provisions and other
 munitions of War. his answer was that the Constitution
 did not Authorise him to Order the Militia into Another
 State. our Election Day which was the 6th of Sept. was
 an Anxious Day on more Accounts than one knowing the
 Enemy had Arrived at Plattsburgh as we could hear the
 Cannon at different parts of the Day & rumour had Mag-
 nified their numbers to 20000 tho it was not generally
 thought they had more than ten. on that day Col. Fafset
 the highest U S officer in Vermont suggested to General
 McComb the propriety of making a general call in Ver-
 mon for Volunteers. the Plan Succeeded to a wonder.
 Expresses were Dispatched North East & South. the Ex-
 press that came our way through Vergennes calld on Gen.
 Strong who acknowledgd the time had come to Defend
 our Liberty & Property that he would turn himself & use
 his Influence to induce others to do the same. this was in
 the afternoon of the 7th day. the Spirit seemed to have
 dropd from Heaven on all parties on that Day to turn our
 and Defend our rights. Panton people on this side of Dead
 Creek went on board a ferry boat and Arrivd at Burling-
 ton between twelve and one at night. the next Morning
 the 8th Day we Organized our Company by Choosing
 Officers for they too must be Voluntarily made as our Ver-
 mont Commissions wil not pass on the other side of the
 Lake. the Volunteers Gennerally made the Company
 Officers and they the field. the Command in Chief was
 given Gen. Sam. Strong of Vergennes. I see by looking
 over the back page (my Yesterdays Labour) that I had
 safe Arrived at burlington on the 8th same day. About
 ten oclock got on board sloop which Carried 3 & 400 of
 us to Peru [?] where we arrived at dusk having had Lit-
 tle wind all day. About midnight the next Sloop Arrived
 with A larger cargo And reported that they had Left more
 at burlington than were over then. this gave us fresh
 Courage for by the by we were the first that Crost & I
 did not know the fire of Patriotism had so universally
 spread. the 9th day we marched up to the fort 8 miles
 Drew Ammunition and such as had no Arms drew them.

Little Ceremony was Necefsary for Any man who called himself A Volunteer from Vermont to Equip himself. Indeed they were glad to see us. the British had Pofseffion of the Village. their Encampment was just out of Cannon shot North of the Village & they had been trying to crofs Saranac river for A number of days. they had been kept on their side by the New York Militia the rifle men & a few companies of regualrs. the Bridges & fords being well Guarded tho for myself I dont think thier Attacks were Serious but only to try Spirit of the Militia as they were not yet ready for a General Attack. they were at this time planting batteries & Geting on thier Artillery. they were obliged to work in the night to prepare there bomb battery for when Ever our People saw any of them in reach they were sure to get an 18 or 24 lb shot Amongst them. it has been ascertained by Deserters since that one of those shots kild 8 men one horse and took a wheel of the Carriage on which they were Drawing a heavy piece of Artillery. the day be fore our Arrival General McComb had Distroyed al the Barracks on the plain South of the fort for believing it to be Morally impofsible for so few men as we had to keep so large an army from Crofsing so small A Stream and of such length. he concluded that when Ever they should be in Earnest they would Crofs over & Attack him at all points & those barracks would have given Shelter till within a short distance of the fort. we of Course had to shift as we could for lodging & this night was very cold. about 3 or 4 Oclock at night we heard a smart firing from the river. immediately 2 sky rockets Afended from the fort. I was standing by the fire with our General who had no better Quarters than the soldiers. he said that was the token for an Alarm and gave Orders to stand to our Arms. some confufion Ensued but we were at length paraded. in A short time news came the Attack was not from the Enemy but that one of our Capt with fifty men had Crofsed over & had Attacked thrice his number and had routed them from where they were Entrenching within 300 yds of our fort Directly Across the river. on the 10th we were after drawing rations and refreshing ordered back about 4 miles to the mouth of the

Sammon [Salmon] river to incorporate with the troops continually Arriving and remain as an Army of reserves for all water Craft proved insufficient to cross the Volunteers as fast as they offered. we passed that day Eating & drinking. at night slept well on a good haymow our Company having the use of A barn. on the Memorable 11th was up in Season and paraded to the bank of the Lake in plain sight of Cumberland head. our fleet was so far in the bay we could not see them. while we were Cooking and Eating we saw the British fleet heave around the point and had had Previously heard an increase of Cannonading at the fort. before we had well got through Eating an Express arrived from Gen McComb informing him that the Enemy had forced a passage about 4 miles up the river Desiring him to march to a village up Sammon river & support the New York Militia who were falling back. we Accordingly began our March had proceeded a little ways A second messenger from General McComb desired Gen Strong to take the road back to the fort & thence up the river Direct. we accordingly Counter marched and took the road to the fort. the fleet were now Engaged for the Command of Lake Champlain a Command interesting to us who lived on her shores. all was doubt & anxiety. some parts of the road lay in plain sight of the fleet and some not. We had Proceeded perhaps 1 mile. Gen Strong Ordered Lieut Spalding to turn A waggon we were meeting and go to the fort and bring 12000 cartridges. Spalding desired me to Accompany him and Another neighbour: as I should then have A plain view of the fleet and get A ride instead of Marching through the mud. the waggon was turned by the point of the bayonet. we went on within About one mile of the fort. the Owner leap from the wagon & told us to Drive as there was no Authority to oblige him to risque his life to go to the fort for Powder. at this time the British had opened 7 batteries on our 3 little forts mostly bombs and rockets also paying of their demand as fast as Possible. all these cannon rattling was A new sight to me. all this last mile we could see our ship the ticonderoga made no fire till just as we got to the fort she wheeled & gave A broadside which brout down the

Colours of the *Confiance* the British frigate. the rest not long after followed suit. this was an hour in which the various feelings of my mind may have been felt by others but cannot be Described by Any for seeing our best Vessel lay mute hope was Almost ready to take flight. the sequel however raised my feelings Above any Other hour of my Life. Altho the bombs were bursting in all Directions they seemd as harmless as tho it was onely a game at ball or some Other Amusement. well we received our load returned met the troops in sight of the fort where we Expected to have been Eased from our Charge but was Mortified by being ordered to follow the first Regiment with our team & by thier taking A shorter road we got into the mud where we were Obligd to remain untill the whole Division had pased by which unlucky Accident Deprived me of the Opt of being Able to Say I had been in A battle. the troops went on and were soon informed that the Enemy were at a short distance. they immediately flanked out & soon met the Advance of the Enemy who after giving two fires surrendered having lost their Capt & 4 or five Others. Lord Wellington Wonderfull hero of Europe Appear no bigger than men to Yankeys. they all took to flight & had Gen Strong known the Ground & marched immediately for the fort I have no Doubt that we might had have made the whole that has Crossed Prisoners which was about 2000. the forts kept firing till night having Silenced the most part of the Enemy's guns. the last of all they fired A Federal salute gave 3 Cheers then the Music struck up Yankey Doodle thus ended the conflict with Governor Prevost who took leave of us that night without bidding us good by. we lay on the field of battle that night without Any cover. in the morning it rained very hard. I was unwell. our Division Crossed over to the Village saw the ravage of war to the fort found as many more Volunteers as composed our Division. the World was full of men. had the Governour been polite enough to have Lengthened his Visit 3 days longer I Presume he would have found Winter Quarters at Greenbush. his Precipitate flight saved my life for I should have stayed to have waited on him till too late to have reached home

*which was all I was able to do as it was. the want of the
least attention would [have] been of sereous Consequence
to me. I think it time to Conclude my lenthly Epistle &
Subscribe myself your friend & Brother.*

Jonathan Stevens

Richard must tell you the rest

December 5th 1814

*My wife wishes to be remembered to you & family
To Benj. Stevens Canaan*

