



A Fire by the Pond: The British Raid in Derby, Vermont, December 27, 1813

Although secondary evidence exists to substantiate that the raid in Derby was a historical fact, the paucity of information related to it leaves many questions unanswered. What happened? Who were the key people involved? Why was the raid conducted? What, if any, were the long-term consequences from the raid?

By KENNETH LAWSON

Derby is not a famous town, an élite town, or a town with numerous famous citizens. But Derby can claim some distinctive historical events. Among them is the British raid of December 27, 1813. A small detachment of British soldiers from Stanstead, Québec, crossed the border into the United States and attacked a military supply depot in Derby. This complete British victory had no casualties, but was successful in destroying the supply depot of the Vermont Militia and carrying away plunder.

Unfortunately, except for a brief overstated report from a British officer, no other detailed contemporary account of the raid exists.

In the early 1800s there were two newspapers in northern Vermont. The *Northern Centinel* (sometimes spelled *Sentinel*), published weekly out of Burlington, contains no mention of the Derby raid in its January

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or February, 1814 issues. The second was the *North Star*, a weekly published in Danville. A search of every edition of the *North Star* for January and February, 1814, again uncovered no mention of the Derby raid. It appears that the contemporary newspapers of northern Vermont did not have any eyewitness or secondary information on the episode.

This lack of contemporary accounts could lead a researcher to speculate that perhaps the raid in fact never occurred; perhaps a British officer invented the whole scenario to make himself look good in his commanding officer's eyes.

However, a few brief accounts of the raid turn up in later histories. Volume 6 of *Records of the Governor and Council of the State of Vermont* (1878) gives a one-paragraph description of the raid:

December 27, a detachment of British troops, under Capt. Barker of the frontier light infantry, crossed the line into Vermont and destroyed some public store-houses and barracks which had been erected at Derby.¹

The account concludes by discussing the removal of troops, magazines, and provisions from French Mills near the Canadian border in New York to Lake Champlain, followed by what appears to be the only extant first-hand account of the action: the official report of the British officer who commanded it.

This brief entry and the accompanying "general order" constitute the only reliable evidence we have of the event and is doubtless the source for all subsequent descriptions of the raid. Rowland E. Robinson's book, *Vermont: A Study of Independence*, published in 1892, mentions the Derby raid in Chapter 19: "Vermont in the War of 1812." Departing slightly from the account in *Governor and Council*, Robinson wrote, "On the last of December a British force made a successful raid on a depot of supplies at Derby, Vermont, destroying barracks and storehouses, and carrying away a considerable amount of stores."² LaFayette Wilbur, in Volume three of his *Early History of Vermont* (1902), has the following brief note, which adheres more closely to the information in *Governor and Council*:

On Dec. 27, a detachment of British troops, under Capt. Barker of the frontier light infantry, crossed the line into Vermont and destroyed some public store-houses and extensive barracks, for the accommodation of 1200 men, which had been erected at Derby.³

All subsequent accounts (see Appendix A) repeat with some variations the information provided in these earlier sources.

I concluded that there was enough secondary evidence to substantiate that the raid in Derby was a historical fact. But the paucity of

information related to the raid in Derby leaves many questions unanswered. What happened? Who were the key people involved? Why was the raid conducted? What, if any, were the long-term consequences from the raid?

BACKGROUND: THE WAR OF 1812 IN NORTHEASTERN VERMONT

The Treaty of Paris in 1783 ended the American Revolution and established the border between Canada and the United States at 45 degrees north latitude. When Vermont joined the United States in 1791, this boundary became its northern border.⁴

In the early nineteenth century, the Vermont-Québec border was not much more than a line on a map. Specifically, Derby, Vermont, and Stanstead, Québec, enjoyed a close relationship through commerce, cultural activities, and intermarriage. The residents of these border communities could not have predicted that by 1812 their respective nations would be at war.

The United States declared war on Great Britain on June 18, 1812. Several factors led up to the war. First, trade restrictions introduced by Great Britain hindered United States trade with France, a country with which Britain was at war. Second, the impressment or forced recruitment of U.S. seamen into the British Navy was a major aggravation and insult for many Americans. Third, English military support of American Indians who were resisting the expansion of settlements on the American frontier in the Ohio Valley was terrifying to those growing frontier populations and intolerable to nearly everyone else. All of this added up to many Americans feeling dishonored by what appeared to be British arrogance toward the fledgling United States, specifically in the face of what was considered to be British insults to national pride.⁵ However, for the residents of Derby and Stanstead, these political issues were a world away.

Along with other New England states, Vermont did not enthusiastically support the declaration of war against Great Britain. However, the residents of Vermont also had long memories. They remembered with terror how the British had used Indians as allies in the Revolutionary War only three decades earlier. They remembered how their parents and grandparents had fought the British in battles large and small. Nevertheless, the Stanstead-Derby border was merely a cartographical distinction largely ignored, as citizens on both sides continued to attend the same schools, churches, and markets. Despite a trade embargo imposed under the administration of President Thomas Jefferson in 1807, herds of cattle crossed freely over the international border. Yet both sides, through their respective federal government policies, were forced to prepare for war.

The border communities in the northern towns of Vermont were woefully unprepared for a war with Great Britain. Immediately after the declaration of war, the selectmen from the Vermont border towns furnished small numbers of armed men to patrol the Canadian border. The towns of Derby, Troy, and Canaan placed a makeshift militia of armed men along the Canadian line.⁶ These first border guards had no military training, no uniforms, and were armed with their hunting rifles taken from home, although each town did provide supplies for these provisional or stopgap militia troops. Clearly this was an unacceptable response to what was developing as an international conflict. On November 9, 1812, the Vermont legislature directed the mode of detaching the militia for service in the war by which the selectmen from each town were required to furnish arms, equipment, knapsacks, blankets, camp utensils, and other items in addition to transportation.⁷

During the War of 1812, western Vermont was on the front lines of combat. Specifically, the coastal communities along Lake Champlain were often raided for food supplies. British troops bivouacked on the islands within Lake Champlain. Burlington was shelled by the British on August 2, 1813. Fort Cassin, a small wooden fort built into the dirt at the mouth of the Otter Creek near Vergennes, Vermont, was shelled by British ships on May 14, 1814. British ships of all sizes roamed Lake Champlain and were in frequent skirmishes and larger battles with the U.S. Navy. But for northeastern Vermont the war was still far away. Friends and neighbors in the Derby-Stanstead communities continued to trade with each other across the international boundary, a frequent problem for both sides in the war. Nevertheless, the Vermont *Records of the Governor and Council* indicated that northern Vermont was sparsely settled and greatly exposed to an attack of the British through Canada, and described measures taken by the state government to attempt some semblance of a border patrol, mentioning Derby by name.⁸

From the Canadian perspective, life along the Vermont border in 1812 remained essentially unchanged. Before the war, Stanstead had been settled by Vermonters and other New Englanders who were lured to Québec by the promise of good, cheap land. By the early 1800s, the main stage road between Boston and Québec City stopped in Stanstead, giving rise to hotels, shops, and other businesses catering to travelers. In 1803, saw mills and grist mills were thriving, while the granite quarry business was beginning to take hold and expand. Stanstead soon prospered above her neighbors in Derby, and the growing Canadian town boasted a number of wealthy families and prosperous businesses.⁹ Later in the war, Stanstead would develop a ragtag militia with orders to

patrol the U.S. border. But for the first year or so of the War of 1812, life in Stanstead proceeded much as it had before the war.

The close family and commercial relationships between Stanstead and Derby meant that residents from both communities continued to trade during the war. These smuggling activities were rampant. The smugglers were decidedly not treasonous, but they viewed the war as someone else's fight, directed by misguided national policies that should not be allowed to affect their daily lives. As one source stated, "The smuggling and other trade with Canada was not a manifestation of disloyalty. It was regarded as good business."¹⁰ Families, neighbors, siblings, and friends all continued to buy and sell across the international border in an attempt to feed their families and maintain their businesses and farms.¹¹ An example was the first white man to settle in Stanstead, the Vermonter Johnson Taplin, who was a friend of Timothy Hinman, the first white settler in Derby. Johnson Taplin lived a humble life as a farmer and trader in Stanstead until the outbreak of the War of 1812.

Taplin at once joined the Militia and eventually became a Captain of Cavalry. Not much is known of his military service; instead of fighting he, along with most everyone else here, probably kept right on trading with our American relatives, leaving the fighting to some other places along the border although there is record of some minor skirmishes locally. Someone was even unkind enough to say that the mean old Canadians burned down the barracks at Derby.¹²

Throughout the War of 1812, the northern border of Vermont was a precarious and disturbed place to live. Untrained militia units often had uncertain orders, with only the general instructions to protect the border with Canada and prevent smuggling. Although the Vermont legislature, in compliance with federal prohibitions, passed anti-smuggling laws, they were largely ignored in the Derby and Stanstead communities. Some brigands in Vermont were disgusted with these illegal activities, which allowed a few to prosper and caused others hardship. There is an account of herds of cattle being gathered in Brownington, just south of Derby, to be crossed into Canada illegally and sold to Canadians. Here Vermonters fired gunshots against Vermonters engaged in smuggling.¹³ Wilbur's *Early History of Vermont* states that specifically in the north-eastern part of the state, resistance to smuggling by Vermonters against Vermonters "proceeded to fearful extremes," "bloodshed and violence" were common, and local Vermonters sometimes used excessive force in apprehending smugglers. One example is from early 1813, when a citizen of Canaan, Vermont, with a pass from the governor to enter Canada, was killed by a vigilante, who then fled into the Vermont wilderness only to be killed himself months later while he resisted arrest.¹⁴

Selectmen from the small communities in northeastern Vermont knew that something had to be done. Their extended border with Canada was vulnerable to attack, while illegal smuggling and the resulting bloodshed between Vermonters was increasing.

Shortly after the declaration of war in June 1812, the Vermont legislature authorized the raising of militia troops for border service and levied an additional tax to support and arm these citizen-soldiers. Local selectmen then petitioned their male citizens to see who could be available for militia service. The supply depot for this disparate and largely untrained Vermont militia was in Derby.

THE BARRACKS AND SUPPLY DEPOT AT DERBY

Timothy Hinman (1762–1850) of Derby donated part of his land along Hinman Pond (later called Derby Pond; since 1933, Lake Derby) to be used for the storage of supplies and munitions for the local militia. This was a strategic location for several reasons. First, there was abundant fresh water for hydration and sanitation at Hinman Pond. Second, the depot was situated along the only major north-south route from Canada into northeastern Vermont, Main Street in Derby. Third, this location was north of the first suburban settlement in Derby, meaning a Canadian force heading south had to pass by the depot before arriving in Derby village. The commanding officer of the local militia that kept its supplies at the Derby depot was Rufus Stewart.

Rufus Stewart (1776–1846) came to Derby from Brattleboro, Vermont, in 1797, settling as a farmer. He married and began raising a family in Derby, until he moved to nearby Morgan around 1810. He served with the Vermont militia and then was given a regular army commission as a captain in the 31st U.S. Infantry. After the war he returned to Morgan and then resettled in Derby until his death in June 1846.

At the first Derby town meeting, in the home of Timothy Hinman on March 29, 1789, Rufus Stewart was elected constable. A constable at that time was the person responsible for keeping the peace, settling disputes, intervening in arguments, and generally keeping the town safe. It makes sense that Rufus Stewart, physically fit at thirty-six years old, and familiar with weapons as a constable, was made the militia captain for northeastern Vermont. He had additional leadership credentials because in either 1811 or 1812, when he moved to Morgan, Stewart became its first representative in the Vermont legislature.

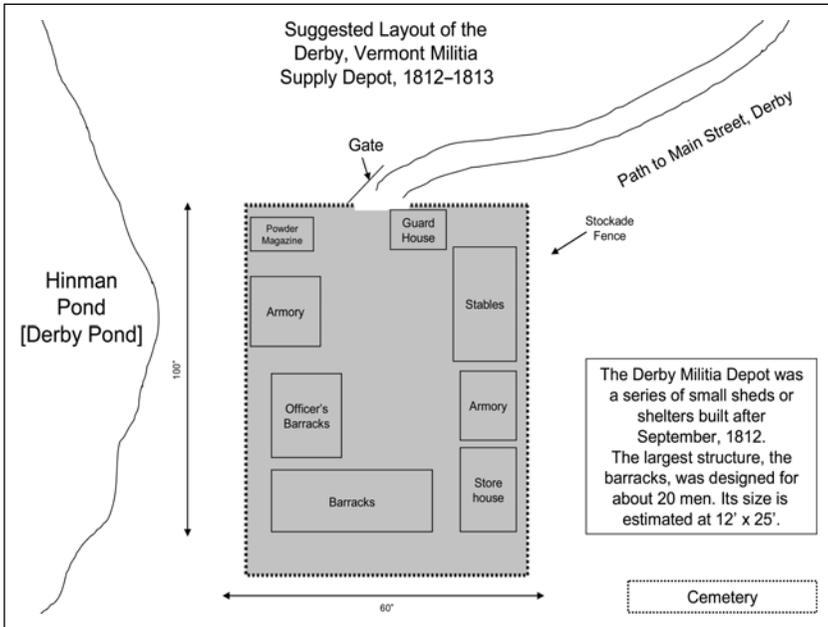
Captain Rufus Stewart supervised the construction of the supply depot at Derby. The physical description of this small bivouac area is uncertain, although the *Derby Land Records* for this period, written in pencil in the year 1812, are still legible. They contain numerous notations

related to land purchases but nothing is recorded about land sold, leased, or rented to the town of Derby for use as a supply depot and stables for the militia. Apparently, Timothy Hinman simply allowed the depot to be built on his land by Hinman Pond without any official transaction. Yet there is a notation related to building structures for the soldiers and their supplies. The book, *Derby Records*, located in the Derby Town Hall vault, includes handwritten notes about expenses paid by the town. The column for September 1812 states, "Decided to paying W. Childs for provision of barns for troops, \$5.50."¹⁵

In the currency of that day, \$5.50 was enough to employ two men for a few days and to pay for enough simple building supplies to construct a couple of non-winterized but weatherproof sheds and a small storage barn. We know that one of the buildings was used as a makeshift barracks, since the *History of Derby* states, "Men were recruited from Derby, Holland and Morgan and quartered in barracks built between the graveyard and Derby Pond." This same book tells of a "young wife who had spent lonely days and nights three miles from the barracks, which were situated near Derby Pond."¹⁶

Because settlements in northeastern Vermont along or near the Canadian border were all tiny villages, each community was able to provide only a few men for militia duty. Militia soldiers were recruited from Derby, Holland, and Morgan, although there may have been a few men from other nearby towns. According to the 1810 census, there were 116 free white males as heads of households in these three towns.¹⁷ An estimate is that about twenty-five percent of these 116 men could be available for militia duty, accounting for age, infirmities, or other reasons. That means around thirty men were available to join Captain Stewart in the local militia. In addition, some of these 116 men had sons of military age. Therefore there may have been as many as sixty men and young men who could potentially serve under Stewart.

Not all the militiamen served at the same time. With men rotating duty and with only a few men sleeping at the Derby barracks at one time, the barracks was built to accommodate perhaps twenty men. That means it was about the size of a two-car garage today. The *History of Derby* states that three buildings were built on the property: a guard house, a barracks, and officer's quarters. An existing barn on the property was also used as barracks.¹⁸ Other buildings constructed at the depot were necessary to supply and equip the citizen-soldiers. We know what structures were necessary at a regular army cantonment or depot area in Vermont during the War of 1812 from the U.S. Army cantonment in Burlington: barracks for soldiers, barracks for officers, stables, storehouses, an armory, and a powder magazine.¹⁹



This suggested layout of the Derby militia supply depot is based on typical militia cantonment areas of that period. No actual diagram of this supply depot and barracks area exists. The buildings were essentially shacks. Map created by Ken Lawson.

Compared to the Burlington cantonment area, it is impossible to state the actual configuration of the much smaller makeshift buildings at the Derby depot. As a general rule, we know that some buildings for protocol or for safety reasons were separate from other buildings. For example, regular Army officers were never quartered with the troops. For safety, Captain Stewart definitely placed the barracks away from the powder magazine. The storehouse was always kept away from the stables for sanitation reasons. A cistern was not necessary since the troops had all the fresh water they needed from Derby Pond. A fence was needed for the supply depot, in this case most likely a split rail fence designed more to keep wandering cattle and curious children away than to be a defensible fighting position.

The small supply and barracks compound on the west shore of Derby Pond was not an extensively fortified military depot. Rather, it was a strategically located cantonment area for a small number of rotating militia citizen-soldiers to resupply, feed horses, receive orders, wash and bathe in Derby Pond, and sleep. This humble facility was an

organization point for militia troops that patrolled the Canadian border from Lake Memphremagog to the New Hampshire line. Captain Stewart used his men as a deterrent to prevent Vermonters from smuggling goods and livestock into Canada, as well as a military force to defend Vermont against a Canadian invasion. As one source stated,

[T]he smugglers became angry and unlawfully resistant and the Canadians very bitter. Stanstead, Québec, with many English troops in its midst, needed much more food than it could produce and offered high prices for beef, flour and other farm products delivered in Stanstead. The conditions greatly increased the amount of smuggling and troops under Rufus Stewart were ordered to patrol all of the Vermont border from the New Hampshire border to Lake Memphremagog.²⁰

At times there was much activity at the depot, with small numbers of troops coming and going from various patrolling missions. At other times the depot was desolate, as the troops were either sleeping at home, out on missions, or temporarily not on militia duty. It was a fluid and transitory situation for a makeshift patrol base. These militiamen were poorly equipped, with civilian clothes and mostly squirrel rifles, often carrying a few days' supply of food their wives made for them at home. As a recent commentator observed, "The volunteers were spread so thin that the base had been left unguarded."²¹ That is why the small British force was able to destroy it so easily.

THE CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE

The residents of Québec who settled near the border of Vermont were a mixed lot. The overwhelming majority of these families were former New Englanders, some who settled in Canada as Loyalists supporting the British in the American Revolutionary War. Others were patriotic United States citizens who settled in Canada, enticed by large amounts of inexpensive and fertile, level land. The majority of these southern Québec residents were poor farmers or tradesmen. Others acquired wealth through trading, mostly legal but also through illegal smuggling during the War of 1812. British veterans of the Revolutionary War received a half-pay wage to keep them in the army reserves, meaning that this wage plus their full-time occupation allowed some to achieve financial affluence. In February 1792, the Canadian government sought to develop more farms on the huge empty spaces in Québec by offering 200-acre farms for development and other lands for development by speculators. This lured many from the United States into Québec and allowed for economic advancement for local Canadians.²² From the end of the American Revolutionary War in 1783 until the time of the War of 1812, the relationship between New England and Québec was excellent.

Everyone who settled anywhere in North America since the first European settlements understood and accepted the fact of a local militia. All physically fit males in Québec between the ages of sixteen and sixty belonged to a local militia company, with a few exceptions such as clergymen, British civil officials, and a few others. The Québec militia around the year 1810 was more of a social and political organization than a trained and well-equipped military force. Similar to their southern neighbors in New England, the militia was called out for service during a crisis and then quickly disbanded, the men typically more concerned about their own farms or businesses than any serious military threat. "The Canadian militia was a rabble. They were called when needed, and after engagements, they were sent back to their farms. Hastily trained, most were unprepared for conditions in the field and thought nothing of leaving a battle to prepare for the harvest."²³ Annual training days were not much more than a muster, speeches by the officers, and some parade drills on the town common. The men were expected to bring their own weapons and ammunition. Acquisition of an officer's commission in the militia was typically a fast way to prominence in a community or favor with British officials. In a genuine military emergency, the militia would be used to support professional British troops by acting as scouts, transporting supplies by cart or sleigh, or building roads or fortifications.²⁴

In 1802, Sir John Johnson received his commission as lieutenant colonel of the Third Battalion Eastern Townships Militia. Three companies of about fifty men each formed in Stanstead. These able-bodied men were gathered and officers were appointed for their once or twice-a-year musters. At the beginning of the War of 1812, there were seven militia companies in Stanstead and the surrounding area.²⁵ These citizen-soldiers appeared upon the parade field in their everyday homespun clothing with picnic baskets packed by their wives. Some had old army guns, some had old fowling pieces, and some appeared with guns that did not fire but looked nice in a military formation. Some of the militia officers had prior military service in the British army, but most men were inexperienced and awkward in military drill and ceremony.²⁶

Sometime after midnight, on the freezing cold morning of December 27, 1813, a small detachment of Stanstead militia, led by a few British officers, departed Stanstead for the less than four-mile ride in winter darkness to the Vermont militia supply depot in Derby. The officers involved in the raid were British Captain Oliver Barker, commanding officer, a few lower-ranking British officers, and several Stanstead militia officers.²⁷ The officers of the British Frontier Light Infantry wore tall black hats with a small visor and a regimental crest on the front. Their

winter overcoats were gray with a fur collar and silver-colored trim, warm jackets cut at the waist. Their clothing was wool, the shirts bright red and the pants gray. Each officer carried a sword and perhaps a side-arm.²⁸ In contrast, the perhaps two dozen or so Stanstead militiamen were clothed in assorted warm civilian clothes with weapons and ammunition from home. They carried with them boxes of wooden matches, similar to those used today. They also carried a bottle or a jar of a liquid incinerate, some type of oil used to pour on the torches that would be lit to set the Derby buildings ablaze.

A cross-border network of smugglers served as spies for the British, informing them when the barracks would be empty. This is a significant point, as one of the Stanstead militia leaders of the raid, Captain Johnson Taplin, was a personal friend of Timothy Hinman.²⁹ The Derby-Stanstead border towns had numerous interactions through commerce, marriage, and friendships, and nobody wanted to be responsible for shooting a relative or a friend.

In the early morning of December 27, the supply area and barracks at Derby were unguarded. The British and Canadians quietly rode their horses into Derby and tied them up near the Derby schoolhouse, which is today a private residence at the corner of Main Street and Wallace Road. The British Infantry then deployed as skirmishers for several hundred feet and slowly surrounded the small barracks and supply compound between Derby Pond and the cemetery. Realizing that the depot was unguarded and uninhabited, they quickly looted supplies, set fire to all the small buildings, and then sprinted through the snow to their horses to gallop back into Stanstead.

REMARKS ON THE OFFICIAL BRITISH MILITARY REPORT OF THE DERBY RAID

With proper military protocol, Captain Oliver Barker reported up the chain of command his interpretation of the raid he led against the militia supply depot in Derby. His immediate superior officer was Colonel Sir Sydney Beckwith, and above Beckwith was Edward Baynes, adjutant-general of British North America. The report in its entirety is as follows:

Adjutant General's Office H.Q.
Québec, 9th January 1814
General Order,

His Excellency the Governor in Chief and Commander of the Forces, has received from Col Sir Sydney Beckwith, a report of Captain Barker, of the Frontier Light Infantry, stating the complete success of an expedition committed to the charge of that officer, against the enemy's Post and Depots at Derby, in the State of Vermont, which were taken possession of at daybreak, on the 17th of December

(1813). An extensive barracks for 1200 men lately erected was destroyed, together with stables and storehouses, and a considerable quantity of valuable military stores, having been brought away.

Captain Barker mentioned captains Curtis and Taplin, Lieutenants Messa and Bodwell, and Ensign Boynton, of the Townships Battalion of Militia, as having been most active with the Volunteers of the Militia, in the execution of this judicious and spirited enterprise.

Edward Baynes
Adjutant General, North America³⁰

The evidence suggests that this report by Captain Barker was not fully accurate. In fact, a detailed comparison of this report with the available facts reveals Captain Barker's report to be full of bravado, crowing his own accomplishments to his superior officers. As we have seen, the structures at the Derby Depot were few, small, and simple.

The claim that Captain Barker seized "a considerable quantity of valuable military stores" does not make sense. Supplies stored at the militia depot consisted of not much more than blankets and cooking utensils and perhaps a sack of dried meat or a few preserved vegetables. It is unlikely that the raid seized any American weapons, as all weapons and ammunition were carried for daily use by the militia. When the soldiers were in the barracks they carried their weapons and ammunition. When they went on patrol or returned home they brought their weapons, supplies, ammunition, and horses with them. Any warm clothing used by the militia in December 1813 was on their bodies and not in storage at the Derby barracks. No horses were taken, no saddles stolen, and no significant supplies of any kind were raided. Evidence of this fact is that not a single claim was made to the Town of Derby for compensation for any supplies, weapons, ammunition, horses, saddles, or anything else as a result of the British raid. The *Town of Derby Land Records*, the *Town of Derby Treasury Account Book, 1808–1833*, and the *Derby Town Meeting Records* give unanimous testimony to the bravado and exaggeration of the report of Captain Barker to his superior officers.

There is some inconsistency as to the exact date of the raid. Captain Barker, in his official report used the date of December 17.³¹ However, the *Officers of the British Forces in Canada during the War of 1812* states that certain officers were thanked for their participation in the December 27th raid in Derby, and that Captain Barker led the December 27th expedition to Derby.³² In Vermont, the *Records of the Governor and Council of the State of Vermont*, also state the date of the Derby raid as December 27.³³ The discrepancy may be a simple transcribing error.

SUMMARY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DERBY RAID

The British raid in Derby had four significant results.

1. The impact of the raid within the town of Derby was noticeable. According to the *Derby Town Meeting Records* of March 22, 1813, violence related to smuggling and the threat of an invasion from Canada developed to the point that the selectmen determined "to see if the town will appoint a committee of safety for the year ensuing." On April 5, 1813, the town voted to appoint seven men from Derby as "a Committee of Safety." One of these men was Rufus Stewart. At the next town meeting after the December 1813 raid, on March 29, 1814, it was decided to hire additional constables for the town.³⁴ These developments were a direct result of the increasing tensions with smugglers and the ramifications of the Derby raid in December 1813. This is apparent from the complete absence of any mention in the *Derby Town Meeting Records* of any need for a Committee of Safety or additional constables before the War of 1812.

2. Tensions along the Vermont border were brought to the attention of federal officials in Washington. Shortly after the Derby raid, Vermont legislators in Washington, D.C., raised their concerns with Secretary of the Treasury George W. Campbell. Violence along the Vermont-Québec border was increasing from the audacity of smugglers and as a result of the raid in Derby. Revenue laws were being ignored; confusion about search and seizure procedures created lawsuits; and the volume of illegal transportation of goods by boat, snow sled, or wagon across the border was staggering. Secretary Campbell addressed the concerns of Vermonters to the chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, John W. Epps. This interesting eight-page letter clarifies the growing tensions along the Vermont-Québec border and the confused legal status of international smugglers.³⁵ The role of the militia to curb smuggling and protect the border, as was done in northeastern Vermont under such men as Captain Rufus Stewart, was restated as follows:

The militia and army of the Unites States on the frontier, should be authorized, under proper regulations, to co-operate with the civil magistrates, and officers of the customs, in seizing and securing persons engaged in an unlawful trade, or intercourse, with the enemy, together with the articles and vehicles employed in such trade, or intercourse.³⁶

3. As a result of the Derby raid, federal troops were sent to northeastern Vermont. While U.S. Army soldiers had been stationed along Lake Champlain from the beginning of the war, this was not the case in the area that would later be called the Northeast Kingdom. Routinely,

regular army troops patrolled both sides of Lake Champlain and the Vermont-Canadian border from Lake Champlain toward Lake Memphremagog. But the area east of Lake Memphremagog to the New Hampshire border, extreme northeastern Vermont, was patrolled only by militia. This changed after the December 1813 Derby raid. The first account we have of federal soldiers in rural northeastern Vermont is in March 1814, when 250 regular army soldiers arrived in nearby Barton to continue the operations that had ceased with the destruction of the Derby depot a few months prior.³⁷

4. The Derby raid instilled fear in American army leaders about their own vulnerability to British raids out of Canada. While British and American raids were common on the New York and Vermont sides of Lake Champlain, a raid approximately seventy miles east of the lake in rural Derby was a cause of concern for American military leaders. This was a direct attack from Canada into an entirely new area. If the British could successfully raid Derby, what would prevent them from raiding the larger U.S. facilities in Burlington, or Plattsburg, New York? The senior American commander in the area, General James Wilkerson, received additional requests for protection of U.S. troops and supplies as a result of the successful British raid in Derby, including from regular army officers in Plattsburg.³⁸

The tiny supply and barracks depot in Derby, Vermont, was part of a larger attempt to hinder smuggling, to protect American sovereignty, and to prevent the advance of British troops into New England during the War of 1812. The depot existed for little more than a year. When the few ramshackle buildings along the western shore of Hinman Pond were burned by the British in December 1813, there was never an attempt to rebuild the depot. The war had moved west into New York and the Great Lakes region. In northeastern Vermont, some smuggling did persist throughout the entire war, but there was never another British raid. Today, the cemetery still exists that marked the militia site along the western shore of Lake Derby. But there is no remnant of the supply depot and barracks. There is no plaque to mark the location of this military skirmish. The Derby raid, though of no significance to the overall military history of the War of 1812, remains an interesting and underappreciated event in Vermont history.

APPENDIX A. DESCRIPTIONS OF THE VERMONT MILITIA DEPOT IN DERBY, 1812–1813

Source	Location	Buildings	Description	Other	Date
<i>History of Derby</i> , 88	Near Derby Pond	Barracks			
<i>History of Derby</i> , 81	Between cemetery and Derby Pond	Barracks		Built for the militia of Derby, Holland and Morgan	
<i>History of Derby</i> , 49	Derby	Barracks, guardhouse, and officers' quarters	Destroyed by fire	British took supplies to Canada	
Official British Report,	Posts and depots at Derby	Barracks for 1,200 men, stables, stores	Daybreak attack	Destroyed barracks and stables, stores taken to Canada	Dec. 17
<i>History of Derby</i> , 49					
<i>Barton Chronicle</i> , 1	Derby		Supply base	Destroyed base, took supplies	Dec. 17
<i>Records of the Governor and Council of Vermont</i> , 490	Derby	Public storehouses and barracks	Destroyed public storehouses and barracks		Dec. 27
<i>Stanstead County Historical Society Journal</i> , 27	Derby	Barracks	Burned down barracks		Dec. 17
<i>Vermont: A Study of Independence</i> , 277	Derby	Storehouses and barracks	Raided supplies and carried away stores		"the last of December"
<i>A Distant Drum</i> , 1	Derby	Barracks	Destroyed barracks built at Derby		
<i>Vermont for Young Vermonters</i> , 237	Derby	Barracks	Destroyed barracks built at Derby	Carried away supplies from American Army	
<i>Early History of Vermont</i> , 222	Derby	Storehouses and barracks for 1,200 men	Destroyed storehouses and barracks		Dec. 27
<i>The Kingdom Historical</i> , 9 (quoting from <i>History of Derby</i>)	Derby Center between cemetery and lake	Three buildings: guardhouse, barracks, and officers' quarters	Barracks poorly defended; buildings set afire	The militia officers took their meals in Timothy Hinman's home	

Note: All sources used for this chart are listed in the endnotes.

NOTES

¹E. P. Walton, ed., *Records of the Governor and Council of the State of Vermont* (Montpelier: J. & J. M. Poland, 1878), 6:490–491.

²Rowland E. Robinson, *Vermont: A Study of Independence* (1892; reprinted, Charleston, S.C.: Bibliolife Publishers, 2009), 277.

³LaFayette Wilbur, *Early History of Vermont* (Jericho, Vt.: Roscoe Printing House, 1902), 3: 222.

⁴Christopher M. Klyza and Stephen C. Trombulak, *The Story of Vermont: A Natural and Cultural History* (Middlebury College Press, 1990), 62.

⁵Many books have been written about the War of 1812. Two excellent surveys are John K. Mahon, *The War of 1812* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1972); and Walter R. Borneman, *1812: The War That Forged a Nation* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004). For a Canadian view of the war, see J. Mackay Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965). A good study of the Chesapeake Affair and the maritime war on Lake Champlain is by Theodore Roosevelt, *The Naval War of 1812* (1882; New York: The Modern Library Press, 1999).

⁶Wilbur, *Early History of Vermont*, 3:199.

⁷*Ibid.*, 3:204.

⁸Walton, *Governor and Council*, 3:468.

⁹*Stanstead Heritage Tour* (Published by the Town of Stanstead, 2008).

¹⁰Peter H. Haraty, *Put the Vermonters Ahead: A History of the Vermont National Guard* (Burlington, Vt.: Queen City Printers, 1978), 59. While Vermonters and others did not support the war and did engage in illegal smuggling, it is naïve to simply dismiss this activity as “good business.” The facts are that both the Americans and Canadians directly disobeyed their laws and worked against their national political and military strategies. These were clear violations of the military principle of denying the enemy in war any assistance, material or moral. Haraty makes note of this in *Put the Vermonters Ahead*, 58.

¹¹Smuggling of Canadian goods into the United States, and U.S. goods into Canada, led to great profits for select individuals. After war was declared on June 18, 1812, the New England states remarked that they would continue trading with British Canada. Wartime smuggling stimulated economic development. The British were very dependent upon American goods smuggled north. See Jon Latimer, “Smuggling and Contraband in the War of 1812,” *War of 1812 Magazine*, 8 (February 2008): 3–12.

¹²Joseph Maheux, “Taplin,” *Stanstead County Historical Society Journal* 5 (1973): 27.

¹³Interview with Sarah Ames, Old Stonehouse Museum, Brownington, Vermont, June 26, 2009. See also Cecile Hay and Mildred Hay, *History of Derby* (Littleton, N.H.: 1967), 89, where it is stated that a trail existed in Derby during the war on which hundreds of cattle were smuggled into Canada.

¹⁴Wilbur, *Early History of Vermont*, 3:223.

¹⁵A photocopy of this ledger account in the *Derby Records* was provided to me by Bill Gardyne, Derby Historical Society, June 24, 2009.

¹⁶Hay and Hay, *History of Derby*, 81, 88.

¹⁷Vermont Census, Orleans County, 1810.

¹⁸Hay and Hay, *History of Derby*, 48.

¹⁹James P. Millard, “Burlington, Vermont during the War of 1812,” www.historiclakes.org.

²⁰Hay and Hay, *History of Derby*, 48.

²¹Jennifer Hersey, “A Surprise on Every Page,” *The [Barton] Chronicle*, April 5, 2006.

²²Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812*, 5–6.

²³Heather Darch and Michel Racicot, “A Distant Drum: The War of 1812 in Missisquoi County,” *Townships Heritage WebMagazine*, July 20, 2009, 1.

²⁴Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812*, 7.

²⁵William Melrose, *The Stanstead Cavalry: History, Opportunities and Possibilities* (Hatley, Québec: n.p., 1914), 8.

²⁶B. F. Hubbard, comp., *Forests and Clearings: The History of Stanstead County, Province of Quebec, with Sketches of More than Five Hundred Families* (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books: 2009), 11–12.

²⁷L. Homfray Irving, *Officers of the British Forces in Canada during the War of 1812* (1908; Sligo, Ireland: Hardpress, 2008), 110, 199.

²⁸Tim Pickles, *New Orleans, 1815: Andrew Jackson Crushes the British* (London and Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 1993), 31, 51.

²⁹Maheux, “Taplin,” 26.

³⁰Hay and Hay, *History of Derby*, 49.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²Irving, *Officers of the British Forces*, 110, 199.

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³³Walton, *Records of the Governor and Council of the State of Vermont*, 3:490.

³⁴*Derby Town Meeting Records 1812–1847*, Vol. 2, un-numbered page.

³⁵“Letter to the Secretary of the Treasury to the Chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, December 7, 1814,” (Washington City, 1814), 7–8.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷John Little, *Loyalties in Conflict: A Canadian Borderland in War and Rebellion, 1812–1840* (Toronto, Ont. and Buffalo, N.Y.: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 40–41.

³⁸Allen S. Everest, *The War of 1812 in the Champlain Valley* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 139.