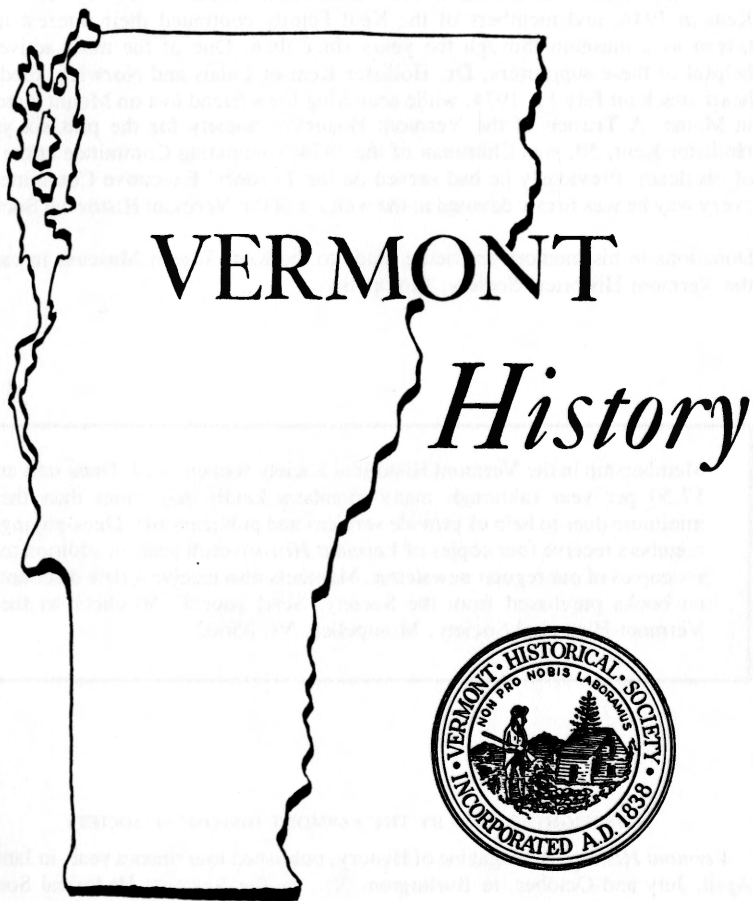


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A lad only 13 years old, he was a seaman  
on Lake Champlain in 1776 . . .

## With Benedict Arnold at Valcour Island: The Diary of Pascal De Angelis

By CHARLES M. SNYDER

AMONG the military exploits of Benedict Arnold only Saratoga is better remembered than Valcour Island. In a cove adjacent to this island and at several other points farther up Lake Champlain in October, 1776, he expended his fleet, described as "a curious assortment of schooners, galleys and gondolas," in a delaying action, which thwarted a British bid to drive a wedge through the infant American nation.<sup>1</sup>

After the battle Arnold and his English counterpart, Sir Guy Carleton, reported highlights to proper authorities, and versions of a few other participants in this bloody encounter became available to historians in the nineteenth century. But sources have remained sparse.<sup>2</sup> Recently, the discovery of the long lost diary of Pascal Charles Joseph De Angelis, a young seaman who served on one of Arnold's row-galleys, adds the tes-

1. *Dictionary of American Biography*, Allen Johnson (ed.), New York, 1928, ("Arnold, Benedict," by Randolph G. Adams), I, 363.

2. Reports by Arnold and General Waterbury were published in *American Archives*, 5th ser., II, 1038-9; 1079-80, 1224 (Peter Force, ed., 9 vols., Wash., D.C., 1837-53). Accounts by Carleton, Capt. Thomas Pringle, commander of the British squadron, and Capt. Charles Douglas, supervisor of the construction of the British vessels, are in *ibid.*, 5th ser., II, 1040, 1069, 1178-9. Additional dispatches from Carleton to General Burgoyne are in *Canadian Archives, Report for 1885*, 248; Baron von Riedesel's reactions are found in the *Memoirs of Madame Riedesel . . .*, W. L. Stone, ed., Albany, 1867), I, 70-74. Other British accounts include the *Journal of Captain Georg Pausch* (Albany, 1886), 84, and *The American Invasion from the North . . . with the Journal of Lieutenant William Digby* (Albany, 1887), 153. For other American reports see "Diary of Joshua Pell, Jr.," *Mag. of American History*, II, Pt. I (1878), 46, and the "Journal of Bayze Wells of Farmington," *Connecticut Historical Soc. Collections*, VII (1899), 283-5.

For secondary studies see Willard M. Wallace, *Traitorous Hero: The Life and Fortunes of Benedict Arnold*. (New York 1954), James T. Flexner, *The Traitor and the Spy* (New York, 1953); Timothy W. Hubbard, "Battle of Valcour Island: Benedict Arnold as Hero," *American Heritage*, XVI (Oct. 1966), 8-11, 87-91; A. T. Mahan, "Naval Campaigns of 1776 on Lake Champlain," *Scribner's Mag.*, XXIII, 147-60; G. W. Allen, *A Naval History of the American Revolution*, 2 vols., Boston, 1913.

timony of an eyewitness and poses a question regarding the timing of events as generally accepted by historians.<sup>3</sup>

Recruitment for Arnold's defense of Lake Champlain reached all the way to Long Island Sound, where Captain Seth A. Warner of Old Saybrook (not to be confused with Colonel Seth Warner of Green Mountain Boys fame) responded. Possibly the youngest of all recruits was his thirteen-year-old stepson, Pascal, son of the late Pascal Constant Petit De Angelis and Hannah Le Moyne De Angelis Warner. Young De Angelis was born at Oranjestad on the Dutch island of St. Eustatius in the West Indies on October 14, 1763. At ten he accompanied his mother and ailing father to Connecticut on a vessel commanded by Captain Warner. His father died enroute, and his mother settled in Old Saybrook, where she subsequently married Warner.

Tall and muscular for his age (his thirteenth birthday was still a few weeks away), he received a bounty of five pounds for enrolling, and one month's wages of forty-eight shillings in advance.

His four page diary — a single sheet twelve by seven inches — remains legible despite a discoloration from age and moisture. The first entry is dated August 13, 1776, the day Warner received his commission to enroll seamen; the last entry is dated October 13, the third and concluding day of the engagements on the lake, remembered as the battle of Valcour Island or Valcour Island and Split Rock.<sup>4</sup> The first three notations relate to recruitment, and may have been a single entry.

August 13, 1776

Captain Seth Warner received orders from his Honour Governour Trumble to inlist a number of seamen and proceed to take command of an armed vessel in Lake Champlain under direction of the commanding officer.

August 13th: inlisted 3 men.

August 15th: inlisted 8 men.

### *Finis*

The remaining entries were probably written from the sanctuary of Crown Point at the conclusion of the three-day encounter. The physical demands of the battle would have made an earlier attention to the diary

3. The diary was removed from De Angelis' home after his death by a son-in-law, Orsamus H. Marshall, of Buffalo. It remained in the Marshall house at 700 Main Street until the demise of Marshall's son in 1909, when it was taken to New Haven, N. Y., by C. Sidney Shepard, a great grandson of De Angelis. In 1969 it became the property of the State University of New York, College of Arts and Science, Oswego.

4. De Angelis' spelling has not been changed, except as indicated. Punctuation has been added.

doubtful. But it is apparent that it was written within a few hours of his arrival at Crown Point, while Arnold's beaching and burning of his flag-ship remained conjectural. Internal evidence provides additional clues that the document is a diary and not a reminiscence of a later date. The syntax is that of an unlettered youth and not of a "fine English and French scholar," as De Angelis was remembered in adulthood.<sup>5</sup>

Many years later, when his memory was failing De Angelis wrote a short reminiscence. He identified his enlistment as June rather than August, and recalled that he had boarded the *Trumbull* at Hinesburg at the head of Lake Champlain. Presumably, he confused Hinesburg with Skenesboro, later renamed Whitehall, where Arnold's fleet rendezvoused.<sup>6</sup>

Early in September Arnold sailed down the lake with an improvised squadron of two schooners, the *Royal Savage* and the *Revenge*, mounting four-6 pounders and eight-4's, and four-4 pounders and four-2 pounders respectively; one sloop, the *Enterprise*, with twelve-4 pounders; four row-galleys, the *Washington*, *Congress*, *Trumbull* and *Lee*, with eight guns ranging from 4 to 8 pounders (his stoutest resource in that they were more maneuverable on the lake's narrow waters than schooners and sloops); and nine gondolas, open boats with three guns each, including one-12 pounder in the bow and two-9's. He proceeded to within a few miles of St. Johns, the English base near the foot of the lake, where he learned of the superiority of Carleton's fleet. The English *Inflexible* alone, with a fire power of eighteen-12 pounders, was almost a match for all of Arnold's ships, and the schooners *Maria* and *Carleton* were individually more powerful than any of his vessels. Carleton had additionally assembled a scow, a gondola, twenty gunboats and four long boats.

It was obvious to Arnold that he could not successfully engage the enemy on the open water of the lake, and, warned in time, he turned back and selected a battle site in a cove on the west side of Valcour Island (six miles south of Plattsburgh). The island cut off a view of his vessels from the north, and once the enemy discovered them they would face navigational problems in making an approach. Thus, if the wind were right, he might face a disorganized adversary.

The British fleet, carrying some 7000 soldiers and reinforced by an armada of Indian canoes loaded with 400 warriors, came up the lake on October 11, and, as Arnold had calculated, sailed past the cove before discovering him. Reversing course, against a headwind, they edged toward their quarry with little regard for formation.

5. Everts and Fariss (ed.), *History of Oneida County, New York* (Philadelphia, 1878), 569.

6. *ibid.*

At the last moment Arnold grew impatient and moved several of his ships into the lake, but he soon saw his mistake and ordered them back into line; but the off-shore breeze hampered their movements.

De Angelis offered his impressions of the action in his diary:

October 11, 1776, in the harbour of Belcher

About 8 o'clock in the morning we received intelligence of 6 sail of the enemy being coming round Comberlin head, and we were then 15 sail in all: vis. 3 galley, 2 schooners, 2 sloops, 8 gundeloes. Whereupon there was an alarm, and General Arnold ordered the 2 schooners and 3 gallies under way immediately.<sup>7</sup> When the enemy appeared in sight about 30 sail in all, and, as we stood off[f] and on, we received orders all to come to anchor in a line of battle. But the schooner Royal Savage mounting 12 guns, Capt. Hally, who misstayed several times and could not get up into line, run aground and remained fast so near the enemy that they fired so incesently on her that Capt. Hally was obliged to quit her to the enemy, who blew her up about 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

But to return to half after 10 o'clock; the enemys fleet attaced ours with great fury and we returned the fire with as great spirit and viger;

October 12

Att light we were clost to the Four Brothers [tiny islands just south and east of Schuyler Island and west of Shelburne Point] and the schooner, sloop and 2 gallies in sight, the wind southerly; and we beat up and came to, and anchor[ed] under the western shore and stoped our leaks and refreshed ourselves, and lay there till half after one at night, when 2 of the gundeloes came along and we hailed them; and they told us that one of our gundeloes was taking water and the other sunk [the New Jersey]. Whereupon we gott underway, and beat down the rest of the night.

De Angelis differs here from the time sequence followed by historians. He places the fleet near the western shore from daylight of the twelfth until one-thirty the following morning, thereby making the departure of the

7. De Angelis makes no mention of the fourth galley, the *Lee*; nor does he identify a second sloop or give the names of the gondolas.

fleet twelve hours later than the time usually given. It was not a simple slip of his pen, for he twice alludes to the later departure time.

But the condition of the *Washington* brought the fleet to a virtual standstill. It had taken a severe pounding, and now barely afloat, lagged behind. Arnold slowed the *Congress* to protect the stricken row-galley, and thereby initiated the second phase of the engagement east of Split Rock Point.

October 13

This morning at day light we espied several sail, and as it grew light we saw the enemies ship [*Inflexible*] and 2 schooners [*Maria* and *Carleton*] but a little astern of our fleet; and about 9 o'clock came up with our fleet and fired at the *Washington* galley and *Congress* galley. And after four or five shots the *Washington* galley strike without firing one gun, General Waterbury being on board; they having taken some of our gundeloes before. But the galley *Congress* sustained the fire of the two schooners, ship, etc. till about half after twelve, when she and four of the gundeloes thrust into a small crick on the east side of the lake, and we saw a great expulsion [explosion] and supposed, as General Arnold was aboard the galley, that he ordered them blown up.

De Angelis' assumption that Arnold had exploded the vessels was not unfounded. After first corralling several of the crippled gondolas, his seamen rowed the stricken flagship into Button Bay on the Vermont shore (due west of Vergennes and east of Westport, New York), where he fired the vessels before the British could make a landing.

Meanwhile, the *Lee* was beached and destroyed on the west side of the lake, and the remaining vessels of the American fleet, the *Enterprise*, *Trumbull* and *Revenge* and several gondolas scattered and were thereby saved from destruction.

We were closely persued, but by roeing and heaving out our ballace and makeing all the sail we could, we arived att Crown Point about half after one o'clock. The end of the fight.

Technically, it was a defeat for the Americans; their fleet was virtually liquidated. They had lost eighty in dead and wounded, and one hundred aboard the *Washington* had been captured. Continuing his offensive Carleton forced the evacuation of Crown Point and pushed ahead toward Ticonderoga, the last American stronghold on the lake. But it was now late fall,

and he decided to return to Montreal and await the coming of spring. His hesitation postponed the British invasion until 1777 and opened the way for the American victory at Saratoga, to be remembered as the turning point of the war. Thus Arnold gave the Americans time to regroup and time to prove to themselves that an ultimate victory was possible.

For De Angelis, the harrowing experience of Valcour Island was only the first of a succession of military experiences. In 1780 he did a nine months' stretch in the Second Regiment of Connecticut Infantry, and in November of 1781, while serving aboard the brig *Lady Green* in the Caribbean, he was wounded and taken as a prisoner to Jamaica. He escaped and made his way to London, where he was impressed into the Royal Navy. But he again escaped and was in Portsmouth, England, when peace was declared. He returned home on October 13, 1783, his twentieth birthday.

After the war he followed the sea for some years, sailing out of East Haddam, Connecticut. In time he owned and commanded several merchantmen in the West Indies trade. He married Elizabeth Webb of Saybrook and fathered eleven children.

In 1795 he purchased a tract of land in Oneida County, New York, and became a founder of Holland Patent. "Six feet in height, straight as an arrow [he] had black eyes, a prominent nose and high forehead, an elegant figure and commanding presence."<sup>8</sup> He died and was buried at Holland Patent in 1839 at seventy-six.

8. Everts and Fariss, *op. cit.*, 569.

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### *Fighting Inflation in 18th Century Vermont:*

In 1781 the town of Wilmington called the Reverend Winslow Packard as its first minister. In his letter of acceptance the Reverend Packard included a cost-of-living clause:

"I understand that you agree whenever you pay ye forementioned sums or any part of them that if the same nominald sum or sums will not purchase as much of the necessaries of life as in ye year one thousand seven hundred and seventy four then ye said sum or sums shall be increased until they will"

— from the *Vermont Record* (Brattleboro), December 15, 1865.