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[Part II]

JOURNAL
Miller's Bay 26th Oct^r 1780

By CAPTAIN JUSTUS SHERWOOD [1747-1798]
Queen's Loyal Rangers

The undertone of danger and threat and at the same time of great events moving darkly into the future pervades Part II of Captain Sherwood's Journal as it does Part I [April Vermont History]. Just what "game" was Ethan Allen, his brother, Ira, Thomas Chittenden, and their associates playing? Captain Sherwood did not know and could only guess. The question is—do we after one hundred and seventy-six years know or must we guess? We intend to find the answer. Editor.

ISLE AUX NOIX—7th. May—81.

Col. Ira Allen arrived (with a flag of truce) in quality of a Commissioner, from Vermont. Just informed me, that as the other Commissioners (from the indisposition of themselves and families) could not come, he was vested with full powers to act in behalf of V——t.

8th. Col. Allen sent his written proposals, for a Cartel, to Maj. Dundas, & c and a private letter to Gen. Haldimand. He informs me, he is not authorised to treat of a Union; but, is verbally instructed by Gov. Chittington and Gen. Allen, to lay their present situation before General Haldimand, and to inform him, that matters are not yet ripe for any permanent proposals; that, they, with some part of the Council, are anxious to bring about a Neutrality, being fully convinced that Congress never intend to admit them as a State, but they dare not make any agreement with Britain, 'till the Populace are better model'd for the purpose—Wish, however, to settle a permanent Cartel, and thereby open a door for further Negotiation.

N.B. Vermont has extended Jurisdiction 20 miles East from Connecticut River, to the ancient Mason Line and West from the N.W. Corner of Massachusetts, to Hudson's River, following up the River to the head, then due North to the Latitude 45°. The eastern Inhabitants are now represented in the Assembly, and the Western, will probably be, by the 15th June next. As this is done by the request

of the People, it will probably soon enable Vermont to make proposals for a Union with Britain, with more safety than at present.

9th. This day, but little Conversation, on account of Mr. Simon, Officer of the Escort—Applied to Col. St. Leger, by Allen's request, and Maj. Dundas' Consent, to have Simon and His Escort removed on board the shipping, but could not obtain it.

10th. Walked and discoursed largely with Allen; he is very cautious and intricate. I urge him, to make some proposals, telling him it is now in the power of Vermont to become a glorious Government, under Great Britain—to be, the Seat of Peace & Plenty, with every kind of Liberty that ever a free people enjoyed, or could wish to enjoy—that he must see that General Haldimand had, in his Instructions to me, conceded to every thing, they could in reason, ask or expect. Allen replied, Gen. Haldimands did not allow them to choose their own Governour, a priviledge they never could relinquish with propriety, as they could always find timber enough to make a Governour, among themselves—and, that when they were ripe for proposals, they could not go farther than Neutrality, during the War; at the end of which, they must, as a seperate Government, be subject to the then ruling Power, if that Power would give them a free Charter, in every sense of the word; but, if not, they would retire to the Mountains, turn Savages and fight the D——l and Hell and human nature at large. I answer—Vermont is not able to do all these extravagant things, and let hot headed Men pretend to what they will, I know human nature too well to be easily persuaded, that the fond, the affectionate Husband, Father, Wife and Mother could ever be prevailed on to leave their agreeable possessions and with their infant Train, lead a savage, wandering Life on the Mountains surrounded by Enemies, from the human and brutal Creation; exposed to hunger, cold and every inconvenience, attending those inhospitable Mountains. I did not pretend to know how far these Chimeras would intimidate Congress, but could assure him, that General Haldimand had too much sagacity and had been too long an experienced Soldier to take any further notice of them, than to treat them with all the contempt they deserved. Col. Allen now began to reason with more coolness and made use of a long chain of arguments, advanced by Gen. Allen to me, at Castletown—(See my Journal of those Proceedings.) I told him, these Arguments had, by me, been already exhibited to His Excellency, and were then very satisfactory to him, but I was certain, the General would now expect some further advances, should therefore advise him, if he could not make any Propositions in behalf of V——t,

to give His Excellency some reasons why he did not. The Conversation again became warm and spirited, especially on Allen's part; for the substance and Spirit of which, see my two Letters to Cap^t. Mathews, dated 11th May.

11th. Col. Allen expresses a great desire to see the General, and his power to treat with Vermont. I tell him, it will give his own people too much jealousy, if he should hold a personal Conference with our Comr. in Chief, and, that he may rest assured, Gen. Haldimand never will promise, or proffer, more than he is amply impowered to fulfill. A——n observes he does not think the Parliament have passed any Act in favour of V——t. I answer, I do not suppose the Parliament of Great Britain have yet considered V——t of consequence enough to engross a Debate in that Assembly. Allen says Vermont must (in his opinion) be consider'd of consequence enough to engross the attention of Parliament, before any permanent Union can take place, between Britain and that People.

12th. This day, have a long and very friendly Conference with Col. Allen; he seems anxious to convince me, that a respectable number of the leading Men of V——t are endeavouring to bring about a Union by way of Neutrality; he appears less reserved and again repeats the Arguments advanced by Gen. Allen, respecting the impossibility of a Union with Britain 'till V——t had fortified herself against the neighbouring States, by a firm, internal Union, and observes, they must firmly unite the Extra Territories, lately taken in, and form the Populace into a proper System for such a Revolution. He says their best Politicians are making every possible Effort to bring this about, that they have sent circular Letters to the different States, as promised by Gen. Allen; he says, they have taken in the new Territories, with a view to embarrass Congress and strengthen themselves for a Revolution; that, many Members (of Assembly) from Connecticut River and East, are friends to the Government of Britain, such as, Judge Wells, Judge Jones, Col. Alcot and many others; that, when the Members from the Western part take their Seats, it is expected a number of them, will be composed of Friends to Government, (or Tories). Col. Allen has given me the following Narrative, as near as I can recollect; viz: Vermont having got information that New Hampshire had renewed her Claims to that State, and had summonsed a Convention of one Member from each Town, for 20 Miles each side Connecticut River, to sit in January. He was deputed to attend said Convention; on his arrival, he found a number of Tories, were Members; he hinted to them, Vermont's

plan of Neutrality, and to the others, the advantage of joining Vermont, by which, they would evade a large burden of Taxes—by these insinuations, he soon gained over the Majority of the Convention, in favour of Vermont. They adjourned 'till february when a Committee was appointed to take this matter under consideration, and the Committee reported in favour of a Union with V—t; this report was carried to the V—t Assembly, then convened at Windsor, where it was ratified and Articles of Union drawn up and sent out for the approbation of the People, which was so unanimous, that Members were soon appointed from each Town, to sit in the Assembly. Col. Allen was sent from this Convention, to the Assembly of N. York, then sitting at Albany, with an official demand from Gov. Chittington to them, to relinquish their Claims on V—t, to which, the Senate agreed; but, not meeting with the same success, with Gov. Clinton and the Assembly, he returned to the Assembly of Vermont with his report, which immediately made Articles of Union agreeable to the petition from the People, on the Western Part, and recommended a Convention of those people, to take the Articles into consideration and join the Assembly in June next. In Consequence of the Eastern Union, they have formed three Brigades, the first, commanded by Gen. Allen, on the West side the Mountains; the second, by Brig. Gen. Bellows on the East side the River; the third, by Brig. Gen. Olcott, on the west side; on the east side the Mountains, besides their Lt. Gov. Carpenter—Allen thinks, when the Western Union is compleat, they can raise ten thousand fighting Men; he says, this great and sudden revolution has been brought about on the principles of a Union with Britain, or at least, of V—t being a neutral power during the War. Allen does not agree with Mr. J—n, that the majority of the people wish to compromise with Britain, but says, their prejudices are yet so great, that it would not be safe to propose it, but to a few among the populace, and they have not yet dared to propose it to the half of the ruling Men.

13th. Col. Allen still appears desirous to convince me that the principal Men in Vermont, are striving to prepare the people for a change, in favour of Government; he wishes me to represent every thing in the most favourable manner to the General, and hopes he will not be impatient; he says, it is as requisite the people should be prepossessed against the proceedings of Congress before they are invited to a Union with Britain, as it is for a christian New Light to be perfectly willing to be dam—d, before he can become a true Convert. This evening, Mr. Allen was observing, that the dam—d

Bustles among the Powers of Europe, would within six months, change the face of American Affairs, but did not know, nor care, whether for the better, or worse. I replied, he must have a predominant wish, as neutrality in principle, was in my opinion, inadmissible. He said, he should not deny, but principle inclined him and V——t in general, to wish for the Success of America; but, Interest and Self-preservation (if Congress continued to oppress them) more strongly inclined them to wish for the Success of Britain, and fight like Devils against their Oppressors, be they, who they might.

14th. This day, Col. Allen seems immersed in Contemplation, in consequence of some news, of the advantage the English have already gain'd over the Dutch; the unanimous and spirited conduct of Great Britain; their raising twelve millions of money, without the least embarrassment, & c. He says, should Britain, by some dam—d turn of fortune, gain a Victory over the combined Fleets, all Europe would not be able to contend with her, and he would give almost his Fortune, to be able at this time, to know what will be the fate of America. He hopes I will not represent any of our Conversation, in such a light, as to incline General Haldimand to break off the Negotiation; for he will assure me, the leading Men of V——t, are sincerely anxious to continue it, in such a manner, as to bring about a pacification.

15th. Col. Allen seems exceedingly anxious to return, and often says, his presence will be very necessary at the next Assembly, as they will not know how to proceed, till they hear what he has to report, from General Haldimand.

16th. Converse some time, with Col. Allen; he informs me, that Gen. Washington has not been at Albany, the Winter past; but, Lady Washington was there, accompanied by Lord Sterling; that she came on a party of pleasure, went to see the Cataracts on the Mohock River; dined two days, with Gen. Schuyler, tarried one week at Albany, then returned to Gen. Washington at Morristown. Allen says, Gen. Washington is, and ever has been, against the Independency of Vermont, as it is repugnant to his darling object, of engrossing to Virginia, all the immense Country, West of that State; that, for the same reason, Maryland was in favour of Vermont and refused to sign the confederacy, 'till Virginia would renounce her claim and consent to have the unsettled Lands, equally divided among the Southern States. This Dispute being amicably settled, last October, Maryland signed the Confederacy; it was now thought, Vermont had no resource, and N. York, N. Hampshire and Massachusetts viewed her as an easy prey; but, she soon found means, to embarrass them (at

least) for a time, by taking a bold step, to extend Jurisdiction, East and West, and creating divisions in the Cabinets of those States; for, a party in N. Hampshire, became jealous of having the Seat of Government removed Westward, to accommodate those people settled so far West of Exeter or Portsmouth, for which reason, they would not oppose Vermont's taking them into Jurisdiction, and, they are now laying every intrigue in the Cabinet and in public, to get the Province of Main annexed to N. Hampshire. In Massachusetts, a respectable number are equally jealous, that their Seat of Government will be removed, to accommodate the Province of Main; to prevent this, they are willing and even desirous, that Vermont should hold what she has engrossed to the Eastward, and N. Hampshire have the Province of Main, as an equivalent. In the State of N. York, there is a formidable party against Gov. Clinton, and a subtle Partisan (to head them) who wishes to step into Clinton's Shoes. This party, to get an accusation against Clinton, advised him to relinquish all Claim to Vermont, which they insisted on, 'till Clinton threatened to prorogue the Assembly. As soon as Vermont extended Jurisdiction to Hudson's River, the Party in opposition to Clinton, loudly exclaimed against him, for provoking Vermont, to this daring Step, and publicly declared, they would never lend any assistance to get this Territory back, 'till Clinton would relinquish his Claim to Vermont, which he positively declares, he never will do.

Col. Allen says, Gen. Washington was exceedingly anxious to learn the business of the british Flag to Vermont, and examined every Man on Oath, that came to his Camp, from that State, for some time after; but did not, finally, appear satisfied with the accounts he obtained.

17th. Maj. Lernoult arrives, with a new Commission, in which he is included. Col. Allen is very anxious to know the reason of his being sent, and, desires me to represent every thing in the most favourable light to him, and assures me that whatever indifference he appeared to shew, on his first arrival, arose from tenaciousness, (as a public Agent) for the Liberty of his Country, but, that he should consider it the greatest misfortune, that could happen to him, should he be the means of breaking off the Negotiation, while there was the least prospect of succeeding, as he should be much censured at home. He expresses a desire to converse with Major Lernoult.

18th. Received the General's answer to letters of the 8th. As much of those Letters, as concerned Mr. Allen, was communicated to him. I walk with him, and endeavour to persuade him to make

some Overtures to Gen. Haldimand; but, he still says, he is not authorised and therefore, can not do any thing of the kind; he thinks Gen. Haldimand will be convinced by the reasons he has given in writing, that Vermont Leaders are doing all that is possible, to effect a Union, or Neutrality; and that Gen. Allen was obliged, for his own safety, to send Col. Robinson's Letters to Congress as it was previously known in public, that such Letters had been sent to him; this was done by the voice of the Legislators, with their public approbation of Gen. Allen's conduct, in not detaining the Man that brought the Letter, which had a great tendency to weaken the prejudices of the People, in favour of the Congress. Gov. Chittington would have been happy to have had it in his power, to give him private Instructions for an Accommodation, but he is (with his Council) under the Eye of the more popular Legislator, and can not act as a British General can; for, had he given such private Instruction, he was not in a condition to support them, nor to keep faith with Gen. Haldimand, without the consent of the Legislature, which they are endeavouring to unite, in the plan of a Reunion, but have not yet effected it. Col. Allen sends a Letter to the Commissioners, with new Proposals for an Exchange.

20th. He receives an Answer, which seems to give him much uneasiness in his mind. He says, he shall never be able to persuade his Employers, that Gen. Haldimand wishes to agree to any Terms with them, except he is able to shew them some certainty of an Exchange when the Prisoners are produced. He sends a second Letter to the Commissioners and a private Note to Major Lernoult.

21st. I communicate to Allen, His Excellency's Letter of the 14th Inst. He requests a Copy, but I refuse to give any Copy from the General's Letters, and observe, that I think he has no right to demand any, 'till he has made some written proposals on the part of Vermont. Allen says, he is now perfectly satisfied of the General's powers to treat, and acknowledges that His Excellency acts, with a noble Generosity and Candour, which he will endeavour to equal on his part. In justice to His Excellency, he will engage to efface as much as he can, the idea of a Truce subsisting between Great Britain and Vermont; he is very sorry he is not able to enter on any Proposals for a reunion; declares, upon his honour, that he sincerely wishes for such an Event, will use all his influence to bring it about, and is certain that his Brother will do the same, but, is much afraid, that Gen. Haldimand will not have patience to wait the time it will necessarily require. He observes, (as usual) the difficulty of changing

popular Bodies, & c, & c; he promises, on the honour of a Gentleman, to do his endeavour, to have Commissioners appointed and properly authorized, for treating on a Reunion, by the 20th of next July, provided they can be assured of exchanging what Prisoners they shall then bring to the Shipping; but, if he can not assure them of this, he thinks they will not listen to any thing he can say.

22nd. This day, I have considerable Conversation with Allen, for the heads of which, see my private Letter to Maj^r. Lernoult, and Allen's private Note, of this day's date.

23rd. Col. Allen expatiates on the difficulties and danger attending the bringing about a Revolution, as a Number of the Councils, and the major part of the Legislators, have not as yet, the least Idea of any thing farther than Neutrality, and many of the Legislators are ignorant of that. He expresses his fears that it will not be accomplished, although he sincerely wishes it may; he still thinks the principles on which America first took Arms, were just, but, he sees, with regret, that Congress has learned to play the Tyrant, and he is convinced, that it is for the safety and interest of Vermont, to accept of General Haldimands Terms. I tell him, he talks very well, but I wish he had said as much, when he first arrived, for, however convinced I may be of his candour, this Change gives some room for suspicion, that he now acts from design. He replies, that General Haldimand's Candour demands the same from him; says, he has not altered his Sentiments, but only thrown them out, more freely than he at first, intended, 'till he had further Instructions from his Employers; but the candid, open manner of the General's Letter to me, he says, forbids his acting with any disguise.

24.th Col. Allen is much the same in conversation, as yesterday, but observes, that as he knows the General will very soon hear what Reports he makes and how he conducts himself, after he gets home, he wishes to have me clearly inform the General with the method he must take, to comply with his demand, of undeceiving the other States, respecting the Truce, & c.—He says, he must, as far as he dare, possess the Minds of the People with the Idea of a Reunion; he shall therefore, tell their own Officers, commanding the Regiment, that lies at Castletown, that he can not tell what may take place, but they must keep themselves in readiness for all Events; but, to the other States, he shall positively declare, that no Truce, nor probability of a Truce, subsists between Gen. Haldimand & Vermont and this, he should have done for their own safety, but, in compliance to the General's desire, he shall now be very particular in the Declaration.

25th. I communicate Capt. Mathews's Letters to Col. Allen, respecting news: He says, this News gives him no farther anxiety, than to excite in him a desire to know, how this War will finally end; for, under the present uncertainty of Vermont, he does not know, whether this News is favourable or unfavourable to him; but, he well knows, that he and his Family have a large fortune, which they do not intend to lose, if there is a possibility of saving it; at any hazard, he is determined that Congress shall not have the parcelling of his Lands to their avaricious Minions. I then shewed him Capt. Mathews's Letter of the General's sentiments; he appeared very much pleased with it and engaged his honour, that the General should hear from their Assembly, by the 20th of next July, and as much sooner, as possible, but did not think he should be able to send any certain account of their result 'till about that time, as they would not assemble 'till near the middle of June, and must sit some time before the business could be fairly opened to the whole House; after which it would necessarily occasion long and warm Debates, let it turn as it would in the end. Mr. Allen and myself agree on a Signal, which we put in writing, signed by both; this Signal is for his Messenger.

Should General Haldimand find it absolutely necessary to send a private Express to Vermont, Col. Allen desires it may be by a Man of trust, who must be directed to make himself known to, either Governor Chittington, Gen. Allen, Col. Allen, or one of the following Gentlemen, Col. Brownson, Doctor Fay, Judge [Facit?], or Capt. Lyon. The contents of the Message should be a secret to the Messenger, wrote on a small piece of paper, which he should be directed to swallow, or otherwise destroy, if in danger of being taken by a Scout from N. York, and, he should be very careful to shun the Vermont Scouts. On these conditions Col. Allen engages that the Messenger shall be immediately sent back.

Col. Allen, after expressing much satisfaction with the polite treatment he had received, embarked about 12 o'clock.

(Signed)

J. Sherwood.

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE JOURNAL

For one hundred and seventy years Vermonters and historians have argued the issue as to Ethan Allen's purpose in his secret negotiations with General Haldimand. The controversy has ranged from invective to cool appraisal. The basic document on which both accusation and defense rests is the Journal which you have, we will assume, read. What do you think?