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Propaganda, Pestilence, and Prosperity: Burlington's Camptown Days During the War of 1812

The arrival of the U.S. Army first doubled then tripled Burlington's population. The presence of 3,000–4,000 troops simultaneously boosted the local economy and created a number of social problems.

By KAREN STITES CAMPBELL

Colonel Isaac Clark surveyed the scene before him on the morning of June 21, 1813. The crowd gathering at the U.S. Army encampment along the Burlington waterfront expected to witness the execution of eight deserters, four condemned to die by the gallows, four to face the firing squad. To the solemn beat of regimental drums, the troops marched into the parade grounds and formed a square. The doomed soldiers were led into the center of the square and faced Colonel Clark, resplendent astride a white horse, his commander's sword hanging by his side. The prisoners fell to their knees and begged for mercy: "We have offended and broken the laws of our country, and by them, we are condemned to suffer the most ignominious punishment. . . . We do as our only hope cling to the belief we shall be spared." All eyes turned to Colonel Clark when he responded: "Soldiers—You whose lives have become forfeited for the crime of desertion . . . know, that the government, through me . . . has permitted you to return to duty, graciously *pardoned you*." Clark warned the assembled troops never to expect such clemency again, for in the future "retributive justice will be as exemplary and terrible as its mercy has been conspicuous." For the benefit of the anxious townspeople, Clark stressed that the compassionate pardon by the U.S. Army demonstrated "that we are slow to punish, and do not delight in unnecessary severity."¹ The army successfully averted

a public relations disaster; with the drama concluded, the crowd quietly dispersed.

This event illustrates the history of Burlington during the War of 1812. Drama and anticipation, followed by abrupt, about-face change of plans by the army and tensions between the townspeople and the troops. The weekly *Burlington Centinel*, the only newspaper in Chittenden County, attempted to shape public opinion in favor of the war cause espoused by the Democratic-Republican faction. Case in point: the *Centinel* printed only a brief notice of the execution of Peter Bailey for desertion in Burlington on June 11, 1813. The public pardon, just ten days later, elicited a great deal of coverage. The *Centinel* reprinted the entire text of the soldiers' petition for clemency and Clark's speech granting a full pardon. Throughout the war years, the Burlington newspaper never wavered from reporting favorably about the progress of the war, the actions of the Champlain District troops, and the local Democratic-Republican Party.

Besides shedding light on the times in its role as a propaganda machine for the pro-war faction, the *Centinel* provides a wealth of information for the study of Burlington's camptown days during the War of 1812. Most accounts of the war in the Champlain Valley have focused on the decisive victory of Commodore Thomas Macdonough and General Alexander Macomb over superior British naval and land forces at the Battle of Plattsburgh on September 11, 1814. The impact of the presence of thousands of troops on the near-frontier town of Burlington and the surrounding area deserves greater study. The scant attention Burlington receives in histories of the War of 1812 concentrates on three subjects: the takeover of the University of Vermont's main building by the army, the devastation of the 1813 epidemic, and the bombardment of Burlington that same year. The first is inaccurate, the second misunderstood, and the third overstated.

The arrival of the U.S. Army first doubled then tripled Burlington's population. The presence of 3,000–4,000 troops simultaneously boosted the local economy and created a number of social problems. While there is a paucity of manuscript material for this period, what does survive helps to illuminate the local response to the war and the socioeconomic impact of Burlington's camptown years. The *Centinel* provides excellent insight into Burlington's reaction to the crisis at hand, as well as the newspaper's attempts to shape public opinion.

BURLINGTON'S CAMPTOWN DAYS

The village of Burlington was rife with rumors throughout the spring of 1812. Tempers ran high and speculation rose among the townsfolk on the possibility of war with Great Britain. Democratic-Republicans clamored for the annexation of British Canada in the name of national

honor and sovereignty, loudly denouncing antiwar Federalists as Tories and traitors. Federalists called for neutrality, accusing the Democratic-Republicans of favoring dictatorship by supporting Napoleon. Families divided on the issues, neighbors quarreled, and farmers argued with merchants in Burlington's Court House Square while trading their produce for goods. Only one thing seemed certain: if war came, the Champlain Valley's strategic location for an invasion of Canada placed Burlington squarely in the center of any action.

Nestled along the eastern shore of Lake Champlain, Burlington enjoyed its position as the leading commercial center in the Champlain Valley at the start of the nineteenth century. The earlier efforts of the Allen family, continued by shipping entrepreneurs such as Guy Catlin and Gideon King, had established the village as a lively trading post for transporting lumber, potash, and produce to Montreal and Quebec City in exchange for manufactured goods. The Champlain Valley formed an almost exclusive economic dependence on Canada for both the export and import trade. Fortunes were made and livelihoods depended upon this commerce.

President Thomas Jefferson's first embargo in 1807 did not include inland trade. However, the Second Supplementary Act the following year made trade between Vermont and Canada illegal, and Vermonters in the Champlain Valley and along the northern border reacted with frustrated rage. Vermont congressman Martin Chittenden, the son of Vermont's first governor and a confirmed Federalist, contended that these measures were meant to "frighten the people into an acquiescence . . . to schrew [*sic*] up their courage & feelings to a war tone." Embargo or not, profits prevailed over patriotism, and trade actually increased during the embargo years, either through clever circumvention of the laws or by outright smuggling.²

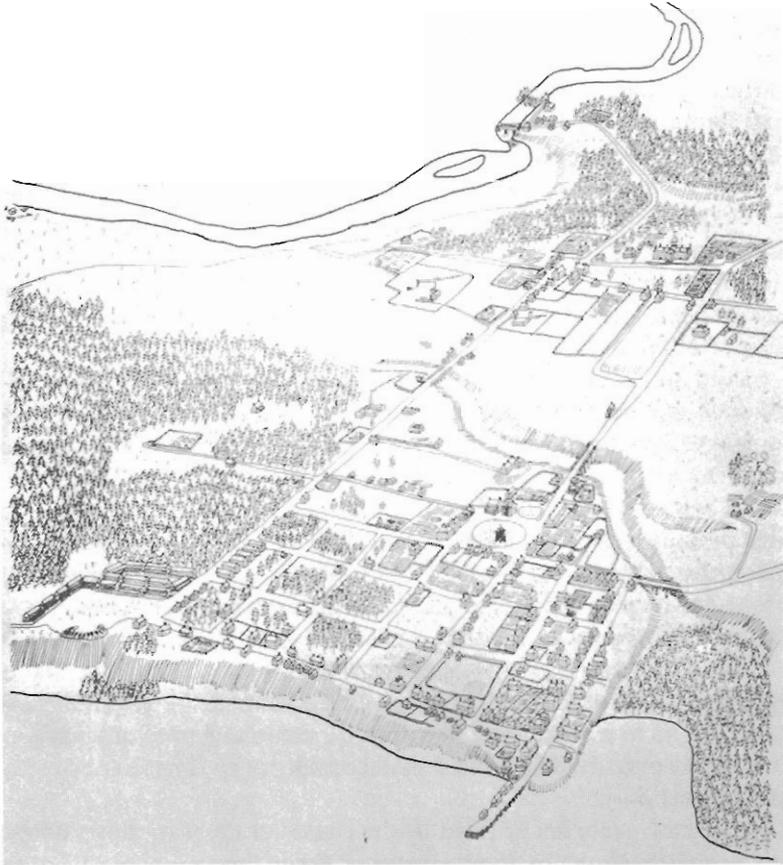
The embargo polarized Vermont politics as never before. The Federalist Party gained popularity throughout the embargo years as Vermonters grew increasingly disgruntled over the interruption of trade with Canada. Federalist Isaac Tichenor's election as governor in 1808 reflected the dissatisfaction with the embargo. Yet in the election for Congress that same year, Vermont divided its votes and sent two Federalists and two Democratic-Republicans to the U.S. House of Representatives. Clearly, the people of the state were split on the issue of national policy versus local economy. Vermonters lost some of their confidence in the national Federalist Party as it underwent a transition from the ideology of Alexander Hamilton and John Adams, who advocated for a strong, centralized government, toward a radical movement for New England's outright secession from the young nation.

Vermonters' desire for unrestricted commerce with Canada was one thing, but with the hard-won struggle for statehood still a fresh memory, secession was quite another. Vermont elected Democratic-Republican Jonas Galusha governor in 1809, a position he held until 1813. Nevertheless, Vermont's Democratic-Republican Party leaders expected that a decision to declare war on Great Britain would stimulate vigorous opposition by Vermont Federalists. For Vermont, as for the nation, the War of 1812 was characterized as much by the internal struggle for political ideology and party power as by a drive for national goals.³

In 1809 Lake Champlain's first steamer, the *Vermont*, sputtered its way through the waters alongside the fleets of sailing ships and lumber rafts. Burlington's population doubled between 1800 and 1810 to 1,690 inhabitants. Although the largest community in Chittenden County, Burlington lagged well behind the older towns in the southern parts of the state. By 1812 a thriving commerce defined the town. Taverns, shops, and dwellings crowded along the waterfront area near the busy wharf. Shops of all sorts – an apothecary, hattery, goldsmith, bookstore, saddle shop, and numerous general stores – lined Court House Square in the commercial center of town. North of College Street, Church Street was “little more than a foot path.” More shops and inns were located higher up the hill near the college green. Daniel Staniford, the town sheriff, operated a successful brewery and distillery of “excellent gin.” Two more distilleries contributed to Burlington's production of 1,000 gallons of spirits in 1811. Horace Loomis's tannery led the county in its annual production of 2,000 tanned hides. A few textile factories, already established near Winooski Falls, annually wove 10,000 yards of linen, wool, and cotton cloth. A wool-carding business and a nail factory operated with equal success.⁴

Burlington boasted the most magistrates in the state: eleven justices of the peace and fourteen lawyers, compared to six lawyers for the rest of Chittenden County. But other social institutions developed more slowly. Religion came late to town; although organized in 1805, the Congregational Society did not construct its church building until 1812, and even then the membership numbered a mere 100 souls. The fledgling University of Vermont consisted of only one building with an entire student body of fewer than fifty scholars guided by a handful of faculty. With entrepreneurs and professionals providing their services, shopkeepers offering a wide array of imported goods, and stately homes beginning to dot the hillside, Burlington was the center of sophistication in a predominantly agricultural county.⁵

Into this scene rode Isaac Clark of Castleton, Vermont, as the newly appointed colonel of the Eleventh U.S. Infantry. Called to duty on June 9,



Map of Burlington during the War of 1812. The U.S. Army established an encampment in Burlington on the bluffs overlooking Lake Champlain (lower left). Barracks, an arsenal, and a hospital outlined the parade grounds and six 24-pound cannons mounted on an earthen embankment guarded the town. Map by David Blow. Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Vermont.

1812, Clark readily responded to the task of preparing Burlington for the likelihood of war. Vermont's U.S. senator Jonathan Robinson wrote to Clark warning him of the inevitable declaration of war and advised him to "whet up your sword but say nothing at Present." Clark tried to maintain discretion by buying in his own name two 5-acre lots overlooking the lake for the military headquarters, then selling the land to the government.⁶

However, Burlingtonians knew war was imminent when 550 U.S. infantry and artillery troops marched into town a few days later. Under the direction of Lieutenant Sylvester Churchill, a native Vermonter, they fortified the bluff overlooking the lake with an earthen embankment cut with thirteen embrasures. Six big guns, fitted to fire 24-pound cannonballs, guarded the town and served as a warning to the British fleet. Five hundred more troops arrived on June 16. The *Centinel* promised to keep the citizens informed, as important events “will in all probability, take place not far distant from this place.” Little doubt of impending conflict remained when 700 additional soldiers, under the command of Brigadier General John Chandler, marched from Boston to join the camp by the end of the month.⁷

Indeed, the official declaration of war on June 18 came as little surprise—although the local response seems somewhat surprising in that a good number of Burlingtonians supported the vote for war. Almost 40 percent voted Democratic-Republican in the hotly contested gubernatorial election in September. Considering the disruption of normal trade activities, what prompted any citizen (even a good Democratic-Republican) dependent upon commerce to favor the war? The *Centinel* hired a new editor to express its pro-war stance and keep the Federalists at bay. Ignatius Thomson, formerly of Pomfret, stated the case: “The cause in which I am about to engage . . . is the cause of my country against the abuses and aggressions of foreign nations. . . . To support the government in its endeavors to avenge these injuries . . . and slanders of unprincipled men and disorganized factions, I shall consider at all times to be my first and greatest duty.”⁸

Vermonters were not affected by the causes of the war, these “abuses and aggressions”: not by impressment of American sailors or violations of maritime rights or Indian troubles in the West. More mercenary reasons prompted many Vermonters to support what became known as Mr. Madison’s war. A faction of Southern Democratic-Republicans eager for war and pro-expansionists, known in Congress as the War Hawks, swayed some New England politicians with the prospects of acquiring Canada and of local profits from supplying the war effort. As Virginia’s John Randolph noted, “The upper country on the Hudson and the Lakes would be enriched by the supplies for the troops, which they alone could furnish. They would have the exclusive market; to say nothing of the increased preponderance from the acquisition of Canada.”⁹

Royall Tyler, chief justice of the Vermont Supreme Court, wrote to Congressman James Fisk, a fellow Democratic-Republican Vermonter, urging him to vote for war to ensure the supremacy of the party. Tyler deemed the war vote of paramount importance, as the singular issue ulti-

mately determining the fate of the two national parties. The patriotic spirit of wartime spelled the ruin of the Federalists, he argued, and the Democratic-Republican Party would emerge triumphant.

A declaration of war will confound the Federalists; it will derange their present plans which are calculated only for political campaigns . . . invite many Federalists into the army—and soldiers are always patriotic in time of war; it will relieve commerce from the embargo, and by opening new sources of risk or gain will break the mercantile phalanx; and above all it will place the opposition on slippery ground, and drive them to silence or rebellion. I do not fear the latter.¹⁰

The majority of Vermont's congressional delegates voted for declaring war on Great Britain. Vermont and New Hampshire cast the only yes ballots from New England and New York when the U.S. House voted on the declaration of war. Three of the four Vermont congressmen endorsed the declaration (Federalist Martin Chittenden casting the one negative vote). When the Senate called its roll, although Senator Stephen R. Bradley abstained from voting, Vermont stood out as the lone New England state to side with the War Hawks.¹¹

News of the official declaration of war reached Burlington on July 2, 1812, in time for the Independence Day celebrations. The *Centinel* called for a "return to the Spirit of '76." The local Democratic-Republican Party recognized the advantageous timing and called a countywide meeting in Williston for July 4. In his address to the assembly, Burlington lawyer (and future governor) Cornelius Van Ness justified the proposed conquest of Canada with the explanation that since the United States initiated the war, therefore "it must be a war of offense . . . it must certainly be a war of conquest." He closed with an appeal to both political parties to "throw away their party animosities, and unite their strength in this great contest" and pleaded with Vermont Federalists not to demonstrate their opposition by aiding the enemy.¹²

Van Ness's appeal for the conquest of Canada tantalized pro-war Vermonters. Colonel Clark's son, Satterlee, a lieutenant at Annapolis, pledged to leave his appointment at the word of invasion: "There is nothing which would give me greater pleasure than to march through Vermont on my route to Canada and to witness the chagrin & mortification of tories."¹³ As Royall Tyler predicted, strong anti-Federal Party sentiments proved a powerful motive for Vermont Democratic-Republicans to support the war cause.

Chittenden County Federalists had their say the following month with a public speech by George Robinson of Burlington, candidate for a seat in the Vermont legislature. According to Robinson, true patriots understood that the dispute between the United States and Great Britain did



Masthead of the Northern Sentinel, Burlington, April 1, 1814. The pro-war newspaper advocated the politics of the Democratic-Republicans throughout the war. The weekly added this drawing of a U.S. soldier to its masthead in 1814. Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Vermont.

not warrant war; negotiation would repair the injuries as “demanded by the interest or honor” of the nation. The Madison government showed disastrous judgment in meddling in the Napoleonic wars and promoting “the cause of the Tyrant of France.” Robinson agreed with Martin Chittenden’s warning to Congress about the dangers of waging war to annex Canada: “When we visit the peaceable, and, as to us innocent, colonies of G. Britain with the horrors of war can we be assured that our own coast will not be visited with like horrors?” Robinson dismissed the idea of annexing Quebec as “a province which we do not want and which would be a curse to us did we possess it.” He summed up the general attitude of the antiwar faction: “We were born Americans, and Americans we would be--as a neutral nation.”¹⁴

The *Centinel* played an active role in the contest for luring votes away from the Federalist faction. Editorials espousing the virtue of the Democratic-Republican cause dominated the August 1812 papers. One such plea, addressed to the Congregational clergy in Franklin and Chittenden Counties, warned them not to serve as “the dupes of a political party” by supporting the Federalist opposition:

It seems, Gentlemen, you have nearly to a man united with a political party, and are using all your influence to give that party aid and comfort . . . Do you, Gentlemen, feel willing to wound the feelings of your republican brethren, of your respective churches or societies, by uniting with their enemies? Does your religion warrant your attending the midnight meetings of a society, the most obnoxious to the friends of the American government, of any ever set on foot by the enemies of the constitution of the United States?

The editorial concluded with a final warning for the ministers to consider that “a large proportion of the people of your charge are firm supporters of our republican government,” not inclined to make contributions to support “political preachers.”¹⁵

“NOT FIT FOR SOLDIERS”

While the local political parties waged their war of words, the U.S. Army hurriedly set up recruiting stations in Burlington, Montpelier, Middlebury, and Swanton. The government called for able-bodied males aged fourteen to forty-five to enlist for a five-year period and offered an enlistment bonus of \$16 with 160 acres of land upon discharge. According to one officer, Colonel Clark's son, recruiting efforts fell on deaf ears in Montpelier: “there is no patriotism in this place it is the damdest [*sic*] federal hole that I ever saw.” Recruitment proceeded slowly as well in Burlington—and in fact throughout the state. Alarmed by the lack of patriotic response, the *Centinel* published an editorial calling for more volunteers: “Let not the recording pen of the historian announce to posterity, that Vermont is so lost to a love of country . . . she would not vigorously step forth.”¹⁶

Although a roster of Vermonters who served in the war lists more than 10,000 soldiers, most enlisted for short periods with local militia companies. Sample records indicate that service ranged from a few days to a few months. Moreover, one in five recruits volunteered just for the march to Plattsburgh to defend the Champlain Valley during that famous battle near the end of the war.¹⁷

When the troops first arrived in Burlington, the *Centinel* reported that they were “likely ambitious young men, and generally of good families, their behavior . . . worthy of Americans.”¹⁸ Throughout the war years, the *Centinel* praised the quality of the recruits and the good care and attention their officers gave them. Those same officers, however, left behind records that contradict this favorable opinion. Dr. James Mann, chief army hospital surgeon for the Champlain District, accused recruiting officers of “filling up their rolls with numbers” rather than with “able-bodied men.” Mann described many recruits as “not fit for soldiers . . . habitually intemperate . . . whose bloated countenances exhibited false and insidious marks of health”; he deemed nearly half of the newly enlisted men not “capable of active duty.” Also allowed to pass muster were many old and unfit men, “who in consequence of bad habits, and infirm constitutions, could find no other employment.”¹⁹

After the war, Major Orsamus Merrill, stationed in Burlington with the Twenty-sixth Infantry, explained the problem of finding proper recruits: “The hardihood of the laborer was not that species of hardihood essential to the soldier.” Merrill asserted that the local civilians, “fondled in the lap of plenty and its indulgencies,” lacked the fortitude to endure the “fatigue and privations incidental to military life.”²⁰

Nor did the government offer much monetary incentive to entice enlistments. Privates received a mere \$5 monthly pay, increased to \$8 in

December 1812. In contrast the average Vermont farm laborer in 1812 earned \$11.67 per month plus board.²¹ Considering the choices—decent pay, warm food and board, and the relative safety of farm life versus low pay, army rations, long marches, and the high risks of war—it seems no surprise that after the first flush of patriotic fervor the call to arms generated little response.

PROSPERITY AND OPPORTUNITY

With the arrival of the troops, the population of Burlington doubled almost overnight, creating an instant market and new opportunities. Several prominent Burlingtonians received government appointments. John Johnson, architect, surveyor, and county clerk, served as inspector general to oversee conditions at the camp facilities.²² Nathan B. Haswell, former customs inspector, ran the commissary for distributing army rations from his cellar-turned-storehouse. Farmers interested in selling their livestock to the army went through Haswell. He also operated the “auction store” on Court House Square—a clearinghouse to resell government-seized goods smuggled into Vermont from Canada. Local merchants bought these confiscated wares then resold them to the general public with the government’s sanction. Otherwise illegal, imported luxury goods ranging from St. Croix rum to chocolate and spices thus continued to be available to the local community.²³

The real boon for the area’s economy centered on feeding the Champlain District troops. Because of the lack of an easy transportation system and refrigeration, all the produce, meat, and bread to satisfy a hungry army had to come from local sources. Each soldier’s daily rations consisted of 1 pound of beef or pork, 1 pound of bread, and 4 ounces of rum, whiskey, or brandy. Area farmers and distilleries prospered as Burlingtonians seized the opportunities at hand. Two enterprising brothers, Henry and Nathan Mayo, won the contract for baking all the bread for the troops. With an average of 1,000 soldiers stationed in the Burlington camp at any one time, the Mayo ovens baked day and night to meet the demand. No wonder that Catlin’s Mill frequently advertised “Cash for Wheat—500 bushels needed.” Cheap boardinghouses and taverns sprang up along the waterfront near the encampment. One tavern, “kept by one Chandonette, a Parisian,” was especially popular with the soldiers.²⁴

Many merchants stocked their stores with goods designed to catch the eyes of soldiers with a little loose change to spend. Samuel Mills’s bookstore advertised *The Soldier’s Drill*, *The Rules and Articles of War*, and maps of “every probable seat of war” in lower and upper Canada. The local tailor now specialized in military uniforms “in the most fashion-

able mode on reasonable terms." Assorted "military and dry goods" were offered for sale at L. and F. Curtis's store. And all the general stores stocked ample supplies of spirits.²⁵

The presence of troops created numerous job possibilities for local residents. The *Centinel* carried advertisements seeking journeymen shoemakers, printers, blacksmiths, druggists, weavers, and hatters. Army provisions were stored in barrels and transported by boats and wagons for regiments on the move to the northern frontiers and the rendezvous at Sacketts Harbor, New York. Burlington's lone cooper soon found the job too much to handle and hired ten extra journeymen to "work at trimming [the] government provisions in this place." Locally hired teamsters drove wagons and sleighs filled with supplies, and small sloops sailed between the two headquarters at Burlington and Plattsburgh.²⁶

There were other, more subtle changes in Burlington as well. Advertisements appeared in the *Centinel* for ladies and gentlemen to have their hair "Cut and Dressed in the latest style." A dressmaker recently arrived from New York announced her skill at designing "fancy goods." Harmon's general store placed a notice regarding the recent receipt of an "assortment of paper hangings" (previously scarce wallpaper). A Mr. Nichols came to town to instruct local youths on the finer points of cotillion and contra dances. *Fashionable* and *elegant* were the key words of the day, reflecting Burlingtonians' pride as the town became a center of refinement and prosperity. But trouble lay ahead.²⁷

THE OPENING CAMPAIGN

The first troops to arrive in the Burlington camp found little more than a parade ground waiting to be cleared. After declaring war, Congress adjourned before appropriating funds for provisions and arms. Colonel Clark complained, "There is not a single musket . . . to take care of the public property" nor even so much as "a single Camp kettle." There were no horses for the officers, no uniforms for the troops, not even drums for the drummer boys. Addressing the most pressing concern first, Clark quickly procured houses for the officers and authorized construction of wooden barracks overlooking the bluff between Pearl and North Streets.²⁸

In late July 1812, General Henry Dearborn finally sent 1,000 muskets for the Champlain District army. Perhaps this is what *Centinel* editor Thomson had in mind when he wrote: "Our land forces begin to have the appearance of an army." Soon thereafter companies of the regiment marched to the northern border for stations in Swanton, Troy, and Derby.²⁹

Initial relations between the soldiers and townsfolk seemed cordial. Colonel Clark expressed his thanks in the *Centinel* for "the polite and

hospitable treatment which I have received from the Inhabitants of Burlington." He praised local residents for their patriotism, for "that love of Country which prefers their own to any government on Earth."³⁰ Despite Clark's flattery, not everyone agreed, and a report from one British officer, Lieutenant Colonel Edward Baynes, thoroughly contradicts this opinion. Baynes traveled through Burlington and western Vermont in August 1812 on a mission from Sir George Prevost to see General Dearborn in Albany about a temporary truce while both sides prepared their recruits. The British commanders in Canada faced the same problems as did the Americans in turning farmers and laborers into soldiers. Prevost sincerely offered a temporary peace out of necessity yet urged Baynes to keep his eyes open while in enemy territory. Dearborn spent four days considering the offer, hesitating about his authority to accept it but finally agreeing to the three-month truce.

Baynes returned to Montreal and reported that the aging Dearborn lacked the "energy of mind or activity of body requisite for the important station he fills." He also told Prevost that he "did not hear a single individual [among the general populace] express a wish but for the speedy accommodation of existing differences. . . . The universal sentiment of this part of the country appears decidedly adverse to war." He noted that the militia appeared completely unprepared, without arms and proper uniforms, and possessed no respect for their officers. Although the militia lacked discipline, the regular army showed no shortage of confidence, "conceiving it to be in their power to pillage Montreal and to march to Quebec whenever they think proper." Despite the army's "high and overrated opinion of their military prowess," Baynes correctly observed: "From the actual state of the American forces assembled on Lake Champlain. I do not think there exists any intention of invading this part of the province."³¹

As Baynes predicted, despite the rhetoric of an intended invasion, the opening campaign passed without a march on Montreal. The Champlain District army was in shambles. General Dearborn procrastinated to the point of inertia. Morale sank when word arrived in mid-September of General William Hull's surrender to an inferior British force at Detroit on August 16. News of the defeat, especially the information that the British had employed Indian troops in the Detroit campaign, heightened fears of an enemy offensive in the Champlain Valley. The *Centinel* voiced the worry: "The towns on the Lake are exposed to invasion especially. . . . We expect to hear of Savage cruelties in some of our towns." Governor Galusha ordered out the militia in the northern towns, expressing "the greatest anxiety for the safety of the frontier inhabitants" yet ad-

mitting the state had no "means of procuring arms" for the militia. Although Lieutenant Thomas Macdonough arrived in September to command a navy, he found at his disposal only two gunboats, both badly in need of repair. Luckily for the Americans, the unorganized enemy forces mobilizing at the southern end of the Richelieu River remained too weak to mount an attack.³²

Democratic-Republican politicians in Vermont worried that the inaction of the army might affect the upcoming state elections in September. Senator Robinson wrote of his chagrin over the botched noncampaign: "the deranged Situation of our Armies & their having done nothing has destroyed the politics of Vermont, disgraced our country. . . . These things will ruin us." He need not have worried; at least for the time being, Vermont stayed true to the Democratic-Republican cause and reelected Governor Galusha. Eight of the fourteen towns in Chittenden County voted for the Democratic-Republican candidate. Federalist Martin Chittenden won a small majority in Burlington, with 170 votes to 112 for Galusha. Dismissing this minor defeat, the *Centinel* confidently affirmed, "Vermont is not so easily cheated out of her constituted liberties by designing men; even secret societies and dark designs only awaken their sense of danger and call forth their exertions."³³

Royall Tyler and the Democratic-Republicans counted on the patriotic enlisted men's vote to help defeat the Federalists on election day. Current voting laws, however, which retained a residency requirement, nullified the potential impact of the soldiers' vote in Burlington, and nonresident soldiers were turned away from the polls. William Harrington, despite his standing as chairman of the local Democratic-Republican Committee, "refused to receive the votes of a part of those freemen in the town whom they did not consider inhabitants of the town." The Vermont legislature quickly passed a law barring a residence restriction for soldiers in future elections. Any Vermont serviceman could now cast his vote "in any town in this state, wherever he may happen to be."³⁴

The General Assembly also enacted a series of laws designed to bolster recruiting efforts. Special volunteer corps raised for a limited period of service and attached to units of the regular army (called detached militia) received a pay incentive of \$10 per month for their service. Moreover, during their tour of duty with either the regular army or the detached militia, Vermont enlisted men enjoyed suspension of all civil processing for debts. And minor debtors currently languishing in jail received exoneration and release upon enlisting. They were perhaps effective ways to attract recruits, but these measures give credence to Dr. Mann's claim about the undesirable character of many enlistees.³⁵

“NOT A COMMON EPIDEMICK”

At the close of 1812, some of the troops moved to quarters in Plattsburgh, and the 1,600 left behind in Burlington endured the long winter's wait. As so often happens when soldiers are crowded together in unsanitary conditions, disease plagued the Northern Army. Over the summer the troops suffered from fevers and—the bane of any army—diarrhea. Autumn brought measles to nearly one-third of the Champlain District soldiers. Although sometimes fatal, the disease was not as deadly as the spotted fever that had afflicted the region the previous year.³⁶

The Champlain District faced a terrible ordeal during the winter of 1812–1813. A deadly epidemic struck, beginning in the camps in Burlington and Plattsburgh and spreading throughout northern Vermont to the middle and finally the southern sections of the state. *Peripneumony notha*—a violent and highly contagious form of pneumonia—filled the lungs with blood and was accompanied by high fever and chills. Death often came within days or even hours after the onset of the first symptoms. Fatalities peaked in December with 150 deaths in the Burlington camp; by Mann's calculations a total of 200–250 soldiers, at least one in eight, died over the winter.³⁷

The first reference to the epidemic did not appear in the *Centinel* until mid-December: “We are happy to have it in our power to state, that the sickness among the Soldiers in this town has abated.” Federalist newspapers from Windsor to Maine printed exaggerated accounts about the extent of the fatalities in the Burlington camp, which the *Centinel* adamantly rejected: “From the public prints you would be induced to believe that the troops [here] have been intirely [*sic*] destroyed by sickness, disease, etc. . . . Their wants have been innumerable [*sic*] and of the most distressing nature. The fact is they have wanted for nothing. . . . While they were sick for a time, health is now perfectly restored.”³⁸

The citizens reacted to the tragedy first with concern and generosity, then with fear and outrage, and finally by turning to their God for comfort. Reports circulated around the state that the sick soldiers suffered from hunger and inadequate medical care. The towns of Jericho, Richmond, and Monkton organized relief efforts, delivering sleighloads of fresh dairy products, vegetables, and poultry for the camp hospitals. Presenting the gifts from Richmond to General Chandler, the driver carefully stated that the donation was given as a gesture of the “patriotism of the citizens,” not because “the wants of the army are not attended to.” Chandler assured the public that the extent of illness had been “wantonly exaggerated” and that the sick received “every attention.”³⁹

When rumors spread about bodies of deceased soldiers spirited off into the night and buried in mass graves, the *Centinel* rebutted the charges.

The second part of this article can be found here:

https://vermonthistory.org/journal/misc/Propoganda_pestilence_vol64_2.pdf