

Victory was Survival:
An Environmental History of Benedict Arnold's 1775 Expedition
Through the Maine Wilderness to Quebec
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History

The alarms of Lexington and Concord had sounded, the British won Bunker and Breeds Hills, and the Continental Army was searching for their next move, a victory; as Private George Morrison illustrated, "the period had now arrived ... to exchange the luxuriant and healthful plains of Cambridge for the inhospitable and dismal regions of the North- To leave delightful fields for barren wildernesses; verdant meadows and enlivening streams for miry marshes and stagnant ponds; and the habitations of man, for the haunts of wild beasts."¹ Like many youths in the early summer of 1775, Morrison enlisted in the newly formed Continental Army and localized militias to fight against the British. Those who enlisted with the Continentals marched to the Continental Army camp in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in May through July 1775, ready to dig in and do their part in the Siege of Boston. Morrison and some 1,100 other troops and their officers would not remain long, volunteering for the wilderness expedition to Quebec, something many of them saw as a welcomed adventure in which they might earn glory. During the summer of 1775, Colonel Benedict Arnold approached the newly appointed Commander in Chief, General George Washington, eager to assist Richard Montgomery and Phillip Schuyler in taking the assumed anti-British Quebec, providing the fledgling fighting force with a needed ally. Arnold was to lead men through the Maine wilderness to Quebec City, "where the two American armies would link up" and "subdue the British defenders either by attack or siege."² Washington, eager to pursue differing military strategies, did not hesitate to pursue the wilderness expedition one

historian characterized as dismaying to well-trained and supplied armies outfitted with everything the American army lacked.³ Armed with John Montross's military journal and map from a decade and a half previous, scouting reports from American spy Jabez Mathews and reports from shipbuilder Reuben Colburn and his scouts, Arnold's expedition set off for Maine on September 11th, 1775.⁴ They all believed the way to be relatively easy; an exciting trek leading to an assured victory. The expedition soon found that nature had other plans for them, and the woods of Maine would put up a battle just as hard and unrelenting as their foes in the British Army.

One of the earliest works on Benedict Arnold's march to Quebec is one of the most environmentally driven in its analysis. Published in 1903, Justin Harvey Smith's *Arnold's March from Cambridge to Quebec* argued, "the march itself was a campaign ... against the forest and the flood, against fatigue, sickness, and famine ... in so keen a struggle the smallest of circumstances was enough to throw the victory."⁵ Smith's work shed light on the critical role of the environment in the march, presenting the idea that it was a greater challenge, if not as great, as facing a traditional enemy.

Other works that present an overview of the Revolutionary War have touched briefly on the Quebec Expedition with varying levels of an environmental focus. Works like Lynn Montross's *Rag, Tag, and Bobtail the Story of the Continental Army 1775-1783*, published in 1952, and John Ferling's 2007 *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence* provide origins of the 1775 expedition and summations of the contributions made by all involved. Ferling's work presents a more environmentally driven history of Arnold's trek through Maine, going into the storm that flooded the Dead River and various terrains of New

England. However, it is not the focus of the section or the work as a whole. Both bring the event to its conclusion and continue with the history of the war for independence.

The "Maine Wilderness" chapter of Don Higginbotham's *Daniel Morgan: Revolutionary Rifleman*, published in 1961, and James A. Huston's "The Logistics of Arnold's March to Quebec," from *Military Affairs* published in 1968, present environmentally driven narratives but come to different conclusions. While not focusing solely on the Quebec expedition, Higginbotham uses the environment to drive the section, arguing how the force beat the odds by simply making it to Canada.⁶ Faced with "exhausting portages, swollen streams, and deep swamps," the chapter credits Daniel Morgan for the expedition's survival. On the other hand, Huston blamed Arnold's use of the heavy batteaux instead of light canoes to transport troops and supplies, something Justin Smith questioned as inaccurate and future works disprove.⁷ Rather than looking at the environment as a contributing cause, Huston blames the march's failure and hardships on the men, unskilled with the batteaux and frontier living, dismissing nature as a cause for the failed attack.⁸ Where Higginbotham leans into the possible impact of the natural world on the expedition's success, Huston leans away, a back and forth within the historiography that continued into the twenty-first century.

Thomas A. Desjardin's *Through a Howling Wilderness Benedict Arnold's March to Quebec 1775*, published in 2012, provides a history of the expedition driven by the role played by the Maine environment. Similar to other works on the subject and Revolutionary War as a whole, Desjardin's work does not claim to do environmental history; however, the methodology of the work suggests the critical role of nature. His narrative driven work recreates the Maine wilderness of 1775 and its effect on the soldiers' minds and bodies. Desjardin's work avoids the jargon Smith relies on while building a detailed narrative of the march, paving the way for

environmental history to enter the dialogue of how the Quebec Expedition and American Revolution are understood.

Though it presents little new information on Arnold's expedition, Sam Brakeley's *in the Wake of America's Hannibal: Tracing Benedict Arnold and the 1775 Expedition to Quebec by Canoe*, published in 2015, presents a unique view of the history. Brakeley, an avid canoer, traced Arnold's march, comparing the terrain the army trekked through in September to November of 1775 with the world of August 2013. Relying on maps of various ages and accounts of the soldiers as presented in Kenneth Lewis Roberts' collection *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition*, Brakeley creates a narrative driven by the environment, how it affected the soldiers, and how it has changed over the centuries.

Recently Blake McGready has looked at the neutral role the environment played during the 1777 Philadelphia campaign, arguing in his 2018 essay that it neither fully served to hamper nor assist the Americans or the British. In "Contested Grounds: An Environmental History of the 1777 Philadelphia Campaign", he notes, "whether it took the forms of heat, thunderstorms, or fog, the weather constantly afforded both sides' strategies. The campaign was just as much a contest between American and British military strength as it was to see which side could more efficiently harness the power of the natural world."⁹ To harness the power of nature is one thing; to be tasked with surviving it is another and needs to be considered in tandem with armies using the natural world to their benefit. The same year, Arthur S. Lefkowitz addressed the need through *Benedict Arnold's Army: The 1775 American Invasion of Canada During the Revolutionary War*. Echoing Justin Smith's work, Lefkowitz keeps the environment an ever-present threat while following Arnold's expedition.¹⁰ Recent works touch on the themes Smith

emphasized over a century ago, making the environment an actor in warfare, looking at it as not only a neutral force to use but as an entity to survive.

Though nature is essentially a neutral player through most circumstances, it ultimately threatened the success of Benedict Arnold's expedition through the Maine wilderness to Quebec and the lives of the soldiers who took part in it. Armed with supplies that quickly proved scanty and a foggy knowledge of what lay ahead, the environment became an obstacle the force struggled to overcome and be battle ready once they had. The Maine wilderness wore down the soldiers, leaving them unable to conduct military operations successfully. Relying on the numerous journals kept by those who participated in Arnold's expedition, this paper maintains each account's various spellings, capitalization, and grammar. Edits are made for clarification as needed and indicated by brackets.

As the force marched out of Cambridge in September, one soldier noted how his comrades proved "zealous in the cause, and not knowing the hardships and distresses" that lay ahead, boarded the ships awaiting at Newbury Port, and sailed to the mouth of the Kennebec River.¹¹ They shoved off from the Massachusetts coast on September 19th with their heads held high and a belief that nature would bend to their wills; no one doubted the expeditions' success; after all, they had not yet learned of anything to the contrary. The comfort that followed confidence did not last long. A day into the voyage, one soldier wrote, "this night had like to prove fatal to us, for we were close aboard of the rocks before we knew anything about it ... expecting every moment to be dashed to pieces against the rocks, but the wind, fortunately, freshing we got clear."¹² The expedition's doctor Isaac Senter, reports that the schooner *Broad Bay* caught on the shoals at the mouth of the Kennebec River and stuck there until the tide was in their favor.¹³ The expedition force could have done little to plan for the early delays and weather

patterns, likely unable to predict the tide cycles of the Maine and Massachusetts bays unless they were locals, which many of them were not. While an issue, their lack of familiarity with the region was not their sole or primary problem early on, nor would it be throughout the expedition. Even if they knew what was to come and how to handle it, they could not have known what each day would be like down to the exact tidal or weather conditions.

The force sailed onward, unhampered by the seas, eager to prove victorious and achieve glory. As they sailed on, however, they found the tides and rough waters of the Atlantic Ocean did more than interrupt travel. Several of the men became seasick, with one recalling years later in his pension report how he suffered greatly from it.¹⁴ Weather and the illness it caused did not discriminate based on one's rank. Each man, from Private to General, was exposed to the same elements, encountering the same risks. While at sea Major Return Johnathan Meigs must have shaken his head as he reconciled the favorable weather and rapid progress with his poor health as recorded, "the wind being fair and very fresh I was very sea-sick," in his journal.¹⁵ Nature and its natural rhythms proved difficult for them. As they went along, however, the woes of seasickness and rough seas would be far overshadowed by other health risks and topographical features.

Once they landed in Maine three days later (September 22nd), several soldiers reported early conditions to be favorable; they slept well, found food to supplement their rations, and only complained of rain and hard rows a handful of times.¹⁶ Even if conditions had been better earlier, the army was not free from the wilderness. Exposure was not a worry relegated to the later parts of the expedition. Instead, it was something men faced from the earliest days of the trek. At Fort Western, an early stopping point in the expedition Caleb Haskell, a Private and Fifer on the expedition, noted, "several of the company have no tents here. We are very uncomfortable, it being rainy and cold and nothing to cover us."¹⁷ Exposure and the ill effects of remaining in wet

clothes followed the men as they marched northward, an ever-present reminder that they might have been able to cut through the wilderness, but they were never free from its effects. Looming threat aside, Major Meigs shared happy prospects for a reasonably easy expedition, with only a small rapid section faced, and done so with no incident.¹⁸

Within the first week of October, problems arose that further delayed the expedition's progress. Repairs needed to be made to the Bateaux, made from freshly cut unseasoned timber; combined with the soldiers who lacked the knowledge of handling the craft, they were not holding up against the torrents.¹⁹ One diarist reported how progress halted for three days while Reuben Colburn and the carpenters who accompanied the expedition made repairs.²⁰ Even if the men had experience and the wood seasoned, the bateaux "would have been torn up dragging over the gravel of the Kennebec in low water conditions."²¹ Another example of nature working against them was the Kennebec's waters being lower than usual in 1775, a change in the natural flow that proved to be another unexpected hardship nature threw at them, something no amount of experience or preparation could have eased.²² With repairs complete, the expedition continued, prepared to face the mighty Kennebec River.

While traveling along the Kennebec River, the men rarely had a chance to row the bateaux; instead, they were obliged to drag them through the water. Private Jeremiah Greenman's group pulled their craft through the cold water up to their armpits.²³ As Greenman recorded, one day of these conditions proved hard enough, but three days in a row proved exhausting.²⁴ One soldier elaborated, "the men were obliged to get into the River and haul the boats over, and some times they fell up to their chins in holes."²⁵ Soaked through and worn down, they kept dragging their boats along, unwilling to submit to the river's force, leaving them worn down and soaked through by day's end. Sergeant William McCoy echoes Greenman, recording long stretches of an

uneven river bed and men up to their chins or overhead in the water as they dragged their batteaux along.²⁶ The slow, bone chilling process led to a loss of precious time. They slogged upstream, unwilling to relent; a foe awaited them in Quebec and a victory to make it all worth it.

Traveling upriver proved to be more than exhausting work; for some soldiers along the expedition, it proved detrimental to their health. Prolonged exposure to the cold water and night air weakened some men, forcing them to fall behind while leaving others unable to continue. Doctor Senter recounted the poor plight of a man named Irvin who, ill from early on, was rendered utterly helpless from "wading in the water every day, then lodging on the ground at night. His joints in his extremities [becoming] inflexible and swelled to an enormous size."²⁷ Prolonged exposure to the cold, staying in wet clothing, and insufficient supplies worked together to wear down even the strongest among them.

Rough waters and exposure were not the only worries the expedition faced as they battled the Kennebec River; its makeup, the way it cut through the land and rock formations, stood as another test. A soldier whose identity remains unknown wrote, "we found the River shallow and rapid in many parts, and our men wading to track the boats and by setting them up were much fatigued and dejected. They had everything to carry across the Portage in the Falls of Shapigan [Skowhegan], about 200 yards, and after all, we advanced three miles only."²⁸ Of the Skowhegan, another diarist noted, "we set and hauled our boats over rocks and shoals sometimes plunging overhead from the ruggedness of the bottom."²⁹ The force passed the way "with great difficulty and labor ... [to] get the bateaus up," and over the uneven ground; a task not completed until nightfall.³⁰ Beyond a fatiguing duty crossing the falls was dangerous work to undertake, one soldier characterized his situation noting, "though the distance is short, it is ... very rocky and high so that a misstep might be productive of bad consequences."³¹ Any accident or injury was

dangerous as the expedition traveled further from civilization, but the threats of falling and exposure followed the army, never giving them a moment's rest. Still, they pressed on, not allowing a 'what if' to slow them. The soldiers shared their misery and conviction to continue their march through the wilderness, hopeful their troubles would ease and a more manageable march lay ahead.

As the army reached the end of the Kennebec, Eleazer Oswald noted the expedition had only lost one man from drowning while on the river, surprised it was one as the currents were swift.³² While fortunate, the note from Oswald makes it sound like the army had faced few mishaps before the October twelfth entry. Though they did not drown, Private Morison reported high near-drowning rates where "men plunged over the head into the deep bassons formed by the concussion of the water against the large rocks, and with difficulty escaped drowning."³³ While few men drowned, the Maine wilderness caused death and disability in other ways.

In an unrelenting wilderness, the expedition discovered "that courage and bodily prowess were the only requisites for conducting" their trek successfully.³⁴ Faced with flooded batteaux, spoiled food, and exposure, the men could do little more but muster their strength and courage and face what was to come. Any hopes of an easy trek through a merciful wilderness faded as September passed into October, and the men became acquainted with the hardships and rigors of a wilderness expedition. Caleb Haskell likely spoke for many of the men when he wrote, "now we are learning to be soldiers," as the inexperienced men had their trial by fire.³⁵

When able to pause, soldiers took the opportunity to comment on the beauty of their surroundings as they reached the end of the Kennebec and the start of the Great Carrying Place. Arnold noted how the mountains were snowcapped, an early warning, albeit picturesque scene, of the weather that was to come.³⁶ Arnold's experience, while devoid of the reasonable

apprehension common amongst enlisted men's accounts, echoes Private John Joseph Henry's record from his scouting party, "the weather, in consequence of the approaching winter, had become piercingly cold."³⁷ His recollections share a stark warning of what the army was to face as they pressed on, and with winter looming, the army "began to feel they were now in the wilderness."³⁸ George Morrison gives credit to this analysis, writing, "the hand of nature seemed to have denied this solitary [place] every good thing- and to have left it a void forever- the refuge of wild beasts" when facing the untamed land that stretched beyond the Kennebec.³⁹

Arnold's force stood as a small united band against the wilds, ready to face whatever lay before them, but what was to come challenged them more than any could have ever expected. Their next big obstacle: portage across the Great Carrying Place, a sloshy passage through swamps and heavy underbrush.⁴⁰ The Great Carrying Place was one long portage that caused as many challenges as the rivers did. Of this region, Private Simon Fobes wrote,

crossed the pond. And then carried our boats and baggage two or three miles to another pond ... we went on until we came to Dead River, the west branch of the Kennebec, it takes rise in the high lands which separate Maine from Canada, the distance from the Long Falls on the Kennebec to the point where we struck Dead River is upwards of twelve miles, and this route including the two ponds is called the Great Carrying Place.⁴¹

What seemed doable on paper proved challenging for the soldiers, both in the terrain they crossed and the weather they faced. To portage, a four-man team would work together, carrying the two-hundred pound batteau, often with the craft cutting into their shoulders, while other men carried the supplies.⁴² Portages were as complex and dangerous as traversing the rivers. A misstep into the mud and several back-and-forth trips fatigued the soldiers. Even if it was free from incidents, the daily trek through the wilderness was an obstacle to survival, having long-term effects on the men and their morale. One soldier noted how portaging through a swamp "fatigued them more than setting or tracking the Batteaux [up] the River," and "some of the men

were unable to carry half a mile."⁴³ The journal is not hyperbolic in its assessment of the men, and the toll carrying took on them. Other accounts echo the fatigue; McCoy noted how men sank to their knees in mud while carrying.⁴⁴

The Portage across the Great Carrying Place was one of the most notable ones, occupying several entries across various journals. The work was as physically demanding as moving the bateaux and just as dangerous. One soldier recalled, "sometimes we had to go back over those carrying places three or four times to bring all of our effects."⁴⁵ This assessment is not unreasonable, and Major Meigs noted how his men spent an entire day getting all their supplies and themselves safely across a carrying place, the matter made worse by it raining all day.⁴⁶ While unloading one of the boats, Pennsylvania Private John Joseph Henry recalled seeing his Sergeant "set his foot on a large bed of moss seemingly firm, and sunk ... into [the] cold water" that filled his boot.⁴⁷ James Melvin noted that as the army traveled four and a half miles over land, part of the way through turned into a bog "overgrown with white moss and brushes, which seemed half withered," into which the men sunk knee-deep.⁴⁸

Sharing the sentiment of a miserable carry but doing it with what must have been a wry smile, Morison noted how "the rains had rendered the earth a complete bog; insomuch that we were often half leg deep in the mud, stumbling over fallen logs one leg sinking deeper in the mire than the other, then down goes the boat and the carriers with it."⁴⁹ The wilderness was proving a formidable foe. However, in early October, the men could still laugh at one another and take strength to push forward to reach their shared goal. Morison continues, "a hearty laugh prevails. The irritated at length get to their feet with their boat, plastered with mud from neck to heel, their comrades tauntingly asking how they liked their washing and lodgings; perhaps a few paces further, down they go, the laugh reverts upon them."⁵⁰ Keeping sentiments light Moses

Kimball wrote after they encamped following the carry they were "all greatly rejoiced at [the] thought of being over [the] worst of our fatigues," however this jubilee would be short lived as the expedition marched on towards the Dead River and the weather continued to turn colder.⁵¹

Arnold had a chance to comment on the beauty of the surroundings with little pause. As the army struggled along the Great Carrying Place, he wrote, "there the prospect is very beautiful and noble, a high chain of mountains encircling the pond, which is deep, clear, fine water over which forked mountains."⁵² While Arnold waxed poetic on the surroundings more often than most men, he was not the only man to write of Maine's natural beauty. Abner Stocking wrote, "encamped in a most delightful wood, where I thought I could have spent some time agreeably in solitude, in contemplating the works of nature ... though we were in a thick wilderness, uninhabited by human beings."⁵³ While they may have thought of the majesty of a mountain or the beauty of fall foliage, it rarely entered their journals as they slogged forward. Simeon Thayer was not as poetic as the mountains came into view while passing through the Great Carrying Place. Putting his and the men's fears to paper, he noted: "the mountains appearing ahead which looked dismal to us, and especially more so, knowing we had them to cross without a conductor."⁵⁴ In other words, they were alone, and Thayer was painfully aware of it. The environment showed its might, silently daring the men to march onwards, testing their strength and resolve to see the mission through.

In "one solar month," as Private William Pierce concluded, the army had set out and were on their way to the Dead River.⁵⁵ In summarizing their journey, Pierce wrote, "we had hard times, for we found it to be a hard piece of work to get up this [the Kennebec] river, which we found very rocky, uneven, swift water, and falls also ... we have twelve miles to carry to get to Ded river."⁵⁶ Following the rapid rocky waters of the Kennebec, another challenge the expedition

faced was the Dead River and those that branched off it. In his diary, Private Greenman described it, noting, "the river runs SE, you can't but jest procive wich way it runs, its black and very deep now."⁵⁷ Diaries contain brief but telling descriptions of the Dead River, a slow flowing body that, compared to the Kennebec, must have been a welcomed sight, a signal that perhaps the rest of the way proved favorable. For tired men to comment on the lack of challenge the next leg of their journey posed is just as notable as them taking time, hunched over their campfire at night, to record in their well protected journals the hard river crossing or endless portage they faced. Both show what the men, strangers to the Maine woods, were thinking as they settled down for the night, what impacted them that day, and whether it was a challenge or hope for an easier time.

Before the weather changed the nature of the Dead River from a peaceful row to a raging torrent, its location, the plants that surrounded it, and stillness, the very thing that made it so appealing at first glance, also caused it to be problematic for the expedition's health. Weakness did not only result from exposure; the water the army relied on became unsanitary. Having ill effects on their health, soldiers described the water in their journals in various ways; Moses Kimball wrote, "the water unwholesome on account of many sorts of leaves falling into the river," while the expedition's doctor wrote, "the water was as yellow as a mixture of saffron and water."⁵⁸ The water made the men ill because of its quality and the quantity they drank because of their salted rations. "vomiting and diarrhea harassed many of them," leaving them weaker than before, their bodies unable to absorb nutrients and water critical to maintain their strength.⁵⁹ One soldier wrote he had a "very bad Purging" and rode in the boat all day, likely too sick or weak to march, and was not well until the following day.⁶⁰ Though he does not indicate what caused his illness, the symptom he shared aligns with what others went through while living off of poorly

preserved, salted food and drinking high quantities of contaminated water. They lived in a vicious cycle of needing to eat and drink to maintain their strength, further reduced by what was available.

The Dead River appeared like a respite, a break from the torrents of the Kennebec, but it would not remain so, turning to "produce a scene truly shocking."⁶¹ Brought on by what historian John Ferling characterized as "a late season hurricane" whose winds and rains whipped and lashed at the men and caused the Dead River to flood, rising "eight vertical feet in as many hours," reaching the soldiers' "campsite before any of them had time to gather their belongings."⁶² For men already soaked and worn down from the day's march and having failed to dry themselves and their clothes before trying to sleep as comfortably as possible, the wrath of mother nature must have added insult to an already dire situation. One soldier recounted that they were obliged to break camp and moved along as best as they could; however, the river was so swift and hard to navigate that many "preferred marching in an excessively. Nay, almost an incredibly bad way. From its [the path's] swampiness and being full of thickets."⁶³ It is hardly surprising that many soldiers turned their backs on the waterways and faced whatever a land route would throw at them. Private Henry, who until late October thought himself a capable swimmer, was thrown from his bateau with others while attempting to navigate the rapid water.⁶⁴ He recalled, "it was a topsy-turvy business, the force of the water threw me often heels-over-head."⁶⁵ The young Pennsylvania soldier and the rest of the crew were fortunate enough to come out of the water with their lives. Either way, the men met with obstacles that tested their dedication to the march. As they slogged through the flooded, unrecognizable landscape, nature would not yield to them but nor would they to nature.

Following a day's attempt to make progress along the Dead River, a soldier wrote, "continued to rain very fast," and by the end of the day, he noted, "we had not one Dry thread about us and with all very faint and Cold ... every man's teeth chattered in their heads."⁶⁶ While the soldier notes that it could have been far colder, his sunny disposition did little to warm the soaked men or make the restless night ahead more comfortable as they tried in vain to dry off.⁶⁷ Ephraim Squire wrote, "hard work for poor soldiers that have to work hard in the rains and cold and wade a mile and a half knee-deep in water and mud, cold enough, and after night to camp in the rain without any shelter."⁶⁸ Shelter from the rain was not their only concern, especially when battling the nor'easter. Finding a safe place to rest in the woods while strong winds blew around them and trees creaked and swayed was a common fear among the men, especially when no one knew what tree was sturdy enough to rest under and which was the next to fall. The conditions were "so windy that it was dangerous being in the woods," remembered one journalist as he and the others struggled to warm and dry themselves.⁶⁹ As they listened to the wind blow through the trees, perhaps recalling the incident of a windy day that "blowed hard ... [where] one of the men was killed by the falling of a tree" or the October night when "a tree blown down by the wind, fell down upon one ... [man] and bruised him in such a manner, that his life was despaired of," they likely feared for their safety.⁷⁰ The soldiers never knew which section was safe, and nowhere were they free from harm, leading to restless nights and days where the cycle repeated.

Following the flooding of the Dead River, Thayer and a small party of men lost their way because of swollen streams overrunning their banks and confusing the scanty reports the expedition relied on.⁷¹ The party spent the day and some of the night wading through cold water and lying without cover.⁷² The group found the rest of their division the following day. Situations like this could quickly turn dire, risking a long, slow, painful slog through the

wilderness or falling victim to it. "Fear was added to sorrow," wrote one distraught soldier in late October, "we found to our astonishment that our journey was much longer than we expected."⁷³ Even with this, scant provisions, and the knowledge that the weather only grew colder from here out, the soldier continued that they "stood firm and resolute. They were ready to encounter yet greater hardships for the good of their country."⁷⁴ The men looked at their foe and dared to continue; they would not back down or allow it to be what stopped them from reaching their greater goal, Quebec, and the fight to make it their ally. As October's end loomed and the army moved along the Dead's flooded banks, Private Morison realized the army's desperate plight and how relief was far from being reached. He lamented, "our provisions began to grow scarce, many of our men too sick, and the whole or much of us reduced by our fatigues', and this too in the midst of a horrid wilderness, far distant from any inhabitation."⁷⁵

One of the last carrying places, aptly named the Terrible Carrying Place, was a "dismal portage ... of two miles and fifty perches; intersected with ... fallen trees, stones, and brush."⁷⁶ The ground adjacent to the ridge is swampy, plentifully strewn with old dead logs, and with everything that could render it impassable."⁷⁷ The description goes on, highlighting the impact the carry had on the men, "the boats and carriers often fall down into the snow, some of them were much hurt by reason of their feet sticking fast among the stones."⁷⁸ Getting one's foot stuck, or tripping was not a fear taken lightly while on the expedition. Abner Stocking shared his fears of injury while making a tough carry, "as we were constantly slipping, we walked in great fear of breaking our bones or dislocating our joints. But to be disabled from walking in this situation was sure death."⁷⁹ The threat of injury followed the men as they trekked through the Maine wilderness but became multiplied as they picked their way through the steep, and often snowy and icy rocks of the mountains of the Terrible Carry,

For men already weakened by enduring the previous month in the wilderness, the Terrible Carrying Place must have led them to question whether or not they would succeed in their endeavor. On the other hand, Benedict Arnold downplayed the Terrible Carrying Place and the hardships it caused his men, writing, "we met many obstructions of Loggs &c which we were obliged to cut away," making no other notable comment on it in his journal.⁸⁰ Men wounded and well limped towards the Chaudière, thinking relief had to be nearby.

As the army marched towards the Chaudière, Private Joseph Ware noted in his journal, "suffered greatly ... had to go wade waist high through swamps and rivers and breaking ice before us."⁸¹ Miserable situations clustered for the army, Ware continued, "here we wandered around all day, and at night came to the same place which we left in the morning ... we were obliged to stand up all night in order to dry ourselves and keep from freezing."⁸² Ware was one of the unlucky ones who got lost in the swamps surrounding Lakes Chaudière and Megantic, an area that Smith characterized as one of the worst parts of the expedition.⁸³ His woes, however, were not unique to him; due to slow communication and lacking knowledge of the terrain, men became lost while marching towards the Chaudière, going out of their way through the swamps. One soldier wrote, "went astray over mountains and swamps which could scarcely be passed by wild beasts ... Waded a small river up to our [waists], then marched on until night in our wet clothes."⁸⁴ Morison dryly noted, "this day we went astray, wandering over mountains and through bogs as usual ... and marched with our clothes wet, until night," ending up five miles from where they started in the morning on account of the confusion caused by lacking knowledge of the land and accurate direction.⁸⁵ Simon Fobes makes clear the dangers of going in the wrong direction in cold weather and wet clothes; looking for the way to the Chaudière, he wrote, "traveling two days on the route ... to our surprise and mortification, we found that we

were wrong. Destitute as we were, with our clothes wet and frozen, we suffered extremely from fatigue, cold, and hunger."⁸⁶ Though Fobes and his fellow soldiers made it out of the swamps thanks to the skills of a Native American guide sympathetic to the Patriot's cause, the damage was done.⁸⁷ Men emerged haggard, further weakened by continued exposure to the elements. Many still held out hope for their success at getting out of the wilderness, making it to Canada, and being able to fight, but men who stumbled out of the woods would be in no shape for fighting

Mountains, too, provided challenges for Arnold's expedition. While traveling through the mountains along the Chain of Ponds, one soldier simply put, "very fatiguing in going down one mountain and climbing another."⁸⁸ To be able to scale the heights with their dwindling supplies tied to their backs, the force was "obliged to crawl up on all fours with nothing but rock, moss, and trees and shrubs to support" them as they passed through the craggy mountains of the Maine-Canada border region.⁸⁹ Though he tended to border on hyperbole, and there is some debate over the area Private George Morison referred to, Morison wrote,

it was no uncommon sight ... to see those coming down the mountains in our rear, falling down upon one another ... on coming to the brow of one of those awful hills, making a halt, as if whether their strength was sufficient for the descent, at last, he casts his eyes to the adjacent hill, and sees his comrades clambering up among the snow and rocks- he is encouraged- he descends, he stumbles ... and falls headlong down the precipice ... his comrade staggers down to his assistance, and in his eagerness falls down himself; at length the wretches raise themselves ... they wade through the mire to the foot of the next and gaze up at its summit ... they attempt it, catching at every twig and shrub they can lay hold of- their feet fly from them- they fall down- to rise no more.⁹⁰

Whether or not Morison exaggerated the situation matters little in the end; soldiers who had long fought the good but all too often unwinnable fight against nature fell prey to the Maine wilderness. These unknown men become two more victims to the wills of the wild, casualties before having a chance to fire a shot.

Men who wore out their clothes or lost or could no longer carry their extras due to weakness faced exposure. Many of them left to the woods to perish because of it.⁹¹ Men trekking their way over rough terrain wore down their shoes, and aside from wet clothes chilling their bodies, their shoes were the first to go, leading to cracked and bleeding feet that slowed them down and increased their chance of being left in the rear to fall victim to the woods. Private James Melvin noted how he had gone without shoes for three days and wore his feet bloody.⁹² While Private Melvin and others like him managed to keep up with the army, even as they wore their clothes to rags and their shoes broke apart on their feet, other men could not keep up, falling back until they faded into the wilderness.

By November, the men were encouraged to look out for themselves, their "case being desperate, and every man, willing to save his life ... marched on over mountains, and through swamps, enough to weary and discourage the stoutest traveler."⁹³ Even if they wanted to keep going, not all of the men could; most were too weakened through fatigue, hunger, and exposure. Morison writes of worn down men attempting to keep up, unwilling to back down, "many of the men began to fall behind, and those in any condition to march were scarcely able to support themselves so that it was impossible for us to bring them along."⁹⁴ After being told to "shift for themselves," the weakened soldiers strove "with all their might to keep up with us, and travel in our footsteps, calling out to us ... 'will you leave us to perish in this wilderness.'"⁹⁵ While some soldiers pushed back against these orders, wanting to help their brothers along as best they could, others were left to themselves, falling victim to the wills of nature, losses of the battle before the fighting began, resulting in a reduction of precious manpower the ever-dwindling expeditionary force could ill afford.⁹⁶ Captain Henry Dearborn noted that many of the men died; their weakened state worsened through the increasingly cold and snowy weather the nearly starved

and barefoot soldiers trekked through.⁹⁷ A Pennsylvania soldier shared the sentiment, fearing it was too late for the men in the rear "disabled from marching by the rheumatism or some other disease" caused by constant exposure to the cold and living in wet clothing.⁹⁸ As they approached the Canadian border, the band of Americans must have been a sorrowful sight, men who looked less than human, bearing all the effects of the power of the wilderness. The environment physically impacted the soldiers in various ways, compounding their sufferings and making for grueling experiences that tested their dedication.

When the force finally reached Quebec on November 9th, 1775, Benedict Arnold had a fraction of the men he started with their lives lost to the wilderness as they trekked through over 300 miles in roughly a month and a half; those who remained alive were in poor shape. The men who had survived the march were weak and remained poorly clad, not ready to face the Canadian winter, let alone seize the fortified city of Quebec. One soldier noted they "resembled an assembly of specters rather than men."⁹⁹ Though welcoming, one historian notes, "the Chaudière Valley residents could have easily crushed the 'weak and naked rebels,'" a warning sign that the surviving men were in no shape for a fight.¹⁰⁰

Even after receiving aid from the sympathetic residents of the Sartigan region and reaching their target of Quebec, the men still reeled from the effects of the wilderness expedition; they "came almost naked into [that] cold country."¹⁰¹ Upon reaching Quebec, a soldier wrote of a muster called to determine the state of the army's survivors,

a more pitiful and humorous spectacle was exhibited than I had ever before seen. In our long and tedious march through the wilderness, it was not with us as with the children of Israel that our clothes waxed not old; ours were torn in pieces by the bushes and hung in strings- few of us had any shoes, but moggasons made of raw skins- many of us without hats- and beards long and visages thin and meager.¹⁰²

While the army was healthier once they reached Canada and the city of Quebec, the cold and continued weakness plagued the men making their situation far from ideal for an attack.¹⁰³ Worn down from the march, Samuel Cooke recalled in his pension application how his feet were so damaged from being in the snow without proper cover that he could not walk independently, adding to the growing sick list and weakening the already crumbling American force.¹⁰⁴ With the remaining men struggling against the cold, the army realized that they lacked supplies to feed and arm the soldiers, a vast majority of it lost along the way on the expedition. It, too, fell victim to overturned bateaux and the rivers of Maine.¹⁰⁵

The December 31st attack failed, and the Americans were taken prisoner and held until the summer of 1776. Though other factors were at play, it is impossible to deny the role played by the natural world. Had their maps been more accurate, or had they left earlier, the results would have been different, the men may have been stronger, and the British under Carlton may not have been reinforced. Had the wilderness been softer, fewer boats overturning in swift currents, fewer storms, and warmer weather, the force may have enjoyed better health, increasing Arnold's number of able men.

Benedict Arnold's force boldly faced the Maine wilderness, gallantly soldiered through swamps, storms, and cold, and bravely faced the fortified walls of Quebec. However, it cannot be denied that they were beaten down by what nature threw at them and left in a physically and numerically weaker position. Still, the expedition proved America was willing to face the British on their terms, able to make an offensive, and their fight would not be quashed easily. It also showed that the Patriots were not easily worn down. They courageously faced the varied topography and weather of their country, pulling on their strength and that of their brothers in

arms, abilities that enabled them to survive the Maine wilderness and the future engagements they would have against the environment as their fight for independence went on.

Notes

¹ George Morison, *Journal of the Expedition to Quebec*, in *March to Quebec Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition*, ed. Kenneth Lewis Roberts, (1938; reis, Portland, ME: Down East. 1980), 509.

² John Ferling, *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 82.

³ Lynn Montross, *Rag, Tag, and Bobtail The Story of the Continental Army 1775-1783*, (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1952), 52; Arthur S. Lefkowitz, *Benedict Arnold's Army: The 1775 American Invasion of Canada During the Revolutionary War*, (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2018), 89-90.

⁴ Mark A. York, *Patriot on the Kennebec: Major Reuben Colburn, Benedict Arnold, and the March to Quebec, 1775*, (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2012), 31-33; Mark R. Anderson, *The Battle for the Fourteenth Colony: America's War of Liberation in Canada 1774-1776*, (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2013), 144.

⁵ Justin Harvey Smith, *Arnold's March from Cambridge to Quebec: A Critical Study Together with a Reprint of Arnold's Journal*, (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1903), 2.

⁶ Don Higginbotham, "Maine Wilderness", in *Daniel Morgan: Revolutionary Rifleman*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1961),

http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9780807839997_higginbotham.6, 27.

⁷ James A. Huston, "The Logistics of Arnold's March to Quebec", *Military Affairs*, vol 32, no. 3, (1968), <https://doi.org/10.2307/1984737>, 123; Sam Brakeley, *In the Wake of America's Hannibal: Tracing Benedict Arnold and the 1775 Expedition to Quebec by Canoe*, (Raleigh, NC: Lulu Press Inc, 2015), 31-34.

⁸ Huston, "The Logistics of Arnold's March to Quebec," 123.

⁹ Blake McGready, "Contested Grounds: An Environmental History of the 1777 Philadelphia Campaign", *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, vol. 85 no. 1, (2018),

<https://doi.org/10.5325/pennhistory.85.1.0032>, 35.

¹⁰ Arthur S Lefkowitz, *Benedict Arnold's Army: The 1775 American Invasion of Canada During the Revolutionary War*. (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2019). 34, 87.

¹¹ Abner Stocking, *Journal of Abner Stocking: As Kept by Himself, During his Long and Tedious March Through the Wilderness to Quebec Until his Return to his Native Place*, in *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition*, ed. Kenneth Lewis Roberts, (1938; reis, Portland, ME: Down East. 1980), 545.

¹² Joseph Ware, *Private Joseph Ware Journal*, in *Voices Waiting to be Heard: Nineteen Eyewitness Accounts of Arnold's 1775 March to Quebec*, ed. Stephan Darley, (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2021), 191.

¹³ Isaac Senter, *Journal of Dr. Isaac Senter*, in *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition*, ed. Kenneth Lewis Roberts, (1938; reis, Portland, ME: Down East. 1980), 198.

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- ¹⁴ Fenner Foot, pension application report, in *Voices Waiting to be Heard: Nineteen Eyewitness Accounts of Arnold's 1775 Expedition to Quebec*, ed. Stephan Darley, (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse. 2021), 227.
- ¹⁵ Return Johnathan Meigs, *A Journal of Occurrences Within the Observation of Return Johnathan Meigs*, in *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition*, ed. Kenneth Lewis Roberts, (1938; reis, Portland, ME: Down East. 1980), 174.
- ¹⁶ Samuel Barney, Diary of Samuel Barney of New Haven, 1775-1776, in *Voices From a Wilderness Expedition: The Journals and Men of Benedict Arnold's Expedition to Quebec in 1775*, ed. Stephan Darley, (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011), 176-177.
- ¹⁷ Caleb Haskell, *Diary at the Siege of Boston and on the March to Quebec*, in *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition*, ed. Kenneth Lewis Roberts, (1938; reis, Portland, ME: Down East. 1980), 474.
- ¹⁸ Meigs, *A Journal of Occurrences Within the Observation of Return Johnathan Meigs*, 176
- ¹⁹ Thomas A. Desjardin, *Through a Howling Wilderness: Benedict Arnold's March to Quebec, 1775*, (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007), 25; Brakeley, *In the Wake of America's Hannibal*, 31.
- ²⁰ Eleazer Oswald, *Captain Eleazer Oswald Journal*, in *Voices Waiting to be Heard: Nineteen Eyewitness Accounts of Arnold's 1775 March to Quebec*, ed. Stephan Darley, (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2021), 132.
- ²¹ York, *Patriot on the Kennebec*, 57.
- ²² *Ibid*, 57
- ²³ Jeremiah Greenman, *Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution, 1775-1783: An Annotated Edition of the Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman*, ed, Robert Bray and Paul Bushnell, (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1978), 14.
- ²⁴ Greenman, *Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution*, 14.
- ²⁵ Anonymous, *Quebec Journal #3*. in *Voices From a Wilderness Expedition: The Journals and Men of Benedict Arnold's Expedition to Quebec in 1775*, ed. Stephan Darley, (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011), 134.
- ²⁶ William McCoy, *Sergeant William McCoy Journal*, in *Voices Waiting to be Heard: Nineteen Eyewitness Accounts of Arnold's 1775 March to Quebec*, ed. Stephan Darley, (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2021), 100.
- ²⁷ Senter, *Journal of Dr. Isaac Senter*, 205-206.
- ²⁸ Anonymous, *Journal*, in *Voices Waiting to be Heard: Nineteen Eyewitness Accounts of Arnold's 1775 March to Quebec*, ed. Stephan Darley, Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse. 2021), 23.
- ²⁹ Anonymous, *Quebec Journal #3*. 134.
- ³⁰ Anonymous, *Pennsylvania Packet Journal*, in *Voices Waiting to be Heard: Nineteen Eyewitness Accounts of Arnold's 1775 March to Quebec*, ed. Stephan Darley, Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse. 2021), 141.
- ³¹ Anonymous, *Pennsylvania Packet Journal*, 142.
- ³² Oswald, *Captain Eleazer Oswald Journal*, 135.
- ³³ Morison, *Journal of the Expedition to Quebec*, 520,
- ³⁴ Isaac Senter, *Doctor Isaac Senter's Second Journal*, in *Voices Waiting to be Heard: Nineteen Eyewitness Accounts of Arnold's 1775 March to Quebec*, ed Stephan Darley, (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2021, First Published Rhode Island Historical Society. Senter, *Doctor Isaac Senter's Second Journal*), 180.
- ³⁵ Haskell, *Diary at the Siege of Boston and on the March to Quebec*, 474.
- ³⁶ Benedict Arnold, *Col Arnold's Journal of his Expedition to Canada*, in *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition*, ed. Kenneth Lewis Roberts, (1938; reis, Portland, ME: Down East. 1980), 49.
- ³⁷ John Joseph Henry, *Campaign Against Quebec*, in *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition*, ed. Kenneth Lewis Roberts, (1938; reis, Portland, ME: Down East. 1980), 315.
- ³⁸ Smith, *Arnold's March from Cambridge to Quebec*, 111.
- ³⁹ Morison, *Journal of the Expedition to Quebec*, 513,

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- ⁴⁰ Higginbotham, "Maine Wilderness," 30.
- ⁴¹ Simon Fobes, *Narrative of Arnold's Expedition to Quebec*, in *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition*, ed. Kenneth Lewis Roberts, (1938; reis, Portland, ME: Down East. 1980), 582.
- ⁴² Ferling, *Almost a Miracle*, 90.
- ⁴³ Anonymous, *Journal*, 24
- ⁴⁴ McCoy, *Sergeant William McCoy Journal*, 101.
- ⁴⁵ Foot, pension application report, 224.
- ⁴⁶ Meigs, *A Journal of Occurrences Within the Observation of Return Johnathan Meigs*, 177.
- ⁴⁷ Henry, *Campaign Against Quebec*, 309.
- ⁴⁸ James Melvin, *The Journal of James Melvin, Private Soldier in Arnold's Expedition Against Quebec in the Year 1775*, (Los Angeles, CA: Hard Press Publishing, 2012), 46.
- ⁴⁹ Morison, *Journal of the Expedition to Quebec*, 514.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 514.
- ⁵¹ Moses Kimball, *Moses Kimball's Journal*, in *Voices From a Wilderness Expedition: The Journals and Men of Benedict Arnold's Expedition to Quebec in 1775*, ed. Stephan Darley, (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011), *Journal*, 164.
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- ⁵³ Stocking, *Journal of Abner Stocking*, 548.
- ⁵⁴ Simeon Thayer, *Journal of his March Through the Wilderness to Quebec*, in *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition*, ed. Kenneth Lewis Roberts, (1938; reis, Portland, ME: Down East. 1980), 252.
- ⁵⁵ William Pierce, *Private William Pierce Journal*, in *Voices Waiting to be Heard: Nineteen Eyewitness Accounts of Arnold's 1775 March to Quebec*, ed. Stephan Darley, (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse. 2021), 157.
- ⁵⁶ Pierce, *Private William Pierce Journal*, 157-158.
- ⁵⁷ Greenman, *Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution*, 16.
- ⁵⁸ Kimball, *Moses Kimball's Journal*, 165; Senter, *Doctor Isaac Senter's Second Journal*, 182.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 182.
- ⁶⁰ John Pierce, *Journal by the Advanced Surveyor with Col, Arnold on the March to Quebec*, in *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition*, ed. Kenneth Lewis Roberts, (1938; reis, Portland, ME: Down East. 1980), 660-661.
- ⁶¹ Anonymous, *Pennsylvania Packet Journal*, 146.
- ⁶² Ferling, *Almost a Miracle*, 92; Desjardin, *Though a Howling Wilderness*, 76.
- ⁶³ Anonymous, *Journal*, 25.
- ⁶⁴ Henry, *Campaign Against Quebec*, 532.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 532.
- ⁶⁶ Pierce, *Journal by the Advanced Surveyor with Col, Arnold on the March to Quebec*, 662,
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 662.
- ⁶⁸ Ephraim Squire, *Diary of Arnold's Expedition to Quebec*, in *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition*, ed. Kenneth Lewis Roberts, (1938; reis, Portland, ME: Down East. 1980), 623.
- ⁶⁹ Squire, *Diary of Arnold's Expedition to Quebec*, 623.
- ⁷⁰ Meigs, *A Journal of Occurrences Within the Observation of Return Johnathan Meigs*, 178; Melvin, *The Journal of James Melvin*, 46.
- ⁷¹ Thayer, *Journal of his March Through the Wilderness to Quebec*, 255.
- ⁷² *Ibid*, 255.
- ⁷³ Socking, *Journal of Abner Stocking*, 551.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 551.
- ⁷⁵ Morison, *Journal of the Expedition to Quebec*, 515-516.
- ⁷⁶ Morison, *Journal of the Expedition to Quebec*, 522.

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- ⁷⁷ Ibid, 522-523.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid, 523.
- ⁷⁹ Stocking, *Journal of Abner Stocking*, 554.
- ⁸⁰ Arnold, *Col Arnold's Journal of his Expedition to Canada*, 58.
- ⁸¹ Ware, *Private Joseph Ware Journal*, 193-194.
- ⁸² Ibid, 194.
- ⁸³ Smith, *Arnold's March from Cambridge to Quebec*, 203. 212.
- ⁸⁴ McCoy, *Sergeant William McCoy Journal*, 102.
- ⁸⁵ Morison, *Journal of the Expedition to Quebec*, 524,
- ⁸⁶ Fobes, *Narrative of Arnold's Expedition to Quebec*, 584.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid, 584.
- ⁸⁸ Anonymous, *Pennsylvania Packet Journal*, 148.
- ⁸⁹ Senter, *Doctor Isaac Senter's Second Journal*, 185.
- ⁹⁰ Morison, *Journal of the Expedition to Quebec*, 525-526.
- ⁹¹ Pierce, *Private William Pierce Journal*, 159.
- ⁹² Melvin, *The Journal of James Melvin*, 54.
- ⁹³ McCoy, *Sergeant William McCoy Journal*, 103.
- ⁹⁴ Morison, *Journal of the Expedition to Quebec*, 526.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid, 526.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid, 526-527.
- ⁹⁷ Henry Dearborn, *Journal of Captain Henry Dearborn in the Quebec Expedition, 1775*, (1886; reis, Scholar Select), 12.
- ⁹⁸ Anonymous, *Pennsylvania Packet Journal*, 150.
- ⁹⁹ Morison, *Journal of the Expedition to Quebec*, 530.
- ¹⁰⁰ Mark R Anderson, *The Battle for the Fourteenth Colony: America's War of Liberation in Canada 1774-1776*, (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2013), 147.
- ¹⁰¹ Pierce, *Private William Pierce Journal*, 159.
- ¹⁰² Stocking, *Journal of Abner Stocking*, 558.
- ¹⁰³ Senter, *Journal of Dr. Isaac S enter*, 226-227.
- ¹⁰⁴ Samuel Cooke, pension application report, in *Voices Waiting to be Heard: Nineteen Eyewitness Accounts of Arnold's 1775 March to Quebec*, ed, Stephan Darley, (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2021), 224.
- ¹⁰⁵ Dearborn, *Journal of Captain Henry Dearborn in the Quebec Expedition, 1775*, 20.

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