

DIARY OF LIEUTENANT FRANCIS NICHOLS, OF  
COLONEL WILLIAM THOMPSON'S BATTALION OF  
PENNSYLVANIA RIFLEMEN, JANUARY TO SEP-  
TEMBER, 1776.

CONTRIBUTED BY THOMAS H. MONTGOMERY.

[The diary of Lieutenant Francis Nichols, which he kept while a prisoner of war, is preceded by his account of the unsuccessful assault on Quebec by the combined forces of Montgomery and Arnold, December 31, 1775, in which he was captured. This account was written on "February 9, 1776, in the Seminary at Quebec," where he was confined with other American officers. Lieutenant Nichols entered the Continental service as second lieutenant of Captain William Hendrick's company; was transferred to the First Pennsylvania Line; was commissioned captain, to date from January 1, 1776; and left the service as major of the Ninth Regiment of the Line. After the war he was appointed the first United States marshal for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, and died at Pottstown, Montgomery County, February 13, 1812.]

*December 31, 1775.*—The American army made the attack on the City of Quebec. General Montgomery with his army attacked at a place called the Potasse, close by the river St. Lawrence; Col. Arnold and his detachment, composed of the troops that marched with him through the Wilderness, attacked on the opposite side at St. Roque. They marched at five o'clock in the morning and took with them a brass field piece to aid in forcing the barriers, but the snow being deep and the road unbroken, they were forced to leave it behind, after being detained for some time in striving to bring it forward. At half after five the attack began and in a few minutes they were in possession of the first barrier, and captured two pieces of cannon. Here Col. Arnold was wounded through the leg by a musket ball, which prevented his proceeding further. The troops continued to advance and captured the first guard which consisted of thirty men. The main body of the

army got broke in striving to bring up the cannon and unfortunately missed the road, their guide being wounded, and the morning being dark, owing to the heavy snow storm, they were forced to countermarch under a heavy fire from the ramparts. Capt. Hendricks having command of the main guard, was in the rear, but he pressed to the front and joined Captains Morgan, Lamb and Lieutenants Steele and Nichols, and attacked the second barrier. Gen. Montgomery being in the advance, had the pickets cut down and passed through. The enemy hearing him encouraging his men, deserted their posts, and threw down their arms, believing that all was over, as Col. Arnold's detachment had possession of the second barrier. A drunken sailor swore he would fire one shot before he would retreat, went to a gun loaded with grape shot, and with a match fired it off, and unfortunately for us killed the brave Montgomery, Capt. Cheesman and Capt. Macpherson his aid de camps. Col. Campbell who usurped the command (for his rank was quartermaster) ordered a retreat. If Col. Campbell had advanced and joined Col. Arnold's troops, he would have met with little opposition, as the citizens had thrown down their arms and we had made numbers of regulars prisoners. When they found that Montgomery's army was retreating, the citizens were prevailed upon to secure fresh arms from the magazine, and as it became light our small number was discovered and they sallied out of the Palace gate after us. Had Col. Campbell advanced, this movement would have been prevented and our success insured. But we held our ground for near four hours under great disadvantages, our guns were getting wet and many of them thus rendered useless. We sustained a heavy fire in our front, right flank and rear. The enemy attempted to turn four guns on us, from a battery within sixty yards of us, when Col. Green ordered a heavy fire on them to prevent it, but from a volley of musketry a ball went through Capt. Hendricks' left breast and he expired in a few minutes; Capt. Lamb received a wound in his left cheek, which he requested Lieut. Nichols to tie up with a

black handkerchief he took from his stock. Our rear guard were forced to surrender to the troops which sallied from the Palace gate, and we with the greatest reluctance were forced to lay down our arms, although we had decided to make a stand until night, and if not joined by Gen. Montgomery to retreat. We did not then know of his fall. Lieutenants Cooper and Humphreys fell in the engagement, Capt. Hubbard was wounded in the heel and died shortly after, and Lieut. Steele had two of his fingers shot off. Our detachment numbered between four and five hundred, there were sixty killed and many wounded. We were treated with the greatest humanity; Gen. Carleton allowed us to send for clothing and money. We were confined in the Seminary, thirty two officers in one room, 31 by 27 feet. Some of the New England officers not having had the small pox, petitioned the General for permission to be inoculated, which he granted and assigned them a separate room; and they were allowed to walk in the entry two at a time for fresh air and exercise. We were shortly after deprived of some privileges, and pens and paper, and were moved about the building to prevent our escaping. Their fears were not ill-grounded, as we were determined should an attack be made on the city to rush out, disarm the guards, set our men at liberty and seize the arms in the magazines, while their troops were on the ramparts.

*March 10, 1776.*—I was removed to the Hôtel Dieu, sick of the Scarlet Fever, and placed under the care of the Mother Abbess, where I had fresh provisions and good attendance. For several nights the nuns sat up with me, four at a time every two hours. Here I feigned myself sick after I had recovered, for fear of being sent back to the Seminary to join my fellow officers, and I was not discharged until I acknowledged that I was well. When I think of my captivity, I shall never forget the time spent among the nuns, who treated me with so much humanity. Dr Maybin informed me that wood was so scarce in the city, that they were compelled to pull down houses in order to obtain the timber for fuel.

*May 30.*—To our great satisfaction we were supplied with fresh provisions, which were much wanted, as we had lived so long on salt pork, much of it tainted, and our health had suffered.<sup>1</sup>

*June 22.*—Mr. Murray<sup>2</sup> informed us of the battle of Three Rivers—that the British troops had just time to land before Gen. [William] Thompson hove in sight, and that if the General had been one hour sooner, he would have carried the post.

*June 25.*—Gen. Thompson, Col. [William] Irvine, and the general's aid de camp, with twenty five privates, were sent down the river on the schooner *Mary*, and were not suffered to see us.

*June 28.*—The Bishop and merchants of the city sub-

<sup>1</sup> [The following petition of Colonel Green and his fellow-prisoners-of-war confined in the "Seminary," the letter to Captain Foy, of August 2, and the parole of Lieutenant Abdiel McAllister, of August 3, 1776, are kindly contributed by Mr. James H. McAllister.—ED. PENNA. MAG.]

"MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY—

"Impressed with a just sense of your Excellency's Humanity and Benevolence and urged by the peculiarity of our present disagreeable Situation being Destitute of both friends and money we beg leave to request that your Excellency will condescend to take our case into Consideration and grant us relief by permitting us to return to our respective homes on our Parole which we shall ever Deem sacred assuring your Excellency that we shall make it a point to Surrender ourselves to any of his Majst<sup>y</sup> Officers when and where your Excellency may think proper to direct.

"Being likewise sensibly touched with the deplorable state of our men who remain at present we take the liberty to recommend them to your Excellency's consideration earnestly soliciting that some measures may be taken for their relief, and we should be certainly happy if they could possibly return to their Families many of whom must be reduced to the greatest Distress.

"Your Excellency's compliance will be esteemed a singular favor and ever gratefully acknowledged by Your Excellency's most O<sup>b</sup> and humb<sup>l</sup> Serv<sup>t</sup>.

CHRISTOPHER GREEN

"and 33 others—

"SEMINARY June 6, 1776

"GENL. CARLETON."

<sup>2</sup> Major Murray, of the garrison.

scribed a sum of money for our relief, but our pride would not allow us to accept it. When the Lieutenant Governor heard of it he was much displeased, as he was fearful that the news would get to England that we had so many friends in the city.

*July 2.*—For sometime past we have had the privilege of walking in the Bishop's garden and to the wall, where we had a prospect of the shipping in the harbor, and the lower town. On Gen. Carleton's leaving the city the command devolved on the Lieut. Governor, who issued the order depriving us of these privileges, and forbidding our conversing with any persons except in the presence of the officer of the guard.

*July 4.*—All the troops in the city set off to join the main army; those who were Roman Catholics came into the Bishop's garden to receive absolution. They kneeled down in the rain and the Bishop came, and placed his hands on their heads as fast as he could, two at a time, and they arose as cheerful as if they had never committed a sin in their lives.

In the evening Mr. Lieut. Governor thought proper to order us to our room and lock the doors, and in order to make the insult greater, gave no reason for this action. Shortly after our door was thrown open, and some of our officers sent in that we had not known were captured. The first was Lieut. [John] Hoge and Lieut. [Samuel] M<sup>c</sup>Ferran, and soon after Capt. [Moses] M<sup>c</sup>Clean and Lieut. [Abdiel] M<sup>c</sup>Allister, who told us that they had gone out fishing, and wishing to get some Spruce beer up a small river that runs into the lake, Mr. Lemat with a party of Indians fired on them, killed Lieut. [Joseph] Culbertson, and Capt. [Robert] Adams, who threw himself flat in the boat was tomahawked and scalp'd, and the others taken prisoner.<sup>1</sup>

*July 5.*—Upon making inquiry we found that Colonel Baum<sup>2</sup> had ordered our doors to be locked; and that he

<sup>1</sup> All officers of Colonel Irvine's Sixth Pennsylvania Battalion.

<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Baum, of the Brunswick Dragoon Regiment, landed at Quebec on June 6, 1776.

disputed the command with the Lieut. Governor, which created some uneasiness in the garrison.

*July 26.*—Gen. Carleton's arrival from Montreal gave us pleasure, for he was the only friend we had in the city in authority. He sent Capt. Foy, of the Artillery, to inform us that he was sorry the commander had detained us so long, and assured us also, that had he known that the Commodore would not have us sent off, he would have chartered a vessel at his own expense. He also requested us to make out a statement of our debts that he might pay them, and a list of stores we would require for our voyage. We informed him £100. stg. would pay all our debts, and if His Excellency would advance that amount, we would remit it to any of His Majesty's officers he would select, who was then a prisoner in Pennsylvania. The next morning he sent us the money by the Barrack Master, Major Murray, with a polite note requesting that we would accept of it as a bounty from the King or himself. He also gave every private a shirt and sea-stores.

*N.B.*—This business was entirely arranged by Major Carleton, our particular friend, and a brother of His Excellency. When he called first and offered his services, we requested him to obtain our paroles for the city. He went to his brother, applied for the privilege, but reported that the General was of the opinion, that it would be financially better for us to go home on parole, and recommended our making application to him; which we did. The Major returned again and informed us with regret, that his brother had taken umbrage at our requisition, mentioning that in case of an exchange taking place, we might be included in the first. He suggested that we draw up another, that he would wait on his brother and strive to remove any difficulty that might have arisen; and that we had better not say anything about exchange. By private conversations he had with some of the officers—that they would willingly return home to their families and not take up arms against the King—we asked how Major Meigs and Capt. Dearborn were released, and he told us he believed it was on these

conditions. We replied that we never wished to see our homes again unless under honourable terms. He said such a requisition might be drawn up and those who objected might decline signing. We told him that we were all of the same mind. (We had gotten into the way of determining every thing by vote.) Finally he told us to draw a requisition for parole, and that if a cartel was settled, we might be included. This he took to his brother, and in a short time returned with his acceptance, but he was sorry to find the sentiment among the officers of the garrison, who he thought were our friends, opposed to us.

*July 30.*—Gen. Carleton allowed two of our officers to go into the city at a time, accompanied by a non-commissioned officer, to settle their accounts and procure sea-stores. He likewise suffered Gen. Thompson and Col. Irvine to pay us a visit, the first since their capture.<sup>1</sup>

*August 7.*—Capt. Endesley came to the Seminary and presented me with my sword, in the presence of all the officers; told me that it was done by order of Gen. Carleton, and that it gave him pleasure to do so, as I had done him the honor to deliver it to him on the morning of December 31, after we had made the attack on the city. He

1 " SEMINARY Aug. 2<sup>d</sup> 1776

"SIR:—

"It has been hinted to us by Gen. Thompson that the only objection his Excellency has to the word *hereafter*, being omitted in the Parole, proceeds from an apprehension that ill natured persons in the Colonies might misconstrue it to the prejudice of Maj. Meggs & Capt. Dearborn. We do not presume to point out this Difficulty, may be obviated, therefore shall only mention, that as we are fully assured that his Excellency had no intention to throw them into a disagreeable predicament with their Countrymen, a declaration of this kind if necessary from us when we arrive in the Colonies, may fully remove it.

"Your kind offers of service, and the willingness you have shown to oblige, we hope will be a sufficient Apology for our troubling so often,

"And your further Intercession with his Excellency in our behalf shall ever be esteemed a singular fav<sup>r</sup> by

"Sir your most obed<sup>t</sup>

" & oblig<sup>d</sup> humb<sup>l</sup>e Servt.

"To

"CAPT. FOY—"

also informed us that we should prepare to embark on the transports for New York. Captains [John] Lamb, [Daniel] Morgan, Oswald, McClean, Lieutenants Steele, McAllister, [William] Heath and [Byron] Bruen, Mr. Wister, Mr. Duncan, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Guire, Mr. Porterfield, and Lieut. Moody and myself embarked on the ship Lord Sandwich; Gen. Thompson and Col. Irvine with a number of others went on board the Prince of Wales; Col. [Christopher] Green and others on the John and Christopher, and the remainder of the prisoners on the Mermaid.<sup>1</sup>

*August 8-9*—I spent in visiting my brother officers on the transports. Capt. Davison favored me with a boat and crew. I shall never forget his friendship and genteel treatment, his favors to me in particular.

*August 10.*—Gen. Carleton made us a present of a quarter cask of Wine and five sheep for our sea-stores, and the same quantity to the officers of the other transports. The Bishop also presented us with two casks of Wine, eight loaves of Sugar and several pounds of green Tea. The Tea we declined, as we had resolved before leaving home, not to use it during the contest, and coffee was sent in lieu of it.

*August 11, Sunday.*—At 10 o'clock a.m. we weighed anchor, the wind East, and fell down the river two miles, where we had a beautiful prospect of the city and lower town; the river St. Charles and the ruins of St. Roque. At 6 o'clock we passed the Falls of the Montmorency, and later cast anchor.

*August 12.*—We set sail this morning, passed Orleans Island, and

<sup>1</sup> "PAROLE OF ABDIEL MCALLISTER.

"I Abdiel M<sup>c</sup>Allister of York County, Province of Pennsylvania hereby pledge my faith and word of Honor to General Carlton that I shall not do or say anything Contrary to the Interest of his Majesty, or his Government, and that whenever required so to do, I shall repair to whatever place His Excellency or any other of his Majesties Commanders in Chief in America shall judge expedient to order me.

"Given under my hand at Quebec Aug<sup>t</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> 1776

"ABDIEL MCALLISTER."

(True copy.)



*August 13*, the wind being from the N.E. we anchored.

*August 23*—Our last sight of land and nothing of interest until

*September 3*, when Thomas Garver died. Mr. Bruen acted as chaplain. He was sewed up in a blanket, to which a bag of stove coal was attached and his body committed to the deep.

*September 8*.—At 2 o'clock p.m. we had a hurricane which lasted three hours; sprung our mizzenmast, and were forced to lay to under bare poles.

*September 10*.—Lost the fleet; changed our course, and at ten o'clock a.m. sighted the frigate [Pearl] to windward, which bent her course towards us and fired a gun to heave to. By the lead, found soundings.

*September 12*.—At two o'clock a.m. made Sandy Hook and anchored. When day appeared we had a beautiful view of the Naversinks and Sandy Hook. We made sail and in a short time had a view of the British encampment on Staten Island and their fleet in the harbor—about 427 armed vessels and transports.

*September 13*.—Three British men of war which sailed past New York, were given a warm reception from the city, and as warmly returned their fire. This movement was to cover the landing of troops on York Island.

*September 14*.—Our army opened a heavy fire on the ships that passed the city yesterday at 2 o'clock, and engaged the troops who were landed. It will be easy to conceive what our feelings were.

*September 15, Sunday*.—More British vessels passed the city and landed troops, which brought on a skirmish that lasted for two hours.

*September 16*.—Early this morning we had a good view of two of their vessels coming down the river chased by two fire ships. After much difficulty they escaped. As the battery at Paulus Hook only fired at them, we felt certain our army had withdrawn from the city.

*September 21*.—A fire broke out in the city, supposed to have been started by our people who remained,—some were

hung on suspicion, among them one white man who was hung up by the heels to a sign post.

*September 22.*—Samuel Loring Esq., Commissary of Prisoners, notified us to prepare to disembark, but we heard nothing further until

*September 24,* when he came on board and ordered us ashore. I told him about my sword which Capt. Wilkinson had on board the frigate Pearl, which he said was up the river, and that by writing I might obtain it, I wrote the following :

“NEW YORK BAY, 24 Sept. 1776.

“SIR.

“Gen. Carleton was so kind as to order my Cutteau de Chase should be returned to me on my being landed at New York, for which purpose it was delivered to the Captain of the Pearl frigate, who I understand is some small distance up the North river. But as we are going ashore, it is impossible for me to send for it. If you will be so obliging as to make application for it, and send it on board the Lord Sandwich, Transport, before we disembark or send it by the next Flag of Truce that goes to the Continental Army, I shall ever esteem it a singular favor.

“I am Sir, your most

“obedient and most H<sup>l</sup> S<sup>t</sup>

“FRANCIS NICHOLS.

“SAMUEL LORING ESQ.”

The boat returned without seeing Mr. Loring and I lost my sword. However, as I had the honour of Endesley returning it by Gen. Carleton's order, and anxious to get on shore, I did not think much about it. My feelings on setting my feet on the Jersey shore are much easier conceived than expressed.

*September 27.*—Set out for Philadelphia in company with Adjutant Febiger and Mr. Henry, a volunteer from Lancaster.

*A List of the Officers taken in making the Attack on the City of Quebec, December 31, 1775.*

*New Hampshire.*

Capt. Henry Dearborn,  
Lieut. Nathaniel Hutchens,

Lieut. Emmi Andrews,  
Lieut. Joseph Thomas.

*Connecticut.*

Major R. J. Meigs,  
 Capt. Eleazer Oswald,  
 Capt. Samuel Lockwood,

Capt. Oliver Hanchett,  
 Lieut. Abijah Savage,  
 Quartermaster Benjamin Catlin.

*Massachusetts.*

Major Timothy Bigelow,  
 Capt. William Goodrich,  
 Lieut. Samuel Brown,

Lieut. John Cumston,  
 Lieut. John Clark,  
 Lieut. James Tisdal.

*Rhode Island.*

Col. Christopher Green,  
 Capt. Samuel Ward,  
 Capt. Simon Thayer,  
 Capt. John Topham,

Lieut. Samuel Webb,  
 Lieut. Edward Slocum,  
 Lieut. William Humphreys,  
 Lieut. — Shaw.

*New York.*

Capt. John Lamb,

Lieut. Andrew Moody,  
 Lieut. Stephen McDugall.

*Pennsylvania.*

Lieut. Francis Nichols,  
 Lieut. Archibald Steele,

Volunteers, { Mathew Duncan,  
 { John Jos. Henry.

*Virginia.*

Capt. Daniel Morgan,  
 Lieut. William Heath,  
 Lieut. Byron Bruen,

Volunteers, { John Maguire,  
 { Charles Porterfield.

Adjutant Christopher Febiger, a Danish officer.