

EXPEDITION MESSENGER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ARNOLD EXPEDITION HISTORICAL SOCIETY



May 2020



Spring Calendar

- May 9 - Mt. Road trail clearing. Meet at pullout on the Carry Pond Road, moving to Mt. Road crossing at 8:30. Rain date May 16.
- June 13 - Spring meeting at the Colburn Barn, Arnold Road, Pittston; inside with a big circle or outside if a nice day. Meeting to start around 9:30 AM.

Newsletter Highlights

- 2020 Spring Calendar
- Editorial - Covid-19 and Essential Services
- Ron Gamage, 1927-2020
- AEHS Papers/Artifacts Project
- AEHS Board 2020-22
- Strategic Distancing in 1776
- Meigs County, TN
- Arnold Bookshelf: Isaac Arnold

• Editorial - Covid 19 and Essential Services

At this writing, Covid-19 cases in the hardest-hit areas of New York may be starting to decline, but those in Massachusetts are rising. Predictions for Maine are for the peak to be in a week or two, which would be the first week of May.

The AEHS has decided to go ahead with the May and June events noted in the Calendar above. Trail clearing is something which can be done with people at safe distances from each other, and the meeting can be held in as large a circle as necessary. But it goes without saying that the priority is everyone's health and safety, so if you are sick, or think you are, please skip these events.

I anticipate this issue to reach everyone electronically before May 9, allowing all such readers at least the possibility of attending. For the postal copies, all bets are off. As of yesterday, printing is officially an "essential service" in New York, something the Founding Fathers would certainly approve, but the mails are unpredictable these days. We hear the whole [Postal Service](#) may be bankrupt by June, thanks to ridiculous financial burdens put on it by a hostile Congress some years back and the lack-of-support/open-opposition from the current Federal government. I have bought some stamps ahead of need in an effort to support the Post Office. On behalf of [Ben Franklin](#) I urge every loyal American to do the same. (Opinions are those of the editor and not necessarily those of the AEHS.)



Dear members: We inadvertently printed the wrong zip code in the December newsletter. Please forward all renewal checks and donations to The Arnold Expedition Historical Society, P.O. Box 94, Eustis, ME **04936**. If you prefer to receive the newsletter electronically, please let us know at: arnoldexpedition@gmail.com.

• The Passing of Ronald Gamage

On March 17 Ronald B. Gamage passed away. Ron served as a director of the Society for many years. He was particularly involved in maintaining and repairing the Nichols Cabin on Middle Carry Pond.

Ron and his lifelong friend Rusty Arsenault worked closely on the trails in the area as well. Both were shipmates on a minesweeper in the Aleutian campaign during the Second World War. Ron was a fine man and we will miss him. His son, John Gamage, a master electrician at Cinbro Co. in Pittsfield, continues the family tradition of promoting the Society's goals.



A full obituary appeared in the Kennebec Journal and Morning Sentinel, you can read it at the following link posted March 25: <https://www.centralmaine.com/?p=1793866>

• AEHS Papers/Artifacts project

The consolidation of records kept by past Society officers and members has started. As a result, we'll have just one place to go when it comes time to check on things like trail signage, rights of way, artifact recovery preservation and storage, past newsletters, property taxes, insurances, research documents, Colburn House agreements and much, much more. It's a long process and the search for records that have been stored away in basements, closets, and garages still continues.

If you have any records, documents, pictures or research files that pertain to the AEHS or to the Arnold Expedition in general and you want to preserve them, let us know. We'll make arrangements to collect and sort them.

Here are pictures of some AEHS officers and directors sitting at the sorting table and the category boxes for the first of several sorting days.



• Arnold Expedition Historical Society Board 2020 - 2022

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• Strategic Distancing in 1776

The term social distancing is increasingly familiar to us in these times of anxiety over an infectious disease. The Continental Army in the summer of 1776 faced a similar... threat. [Smallpox](#), a virulent, painful, and extremely contagious disease was the bane of the Continental Army heading into 1776. ... One of most dangerous outbreaks came during the American invasion of Canada. ... [After the failure to capture Québec, t]he weary Americans... prepared for a long siege of the city with inadequate tools, artillery, and equipment.

British reinforcements eventually relieved the besieged city in May of 1776 and in roughly two months the American forces were pushed back over 250 miles ... to the southern end of Lake Champlain. The retreat was harrowing, ill-equipped and harried by British regulars, the American forces suffered immensely before consolidating at the old fortress of Crown Point in early July. Throughout the winter and the demoralizing retreat, it was not a human enemy that caused the most havoc and fear. John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail in June of 1776 and explained: “The Small Pox is ten times more terrible than Britons, Canadians and Indians together.”

... The Canadian campaign had brought soldiers together in close quarters from as far south as Virginia and as far north and east as Maine. In this dense and diverse human environment, the disease spread quickly among soldiers who had not received immunity by surviving ... the disease earlier in life. Rates of illness [reached] almost 50% of the American forces outside Québec by May.... In their wake the Americans left a trail of dead and dying men, suffering from smallpox, who could not match the speed of the withdrawal.

The disease spread in the American camps, and reinforcements joining the army were often disabled when they arrived and contracted the disease themselves. The horror of the epidemic peaked at [Isle aux Noix](#) in the Richelieu River, just north of Lake Champlain, where American forces consolidated before heading to Crown Point. The unhealthy, low-lying ground and the massive numbers of sick men combined in an excruciating scene of misery. ...[T]he rapid spread of the disease, and the hasty pace of retreat left men in agony, with scores dying daily and being hastily buried in mass graves. ... The American commander, [General John Thomas](#), died of smallpox on June 2, 1776. [*Thomas was also a physician; the town of Thomaston, Maine is named for him.*]

What was to be done? ... Inoculation was a well-known treatment by 1776. By cutting the skin and inserting the contents of a smallpox sufferer’s pustules patients contracted a milder form of the disease, and when recovered received the benefit of immunity as if they had survived a full outbreak. ... Despite its potential, inoculation was still dangerous. Poorly conducted inoculation could result in spreading the disease, those who were inoculated were incapacitated for weeks, and inoculation could still be deadly, if not to the same percentages as the full illness. [[Jenner](#) and his cowpox vaccine were still fifteen to twenty years in the future.]

... Smallpox had broken out in Boston during the British occupation at the same time. The British army had higher rates of immunity within their ranks due to endemic exposure to the disease in Great Britain, but General Howe had recommended that British soldiers who did not have immunity should be inoculated. While it was not mandatory, troops who were being inoculated, or didn’t have immunity, were segregated to prevent the spread of the disease and to preserve the fighting ability of the army.

Continental soldiers received no such orders and fear of smallpox drove many in the northern army to inoculate themselves and their comrades over the winter of 1775 into 1776. Continental Army commanders quickly saw the situation getting out of hand. Between botched inoculations and disabled men who had been inoculated, more of the army was being incapacitated, precisely when they needed to preserve order. Orders were issued to the explicit army prohibiting the practice, which threatened the health and capabilities of the army. Throughout the spring these orders were repeated, with harsh punishments threatened, but as troops retreated and new men joined the army and witnessed the horrors of the disease, haphazard and uncoordinated inoculations continued.

By the beginning of July 1776, American forces had fallen back up Lake Champlain to Crown Point and searched for a place to make their stand against the British, and the disease. The remarkable ability of the virus to survive on [cloth] and other surfaces meant that anywhere it had been was dangerous. ... Stopping the spread of the disease meant getting susceptible people away from it, the Continental army needed to practice Strategic distancing.

Knowing that almost anywhere soldiers went had the possibility to spread the virus, American forces, now under the command of General Horatio Gates, met at Crown Point to discuss the end of the retreat. A Council of War was called on July 7, 1776. They made the decision to make a stand not at Isle aux Noix or Crown Point but at the narrow point in Lake Champlain where the [La Chute River](#) empties into the lake, particularly the virgin east side of the lake, where no troops had been stationed. They resolved: “That it is prudent to retire immediately to the strong ground on the east side of the Lake opposite to Ticonderoga, with all the healthy and uninfected troops; and that the sick and infected with the smallpox be removed to Fort George, it appearing clearly to the Council that the post opposite to Ticonderoga will the most effectually secure the country, and removing the infected with the small-pox obviate every objection that may at present retard the Militia (ordered by Congress) from joining the Army.”

By moving the army to Ticonderoga and its eastern shore counterpart (soon to be known as Mount Independence) the army sought to avoid a contagious location. It further separated its already sick men by sending them further south to Fort George at the lower end of Lake George. There, away from the main body of troops, but close enough to rejoin the army quickly, the worst cases could recover. The disease continued to afflict the army, but calculated and systematic decisions to move to uninfected areas and formally segregate ill troops may have saved the American Revolution. By the late summer, smallpox was reduced in its virulence across the entire army. From mowing down huge portions of the army in Canada over the winter, when Edmund Munro arrived to reinforce the army at Ticonderoga with militia from Lexington, Massachusetts in mid-August, he was able to report to his wife that, “there is none sick of the small Pox & it is thought there is no Danger.”

Later General George Washington would introduce [large-scale inoculation](#) to the entire Continental Army. To be most effective, and to preserve the fighting capabilities of the Continental Army, inoculation needed to be conducted in a systemic fashion, not the haphazard way it was being conducted in Canada in late 1775 and 1776. But the strategic distancing practiced by General Gates in July of 1776 preserved the integrity of the northern army. By October, when the British advanced up the Lake, American soldiers sent to the hospital at Lake George mustered the strength to rejoin the army at Ticonderoga, which had swelled to over 10,000 men strong.

The American troops at Ticonderoga in the summer of 1776 may not have defeated smallpox, but by taking careful, and calculated steps, they mitigated its most harmful effects and preserved their ability to fight. This was a critical step for the American Revolution, allowing them to resist the British advance in October and preserving the army as a fighting force. Many in the army might have echoed John Adams, who in his letters to Abigail reiterated his hope and perseverance in the face of infectious disease and military defeat: “these Reverses of Fortune don’t discourage me. It was natural to expect them, and We ought to be prepared in our Minds for greater Changes, and more melancholly Scenes still. It is an animating Cause, and brave Spirits are not subdued with Difficulties.”

Reprinted from the website of Fort Ticonderoga, with some editing. Permission to reprint was requested, but no response being forthcoming, I proceeded “in the name of the Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress”; they should be used to that. Link to full article: [Strategic Distancing](#)

• Meigs County, Tennessee

To the Editor:

We have a county, just north of Hamilton County (Chattanooga) in Tennessee, named Meigs County. It was named for Return Jonathan Meigs. In fact, he and his wife are buried in Rhea County, just across the Tennessee River from Meigs County. Meigs is known around here more for his connection with the Cherokee nation. Meigs was the first Agent representing the United States with the sovereign Cherokee nation. He issued passports to cross the Cherokee nation as well as acted as Ambassador. I wrote an article a number of years ago for Steve Clark, who included it in the "Expedition Messenger". Tell Kenny Wing I said hello.

Bart Crattie,
Lookout Mountain, Georgia

[Not so many years ago; the article was in the May 2012 issue. Here is the introductory paragraph from that publication. - Ed. Note the link at the end still works, it is from a Meigs family history site.]

As most AEHS members are aware, Major Meigs was the leader of the third division during the 1775 Expedition. He was captured on Jan. 1, 1776 during the attack on Quebec. Later he was paroled and returned to his home in Connecticut. He later rejoined the army and led a successful raid on Sags Harbor, Long Island, for which he was awarded an honorary sword by Congress. He participated in several other campaigns. He left the army in 1781 with the rank of Colonel.

He later was one of the first leaders to settle the Ohio territory and later became an Indian Agent and advocate for the Cherokee Nation. He died with great honor in 1823.

AEHS members Bart Crattie and John Parsons, have done a little background investigation of his life. He is buried in Tennessee, and a nearby county is named after him. For a very interesting short biography of his life and the Meigs family, click on the following website. <http://meigs.org/rjm90.htm>



• The Benedict Arnold Bookshelf

The list of books about Benedict Arnold grows longer every year. I believe it is common knowledge (meaning unsubstantiated rumor) that the American with the most shelf space devoted to them is Abraham Lincoln, probably followed by George Washington. Wikipedia says there are some sixteen thousand works on Lincoln (125 on the assassination alone) and six thousand on [Washington](#). (Has anyone here read all seven large volumes of Douglas Southall Freeman's Washington biography? Not the one-volume condensed version.) But I don't know of a comparable estimate for Benedict Arnold.

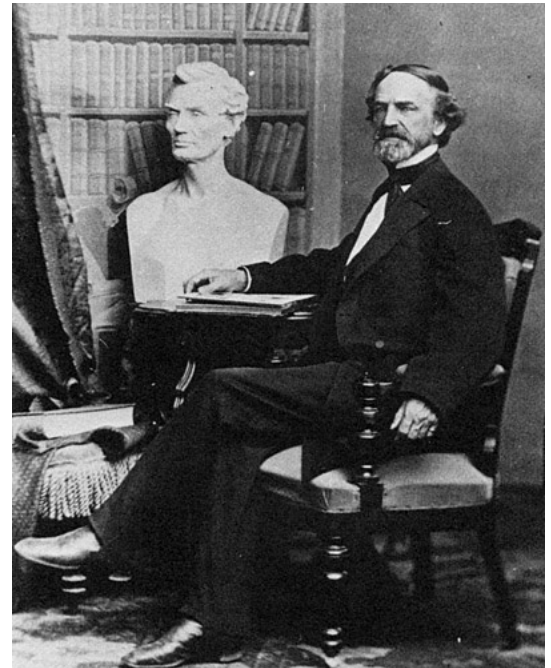
The first Arnold biography is probably the one by [Jared Sparks](#), a big name in the nineteenth century, who published his *Life of Arnold* in 1835. Sparks was born in 1789, so could have talked with veterans who had known Arnold personally. Sparks's *Life of Arnold* is rather hostile. The [whole text](#) is available online if you care to read it. (He also published twelve volumes of George Washington's papers, if Freeman was not enough for you.)

There was supposed to have been a [seminar on the American Revolution](#) at Williamsburg VA in March of this year, but the universe had other plans. Booked to speak were Arnold biographers [James Kirby Martin](#), [Stephen Brumwell](#) and [Nathaniel Philbrick](#) as well as other familiar names. Ah well. I did read their biographies in order to be prepared, and enjoyed both of them, but in this issue I will highlight an older work.

• Isaac N. Arnold

[Isaac Newton Arnold](#) (1815-1884) wrote one of the first biographies of Benedict Arnold which was at all sympathetic. *The Life of Benedict Arnold: His Patriotism and His Treason* was published in 1880 and recently has been reprinted (with no new material added.) He clearly condemns Arnold's treason but tries to give due credit for all that went before. He quotes a Colonel Lamb, speaking to a detractor who said that at Saratoga, Benedict Arnold merely exhibited 'Dutch courage': "Sir, let me tell you, that drunk or sober, you will never be an Arnold, or fit to compare with him in any military capacity."

Some might assume that Isaac was a descendant of Benedict Arnold, but no. In his introduction he makes it clear that while they were related, it was through an ancestor some 250 years back. Isaac's grandfather Thomas Arnold did fight in the Revolution but remained loyal, in fact he named Isaac's father George Washington Arnold.



Before all this writing, Isaac Arnold was a congressman from Illinois, noted for introducing a bill banning slavery in the Territories, which became law in 1862. He also proposed the first constitutional amendment banning slavery throughout the United States, in 1864.

Isaac Arnold's hero was Abraham Lincoln, of whom he wrote not one but two biographies. In *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, published in 1884, he described how he personally called on Lincoln at the White House on the evening of April 14, 1865. "... just as he was stepping into his carriage, the author met him, and he said, 'Excuse me now. I am going to the theatre. Come and see me in the morning.'" (p. 431.)

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For non-members, add one additional dollar for postage.



To order the AEHS 18 x 28 color, two-sided map of **The 1775 Expedition's Route** from the Kennebec River to Lac Megantic, Canada send check for \$5.95.
These can be ordered unfolded, for framing or wall mounting, for an additional \$6.00 to cover cost of shipping tube and postage.

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