

# EXPEDITION MESSENGER

## NEWSLETTER OF THE ARNOLD EXPEDITION HISTORICAL SOCIETY



*September, 2018*

### Annual Meeting to be Held

The annual meeting of the Society will be held on September 15, a Saturday, at 1:00 PM. It will be held at the Colburn House in Pittston as we have in the past. A short business meeting will be followed by a featured lecture by the adventurer and story teller **Hodding Carter**.

As members will remember, he had a replica of an expedition bateau built and manned with a small crew to traverse the entire Expedition's route from Pittston to Quebec City. The Society did assist his group particularly by director Norm Kalloch over the Great Carrying Place and by Kenny Wing who guided them up the No. Branch of the Dead River and Height of Land Portage into Canada.

It should be a most interesting lecture and is open to all the members and the public.

A meeting of the AEHS Board will also be held that day, and will meet at 9:30 AM at the same site. As always, members are most welcome to attend. For any attendees, we will be holding a picnic brown bag lunch between the meetings and all are also invited to join us.

Good weather is absolutely guaranteed!

### Newsletter Highlights

- Annual Meeting to be held
- New Newsletter Editor Needed
- Report of June Board Meeting
- *Hunting Arnold's Gold*,  
feature article
- The Ammo Box

### New Newsletter Editor Needed

The current AEHS newsletter editor has indicated that it is time for a change! Steve and Sherri Clark have been at this task since 2005 which has encompassed no less than 37 editions. The letter is published three times a year and usually has eight pages. The December newsletter has developed into a centerfold of four pages of colored pictures of Society activities since 2011.

The job entails collecting news items and articles from members, editing and arranging them within the space available. Modern word processors make this relatively easy.

So the Society is seeking a person who has a literary touch, has a computer and a bit of time three times a year. The job is fun, creative and of course helps the Society to communicate with its members.

This job begins after January 1<sup>st</sup>, of this coming year with the first edition due by May 1st.

Please contact our president, Fred Clark, (207) 872-9471 or by mail through our address on the back page of this newsletter. It is a very rewarding part of being a member of the Society without having to slog through the Megantic Swamps.



## **Report of AEHS Board Meeting of June 16, 2018**

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 by president, Fred Clark. Present were Fred Clark, Steve Clark, Mike Holt, Bob Donovan, Norm Kalloch, Clayton McLaughlin, Pete Morrissey, Sarah Donovan, Pat Holt, Sherri Clark and Caia Judge.

The Treasure's Report was presented by a written submission by Alan Burnell who was absent. It was reviewed and accepted by the Board.

**Predication of Artifacts.** An involved discussion on artifacts recovered during the 2017 Archaeological Field Study was conducted. It was decided to preserve the recovered boards from the so-called "Ammo Box." An appropriation of \$2,500 to do this was approved by the Board. Pat Holt has agreed to attempt a reconstruction of the box. Further, it was agreed to establish a display showing both the preserved original boards and the replica of the ammo box. Over 2,000 recovered musket balls will be a part of it. The display's location is being explored.

**Possible Grant to Undertake a Major Project** This possible grant would allow the Society to undertake a new, major project, possibly in the Chain of Ponds country. This would involve restoring a section of the old Height of Land Portage Trail. This possibility will be explored by Fred and Steve Clark and will be reported to the Board in September.

**Extinguishment of an Easement Near East Carry Pond.** An old easement held by the Society near East Carry Pond was discussed. A local landowner has requested that we extinguish this easement. It is no longer important to have this easement as it now follows a gravel road. It was discussed to see if another section of the portage trail could be protected by a new easement in an exchange. Norm Kallock is negotiating this possibility.

**Colburn House Management** An involved discussion of what to do with the management of the Colburn House ensued. The issue involves the State Bureau of Parks and Lands as the house has not been opened to the public for four years now. Also, there is no long term management plan to guide the State or us. A discussion with the State needs to be undertaken.

**Storage of AEHS Records** The storage of AEHS records was discussed. It was pointed out that they are spread around and are not organized. There is a danger that they will be lost. The discussion focused on the possibility of accessing them by establishing an Internet website. It was pointed out that most organizations like ours have decided on internet access. This would provide detailed information of our records to any person. This possibility will be looked into in the future.

**Reproduction of video of the 1975 Reenactment** A discussion regarding the need to convert our copies of the 1975 reenactment from the old video format to a more modern CD format. By doing this it might be made available for sale to our members as well as preserving this valuable record of that event. This is being looked into by Steve Clark.



## Hunting Benedict Arnold's Gold

By Stephen Clark

One time while passing through the Quebec town of Lac Megantic, I was told of a fascinating article that had been recently published there regarding Benedict Arnold's buried gold. The author claimed that while Arnold and his small American army passed through that area on their way to capture the citadel of Quebec, Arnold had decided to bury a cache of gold to protect it from capture by the British.

Over time, stories had arisen that his army was carrying a vast horde of gold to use in persuading the Canadians to join the Revolution. This tale had evolved to the point where some speculated as to where the treasure might have been buried.

This kind of legend is not unusual in history. It has popped up time and again. Remember the pervasive story regarding Blackbeard's golden treasure that was to have been lost near the site of his wrecked ship, the *Whydah* on Cape Cod. Treasure hunters still spend summers hunting for his treasure.

Then there is the story of the lost treasure on Oak Island, near Halifax, NS. It developed in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when it was discovered that a rope burn on a tree limb which hung over a deep, mysterious well. The well was a labyrinth of very sophisticated construction and contained designed traps, indicating that something of great value lay below. Over many years, various attempts have been made to unearth the presumed treasure. Similar legends of lost treasure have evolved in the U.S.

In the case of the 1775 Revolutionary War's Quebec expedition there is a treasure story which has a strong element of truth to it. But it is quite different from a tale of buried bags of gold. Following is that story, undoubtedly the source of the exaggerated tale of Arnold's buried gold.

The context of the story begins in August and early September of 1775. Gen. Washington, Arnold and other key officers were devising a two pronged attack on Canada to bring that Province into the Revolutionary War on the side of the Americans. Arnold was assigned the command of a small American army that was to secretly attack Quebec City, then the British capitol of Canada. It was to be a backdoor surprise attack via an ascent of the Kennebec River, through the wild Border Mountains and down the Chaudiere River to the St. Lawrence. About 1100 soldiers comprised the expedition beginning at Cambridge, Massachusetts, which at that time was the headquarters of the American army.

In order to support the army while in Canada, hard currency (coinage) was required. One should remember this moment was only four months after Lexington and Concord, and that an official government would not be formed until the signing of the Declaration of Independence, ten months later. So there was no such thing as paper money, certainly none that the suspicious Canadians would accept. (Cont. Page 4)



Page 4 (cont. from Page 3)

In the aftermath of Lexington and Concord, most of the rich gentry, who were labeled loyalists, had fled into Boston to the protection of the British army. Any portable valuables including any coinage would have gone with them. Thus there was little to be confiscated by the fledgling rebels.

So the various local "Committees of Safety" supporting the army had a difficult time scraping up hard cash to sustain the 15,000 American troops besieging Boston.

Somehow, this was barely accomplished and a portion of the collected coinage was allocated for the Quebec Expedition. This consisted of various denominations of British, French, Spanish, Portugese and a variety of other coinage. Undoubtedly there was some gold coinage, but doubtful there were bags and bags of gold doubloons. Records have been lost to know how much was allocated for the expedition. Its total value, and weight are unknown. Most likely it was not a large amount, but would have been stored in either a wooden keg or a heavily constructed wooden box. It is also possible that other gold and silver items of value could also have been included.

On or about Sept. 15<sup>th</sup>, 1775, the "treasure keg" was sent overland to Newburyport as Boston was in British hands. From there it went onboard one of the 11 small schooners that would carry the army along the coast then up the Kennebec River. At the Colburn shipyard it was offloaded into one of the bateau and rowed upriver to Ft. Western, the staging area for the expedition. There were 220 bateau and we do not know who oversaw the cash keg (s). It most likely was included in either the second or third of the four divisions (Greene or Meigs).

At this point we must introduce two additional players to this saga. They were scouts, the Getchell brothers who joined the army while at Ft. Western. They were natives of Vassalboro, the next settlement north of Fort Western. They proved to be knowledgeable woodsmen and knew the route of the expedition, at least as far as the Chain of Ponds near the Boundary Mountains (the present Canadian boundary). Capt. Colburn had recently sent them on a scouting trip upriver and they had just returned.

We must interject here that much of the following information regarding the Getchell brothers has been researched by one Frank Getchell who is a direct descendant of the brothers. He is a family historian and for many years operated a local store in Vassalboro at Getchell's Corner. It is with his permission that we include his research.

After striking north with the army, they proceeded up the arduous ascent of the Kennebec, across the Great Carrying Place, then up the not so Dead River.

On October 19<sup>th</sup> the struggling army, already low on rations, was hit by a late fall hurricane, the rain lasting five days. It transformed the normally serene upland Dead River into a ragging torrent at flood stage. The men even ended up pushing the bateau through the flooded trees along the banks of the river. (Cont. Page 5)



The scene shifts upstream on the North Branch of the Dead River to one of its many falls, at Shadagee.

Below these falls even today, there is a narrow, steep-walled canyon which was then at flood stage. It proved to be quite daunting. .

A line of seven bateau were being roped and poled against this powerful current by the struggling boat crews. Without warning the lead bateau lost control, turned broadside and like a row of bowling pins, capsized each of the trailing bateau, spilling men and contents into the raging flood. All the precious food, supplies, oars, paddles, poles and men were swept rapidly downstream in the freezing water. All the wooden items were strung out for miles. The bateau were wrecked into kindling. However, the keg of cash must have rolled along the bottom until snagged at some point downstream. Because of its weight, it remained submerged.

Miraculously no men were drowned and they were fished out wet, bedraggled and next to death. Plus all their personal belongings, and crucially their muskets lay at the bottom of the river. Fires were immediately built to prevent the freezing men from hypothermia and death.

The march was halted as it was late and a soggy camp was made near the falls. This event was prominently described in the journals of some of the men. The site was appropriately named Camp Disaster.

The Getchell brothers may have observed the disaster. It most certainly would have been the main topic of conversation around the warming and drying fires that night. Even though the loss of the money keg and its capacity to buy food in Canada may have been discussed, the immediate need for food, and its loss in the flooded river, undoubtedly was of much greater importance that night. They had been on 3/4 rations for about two weeks so food undoubtedly was always their prime concern.

The next day, the expedition resumed its way upstream towards the Chain of Ponds and on to Quebec.

The involvement of the Getchell brothers during the remainder of the march is not known. It is unlikely they knew the route beyond the Boundary Mountains. Nor is there any record that they participated in the December 31<sup>st</sup> attack on Quebec. It is also not known when and where they left the army.

The next record of their activities was that they were at home in Vassalboro the following spring of 1776. It is not known when they arrived there.

Although they accompanied the expedition, they may not have been officially on the army's roster. Also it is unclear who was to pay them, the army or Capt. Colburn. The latter was the person who hired them to do the initial scouting of the route. Nor was Colburn ever paid for his accompanying the expedition with his crew of repairmen, who stayed with the army as far as the Great Carrying Place. (cont. Page 6)



As a result of Frank Getchell's research, it is known that in early summer, after the spring runoff reduced river levels, the two brothers disappeared into the wilds for more than a month. Could it be that during the long winter they decided to return to the Dead River and hunt for the lost money keg? This certainly would be a way to get paid for their services!

They returned home later in the summer and did not divulge where they had gone (just a little hunting trip!). After returning, they carefully and quietly began to purchase land in Vassalboro and the surrounding area. This was continued during the next few years. It is curious as to where the wherewithal for these purchases came from.

One of the legal quirks of that era was that the type and amount of remuneration was recorded on the registered deed transfers. In many cases it was because the value of the payment was often in goods rather than money. Mr. Getchell has examined a number of these deeds still retained. He found that the Getchell brothers paid for these purchased lands in hard currency. This was unusual for that time as there was little hard cash floating around. Paper currency came to the Province of Maine after the formation of the new government several years later. Hard currency in 1776 was still the "coin of the realm."

The brothers continued to pay coinage for new land for some time according to the research. One of the Getchell brothers eventually moved to the Orono area, settled and continued to purchase land in that area.

Since this process was undertaken slowly, over time, and within the mostly private deeding process, there evidently was no suspicions that arose and few questions were raised.

It is likely that the keg of coinage on the bottom of the Dead River was recovered and eventually contributed to grow the economy of the Province of Maine. We will never know definitively as it falls into the category of one of history's mysteries. This is probably as close to the truth as we will ever know of the legend of "Benedict Arnold's Gold."

The event reminds the author of the old schoolyard morality,  
**"finders keepers; losers weepers."**

### **Trail Clearing Trip to the Great Carrying Place**

On July 24th Fred Clark, Clayton McLaughlin, Bob Donovan and Pete Morrissey drove in to the "connector trail" from the Long Falls Dam Road. The connector trail connects the Appalachian Trail to the Spring Road allowing hikers a route around the south end of West Carry Pond and back to the portage route. Part of it follows an abandoned logging road that is grassy.

We used an old gravelly walk behind the mower for part of the way and "weed whackers" for the rest of it. The section we mowed is easily passable now.

At a later date Norm Kalloch used a brush saw to finish cleaning the trail through the woods to the intersection of the AT.

Bob Donovan



## The Ammo Box

*by Kenny Wing*

I have been thinking about musket balls and shot. Dad's [Duluth] find, a "cache" of musket balls totaled 823 with shot. This weighed in at 23 pounds. He and I have always thought this would be contained in a 25 pound keg. Dad also found many examples of soldiers molding their own balls around various campfire sites.

They evidently were making lead balls while on the move. These lead molds were made for the size of their particular Calabar muskets.

This compares to the more than 2000 lead balls found during the 2017 archeological field study. The weight in this box was 87 pounds and obviously had to be carried by two men with a pole between them and rope handles.

All the balls and shot recovered in the "ammo box" were mixed up, no sorting of the sizes within the box. We are very sure of that archaeologically. This is also true for the cache Dad found; they were all mixed up.

When soldiers are actively fighting and firing their guns as fast as they can, they were not worried about musket balls smaller than their weapon's bore. I've witnessed rapid fire of a musket and was shown how a man could fire a musket, one round every 7-11 seconds with unpatched balls.

Examining these caches of balls, it is my thoughts that there were three "standard" sizes of musket balls used by the soldiers on the expedition. There were so many different musket barrel sizes made during this era, they could be fired, unpatched [loaded with no warding], in their guns once you "grabbed" the right caliber of ball.

When one examines a pile of musket balls like what was in the ammo box, you can very quickly discern by eye the difference between the three sizes. Sorting them out in the field wasn't a problem in my humble opinion.

The smaller shot within the ammo box is on the average of .30 caliber, very close to what we would call "00 buck" or "buckshot".

It is hopeful that we may recover other ammo boxes to add to our knowledge of the expedition. Some of them may be at the bottom of the waterways, especially on the North Branch of the Dead River.

I've also wondered about Greene's Division which was ordered to "make cartridges". I assume that would entail making paper cartridges twisted and folded with paper around a ball and powder charge. This most likely was ordered to keep the men busy! It was done on the Dead River while waiting for food to be brought up. They were still a long way off from an attack on Quebec! To do this, they would have had to be dipping into either box or kegs of lead, or molding balls to fit their particular muskets.

Another mystery!

**Did you know that;** Henry Dearborn, who was a Captain of one company during the expedition, and was captured at Quebec, later became the General of the Army during the Washington administration and served in that capacity until well into the War of 1812!

## AEHS New Membership Form

Mail this form with your check to: AEHS , C/o Lucas Freeman, Sec.  
280 Winthrop Rd.  
Readfield, ME 04355

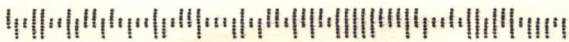
Include your phone number and email address if this is acceptable. Make check payable to AEHS.

Category:

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Membership	\$ 30
<input type="checkbox"/> Family Membership	\$ 35
<input type="checkbox"/> Contributing Membership	\$ 75
<input type="checkbox"/> Life Membership	\$ 250 (one time payment)
Additional donation for Society programs	\$ _____ (tax deductible)

➔ To order the 16 page booklet-guide to **The Great Carrying Place Portage Trail**, 12 miles in length, send check for \$5.00 to AEHS. 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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