
EXPEDITION MESSENGER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ARNOLD EXPEDITION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

September 2022



Calendar

Sept. 24: AEHS meets at [Fort Western](#) in Augusta, to coincide with their Benedict Arnold Weekend. Board meets at 9:30 AM, with the 250th Anniversary Committee to follow, and general annual meeting after that. (Bring your lunch.)

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We're grateful to all members who have remitted their annual dues for 2022.

If you have not already renewed, please do so by clicking here: [Membership Archives - Arnold Expedition Historical Society](#) . You can also send a check made payable to: AEHS c/o Steve Gehrich (treasurer), 386 Murphys Corner Rd, Woolwich, ME 04579.

Colburn House saved!

The Reuben Colburn house in Pittston, now falling apart much like the 220 bateaux once launched from there onto the Kennebec, will be repaired. Getting money out of Congress was perhaps Benedict Arnold's biggest challenge, but now the National Park Service has allocated half a million dollars to the Maine Department of Agriculture,

Conservation and Forestry for the Colburn project.

AEHS Trail Grant \$\$

[Friends Fiduciary](#) has awarded the AEHS a grant of \$14,000 to be used for the identifying, clearing and marking of The Great Carrying Place of the Arnold Trail. Extending the trail on to the Canadian border is a long-term goal as well.

Road Marker at Anson

by Clayton McLaughlin
with an assist by Bob Donovan

This is the road that Arnold's men cut to bypass the falls in what is now Madison, and Anson. It is located in front of the Post offices on Arnold St. The placard was placed on this boulder by the D.A.R.



Trail Clearing May 21

by Clayton McLaughlin

The 21st of May started out with a light drizzle, so the Holt brothers held off cooking the donuts that we all look forward to. The rain, however did not deter the seven of us that assembled at Arnold's Landing, and by 8:30 the drizzle had stopped. The black flies made a cameo appearance, and Fred Clark assigned us all to our sections. Fred along with Mark and Kathy Kahler took the upper part from East Carry back toward Mountain Road. Benjamin Smith and I took from Mountain Road toward East Carry Pond, meeting the other group about

halfway. Mike and Pat Holt started from Carrying Place Road and worked their way towards Mountain Road. As Benjamin and I were unloading our equipment from the truck on Mountain Road we were met by Norm Kalloch (making us a total of eight), and he started working from there toward Carrying Place Road meeting the Holt brothers about midway. The rain was done, the black flies were marginal, and due to our maintenance over the last few years we had one of the easiest cleanups in some time. I should mention that Fred had come up the day before, spending the night in the cabin at Middle Carry, and had cleared the new section from Mountain Road to the west side of East Carry. All in all it was an excellent day on the Arnold Trail. *[But what about the donuts? – Ed.]*

250th Committee Plans

Most of us remember the Bicentennial. Those too young to remember that can look forward to the Tricentennial. But who expected the Semiquincentennial? It doesn't roll off the tongue like the others, does it? From now on we will stick to calling it "the 250th". The AEHS 250th Committee met at Fort Western on August 9th. Co-chairs are Steve Clark and Chris Ireland. The group will meet next on Sept. 24th, see Calendar above.

Our 1975 reenactment followed the original route to the extent possible, with some variations in hardware. It was a march overland (using cars and trucks) or along the Kennebec and Dead Rivers via bateau replicas, built using Cecil Piece's plans. National Guard vehicles were used to move the boats. The group passed through Coburn Gore, on to Lac Megantic then held a reenactment of the battle on the Plain of Abraham. Something this ambitious is beyond our current capacity in numbers if nothing else. (Membership then was over 800.)

The Committee is working on contacting the other historical societies along the Kennebec and Dead River Valleys to collaborate with us. There are some fourteen such groups. Educational programs in local schools are another option, and the showing of relevant films at the [Colonial Theater](#) in Augusta and the [Maine Film Festival](#) out of Waterville. Another locale is Newburyport, MA, from which the expedition embarked. We will also reach out to the [Colonial Maine Living History Association](#).

Steve Clark's 3rd chapter pt 1

Descent to the St. Lawrence

Before narrating the army's march northward, it would be worthwhile to understand the confusing terrain confronting them.

As each contingent descended from the Boundary Mountains, during the next few days unbeknownst to them, at the south end of huge Lac Megantic, was a complex swamp system with various streams flowing through it. Montresor's description and map of the swamp, which the expedition was using, was limited because he had descended through the swamp at dusk, missing many of its crucial features. This oversight would later endanger the entire army. The expedition's guides knew virtually nothing about negotiating it, as we shall see.

Of the four contingents taking different routes through or around the swamp, only one relied on the services of a guide, which caused near disaster. Church's and Steele's key trail finding and marking activities had been terminated by Arnold as he had decided to attach them to his advanced party. The result was that the various contingents had to "fly blind."

It turned out that there were four different routes taken by the army to pass through or around the treacherous Megantic swamps. Complicating this maze, was the fact that its commander decided to transform the army from one primarily on water to one entirely on foot.

The result of these factors was that the army was in peril while passing through or around the Megantic swamp. The army came very close to being dissolved as a military force.

With this preface, let us now follow these decisive events that so endangered them all.

The morning of Oct. 27 Arnold's party including Lts. Church's and Steele's men descended from the mountain gap into a valley to reach the end of the Height of Land portage. Here they were astounded to enter a huge park-like meadow, dominated by mature elms. Through it passed a small stream which led northward (later named the Arnold River). The meadow was known as the Beautiful Meadow. An open meadow was a rarity in that country.

Here he found Capt. Hanchett's company which had been sent forward to reach the French settlements and procure food. They had just laboriously carried four of their heavy bateaux over the mountain and were preparing to descend the river to the lake.

Arnold, on the spur of the moment decided to assume Hanchett's task. Capt. Hanchett and his 55 soldiers had been given this assignment at the Council of War three days earlier.

This was a poor decision by Arnold as it made Hanchett look like a failure in front of his men.

After taking over the four bateaux, he ordered Hanchett and his men to follow the river down to the lake, not knowing the extreme danger these orders would cause to Hanchett's company.

Arnold's party then loaded the bateau then followed the narrow stream northward and soon entered the swamp. They came to a fork in the stream. Montresor's description indicated they should take the left, westernmost branch (later named the Black Arnold branch). In less than a mile they broke out of the swamp onto Lac Megantic. They headed for a prominent point on the east shore and found a fine camping spot,

including a native bark hut. As darkness fell, they started large campfires to warm themselves and to act as a signal.

After the departure of Arnold's party, Hanchett's company had, as ordered, followed the small stream toward the lake. As they progressed through the dense woods along the stream they gradually entered the swamp, it becoming gradually deeper as they neared the lake. As darkness approached, they could go no further as they were now knee- to waist-deep in freezing water. There was no high ground around them. Essentially they were in a trap created by the swamp. Some began climbing scrubby trees attempting to find a route out of the swamp and to extract themselves from the freezing water.

Finally at dark they all had to climb trees attempting to escape a cold death. Luckily they saw the signal fires across the lake. They began to shout in unison to attract those across the lake.

They were finally heard and the bateaux were immediately launched, rowing across the lake to rescue the men still perched in trees. Soon they were thankfully huddled around the lifesaving fires. It had been a very close thing. Capt. Hanchett would never forgive Arnold for this endangerment of him and his men.

The following morning Arnold's party launched the bateaux and struck northward toward the end of the fourteen-mile-long lake, there to find its outlet, the beginning of the Chaudière River. Hanchett's company followed the shoreline toward the same goal.

Before Arnold departed he did two important things. First he left two men

to keep the signal fires going and second he sent a guide, one Hull, with orders for the soldiers behind, not to follow the route Hanchett had taken into the swamp.

Back at the Beautiful Meadow that same day, much more was occurring. Morgan's tough men, amazingly, with no orders, had portaged seven of their remaining bateaux over the mountain. After a brief meal they launched their boats, beginning the descent down the stream to the lake.

About the same time, two companies, Dearborn's and Goodrich's arrived at the Meadow and briefly rested. At this point both companies had abandoned their bateaux and were on foot.

Capt. Dearborn was exhausted and barely able to keep up. Luckily his men found a native's canoe hanging in a tree. He quickly requisitioned it to descend the stream. The size of each company is estimated at about 60 soldiers. Evidently Arnold's guide had not reached them because they soon followed Hatchet's route down the stream. They had only their packs, arms and very little food.

When Dearborn in his canoe reached the fork in the stream, not having any indication which branch to take, he led his men along the easterly branch. However this led them more into the middle of the swamp. Since there was no trail the men tended to drift off into isolated groups. Some became lost, and soon it was each group drifting in various directions within the dense woods. They did bear easterly thus avoiding the worst of the swamp.

Darkness was approaching and men began to seek higher ground to sleep

and kindle fires. There were only a few small hummocks where a fire could be built and blankets placed. They were dangerously wet as it became colder. Some who were lost, could start no fire, had no food, were exhausted, and simply sat down and gave up. Their bones are still there!

At dusk Dearborn, still in his small canoe, met some of Goodrich's men who were on the stream's shore. They told him Goodrich had waded downstream to find a way across. He immediately struck off to find him. Shortly he found Goodrich struggling up to his waist and near death. He was barely able to get on board. They then headed back upstream to their men. If Dearborn had not rescued Capt. Goodrich, it is doubtful he would have survived.

The following morning more lost men who had spent the night in the swamp stumbled in to join the others. It was obvious they could go no further until they were able to cross the deep stream. The fragile bark canoe they had was hardly large enough to ferry a hundred men to the other side. It would have taken much of the day if attempted.

A stroke of luck was needed and around the bend it came! It was a single bateau carrying sick men from Capt. Smith's company. They had carried only one bateau across the mountain. They immediately began the ferry. But their luck was still limited as only 200 yards beyond this stream, another was discovered (the outlet stream from nearby Rush Lake).

As soon as they had ferried everyone across the first stream, they portaged their craft through the woods to the

second deep stream. They then repeated the ferrying process.

They finally reached higher ground and were out of the swamp trap.

The two companies once again together immediately marched north, soon reaching the shore of Lac Megantic. They spotted smoke from the signal fire and soon arrived at the bark hut.

Dearborn, unable to keep up, stayed with his canoe. It was about 13 miles to reach the lake's end and the beginning of the Chaudière. They wasted no time marching along the lake shore, following the rough path broken by Hanchett's men.

Before starting for the Chaudière, Arnold had realized two dangers to his army. First, the men were so weakened they could no longer carry their heavy bateaux. Thus the army must advance on foot. Second, he then knew that the army could not descend through the swamp as Hanchett had. Therefore he sent guide Hull back across the lake, up the stream to warn the army to avoid entering the swamp and to march northeast, keeping to the high ground.

Hull obviously missed Dearborn and Goodrich's companies as they had already entered the swamp. Morgan's company had portaged their bateau so they had the means to descend to the lake and continue north.

At the Beautiful Meadow, Hull met Greene and Meigs's divisions and gave them Arnold's orders. These were passed back down the line of march to the men in the rear.

(Note: The AEHS has been able to confirm the transformation of the army

from being waterborne to an army on foot because of two important archaeological discoveries. The first was the discovery of the remains of what had been an abandoned bateau and where it lay. Remaining nails formed the outline of a bateau. They were found near the old portage trail near one of the ponds on the Height of Land portage.

The other discovery was a cache of more than two thousand musket balls of various calibers, together weighing 92 pounds. These were also found on the route of the portage trail. Interestingly, the lead oxide leaching from the balls had preserved much of the wooden box. As a result its dimensions and design could be determined. Abandoning their ammunition reveals the degree of desperation of its carriers. They could no longer carry the heavy load. They had to drop it to keep up or perish.)

Back to events at the Beautiful Meadow. Lt. Col. Greene, who was the army's second in command, with the remaining officers, discussed with guide Hull how to proceed, to avoid the swamp. The guide said to keep to the high ground to the northeast of the lake. However that way had no marked trail. Church and Steele had been pulled off this task by Arnold. It is not known how many soldiers were in this contingent. It was the bulk of the remaining army.

In it was Greene's three companies, the remnants of Meigs's division and some men from Morgan's division. Essentially it was all or parts of six companies. Best estimate would be 350 to 375 soldiers.

Before starting forward, Greene and his officers decided to equally divide the

meager remaining food. This consisted of two pints of flour and a small chunk of spoiled meat. This would have to last them until they reached the French settlements, a period of four or five days. Officers tried to caution men not to eat all their skimpy allotments, difficult advice to starving men.

After the food division, the guide Hull led the army across the meadow and into the woods. There was no trail to follow, so the march gradually deteriorated into a horde, randomly crashing through the woods. As the afternoon progressed, Hull became less sure of himself. When they sighted a lake, it was not Megantic. Hull finally declared that he was lost and did not know how to find his way back to the route northward. This unknown lake had many long arms causing difficulty just to follow its shoreline eastward. (The lake was later named Spider Lake.) Night was approaching so Greene called a halt. It had been a disastrous day, even though they had avoided the swamp, they were now completely lost in an unknown wilderness.

Next morning Greene, not knowing which way to go, continued bearing eastward (away from Megantic) toward the end of the unknown lake. The men were frightened, discouraged and without food.

If Greene had continued eastward the army would have dissolved and many more men would have died.

Finally they reached the lake's east end, encountering a deep inlet stream. They were able to drop a large tree to form a rough bridge, allowing them singly to scramble over. Some of the weakened men had to be carried across.

Others who were ready to give up had to be dragged onward. They were all near their limit, particularly as their leaders appeared not to know where to go.

Then, occurred what seemed to be a miracle! A Native American appeared like an apparition. He knew some English and after a few minutes of talk, he indicated that he knew the way back to Lac Megantic. Greene and all the officers being desperate, put the entire future of their men onto this complete stranger (most white men of that day mistrusted all natives).

He immediately led them around the end of Spider Lake and headed northwest over gentle rolling hills allowing them to march easier, faster and with more confidence.

By midafternoon, with joy, they sighted Megantic through the trees. Soon they encountered the broken trail left by the preceding soldiers.

The army had just barely survived! Curiously, the native that had saved them seemed to disappear into the surrounding woods. After a short break allowing the stragglers to catch up, they struck northward towards the Chaudière.

To be Concluded, with
Down the Chaudière River



AEHS Membership Form

Mail this form with your check to: AEHS, c/o Steve Gehrich, 386 Murphys Corner Rd., Woolwich ME 04579. Include your phone number, and email address if this is acceptable; and please advise whether or not you want to receive the newsletter electronically. Make check payable to AEHS.

Category:

_____ Individual Membership \$30

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Additional donation for Society programs _____ (tax-deductible)

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 \$12.00. 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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