

WHAT'S IN A NAME: How Durben in Glasgow Became Dearborn in Quebec

I discovered the Captain Durben journal in 2009, from an unexpected source, while researching Benedict Arnold's expedition to Quebec, a disastrous 1775 attempt to invade Canada and capture the city for the American cause. One of my primary purposes at that time was to compile a comprehensive bibliography of all printings of every journal written about the Arnold expedition, which seems to have generated more journals than any Revolutionary War battle.

One of many google searches took me to a surprising entry, featured in an on-line Americana exhibit by the Special Collections Section of the University of Glasgow Library, which was devoted to 18th-century books and manuscripts (http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/exhibns/Americana/18th_century.html). On the page 4, I found a picture of the first page and a description of a manuscript titled, "A Journal of the Rebel Expedition," written by a Captain Durben. The subtitle stated that this was, "An exact copy of a Journal of the Route and Proceedings of 1100 Rebels, who marched from Cambridge, in Massachusetts Bay, under the Command of General Arnold, in the fall of the year 1775; to attack Quebec" (http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/manuscripts/search/detail_c.cfm?ID=36142). I was immediately intrigued – this document purported to be a manuscript journal of the Arnold expedition unknown to me.

Upon reflection, I was astonished that an unknown journal of an important Revolutionary War event had been residing in a university library in Scotland for over 225 years and it had never been mentioned in any Revolutionary War source. At the same time I was also skeptical. How did a manuscript journal written by an American officer end up in Scotland? Moreover, I had done enough research on the Quebec expedition to know that there was no American officer named Durben. The more I thought about the Americana exhibit the more I was convinced that when I researched it further, the manuscript would turn out to be a disappointment because it would *not* to be an original journal of the expedition to Quebec.

The Durben manuscript was contained in a bound volume entitled "Manuscripts from the Library of William Hunter". Dr. Hunter was a Scottish physician and private book and manuscript collector so active in his era that he was a competitor of the British Library. At his death in 1783, he bequeathed his collection, including the Durben journal, to the Library of the University of Glasgow.

I wrote to the Special Collection librarians at the University of Glasgow Library requesting a photocopy of the manuscript journal. They readily copied the entire file and sent it to me in a very timely manner. The package included the Durben journal plus two other, shorter journals of the expedition. No author is identified by name for either of these shorter journals.

After closely examining the Durben manuscript, I concluded that it was a period copy of a journal originally authored by Captain Henry Dearborn (1751-1829) of New Hampshire, probably one of the best known officers on the expedition, other than Arnold himself. He was captured in the assault on Quebec on December 31, 1775 and served in prison in Quebec until he was released on parole early in May of 1776. The journal entries cover the period September 13, 1775, through May 18, 1776. It was written contemporaneously as events occurred, as the author went along on the expedition and then, during the winter of 1775-1776, when he was imprisoned in Quebec. The transcription was evidently penned sometime thereafter, by Dr. Robert Robertson (1742-1829), a Scottish surgeon serving with the Royal Navy in Quebec in 1776. The evidence that led me to these conclusions is as follows.

The name Durben first threw me because there was no officer in the Arnold expedition with that name. Looking at names that might sound like Durben, I tentatively concluded that the author might be Captain Henry Dearborn. Durben sounds a lot like Dearborn. Furthermore, the name does not fit any other officer in the Arnold expedition. No other officer had a name that sounds anything like Durben, and no officer's name except Dearborn begins with the letter "D."

Two entries in the journal provided additional evidence supporting Dearborn's authorship. The author mentions two of his officers by name and both of them were in Captain Dearborn's company. The first is Joseph Thomas, who was appointed as his Ensign according to his daily entry for the 18th of September. The author also refers in another daily entry on November 2nd to a Lieutenant Hutchins being in his company. Both Joseph Thomas and Nathaniel Hutchins were officers in Dearborn's company and both are listed in *New Hampshire Troops in the Quebec Expedition*, published by the State of New Hampshire in 1885.

The Durben journal concludes with entries for the days of May 17 and 18, 1776, which describe the author leaving on a boat with Major Return J. Meigs. If the early exit from Quebec by the two officers, Meigs and Dearborn, are verified by other expedition journals, it would be compelling supportive evidence that the author of the Durben journal was Henry Dearborn. In Private James Melvin's journal, the entry on May 18, 1776, reads: "Pleasant weather; hear that Major Meigs and Captain Dearborn are gone home." There is also two entries in Captain Simeon Thayer's journal which says: " May 17... "Major Meigs had the liberty to walk the town until 4 o'clock. Mr Laveris came and informed Capt. Dearborn that he had obtained liberty for him to go home on his parole... May 18. About ten o'clock they [Meigs and Dearborn] set sail for Halifax.". It is clear from these entries that it was well known by the men in prison in Quebec that Dearborn and Meigs went home together.

A note located at the end of the " Captia" portion of the Durben manuscript describes how the journal came into the hands of its transcriber. In it he is describing how Meigs and Dearborn went on board the schooner that was to take them to Halifax on May 17th but it did not make it out of the harbor and had to return. It ended up sailing again the next day but in between the journal was stolen from Dearborn.. "By some accident or

another, the Schooner that they sailed in was obliged to return to Quebec; and a person on board of her stole the originals from the author, & gave it to one of his own friends a shore, who was so obliging as to lend it to me to take a copy of it- at least this is the history which I got from that gentleman, of it.” It is clear from this information that Dearborn wrote this journal prior to May 17, 1776.

At the bottom of page 1, Dr. Hunter writes that the journal was given to him by a Mr. Robertson, who he described as a surgeon on *H.M.S. Juno*. The University of Glasgow describes the *Juno* as a “32-gun ship launched in 1757” and “a fifth rate shipping frigate which was burnt on 7 August 1778.” Entries in *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* confirm that Dr. Robertson was on board the *Juno*. The frigate arrived in Quebec on June 4, 1776, five months after the assault on Quebec and two weeks after Meigs and Dearborn left Quebec aboard the *H.M.S. Niger*. Thus, Dearborn was long gone from Quebec when the journal made its way to Robertson via an unknown third party who had stolen it from Dearborn.

A little over two years later, on August 7, 1778, the *Juno* was burned in Providence Harbor to prevent its capture by American forces. Since Robertson was not listed as a surgeon on any other ship after 1778, it is reasonable to conclude that he was not on the *Juno* when it was destroyed, or else he would have been transferred to another ship. I believe it is likely that Robertson transcribed Dearborn’s original manuscript journal while he was on board the *Juno*, between the time it left Quebec in September 1776 and August 13, 1777, the last known date he was on board.

Dr. William Hunter, the subsequent recipient of the manuscript, died on March 30, 1783, and from his signed notation in the journal we know that it was in his hands before he died. Sometime between 1777 and 1783 Robertson apparently gave the journal he had transcribed to Hunter. It has been in the Hunter manuscript collection since that time and at the time I discovered it had never been published before.

What we have then is a journal dating back to 1775, written originally by Henry Dearborn. This original journal was subsequently stolen from its author, transcribed and edited by Robertson, and then given to Hunter. The original manuscript in Dearborn's handwriting has long since disappeared, or at least its whereabouts is not presently known.

After the Quebec experience, Dearborn went on to an impressive military career during the Revolution participating in the battles of Saratoga, Monmouth, Sullivan’s campaign and Yorktown, and ending up as a lieutenant colonel. After the war, Dearborn was appointed to be a Major General in the Maine State militia, a United States Marshall in Maine and a Congressman from Maine. In 1801, he was appointed by President Thomas Jefferson as Secretary of War and during the War of 1812, Madison appointed him as the Senior Major General in the Army and placed him in command of the northeast sector. From 1822 to 1824, he served as Minister Plenipotentiary to Portugal and died in Roxbury, Massachusetts in 1829.

Henry Dearborn is known to have written a total of five other journals of his Revolutionary War experiences, all of which survive in manuscript form. Four of these are in Dearborn's handwriting. The last discovered journal, covering the march to Quebec, survives at the Boston Public Library (BPL) and was published in the *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* in 1886. According to a 19th century handwriting expert, John Wingate Thornton, this last journal is not in Dearborn's handwriting, although he did make some corrections to the manuscript in his hand. In order to better compare the two journals, I spent a day reviewing the manuscript in Boston.

Comparing the Glasgow journal with the one published by the Massachusetts Historical Society, it is easy to see that many of the entries and the events that are covered are similar. However, the Glasgow journal is shorter and more succinct in its entries, which lends credibility to the conclusion that it was written during the events. It is much more likely that someone writing during a significant army field maneuver would not have time for the more extensive and flowery descriptions that are found in the later journal.

An example of the differences in the two journals can be found in the entries for September 22nd. The Durben journal entry is:
"22nd. We got up where the Bateaux were built; from thence we carried thirty three men of each Company in the Bateaux up to Fort Western; That is about forty miles up from the mouth of the River; and at night all our men had mostly got up to the Fort."

The MHS journal entry is the following:
"Septemr 22d. Proceeded up the River. We pass'd Fort Richmond at 11: O clock where there are but few Settlements at Present, this afternoon we pass'd Pownalborough, Where there is a Courthouse and Gaol—and some very good Settlements, This day at 4 O Clock we arrived at the place where our Batteaus were Built.
We were order'd to Leave one Sergeant, one Corporal and Thirteen men here to take a Long the Batteau's, they embarked on Board the Batteaus, and we proceeded up the River to Cabisaconty, or Gardners Town, Where Doctor Gardner of Boston owns a Large Tract of Land and some Mills, & a Number of very good dwelling Houses, where we Stayed Last night, on Shore."

Another even more significant variation is found in the comparable entries for October 4th, although it is not clear if the same events for that day are being described in the two accounts.

The Durben journals entry is: "4th. We haled [hauled] up our Bateaux at the Portage, and dried them."

The MHS entry is: "4 Our Course in general from the mouth of the river to this place has been from North, to North East, from here we Steer N.:W. to Norrigwalk, which is Twelve miles to where we arrived to night, the River here is not very rapid. Except Two bad falls, the Land on the North side of the river is very good, where there are 2 or 3 families settled, at Norrigwalk, is to be seen the ruins of an Indian Town, also a fort, a

Chapel, and a Large Tract of Clear Land but not very good, there is but one family here at present Half a Mile above this old fort, is a Great fall, where there is a Carrying place of one Mile and a Quarter.”

The missing Quebec expedition journal in Dearborn’s own handwriting is an obvious omission in the personal accounts of his Revolutionary War experiences. Until now, it was thought that the original manuscript journal written at the time by Dearborn was the one published by the Massachusetts Historical Society -- even though not in his handwriting. Now, however, we know better because we have that original journal, or at least a sanitized version of it, from the late eighteenth century.

Finding Henry Dearborn’s original journal has been exciting and rewarding in ways I could not have predicted. I am convinced that had I not followed through on tedious google searches lasting many pages, this journal would have never been discovered and made public. As Revolutionary War manuscripts go, this one is not earth shattering or a momentous revelation that will change the history of the invasion of Canada. But in its own right it is a significant finding that clarifies the history of one journal and presents the original version of a participant’s journal which has been around for a long time.

Through hard work and persistence, I was able to achieve my objective of identifying all of the extant expedition to Quebec journals which now total thirty-three, including the three found in the Glasgow Library. When I started this journey, I did not expect to find previously unknown and unpublished journals, particularly in Scotland. Much to my surprise there are still unknown manuscripts to be found in the unlikeliest of places. I now know that research that starts out in one direction can lead to surprising and unexpected results that are more rewarding than the original objective.

FURTHER READING

The complete transcribed Dearborn journal, as well as the two smaller journals, and notes by Robertson and Hunter, can be found in Stephen Darley, *Voices from a Wilderness Expedition: The Journals and Men of Benedict Arnold’s Expedition to Quebec in 1775* (AuthorHouse 2011).

To read other journals of the Quebec expedition, see the compilation of thirteen journals by Kenneth Roberts, *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold’s Expedition* (New York: 1946). The best histories of the Arnold expedition are Justin H. Smith, *Arnold’s March from Cambridge to Quebec* (New York: 1903); John Codman, *Arnold’s Expedition to Quebec* (New York: 1901) and Thomas A. Desjardin, *Through a Howling Wilderness, Benedict Arnold’s March to Quebec in 1775* (New York: 2006).

There are numerous publications of individual Revolutionary War journals from a variety of battles and campaigns. Two compilations of journals from the war are John C. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered, Eyewitness Accounts of the War for American*

Independence (Chicago, 1980) and George C. Scheer and Hugh Rankin, *Rebels and Redcoats* (New York, 1957).

For background on Benedict Arnold, the most thoroughly researched biography is James Kirby Martin, *Benedict Arnold Revolutionary Hero, An American Warrior Reconsidered* (New York; 1997).