

## EARLY ACCOUNT OF THE EXPEDITION TO QUEBEC UNDER BENEDICT ARNOLD FROM THE *ANNUAL REGISTER* FOR THE YEAR 1776

The *Annual Register* was written by Edmund Burke for a number of years in the eighteenth century, including the period covering the American Revolution. This particular *Annual Register* was for the year 1776 and was published in 1777. Although it was published over one year after the assault on Quebec, it is surprisingly accurate in most of the details that it presents, and is the first comprehensive description of the American invasion of Canada, including Arnold's expedition to Quebec. It is interesting to note that this early description of the invasion of Canada conducted under Arnold's command provides the basic narrative of Arnold's expedition which was used over and over many times down through the years by various writers in describing the event. This narrative set the tone for how the expedition was viewed by people at that time, but what is more interesting is that its basic message is still what we understand today. The difficulties encountered by Arnold's detachment in the wilderness were established with much credibility by the description in this magazine.

The invasion of Canada as conceived by Commander in Chief George Washington involved a two prong invasion. The main force was led by Brigadier General Richard Montgomery<sup>1</sup> and began at Fort Ticonderoga and traveled north on Lake Champlain and then up the Richelieu River. It would capture the two forts, St. Johns and Chamblee<sup>2</sup>, on the Richelieu River and then take Montreal. The second force, under the command of Colonel Benedict Arnold was supposed to be a secret expedition starting from the American headquarters at Cambridge, Massachusetts and going by vessels from Newburyport, Mass up the Kennebec River to Fort Western, today's Augusta, Maine. It would continue on the Kennebec until it reached the Great Carrying Place and then go by land through the unsettled wilderness of Maine to the Dead River which would lead to Lake Megantic, which is the headwaters of the Chaudiere River. That river heads north and empties into the St. Lawrence River just above the fortified town of Quebec. The plan called for the two forces to join together in Canada and take Quebec. Washington was convinced that conquering Canada would make a significant inroad in the British ability to successfully wage war on the colonies. Unfortunately, the secret expedition did not remain secret so its arrival in Canada was not a total surprise to the British.

It is doubtful that any other officer then serving in the American army, other than Benedict Arnold, could have successfully led his men through the numerous obstacles that were encountered on their march to Quebec. The ability of Arnold's relatively small army of 1125 men to surmount the wilderness and reach Quebec was due to the extraordinary efforts of Arnold and his men. Jedediah Morse said of Arnold in his 1824 book, "[d]uring his expedition, Arnold conducted with unexampled resolution, fortitude, and patience." Some of the difficulties that Arnold's men encountered included small pox and other sickness, hurricane weather, cold weather and snow, inaccurate time and distance estimates, inadequate food supply, unexpected difficult topography and the unexpected return of approximately one-third of his men before they reached Quebec.

Edmund Burke had never set foot in North America yet he was accurately describing it and was using correct names of places and rivers in such a way that many readers must have thought he was actually there on the expedition. The extent of Burke's knowledge about some of the details of the expedition is astonishing. He must have had access to some of the letters that passed between Arnold, Montgomery and Washington as well as the two journals (McCoy and Meigs) of the Arnold expedition published in 1776.

The *Register's* description of the invasion of Canada in 1775 begins with a narrative of the expedition led by General Richard Montgomery with a number of pages describing the siege of St. Johns and the ultimate capture of Montreal. That portion of the narrative is not presented here. This part provided here of the narrative goes on to describe the Arnold expedition in the following words.

*When they arrived at the head of the Kennebec, they sent back their sick, and one of the colonels took that opportunity of returning with his division, under pretence of the scarcity of provisions, without the consent or knowledge of the Commander in Chief, who had marched forwards. By this desertion, and the sick that were returned, Arnold's detachment was reduced about one third from its original number. They, however, proceeded with their usual consistency; and having crossed the heights of land, as a ridge that extends quite through that continent is called, and from whence the waters on either side take courses directly contrary to those on the other, they at length arrived at the head of the river Chandiere, which running through Canada, falls into the river St. Lawrence, near Quebec. Their difficulties now were growing to an end, and they soon approached the inhabited parts of Canada; on the 3d of November, a party which they had pushed forward returned with provisions, and they soon after came to a house, being the first they had beheld for thirty-one days, having spent that whole time in traversing an hideous wilderness, without ever meeting any thing human.*

*The Canadians received them here with the same good-will that Montgomery's corps had experienced in the neighborhood of Montreal; they supplied them liberally with provisions and necessities, and rendered them every other assistance in their power. Arnold immediately published an address to the people, signed by General Washington, of the same nature with that which had been before issued by Schuyler and Montgomery. They were invited to join with the other colonies in an indissoluble union to range themselves under the standard of general liberty. They were informed, that the armament was sent into the province, not to plunder, but to protect and animate them; that they themselves were enjoined to act, and to consider themselves, as in the country of their best friends; they were requested, therefore, not to desert their habitations, nor fly Whilst the Provincials were thus carrying on the war in Upper Canada from the New-York side, and by the old beaten course of the Lakes, an expedition, considerably distinguished by its novelty, spirit, enterprise, by the difficulties that opposed, and the constancy that succeeded in its execution, was undertaken directly against the lower part of the province and city of Quebec, from the New-England side, by a route which had hitherto been untried, and considered as impracticable. This expedition was undertaken by Colonel Arnold, who about the middle of September, at the head of two regiments, consisting of 1100 men, marched from the camp near Boston, to Newburyport, at the mouth of the*

*river Merrimack, where vessels were in readiness to convey them by sea to the mouth of the river Kennebec, in New Hampshire, a voyage of about forty leagues.*

*On the 22d of the same month they embarked their stores and troops in 200 batteaux, at Gardiner's Town, on the Kennebec, and proceeded with great difficulty up that river, having a rapid stream, with a rocky bottom and shores, continually interrupted by falls and carrying places, with numberless other impediments to encounter. In this passage, the batteaux were frequently filled with waters, or overset, in consequence of which a part of their arms, ammunition, and provisions, were sometimes lost. At the numerous carrying places, besides the labour of loading and reloading, they were obliged to convey the boats on their shoulders. The great carrying place was above twelve miles across. That part of the detachment which was not employed in the batteaux, marched along the banks of the river, and the boats and men being disposed in three divisions, each division encamped together every night. Nor was the march by land more eligible than the passage by water. They had thick woods, deep swamps, difficult mountains, and precipices, alternately to encounter, and were at times obliged to cut their way for miles together through the thickets. At the carrying places they were obliged to traverse the same ground several times, heavy loaded. From all these impediments their progress was of course very slow, being only from four or five to nine or ten miles a day. The constant fatigue and labour caused many men to fall sick, which added to their difficulties, and provisions grew at length so scarce, that some of the men eat their dogs, and whatever else of any kind that could be converted to food.*

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*The city of Quebec was at this time in a state of great weakness, as well as internal discontent and disorder. The British merchants and inhabitants had been long much disgusted and dissatisfied. Their opposition to the Quebec Act, and the petitions which they had sent to England upon that subject, had been grievously resented by their own government; and from that period, they had, as the discontented said, not only been slighted and treated with indifference, but even regarded with an apparent eye of distrust and suspicion. They complained, that as the great political object in that country was to attach to the native Canadians inviolably to government, so the French noblesse, and civil officers, became, excepting the British military, the only favourites; and their having soon acquired the manners and affectations of all other courtiers and favourites, passed no occasion to insult the English as malcontents, with the violence of their zeal, and the outrageousness of their loyalty. They represented, that these new courtiers industriously brought up questions upon public affairs, and discourses upon government in their company, and then construed that freedom of opinion, which the native English had derived from nature and habit, as well as from present discontent, as proceeding from real ill design and disaffection. There needs not a stronger proof how little they were trusted or regarded, than that when the troops were sent off to Montreal and the Sorel to oppose the rebels, notwithstanding the very alarming state of public affairs, and that the city, together with the large property which they possessed in it, were left exposed without a garrison; yet their application for leave to be embodied as a militia for its defence, so far from being complied with, was not even, as they affirmed, deemed worthy*

*of an answer. How much of this representation was the mere effect of discontent, we cannot undertake to say. It is certain that great heartburnings and animosities prevailed among the British civil subjects and the military power in their government, which the Quebec Act irritated and inflamed to a high degree.*

*Neither does it appear that any great reliance could be placed at that time upon the French inhabitants for the defence of the city. Many of them were at least wavering, and some worse. As to other matters, there were no troops of any fort in the place, until McLean's handful of new-raised emigrants arrived from Sorel. Some marines which the Governor had sent for to Boston were refused by a naval council of war, from the lateness of the season, and the danger of the navigation. The militia, however, had been lately embodied by the Lieutenant-Governor.*

*Such was the state of affairs at Quebec, when Arnold and his party appeared at Point Levi, opposite the town. The river was fortunately between them, and the boats secured, otherwise it seems highly probable that they would have become masters of the place in the first surprise and confusion. This defect was indeed remedied in a few days by the alacrity of the Canadians, who supplied them with canoes, and they effected their passage in a dark night, notwithstanding the vigilance of the armed vessels and frigates of war in the river. But the crucial moment was now passed. The discontented inhabitants, English and Canadians, as soon as danger pressed, united for their common defence. They became seriously alarmed for the immense property which Quebec contained. They desired to be, and were, embodied and armed. The sailors had landed, and were at the batteries to serve the guns, the defendants were considerably superior in number to the assailants, and Arnold had no artillery. In these circumstances, his only hope must have been the defection of the inhabitants; and disappointed in that, nothing remained practicable for him, but intercepting the roads and cutting off the supplies, until the arrival of Montgomery. He accordingly paraded for some days on the heights near the town, and sent two flags to summon the inhabitants; but they were fired at, and no message admitted; upon which, he at length drew off his detachment into quarters of refreshment.”*

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