

SIX CAPTAINS FROM CONNECTICUT

This article presents information on six important captains of the seventeen American vessels that were involved in the October 12-14, 1776, Revolutionary War Battle of Valcour Island on Lake Champlain. The commander of the American fleet that participated in that battle was Brigadier General Benedict Arnold from New Haven. Although Arnold's fleet was outgunned and outmanned by the British, Arnold's heroic actions at Valcour Island stopped the British from capturing the forts on Lake Champlain in 1776 and delayed the British advance until the spring of 1777. In that year, the British made a major advance south on Lake Champlain but even with an extensive army they were stopped by the Americans in the Battle of Saratoga in September and October of 1777.

Many historians argue that the Battle of Valcour Island saved the Revolution. This was because in 1776 the Northern American Army was in total disarray after its disastrous failure to conquer Canada and its retreat from Canada in June of 1776 with a ragged remnants of an Army suffering from disease and expiring enlistments. As a result, the Lake Champlain region was vulnerable to a British invasion with the 8000 reinforcement troops that arrived from England in June of 1776. Naval historian A. T. Mahan stated that "Never had any force, big or small, lived to better purpose or died more gloriously, for it saved the Lake for that year."¹

Since Benedict Arnold was from Connecticut, it is not surprising that more than one third of the vessels under his command were commanded by experienced sea faring men from Connecticut. Unfortunately, since the battle almost no attention has been paid to the men who led the vessels into action. In the 235 years since the battle, no one has identified and described the captains who commanded the American vessels until my 2013 book on the Battle of Valcour Island.²

Seth Warner, Galley Trumbull

The Seth Warner who captained the *Trumbull* is not the same person as Colonel Seth Warner from Vermont, who was a member of the Green Mountain Boys and who was in the Battle of Bennington in 1777. Captain Seth Andrew Warner, the son of Andrew Warner, a farmer, and Sarah Graves, was born in Saybrook, Connecticut. His date of birth is cited by different sources as on January 28, either in 1742 or 1743. He married Hannah LeMoyne De Angelis from Boston, Massachusetts, on December 19, 1773 in Bristol, Rhode Island.³

There is no information on the life of Captain Warner prior to the Revolutionary War, although he must have had experience in the seafaring world of Connecticut in the 1760s and 1770s. Benedict Arnold must have known Warner prior to the war through his own involvement in the seafaring trade in Connecticut; in a letter dated July 24, 1776, Arnold named him as being a desirable person to raise a company of seamen for service on the lakes because he was an experienced commander.⁴ On August 8, Arnold specifically requested to Schuyler that Warner be assigned as one of the captains of his fleet. Warner accepted the assignment on August 12 and conferred with Governor John Trumbull to set pay rates for his men. By September 15, Arnold's letter to Gates indicates that Warner was one of four captains that he previously requested and that he had now been appointed to captain one of the galleys.⁵ Harrison Bird's book, *Navies in the Mountains*, describes Warner as riding "out of the woods in an ox-cart, seated on his war chest, his sextant in its wooden box on his knee."⁶ There is no record of any military service by Warner prior to his involvement in the Valcour battle.

Captain Warner has a payroll listed for the galley *Trumbull* that is in Vol. VIII of the *Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society, Revolutionary War Rolls and Lists*.⁷ There is also a pay abstract for the *Trumbull* galley marines in Henry P. Johnston's *Record of Service of Connecticut Men in the War of the Revolution*, which lists Captain Seth Warner as being from East Haddam.⁸ Based on the other records available, that is not his correct hometown.

The only other record of service in the Revolutionary War for Seth Warner is that in September 1779 he was commanding the sloop *Sally*, which captured a British brig, and on March 8, 1780, he was commissioned as commander of the *Sally*, which had sixteen guns and fifty men. On June 1, 1780, he assisted in the capture of

another British brig, *Cornelia*, which contained British provisions and which was brought into East Haddam, Connecticut.⁹ Captain Seth Warner died on April 9, 1790, at the age of forty-eight.¹⁰

Samuel Mansfield, Gondola New Haven

Samuel Mansfield was born in 1757 or 1758 in New Haven, Connecticut, the son of Samuel Mansfield, who was the High Sheriff of New Haven. He was the brother-in-law of Major General Benedict Arnold through Arnold's first wife, Margaret Mansfield. Arnold had a business partnership with his father-in-law, and most likely provided a position and training in his trading business for his much younger brother-in-law, Samuel.¹¹ He married Elizabeth Greene in 1783 and they had three children.¹²

According to Heitman's Register, Samuel Mansfield was a volunteer in the Canadian expedition to reinforce the American Army in 1776, undoubtedly with the concurrence of Benedict Arnold, who would have wanted his eighteen-year-old brother-in-law to be under his supervision.¹³ Mansfield was in the retreat from Canada with Arnold, and stayed on at Fort Ticonderoga during 1776. In early August, Mansfield was assigned as a commander of the *New Haven* gondola, and his name is on the list of American vessels, dated August 18, as the commander of that gondola. The *New Haven* was one of the five vessels Arnold burned at Arnold's Bay on October 13.

In a letter to George Washington, written on January 13, 1777, Arnold recommended Samuel Mansfield to command a company of artillery, stating that he had been a lieutenant of artillery "last summer" and was afterwards "captain of a galley."¹⁴ The pension application of Benjamin Murray from Norfolk, Connecticut, also confirms that Samuel Mansfield was the captain of the *New Haven*.¹⁵ Mansfield was commissioned as a captain in John Lamb's Artillery Regiment with an effective date of January 1, 1777. He subsequently commanded his own company in Lamb's Regiment as shown by a muster roll, dated February 1778. Mansfield served in the artillery until he became disaffected with the assignment of officers, especially that of someone who had less seniority being placed over him. On November 6, 1778, he wrote a letter of resignation from the service, explaining that he could no longer serve under such a condition.¹⁶

Heitman lists a Samuel Mansfield as a volunteer aide-de-camp to Governor George Walton of Georgia during the siege of Savannah in 1779, although there is no record of how and when he went to Georgia. This author believes that the aide to Governor Walton was a different person with the name of Samuel Mansfield. Samuel Mansfield moved from Connecticut to New York after the war because he was an original member of the New York State Society of the Cincinnati from 1783, and his family is listed in the census of Hudson, New York in 1790. Samuel Mansfield died on February 3, 1810, in Hudson, New York.

John Thatcher, Galley Washington

John Thatcher was born in Norwalk, Connecticut, on July 25, 1742. He married Ann Perry in 1767 and she had three children. He married Mehetable Ufford in 1778 and she had five children. By 1766 Thatcher was living in New Milford, Connecticut, and he seems to have lived in New Haven prior to the outbreak of the war as he was listed as one of the original members of 2nd Governor's Footguard of New Haven, along with Benedict Arnold and Eleazer Oswald, in a document dated December 28, 1774.¹⁷ He was also listed as being from New Haven in the autobiography of Samuel Blakeslee of Wallingford, Connecticut. In the summer of 1776, he was captain of a company in Colonel Heman Swift's Connecticut Regiment and marched with them to Fort Ticonderoga. In August 1776, he was appointed as captain of the galley *Washington* at the request of Benedict Arnold, and by August 25, he was with General David Waterbury and delivering messages from Waterbury to Gates.¹⁸

In the Valcour battle, Thatcher and Waterbury surrendered *Washington* on October 13 due to her deteriorated condition and inability to maneuver or sail. General Waterbury, who was on the *Washington* during the action, described her condition as "so torn to pieces that it was almost impossible to keep her above water."¹⁹ As a result of the surrender, all survivors, including Waterbury and Thatcher, were taken prisoner, but all of the *Washington*'s crew were quickly released on parole, and Thatcher's sword was returned to him.

In the battle, Thatcher was wounded in the leg and sometime thereafter he lost the leg. Arnold described the *Washington*'s role in the action in a letter to Gates on October 12, in which he says, "the Congress and Washington have suffer'd greatly, the latter lost first lieut. Killed, & Capt & master wounded."²⁰ According to a statement made by his son David (who was one of the children from his marriage to Ufford), Thatcher's leg wound was so severe that he was "disabled for life to do business, having lost his property & leg, and being unable to support his family."²¹ As a result of his injury, he was awarded a pension in 1789 under the Act of June 7, 1785. Obviously, he had no subsequent service in the Revolutionary War. John Thatcher died on January 16, 1805 at the age of sixty-two and was buried in Litchfield, Connecticut.²² His pension file provides the evidence for his command of the *Washington*.

David Hawley, Schooner Royal Savage

David Hawley was born in Stratford, Connecticut, in 1741, the son of James and Eunice Hawley. Nothing is known about his life prior to the Revolutionary War. Early in the war, Hawley went to the West Indies to bring back a cargo of gunpowder that was subsequently divided between Stratford and Fairfield. In March 1776, he was in command of a privateer sailing out of Stratford that was captured by a British man-of-war four days after sailing. He was taken to Halifax but escaped and returned home. In July 1776, he was appointed to command the *Oliver Cromwell* but before he sailed, the state of Connecticut commissioned him to raise a detachment for service on Lake Champlain.²³

Based on his record of commanding vessels and being from Connecticut, it is likely that Hawley knew Benedict Arnold prior to the Revolution. He served as the captain of the *Royal Savage*, which was burned and sunk by the British at the end of the first day of the battle, after she became disabled and was abandoned by its crew. Hawley's seamanship can be called into question due to the unintentional grounding of the *Royal Savage* at the beginning of the battle. Arnold described the running aground as "bad management,"²⁴ which he did not ever clarify or expand upon. Hawley then went on board another vessel, either the *Washington* or *Congress*, and continued to fight until the battle was over.

Hawley's next area of service was the Long Island Sound, where he commanded at least two different vessels, *Schuyler* and *Guilford*. He was captured more than once but always managed to escape. In 1779, his vessel was taken by the British while in the New Haven Harbor, but Hawley managed to avoid capture and fitted out a flotilla of armed boats. In November 1779, he commanded a force of twenty men in a raid on Long Island, where his men captured Judge Thomas Jones of the Supreme Court of New York. Judge Jones was later exchanged for Connecticut militia General Gold Silliman, who had been taken prisoner the previous year.

In 1780, Hawley led three armed vessels to Blue Point, Long Island, where he captured eleven British vessels. Also during 1780, he captured two British sloops in Long Island Sound, one of which carried numerous West India goods. Hawley is credited with capturing over twenty enemy vessels during the war. After the war, he built the first brick house in the city of Bridgeport, Connecticut, on the corner of Water and Gilbert streets, which was later used as a saddle factory by Seth B. Jones. Hawley never married, and died in Bridgeport in 1807.²⁵

James Arnold, Galley Congress

Because James Arnold commanded a company of New Hampshire men originating from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, when he was appointed captain of the *Congress* in 1776, it could be assumed that James Arnold himself was from Portsmouth. However, the best evidence suggests that the James Arnold who commanded the *Congress* galley was born in East Haddam, Connecticut, on February 24, 1735.²⁶ He is not related to General Benedict Arnold, although both men were from Connecticut. There is no other credible candidate from New Hampshire, Connecticut or Massachusetts who could have been the James Arnold who was at Valcour Island. James Arnold from Haddam married Mary Brainerd in 1758, and they had five children.

In May 1776, James Arnold was appointed by the General Assembly of Connecticut as a captain of a company in a Connecticut regiment.²⁷ By the middle of July, he was captain of a company in Colonel Wingate's New Hampshire Regiment, which was assigned to the Northern Army in Ticonderoga.²⁸ There is no clear indication

of how he went from being a captain of a company from a Connecticut town to being a captain of a New Hampshire company. It is, however, this author's supposition that James Arnold moved to Portsmouth in the late spring of 1776. As a result, he was able to recruit the majority of his company in the Portsmouth area and, in fact, may have been selected as a company commander based on his previous seafaring experience. One of the confusing aspects of the battle is that there were two officers on the *Congress* named Arnold. In a September 12, 1776 letter from Gates to Benedict Arnold, a Captain Arnold is identified as commanding one of the galleys.²⁹

James Arnold's Connecticut connection could account for his appointment as a captain in Arnold's fleet. By August of 1776, Benedict Arnold was sorely in need of experienced captains, and based on the Connecticut residence, it is likely that Benedict Arnold knew James Arnold before the war.

In 1777, James Arnold, as master of the New Hampshire schooner *Mary*, obtained a permit to sail to the West Indies. In 1778, he was still master of the *Mary*. There is no further record of James Arnold being in the Revolutionary War either in the infantry or the navy. After the war, James Arnold moved his family to Vermont and died in Arlington, Vermont, in 1783, at the age of forty-eight.³⁰

Frederick Chappell, Galley Gates

Frederick Chappell was born in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1740. There is very little record of his activities prior to the Revolutionary War, but there was a Frederick Chapel listed in Colonel Nathan Whiting's Connecticut Regiment in the French and Indian War. Because Chappell was from New Haven it is also likely that he was acquainted with Benedict Arnold prior to the war and that he was known by Arnold to be an experienced seaman. Sometime prior to 1765, Chappell married Patience Bills in New Haven.

On August 16, 1776, The Connecticut Council of Safety passed the following resolution:

Voted to draw an order in favour of Capt. Frederick Chappel of N. Haven for the sum of £180 to enable him to raise a crew of seaman for the naval service of the United States of America on the Lakes to the northward, to which service he is appointed a Captain ...³¹

On that same day Governor Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut sent the following letter to General George Washington:

Major General Schuyler has requested that two Hundred Seamen may be raised in this state to man the Vessels on the Lake. As most of our seamen are marched with the Militia to join your Army, I have to ask the favour of you to permit Capt. David Hawly, and Capt. Frederick Chappel to enlist such Number of Seamen out of our Militia as may be necessary for that Service.³²

Chappell and Hawley did recruit a number of seamen, mostly from the Connecticut regiments in New York, and Chappell's men arrived at Fort Ticonderoga by September 19, 1776. Chappell was selected to command the *Gates* galley, but she was not completed by the time the Battle of Valcour Island occurred. Chappell remained at Ticonderoga in command of the *Gates* until General Schuyler ordered him on January 15, 1777, to proceed to Connecticut and recruit a company of sailors for service on the lake. He did the recruiting and then returned. He is listed on a document dated June 26, 1777, as the commander of the *Gates* galley at Fort Ticonderoga.³³ When the American forces abandoned Ticonderoga, Chappell's vessel was one of the escorts for the fleeing convoy that went to Skenesborough. The *Gates* was blown up by her own crew on July 6, 1777, in lieu of being captured by the British. Chappell must have retreated with the other American forces after the British attack on Skenesborough. Chappell's only other record of service was as a 2nd lieutenant on the Connecticut-based privateer ship *Deane* in 1780.³⁴

Frederick Chappell died in 1789 at the age of forty-nine, leaving a wife and at least one child. His wife died in Danbury at her son's home on December 10, 1801.³⁵

END NOTES

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- ¹ A.T. Mahan. "The Naval Campaign of 1776 on Lake Champlain." *Scribners Magazine*, Feb. 1898: 158.
- ² Stephen Darley. *The Battle of Valcour Island: The Participants and Vessels of Benedict Arnold's 1776 Defense of Lake Champlain*. CreateSpace, 2013. In the book, I identify 458 officers and men who served in the battle.
- ³ Seth Andrew LeMoyné Warner, The Genealogy Center of the Allen Public Library for Seth Andrew Le Moyné Warner (online source); Descendants of Sarah Graves and Andrew Warner of CT, Generation 1 (from the Graves Family Organization's website).
- ⁴ Arnold to Schuyler, July 24, 1776. *NDAR*, Vol. 5: 1197-98.
- ⁵ Arnold to Gates, September 15, 1776. *NDAR*, Vol. 6: 837.
- ⁶ Harrison Bird, *Navies in the Mountains*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1962: 173.
- ⁷ Revolutionary War Rolls & Lists, *Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society*, Vol. II.
- ⁸ Henry P. Johnston, ed., *Record of Service of Connecticut Men in the War of the Revolution*. Hartford: Adjutant General's Office, 1889: 594.
- ⁹ Louis F. Middlebrook, *History of Maritime Connecticut During the American Revolution, 1775-1783*. Salem, MA: The Essex Institute, 1925: 209, 213. www.awiatsea.com/Officers.html.
- ¹⁰ See page for Seth Warner on Wilcox Family Tree, www.ancestry.com.
- ¹¹ Samuel Mansfield Family Tree, www.ancestry.com.
- ¹² Samuel Mansfield Family Tree, www.ancestry.com; 1790 Federal Census, Hudson, New York.
- ¹³ Heitman, *Historical Register*, 379.
- ¹⁴ Arnold to Washington, January 13, 1777. Washington Papers, Library of Congress.
- ¹⁵ Benjamin Murray Pension Application, W24021, NARA Revolutionary War Pension Files.
- ¹⁶ Isaac Q. Leake, *Memoir of the Life and Times of John Lamb*. Glendale, N.Y.: Benchmark Publishing Co., 1970: 150; NARA Revolutionary War Service Records, Samuel Mansfield.
- ¹⁷ *Second Company Governor's Footguards, Souvenir History, 150th Anniversary, 1775-1925*. New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1925: 6-7.
- ¹⁸ Waterbury to Gates, Aug. 25, 1776. *AA*, Ser. 5, Vol. I: 1187; John Thatcher Pension Application, R1439. NARA Revolutionary War Pension Files; Heitman, *Historical Register*, 537.
- ¹⁹ Waterbury to Hancock: 1294-95.
- ²⁰ Arnold to Gates. *AA*, Ser. 5, Vol. I: 1129.
- ²¹ John Thatcher Pension Application.
- ²² Thatcher-Thatcher Genealogy, *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, Vol. 44, 1913: 245-52.
- ²³ CT Sons of American Revolution, biography of David Hawley. www.connecticutsar.org/patriots/hawley_david.htm.
- ²⁴ Arnold to Gates, Oct. 12, 1776.
- ²⁵ Rev. Samuel Orcutt, *History of the Old Towns of Stratford, Connecticut*. Bridgeport: Fairfield County Historical Society, 1886: 398; William Howard Wilcoxsen, *History of Stratford, 1639-1939*. Stratford, CT: Stratford Tercentenary Commission, 1939: 618-19.
- ²⁶ James Arnold Family Tree, www.ancestry.com.
- ²⁷ General Assembly of CT, May Session, 9 May to 8 June 1776.
- ²⁸ Hammond, *Rolls*: 343.
- ²⁹ Gates to Arnold, September 12, 1776. *NDAR*, Vol. 6: 791-92.
- ³⁰ James Arnold, NARA Revolutionary War Service Records, see www.fold3.com; Captain of *New Hampshire* schooner, *NDAR*, Vol. 11: 220.
- ³¹ Charles J. Hoadly, *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut from May 1775 to June 1776*. Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1890: 503.
- ³² Frederick Chappell Family Tree, www.ancestry.com.
- ³³ In *Disposition of American Fleet Afloat ...*, Frederick Chappell is listed as commander of *Gates* galley, *NDAR*, 9: 174.
- ³⁴ Middlebrook, *Maritime Connecticut During the Revolution*: 66.
- ³⁵ Frederick Chappell page from the Calkins Family Tree, www.ancestry.com; Biography of Chappell at www.awiatsea.com/Officers.html.