

WILLIAM GOODRICH: A LITTLE KNOWN REVOLUTIONARY WAR OFFICER FROM STOCKBRIDGE

By

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William Goodrich has been an enigma until now because details on his early life were thought to be non-existent and no one had been able to identify his parents, his birthplace or date of birth. Since so little attention has paid to the life of William Goodrich even though he was a company commander on the 1775 expedition to Quebec, this author has tried to identify all of the know records regarding his life. Fortunately, subsequent research began to uncover some details about Goodrich's life and a more complete picture has emerged.¹ The information on William Goodrich presented here is taken from the author's recently published book, *Voices from a Wilderness Expedition: The Journals and Men of Benedict Arnold's Expedition to Quebec in 1775*.²

William Goodrich was born in Sheffield, Massachusetts to William and Abiah Stocking Goodrich on December 19, 1734. His father, William, is on a 1733 list of proprietors of the Third Division on the Housatonic River in the area that became known as Sheffield. All of the divisions, including the Third Division, were incorporated as the town of Sheffield in January of 1733. Some time prior to his marriage, William Jr. moved to Stockbridge. In Stockbridge, William Jr. married Sybil Woodbridge, daughter of Timothy Woodbridge, around 1768, although there is no record in Stockbridge or any other Massachusetts town of any formal marriage. They had two children both of whom were born in Stockbridge. His son William died in 1771 at the age of one and a half and is buried in Stockbridge. There is no written record that mentions his daughter, Experience, although at least one history has asserted that he had one.³

His civilian occupation before the war was hotel or tavern keeper. In 1773, he applied to Governor Thomas Hutchinson for a license from the Massachusetts Colony "for keeping a house of publick entertainment and that it [his property] would greatly commode travelers."⁴ His petition was subsequently granted, after he obtained the approval of the selectmen of the Town of Stockbridge. He opened the first tavern in Stockbridge on the corner of Main and South Streets in a newly constructed house. This building was moved to a new location on the corner of East Main Street and Lincoln Lane in the nineteenth century and is still there today, although it has changed significantly from the original.⁵ When he was appointed a company commander in April of 1775, "the tavern operated by William Goodrich fell into disuse". After his confinement in Quebec, Goodrich returned home to find his tavern had been closed and that there was a competing tavern across the street. Situated where the Red Lion Inn is today, it was owned by Anna Bingham, one of the more interesting characters in the early history of Stockbridge.⁶ Reopening his tavern was not feasible so he turned to other ways of making money, including land speculation.

Presumably as a result of his connection to the Woodbridge family, Goodrich followed in the footsteps of his father-in-law, Timothy Woodbridge, and began buying up Stockbridge Indian lands. During the period between 1763 and 1786, William Goodrich was the third largest purchaser of Indian land with thirteen purchases totaling 1011 acres.⁷ None of his land speculation seems to have made Goodrich any significant money. It may, however, have helped him in other areas.

In the spring of 1775, Goodrich and one of his colleagues "applied to the Committee of Safety for assistance in enlisting two companies of Indians from the western parts of the colony."⁸ On April 4, 1775, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress sent a letter to the Stockbridge chief, Jehoiakim Mtohkain, through Colonel John Paterson and Captain William Goodrich, offering a blanket and a yard of ribbon to those Indian men who would enlist in the Massachusetts' militia.⁹ On April 4th, the Congress also authorized Goodrich to expand the company he was enlisting to one hundred men and directed "that they may be considered as rangers." He was instructed to apply to Colonel Paterson for further instructions regarding the enlistment of the Indians. On April 11th, the Indians responded through Goodrich "asking to be allowed to fight in their own Indian way, as they were not used to train and fight English fashion."¹⁰ There is no record of a response from the Congress but Goodrich did precede with his enlistment efforts. When the Lexington Alarm sounded, Goodrich's company, including thirty-two Stockbridge Indians, marched to Cambridge on April 22nd with Colonel John Paterson's regiment. On May 27, Goodrich's commission as captain was confirmed by the Massachusetts Provincial Congress.¹¹

There is a reference to Captain William Goodrich's Company at the siege of Boston in a June 21st letter from a group of Stockbridge Indians stationed around Boston requesting that the army limit the amount of whiskey that

would be made available to the Indians.¹² Some have alleged that the Goodrich Company was in the Battle of Bunker Hill but their participation has not been verified. One historian reported that the dull camp life around Boston was not compatible to the Indians and that some of them left and went home during the summer of 1775. It is unclear how many Indians were still in Cambridge with his company when Goodrich signed up with Arnold's expedition.

Goodrich had a difficult march to Quebec apparently suffering more than some of the other officers. Dearborn's journal entry for October 28th states that when Dearborn met up with him at the river going into Chaudière Pond, "Capt. Goodrich was almost perished with the cold, having Waded Several Miles Backwards, and forwards, Sometimes to his arm pits in Water & Ice, endeavouring to find some place to Cross this River". Dearborn described how he took Goodrich into his canoe and carried him over to the other side which presumably saved his life.¹³ Goodrich is described in a footnote in Heth's journal as "a trouble maker in Arnold's army. He objected to the assault and asked to be withdrawn from Arnold's command".¹⁴ Pierce's journal, which is a primary source of describing the discontent with Arnold, names the three officers who were unwilling to scale the walls of Quebec as Goodrich, Hanchett and Hubbard. In fact, Pierce says that on December 2nd, "Capt. Goodriches men protested they would go home."¹⁵

At the assault on Quebec, Goodrich was one of the American officers who was captured and put in prison. He was exchanged with the rest of the captured officers in the fall of 1776. While he was in prison in Quebec, the Town of Stockbridge granted Goodrich fifty acres of land in a transaction where he is described as "a white hotel keeper and a captain of minute men in the Revolution."¹⁶ The only mention of Goodrich in captivity is found in William Heth's journal that presents a very negative portrait of Goodrich. Heth says he stole a watch from a local Canadian which Daniel Morgan found out about and demanded that he return it. Heth describes the harsh language, used by Morgan as "by G-d you shall." Goodrich still refused to give Morgan the watch. Morgan then told Goodrich "that if he did not deliver it up to Mr. Cunningham he wou'd take it from him and give him a damn'd flogging into the bargain." After more argument between the two men, Morgan grabbed Goodrich by the throat and he gave up the watch. Heth sums up Goodrich as follows, "I say that, many of us have entertained a worse opinion of him—than before—but, to increase that unfavorable opinion, a few days after, we were acquainted that, when he retreated to Point Aux Tremble, --- he led off a blooded colt, the property of Mr. Rich'd Murry—which he swap'd away for a horse, & sent one of his soldiers home with him—This we look'd upon to be such a degree of baseness that he was treated with the utmost contempt whenever he came in our room".¹⁷

When Goodrich returned home, he rejoined Paterson's regiment and was appointed to serve as a major without being commissioned. In response to a written request from Paterson, Goodrich was promoted to major in the Massachusetts militia by the Massachusetts War Council on June 26, 1777 and assigned to Paterson's brigade. On July 24th, Goodrich applied to Paterson for permission to resign from his regiment, which was granted. For the next two years there is no record of Goodrich's military service. He was probably still recuperating from his experiences in Quebec and trying to recover from the loss of his business. In June of 1779, Washington wrote to Goodrich authorizing him to raise a company of Stockbridge Indians to serve in the Sullivan expedition with the same pay rate as other volunteers and enlistees in that expedition. Washington wrote a subsequent letter to Goodrich on July 4th, in response to Goodrich's letter of June 30th, telling him that the conditions under which Goodrich had engaged the Indians was not acceptable, but if the Stockbridge Indians desired to serve under "the terms and conditions I mentioned I shall have no objection to the measure".¹⁸ A company of Stockbridge Indians did serve under Sullivan on his expedition but no record exists of their activities. It is clear that Goodrich himself did not serve in that expedition as the commander of the Indians because he was appointed one of three Stockbridge town assessors in 1779, indicating that he must have been in town at that time.

By 1780, William Goodrich was in a difficult financial condition and he tried to obtain reimbursement from both the Continental Congress and the Massachusetts House of Representatives for losses that he incurred on the expedition to Quebec. His petition to the state on January 20, 1780 claims, "he was a great sufferer not only by his captivity, but also in the loss of a number of valuable items." He claims a total value of the items lost as "approx. to the amount of thirty five pounds". He attached an itemization of his losses which he titled "Account of things left at Quebec." The list of items included a gun and side arms, shirts, blankets bedding, a beaver hat and plates, knives, forks and spoons. There is no evidence that either the federal or state legislative bodies ever acted on his requests.¹⁹

On October 23, 1780, Goodrich was a major in command of Captain Enoch Noble's company from Berkshire County, which marched to Bennington in response to a request by Governor Chittenden and Brigadier General Ethan Allen to "guard the frontiers in the State of Vermont." He served with the Noble Company until November 7, 1780.²⁰ There is no record of any other companies under Goodrich that might have accompanied Noble. Goodrich himself may have been present for that service based on the fact that he submitted a 1781 invoice to the State of Vermont, which was subsequently paid, for his service on behalf of Vermont from October 23rd to November 4th. In April of 1781, the State of Vermont authorized Goodrich to supply them with 18,000 gunflints and six tons of lead.²¹ William Goodrich's service to Vermont was substantial enough to allow him to be listed as a Revolutionary officer from Vermont.

According to his pension application, James Holcomb joined a regiment from Berkshire County in May of 1781 under Colonel Fellows, Major William Goodrich and Major Skinner, which marched to White Plains and served until the surrender of Cornwallis. No other record exists showing the participation by a Goodrich detachment in that activity, although the pension application is a reliable source. On August 14, 1781, Goodrich wrote General Washington from Stockbridge stating "that there is a considerable number of old officers and other gentlemen in the County of Berkshire [who] would be happy to serve your Excellency as volunteers for a month or more if needed".²² Washington responded on September 2nd that "the circumstances of the Campaign at present are such as will not probably require your Services". Washington goes on to tell him that the appropriate person to address his offer to is General Heath "who commands the troops in the vicinity of N. York".²³ It stands to reason that Washington's attitude toward Goodrich was influenced by the reports he received regarding Goodrich's conduct on the expedition. There is no indication that Goodrich made any request to Heath or that he served again in any military capacity. Given the petition referred to in the next paragraph it is likely that Goodrich focused his efforts on assisting Vermont, perhaps with the help of his former colleague from the Quebec expedition, Colonel Roger Enos.

In February, 1782, William Goodrich and six other former officers petitioned the Governor of Vermont and the General Court of Vermont for a vacant parcel of land south of New Haven, west of Ferrisburg and north of Monkton as a result of being wounded in defending the frontiers of Vermont "in the Battle of Johns Town in October last".²⁴ No record has been found of a unit commanded by William Goodrich participating in that battle and no information was found regarding a wound other than the details contained in a summary of the petition.

Sybil Goodrich, William's wife, died on June 21, 1782 at the age of forty. Four days after her death, William Goodrich purchased his last parcel of land in Stockbridge buying fifty acres on County Road. In 1783, Goodrich was a witness to a deed to his brother-in-law, Enoch Woodbridge, for a parcel of land in Bennington, Vermont. This is the last known land transaction involving Goodrich.²⁵

The most interesting information about William Goodrich after the war involves two different activities. The first was a number of land speculation activities in the State of Vermont. On November 3, 1780, William Goodrich and sixty-four other individuals were granted a township by the Vermont legislature for a parcel of land in Franklin County near the Canadian border "six miles square as laid down in the plan herewith returned by the name of Berkshire." The town was chartered by the state on August 3, 1781. Goodrich was the first land owner to transfer land in the new town which occurred on March 29, 1782 in a deed to William Maltby of Lenox, Massachusetts.²⁶ It does not appear that William Goodrich ever lived in the township of Berkshire so it is likely that he viewed this township as an investment and not as a potential residence. In fact, Goodrich and a number of other proprietors did not pay their required monies and as late as 1794 were listed in newspaper legal notices.

In addition to being the lead proprietor in Berkshire, Goodrich was also a proprietor in the following Vermont towns all of which were set up for land speculation prior to the end of the war. The towns of Woolcot and Starksboro in Addison County, Vershire in Orange County, Weybridge in Bennington County and the Town of Montpelier, where he followed his old expedition companion Timothy Bigelow. In each of these towns, Goodrich became one of the listed proprietors in default on his required payments beginning in 1787 and continuing through the early 1800's. Goodrich's wife Sybil was also a proprietor in Vershire and Montpelier and is on those same lists.²⁷ It is clear that none of his land ventures ever produced any significant money for William Goodrich.

The second post war activity was the military action, known as Shays Rebellion, which took place in Berkshire County in the first half of 1787. Berkshire County's participation in that rebellion on the side of the government involved local leaders, including General William Paterson and Colonel John Ashley. There was a detachment of

approximately forty men from Sheffield that all sources seem to agree was under the command of a Captain Goodrich. There is no contemporary record that mentions the first name of Captain Goodrich and two more current histories are content to only provide the last name of Goodrich for this commanding officer. A third source identifies the leader as Captain William Goodrich and a fourth source calls the leader Captain Joseph Goodrich. There was a Joseph Goodrich in Sheffield who served in the Massachusetts militia during the Revolutionary War and attained the rank of sergeant by the end of the war. At his death in 1827, he was being referred to as Colonel Joseph Goodrich. Based on the available evidence, it is this author's opinion that the leader of the Sheffield detachment in 1787 was Joseph Goodrich and not William

William Goodrich was in such adverse financial condition that in October of 1787 he got the Vermont General Assembly to discharge him from "all debts or demands against him" and they established a commission to supervise the use of his remaining assets to pay off all of his creditors on a pro rata basis. The three commissioners appointed to supervise his assets placed advertisements in Vermont newspapers in January of 1788 giving notice to all creditors. The process Goodrich followed seems to be a colonial version of the modern bankruptcy proceedings.²⁸ By 1788, Goodrich was fifty-four years old and all of his money-making ventures had collapsed.

The Stockbridge Library has a notation in their file on William Goodrich that in 1789 he led the funeral procession and made the only remarks at the funeral of Ethan Allen. There is no source cited in support of this statement and this author has not been able to find any source to support that contention. The Library file also indicates that he moved to Middlebury Vermont in the later part of the 1780's and that he died there in 1812. Since there is no record of William Goodrich being buried in the Stockbridge cemetery, initially there seemed to be some credibility to the possibility of his burial in Middlebury. The problem with the Library's information about Goodrich being buried in Middlebury is that the 1776 return of Quebec prisoners lists Goodrich's age as 37. In fact, he was born in 1734 which in 1775 would make him forty-one years old. The William Goodrich who is buried in Middlebury and died in 1812 was born in 1755 and was 57 years of age according to the inscription on his tombstone.

The birth year of 1734 is consistent with the date of the birth of his son William in 1771, whereas the 1755 date, which is when the William Goodrich in Middlebury was born, is not. By 1812, he would have been 78 and not 57 as stated on the tombstone. The History of Middlebury identifies the William Goodrich buried in the cemetery as the son of Stephen Goodrich and says that he was born in Connecticut.²⁹ The Henry Sheldon Museum in Middlebury confirms this information. This information leads to the conclusion that the William Goodrich on the expedition to Quebec did not spend his last years in Middlebury, Vermont. Unfortunately, no record of Goodrich's death and burial has been uncovered to date.

END NOTES

¹ Sources for the information contained in the sketch are: Barbara Allen, Report to Stephen Darley on Capt. William Goodrich from Records in Stockbridge Library, Jan. 2010; Lafayette W. Chase. *The Goodrich Family in America*. Chicago: Goodrich Family Memorial Association, 1889; Orson Kingsley. Report to Stephen Darley on Major William Goodrich in Middlebury, VT, Henry Sheldon Museum, Feb. 2010; Electra Fidelia Jones. *Stockbridge: Past and Present, or Records of Old Mission Station*. Springfield: S. Bowles & Co., 1854; Lillian Preiss. Sheffield, Frontier Town. Sheffield: Sheffield Bicentennial Committee, 1976; Report to Stephen Darley from Sheffield Historical Society on Major William Goodrich in Sheffield, March. 2010.

² Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011.

³ Jones, *Stockbridge Past or Present*, 135.

⁴ Petition of Goodrich to Lt. Governor Thomas Hutchinson, Feb. 19, 1773. Mass Archives, III, 570-571.

⁵ Information and old town map in the Stockbridge Library confirms the moving of the house.

⁶ Lion G. Miles, Anna Bingham: From the Red Lion Inn to the Supreme Court. *New England Quarterly*, vol. 69, June 1996: 289-290.

⁷ Lion G. Miles. The Red Man Dispossessed: The Williams Family and the Alienation of Indian Land in Stockbridge, Mass. 1736-1818. *New England Quarterly*, vol. 67, March 1995.

⁸ Isaac Greenwood. The Stockbridge Indians During the American Revolution. *NEHGR*, vol. 54, Jan. 1900: 162-164.

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- ⁹ Stockbridge Indians During the American Revolution, 162-163.
- ¹⁰ Stockbridge Indians During the American Revolution, 163.
- ¹¹ Goodrich commission as Capt in *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in Revolutionary War*, 595.
- ¹² Thomas Egleston. *The Life of Major-General John Paterson*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1878: 44-45.
- ¹³ Kenneth Roberts. *March to Quebec*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1946. Dearborn journal, 138.
- ¹⁴ Heth journal, Winchester VA Hist. Soc., 117-118.
- ¹⁵ March to Quebec, Pierce journal, 689.
- ¹⁶ Stockbridge, Massachusetts. *Proprietor's Record Book, Meeting of May, 1776*. "Granted to William Goodrich (a white hotel keeper and a captain of minute-men in the Revolution) in consideration of his having an ox killed, fifty acres of land".
- ¹⁷ Heth journal, Annual Papers of Winchester VA Hist. Soc., 1931: 117-118.
- ¹⁸ Washington to Goodrich, June 19, 1779. Washington Papers LOC, #150290; Washington to Goodrich, July 4, 1779. Washington Papers LOC, #150379.
- ¹⁹ Goodrich reimbursement claims. State: November 20, 1780. Mass. Archives, 186:72; Federal: Goodrich Letter to Philip Schuyler, July 24, 1777. Philip Schuyler Papers, New York Public Library, Box 33. No. 790.
- ²⁰ State of Vermont. Rev. War Rolls. Major William Goodrich and Staff. 808.
- ²¹ State of Vermont. Rev. War Rolls, 789.
- ²² Goodrich to Washington, Aug 24, 1781. Washington Papers LOC, image 46.
- ²³ Washington to Goodrich, Sept. 2, 1781. Washington Papers LOC, image 230094.
- ²⁴ Goodrich petition to VT in Feb 1782 in NARA Revolutionary War Service records. William Goodrich Petition, image 18105121.
- ²⁵ Barbara Allen. Report to Stephen Darley on Records in Stockbridge Library Relative to William Goodrich. Their records show that "in 1783 he signed a deed in Bennington, Vermont".
- ²⁶ Appendix to Deming's Vermont Officers, 126. "Chartered June 22, 1781 to William Goodrich and 59 others".
- ²⁷ There are various newspaper legal notices in the late 1780's, 1790's and early 1800's regarding defaults on Vermont land. An example is *The Rutland Herald*, Vol. 12, Issue 12, 3/22/1806, regarding the proprietors of Vershire, Vermont who are delinquent on the money owed. William Goodrich is one of the listed proprietors. Also *Vermont Journal*, vol. 4, issue 196, 4/30/ 1787 for Montpelier, Vermont, of which both William and Sybil Goodrich are listed as delinquent. There are a number of ads listing Goodrich as delinquent on various land deals in Vermont in the 1780s and 90's, which shows a pattern of defaulting on his obligations.
- ²⁸ A legal notice was published in Vermont newspapers in 1788 stating that on October 23, 1787, the General Assembly of Vermont passed an act "discharging Maj. William Goodrich, of Pawlet, State of Vermont, from all debts or demands against him". *Vermont Journal*, vol. 5, issue 238, 2/18/1788.
- ²⁹ Samuel Smith. *The History of the Town of Middlebury in the County of Addison, Vermont*. Middlebury: A.H. Copeland, 1859.