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The War of 1812 in Northern New York: The Observations of Captain Rufus McIntire

Edited by JOHN C. FREDRIKSEN

A rare eyewitness account of a neglected aspect of the war. John Fredriksen holds a Master's degree in American history from the University of Michigan and is author of Free Trade and Sailors' Rights: A Bibliography of the War of 1812.

DURING THE WAR OF 1812, the basic offensive strategy of the United States was a multi-pronged thrust into Canada for the purpose of seizing territory and exchanging it for diplomatic concessions. Owing to its proximity and geography, New York was destined to figure prominently in that scheme. Surrounded on three sides by water, over which the movement of men and supplies was greatly facilitated, the Empire State constituted a natural staging area for access to the three traditional invasion routes into Canada. Two of these, the Niagara and Champlain corridors, were hotly contested by both sides and occasioned a number of bloody engagements such as Queenston Heights, Lundy's Lane and Plattsburgh. Historically speaking, these events are well known and the object of considerable scholarship. We are generally less informed, however, about the role played by the third invasion route, of crossing Lake Ontario directly into Upper Canada. Perhaps because this theater lacked an encounter of the magnitude of a Lake Erie or a Lake Champlain it has failed to gather as much attention as other fronts.¹ The gap is ironic, for throughout the War of 1812 northern New York was the scene of intense naval construc-

1. On the Niagara and Champlain corridors, see, for example, Louis L. Babcock, *The War of 1812 on the Niagara Frontier* (Buffalo, 1927), and Allan S. Everest, *The War of 1812 in the Champlain Valley* (Syracuse, 1981). The only detailed treatment of the third invasion route remains two articles by Ernest A. Cruikshank: "The Contest for Command of Lake Ontario in 1812 and 1813," *Royal Society of Canada Transactions* 10 (1916), 161-223, and "The Contest for the Command of Lake Ontario in 1814," *Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records* 21 (1923), 99-153.

tion, large troop concentrations, and considerable amphibious warfare. For two and a half years the British maintained the initiative, with a nearly successful capture of Sackett's Harbor, and equally destructive raids on Sodus Point and Oswego. The Americans countered by capturing York, the Provincial capital, and with a spectacular ambush of marauding British troops at Sandy Creek. The dramatic and see-saw course of construction, raid, and counter-raid renders this one of the war's most interesting regions. Only a near complete lack of primary materials, so endemic to War of 1812 research, has precluded further study of the important role that New York played.

Any discussion of the War of 1812 in northern New York must take into account American troops stationed at Sackett's Harbor, the strategic naval base on Lake Ontario. One such participant was Captain Rufus McIntire of the Third U.S. Artillery. Though we are concerned with his wartime activities, McIntire is an interesting historical figure in his own right. Born at York, Maine, in 1784, he attended Dartmouth College and by 1809 had graduated with honors. McIntire then commenced a successful law practice, but enlisted upon the outbreak of war with Britain. In stark contrast to the avowed anti-war sentiments of New England, young McIntire espoused a pristine patriotism. "I know," he explained to his mother upon enlisting, "I sacrifice my time, and my ease, and expose my morals to be corrupted by the licentiousness of a camp, my health to be impaired by fatiguing marches and the chilly cold of a more northern clime, and my life to danger ... [but] I am satisfied that the essential rights of my country have been trampled on and are at stake and that the war in consequence thereof is a righteous and necessary war, and that it ought to be spiritedly supported by every man in America."² McIntire acquitted himself well during the war and returned to Maine to pursue the career of a public servant. Having settled in Parsonfield, he first represented York County in the newly-independent state legislature. From 1827 to 1834 McIntire served three terms in Congress, but not until 1839 did he fulfill his most important civil function, that of State Land Agent. In this capacity he helped diffuse tensions arising from the so-called "Aroostock war" between Maine and New Brunswick, whose territorial ambiguities threatened a third war with Great Britain. McIntire subsequently was appointed U.S. Marshal by President Polk, and Surveyor of the Port of Portland during the

2. Philip W. McIntire, "Presentations of the Sword of Rufus McIntire," *Maine Historical Society Collections* 1 (1904), 188.

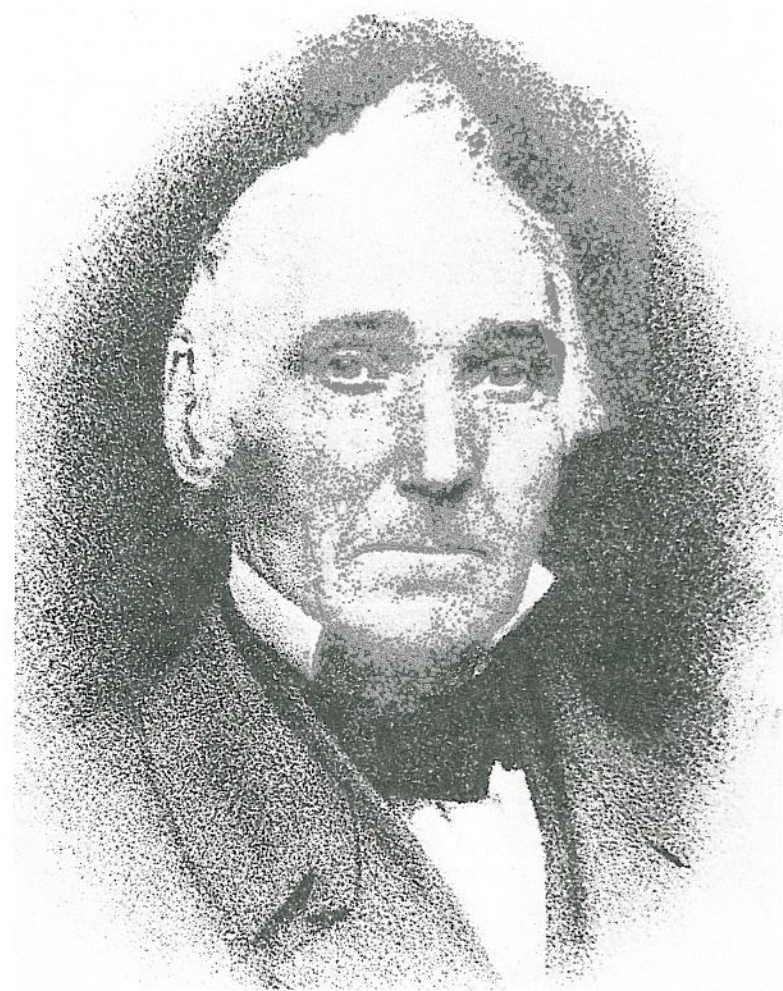
Pierce administration. The last post closed his public career, but death did not claim this accomplished Maine citizen until April 28, 1866, at the age of eighty-one.³

As War of 1812 records go, the recently uncovered manuscripts of Rufus McIntire represent an important and unusual find for the following reason: The accomplishments of American armies in Canada, including their victories, defeats, and depredations, are well known and easily documented. However, the component parts of those forces, the infantry and artillery regiments hastily mustered by the Madison administration and then callously disbanded after the peace, have not fared as well. Virtually nothing is known concerning their day to day activities, or the combat honors accrued over many a hard-fought field. McIntire's is the first series of letters to expound upon the career of the Third U.S. Artillery Regiment, an elite but apparently forgotten formation from the War of 1812. They shed considerable light on its operational excellence and the role it played in various campaigns in Canada and northern New York. At a time when the tactics of many American units bordered on the amateurish, the Third Artillery never failed to give a good account of itself. Even Commodore Isaac Chauncey, no friend of the military, was lavish in his praise for the Third, calling it "one of the best disciplined corps in the army and remarkable for the great number of scientific and correct officers in it."⁴ Because the history of the Third Artillery largely mirrors the war in northern New York, it warrants our continued attention.

As a correspondent, Captain McIntire offers fresh perspective on a number of war-time events, for he neatly encapsulates occurrences and presents them in great detail. In his description of the British repulse from Sackett's Harbor, McIntire is proud but impartial as he describes the flow of battlefield events. As a professional soldier, however, he is perturbed by what he considers unwarranted credit given the militia for political reasons. McIntire then accompanied the ill-fated Montreal expedition of General Wilkinson, which culminated in the American defeat at Chrysler's Farm on November 11, 1813. Though expanding upon successful skirmishes in his sector, he voices frustration and bewilderment over the American defeat. Nowhere is McIntire's penchant for detail more clearly demonstrated than in his rendition of the desperate defense

3. A detailed sketch of McIntire's civil career is in J.W. Dearborn, *History of Parsonfield, Maine* (Portland, 1888), 21-23.

4. John Brannon, *Official letters of the military and naval officers of the United States during the war with Great Britain* (Washington, 1823), 333.



Rufus McIntire in later years. From J. W. Dearborn, History of Parsonfield, Maine (1888).

of Oswego, May 5–6, 1814. Beyond an exciting narrative, the reader is proffered important and heretofore unknown facts relative to troop dispositions before, during, and after the battle. Finally, his correspondence ends with several letters concerning the defensive measures taken at Sackett's Harbor in anticipation of a general

British assault. McIntire conveys the anxiety of an impending attack, but also, in the accepted tradition of the Third Artillery, the sublime confidence of repulsing any such maneuver.

Beyond its obvious military value, there is also a peculiar political twist to McIntire's correspondence—not central to the struggle in New York, but useful from the standpoint of the war in general. Despite the litany of hardships and personal loss encountered, McIntire's letters are consistently written from the perspective of one to whose services "the country is entitled and be the consequences what may, I cannot consciously withhold."⁵ Given the political climate of Massachusetts, whose Federalist government administered the Maine territory, it is a most unusual pronouncement. McIntire's constant allusions to Yankee regiments and character suggests a national pride which transcends regional loyalties as well as the anti-war policies of his native state. His open disdain and acerbic criticism of Massachusetts Federalists, apparently to a sympathetic home audience, demonstrates that support for that faction among New Englanders was less than monolithic.

So, in a military, historical and political sense, the letters of Rufus McIntire greatly enhance our understanding of conditions and activities of the war in northern New York. Given the preponderance of attention traditionally fixed upon the Niagara and Champlain frontiers, it is a welcome addition to our resources concerning a strategic but forgotten theater of the War of 1812.

McIntire's letters were addressed to John Holmes, then a state senator, of Alfred, Maine. The letters are in the New York State Library in Albany, and are published with the permission of the New York State Library. They are presented as McIntire wrote them, except that his occasional dashes have been changed to more specific punctuation marks and ampersands have been replaced by "and."

Sacket's Harbor July 5th 1813

Dear Sir,

Inclosed is my deposition agreeable to your request. I have there stated the substance of what I could recollect relative to the affair. Perhaps it is less particular than you expect but I believe I have stated intelligently whatever is important in the action within my knowledge.

I can give you but little information of the proceedings here more than

5. McIntire, "Presentations," 188.

you see in the public papers. We are disciplining our troops as fast as possible. Genl. Lewis has lately arrived and commands here.⁶ The rigging of the Genl. Pike goes on rapidly—she will soon be ready to sail, till then we shall not venture out on the lake. Last Wednesday Sir James Yeo with about eight hundred men, principally sailors, started from Kingston in boats with a determination to enter our harbor and destroy (some) of our shipping in the night at all hazards.⁷ [The] night proved so dark they could not find the way before light and they therefore landed on a point of land at the mouth of harbor called Point Peninsula about 12 miles from our shipping. They hauled their boats ashore and covered them with brush and lay concealed on Thursday with a determination to put their plan into execution that night. But so many of their men deserted, Sir James thinking, it is presumed, that we had got information, and fearing to trust any longer to the fidelity of his men, returned to Kingston. One of the deserters got to camp just before night on Thursday which put us on the alert and early next morning our fleet went out to intercept him but he had made his escape. Fifteen deserters from him have already reported themselves at this post and say that nearly fifty left him who have probably scattered into the country. We are constantly prepared for some desperate attack from the enemy on our fleet; for we know their great object is to destroy a part of it before the Genl. Pike is ready. This is very important. I consider that on our superiority on the lake depends the success of the campaign in a great measure. We are particularly on the alert tonight as it is reported that the enemy have four thousand troops embarked at Kingston to attack this place and the wind is very favorable. I do not believe in the report because they have not shipping enough to convey half that number in addition to the ship crews. They may however make an attack thinking to take us by surprise. If they do attack us I am confident they will repent their rashness. If the enemy with their whole fleet and one thousand troops were obliged to retreat when our whole fleet was absent and we had not more than eight hundred men (except militia) and not more than six hundred in action they cannot expect any better success now even if they bring four thousand troops. In regard to the late attack I would observe that I have been very much surprised that with his force the enemy did not succeed, but much of that surprise has ceased since we know for a certainty that his loss was at least two hundred and eighty.⁸ They left

6. Morgan Lewis (1754–1844), veteran of the Revolution and former governor of New York, was quartermaster-general and major general on the Niagara frontier until 1814, when he assumed command of the New York City region.

7. Sir James Lucas Yeo (1782–1818), with twenty years naval service and knighthood for his conquest of Cayenne, French Guiana, in 1810, was appointed commander of British naval forces in the Great Lakes in 1813.

8. Sackett's Harbor was attacked on May 29, 1813. The Americans were victorious but it

upwards of fifty killed, wounded and prisoners and we have correct information that two hundred and thirty wounded were carried into their hospital in Kingston. They probably had many wounded who were not carried in. Some estimate the whole at near four hundred. Among their killed was a full proportion of officers.

Some of our recruits, it is true, did not fight with the regularity of old soldiers, but skulking by companies behind whatever would screen them they kept up a most destructive fire. This mode of fighting, though it does no great credit to our discipline, completely foiled the enemy; his orders were to fire one or two rounds on our lines and then to charge bayonet, but he found that when he attempted to charge one company they retreated and were covered and protected by others in their rear. The enemy boasts that he drove us several hours; this is true, but in all that time he did not get half a mile. The militia were stationed near where they landed and all fled as soon as the enemy were ashore. I would except a few under Capt. McNitt. Genl. Brown says one hundred, but Genl. Brown belongs to the militia and his partiality has probably doubled a real number. Genl. Brown is no doubt a brave man but not a consummate general.⁹ The volunteers I believe fought well. I know nearly the number in each corps and am satisfied that we had not more than seven hundred engaged at one time including the volunteers and perhaps add Capt. McNitt's militia. The enemy had at least nine hundred in the engagement after deducting their probable loss in landing. Add to this the assistance they received from their shipping which was considerable. Col. Mills was killed by a grape shot from one of their gunboats and a considerable portion of our killed and wounded received their wounds in the same quarter. 'Tis true we had some field pieces but I do [not] consider that they rendered us so much service as the shipping did them and besides I reckon the men that manned them among the engaged on our side. I cannot determine in my own mind which had the advantage of ground. When the enemy landed they had a cleared spot, then woods, partly cleared, then a few large trees with underbrush and finally the ground retreated from perfectly clear. Part of the time they had the disadvantage of being fair marks in the cleared ground while our troops were in the woods and part of the time we labored under the same disadvantage. The enemy, in his official orders asserts that our troops threw themselves into block houses which obliged him to retreat. This is not true: he probably meant a few miserable huts built of

was an extremely close call. See "The battle of Sackett's Harbor," *Military and Naval Magazine of the United States* (March, 1833), 17–25, and "Defense of Sackett's Harbor," *Portfolio* 15 (May, 1815), 397–403.

9. Jacob J. Brown, 1775–1828. Although no official biography exists, an interesting panegyric is "Jacob Brown," *Military and Naval History of the United States* 6 (February, 1836), 397–410.

round sticks which had been occupied as barracks but which were so open that I doubt whether they were any benefit to us except they gave our men some confidence and scared the enemy. In fact several of our men were shot in them. In the above sketch you have I believe very nearly a correct account of the relative force and advantage of both parties and can judge American bravery when compared with the British bravery aided by skill and discipline.

I am sorry to learn from your letter and one I rec'd from Mr. Goodwin of the continued sickness of Bradford and sincerely hope he is restored to health. I have been quite unwell but am perfectly restored to health.

My best wishes attend you and your worthy family. That you may all enjoy health, peace and happiness is the earnest prayer of your friend and humble servant.

Rufus McIntire

Sacket's Harbor Sept. 11th 1813

Dear Sir,

Yours of the 26th August ult. came to hand yesterday and am much obliged to you for the same. Your speculations in regard to the invasion of Canada and best mode of conducting the war on the frontiers are in my opinion very correct, and are what I hope to see soon realized. The command of Lake Ontario is still doubtful. Both squadrons are out and a few days will decide the superiority.

The command of this lake is not considered by Genl. Wilkinson as necessarily connected with the operations of the army tho' the *particular* movements of the army will probably depend on it.¹⁰ We expect to leave this place soon but cannot conjecture in what direction. We are ordered not to write to our friends anything relative to the movements of the army till the close of the campaign. You will therefore perceive the impropriety of my saying anything that can be constructed into a breach of order. Genl. Wilkinson has gone to the Niagara frontier. The Secretary of War is here.¹¹ Genl. Lewis has gone eastward—tis said to the *springs* for his health. May the waters prove salutary—to the army of the U. States.

Genl. Wilkinson, commander at Sacket's Harbor has infused new spirit into the troops at this post. He inspired a degree of confidence in every officer and soldier that I never saw equalled. Under him I am confident the

10. James Wilkinson (1757–1825), whose checkered career included service in the Revolution and the governorship of Louisiana Territory, replaced Gen. Henry Dearborn as commander of the American forces on July 6.

11. John Armstrong (1758–1843) of New York State, was United States Senator, 1800–1804, and Jefferson's minister to France, 1804–1810. He became Madison's Secretary of War in January, 1813, and resigned in September, 1814.

army will not shew a want of courage or conduct. He throws a mystery over our army, our manoeuvres and future intentions that are impenetrable and are highly necessary when so near the enemy and where everything that can be known is immediately communicated to the enemy.

Col. Walbach, one of the Adjutant Generals, is here and is as popular as Adj. Genl. as he was as Captain and commander of Fort Constitution.¹² We have many other officers that would do honor to any army.

You speak of the army under Boyd as the most experienced troops.¹³ They are so no doubt and have been harrassed and *picqueted* into a degree of watchfulness and discipline that make them useful; but I dare engage that the troops now here, should they ever be engaged with the enemy, will do as much honor to the American name as any troops that ever fought under Genl. Boyd.

There are five companies of our regiment here and are allowed to equal, both in appearance and discipline, any troops in the service. Our Regt. have not distinguished themselves yet in consequence of their having been kept by the commanding General as a *corps de reserve*, the highest compliment that could be paid them.

You mention the reports of a fatal sickness said to prevail here. 'Tis true we have had many sick principally of the diarrhea or camp disorder but not more than is common with all new armies till the men get habituated to a camp life. The health of the camp is greatly improved—not one half so many on the sick report as there were in the first of August and the most of those sick are convalescent and will soon be fit for active service.

I should write often, but have nothing to write except the affairs of the army and of them we are forbidden to write or rather it is hard to distinguish what is proper and what is not. You very justly remark that there are many things about an army that never reach you through the papers. I believe the truth is never more than half told—that the most important is kept back. I know that to be the case of the attack at Sacket's Harbor and that Genl. Brown was promoted from Brig. Genl. in the militia to a Brig. Genl. in the regular service—I will not say in consequence thereof but I will say that had the enemy done what they might with ease (burnt the new ship) Genl. Brown would have been more censured than Smyth or any other.¹⁴ A heavy cannonading is now heard on the lake—the fleets are undoubtedly engaged—they are so near that I feel the barracks jar very sensibly every discharge (4 o'clock P.M.) I was

12. John DeBarth Walbach (1768–1857) formerly of the Austrian army.

13. John P. Boyd, 1764–1830, a veteran of Tippecanoe, 1811.

14. Alexander Smyth (1765–1830). McIntire is alluding to Smyth's aborted crossing of the Niagara River in December, 1812. See Frank H. Severance, "The case of Brigadier Alexander Smyth as Shown by his Writings," *Buffalo Historical Society Publications* 18 (1914), 213–255.

interrupted when I had written the above. The cannonading has continued one hour and a half having started [] of an hour before sunset began and continued till sunset, most tremendously—almost a continual roar of cannon. Since that not a gun has been heard. (10 o'clock evening) The command of the lake is no doubt decided. The force of each nearly equal, very doubtful which has gained the victory. A few guns like signal guns or those in the chase were heard all day. I will not close this till I know the result. The mail is stopped between this and Utica and we are obliged to depend on the expresses. I do not consider it safe to send money or I would enclose you 50 or 100 dollars which I wish you had.

Give my best respects to Mrs. Holmes and children, I hope Mr. Goodwins family, Mr. Layward's family and all the neighbors are well.

Yours most respectfully,
Rufus McIntire

P.S. Sept. 14th

We have waited in vain for certain information from the fleets on the lake. It is reported and believed here that our fleet has been seen passing up the lake since the action and were thirteen sail and among them three ships. If this be true we have captured a part of the enemy's squadron. Reports from other sources say that the Wolfe only escaped and that all the others were captured or destroyed and that the Genl. Pike is a complete wreck. I do not know what credit to give these reports. If the enemy had been successful we should have heard a Royal salute from Kingston as on other occasions. It is not improbable that our fleet would proceed up the lake after their success to report to the commanding General. We are extremely anxious to hear the certainty of these things. There is a mail going again and I must close.

Camp, French Mills Decr 8th 1813

Dear Sir,

I wrote you from Grenadier Island at the commencement of our late expedition and then promised something more when the campaign ended. I was then in high hopes of being able to write you from Montreal or some other part of his Majesty's dominion but the campaign has ended without having those hopes realized. We have nothing to do but make ourselves comfortable this winter and try again in the spring. To make ourselves comfortable we had to build huts which are nearly done.

Why has the expedition failed? Why was not Kingston and Prescott first reduced? Why did not Genl. Hampton cooperate with the Commander in Chief?¹⁵ I can easily conceive that these and a thousand similar questions

15. Wade Hampton, 1751–1835.

are every day asked by the good citizens who have been anxiously waiting to see these events and are questions which I am as unable to answer as you who are remote from the scene. It is however understood here that the plan of the expedition was laid by the Secretary of War and tis said, contrary to the opinion of Genl. Wilkinson. I believe the old maxim had better been adhered to (not to leave a strong fort in the rear unsubdued). Bonaparte tis true disregards this maxim but Bonaparte moves with such rapidity that an enemy in the rear can do him no injury. We are not habituated to such movements. Much of the failure of the expedition I think may fairly be attributed to the delay in getting into the St. Lawrence, the causes of which no man had in his control.

As I cannot give you information on the more important points I will endeavor to give you a faithful account of the expedition itself and in doing this I shall be more particular in the circumstances which fell immediately under my observation. The last division of the army left Grenadier Island Novr. and the same day arrived at French Creek. We found that the first division that had arrived at that place had been attacked by a part of the B. fleet and beaten them off by getting on shore a couple of 18 pounders. Two of the enemy's schooners suffered considerably. On the 5th we were again embarked and the next morning proceeded down the river to Morristown about 5 or 6 miles above Ogdensburg and Prescott. Here we lay the next day till evening when a part of the troops landed and marched down through Ogdensburg by land leaving the boats which were doubly manned at the oars to proceed down by the fort in the after part of the night. As we passed through Ogdensburg village the enemy kept up a continual cannonading. Many of their balls and shell were very well directed but did no damage. When the boats passed in the morning they again kept up a very heavy cannonading to but little effect—only one ball touched us and that killed and wounded three men. In the forenoon of the 8th the boats came ashore at Lisbon at seven miles below Prescott and took on board the troops that marched down. I believe I mentioned before that Col. Macomb had commanded part of the *Corps de reserve*.¹⁶ This corps was afterwards new organized and called the *Corps d' Elite*. It was composed of the Rifle corps of about 150 or 300 under Major Forsythe; the Albany volunteers under Major Herkimer about as strong; a detachment of the 20th Regt. Infy and Richmond Volunteers under Col. Randolph about as strong; and five companies of the 3rd Regt. of Artillery about 300 or 350 strong under the brave Col. Scott of the 2nd Regt. Arty. who joined us here as a volunteer and obtained this command—The

16. Alexander Macomb (1782–1841) was colonel of the Third Artillery and subsequently one of the victors of Plattsburgh in 1814. See Milo M. Quaife, "Alexander Macomb," *Burton Historical Society Collection Leaflet* 10 (November, 1931), 1–16.

whole commanded by Col. Maccomb.¹⁷ This corps instead of a reserve was now to be in advance—a kind of standing van guard and were to take the lead in every thing that looked like difficulty or danger—an arduous, dangerous but glorious service had the campaign continued any length of time. The *Elite* were now ordered to proceed down in advance about 10 or 12 miles and land on the Canada shore about a mile above a battery which was situated on a narrow part of the river—to march down and take the battery. This we accomplished without loss though we were fired upon by about two hundred militia previous to our landing. The battery was abandoned by the enemy on our approach. The next day (Novr 9) our army came down and ferried over the Light Dragoons and Light Artillery. (Novr 10) Our picquets were attacked at revellie and the *Elite* were ordered out to support them and on our approach the enemy fled up the river. The *Elite*, Light Dragoons, one company of Light Artillery and Genl. Brown's brigade, the whole under Genl. Brown, were then ordered to march down towards Cornwall and were started off immediately. We that day reached the plain which was the scene of action of the 11th and there found the remainder of the Army that had proceeded down in boats and there encamped. On the morning of the 11th Genl. Brown's command took up the line of march early and proceeded on till about noon unmolested. At this time we found a bridge broken down and Major Forsyth with his corps were examining the bridge and attempting to repair it when they were fired on from behind a little rising ground on the other side. The Riflemen kept up a scattering fire as they could see an object. Col. Scott with his command immediately proceeded up the creek in quest of the enemy and a fording place. The bushes were thick and retarded our march but we at length found a fording place and crossed. It was a few minutes too late for the enemy had just slipped us. Had we been ten or fifteen minutes sooner we should have cut off a few hundred of them. The front company however killed one Indian and took two or three Canadians prisoners. The Riflemen killed and wounded several. Ensign James of the Rifle corps alone pursued a party of six or eight of the enemy, killed one and took one prisoner. He took one prisoner the night we first landed—an officer on horseback who was reconnoitering us. He (James) fired at another officer, wounded him, but he rode off. We have since heard that he died of his wounds. The enemy made another stand about a mile below in force, from 8 to 12 hundred militia and about 30 Indians, but a shot from the riflemen dispersed them into the woods. We then proceeded to within four miles of Cornwall and encamped—The next day marched two miles further and waited for the boats. After we left the army on the

17. Benjamin Forsyth (1760?–1814), major in the United States Rifle Regiment, distinguished himself in action at Ogdensburg, York, and Fort George.

morning of the 11th the enemy made their appearance above in gunboats. They came down and commenced a fire on a part of the army that lay higher up than the rest. Genls. Boyd and Covington were ordered up with a part of their brigades to dislodge them from their post.¹⁸ This they effected, the enemy retreated and threw themselves into a ravine and there made a stand. The enemy then having the advantage [] but the enemy dare not follow them. Our [] boats and came down. This I believe to be the substance of that affair. You will see in print I presume many particular accounts of it. I was not there so cannot speak from my own knowledge. On the 12th the boats came down to where we (the advance) were encamped and on the 13th we embarked and arrived at this place.

It was no doubt proper to leave Canada at the time we did. Without the cooperation of Genl. Hampton we could not expect to get to Montreal as the enemy in superior force to ours, was waiting for us at *Cote de lac* while 3000 were harassing us at rear.

The appearance of this sheet warns me to finish—more hereafter—write me soon—Yours, etc.

Rufus McIntire

Rome (Oneida Co. State of N. York)
March 17, 1814

Dear Sir,

I wrote you from Sackett's Harbor some time since. Since that time we have been ordered westward and arrived at this place yesterday. Tomorrow we proceed on towards the Niagara frontier. We have in our detachment six companies of the 3d Artillery regiment, one of the 2d Regt. Arty. and one of the Light Artillery averaging about eighty men to a company, all in fine health and under the command of Lt. Col. Mitchell. A Battalion of the 11th Regt. Infy under Lt. Col. Bedel marched hence yesterday—the same destination. Col. Ripley with the 21st Regt. Infy marches hence today and the 9th Regt. Infy are expected here today and will follow one day after us.¹⁹ Genl. Brown left here yesterday and will command us.

18. Leonard Covington, 1768–1813. The battle in question is Chrysler's Farm, November 11, 1813.

19. For a brief sketch of George E. Mitchell (1781–1832) consult George Johnson, *History of Cecil County, Maryland* (Elkton, Maryland, 1881), 497–501. Moody Bedel (1764–1841) was a veteran of Benedict Arnold's expedition against Montreal in 1775. See Daniel Doan, "The enigmatic Moody Bedel," *Historical New Hampshire* 25 (Fall, 1970), 27–36. Eleazar Wheelock Ripley (1782–1839), as brevet-major general, was the highest-ranking New England soldier of the war. See Nicholas Bylies, *Eleazar Wheelock Ripley and the War of 1812* (Des Moines, 1890).

Col. Scott is on his way from Albany to the same place. Batavia, a town about forty miles interior from Fort Niagara is the point to which we are all ordered to present. To what point on the frontier we shall from thence be ordered I know not. You can guess as well as any other *Yankee*.

Our march averages about twenty miles per day which our men perform with ease. Their health always improves on a march if good quarters are obtained at night. This we shall be able to obtain through the whole march as there are villages scattered all along from ten to twenty five mile distant from each other where six or seven hundred men can easily be quartered. This is the reason for having several regiments follow each other a days march distant.

The letter I wrote you at Sackett's Harbor I sent to Portsmouth by Capt. Vose. It contained 50 dolls. and some papers belonging in your neighborhood. The letter I presume will go safe, but will probably arrive much sooner than this.

I am in haste and cannot write more at present. I should be happy to receive a letter from you. Please to direct it to me at Batavia and I will make arrangements to get it.

Give my respects to all friends—Mr. Saywards and Mr. Goodwin's families in particular. Your own family will always retain my most grateful remembrance.

I am, Sir, with the highest respect your most obedient servant and affectionate friend,

Rufus McIntire

Batavia, State of N. York, Apr 15
1814

Dear Sir,

Our regiment arrived at this place on the 29th ult. in excellent health tho somewhat fatigued by seventeen days marching, five of the last of which was thro' the mud ankle deep. You have probably learned by the public papers that after we had performed a part of our march we retrograded to Salina. By that retrograde movement we (our regiment) lost nearly five days. This village is twenty nine miles from Williamsville or (Eleven Mile Creek) where the militia have been stationed and whither a part of our regular force have gone.

The 25th Regt. Infy have marched towards Lewistown and the rest of the Infy that left Sackett's Harbor consisting of the 9th, 21st, and a battalion of the 11th have gone to Williamsville. Williamsville is on the road hence to Buffalo and eleven miles this side of that place. The militia have within two or three days all been discharged. Our regiment is waiting

for tents which are expected hourly. We are in no great hurry as probably nothing will be done until our train of artillery comes up. It left Canandaigua, forty nine miles from this place and the roads are so excessively bad that it will not reach this place in less than four days. The road to Williamsville is still worse. The inhabitants say it never was so bad. The distance from Williamsville to Ft. Niagara is over thirty miles so that if operations are to be made against that fort we cannot commence them in less than three or four weeks. If on the other hand we do not go against Fort Niagara but cross over near Black Rock and march down against Fort George (which I am of the opinion would be most advisable) we cannot cross till we have built boats or until the fleet comes down from Erie and I do not think we have yet sufficient force to attempt to plant the American standard on the enemy's shore and on the whole I do not think we lose anything if we remain here a fortnight longer. What will be the plan of operation in this quarter is uncertain. Genl. Brown commands and the troops under him were selected by him at Sacket's Harbor—all *Yankee regiments* excepts ours which was raised in N. England and the middle states. Two companies of the 2d Regt. Arty are attached to ours. Genl. Brown who has been promoted over so many Brigadier Genls. who so much possesses the confidence in the troops under his command. Brigr. Genl. Scott so distinguished as a fighting character (and in my opinion the best officer in the whole army of any grade) has joined us and is the only brigadier present. If it be possible to meet the enemy I know Scott will manage to meet him if he can do it on anything like equal ground. He expresses the highest confidence in our regiment in particular and assures us that as we shall not all be furnished with pieces of artillery he is anxious to lead that part who will act as infantry to the charge. The troops under Genl. Brown probably at present amount to about two thousand. The enemy have about five hundred men in Fort Niagara and have greatly improved the fort. We can take it I think by laying in a regular siege to it but the expense in *time, men and money* will in my opinion counterbalance any advantage resulting from the possession of it. In fact I see but little advantage the enemy have in its possession. 'Tis true it is wounding to the national pride for the enemy to keep it. Other wise it is of but little importance. The enemy command nothing but the bare site of the fort and a mile of plain about it and are dependent for supplies of every kind from the other side. If our army be sufficiently strong to cross and occupy Fort George and Newark, the garrison must capitulate in one fortnight or be starved. Their men desert every opportunity. About ten days ago fourteen deserted from a small detachment they sent out about a mile to destroy a battery up the river. These deserters say that one half of their regiment will desert the first opportunity. It is the 100th Regt and have been considered

the most loyal of any and in fact were lately sent into the fort on that account to relieve some troops that appeared less loyal.

There is a report here that the enemy's fleet is out. Three of their vessels were said to be seen from the mouth of the Genessee river a few days ago. Many well informed people, however, say that it is impossible for them to be out so early.

Co. Dennis did more mischief at Sacket's Harbor last fall in granting furloughs than five recruiting officers could do good in three months.²⁰

My respects to all enquiring friends—Mrs. Holmes in particular.

Yours most respectfully,
Rufus McIntire

Volney, Oswego Falls (12 miles above the Fort)
May 9, 1814

Dear Sir,

We have had an action with the enemy at Fort Oswego and been compelled to retreat to this place. The enemy after destroying or taking away what they could find retired next morning. The particulars I will endeavor to give you and you can judge whether we did our duty or not.

Our force consisted of Capt. Boyle's, Romaine's, McIntire's, Pierce's²¹ companies of Arty formerly the 3rd Regt and Capt. Melvin's Co. of Light Artillery altogether amounting to 342 men who arrived at the fort 30th Apr. after a march of more than 150 miles at the rate of more than 20 miles per day and found the fort in an entire defenseless situation. The fort was once an excellent one when in repair with its outworks large enough to contain 2000 men and fight them to advantage. The hand of time had destroyed every picket and the escarp could be easily ascended on any point—in some places as easily as through a gate. We found five pieces of artillery in it—three 4 pounders, one six and one nine—all very old, three without trunions and all most miserably mounted and even such carriages as they had out of repair. Indeed they were all condemned pieces but had been mounted in case of necessity and we were compelled to use them from the same cause. We immediately set about repairing them, fixing platforms and making cartridges & c & c. The pieces were attached to Capt. Boyle's and three of them placed in a battery in front of the fort and the other two in the bastions of the fort for defense on the land side. All the other companies acted as Infantry. Early in the morning of the 5th

20. Colonel Richard Dennis of the Eighteenth U.S. Infantry.

21. Benjamin K. Pierce was a brother of President Franklin Pierce. For his postwar career see Louis H. Burbey, *Our Worthy Commander: the Life and Times of Benjamin K. Pierce* (Fort Pierce, Fla., 1976).

inst we discovered a fleet—soon made it out to be the enemy's consisting of four ships, one brig and two hermaphrodite brigs with gun boats, a bomb catch for throwing shells and rockets and a long string of boats in tow. The wind being light they did not till afternoon get up before the fort within a mile or a half where they anchored and the boats being filled with troops rendezvoused along side the commodore's ship and rowed slowly for shore proceeded rapidly by their gunboats when they commenced a cannonading from the boats and ships on our fort and little battery which was spiritedly returned by Capt. Boyle, smartly from the nine pounder as the fours would not reach them and the six under the direction of Lt. Legate after a few discharges burst without doing any mischief. Capt. Boyle having several times struck the boats they retired and the wind springing up unfavorable to their operations, their troops were taken into their vessels and they ran down the lake with the loss of several boats which were picked up by the citizens. One was taken up by our soldiers sixty feet long rowed 36 oars and would carry 100 or 150 men. During the night the fleet frequently were seen making signals and one was in sight nearly all night. A deserter assures us that a boat from the village brought a letter and from several circumstances we have no doubt they had some communication from the shore. Col. Mitchell not wishing to divide his force by detaching any to the village side of the river and wishing to deceive the enemy concealed all his force in the fort except Capt. Boyle's Co. at the battery and ordered the tents in store to be pitched in rear of the village and a small battery and breastwork. By this deception the enemy were evidently embarrassed the first day. On the morning of the 6th we again discovered the fleet bearing up under every sail and boats full of men in tow. About 200 militia had by this time come in and were shewn near the tents and in the wood so as to appear as numerous as possible and our troops in the fort were marched out in their view and returned secretly so as to be shown twice or thrice but they now had obtained too much information to be deceived. About 10 A.M. they took their position having before that time shown a disposition to land on the village side. We were marched out of the fort secretly into the woods and made our appearance at the ferry and crossed over one company. This appeared to them a reinforcement. When they had taken their position which was very judiciously made to rake every part of the fort and the plain and woods adjacent they commenced a most tremendous cannonade from every vessel aimed at first entirely at our little battery of one 9 and one 4 pounder, but were unable to silence it for more than three hours and not then till every cartridge was expended and they had possession of the rear of the fort. Lt. Legate at the 4 pounder could not bring his piece to bear on the nearest ship from the battery and therefore took it out and was entirely

exposed to their fire—one ship was not much beyond musket shot. At length Col. Mitchell discovered by their movements that their intention was to land about one hundred rods north easterly of the fort on the shore of the lake and ordered us up from the ferry back to the fort and into the ditch. This order was promptly obeyed though we had to cross the place under a continual shower of round, grape shot and shells. We were sent here not particularly to protect the fort and harbor but the public property on this river, a principal part of which was at the falls. Col. Mitchell therefore resolved not to shut himself into the fort but to oppose the enemy at landing and fight there as long as possible from the outworks, but if unable to repel them was resolved to retreat to this place and make another stand. As the enemy approached the shore Col. Mitchell marched out two companies from the ditch and met them on the shore exposed to a tremendous shower of grape from the ships directed at his little band of about 100 men. After firing six or seven rounds he retreated slowly into the ditch followed by the enemy. We poured in the fire so briskly that they were checked and retired behind some bushes and a ravine where they were partially covered. They then attempted to flank our right but we prevented it by extending our right. A column then advanced to our left along the shore of the lake and got possession of the fort between our left and the battery and we were then obliged to retreat after sustaining the action 36 minutes at close musket shot.

We were not much over 200 men in the ditch in all for Capt. Boyle's Co. was still at the battery and the guard was still in the fort. To us was opposed 600 of DeWatteville's corps—600 marines and 250 sailors with two field pieces—1450 in all who landed in the first division under Lt. Genl. Drummond and Sir James Yeo—the sailors under the immediate command of Capt. Mulcaster of the navy and second in command and said to be a better officer than the commodore. Capt. M. was shot in the groin and is dead. They had a reserve in boats in a second division at least eight hundred British troops. The officers took tea at a tavern in the village and there acknowledged a shot while trying to tear down the American flag over the fort. Two others tried it and were instantly shot.

Sir James acknowledged a slight wound in the heel and a ball through his cap. Our loss is five killed 28 wounded, 3 since dead, about 24 prisoners and 11 missing. Lt. Blaney killed and only one other officer slightly wounded. Our men fought most bravely and we could with difficulty get them to retreat, "*Let us give them one more fire*" said they not knowing the enemy were in the fort. It is impossible to describe and do justice to the intrepidity of Col. Mitchell. He was cool and serene tho' constantly exposed from the com't of the cannonading to the last and to finish his heroic character, while on the retreat mounted under a shower of

shot of every description from the ships and the musketry of the troops, a poor wounded soldier begged for assistance when he dismounted, put the soldier on his horse, and walked coolly in rear of his men. He has been pleased to express his entire approbation of the conduct of all his officers. The enemy spoke in the highest terms of him. The number of enemy I have given is the smallest number stated by their deserters as well as by the citizens of the village who were present. The enemy after plundering the village, taking what they could find, burnt our platform and left the shore that night and the harbor the next morning. They took all our baggage public and private. We could have saved it but were afraid of disheartening our men by removing it—choosing rather to sacrifice everything than have our men prove cowards. My waiter brought off a small trunk containing my papers which is all I saved except what I had on. They left our wounded. All the public property of any value they got was eight pieces of cannon intended for our fleet. They were sunk but found 8 out of 10.

I had 72 men in my Co.—2 of them being sick. I had two killed, 2 sergeants and two privates wounded, three taken prisoners and three missing. Henry Hart the son of Martin Hart killed. All my brave fellows from your part of the country safe. It is astonishing our loss was so small considering how much we were exposed.

Lt. Pierce of the Navy with about twenty sailors was with us in the ditch and advanced with Col. M. to the shore. They conducted well. The militia ran off at the first fire from the ships directed to their village side of the river. Capt. Romaine in vain endeavored to keep them in the fight. We shall probably stay here or return to Oswego and remain there a few weeks till the public property be removed to Sack. H. or elsewhere.

Give my respect to my friends. Tell Mrs. Wentworth that *little Ichabod* was in the action and did his duty like a brave man.

Yours most respectfully,
Rufus McIntire

Our calculation of their force when we saw them in the boats was nearly correct. We calculated that they had at least 1800 and from the best information we can get they had over double that number. Two of their ships are new. They had all the naval force they will have this season. One of the new ships is a double decker and is called the Prince Regent, that name being transferred from the brig that formerly bore it. The other ship is called the Princess Charlotte I know not which. Our large ship at the harbor is launched or will be ready as soon as we can get her guns and rigging through this place, a part having gone. She is called the Superior. The other two are nearly ready for sea called the Jefferson and the Jones nearly as large as the Madison.

Sacket's Harbor, August 1st 1814

Dear Sir,

It is so long since I have heard from Alfred that I will now attempt by *eseracell* [?] to *provoke* you to write to me. The newspapers inform of the public affairs eastward but I feel equally anxious to hear of the welfare of my friends and of the incidents which take place among them. The last letter I recd from you was written in April for which I am obliged to you but should be more so if it had been longer.

Our fleet sailed this morning with a light breeze—destination unknown. They have six weeks provisions on board. It consists of the Superior, Mohawk, Pike and Madison ships; the Sylph, Jones, Jefferson and Oneida brigs; and Lady of the Lake and Tompkins schooners. The latter is to be used as a bomb ketch or something like that and is manned with Capt. Archer's Co. of artillery. Capt. Archer has the direction of the Tompkins.²² He is a singular man but has proved himself very brave and is a man of talents. He is a little too fond of new projects and speculations and will either do *much* or *nothing*. Commodore Chauncey has so far recovered his health as to go in the fleet tho' he is yet low.²³ His ill health probably delayed the sailing of the fleet some tho' I am not able to ascertain certainly why it has not sailed before. There seems to be some mystery about it and the officers of the navy have, some of them, spoken freely on the subject. I fear the enemy have been able to send reinforcements to the head of the lake, that Genl. Brown will be compelled to leave the Canada shore without effecting the object of his expedition. The delay in the sailing of our fleet must disappoint Genl. Brown and I think destroy his calculation of success. We have got information of his late battle wherein Genl. Brown and Scott were both severely wounded and you will no doubt get the particulars before this reaches you. The British Genl. Rial is our prisoner together with about twenty other officers and nearly 300 prisoner's and the enemy's artillery.²⁴ It appears the battle lasted about six hours when the enemy were driven at all points. It appears Genl. Brown was retreating and the enemy by a circuitous movement were attempting to get in his rear but were disappointed and defeated with great loss. Genl. Brown recd two balls in his thigh but remained on his horse till the army were quietly encamped. Genl. Gaines on the rect of the news by express left this post for Brown's army where he will command till the

22. Samuel B. Archer (1790–1825) of Virginia, was a captain in Scott's Second regiment of Artillery.

23. The inability of Isaac Chauncey (1772–1840) to wrest control of Lake Ontario from the British was a source of considerable controversy. An adequate discussion is in Fletcher Pratt, *Preble's Boys: Commodore Edward Preble and the Rise of American Seapower* (New York, 1950), 170–99.

24. Phineas Riall (1775–1850) was captured at Lundy's Lane, July 25, 1814.

recovery of Genl. Brown which will be shortly as the wound is a flesh one only.²⁵ The battle was fought between Queenston and Chippeway. I presume this and the battle of Chippewa were the most regular and best fought battles we have had this war and has furnished a fine specimen of great improvements this season. Genl. Brown is a very industrious officer but I consider Genl. Scott as the life and soul of that army. Capt. Jones of the Arty and Assistant Adjutant General of that wing of the army I presume has contributed much to their police, discipline & c.²⁶ Genl. Brown knows how to profit by the services of those intelligent men who know how to fight.

Should the fleet sail to the head of the lake which is probable, Sacket's Harbor will be much exposed. We have a few regular troops here having nearly all gone to Niagara and Plattsburg. About 12 or 1500 militia have been ordered in and have partly arrived. Genl. Martin commands them and the post. Col. Mitchell commands the regulars consisting of his battalion of Artillery and some dismounted dragoons. Our batteries, redoubts, etc. are however in good order and if properly supported by infantry will be able to resist a very large force. If the militia fight (which will be the first time in this quarter) we can repel any force the enemy can bring against us at present. Kingston is drained of troops and Genl. Drummond has gone up the lake to oppose Genl. Brown.²⁷ Could our fleet take on board Genl. Brown and army and transport it to Kingston that important post would inevitably fall together with the fleet, but I fear the fleet will be too late. There is no probability of our fleet meeting the enemy's. Sir James will no doubt remain snug in Kingston till his new ship is ready which will be in about two months and will carry 102 guns.²⁸ A few days since a mail bag from Kingston for England was intercepted on the St. Lawrence which gave up very particular information of everything there. The officers and carpenters in their letters to their friends depreciate the service in Canada and complain much of sickness and poor living, & c. & c.

The troops at this fort are unusually healthy and I understand Genl. Brown's army are so also. The season has been very fine for health & c—

25. Edmund P. Gaines (1777–1849) entered the United States Army as an ensign in 1809, became a brigadier general in 1814 and was breveted major general for gallantry at Fort Erie.

26. Roger Jones (1790–1849) of Virginia joined the Marines in 1809 and was made captain of artillery in 1812. He was twice breveted for gallantry during the war.

27. Lt. Gen. Sir George Gordon Drummond (1771–1854) brought 800 veteran troops from Kingston to the mouth of the Niagara.

28. At the time of its launching this vessel, christened H.M.S. *St. Lawrence*, was the largest warship in the world. It proved to be the final arbiter of the struggle on Lake Ontario. See Hugh A. Halliday, "H.M.S. *St. Lawrence*: White Elephant of Lake Ontario," *Canadian Frontier* 4 (Spring, 1975), 14–18, and Gordon Donaldson, "When Kingston built the world's mightiest ships," *Canadian Geographic* 103 (Oct.–Nov., 1984) 55–61.

rather cool and dry and little fluctuations in the temperature.

I observe in papers that Eastport is taken and our whole coast threatened by a predatory war. I think that the enemy will not attempt to penetrate the country with 18 or even 30,000 men but will endeavor to destroy the seaports and shipping. It appears to me that the enemy are determined to pursue this course rather than make peace and have our shipping rival theirs in commerce. A jealousy of us as rivals in commerce has no doubt been the cause of all these depredations and claims upon us and crisis of their affairs in Europe and yet our *peace party* are rejoicing at that very moment of *crisis*!! I hope these admirers and faithful servants of the magnanimous crowned heads of Europe will share the fate of the *Cortes of Spain*—who have been exhausting the treasure and spilling the blood of Spain—not for their liberties but for the interest of their loving master Ferdinand who is now severely chastizing them for their fidelity. A wholesome lesson to these servile lovers of contemptable tyrants. It would be a happy circumstance for our country if our admirers of royal pageantry and *rightful sovereigns* can be convinced that magnanimous princes can be ungrateful as well as Republics. Excuse these crude ideas. I was insensibly led to put them on this sheet. Please write to me and give me your opinion of the prospect of peace as well as of the affairs about you. Give me respects to Mrs. Holmes and all friends.

Yours respectfully,
Rufus McIntire

Fort Virginia, Sacket's Harbor
Sept. 21st 1814

Dear Sir,

Having long deferred writing to you in hopes of first receiving a letter from you but now despairing of that I will endeavor to *extort* something from you in your leisure moments. You will have heard all [the] news in [this quarter] from the public prints ere this reaches you except perhaps what has transpired in this vicinity. Our fleet sailed this day having on board Genl. Izard and army—destination probably the head of the lake or perhaps Genessee river to reinforce Genl. Brown.²⁹ The light Arty marched yesterday by land for the Niagara frontier and the Dragoons (dismounted) this day for the same place. I know not the place of operations, whether to simply join Genl. Brown or to attack the enemy in

29. George Izard (1776–1828) was another controversial figure, much assailed by historians for his lack of military prowess. An interesting defense of his reputation is Gabriel H. Manigault, "The Military Career of Major General George Izard," *Magazine of American History* 20 (June, 1888), 465–72.

rear between Fort George and Burlington. I think the former because they are not provided with artillery to act along. The bad weather delayed the movement two or three days and it still continues to rain. We have had incessant rain and storm for a week past which has made the roads extremely bad and I fear will delay and injure the final result of the campaign. The enemy are said to be drawing their troops from Little York & c down to Kingston. Whether this is precautionary in anticipation of an attack from Genl. Izard or with intent to attack this post is uncertain—probably both. Most of the officers here strongly expect an attack and we are preparing as though we were certain of it. Whether they will defer an attack till their new ship (which will mount over one hundred guns) be ready or whether they will come as soon as they hear the absence of our fleet is uncertain. I am of the opinion that at this season of the year when the weather is so unsteady, they will not venture out without their line of battle ship, especially as she will be ready by the first of October or by the 4th or 5th at farthest. Our fleet will soon return. I am not certain but that Co. Chauncey will engage the enemy notwithstanding the great disparity of force. Col. Mitchell [] forces [] heard of the militia has arrived this evening and will probably take command of the post. The regular force consists of the battalion of Arty, a battalion of the 13th Infy and small battalion of the 45th Infy in the whole probably about 10 or 1200. The number of militia I do not know but suppose about as many more—some volunteers and some the detached militia. We have been constantly on fatigue this summer in throwing up a chain of redoubts around this place and have dignified them with the name of *forts*. We will commence tomorrow to entrench the spaces between these works and in a few days the whole place will be completely surrounded with, at least, some show of defense. I do not know what dependence can be placed on the militia but believe they can be made to fight when hemmed in and covered behind pickets & c. At any rate let the enemy come in what force he may, he will certainly pay dear for what he gets here. I have not however much confidence in our works and think them radically defective, they being too scattered for the force we have. Were they more concentrated or indeed only one regular fort with the same number of guns and men it could be defended against twice the force that it can at present. The mail which was lately intercepted between Kingston and Niagara contained an order from Sir. G. Prevost to Genl. Drummond to destroy this place, by siege if necessary as soon as their fleet could get out or before if practicable. What alteration may take place in their plan of operation in consequence of McDonough's victory and the defeat of their army before Plattsburg is uncertain.³⁰ They may have met with another check before Erie which we have just heard of. Genl. Brown writes that

the enemy had two batteries near him and troubled him much with their shells, so much that he was out of patience and determined to sally out and destroy them. This he effected [] to his [], having destroyed all their batteries, blown up all their magazines, killed and wounded 400 and took 400 prisoners among them 12 officers. His own loss great in officers but trifling in men. Genl. Ripley mortally wounded. Cols. Gibson and Wood killed—valuable officers. Genl. Brown has 3000 militia who have crossed over to Erie. A part of them were in the late sally and did well. Genl. Porter was wounded. We have also heard of the repulse of the enemy near Baltimore. We rejoice to hear that the militia begin to do their duty and are sorry that those at Hampden disgraced the district of Maine. Hope if they attempt Portland or Portsmouth that the militia will retrieve their character.

How does Govr Strong like to be relieved from the burden of governing a part of his territories?³¹ I am glad to find that some of his constitutional scruples are worn away and that he really believes there is some danger near. The fate of Alexandria has I hope destroyed the delusive expectation that the British army would discriminate between friends and foes among our citizens. Whatever in veneracy the enemy may show towards any political party in this country they are too well versed in the knowledge of human nature to put any confidence in or shew any favors to men or parties of men who they consider any better than traitors to tell their own country—traitors who have resolution sufficient only to declare the wishes and purposes of their hearts but dare not attempt to put them into execution.

The incendiary mode of warfare which our pious, honorable and magnanimous enemy have adopted on the seaboard I hope will be of incalculable benefit to the nation. It will teach our admirers of the forbearing, humane, generous British that their fatal delusion has cost their country dear and that it is not only as patriotic but quite as correct to believe our own rulers, the men of our choice have as much honesty, humanity and good faith as Govr Strong's boasted bulwark of religion. The manner which the enemy make war on the shores of the Chesapeake would almost justify us on our part to make it a war of extermination—to

30. Sir George Prevost (1767–1816) was governor-general of Canada and had commanded the aborted expedition against Sackett's Harbor in 1813. For this and his failure before Plattsburgh he was summoned to England to face possible court-martial, but died of illness enroute. See J. McKay Hitsman, "Sir George Prevost's Conduct of the Canadian War of 1812," *Canadian Historical Association Report* (1962), 34–43. Thomas Macdonough (1783–1825) achieved the most important naval victory of the war, at Plattsburgh on September 11, 1814.

31. Caleb Strong (1745–1819) was a leading Federalist ideologue and a vocal opponent of the war. Consult Edward Rozwere, "Caleb Strong: Last of the River Gods," in *The Northampton Book* (Northampton, Mass., 1954), 56–76.

sacrifice every man who dares put his foot on our soil. But let it suffice that it will create a national hatred or at least destroy a too great national partiality which has unhappily too much and too long prevailed.

Yours & c.

Rufus McIntire

Sacket's Harbor Decr 14th 1814

Dear Sir,

Yours dated in Novr came to hand the 2d inst. Am very grateful for your friendly letter. I feared I was forgotten by my old friends as I had not recd any communication from them for a long time. Perhaps my own negligence in writing accounts for the long silence of my friends.

The public papers give us a general sketch of the state of affairs in Mass. but I feel extremely anxious to hear a thousand particulars of "men and things" which I cannot at this distance of place. I feel much inclined to visit home this winter and learn these particulars as well as to see my connections and friends. Is it possible that the leaders of a certain party in N. England will cap the climax of their folly by open resistance to the Govt of the U. States? Or will they attempt the more peaceable but not less wicked measure to negotiate a neutrality or separate peace with the enemy? After what they have done I should not be surprized at any piece of folly or villany they may attempt. I believe they have done all the mischief they possibly could in their blustering dare. Gentlemen who live out of N. England are sometimes apprehensive of domestic difficulties from the strange proceeding of the two last legislatures of Mass. and express much indignation at their conduct. They consider YOUR exertions to have greatly checked the violence of those proceedings. Indeed many with whom I have conversed consider your continued presence at that post of danger to be necessary to the public tranquility and however they may wish for the benefit of your talents in Congress yet they think that the power of your eloquence is more usefully and effectually employed in opposing and suppressing treason in the Mass. legislature. Think not, Sir, that I am attempting to flatter you. There is no need of it and if there was, my inclination is less than ever to flatter anybody, and you know I was never much inclined to be a syncophant.

The season is so far advanced that all idea of an attack on this post has for sometime entirely subsided. The enemy may come when the ice bridges over the St. Lawrence. It is not all probable as he will not in the winter be able to lay siege to the place if an assault fails which would be almost certain. It is understood to be the determination of the enemy to attack and if necessary to besiege the place early next spring. If he persists

in his purpose of carrying on offensive operations the next campaign will probably commence here. We shall be prepared to meet them with the heroes of Chippeway, Bridgewater and Erie and some other as good troops. A British Lieutenant of the Navy has lately deserted and is now here on board the fleet and solicits employment in our service. He commanded the schooner which our squadron drove ashore last summer at the head of the lake. He says that for that act of destroying the schooner he was unjustly reprimanded by Sir James Yeo which his "English spirit could not brook." If he is not a spy (and it is probable that he is) it is more likely that he has been cashiered for that or some other conduct.

Nothing for certainty is yet known respecting an increase of our naval force on this lake. The only fact that has transpired worthy of notice is that the Agent of the Contractor for building Public ships here has for ten days past been extremely active in making contracts for very large quantities of ship timber to be delivered as soon as possible. This gives rise to numerous reports and conjectures as to the kind of ships to be built but nothing else is known and you can draw as correct conclusions as any other person at present. I don't [] what additional force to build nor will they till they consult Commodore Chauncey who left here about the 1st inst. suddenly and in haste for N. York or elsewhere. This is a conjecture of my own. My opinion is against this war of shipbuilding on this lake for it is now certain that the enemy will not meet us without an undoubted superiority and will remain secure in port when equal of inferior. We cannot therefore ever bring the thing to issue unless one party or the other gets strong enough to destroy the depots at Kingston or S.H. and thus destroy the fleet or drive them out.

I should have answered your letter before but have been absent about ten days in the country for the benefit of my health which has been thereby fully restored. I had been unwell for several weeks and the physician recommend exercise and the air inland from the lake. An invalid could not take much exercise at the Harbor for the most rainy season ever known, a clay soil and constant passing made for the whole village and vicinity a constant mire almost impassible for a horse. The cold has now made it hard and a few inches of snow has made it tolerably smooth. The bay was a few days since partly frozen over but is open again.

I need not assure you of the continuance of my grateful esteem and respect.

Rufus McIntire

Sacket's Harbor, March 4th 1815

Dear Sir,

Peace, with all her smiling train, having once more taken her abode in

the land of freedom and my country seeming no longer to require my feeble services in the tented field, I fondly anticipate the pleasure of soon visiting my connections and friends, participating with them in all the enjoyments of social life. The time has arrived when I can again indulge in seeking a provision for myself. At this critical moment of *commencing* a new race, I feel a pleasure in having a friend whose advice I am free to ask and who is so able and, I flatter myself, willing to advise me. The army will probably in a month or two be disposed of when I shall be at liberty to look out for a stand and at my age you know it will be necessary to do it immediately, but the great question is, where? I have in contemplation to visit the western country as far as the Indiana or Illinois territories and satisfy myself of the prospects there before I return to Maine. What do you think of such a project? Is the prospect in the D. of Maine sufficiently encouraging as ought to destroy all thoughts in me of immigrating into the western woods? Please favor me with your ideas and advice on this subject. I have an idea that, at present, law business in Maine must be small and lawyers plenty in general, tho' perhaps some particular openings may offer where a beginner might with advantage commence. Do you know of any such? I do not know what changes may have taken place in the County of York, but suppose no prospects in any place there. I know of no place nearer than Kennebeck where there can be much prospect and not there except in the new towns that in course of time may afford business.

Nothing new here except what comes in the public papers of which you are first informed. The ships building here will not be finished. The carpenters are mostly gone home. The ships are planked up to the ports of the upper deck and caulked nearly to the lower ports. They would have been ready to launch before April. One of them has more keel than any ship ever launched!³² The frame of another is completely ready and would have been set on the same ways and launched in thirty days after the other. The ordnance, stores and riggings would all have been here by the 1st of April. The enemy were also making great exertions but I think we should have had the superiority by June next had the war continued.

The Comg. Officer at Kingston has not yet recd official information from his own government of the peace and consequently would not admit our flag officers into the town when they carried the treaty & c. In strictness of military etiquette this was correct tho perhaps the occasion might have justified a little more liberality had they felt much cordiality on

32. In reaction to the British battleship, the American responded with two warships, the *Chippewa* and *New Orleans*, which were larger still. None of these giants ever fired a shot in anger. See Richard A. Palmer, "The Great Warship That Waited and Waited . . .," *Inland Seas* 40 (Winter, 1984), 272-85.

the event. Their officers who recd the flag treated us with extreme politeness tho' they were evidently chagrined at the termination of their famous N. Orleans expedition. They made but few inquiries respecting the affair, seemed sore on the subject, and the treaty coming immediately after, looked like their recg the *last blow*.

Soldiers are enlisted to serve during the war will be discharged but not till they are paid. Those on this station can then return home with nearly 100 dolls. in their pockets.

How do the Hartford *Conventionalists* feel now? At a distance they look rather foolish.³³

Give my respects to Mrs. Holmes. Neighbors and friends are not forgotten. Where is Mr. Goodwin? I remember all the children *as they were* particularly my little favorite Hanna. Two years, however, may have effected much alteration in their appearance.

Yours respectfully,
Rufus McIntire

33. The Hartford Convention was summoned by New England Federalists to discuss the eventual secession of that region from the Union. Coming on the heels of the dramatic victory of New Orleans and the wave of patriotism which swept the country after the War of 1812, it led to the demise of that party. See J. Wendell Knox, *Conspiracy in American Politics, 1787-1815* (New York, 1972), 285-315, and James M. Banner, *To the Hartford Convention* (New York, 1969).

On Doing Local History in New York State

By CAROL KAMMEN

DUPLICATION OF EFFORT

IN 1986 TWO NEW YORK STATE publishers brought out books on the 1906 Gillette murder. The books appeared within weeks of each other. Two books on that single case, some said, were unnecessary, a waste; they will compete with each other and neither will sell well. A year earlier, in the fall of 1985, I published a history of my county, the first in almost a century. In the spring of 1986 another history of the county appeared, this one commissioned by a local bank celebrating its 150th anniversary. Later that same year, a third book, one not intended to be a county history but rather a study of the county's leading families, was also offered to the public. The author of this third volume told me that several of her friends—knowing that I had already produced a history of the county, as had another author—were afraid that hers would be a duplication of effort. Surely three books on our county were too many.*

In the case of Abraham Lincoln or of Franklin D. Roosevelt, there are any number of biographies and no one worries about the fate of competing works. In the realm of local history, however, there is some concern that there are only so many presses willing to publish works of local history and that there are only so many people willing to buy them; that a duplication of effort is wasteful and possibly harmful. This attitude implies that the history of a county, or the history of a murder, once told, is told for all time. It also suggests that a history once told is all the story that can be told, that everything about the subject has been said. Ultimately, it is an attitude that implies that history is little but a straight-forward story to be extracted from the existing facts and that the facts speak for

*I have purposely omitted the titles of these books because the individual titles are not important whereas the question of duplication of effort is.