



## Timeline: The St. John River Valley in the American Revolution (1775–1776)

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### 1775 – August 25 **The Expedition**

#### **Fort Frederick burned.**

James Simonds and Daniel Leavitt report the attack to Halifax, prompting early but limited defensive measures. Many settlers flee upriver.

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### 1776 – May (Early)

#### **American privateers enter the St. John River.**

They warn settlers that Nova Scotia will be invaded and that those loyal to the Crown risk losing their land.

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### 1776 – May 14

#### **Maugerville meeting adopts pro-Massachusetts resolutions.**

Over 120 settlers signed, pledging to share “with our lives and fortunes... the present struggle for liberty.” A committee is formed to manage civil and military affairs.

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### 1776 – Summer

#### **Loyalist resistance remains strong elsewhere.**

Families in Burton, Gagetown, Conway, Portland Point, and Acadian communities maintain allegiance to the Crown.

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### 1776 – August–November

#### **Jonathan Eddy’s expedition forms.**

Eddy gathers recruits from Machias, Passamaquoddy, and the St. John River, including Indigenous allies, to attack Fort Cumberland.

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### 1776 – November 29

#### **Attack on Fort Cumberland fails.**

British reinforcements under Major Thomas Batt arrive and scatter Eddy’s force. Retreating rebels arrive at the St. John in hardship and are reluctantly supplied by Hazen, Simonds & White.

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### 1776 – December 14

#### **Unpaid bill issued to Portland merchants.**

Eddy’s officers leave a draft for “forty-one Spanish milled Dollars,” likely never honoured.

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### Late 1776

#### **Rebel supporters forced to choose.**

Most who signed the Maugerville resolutions must swear allegiance to King George III or leave the region.

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The burning of Fort Frederick on 25 August 1775 was reported to Halifax by James Simonds and Daniel Leavitt, who travelled to Windsor in a whaleboat seeking government protection. Their report caused significant concern among military officials and led to early defensive measures, though real protection would not be in place for more than two years. The following year proved difficult for the residents of Portland Point and the few remaining in Conway. Many families moved upriver or further inland, fearing more trouble.

### The River Expedition of May 1776

#### Summary version

In the early years of the American Revolution/War of Independence, the St. John River valley found itself caught between loyalty to the Crown and pressure from the rebelling colonies to the south. After Fort Frederick was burned in 1775, fear and uncertainty spread through the settlements. Many families fled upriver, while others tried to maintain their livelihoods under growing threat.

In May 1776, American privateers entered the river, warning settlers that Nova Scotia would soon be invaded and that anyone loyal to Britain risked losing their land. At Maugerville, a public meeting produced a series of resolutions declaring support for Massachusetts. One resolution pledged to share “with our lives and fortunes... the present struggle for liberty.” More than a hundred settlers signed.

Yet loyalty in the region was far from unanimous. Many families in nearby communities, Burton, Gagetown, Conway, Portland Point, and others, remained steadfastly loyal to the Crown. Several Acadian families also served as couriers, guides, and pilots for British authorities.

Later that year, Jonathan Eddy led an American-backed attempt to capture Fort Cumberland. Although some men from the St. John River joined him, the expedition failed. British reinforcements scattered Eddy’s force, which retreated in hardship back toward the St. John River.

By the end of 1776, most who had supported the Maugerville resolutions were compelled either to swear allegiance to the King or leave the region. The St. John River communities emerged from this turbulent period divided, reshaped, and deeply marked by the choices made during the Revolution.





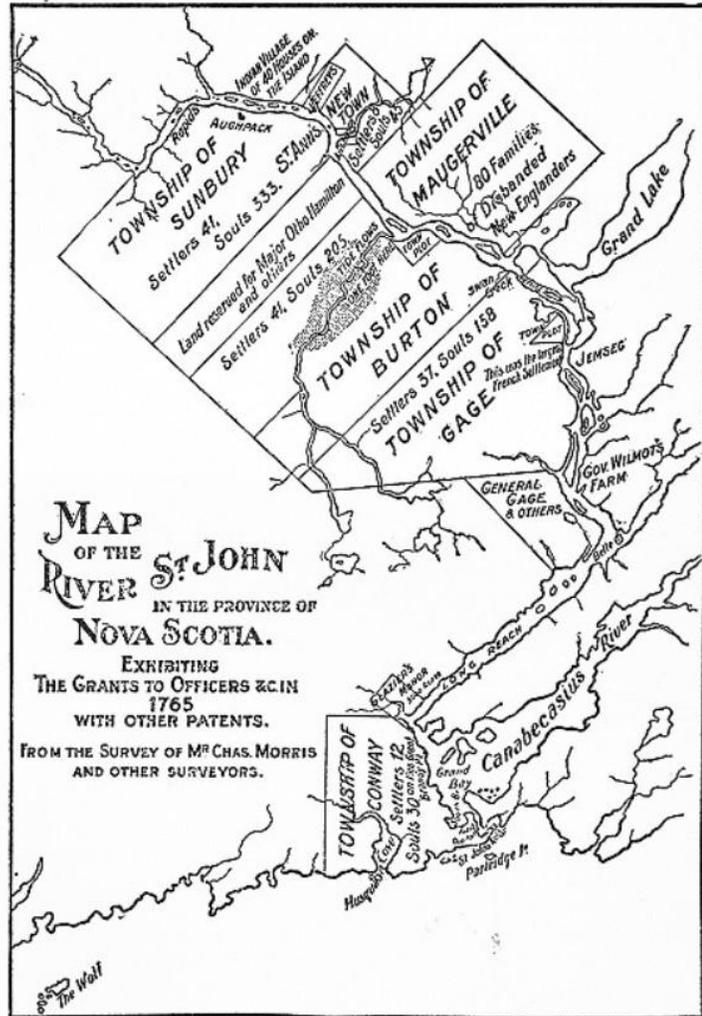
### The longer version

Less than nine months after the Raid on 1775 Fort Frederick, in May of 1776, two privateers entered the harbour at the Mouth of the St. John River and stayed for more than a week. Their boats went upriver to Maugerville, telling residents that the province would soon be invaded from the west, that privateers were everywhere along the coast, and that all commerce would be stopped unless the settlers joined them. They warned that if the “Americans” were forced to conquer the region at their own “trouble and expense,” anyone loyal to the Crown should expect to lose their property and land.

A public meeting was held on 14 May at the Maugerville meeting house, where a series of strongly disloyal resolutions were adopted. One of the leading figures was Rev. Seth Noble, who had already written to General Washington stressing the importance of controlling the St. John River. Jacob Barker, Esquire, was chosen as chairman, and a committee was appointed to draft the resolutions.<sup>1</sup> One of the resolutions stated:

"Resolved, That it is our minds and desire to submit ourselves to the government of Massachusetts Bay and that we are ready with our lives and fortunes to share with them the event of the present struggle for liberty, however God in his providence may order it."

The resolutions were circulated and signed by 120 people, most of them heads of families. The committee claimed that only twelve or thirteen refused to sign, mostly those living near the river's mouth. If true, the resolutions cannot have been presented to all inhabitants, since evidence shows that at least thirty families outside Maugerville remained consistently loyal to the Crown. Their names deserve as much recognition as the Loyalists who arrived from the American colonies in 1783. In Maugerville itself, we lack records to identify any Loyalists—if there were any. But in nearby communities, we can name several.



<sup>1</sup> Members of the committee were: Jacob Barker, Israel Perley, Phineas Nevers, Daniel Palmer, Moses Pickard, Edward Coy, Thomas Hartt, Israel Kinny, Asa Kimble, Asa Perley, Oliver Perley, and Hugh Quinton.



| Location (upper river to mouth)   | Known Loyal Settlers   |
|---|--|
| St. Anne's(now Fredericton) in the Township of Sunbury  | Benjamin Atherton and Philip Weade.  |
| Township of Burton  | John Larley, Joseph Howland, and Thomas Jones.   |
| Township of Gage  | in Gagetown, Zebulon Estey, Henry West, John Crabtree, John Hendrick, Peter Carr, and Lewis Mitchell.  |
| Living on the Canabecasis (the Kennebecasis)  | Benjamin Darling   |
| Township of Conway  | Samuel Peabody, Jonathan Leavitt, Thomas Jenkins, John Bradley, Gervas Say, James Woodman, Peter Smith, and Christopher Cross.   |
| Portland Point (known earlier as Simonds Point), eventually the City of Portland, now the North End of Saint John | James Simonds, James White, William Hazen, John Hazen, William Godsoe, Lemuel Cleveland, Robert Cram, John Nason, Moses Greenough, Christopher Blake, and most of the employees of Hazen, Simonds & White. |

Several Acadians are also mentioned. Louis and Michel Mercure carried dispatches between Nova Scotia and Québec during the war. Members of the Martin family: Jean, Simon, Joseph, François, and Amant. The Cyr family also provided important assistance as guides and pilots. Most of these people were noted by Brigade-Major Captain Studholme<sup>2</sup> of the RFA for their loyalty and active service.

With the lack of records, it is difficult to determine how many people were truly inclined toward disloyalty. They certainly had strong incentives to side with their old friends in Massachusetts. In Maugerville, the influence of Rev. Seth Noble and the leading elders strongly favoured the REBEL American cause. Jacob Barker, who chaired the May meeting, was both a justice of the peace and a ruling elder of the church. Israel Perley and Phineas Nevers were justices and former representatives of Sunbury County in the Nova Scotia legislature. Daniel Palmer, Edward Coy, Israel Kinney, and Asa Perley were ruling elders. Moses Pickard, Thomas Hartt, and Hugh Quinton were prominent members of the church. These men, along with Asa Kimball and Oliver Perley, were appointed to apply immediately to the Massachusetts Congress for relief from the hardships the community faced.

The meeting also unanimously agreed that this committee would oversee all civil and military matters until further notice, and that anyone who signed the resolutions would refuse to deal with anyone who did not. Several resolutions openly defied the authority of the Province of Nova Scotia, with signatories pledging to support their committee "at the expense, if necessary, of their lives and fortunes."

For a time, everything seemed to favour the promoters of rebellion. But within a year, most of those who had pledged themselves as "ready with their lives and fortunes to share with them the event of the present struggle for liberty, however God in His providence may order it," were compelled either swear allegiance to King George III or leave the region.

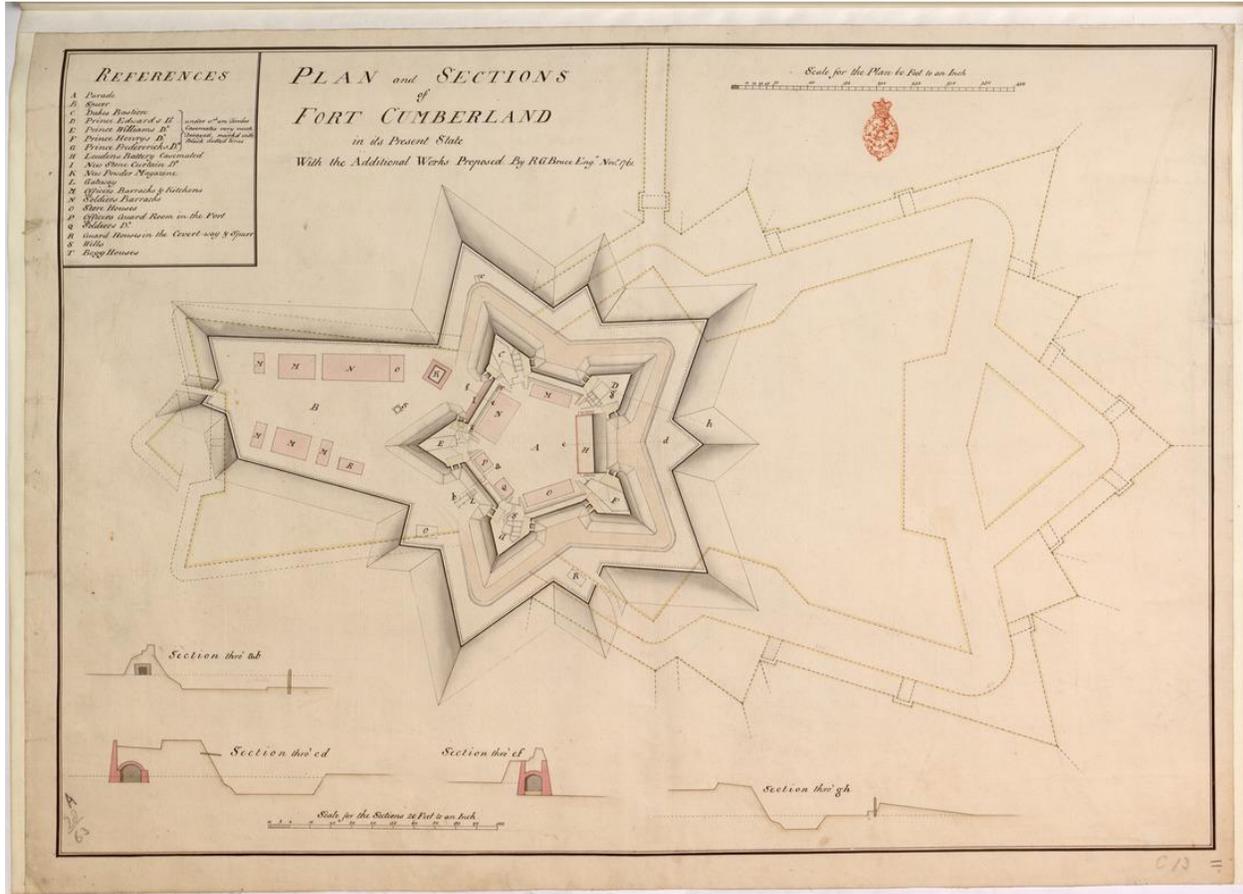
In the autumn of 1776, pirates and picaroons were so active in the Bay of Fundy that the Royal Navy sent HMS *Vulture*, HMS *Hope*, and HMS *Albany* from Halifax. Even so, privateers often slipped past the warships at night or in fog, continuing to plunder unprotected settlements.

<sup>2</sup> Studholme was an Irish ex-regular of the British Army. He is well known historically and there is much on the man.



Another aggressive endeavor soon emerged from Machias, an attempt far more ambitious than the burning of Fort Frederick. This was an effort to capture Fort Cumberland, which was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Goreham<sup>3</sup> of the Royal Fencible Americans.

### Fort Cumberland



The expedition was led by Jonathan Eddy, who had recently been commissioned a lieutenant colonel by the State of Massachusetts Congress. A native of Norton, Massachusetts, he had settled in Cumberland around 1763 but returned to Massachusetts when the Revolution began. In July 1776, he left Boston for Machias, and in mid-August sailed from there with 28 men—the nucleus of his planned force. A few recruits joined him at Passamaquoddy. He found little support at the Mouth of the St. John, though Hazen, Simonds, and White did not oppose him. Continuing upriver to Maugerville, Eddy later wrote that he found the people “almost universally hearty in our cause; they joined us with one captain, one lieutenant and twenty-five men, as also sixteen Indians.” The St. John River contingent was likely led by Hugh Quinton, with a lieutenant named Jewett from Maugerville.

<sup>3</sup> Goreham, a former commander of Rangers in Nova Scotia during the previous war, arrived at Boston in the fall of 1775, meeting up with officers already recruiting for the corps. Over the next year, the unit would recruit extensively in Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and the Island of Saint John's (later Prince Edward Island). On May 24, 1776, Lt. Col. Goreham and the Fencibles left Halifax for Fort Cumberland, where the bulk of the corps would spend the next seven and a half years.



At Cumberland, Eddy gained more recruits, but his total force probably never exceeded 200 men, poorly equipped and lacking artillery. The St. John River Indigenous allies were led by Chief Ambroise St. Aubin<sup>4</sup>, whom Eddy described as “behaving most gallantly.” Despite this, the expedition accomplished nothing.

All attempts to take the fort failed. The arrival of Major Thomas Batt, RM of HMS *Vulture* and Captain Studholme of the Royal Fencible Americans made Eddy’s position untenable. Early on 29 November, Major Batt led 150 marines and Fencibles in a surprise attack that scattered Eddy’s men, killing and wounding several, at the cost of two dead and three wounded on the British side.

Eddy’s force suffered greatly on their retreat and arrived back in the Portland Pt. area in miserable condition. If they had been unwelcome at Portland Point on their advance, they were even less welcome on their return. Hazen, Simonds, and White were forced to supply them with provisions simply to prevent them from looting their store and homes. In return, the partners received the following bill—almost certainly never paid:

Portland, Nova Scotia, December 14th, 1776.

Gentlemen, - At sight of this our second Bill (first of same tenor and date not paid) please to pay to Messrs. William Hazen, James Simonds and James White, or order, forty-one Spanish milled Dollars for value received of them.

Ezekiel Foster, Lt., Edmund Stevens, Capt., David Prescott, Lt., Daniel Meservy, Lt.

To the Honorable Council of Massachusetts States.

James White later remarked that the supplies were given simply to rid the area of “a needy, lawless banditti.”

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<sup>4</sup> Ambroise Saint-Aubin (also known as Ambroise Bear, Ambroise Pier, and other variations) was a prominent Wolastoqiyik chief based in the Saint John River valley. He was known for his diplomatic efforts to maintain Wolastoqiyik control over the Saint John River region during this tumultuous period. In September 1775, Saint-Aubin and fellow Wolastoqiyik chief Pierre Tomah travelled to the Penobscot truck house (now Bangor, Maine) to declare their support for the Massachusetts government. In July 1776, he led a delegation to Watertown, Massachusetts, to meet with American officials. He participated in the failed American-led expedition against Fort Cumberland. He died in October 1780, and some of his followers suspected he had been poisoned. There is much more on this man.