

15 An American Original

The Patriots took Ticonderoga on May 10, 1775, the very day the Second Continental Congress convened.



This statue of Ethan Allen has disappeared. It was the only portrait of Allen said to be a good likeness by men who knew him.

The word *catamount* is used to describe many big cats, including the *puma*, the *panther*, the *cougar*, and the *mountain lion*. Catamounts live on birds and small animals (which makes them *predators*). These felines used to roam most of the northern United States, especially the Rocky Mountain area.

Ethan Allen was born in Connecticut in 1738—that much we know as fact. The stories say he was asked to leave his hometown. It was his tongue that got Ethan Allen in trouble. His language was rough and rowdy, more than fine-mannered Connecticut citizens could handle.

They couldn't put a muzzle on Ethan Allen. In fact, they couldn't do much of anything with him. He was a sinewy giant of a man, famous for his strength. Like George Washington, he could out-wrestle and out-throw and outlift any challengers. But he may not have felt like fighting all of Connecticut.

So off he went to the New Hampshire Grants to farm and speak his mind. The New Hampshire Grants was the green mountain land between New Hampshire and New York that is now Vermont. New Hampshire sold the land to farmers; then England said the land belonged to New York. New York told the farmers to move out or buy the land again.

Now no one could tell Ethan Allen what to do. He, and his friends banded together, calling themselves the Green Mountain Boys. They boasted that they could shoot a nut out of the jaws of a squirrel, and perhaps they could. But it wasn't squirrels they went after. It was the "Yorkers" who were moving into their territory.

Then the Revolution came, and the Green Mountain Boys had something else to fight about. It was at the Catamount Tavern, in the little town of Bennington, in 1775, that Ethan Allen had a famous

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meeting with Patriots from Connecticut. Allen liked the tavern. It had a big stuffed catamount that snarled in the direction of New York.

The Patriots had come to ask the Green Mountain Boys for help. They brought some fighters and some cash, and they paid for the drinks. Allen and his men agreed to do what they asked. They agreed to capture an important British fort—Fort Ticonderoga—on Lake Champlain.

Along with bluster and strong muscles, Ethan Allen also had a good mind. He planned the attack carefully. First he sent a spy. The spy was a farmer who wandered into the British fort pretending he was looking for a barber. What he was really looking for was information. He found what he came for. The spy told Allen the number of men in the fort. Then he told him there was a weak spot in the walls where the fort could be entered.

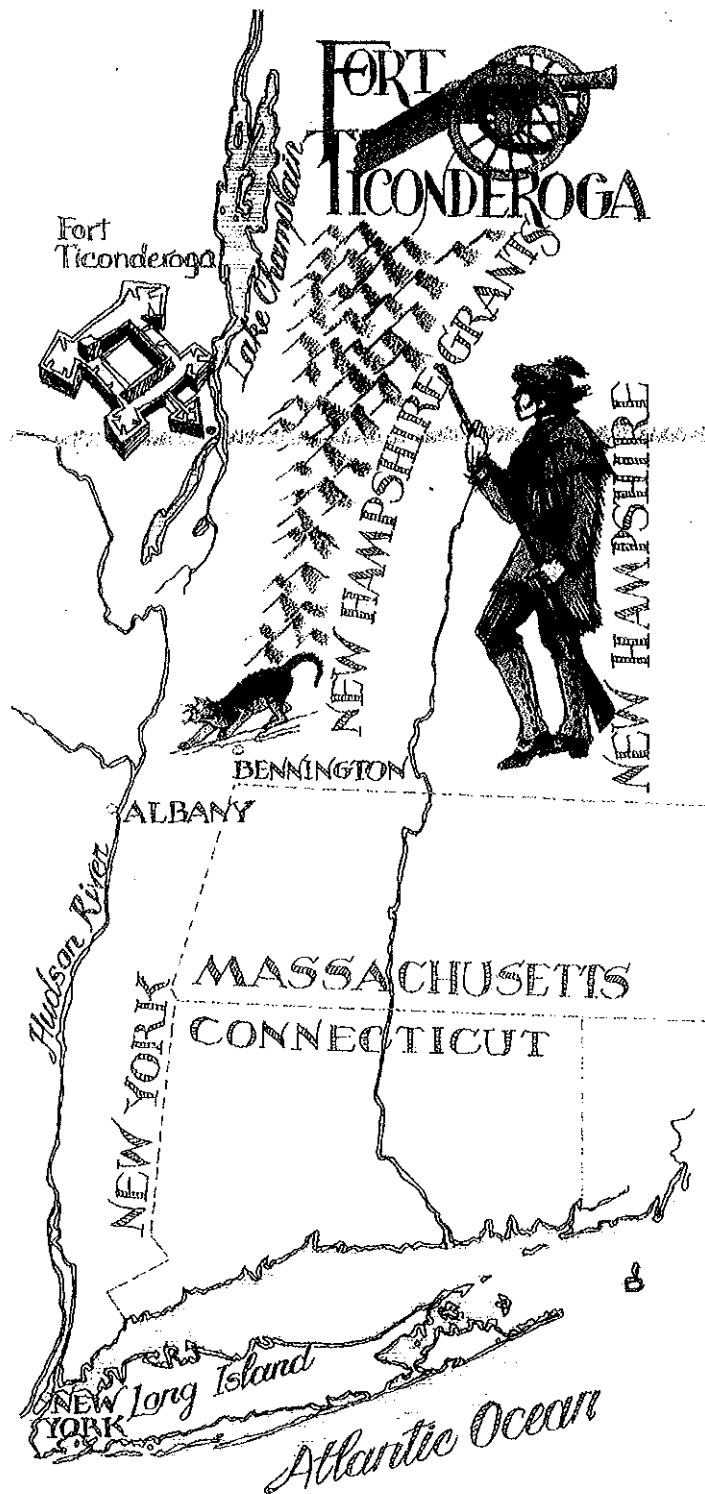
Just as Allen and the Green Mountain Boys were getting ready to start out, Benedict Arnold appeared.

Arnold was a colonel in the Continental army, with a fancy uniform and a valet. He later became a traitor, going over to the British side. Despite that villainy, it is only fair to tell you he was a strong leader and a good fighter. Benedict Arnold said he was going to take command of the mission, under orders from Massachusetts.

Ethan Allen couldn't stand Arnold; he called him a "damned rascal." They might have fought each other, but time was running out and the attack was set for early morning. So they agreed to lead together, shoulder to shoulder.

Into the fort they went—Benedict Arnold like a proper soldier and Ethan Allen and his men howling war whoops like Mohawk Indians. A startled sentry ran for his life.

Then a British officer appeared with his pants in his hands—he hadn't had time to put them on. The astonished officer asked on whose authority they attacked. Ethan Allen roared an answer that was to become famous: "In the



Fort Ticonderoga guarded Lake Champlain. Now the Americans held the route into Canada.



Benedict Arnold was a good soldier and very brave in battle. He once said about himself that "his courage was acquired, and he was a coward till he was 15 years old." It was a terrible shock to the Patriots when he went over to the British side in 1780.

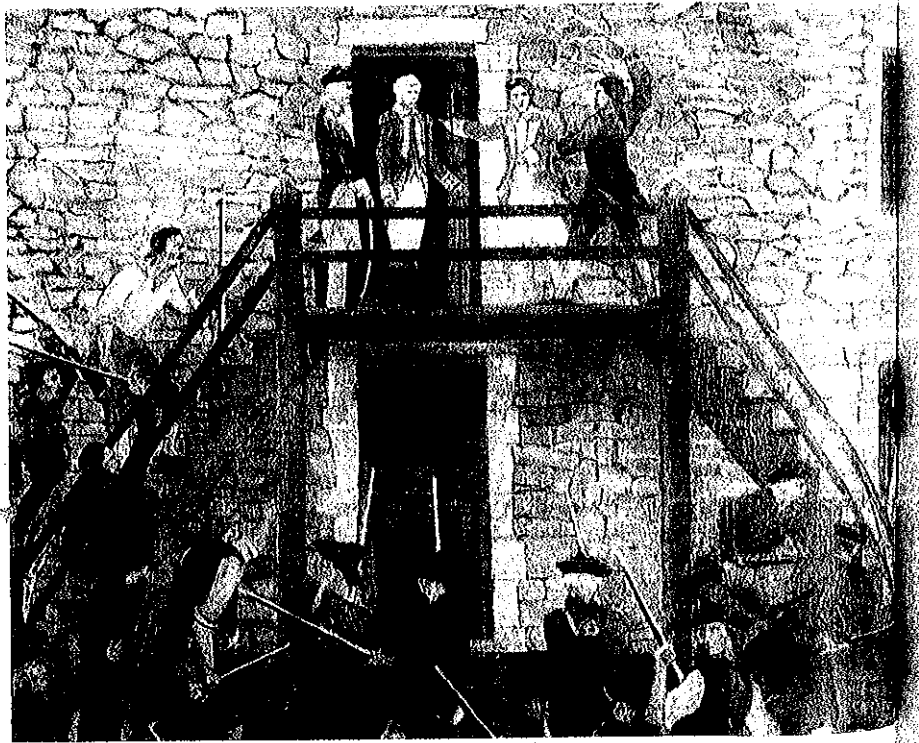
Vermont was an independent nation from 1777 to 1791. It coined its own money, ran its own postal service, had its own constitution, and was the first state to outlaw slavery.

name of the Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress!" It wasn't much longer before the fort, its cannons, and its rum all belonged to the Patriots.

No one was killed. That was typical of Ethan Allen. He was a curser, not a killer. He'd capture Yorkers or redcoats and beat them with a beech stick, but he wouldn't shoot them.

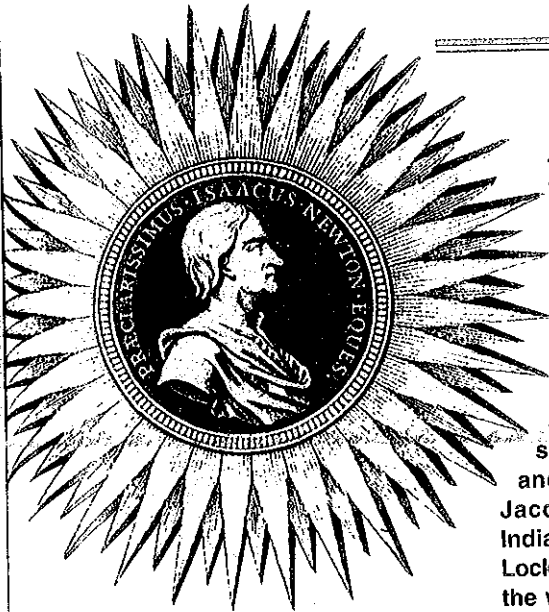
Four months later Ethan Allen led a force to Canada; he planned to capture Montreal—or so he said. Instead, he was captured, and he spent two years in prison. When he got out of jail, he met General Washington. Washington said of him, "There is an original something in him that commands attention."

Original he was. He had his own ideas on religion and God, and he wrote a book explaining his beliefs. He helped establish Vermont as an independent republic. If New York and New Hampshire and even Massachusetts couldn't agree on Vermont's land, Vermont would just go its own way. And it did, until 1791, when it became the 14th state.



Ethan Allen, waving his sword on the right, catches the British commander at Fort Ticonderoga (*second from right*)—with his pants down.

How the New World Changed the Old, and Vice Versa



"See the great Newton, he who first survey'd,
The Plan by which the Universe was made."

Lights were being lit in the 18th century—so many lights that it would come to be called a time of "Enlightenment." The lights were going on in the minds of the thinking people. Some of the electricity for those lights had come from a scientist named Isaac Newton. Newton had shown that the universe was not as full of mystery as people had supposed. It could be understood with study and observation and by people using their brains. That was an astonishing thought in a world that had often been guided by superstition and fear. Suddenly there seemed to be all kinds of brilliant thinkers who were using their minds and encouraging others to do the same thing.

An Englishman named John Locke and a Frenchman named Jean-Jacques Rousseau (jahn-jahk-roo-SO) were two of

the most important Enlightenment thinkers. They thought about politics and the way governments were run. They got some of their ideas by considering the American Indian and the "New World." Jean-Jacques Rousseau called Indians "noble savages." John Locke said, "In the beginning, all the world was America." (What do you think he meant by that?)

John Locke wrote about natural rights. He said that governments should be run for the people, not for their rulers. Locke made people think about democracy.

The colonists in America read what Locke wrote. They read about the ancient democracies in Greece and Rome. They knew that most American Indians seemed to live a free, democratic life in self-governing tribes.

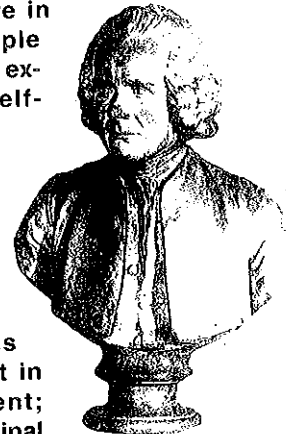


Philosopher John Locke wrote, "Wherever Law ends, Tyranny begins."

The colonists knew something else: they knew they could govern themselves. They didn't need kings or nobles to make decisions for them. Americans had been running their own assemblies for years. There was the General Court in Massachusetts, the House of Burgesses in Virginia, and law-making bodies in each colony. Nowhere in Europe did people have that kind of experience in self-government.

An article published in England around 1776 said, "The darling passion of the American is liberty and that in its fullest extent; nor is it the original natives only to whom this passion is confined; our colonists sent thither seem to have imbibed the same principles."

Americans were sending raw materials to England—like lumber and tobacco—and getting them sent back as finished goods—furniture and cigars. Well, another raw material got sent back and forth across the sea: the idea of freedom and democratic government.



"Never exceed your rights," wrote Rousseau, "and they will soon become unlimited." What did he mean?