

SOME NOTES ON JAMES HACKETT, PATRIOT-SHIPBUILDER

Born in Amesbury, Massachusetts into a shipbuilding family, young James Hackett was only a teenager when he joined Rogers Rangers during the French and Indian War. On July 31, 1758, he was a sergeant in charge of a scouting party with nine others when Native Americans allied with the French surprised them as they stopped to eat. The ensuing skirmish was later named "Hackett's Mess-Time Fight". Eight of the militia were killed. One man was taken captive. James Hackett escaped. Burt Loescher in his self-published *History of Rogers Rangers* described James as follows: "James Hackett of John Stark's Company, Sergeant in 1759. Captured with Fletcher in his battle near St. John's in La Prairie on August 27, 1759. Remained a prisoner in Montreal until exchanged November 15, 1759. Served until disbandment of Rangers November 11, 1760". After his discharge, James settled in Exeter, NH. Why he chose Exeter rather than returning to Amesbury, Massachusetts is uncertain. Perhaps he became friends with several among the established Gilman family while serving with Rogers Rangers. Samuel and David Gilman, officers in Rogers Rangers, were from Exeter. David Gilman was discharged on the same day as was James Hackett, so perhaps Hackett followed his friend and with the Gilmans, the Folsoms and others became involved in what was to become the very profitable shipbuilding and mercantile trades in that town. In 1765, James sold land he inherited from his father adjacent to the Hackett family shipyards in Amesbury, Massachusetts to his cousin, Elijah Fowler, son of Thomas and Ruth (Hackett) Fowler (Essex County Deeds Book 119, p. 93), and thus made clear his intention to remain in Exeter, New Hampshire while establishing his reputation as a shipbuilder.

At the dawn of the American Revolution, James Hackett participated in the raid at Fort William & Mary in New Castle, New Hampshire in December of 1774. He commanded an armed company of Exeter infantry that protected the upriver passage of cannon seized by New Hampshire patriots during the raids on Fort William and Mary.. As captain, he led a company to Cambridge, Massachusetts in April 1775 following the attacks on Lexington and Concord. On July 4, 1776, he was appointed as Lt. Colonel in Wingate's Regiment. He turned down command of a New Hampshire regiment in 1776 to fit out armed vessels built in New Hampshire. In 1778, he volunteered for duty under Gen. Sullivan in Rhode Island in a company of light horse raised by Col. John Langdon in Portsmouth and was made lieutenant. He served as Lt. Colonel at Saratoga with Langdon's New Hampshire Independent Company. His greatest contribution, however, was as a master ship builder for the continental navy. For his indispensable services, Hackett was brevetted a colonel and commanded a battalion of artillery of three companies at Portsmouth. He had the honor of receiving General Washington with a "grand salute" on the occasion of his Excellency's reception at Portsmouth on October 31, 1789.

In his book, *Colony, Province, State, 1623-1888: History of New Hampshire*, John N. McClintock noted:

"Col. Hackett had been for some time engaged in shipbuilding at Exeter and was a man of enterprise and determination. He was no laggard in evincing his willingness to enlist in his country's cause, for he was one of the first to march to the scene of hostilities on the morn after the Concord fight."

From: Charles Bell, *History of Exeter, NH* comes the following quote:

"But after the French wars...Gov. John Wentworth took pride in a fine display of soldiery, and in 1769, encouraged the people of Exeter to form a corps d'elite as sort of exemplar to improve the character of the militia in general. Several gentlemen of the town, of age and position, joined it, among them George Odiorne, Christopher Rymes, James Hackett...December 1774 - about 75 or so Exeter men marched to Portsmouth, NH to offer assistance in stripping the Fort William & Mary - met at Stoodley's Inn...mentions that James Hackett was present...An account was afterwards presented to the State of NH by the town containing these items: To Captain Hackett's pay for his company to Cambridge in 1775: 137 pounds, 13 shillings, 10 pence..."

James Hackett's contemporaries thought highly of this brave and talented man. From a May 20, 1776 letter written by John Langdon to Gen. William Whipple comes the following: "If a Battalion should be Ordered for this part of the Continent, I think Major James Hackett the Compleatest Officer we have to comm'd and James Hill a good second."

In a letter dated at Portsmouth, New Hampshire on November 6, 1789, a Col. Cogswell related to his wife that he and Col. Hackett were part of a party of thirteen "dressed in the uniform of Federal soldiers", in a large barge that rowed around Portsmouth Harbor during the President's visit to the city in late October of that year:. "As Gen. Sullivan had proposed that we should pass over our fishing ground in our sail, hooks and lines were taken with us. Col. Hackett and I dug the clams after we were dressed in our uniforms, and it is fortunate we didn't dirty ourselves, but we didn't."

Col. Hackett is best known as a Master Shipbuilder completing an incomparable list of vessels. With the assistance of his compatriots James Hill and Stephen Paul, he constructed the frigate RALEIGH, the ship which appears under construction on the seal and flag of the State of New Hampshire. He also built the famed sloop of war RANGER; the largest Continental warship of the Revolution, the ship of the line AMERICA; two early vessels of the service which was a forerunner to the United States Coast Guard, the United States Revenue Service cutters SCAMMEL II and the GOVERNOR GILMAN; the USS CONGRESS, which was one of the first six frigates of the United States Navy; a host of privateers and merchant vessels including the McCLARY, the PORTSMOUTH I, the BELLONA and the FREE TRADE; and the tribute ship frigate CRESCENT. It is believed that Col. Hackett reconditioned the French xebec LaBROCHETTE or L'ESTURGEON on Lake Champlain during the French and Indian War. From the Diary of Ezra Green (The New England Historical and Genealogical Society, January 1875) comes the following description of the RANGER setting sail in 1777: "Portsmouth Road, Nov. 1st, 1777, Saturday - Between the hours of 8 & 9 this morning weigh'd anchor and proceeded to Sea with a moderate breeze, before night lost sight of the American shore."

James Hackett was recognized as one of the most talented shipbuilders of his time. In William G. Saltonstall's *Ports of Piscataqua*, he related: "On December 11, 1775 the Continental Congress decided to build thirteen frigates. One of the largest class, a thirty-two, was assigned to Portsmouth. John Langdon arrived in late January with a memorandum of dimensions for the vessel, later to be named the RALEIGH. Acting as agent for the Continental Congress, Langdon awarded the contract to Messrs. Hackett, Hill, and Paul. James Hackett was Piscataqua's most renowned master-carpenter of the day...On March 21st, 1776, her keel was laid at Rindge's

Wharf. Precisely two months later the New Hampshire Gazette proudly described the launching."

Saltontall's book offers the following additional comments relating to James Hackett:

"Of the three seventy-fours ordered by the Continental Congress in 1776, only the AMERICA by William Hackett [note: cousin to James Hackett], was completed. As was the case with both the other Portsmouth continentals, Colonel James Hackett was the master-builder...The AMERICA was the first ship-of-the-line built by the United States."

"...on March 20, 1784, John Langdon contracted with Major James Hackett of Exeter for 'a good well built Ship' to be delivered at Langdon's Island 'finished to a cleat.' Hackett was to be paid as follows: Four Hundred and Thirty Pounds in Cash---Three Hogsheads Rum at four Shillings and six Pence pr. Gallon. Five Hogsheads Molasses, at two shillings pr. Gallon.--- One Teirce Coffee at One Shilling and three Pence pr. Lt. --- Fifteen barrels Sugar at three Pounds pr. Hundred W. --- Two hundred weight of Bohea Tea, at four and six pence pr. pound. The Remainder in any Dry Goods the said Langdon may have at two for one from the Sterling Cost."

"No public vessels had been built at Portsmouth since the AMERICA was launched in 1782. Twelve years later, as trouble brewed with Algiers, Congress provided for the building of the CONGRESS, 36, on Langdon's Island. Because of improving relations with Algiers, however, the work was not pressed, so that the launching took place as late as August, 1799. A major gesture leading to these more cordial relations was the presentation to the Dey of Algiers by the United States of the 32-gun frigate CRESCENT, built in Portsmouth by Colonel James Hackett."

"Early in 1798, the United States embarked on the Quasi-War with France, caused by French depredations on American commerce...The newly organized Navy Department commissioned Colonel James Hackett to build the 24-gun ship PORTSMOUTH. Completed within the year, she 'stood down the river under easy sail [in January, 1790] saluting the town by a federal discharge.'...The SCAMMEL, 14, a 187-ton revenue schooner, was launched by Colonel Hackett at about the same time..."

"After the launch of the CONGRESS, the GAZETTE called special attention to the high quality and considerable quantity of the work done by Colonel James Hackett. Five ships of war were built by him during the Revolution [RALEIGH; PORTSMOUTH; RANGER; BELLONA; AMERICA] and four vessels between 1796 and 1799 [CRESCENT, SCAMMEL, PORTSMOUTH; CONGRESS]. 'What naval constructor,' the GAZETTE asked, 'could show a nobler list? Whose workmanship will compare with Hackett's? Let the government examine the bills and determine whose are cheapest. An experienced, tried, faithful servant merits constant employ."

Commenting on the launching of the frigate CONGRESS on August 15, 1799, the New Hampshire Gazette described the day as follows:

"every necessary arrangement being previously made, which could possibly facilitate the labours of the day, Col. Hackett, United States Naval Constructor, at the Port of Portsmouth, proceeded to prepare for the positive launch of the Frigate CONGRESS, one of the most beautifully

modeled and elegantly finished ships in the service of the Union...The inside and outside work of the CONGRESS is pronounced vastly superior to any European ships, and equal to the very first stile of American building. We pronounce her to be the Non Pareil...It is expected that when the Secretary of the navy shall compare the estimates of building the CRESCENT, SCAMMEL, PORTSMOUTH and CONGRESS, in point of expense, labor, materials and various works, with sums already paid for building vessels of the same size, model, and tonnage in other ports; and examine the excellent workmanship of these ships; their neatness of finishing and beauty of appearance, and discern every solid advantage in a clear saving of at least one third money and time, that he will expedite his orders to erect the keel of one of the 74's at the navy yard, and that the waves of Piscataqua will float another line of battle, beside the AMERICA."

From the *Dictionary of American Fighting Ships, Vol. VI*: "The first Raleigh, a frigate built by Messrs. Hackett, Hill, and Paul of Portsmouth, N.H., under the supervision of Thomas Thompson, was authorized by the Continental Congress on 13 December 1775; laid down on 21 March 1776; and launched on 21 May 1776. Raleigh, with a full length figure of Sir Walter Raleigh as a figurehead, put to sea under Capt. Thomas Thompson on 12 August 1777."

James Hackett bought and sold a number of parcels of real estate in Exeter, New Hampshire over a period of years. These included a parcel purchased from him by Nathaniel Herrick, his son-in-law, amounting to just over 12 rods in width (approximately 198 feet) in 1791 (Rockingham Co. Deed Book 129, pg. 339). James Hackett originally purchased his 1/2 acre house lot in 1765 (Registry Book 89, pg. 220). He purchased an additional 13 acres on April 28, 1777 (Rockingham Co. Deed Book 109, pp. 28-29), 1782 (10 acres) and 1783 (1 1/2 acres and a portion of a 5 acre parcel). He held on to his 1/2 acre house lot for almost 40 years. His sale of the house to David and Benjamin Wiggin is found in Rockingham Co. Book 161, pg. 246. This was the "mansion house" (as it is described in his will) and land on which Col. Hackett lived during his years in Exeter along with the parcel sold to Nathaniel Herrick 11 years before James Hackett's death and included the small tenement and barn in which James' brother, William Hackett, lived. James sold his Exeter home on July 26, 1802, just three months after making his will. It is worth noting that by January of 1778, James Hackett's name on legal documents is frequently followed with the title of Esquire, suggesting that he had incurred the financial and business standing in the Exeter community to be recognized as a gentleman.

Colonel Hackett also owned a 320 acre farm and tavern in Brookfield, NH. This property was managed by Hiram Hodge, son of Ensign and Elizabeth (Hill) Hodge, Col. Hackett's third wife. Both Col. James Hackett and his third wife, Betsey Hill Hodge, are believed to be buried in the Hackett family cemetery in Brookfield, NH, along with James Hackett, Jr., his wife Betsey Hodge (daughter of Betsey Hill Hodge), some of their children and various other relatives.

In a September 16, 1806, article in the *New Hampshire Gazette*, when the property was auctioned, Col. Hackett's former site was described as follows:

A "valuable and elegantly situated" farm of 320 acres (200 clear), with good stone walls, 180 apple trees for cider, with a "large handsome two story Dwelling House" 38 by 46 feet in good repair, excellent well near the door, 2 good barns (one entirely new, 48 feet by 34, the other 106 by 34) and a "convenient store" 20 by 36 feet. "Every kind of farm utensil will also be sold." The auctioneer, Mr. Cazneau Bayley of Portsmouth, noted the property was "considered one of

the best and most productive farms in New Hampshire, 52 head of horned cattle, besides sheep and horses, have been wintered and summered on said farm."

In his will (Strafford County Probate Court, Dover, NH, pp. 495-499), James Hackett named his son, James Hackett, Jr., as sole executor. The will is dated April 24, 1802 and was witnessed by Edward Sargent, Edmund H. Quincy and Daniel R. Sheaffer.

*He named his wife Elizabeth Hackett; his sons James and William and son, John Hackett, "absent for sometime past, and it's uncertain whether he may be living or dead"

*His daughter Abigail Currier, wife of Ephaim Currier

*His daughter Mary Herrick, wife of Nathaniel Herrick

*His daughter Joanna Hackett, unmarried

*His daughter Sarah Akin, wife of Mathew Akin

*His daughter Elizabeth Burnes, wife of Jeremiah Burnes

The notice for settlement of the estate was posted In an article in *The United States Oracle and Portsmouth Advertiser* on December 4, 1802:

"The subscriber hereby gives Notice that he is appointed sole Executor of the last will and testament of JAMES HACKETT, late of Brookfield, Esq., deceased, and has taken upon himself that trust by giving bonds as the law directs, and all persons who have any demands on said estate are desired to exhibit their claims for settlement, and those who are indebted to said estate are desired to make immediate payment, either to said executor at his house in Brookfield, or to his attorney Edmund H. Quincy, at Portsmouth. JAMES HACKETT, Brookfield, November 17, 1802."

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