

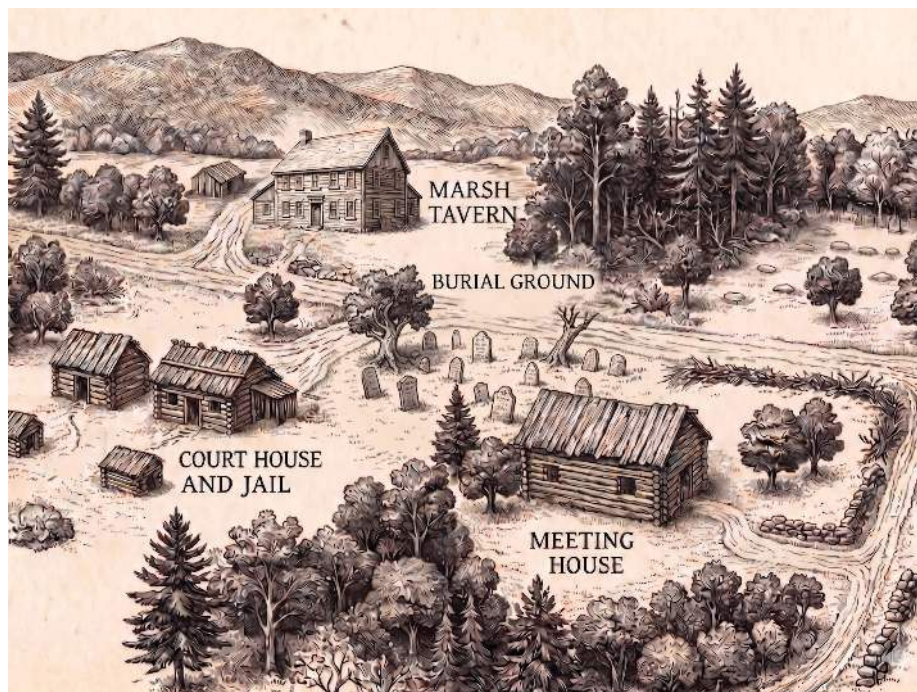
From Ploughshares to Powder Horns

Just a mere 16 years after being chartered, Manchester became an important military command center for the New England militias that were fighting against the encroachment of British forces from Canada. An outpost in what was still a wilderness, Manchester had attracted settlers from the lower colonies, offering acres of land ready to be logged and turned into farmsteads. It was not much of a town at the time, but its location on the main north/south road through the valley gave it strategic importance. The Marsh Tavern in the Village became a central meeting place for the Green Mountain Boys who were rallying men to protect their lands as much as the cause of independence.

Several of the Green Mountain Boys were prominent local landowners. They had joined together with other Vermonters to protect their land holdings from being taken from them by the



Gravestone of John Roberts and his wife Susannah, in Dellwood Cemetery, Manchester



Artistic rendering of Manchester Village in the 1770s

New York colonial government, which disputed the land grants given by the New Hampshire Gov. Wentworth Bennington that included Manchester.

John Roberts, a man of impressive physical stature, was one of the original Green Mountain Boys and served in Colonel Seth Warner's regiment. He and his five sons participated in Ethan Allen's expedition in May 1775 that resulted in the capture of Fort Ticonderoga. His son, Christopher, was reported to be among the first to enter the fort with Allen. Later that year, John Roberts took part in General Montgomery's failed Montreal campaign in November 1775. Records show he was taken prisoner and later pardoned and released by Governor General Guy Carleton. John's sons Benjamin, John, and William fought in the battles of Hubbardton and Bennington in 1777. Son Peter participated in the battles of Hubbardton, Bennington, and the final victory at Saratoga. The Roberts homestead is on the north side of Manchester on the corner of North Road and Route 7A. *(continued next page)*

From Ploughshares to Powder Horns *(continued)*



Gravestone of Gideon Ormsby in Dellwood Cemetery, Manchester

Major Gideon Ormsby (1736–1804) was a foundational figure in Manchester, serving as a prominent member of the early community and land speculator. A dedicated leader in the Vermont militia, he rose through the ranks to become a major and served on the town's Committee of Safety.

In the early years of the struggle for independence, Ormsby was infamous for his relentless pursuit of those who chose to remain loyal to the king of England, who were called Tories or Loyalists. Though Vermonters were mainly united in their fight with New York, they were not as united in the struggle with Great Britain. Several

prominent citizens were not so sure the patriots were going to win the war. They were eventually forced to leave Manchester and their farms were confiscated. The Council of Safety had been finding it difficult to pay for the region's defense until Ira Allen proposed the confiscation and sale of Tory estates. The properties of prominent residents of Manchester like Samuel Rose, Jeremiah French, and William Marsh, among other known local Tory sympathizers in Manchester, were put the auction block.

In addition to his military service, Ormsby participated in the Dorset Conventions that established Vermont's independence. He was a long-term statesman, representing Manchester in the first Vermont Legislature in 1778, where he served for seventeen years. He was held in high regard by state officials, including Governor Thomas Chittenden, who appointed him to a strategic committee in 1781 to plan the defense of Vermont's frontiers against British forces. The original Ormsby homestead in on Route 7A south. The nearby Ormsby Inn was named in his honor by Edward Isham who built his summer home across the road.

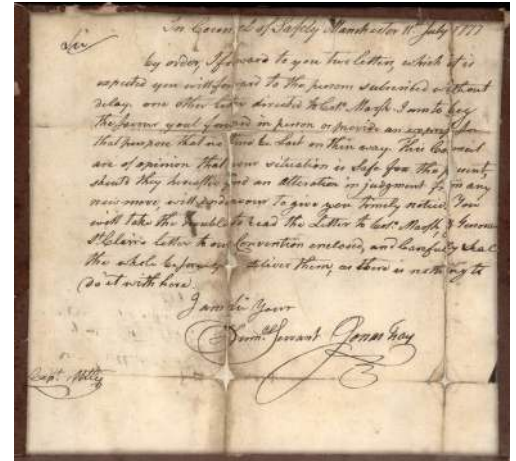
**This article is excerpted from the program "Farmers, Fathers, and Green Mountain Boys: Manchester in the Revolution" given by MHS Curator Shawn Harrington on July 1 at the Southern Vermont Arts Center. It will be available to view on GNAT-TV.*

The Manchester Historical Society, located in the lower level of the Manchester Community Library, is open Monday–Friday 10 am–4 pm and by appointment.

You can always find more interesting history and up-to-the-minute MHS happenings on social media. Ask us a question about local history and we'll do our best to find an answer.



Primary Sources



TRANSCRIPTION

In Council of Safety Manchester 11th July 1777
Sir by order, I forward to you two letters, which it is expected you will forward to the persons subscribed without delay. one other letter directed to Colo. Marsh I am to beg the favour you'll forward in person or provide an express for that purpose that no time be lost on their way. This Council are of opinion that your situation is Safe for the present, should they hereafter find an alteration in judgment from any new move, will endeavour to give you timely notice. You will take the trouble to read the Letter to Colo. Marsh & General St Clair's letter to our Convention enclosed, and Carefully Seal the whole before you deliver them, as there is nothing to do it with here.

I am Sir Your Hum.l Servant Jonas Fay
Capt. Holley

This incredibly urgent and pivotal document, written during one of the most chaotic and defining weeks in Vermont's history, describes a dramatic moment in the narrative of Manchester's early settlement and its role in the Republic of Vermont up to 1778.

Written on July 11, 1777, this letter was drafted mere days after the disastrous American evacuation of Fort Ticonderoga (July 5–6) and the subsequent Battle of Hubbardton (July 7). British General John Burgoyne's forces were pushing deep into Vermont, causing widespread panic.

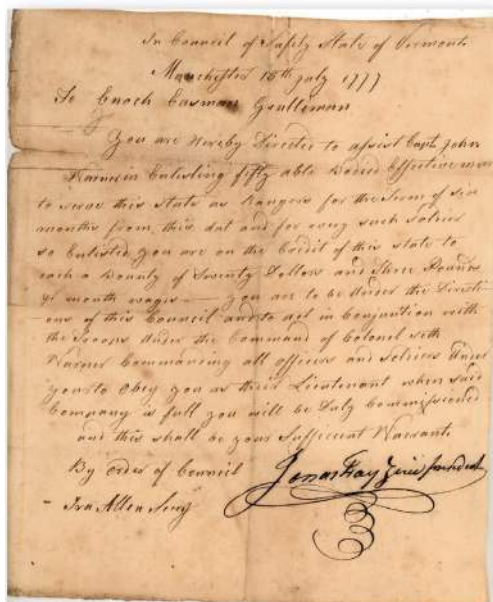
The letter is signed by Jonas Fay who served as the vice president and secretary of the council.

Primary Sources

A critical figure, he was operating at the nerve center of Vermont's defense strategy directly from Manchester.

The mention of "General St Clair's letter to our Convention" directly links this document to Arthur St. Clair, the commander who had just surrendered Ticonderoga. The council is actively distributing St. Clair's intelligence and military assessments to local commanders like Colonel Joseph Marsh to coordinate a militia response.

Fay's letter notes that the council believes Captain Holley's "situation is Safe for the present" but promises to give "timely notice" of "any new move" perfectly capturing the precarious, minute-by-minute military calculus happening in Manchester as British forces maneuvered southward toward Saratoga.



TRANSCRIPTION

*In Council of Safety State of Vermont. Manchester 15th July 1777
To Enoch Eastman, Gentleman*

You are Hereby Directed to assist Capt John Warner in Enlisting fifty able bodied Effective men to serve this state as Rangers for the Term of six months from this dat[e] and for every such soldier so Enlisted you are on the Credit of this state to Each a bounty of Seventy Dollars and Three Pounds pr month wages. — You are to be Under the Directions of this Council and to act in Conjunction with the Troops Under the Command of Colonel Seth Warner Commanding all officers and Soldiers Under you to Obey you as their Lieutenant when said Company is full you will be duly Commissioned and this shall be your Sufficient Warrant.

*By Order of Council Ira Allen Secy. [Secretary] Jonas Fay
Vice President*

This document is direct evidence of the Council's proceedings in Manchester and their active efforts to fund and organize local militia forces during the Revolutionary War. It is an official military warrant issued in Manchester by the Vermont Council of Safety, explicitly directing Enoch Eastman to recruit fifty Rangers to serve under Colonel Seth Warner. Signed by Ira Allen and Jonas Fay, the order guarantees specific financial bounties (or PAY) for the enlisted men.



TRANSCRIPTION

*State of Vermont In Council of Safety Manchester 15th July 1777
To Enoch Eastmond [Eastman], Gentleman*

*We reposing especial trust and confidence in your patriotism Valour Conduct & fidelity;
Do by these presents constitute and appoint you to be first Lieutenant in Capt John Warners Company of Rangers, and fourth in a regiment whereof Samuel Herrick Esqr. is Lieutenant Colonel Commandant, and raised within this State for the immediate defence thereof. — You are therefore Carefully and diligently to discharge the duty of first Lieutenant in said Company, and fourth in said regiment by doing and performing all manner of things thereunto belonging. And we do strictly charge and require, All officers and Soldiers under your Command, to be Obedient to your orders according to your Rank — And you are To Observe and follow such orders and directions from time to time as you shall Receive from the Commander in Chief of the Northern Department, this Council, or Any Other your Superior Officers, according to the rules and discipline of War — In pursuance of the trust reposed in you, this Commission to Continue in force until the 15th day of Jan'y next Attest Ira Allen Secy By order of Council Thos. Chittenden President*

Another July 15, 1777, document is a formal military commission issued by the Vermont Council of Safety in Manchester, officially appointing Enoch Eastman as a first lieutenant in Captain John Warner's company of Rangers. Signed by Council President Thomas Chittenden and Secretary Ira Allen, the order places Eastman's unit under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Herrick for a six-month term to provide immediate defense for the state.*

*The Eastman documents are courtesy of Howard Wilcox given him by his aunt, Grace Root Wilcox, who was a descendent of Enoch Eastman.



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The mission of the Manchester Historical Society is to collect, preserve, interpret and present the story of Manchester through the research collection, exhibitions, programs, and publications.

MHS PROGRAMS AVAILABLE ONLINE

On June 4, MHS Curator Shawn Harrington gave a talk about Mary Todd Lincoln's notable 1886 visit to Manchester as part of Hildene's Lincoln Forum Symposium 2026 held in Lincoln Hall. "Mary Lincoln Takes Manchester" drew a large and appreciative audience. You can view the talk at gnat-tv.org/the-lincoln-forum-symposium-2026-shawn-harrington-mary-lincoln-takes-manchester

On July 1, Shawn's presentation at the Southern Vermont Arts Center's Arkell Pavillion also brought out over a large audience to hear "Farmers, Fathers, and Green Mountain Boys: Manchester in the Revolution" in collaboration with Green Mountain Academy for Lifelong Learning and the Southern Vermont Arts Center. In his talk he looked at the early families who settled in Manchester, explored their struggles, and traced Manchester's journey from a frontier outpost to a premier tourist destination. This talk will also be available on the GNAT-TV website gnat-tv.org.

Also available online is a recently donated and digitized 1976 documentary about the Vermont Bicentennial celebration. "Ties that Bind." Before the film, MHS Curator Shawn Harrington talks with Timothy Stevenson, one of the documentary's producers, to hear about the creation and preservation of this unique view of how Manchester celebrated the 200th anniversary of our nation's founding. gnat-tv.org/time-stamp-ties-that-bind



Local Award for Our Curator

MHS curator Shawn Harrington received the 2026 GNATTV Award for community impact at GNAT-TV's annual "Hats Off to Summer" celebration at the Inn at Manchester. He was honored and for his dedication to preserving, celebrating, and documenting southwestern Vermont's history and making that history accessible to the community at large through his many collaborations with GNAT-TV.

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