

Green Mountain Boys

Vermont was not one of the 13 colonies.

In 1609 French explorer Samuel de Champlain claimed part of the region for France. Several suggest French explorer Samuel de Champlain referred to it as "Verd Mont" (green mountains).

(However, Vermont Historical Society states, "The word Vermont (or alternate renderings) does not appear in the publications of Champlain, Des sauvages and Les Voyages (1613 and 1632 versions), or on the maps which he prepared or published.") A Vermont lake is named for Champlain.

The state's name comes from two French words vert (green) and mont (mountain), which explains Vermont's nickname, the "Green Mountain State." (Library of Congress)

Samuel de Champlain was followed by missionaries, traders, settlers, and soldiers who identified rivers and other physical features of the Champlain watershed.

Another of the early voices to make the association is Zadock Thompson. In his History of Vermont (1842), Thompson affirms that the name "Verd Mont" had been applied to the Green Mountains long before the claimed christening of the state as "Verd Mont" by Reverend Hugh Peters in 1763.

"All accounts concur that the name of Vermont was given to the State by Dr. Thomas Young, of Philadelphia. Ira Allen says in his history that,

the name Vermont was given to the district of the New Hampshire Grants, as an emblematical one, from the French Verd mont, Green Mountain, intended to perpetuate the name of the Green Mountain Boys, by Dr. Thomas Young"

In a petition to the Vermont assembly in behalf of the widow of Dr. Young, signed by Thomas Chittenden, Ethan Allen and Joseph Fay, in 1785, they speak highly of Dr. Young's services in establishing the independence of the State, and say that "to him we stand indebted for the very name of Vermont." (History of Bennington County)

Families from southern New England who settled in the 'Grants' (as the New Hampshire titled lands were known) created communities similar to the ones they had left behind. They were confident that if they moved their families, built farms, and worked the land, their claims would be justified.

They believed that the royal governments of New Hampshire and New York, representing the king, wouldn't deny the rights of citizens who tamed the land, organized governments, paid taxes, and obeyed the laws.

When the 'Yorkers' (as the New York landholders were called) started to stake their claims, the troubles began. (Vermont Historical Society)

The Green Mountain Boys at present-day Bennington, Vermont, was an unauthorized militia organized to defend the property rights of local residents who had received land grants from New Hampshire.

New York, which then claimed present-day Vermont, disputed New Hampshire's right to grant land west of the Green Mountains.

When a New York sheriff, leading 300 militiamen, attempted to take possession of Grants farms in 1771, he was met with resistance. A determined group of Bennington militia led by young firebrands Ethan Allen and Remember Baker blocked his efforts.

Several Grants towns then organized committees of safety and military companies to protect their interests against the Yorkers. These military groups called themselves "The New Hampshire Men" while New York authorities referred to them as the "Bennington Mob" and rioters.

By 1772, they were called the "Green Mountain Boys."

Their leader Ethan Allen declared they were fighting for their "liberty, property, and life,"

Those bloody law-givers know we are necessitated to oppose their execution of law, where it points directly at our property, or give up the same:

but there is one thing is matter of consolation to us, viz. that printed sentences of death will not kill us when we are at a distance; and if the executioners approach us,

they will be as likely to fall victims to death as we: and that person, or country of persons, are cowards indeed,

if they cannot as manfully fight for their liberty, property and life, as villains can do to deprive them thereof. (A Vindication, Ethan Allen)

The Green Mountain Boys stopped sheriffs from enforcing New York laws and terrorized settlers who had New York grants, burning buildings, stealing cattle, and administering occasional floggings with birch rods.

Catamount Tavern

The Catamount Tavern was the gathering place of men who played vital roles in the creation of the state of Vermont. Built in the mid-1760s by Stephen Fay, one of Bennington's original settlers, it was first called the Green Mountain Tavern. It was one of three taverns in the town that served people journeying to their new homes on the frontier.

Dr. Jonas Fay, Ethan Allen, Remember Baker, and Thomas Chittenden were some of the patriots that gathered in the Catamount's rooms. They plotted the course of the Green Mountain Boys, the Council of Safety, and later the government of the new Republic of Vermont.

Westminster Massacre

The Westminster confrontation was a continuation of the Grants vs. Yorkers dispute. The farmers needed to put off their creditors until the fall harvest when they would have money to pay off their debts. They resented the New York land speculators they owed and feared being jailed or losing their land.

Up until this time, most Grants settlers on the east side of the Green Mountains had peacefully negotiated any disputes with New York.

When one hundred unarmed farmers occupying the county courthouse at Westminster refused to leave, a Yorker sheriff ordered his men to shoot them. Panic ensued and forty men, including the wounded, were herded like animals into the courthouse jail and left to die.

Massachusetts and New Hampshire militia came to the farmers' aid the next day and arrested the sheriff. The Westminster Massacre of March 13, 1775 is viewed by some as the first battle of the American Revolution.

They had not been enthusiastic supporters of the Green Mountain Boys. The New York sheriff's actions changed their minds, and they were happy when Ethan Allen's men rode into town the next day.

Green Mountain Boys in the American Revolution

Under the joint command of Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold, the Green Mountain Boys immediately joined the Revolution.

(Benedict Arnold, later known as a traitor during the American Revolution, was an important part of fighting for the American cause. He created a navy for Lake Champlain, battled the British at Valcour Island, and burned the boats in what is now Arnold Bay during retreat from that battle, effectively stopping the British from gaining a foothold in the area.)

A Green Mountain Boys regiment was authorized by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1775 and they became part of the Continental Army (they were part of the Northern Army).

Colonel Seth Warner and a regiment of 500 men were called the Green Mountain Rangers.

They served in the abortive offensive against Canada. Reorganized despite an ongoing conflict with New York over jurisdiction, the Green Mountain Boys took the field against General John Burgoyne in 1777, playing central roles at the battles of Hubbardton and Bennington.

The latter action, which destroyed a detachment of Burgoyne's army as it sought to forage for supplies, was crucial to Burgoyne's eventual defeat.

Control of Lake Champlain was a crucial military objective during the Revolutionary War.

The British strategy was to unite their Canadian forces with those in New York. If they succeeded they would cut off New York and New England from the other colonies.



The Champlain Valley was the site of several bloody encounters. Settlers in this no man's land fled their homes for the duration of the war, fearful of the British and their Iroquois Indian allies.

The British had several victories, but the Americans fought hard and delayed their advance south. These delays allowed the American armies to regroup.

When the British were defeated at Bennington and again at Saratoga, they gave up their plan to control Lake Champlain.

This was a turning point in the war, as it allowed the Continental Army to turn southward and convinced France to enter the war as an ally of the Americans.



Some key Green Mountain Boys/American Revolution dates,

May 10, 1775—The capture of Fort Ticonderoga by Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys was a major victory for America during the early part of the American Revolution.

September 25, 1775—While leading a losing effort against the British at Montreal, Canada, Ethan Allen is captured. He will remain a British prisoner of war until May 31, 1778.

June 1776—The Americans begin building a fort across the lake from Fort Ticonderoga in the present town of Orwell, VT. Later that summer it is named Mount Independence by the troops in honor of the Declaration of Independence. At its strongest, over 12,000 troops are stationed in this fortification.

July 4, 1776—America declares independence from Great Britain.

October 1776— The American navy, led by Benedict Arnold, is defeated at the Battle of Valcour Island on Lake Champlain. The British sail down the lake but turn back when they see the fortifications at Mount Independence and Fort Ticonderoga. This delays their advance down the lake until the following year.

July 1777— The British, under General Burgoyne, advance with a 7,000-man army down both the New York and Vermont sides of Lake Champlain. The Americans flee from Fort Ticonderoga and Mount Independence after the British gain the heights of Mount Defiance. By this time, the American forces at Mount Independence are down to 2,500 troops who are in poor condition after suffering through a winter of devastating illnesses.

July 7, 1777— The Battle of Hubbardton is fought as a small force of Americans tries to stop the British from overtaking the troops that are retreating from Fort Ticonderoga and Mount Independence. The British eventually prevail, but it is only after the Americans twice repulse them. The total loss for the Americans is 324 killed, wounded, or taken prisoner, while 183 British are killed.

August 16, 1777— The Battle of Bennington is fought when Hessian troops, German mercenaries fighting for the British, are dispatched to Vermont to confiscate much-needed provisions. They clash with Americans just to the west of Bennington. The Americans, predominantly militia from Vermont and New Hampshire, are victorious. Two hundred from the British army die and 700 are taken prisoner.

October 17, 1777— British General Burgoyne surrenders his army of 6,000 men after defeat at the Battle of Saratoga. The Battle of Saratoga marks the end of major military engagements near or in Vermont, but its inhabitants remain under constant threat from British marauders and their Indian allies.

October 16, 1780— A British regiment and nearly 300 Mohawk Indians attack scattered Vermont homesteads on the White River. They terrorize settlers, killing four men, slaughtering livestock, and burning houses and barns. Twenty-seven people are captured and taken to Canada. This incident becomes known as the Royalton Raid because of the extensive damage done to that town.

Fall 1780— The Haldimand Negotiations begin. Leaders of Vermont are fearful of more attacks like the Royalton Raid, and are frustrated by the lack of recognition by the American Continental Congress. They begin talking to Frederick Haldimand, the Governor General of Canada, about rejoining the British Empire. These discussions, along with ongoing talks with the Congress, continue with the British through 1782, but finally end when the Treaty of Paris is signed.

September 3, 1783— The Treaty of Paris is signed, ending the American Revolutionary War.

Ethan Allen

Ethan Allen (born January 21, 1738, Litchfield, Connecticut - died February 12, 1789, Burlington, Vermont) was a soldier and frontiersman, and leader of the Green Mountain Boys during the American Revolution.

After fighting in the French and Indian War (1754–63), Allen settled in what is now Vermont. At the outbreak of the American Revolution, he raised his force of Green Mountain Boys (organized in 1770) and Connecticut troops and helped capture the British fort at Ticonderoga, New York (May 10, 1775).

Later, as a volunteer in General Philip Schuyler's forces, he attempted to take Montreal (September 1775), in the course of which he was captured by the British and held prisoner until May 6, 1778.

Congress gave Allen the brevet rank of colonel with back pay, but he did not serve in the war after his release. Instead, he devoted his time to local affairs in Vermont, especially working for separate statehood from New York. Failing to achieve this, he attempted to negotiate the annexation of Vermont to Canada.

Vermont Statehood

It was not a certainty in 1777 that Vermont would become the fourteenth state in the Union. America was still at war and victory wasn't assured. New York, an important part of the American effort, wasn't going to give up title to the Grants without a fight.

Vermont didn't improve its chances of acceptance when it began negotiating with Great Britain to become part of greater Canada. The American Congress was suspicious of the new republic and became even more frustrated when Vermont tried to annex more lands—this time from New Hampshire.

Finally, in 1790 New York and Vermont settled their long-standing differences over the Grants. In January 1791 Vermont delegates met in Bennington and ratified the US Constitution. On March 4, 1791, Vermont was accepted into the United States of America, as the fourteenth state.

Information here is primarily from Vermont Historical Society (almost all); The American Revolutionary War, Jeff Wallenfeldt; A Vindication, Ethan Allen

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the American Revolution, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young