

Agent 13 in the North Country
St. Lawrence University Special Collections
Matt Dudley
mcdudl10@stlawu.edu

*My exhibit is open for viewing in Special Collections, from 9am-4pm Monday-Friday, until June 4th .

Context:

Though I write this catalogue in fulfillment of my spring semester independent study, my research on General James Wilkinson began last semester in Dr. Schrems' 299 Seminar: The War of 1812. Had it not been for her primary resource assignment first semester, I would not be writing to you now. Early in the course my class paid a visit to Special Collections in ODY to select sources to center our analytical papers on. As a small side-story, we had started reading Walter Bornemann's *War That Forged A Nation* a few weeks before our first visit. Thanks to Bornemann's work I entered the archives with some previous knowledge of Agent 13's malfeasance. So when Mark McMurray, curator of Special Collections, handed the War of 1812 finding aid that day I was astounded by the fact that several of General Wilkinson's letters of correspondence were among its contents. After looking through the three tattered letters I selected Wilkinson's to Colonel Solomon Van Renseleare as the focus of my paper. I had also become acquainted Van Renseleare through Bornemann's book. Upon completing the assignment and several more within the course, Dr. Schrems and I spoke about the possibility of continuing the seminar as an independent study. I happily agreed with her offer, as I have sought to become a historian since kindergarten or first grade. In laying the ground rules, the goals of my research took form. First was simply to commemorate and raise awareness for the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 on campus. Second, we aimed to concentrate the campus' attention on the invaluable wealth of resources held by Special Collections. The third goal was to make the project relevant to the North Country. Thus in selecting my topic, nothing seemed more logical than continuing my research into the duplicitous life of General James Wilkinson, Commanding General of the US Army during its campaign in the North Country and Agent 13 in service to the Spanish Crown.

Introduction to the Exhibit:

Overtime Dr. Schrems and I realized the preferential course of action in undertaking my research was to create an exhibit and display it within Special Collections. In a sense, my independent research materialized as a Museum Studies course. In fulfillment of my assignment I spent dozens of hours in Special Collections sifting through newspapers of the period, Wilkinson's *Memoirs of My Own Times*, and his letters to construct his travels throughout the North Country. The following is the introduction to my findings:

How did an American-born under cover spy working for Spain become commanding General of the US armed forces during the War of 1812? Better yet how did this spy, codename: Agent 13, remain undetected unlike Benedict Arnold, his friend during the American Revolution, or more modern spies like the Rosenbergs? The answer might disturb you. Those we now consider our founding fathers, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Madison were well aware of his

duplicity.¹ But before you judge them, consider their motives. Agent 13 was a known entity. Had they killed or removed him from his post they might have been left guessing as to who the Spanish might send in his place. Moreover, Agent 13 was considered by many to be the most experienced leader left over from the Revolution. To remove him would have yielded more cons than pros. Wilkinson made a name for himself during the Revolution as a valuable aid-de-camp of General Horatio Gates. Wilkinson personally arbitrated General Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga and was made the youngest General in the Continental Army at the age of 20.² General Wilkinson made his way to the top thanks solely to his eloquence and people skills. These skills also won him acclaim with the Spanish in 1787 when he travelled down the Mississippi to strike a personal trade deal and sign over his allegiance to the Crown.³ Wilkinson was sly, cunning, and would become one of the true masters in espionage. His most recent biographer, Andro Linklater, argues Wilkinson "never won a battle but never lost an inquiry."⁴ This exhibit agrees with that assessment and presents Wilkinson losing his final battles and surviving his last inquiry. "Agent 13 in the North Country" argues that Agent 13's military failures in the North Country led to his demise as both Commander of the US Armed Forces and as a spy for the Spanish Crown. General James Wilkinson spent his final campaign in bed, addicted to opium and alcohol.

Exhibit Descriptions:

Case by case I will walk you through my exhibit explaining my decision to include each item. At the same time I will endeavor to flesh out the narrative of the exhibit, by representing the sum and overlap of its component parts. Each case includes a brief description, a transcript of the document, and a transcript of the description card I have placed within each case.

Case 1

This case functions as an introductory case and displays all the works I selected for my bibliography. In it I also have included the above introduction.

Case 2

Here I use a newspaper article from the *Rhode Island American* to first represent James Wilkinson's presence in the region. The piece depicts his maneuvers around Kingston and how they functioned as a diversion to draw British attention away from Montreal. I have also included a replica wooden canteen, loaned by Tim Cryderman. My good friend from Laurentian Singers

¹ Andro Linklater, *An Artist in Treason*, (New York: Walker Publishing Group, 2009), 3.

² Ibid, 42.

³ Ibid, 86.

⁴ Ibid, 312.

and fellow History Major Ethan Bishop coined a fitting term for the object during his visit in calling it a “mini-barrel.” With the canteen I want to represent the experience of the common soldiers who served under General Wilkinson during the campaign. If we are to make heroes out of anyone through history writing let them be the everyday soldiers who paid for General Wilkinson’s incompetence with their lives.

Newspaper Article: *Rhode Island American* (Providence)

Wilkinson’s forces staged maneuvers around Kingston in order to keep the British guessing at whether the impending attack was aimed at Montreal (November 9, 1813).

Canteen: 7” in diameter, wooden with metal bracing, blue paint with red insignia, “mini-barrel” design.

This reproduction canteen is similar to those used by soldiers in service to the Northern Army. Special thanks to Tim Cryderman, Vice-President of Forsyth’s Rifles and the Second Vice-President of the Fort de La Présentation Board of Directors, both headquartered in Ogdensburg, NY for loaning this object.

“Taking of Montreal postponed till further notice.”

“The following extract is from a letter to the editors of the Chronicle, is copied from the Exchange Coffee-House Books. We should have considered it as a *quiz*, but we know the loyal publishers of that paper are not in the habit of making sport of prodigious exploits of our armies. We are therefore reluctantly constrained to believe that the reduction of Montreal did not enter into the plan of the campaign of which every object has been accomplished. [sic]” *Daily Advertiser.*

“Extract of a letter from Plattsburgh, to the editors of the Boston Chronicle, dated the 21st ultimo.”

“It is said the whole object of the campaign is COMPLETELY ACCOMPLISHED. Sir George Prevost with his army having been *kept down* at Montreal, while Wilkinson has been undisturbed in his operations against Kingston.”

Case 3

This case ties into my representation of material culture by presenting a first hand account of an unnamed soldier’s experience in service to the United States Army under General Wilkinson. From the soldier’s description I hope visitors can almost feel the chill of his rain-soaked and tattered uniform.

Within case three I have also included General Wilkinson's public statement countering the threats made by Governor General Prevost. Within the context of my exhibit, this document argues for the patriotic side of General Wilkinson.

Newspaper Articles: *Rhode Island American* (Providence)

November 16, 1813 issue features: **A Soldier's Perspective**

- A letter of correspondence from an unnamed soldier under Wilkinson at Grenadier Island providing a unique perspective on the harsh conditions encountered by troops at the end of the campaign season. (October 26, 1813)
- Confirmation that troops under Wilkinson's command set out on the St. Lawrence River on October 31, 1813.

November 26, 1813 issue features:

- Wilkinson's harsh words intended for the Governor General of Canada George Prevost on behalf of the United States of America.

"The Army under General Wilkinson, reinforced by the detachment under the command of Colonels Randolph and Coles, began their movements from Grenadier [Island] and down the St. Lawrence, on the 31st of October."

"Extract of a letter from Major-General Wilkinson to Lieutenant-General Sir George Prevost, dated Head-Quarters Grenadier Island, November 1st 1813."

"I yesterday evening had the honour to receive your letter of the 17th past, and shall immediately transmit a copy of it to the Executive of the United States.

"I forbear to animadvert [strongly criticize] on the acts of our superiours, whatever may be their tendency: but you must pardon me, for taking exception to an expression in your letter. The government of the United States cannot be "DETERRED," by any considerations of Life or Death, or Depredation, or Conflagration, from the faithful discharge of its duty to the American nation."

"Wilkinson's Army"

"The following article is from a southern paper, and said to be extracted from a letter, received at Baltimore, from an officer in Wilkinson's army at Grenadier Island, October 26th."

"Here we are at the east end of Lake Ontario, pelted daily with the inexhaustible rains, that seem to be collected and poured upon us, from all the lakes and swamps from this lake to Superior.- We have indeed for nearly a month been exposed to such torrents, as you have no idea of in your part of the world. In consequence of the bad weather our troops

from Fort George and Sackett's Harbor, have been scattered every where [sic] along the coast , many having staved their boats, but most of them have now arrived here.”

“Thus you see how the best laid plans may be frustrated, or postponed, by the weather.- General Wilkinson had drawn most of the troops out of Kingston, up the head of the Lake, and intended to have run rapidly down and attacked that place, thus emptied: but the dispersion of our boats by storm, baffled this fine scheme; I hope, however, it is not defeated. I pretend not to know what new measures, new events may produce, but seeing that our commander in chief arrived here after the fine season was gone, *we ought not expect that he can overcome nature, and bring back in winter, the opportunities of summer*. Had his predecessors performed their duties, our army would not now be shivering on a comfortless island. Yet I know the General feels the necessity of striking a blow, and *he will strike when it is practicable*.”

“Considering the copious and uninterrupted rains, our troops are healthy and spirited.”
“P.S.-If we attack Kingston, after allowing the enemy so much time for preparation, I anticipate a tremendous contest. Fresh troops, coming out of warm, dry barracks, have a great advantage over a weather-beaten army; yet I doubt not we shall be victorious, meet them when or where we may.”

Case 4

The presence of glass bottles and a whiskey flask connote General Wilkinson's reported substance abuse throughout the latter portion of his life. These objects are important due to their portrayal of Wilkinson's lack of physical health throughout the campaign. The accompanying excerpt of Wilkinson's letter to John Armstrong from the *Rhode Island American* expresses the toll alcohol and Laudanum had on his efficacy as Commanding General (he was not present at the Battle of Chrysler's Farm). I am not pursuing the ahistorical argument that had he been there on the field of battle lives of some of the 103 men killed would have been saved. Had a more effective General been in command crisis may have been averted. Beyond the record of casualties and Wilkinson's letter I have also included his hollow proclamation to the inhabitants of Canada. This in part characterizes Wilkinson as somewhat of a paper lion. Lastly, something interesting I learned at the Fort de La Presentation Lectures on April 28, 2012 in Ogdensburg is that because of the heightened water level of the St. Lawrence Seaway, the Chrysler's Farm battlefield is now under water.

Glass Bottles of the period and Whiskey Flask: 2 bottles & 1 flask

- **1 bottle, 6" x 2.5" x 1", thick glass with blue hue**
- **1 bottle, 5.5" x 2" x .75", thick clear glass**
- **1 modern day whiskey flask, stainless steel**

These bottles represent General Wilkinson's continual substance abuse throughout the campaign of Laudanum and alcohol. All of his biographers agree that these activities did take place but vary in their interpretations of how the substances affected his efficacy as Commanding General. Special thanks to Tim Cryderman the Second Vice-President of the Fort de La Présentation Board of Directors, both headquartered in Ogdensburg.

Newspaper Articles: *The Weekly Messenger* (Boston)

December 3, 1813 issue features: **The Battle of Chrysler's Farm (Nov. 10, 1813)**

- Wilkinson's hollow proclamation to the citizens of Canada in preparation for his invasion. (November 6, 1813)
- Wilkinson's efforts at damage control in accounting for his defeat and absence from the field of battle, sent to Secretary of War Armstrong. (November 16, 1813)
- Record of casualties experienced by American forces at Chrysler's Farm (102 killed, 237 wounded)

"You who remain quiet at home..."

"PROCLAMATION"

"TO THE INHABITANTS THEREOF,"

"The army of the United States which I have the honor to command, invades these provinces to conquer and not to destroy; to subdue the forces of his Britannic Majesty, not to war against his unoffending subjects. Those, therefore, among you who remain quiet at home, should victory incline to the American standard, shall be protected in their persons and property.— But those who are found in arms must necessarily be treated as avowed enemies."

"To menace is unmanly- to seduce dishonorable- Yet it is just and humane to place these alternatives before you."

"Done at the Head Quarters of the army of the United States, the 6th day of Nov. 1813, near Ogdensburg, on the river St. Lawrence."

JAMES WILKINSON

"Letter to Secretary Armstrong"

“The corps of the enemy from Kingston, which followed me, hung on my rear, and in concert with a heavy galley and a few gun boats, seemed determined to retard my progress. I was tempted to halt, turn around and put an end to his teasing; but alas! I was confined to my bed.... The enemy deserve credit for their zeal and intelligence, which the active universal hostility of the male inhabitants of the country enabled them to employ to their greatest advantage.... But, Sir, the information I now give you, is derived from officers of my confidence, who took active parts in the conflict; for though I was enabled to order the attack, it was my hard fortune not to be able to lead the troops I commanded.— The disease with which I was assailed on the 2d of September, on my journey to Fort George, having with a few short intervals of convalescence preyed on me ever since, and at the moment of this action, I was confined to my bed and emaciated almost to a skeleton, unable to set on my horse or to move ten paces without assistance.”

CASUALTIES OF WAR

“Wilkinson, in action fought at Williamsburgh, in Upper Canada, on the 11th of November, 1813.

KILLED

Subalterns 3, sergeants 7, corporals 3, musicians 1, privates 85- total 102

WOUNDED

Brigadier General 1, assistant adjutant general 1, aid de camp 1, colonel 1, major 1, captains 5, subalterns 6, sergeants 9, corporals 13, musicians 1, privates 198- total 237.

Case 5

Case five is my personal favorite due to its provocative nature and the serendipitous string of events that led me to the discovery of the relationship between its contents. The first day I looked at General Wilkinson’s *Memoirs of My Own Times* the first page I turned to, out of the 2,000 page three volume set, just so happened to be his rebuttal of allegations of public drunkenness in Ogdensburg, NY. At first I had no idea how useful this rebuttal would become, yet I had sense enough to record the page number. A couple weeks later when scanning Special Collections’ newspapers from the war I found the allegations against General Wilkinson published in *The Rhode Island American*. Case five presents the 200 year old conflict between justice Nathan Ford of Ogdensburg, who according to Dekalb Town Historian Bryan Thompson was sympathetic to the British, and therefore hostile to General Wilkinson.

Newspaper Article: *Rhode Island American*

December 10, 1813 issue features: **Wilkinson's feud w/ Nathan Ford**

- Ogdensburg Court Justice Nathan Ford lays out allegations of Wilkinson's drunken disorderly conduct. Ford like Wilkinson had a hidden agenda, in that he supported the British cause.

Book: *Memoirs of My Own Times* by James Wilkinson (pgs. 458-460)

Wilkinson's responds to Ford's slander. Wilkinson wrote his memoirs after the war to quell all of the allegations made by citizens like Ford, fellow Generals, and President Madison.

"FROM THE NEW YORK HERALD"

"By the Steam-Boat which arrived from Albany, we received the following letter from Nathan Ford, Esq. first Judge of the county of St. Lawrence, in this state..."

"TO GENERAL WILKINSON COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE ARMIES OF THE UNITED STATES"

"Sir- In your passage down the St. Lawrence upon your expedition to Montreal, you landed your troops three miles above this village. Your illiberal, and ungentlemanly abuse of my character, on that day, and the succeeding evening, was such as none but a man of your cast would have indulged in.... "You declared it to be your wish that Ogdensburgh might be burnt, and as for Judge Ford you would hang him, and if the enemy did not burn his property, you would be God damned if you did not." Contemptible wretch!- That you are much better qualified for an incendiary, and a hangman, than you are for a General, has never been a question with me.... When you arrived at Mr. Thorp's, which is but four miles from where you sat out, (the night you moved the army through this village,) you discovered (or others discovered it for you,) it was necessary to stop, and take a nap, and give time for the fumes of hot rum to evaporate. *A Great General* requires great stimulants. There are none who will doubt your *great qualities*, or the clearness of your head, when it is known, that it requires you two drinks of *hot rum*, to enable you to go through the operation of one shaving.... For the sake of *its sublimity* and your *taste*, I will repeat one of the verses, of your song,

"I am now a going to Canada,

"And there I will get money,

"And there I will kiss the pretty squaws,

"They are as sweet as honey."

It is no secret that money is your god, and the end has always justified the means for your obtaining it. As for honey squaws, that is a matter of your own; I have no doubt, you

prefer black honey to white.... I shall now leave you, to the enjoyment of your billingsgate ribaldry, your hot rum, and your honey sweet squaws.

Nathan Ford

Ogdensburgh, November 10, 1813.

“Charge 2d.- *Drunkenness on Duty*

The scurrilous libel on my character, published BY A DISAFFECTED CITIZEN OF OGDENSBURGH, WHOSE TRAITOROUS MACHINATIONS I HAD EXPOSED, has been dressed up with judicial solemnity, and spun out in four different specifications. I might spare any remarks, on a charge, *against the truth of which, every witness of the prosecution bears testimony;* but as malice of my accuser, has afforded me an opportunity, of proving *the habits of my life, and my detestation of this beastly vice;* I shall briefly notice the substance of the testimony which has been given on this point. Colonel Walbach testified, that he commenced his career of military service, under me in the year 1801, and was in my family four years, as an aid-de-camp, and was again about my person, as adjutant general, in the campaign of 1813. He testified, that I was always particularly attentive, to the habits, manners, dress, health, police, and discipline of the troops, *and that I particularly detested drunkenness.* Colonel Nichol, late inspector-general, testified, *that he had been acquainted with me, eight years,* that he was with me in New Orleans, *and frequently attended entertainments with me,* at that place, at Washington, and Carlisle, *that he never saw me, in the least intoxicated, but had frequently known me, discourage intoxication in others.... I trust the records of this court, will silence the foul tongue of calumny, which has charged me WITH A VICE MY SOUL DETESTS, AND WHICH I HAVE ALWAYS EXERTED MY AUTHORITY TO ERADICATE FROM THE ARMY;* *and whoever shall examine those records, will find that every witness (examined to this point) for and against the prosecution, has borne testimony to my sobriety before, during, and after my passage of Prescott.... I have been pursued by my enemies. I wish to expose the system of espionage, which has been introduced into our army, and which, if encouraged, will infect the whole corps with jealousies, and dissolve the bonds of friendship, honour, and patriotism.”*

Case 6

From a recent conversation with Tim Cryderman I learned that “Hamilton on the St. Lawrence” (as depicted in the transcript of Wilkinson’s Council of Generals) is now known as Waddington, NY. From talking to Tim Cryderman I also learned that Whitehouse Bay in Waddington is named after a house on the river where dozens of military higher-ups met to strategize during the war. This coincidence might indicate where the document (c. Nov 8, 1813) was written. I have included Tim Cryderman’s re-enactment spyglass due to the overlap it has with assessments of troop strength across the St. Lawrence River. Something similar would have been used during the war.

Copy of Council of Generals before invasion of Prescott, Ontario (transcribed by Captain McPherson secretary to General Wilkinson)

- Document assessing troop strength across from Hamilton (Waddington) on the St. Lawrence River and the desired plan of action.

Spyglass: 1” diameter, 11” length, gold paint on brown base metal

- This replica is similar to what Generals and their scouts would have used to observe enemy maneuvers and determine troop strength. Special thanks to Tim Cryderman, Vice-President of Forsyth’s Rifles of Ogdensburg and the Second Vice-President of the Fort de La Présentation Board of Directors, both headquartered in Ogdensburg, NY for loaning this object.

Near Hamilton on the St. Lawrence Nov 8th 1813

Major General Wilkinson states in a council of War to Major General Lewis, Brigadier Generals Boyd, Brown, Covington + Porter as following

That the force under his immediate command is reported at 7:000 now Com officers and privates that he expects to make a junction with Major General Hampton at St. Regis whose division has been reported at 4.000.

The provisions on hand amount to about ten days bread twenty days meat.

The best information of the Enemy’s force is as follows_ 600 under Col Murray troops of the line at the boteau de Lac strongly fortified with artillery. 200 on the island opposite with two pieces of artillery, and about the same number on the So. Shore with the two pieces of artillery_ 200 or 300 more of the British line with artillery but without ammunition at the Cedars. At Montreal 200 sailors & 300 marines with the militia numbers unknown, no fortification at that city, or in advance of it_ 2500 troops expected daily from Quebec. The militia on the line reported at 20.000 men Canadians chiefly. Under the circumstances Major General Wilkinson submits to the council the following propositions viz

Shall the army proceed with all possible rapidity to the attack of the said city of Montreal_ the above information is given by a confidential agent of reputed integrity, who left Montreal on the 30 instant; it may be added for the information of the council, that two British armed vessels with sixty batteries with troops, had arrived at Prescott this morning, and that four hundred were the last evening at the bornwalk about thirty three miles below this point.

It is our opinion we should proceed to Montreal the object of the Expedition.

/ signed / Morgan Lewis
 Jn P. Boyd
 Jac. Brown
 Rob Swartout

It is my opinion that we proceed from the place under great danger from the want of proper transports, pilots, but I am anxious to meet the Enemy at Montreal, because I now know no other alternative /signed / Leo Covington

M. Porter

true copy from the original in my possession

N.H. Macpherson Captain + Secretary

Case 7

Finding General Wilkinson's exact place of convalescence during the winter of 1813-14 was another case of serendipity within my research. At one of my regular meetings with Dr. Schrems and Mark McMurray in Special Collections Mark mentioned that the Watertown Times had put out a commemorative book on the war and that it might be a valuable addition to my exhibit. After finding the book, the first or second page I turned to read "Wilkinson's Winter Quarters" and provided a picture of the Harison Mansion in Malone, NY. For a while I was having trouble determining where or if the Harison Mansion still exists. Luckily my grandparents who were born and raised in Malone knew that the Harison Mansion normally goes by the Harison House and still stands on Webster Street in Malone. I have also included a corresponding excerpt from *The Rhode Island American* that elaborates on Wilkinson's health. After his convalescence Wilkinson made one last desperate attempt at improving his reputation by taking the blockhouse at LaColle Mills, Quebec. Because I was not able to find any mention of Wilkinson's final unsuccessful military operation I have included a map of the contest.

Book: *Bugles on the Border* by Harry F. Landon

- Confirmation of Wilkinson's place of convalescence throughout winter of 1813-1814 while his troops took up winter quarters in Fort Covington.

Newspaper Article: *Excerpt from Rhode Island American* (Providence)

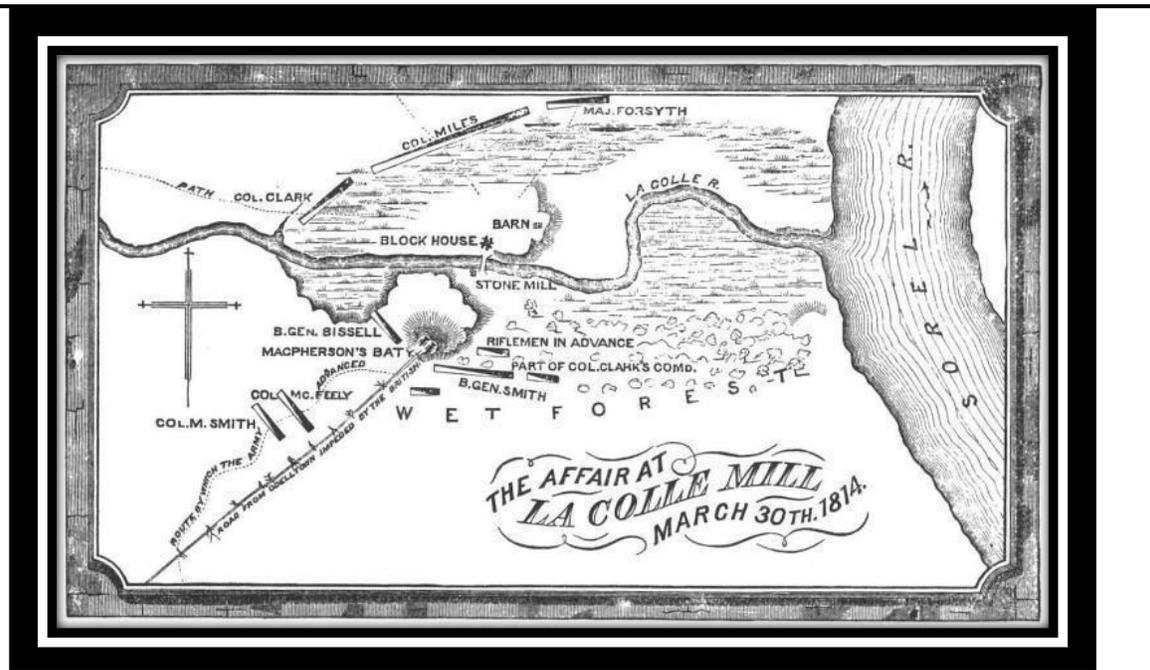
- Description of Wilkinson's condition and expectations for Spring campaign season.

Map: Battle of Lacolle Mills, Quebec (March 30, 1814)

- Though I was unable to find any references in our 1812 collection, Wilkinson's final defeat took place at a small blockhouse in Quebec at the hands of the *Voltigeurs* and against the newly developed Congreve Rocket.

*“Extract of a letter from Burlington
December 4”*

“The General is still at Malone, and is convalescing, so as to walk about his room.... We are not without apprehensions that the enemy will attack Wilkinson's army or Plattsburgh this season, as it is said they are preparing for some expedition, we know not what.”



northcountryny.com

Case 8

By following General Wilkinson's travels to his final court martial, I show the repercussions of the Battle of Lacolle Mills and how General Wilkinson's campaign in the North Country was the tipping point in his fall from prominence. Because of my space limitations I was not able to include all I wanted in case eight. In the newspapers there was also mention of a fiasco between General Wilkinson and General Hampton in which Wilkinson endeavored to have Hampton arrested. To gain a better understanding of Wilkinson's successful defense of his own character in his final court martial I perused his *Memoirs* and found some valuable commentary on the proceedings. Something interesting that I took away from James Wilkinson's most recent biography is that he was never tried on any charges of espionage. The government higher-ups ensured such charges were never raised in order to insulate the legacy of the first presidents, who were cognizant of Wilkinson's espionage.

Newspaper Articles: *Rhode Island American* (Providence)

May 17/31 & July 8, 1814 issues feature:

- Record of Wilkinson's dismissal from command and subsequent travel through Lake George, Saratoga, and Washington, DC.

December 27, 1814 issue features:

- Wilkinson was summoned to court martial in Utica. From his *Memoirs* page 3 Volume III we learn that the trial began on January 3, 1815.

May 31, 1814

"General Wilkinson arrived at Saratoga Springs a few days since. It is said that he has been ordered to retire from the command of the northern army with permission to reside in Baltimore, Annapolis or Philadelphia."

May 17, 1814

"We understand that General Izard has assumed the command of the army at Plattsburgh, late under the command of General Wilkinson, who is suspended from the service and taken up his residence at Lake George."

July 8, 1814

"Major-General Wilkinson and suite have arrived in Washington city."

December 27, 1814

"Major General Izard has been excused from serving as a member on the trial of General Wilkinson, to be held at Utica, and General Porter ordered in his place."

Case 9

With the final case in my exhibit we come full circle back to the primary source document that spurred my entire research process. Wilkinson's letter speaks volumes for the state of affairs in the United States at war's end. Because he slanders those who then and now were considered the heroes of the war, we can see how he endeavored to go against the grain of public opinion and improve his own reputation by destroying others. He endeavored to do the same before the war with General Wayne. I have included a couple items of Tim Cryderman to humanize General Wilkinson.

Document: Letter handwritten by General Wilkinson to Solomon Van Renseleare

- In a last ditch effort to shirk his responsibility for failure; Agent 13 slandered younger more successful Generals such as Jacob Brown and Winfield Scott. As an active member of the Association of Disbanded Officers he also expresses his grievances over the inability of the government to compensate its officers at war's end. And finally, Wilkinson drops a hint to Renseleare that his *Memoirs* will be ready for the press in a matter of weeks.

Quill Pen and Ink Well, Bi-Cornered or *Chapeau Bras* Hat

- **Quill pen; white feather, 10" length, in clay ink well**
- **Hat constructed of gold braiding and navy blue velvet**
- Representative of what Wilkinson would have used when writing to Van Renseleare. The Bi-Cornered hat was typical to General serving the United States during the conflict. Special thanks to Tim Cryderman, Vice-President of Forsyth's Rifles of Ogdensburg and the Second Vice-President of the Fort de La Présentation Board of Directors, both headquartered in Ogdensburg, NY for loaning this object.

Washington

May 15th 15

My Dear Van,

I have recd your favor of the 8th & have barely time to say a word – I am pleased to find Armstrong has come out, I wish him to indulge his ridicule wit & sarcasm, while he assists me to the secrets he exposes, his garbling & misquoting my correspondence, & his bold aspiration of a thing of falsehood, will procure him but a short lived triumph to which he is welcome – he will be answered merely to

vex and draw more from him if possible, a half dozen lies will be exposed & that is all.-

The Directory of Generals have finished their work of proscription & the list is before the President in Virginia – they have proceeded partially and unjustly & in my judgement [sic] illegally – a tempest will ensue or I am mistake – 2500 officers who will find themselves excluded by intrigue & favoritism will not rest quietly – The Rifle, Artillery & Calvary officers are transferred to the Infantry to the exclusion of the most meritorious officers of that arm – this I think the Law does not warrant, because it involves the necessity of new nominations & new commissions, which the Law only authorizes the President to “arrange from the General Corps of Troops now in the service” Look at the Law and get Mr. Van Vechtens opinion – the perjured King is kept to the exclusion of Kingsbury Schuyler & thirty other officers and that by transfer from the Rifle Corps – Atkinson & Col Macdonald of the Rifle Corps are also Colonels.- but the decision of the [sic] is not yet known, it is for this reason & I believe a deficit of funds the officers of the Army have not been discharged – I pray you to send the inclosed [sic] to Dr. Bull as soon as may be.- on the other and more important subject I shall keep you advised – I can say nothing conclusive until it is known whether Crawford accepts or goes home to Georgia – but the seed are sown [sic] & will sprout in due season – Jackson has not accepted – your poor beast Brown will be disgraced if it be possible – he saluted me most graciously in presence of Macdonough Hull and others and I told Him flatly I would not speak to Him. That is you must excuse my speaking to you – but he has obliged in a letter to the President to acknowledge the errors of his official letters of the Battle of Bridgewater, that is to recall his lies respecting Riply & to acknowledge that He Riply saved the army.- indeed his courage is questioned from his conduct in that Battle – they say he was found hid behind some apple trees – but Scott is the greatest rascal of the two – the villain does not look me in the face – tis said He is going to Europe to give Bonaparte lessons in the art of war – remember my Friend and bear in fond recollection that you are not to mention my name – send me a,

candid, list of your legislature marking the opposite party – my love to all whom you love – ever yours

J.W.

Col Van Renselear

I am preparing my trial & it will be ready for the press in four weeks-

With Tim Cryderman's reenactment uniform I have endeavored to further humanize Wilkinson in the eyes of my visitors. Another aspect of deciding on a topic for my exhibit was making my research accessible to a broad spectrum of observers. For me, this meant concentrating on one historical figure and not endeavoring to convey the entire course of the war or some other grandiose topic. Since the start of my exhibit, Tim's uniform has functioned as an effective interest catcher for visitors to ODY. It is truly astounding that 200 years ago a man who had declared his allegiance to a foreign king dressed in a similar uniform and led thousands.

War of 1812 Era Officer's Uniform

Worn in America's Early Republican period: Complete with:

- dropfall shirt and pants,
- tunic jacket,
- rucksack,
- sash,
- belt w/ sword holster,
- buckle brogan shoes.

Special thanks to Tim Cryderman, Vice-President of Forsyth's Rifles of Ogdensburg and the Second Vice-President of the Fort de La Présentation Board of Directors, both headquartered in Ogdensburg, NY for loaning this object.

After spring break I worked with Carol Cady in GIS to build a visual representation of General Wilkinson's travels through Northern New York. We worked over the course of four weeks and I gained the extra experience of a crash course in digital cartography.



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“Wilkinson’s Army.” Providence, RI: *Rhode Island American*. November 16, 1813. Special Collections: St. Lawrence University.

I have included my primary source analysis from my 299 Seminar with Dr. Schrems to compliment Wilkinson's letter to Van Renseleare.

General James Wilkinson was and still remains today a polarizing figure among historians. Due to his oath of allegiance to the Spanish Crown in 1787 and his involvement in a number of conspiracies with Aaron Burr, Wilkinson's place in history is shrouded in dramatic irony.⁵ This is to say, although we are afforded the luxury of hindsight, Wilkinson kept his contemporaries effectively hoodwinked with regards to his double-dealing. Although the root of the General's actions was not unearthed until later on, "[at the time] public opinion was much divided, as to some points in... [his] character and conduct."⁶ Wilkinson took a great deal of flak while he was alive and probably takes even more today from authors such as Walter R. Borneman, yet a common reality exists in all accounts; his renown in the Revolution enabled him to become one of the major contributors to the War of 1812. The inherent question of "patriot or scoundrel" underscores the research potential of the document in question.⁷

The recipient of General Wilkinson's correspondence was Colonel Solomon Van Renseleare, a high-ranking officer in the New York State militia at the time. Colonel Van Renseleare, himself a veteran of warfare with Indigenous forces, served as an advisor to his inexperienced cousin General Stephen Van Renseleare; most notably at the battle of Queenstown Heights.⁸ After the war, Van Renseleare's

⁵ Walter R. Borneman, *1812: The War that Forged a Nation*, New York: Harper Perennial, 2004, pg. 12.

⁶ Henry Marie Brackenridge, *History of the Late War*, Pittsburgh: C.H. Kay and Co., 1844, pg 167.

⁷ Walter R. Borneman, *1812: The War that Forged a Nation*, New York: Harper Perennial, 2004, pg. 177.

⁸ Stefan Bielinski, "Solomon Van Renseleare," <http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/bios/vr/solvr5113.html>, (Oct. 19, 2011).

military career contributed to his election to Congress (as a Federalist) and his appointment as Post-Master of Albany, New York. Though Van Renseleare's military career pales in comparison to that of Wilkinson, his background is highly significant in the context of the pair's correspondence. For more information on Colonel Van Renseleare try the Library of Congress and/or the work he co-authored with Secretary of War John Armstrong entitled "A Narrative of the Affair of Queenstown: In the War of 1812."

General Wilkinson's correspondence with Van Renseleare centers on the issue of honorable conduct in wartime. In the archive listing, the document is found under the title "letter concerning disgraced officers."⁹ Though after some careful analysis Wilkinson's personal title for the letter was found: "Characters of Generals Brown and Scott." Though this title designates the focus of the letter, the author covers a wide range of characters and topics, from disgraced former Secretary of War John Armstrong and favoritism in Infantry officer nominations to the uncertainty surrounding the appointment of a new Secretary of War. I had to delve a bit deeper to make an educated guess at what Wilkinson meant when he speaks of the uncertainty surrounding "Crawford's acceptance."¹⁰ After looking at the timeline of U.S. Secretaries of War it was clear that the letter fits right in the middle of the period between James Monroe's resignation (March 1815) and William H. Crawford's eventual acceptance of the appointment (August 1815).¹¹

⁹ James Wilkinson to Solomon Van Renseleare, "Characters of Generals Brown and Scott," May 16, 1815, Special Collections: St. Lawrence University.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "U.S. Secretary of War- U.S. Government Office," <http://www.nndb.com/gov/547/000056379/>, (Oct. 20, 2011).

The letter itself is postmarked May 16th, 1815. Wilkinson scrawled out his thoughts on a rather large and rigid 12"x8" piece of parchment. The thickness and size of the paper is a function of it being its own envelope. Crease marks still remain a part of the document from where it was folded onto itself, sealed, and shipped. From talking to the head archivist in ODY Library the letter was probably bonded with sealing wax pigmented by vermillion, thus giving its seal a red and flaky appearance. Because of the original quality of the document's material, it has faired the tests of time rather well. Besides natural yellowing of the parchment, there is some graying and dark discoloration on the document. In some spots this effects legibility, although on the whole Wilkinson's caustic words come through loud and clear. The critical tone of Wilkinson's words speaks volumes for the environment in which they were written.

Five months after the Treaty of Ghent, in the wake of the war, every significant contributor's previous conduct would have fallen under immense scrutiny. This was the time when the successful contributors that we encountered in Borneman's work, such as Jacob Brown, Andrew Jackson, and Winfield Scott would have been heralded as national heroes. At the same time, the end of hostilities gave the entire nation pause to lay blame on figures such as John Armstrong, Henry Dearborn, and of course James Wilkinson. Wilkinson's indictment of others' actions such as Armstrong's "lies", Scott's alleged meeting with Napoleon, and Brown's alleged cowardess in battle would have been a valuable contribution to the gossip

and sensationalism surrounding the conflict.¹² Because Wilkinson implores Van Renseleare, “not to mention [his] name”, we can assume he intended for Van to spread the word about Brown and Scott’s alleged misconduct, thereby striking at their public images.¹³ What makes Wilkinson’s correspondence so valuable to us as historians is the irony of the situation— he was in fact an agent of the Spanish. Through this lens Wilkinson’s words take on a whole new meaning. Unlike Generals Brown or Scott, he had no concrete successes within the war and was covering up a dirty secret. It might be reasonable to say Wilkinson’s invective against those who we now consider the heroes of the war, was aimed at shirking the blame he deserved.

Wilkinson’s correspondence serves as mortar in supporting one of the overarching themes we encountered in class. Throughout all our texts we witnessed the obstructive potential of personal conflicts and idiosyncrasies on the war effort. Though it seems a disconnect exists in which, as fledgling historians, we tend to lose track of the fact that actual human beings lived out what is depicted in our texts. Words as caustic as, “your poor beast Brown will be disgraced if possible- he saluted me most graciously in the presence of Macdonough Hull and others and I told him flatly I would not speak to him,” are immensely important in representing the effects of personal agendas on the war effort.¹⁴ They boggle the mind as to how these men fought for a common cause. Likewise Wilkinson’s words, “Scott... the greatest rascal of the two... does not look me in the face- ‘tis said he is going to Europe to give

¹² James Wilkinson to Solomon Van Renseleare, “Characters of Generals Brown and Scott,” May 16, 1815, Special Collections: St. Lawrence University.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Bonaparte lessons in the art of war,” appeal to our sense of the imperfect impact of human nature on history.¹⁵ Above all else these indictments speak not only for Wilkinson’s insecurity, but also his jealousy. Wilkinson’s words give a prime example for all that we learned in class pertaining to dissidence within the ranks. Furthermore, Wilkinson’s letter reveals a great deal about the problems the military faced in consolidating its forces in the absence of war. His statement, “it is for this reason... I believe a deficit of funds the officers of the Army have not been discharged” speaks for the large amount of national debt the United States incurred during the war.¹⁶ With a bit of research, the numbers line up in agreement with Wilkinson. As of September 15th, 1815 the United States had generated approximately \$119 million in debt.¹⁷ This amount of debt would have made compensation of officers extremely difficult at war’s end.

Beyond the analyses depicted above, there exist a broad range of further openings for research within General Wilkinson’s letter to Van Rensselaer. Probably the most obvious is an analysis of how the author’s accusations fit into the broader feud between high-ranking Generals at the time. To do so one would have to gain access to the personal writings of figures such as Generals Brown, Scott, and Armstrong. Tying into this research would be a broad analysis of General Wilkinson’s own personal documents to determine whether he had a track record of spitting this much venom. Another possible starting point could be a study of how the Government ended up compensating its military officers for their service.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Bureau of Public Debt, “The 19th Century,” <http://www.publicdebt.treas.gov/history/1800.htm>, (Oct. 20, 2011).

Whichever route is taken, General James Wilkinson's letter proves to be a valuable touchstone in pointing us towards other voices in the silence.¹⁸

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¹⁸ John H. Arnold, *A Very Short Introduction: History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 79.