



INSIDE THE VAULT

*Washington Gets His Guns:
Henry Knox and the “Noble Train”*

with Dr. Phil Hamilton

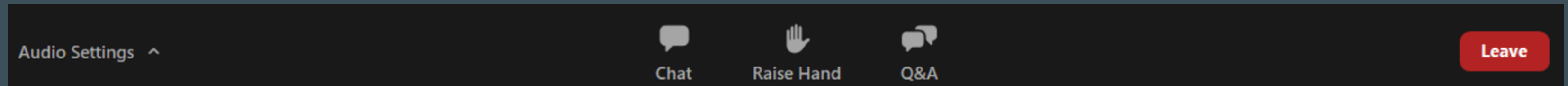
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2025

☆☆☆

THE
GILDER LEHRMAN
INSTITUTE
of
AMERICAN HISTORY

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How to Participate



- If you would like to ask a question, you can use the Q&A feature.
- We will be answering audience questions throughout the session.
- The views expressed here are those of the historian.

For Security and Privacy

- Your microphone is automatically muted.
- Your camera is automatically turned off.



Today's Documents

II-2

This time was
was 19 years &
3 months etc

Wm Knox
North Landing Dec^r 14. 1778.

Dear Brother —

at Sabbathday point

last evening the boat arriv'd which you
sent with the letters and provisions we ^{got} off the low
Sabbath day morning and immediately set off for Sabbath
day point where we arriv'd in the evening beating all the
way against the wind. Monday morning our force
sunk but luckily so near the shore that when
she sunk her gunnel was above water, so that Saturday
we were able to bail her out and tow her (to the)
landward shore of the point where we took out the three
mortars. And by halting the cannon aft battomed
her, and now she stands ready for sail the first fair
wind. Capt. Johnson arriv'd at Sabbathday point about
the time your boat did. and this morning I went
with him in your boat for the landing. When we
arriv'd we sent off the new petiaugre with the

2 18

To Mr. Douglass
 Fort Green Dec 17. 1775
 3668
 sent at 87
 Col
 May it please your excellency
 I return to you with the cannon ^{on the 11} ~~on the 11~~
~~being~~ nearly the time I committed. It would take as
 to transport them to ~~here~~ ^{as well as} it is not easy to estimate the
 difficulties we have had in getting them ^{over the lake} away to the
 advanced station of the year & contrary winds, but
 the danger is now past & ~~there~~ ^{three} days ago it was
 very uncertain whether we could have gotten them
 this season until next spring but now please God
 they must go. I have ~~gotten~~ ^{made} forty two carrying
 strong sleds & have provided eighty yoke of oxen to
 drag them as far as Springfield where ^{I shall} ~~we will~~ get
 fresh cattle to carry them to Canby - the route will
 be from here to Kinderhook from thence into Great
 Barrington Massachusetts Bay & down to Springfield
 There will be ^{scarcely} any possibility of getting ~~conveying~~ them
 here to Albany or Kinderhook but on sleds the route
 being ~~so~~ much galled, there is good sledding from
 this at present the sledding is tolerable to Saratoga
 about 26 miles; beyond ^{that is} ~~there is~~ more. I have sent for
 the sleds ^{begin} to come here & expect to move them
 to Saratoga on ^{Wednesday or} Thursday next trusting that between
 this & then we shall have a ^{fine} fall of snow which
 will ^{enable us to proceed further} make the carriage easy - if that should
 be the case I hope in 16 or 17 days time to be able to
 present to your Excellency a noble train of artillery
 as will appear by the Inventory which I have
 enclosed. I also send a list of those stores which I
 desired of Mr. Douglas to send from New York -
 I did not know then of any 13 inch mortars which
 was the reason of my ordering but few shells of
 that size. I now write to him for 500 ^{17 inch} ~~galle~~ ^{galle}
 of No. 3 & 4 - ^{asked for the purpose of these three rounds}

3840

To Mr. K. Albany Jan 7 5 1835
 My lovely dearest friend
 Those people who live as you I do never
 ought to part. It is with the greatest anxiety that I am forced to do
 so. I shall at this distance have my love at a time to when
 I thought to have been happy in your arms. I feel
 for you my love & feel for myself, but as the world has
 without a home life is a blank march in the course of events
 unprotected. In a week or two longer I am resolved to
 write her a long letter. [A man whom General Washington
 has sent express to General Ashmun has promised me to
 deliver it with his own hands to you] — for which you
 will give something — with what raptures should I receive
 a letter from my angel hands. I should think it one
 of the best tokens of heaven. I would kiss it. I would give it
 my blood. I would give it then till no part remained. I
 thought it would be the last token of her love. It would make
 the freshets in my memory, my heart is perpetually in
 my mind constantly in my heart. I wish my interests
 were as sure in heaven as I am it is in my heart. I
 would pray without ceasing for your happiness. May
 that Being who bleeds the sincere with the rays of his being
 Providence, bless you with a happy new year — on
 you may joy forever with us happy to your felicity. I am
 exceedingly concerned for fear my love should expire at
 my not being able to come at the time expected, do not
 I beseech you — consider I keep in mind the happy and
 happy meeting we shall have after two months of my long
 absence, if my Dear thinks fit with the expectation
 I do not believe she does it will go a great way in

Letter from William Knox to Henry Knox, December 14,
1775. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02437.00219)

Letter from Henry Knox to George Washington, December 17, 1775. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02437.00222)

Letter from Henry Knox to Lucy Knox, January 5, 1776.
(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02437.00237)

Dr. Phil Hamilton



Dr. Hamilton is a historian of the American Revolutionary and early republican periods and professor of history at Christopher Newport University. He has published widely on this period, including his books *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family: The Tuckers of Virginia* and *The Revolutionary War Lives and Letters of Lucy and Henry Knox*. He is also the author of *Serving the Old Dominion: A History of Christopher Newport University*.

Henry Knox (1750-1806)



E. Savage, Pinx^t

H. W. Smith, Sc^{pt}

Knox

- Left school at age 11
- Taught himself history, military strategy, and engineering
- Opened a bookstore at age 21
- Developed a plan to use sleds to pull cannons during the 1775 winter expedition and was promoted to chief of artillery in the Continental Army
- Appointed by Congress to secretary of war in 1785
- Buried with full military honors

Henry Knox, engraved by H. W. Smith, circa 1860. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02437.1073)

Lucy Knox (1756-1824)

- Member of a wealthy loyalist family
- Married Henry Knox in 1774, prior to the war
- Disowned by her family because she sided politically with her husband
- Escaped during the siege of Boston in 1775
- Pregnant throughout the 1775 expedition and gave birth in February 1776



Silhouette of Lucy Flucker Knox, circa 1790. (Massachusetts Historical Society)

Washington Gets His Guns



May 1775

Americans capture Fort Ticonderoga, where there are many large cannons.

November 1775

George Washington gives Knox the lead on the expedition for the cannons.

January 25, 1776

Cannons arrive outside Boston via sleds pulled by oxen.

March 17, 1776

British load their ships and withdraw to Nova Scotia.

April 1775

Siege of Boston takes place in the wake of Lexington and Concord.

June 1775

George Washington is appointed commander of the Continental Army.

December 17, 1775

Having reached Fort Ticonderoga, Knox writes to Washington from Lake George, NY, describing the difficulty of moving the cannons.

March 2-4, 1776

Powder for the cannons arrives and Americans fire on Boston and mount guns on Dorchester Heights.

Revolutionary War Artillery

Cannons

- Loaded with cartridge and filled with gunpowder
- Fired solid shots, grapeshots, and cannister shots
- Often carried by horse-drawn carriages
- Used for flat trajectory in battle



Mortars

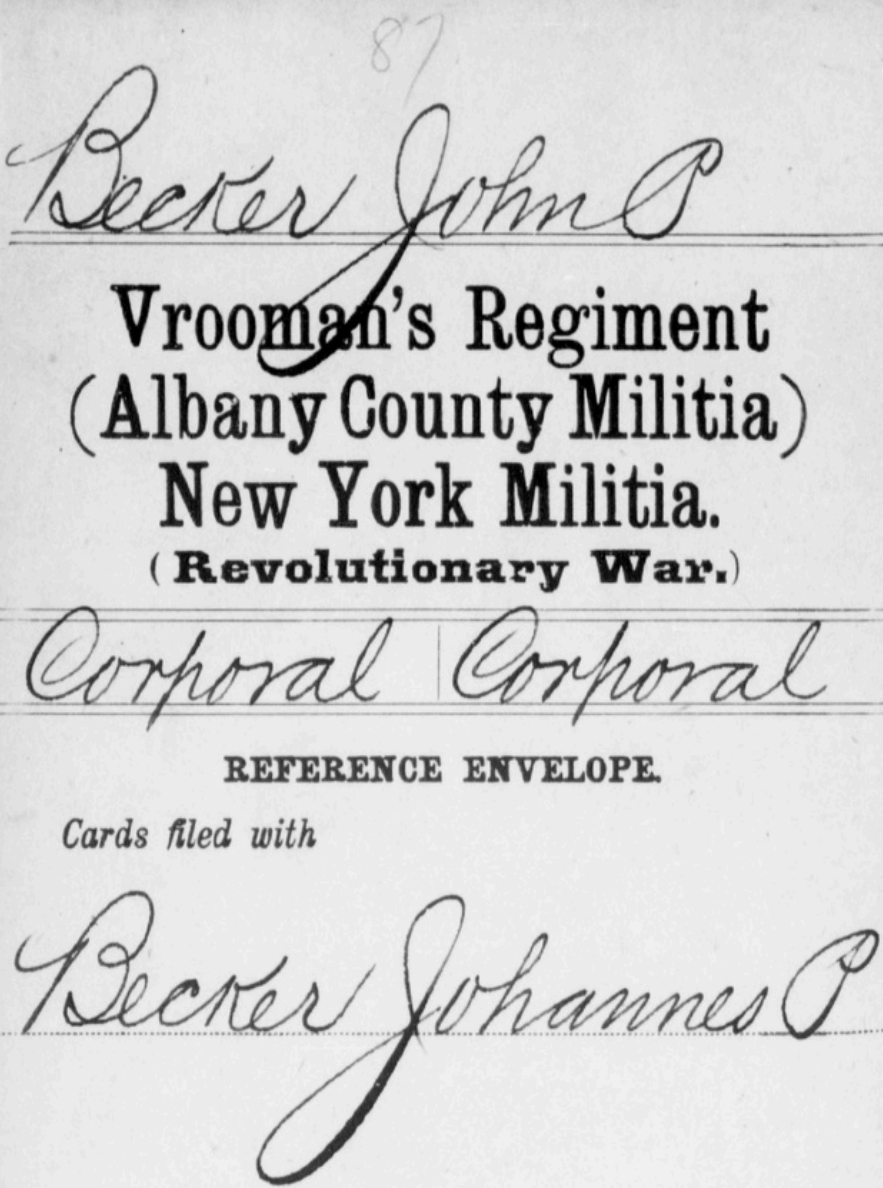
- Mounted on a flat bed with an elevated barrel
- High trajectory
- Shell exploded in the air, releasing shrapnel over enemies into forts and camps



Howitzers

- Combined mechanisms of the cannon and mortar
- Shorter barrels than cannons
- Flat and high trajectory





John Becker



“... we felt an unusual degree of interest in fulfilling our contracts. The pieces were apportioned to our respective companies. My father took in charge a heavy iron nine pounder, which required the united efforts of four horses to drag it along. Others had the heavy resistance of 18s and 24s to overcome, which required the exertions of at least eight horses. We had altogether about forty or fifty pieces to transport, and our cavalcade was quite imposing.”

– John P. Becker recounting his experience helping his father move cannons to Springfield during the 1775 winter expedition, from *The Sexagenary: Or, Reminiscences of the American Revolution*, Albany, NY, 1866.

Becker, John P. - Vrooman's Regiment
(National Archives, War Department Collection
of Revolutionary War Records)

Transporting the Guns

Letter from William Knox to Henry Knox

“We got of the Scow Sabbath day morning and immediately set of for Sabbath day point where we arriv’d in the evening, beating all the way against the wind. Monday morning our Scow sunk but luckily so near the shore that when she sank her gunnel was above water, so that yesterday we were able to bail her out and tow her to the leward shore of the point where we took out the three mortars, and by halling the cannon aft ballanc’d her, and now she stands ready for sail the first fair wind.”

Letter from William Knox to Henry Knox, December 14, 1775
(The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02437.00219)

at this time we
were 19 years &
3 months old

Wm Knox
North Landing (Du. 14. 1775)

Dear Brother
(290)

at Sabbath day point

last evening the boat arriv'd which you
sent with the letters and provisions, we ^{got} of the scow
Sabbath day morning and immediately set of for Sabbath
day point where we arriv'd in the evening beating all the
way against the wind. Monday morning our scow
sunk but luckily so near the shore that when
she sunk her gunnel was above water, so that yesterday
we were able to bail her out and tow her to the
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wind. Capt. Johnson arriv'd at Sabbath day point about
the time your boat did. and this morning I sat out
with him in your boat for the landing. when we
arriv'd we sent of the new petiaugre with the 2/8.

3947
2.18

Fort George Dec 17. 1775. 1668
May it please your Excellency
I return'd ^{on the 11} ~~here~~ ^{to this place} & brought with me the
~~the~~ being nearly the time I computed. It would take us
to transport them to ~~there~~ ^{an estimate} It is not easy ^{conceive} to estimate the
difficulties we have had getting them ~~here~~ ^{over the Lake} owing to the
advanc'd season of the year & contrary winds, but
the danger is now past ~~I think~~ ^{three} days ago it was
very uncertain whether we could have gotten them
this season untill next spring, but now please God
they must go. I have ~~gotten~~ ^{had} made forty two exceeding
strong sleds & have provided eighty yoke of oxen to
drag them as far as Springfield where ~~we will~~ ^{I shall} get
fresh Cattle to Carry them to Camp. — the route will
be from here to Kinderhook from thence into Great
Harrington Massachusetts Bay & down to Springfield
There will be ^{scarcely} any possibility of getting ~~conveying~~ them from
here to Albany or Kinderhook but on sleds the route
being ~~very~~ much gullied, there is good sledging from
that at present the sledging is tolerable to Saratoga
about 40 miles; beyond ~~there~~ ^{that is} none. I have sent for
the sled teams to come here & expect ^{begin} to move them
to Saratoga on ^{Wednesday} Thursday next trusting that between
this & then we shall have a ^{fine} fall of snow which
will ^{enable us to proceed further} make the carriage easy — if that should
be the case I hope in 16 or 17 days time to be able to
present to your Excellency a noble train of artillery
~~as will appear by the Inventory~~ ^{which} which I have
Inclos'd. I also send a list of three stores which I
desir'd of Mr. Dougal to send from New York —
I did not know then of any 13 inch mortars which
was the reason of my ordering but ~~of the shells of~~
that size I now write to him for 500. ^{17. inch} shells
for 200. ~~500.~~ 400 — ^{which for the purpose} ~~at being of those sizes would be~~

Transporting the Cannons

Letter from Henry Knox to George Washington



“It is not easy [to] conceive the difficulties we have had in getting them over the Lake owing to the advanc’d Season of the Year & contrary winds, but the danger is now past & three days ago it was very uncertain whether we could have gotten them untill next spring, but now please God they must go – I have had made forty two exceeding Strong Sleds & have provided eighty Yoke of oxen to drag them as far as Springfield where I shall get fresh Cattle to Carry them to Camp. . . .”

Letter from Henry Knox to George Washington, December 17, 1775
(The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02437.00222)

Fort George Dec 17. 1775. 1668
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about 20 miles; beyond ^{that} ~~there~~ ^{is} none. I have sent for
the sleds & teams to come here & expect ^{begin} to move them
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for 200. ~~of 4. & 4.500 — 4.500 —~~ ^{which for the purpose} ~~at being of those sizes would be~~

Transporting the Cannons

Letter from Henry Knox to George Washington



“I have sent for the Sleds & teams to come up & expect to begin to move them to Saratoga on Wednesday or Thursday next trusting that between this & that period we shall have a fine fall of Snow which will enable us to proceed further & make the Carriage easy—if that should be the case I hope in 16 or 17 days to be able to present to your Excellency a Noble train of Artillery.”

Letter from Henry Knox to George Washington, December 17, 1775

(The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02437.00222)

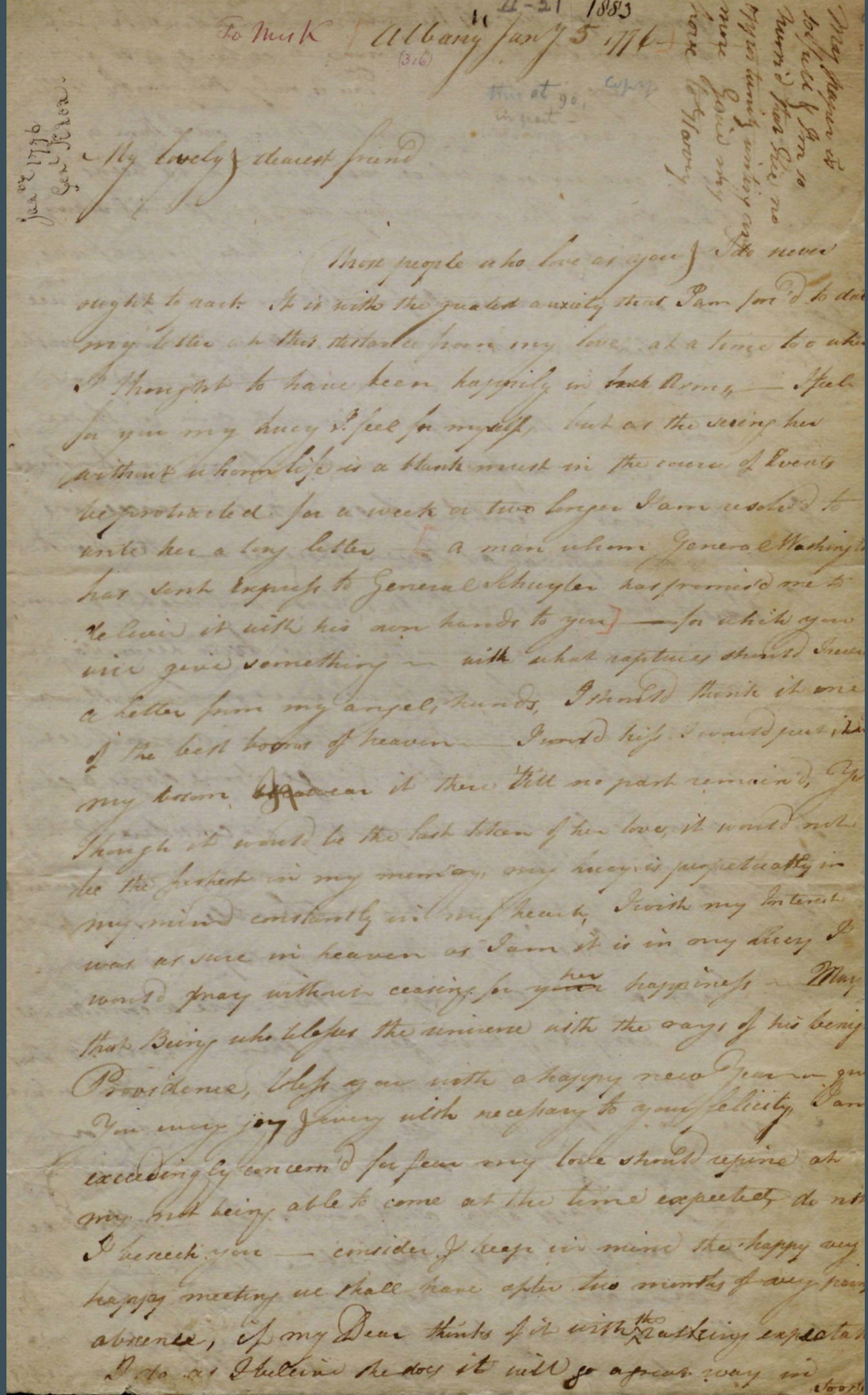
Transporting the Cannons

Letter from Henry Knox to Lucy Knox

“In my last I inform’d you which was Decr 17. that I hop’d to be with you in three weeks . . . the weather for three or four days past has been intolerably warm considering my wishes – the Thaw has been so great that I’ve trembl’d for the Consequences, for without Snow my very important charge cannot get along – I came from lake George some days ago In the severely cold weather & suffer’d by it considerably. . . .”

“My brother is now at lake George Buisly [sic] employ’d in loading the sleds as they come up – there are a considerable number employ’d in getting them down to this place where If the weather should come cold which I hope for – they will all be on next Tuesday or Wednesday – & the next Tuesday at Springfield & four or five days after at Cambridge. . . .”

Letter from Henry Knox to Lucy Knox, January 5, 1776
(The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02437.00237)

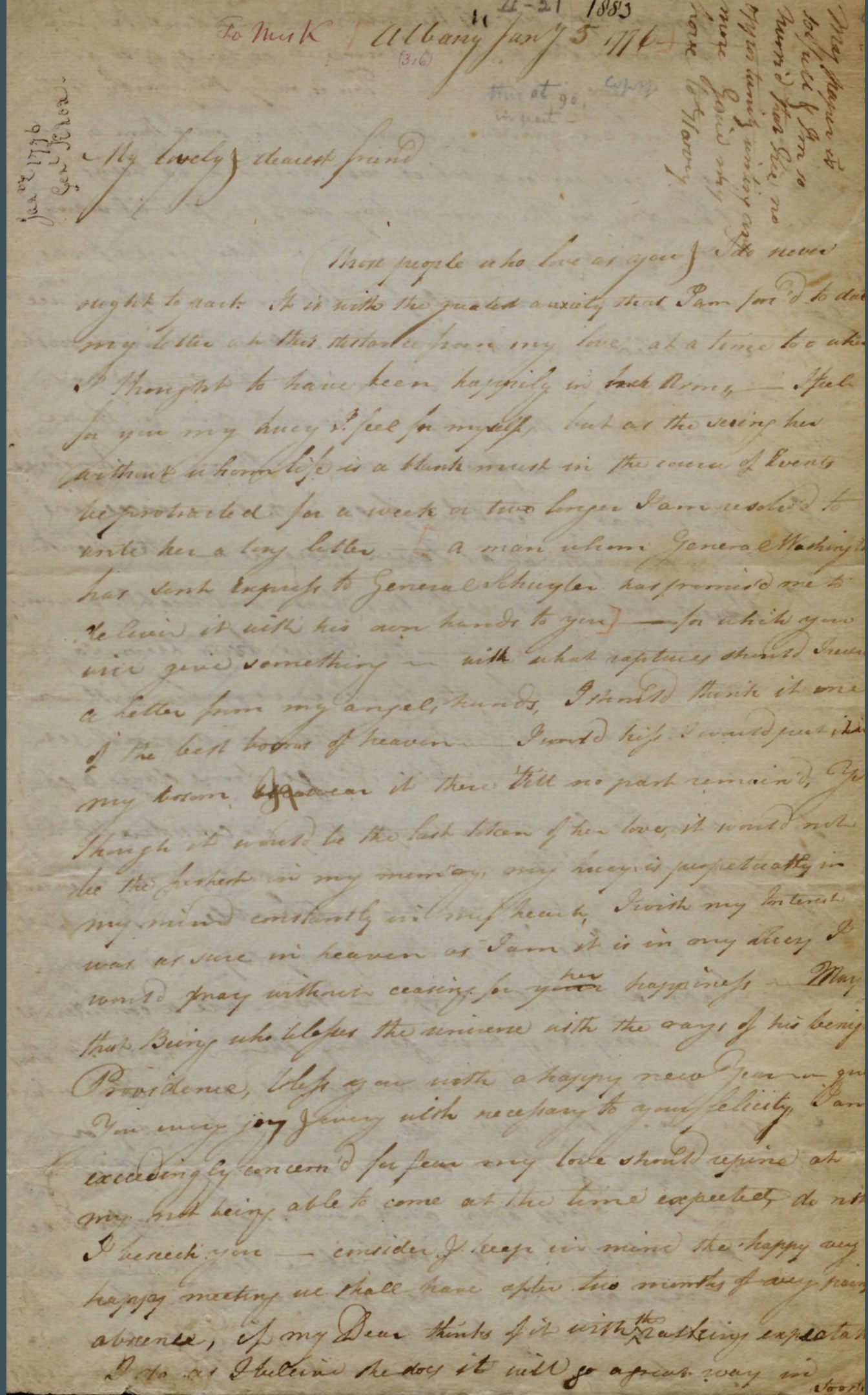


Description of New York

Letter from Henry Knox to Lucy Knox

“A little about my travels – New York is a place where I think in General the houses are better than at Boston – they are Generally of Brick – and three Stories high with the largest kind of windows – Their Churches are Grand their Colleges & workhouse & hospitals Most excellently situated & also exceedingly commodious their principal streets much wider than ours. . . . the people – why – the people, are magnificent in their equipages which are numerous in their house furniture which is fine – In their pride & conceit which are inimitable, in their profaneness – which is intolerable, in their want of principle which is prevalent – In their Toryism which is Unsufferable & for which they must repent in dust & ashes. . . .”

Letter from Henry Knox to Lucy Knox, January 5, 1776
(The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02437.00237)

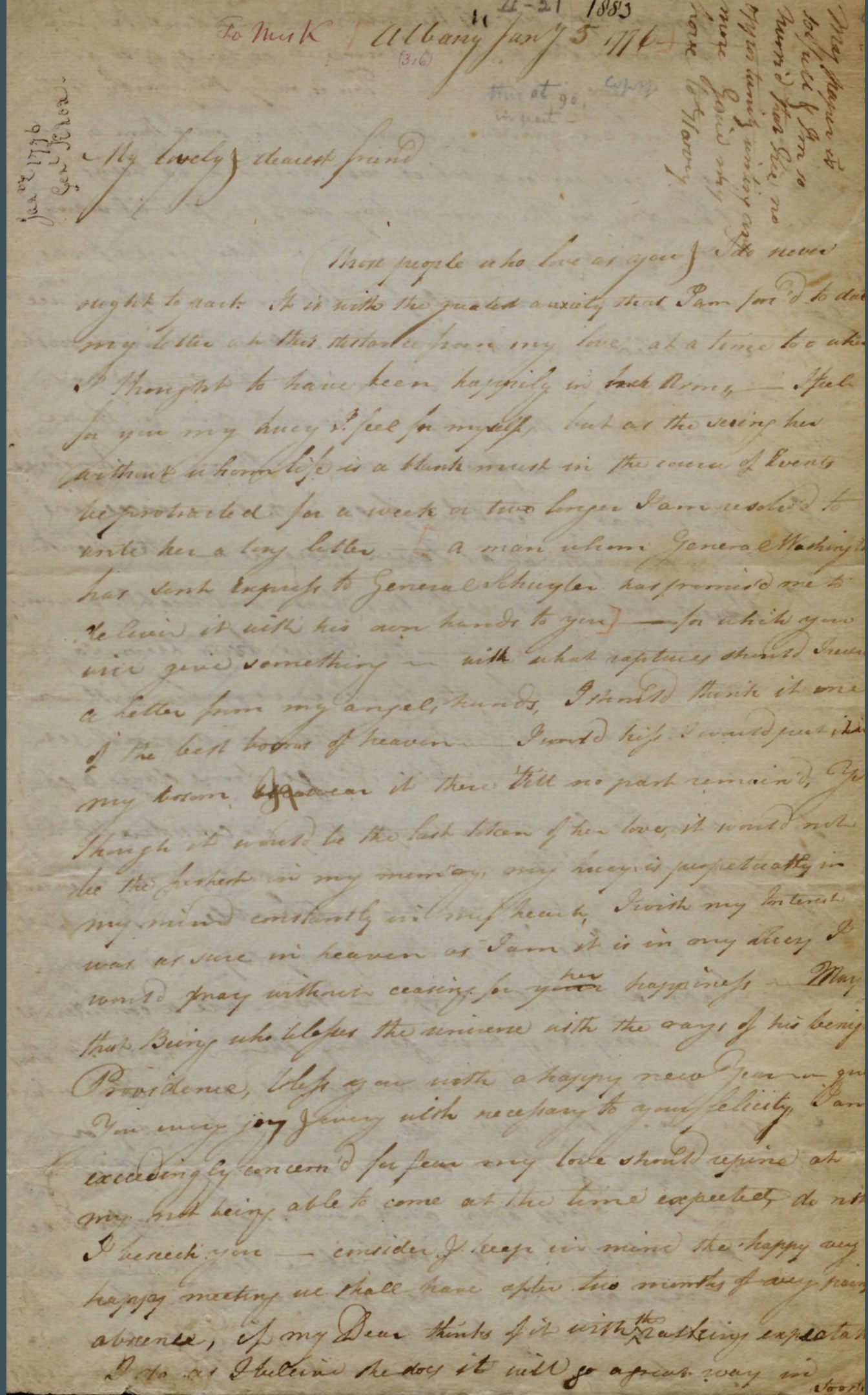


Missing Lucy

Letter from Henry Knox to Lucy Knox

“I am exceedingly concern’d for fear my love should repine at my not being able to come at the time expected. . . . This is only the fourth letter that I have had an opportunity to write to you, one of them a very little sneaking one indeed, which was owing to its being written before day in the most pressing hurry as General Schuyler had just then arriv’d from Ticonderoga over Lake George as was going to set out immediately for Albany – often since when I reflected upon its shortness – I would almost wish I had sent none. . . .”

Letter from Henry Knox to Lucy Knox, January 5, 1776
(The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02437.00237)



Revolutionary Military Strategy

- Most soldiers were farmers and merchants with no formal military training
- Fabian Strategy/War of Attrition
- Spy networks
- French alliance

America's First Ally. The Return of Lafayette with Assurances of Good Will from France (1780), based on a painting by Edward P. Moran, The Mentor Association, New York, 1918 (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC08878.0085)



Q&A

Wm Knox II-2
North Landing Dec^r 14. 1775.
Dear Brother
Last evening the boat arriv'd which you
sent with the letters and provisions we ^{got} of the crew
Sabbath day morning and immediately set off for Sabbath
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she sunk her gunnel was above water, so that Saturday
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the time your boat did. and this morning I sat out
with him in your boat for the landing, when we
arriv'd we sent off the new petiaugre with the 2^d 18.

Fort George Dec^r 17. 1775. 3668
May it please your Excellency
I return ^{to this place} ^{on the 15th} with the cannon ^{concerning} ^{over the lake}
being nearly the time I computed it would take us
to transport them to ^{the lake} ^{concerning} ^{over the lake} it is not easy to state the
difficulties we have had getting them ^{over the lake} ^{concerning} ^{over the lake} the
advance season of the year & contrary winds, but
the danger is now past & ^{on the 15th} ^{concerning} ^{over the lake} those days ago it was
very uncertain whether we could have gotten them
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94th 400 - 95th 400 - 96th 400 - 97th 400 - 98th 400 - 99th 400 - 100th 400 - 101th 400 - 102th 400 - 103th 400 - 104th 400 - 105th 400 - 106th 400 - 107th 400 - 108th 400 - 109th 400 - 110th 400 - 111th 400 - 112th 400 - 113th 400 - 114th 400 - 115th 400 - 116th 400 - 117th 400 - 118th 400 - 119th 400 - 120th 400 - 121th 400 - 122th 400 - 123th 400 - 124th 400 - 125th 400 - 126th 400 - 127th 400 - 128th 400 - 129th 400 - 130th 400 - 131th 400 - 132th 400 - 133th 400 - 134th 400 - 135th 400 - 136th 400 - 137th 400 - 138th 400 - 139th 400 - 140th 400 - 141th 400 - 142th 400 - 143th 400 - 144th 400 - 145th 400 - 146th 400 - 147th 400 - 148th 400 - 149th 400 - 150th 400 - 151th 400 - 152th 400 - 153th 400 - 154th 400 - 155th 400 - 156th 400 - 157th 400 - 158th 400 - 159th 400 - 160th 400 - 161th 400 - 162th 400 - 163th 400 - 164th 400 - 165th 400 - 166th 400 - 167th 400 - 168th 400 - 169th 400 - 170th 400 - 171th 400 - 172th 400 - 173th 400 - 174th 400 - 175th 400 - 176th 400 - 177th 400 - 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Upcoming Programs

INSIDE THE VAULT:

January 8 at 7 p.m. ET (4 p.m. PT)

- Continental Army Soldiers' Experiences at Valley Forge and Beyond with Rick Atkinson, recipient of the 2020 George Washington Prize

February 5 at 7 p.m. ET (4 p.m. PT)

- James Forten's "Letters from a Man of Colour" with Dr. Julie Winch, historian and author of *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten*

BOOK BREAKS: December 7 at 2 p.m. ET (11 a.m. PT)

- Edward F. O'Keefe will discuss his book *The Loves of Theodore Roosevelt: The Women Who Created a President*



The Declaration of Independence at 250

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

December 11, 2025, at 7–8:30 p.m. ET

- The Abolitionist Origins of the Second American Revolution with Dr. Manisha Sinha, University of Connecticut

January 8, 2026, at 7–8:30 p.m. ET

- The Rediscovery of America: The Declaration of Independence and the Perils of Narrative History with Dr. Ned Blackhawk, Yale University

April 8, 2026, at 7–8:30 p.m. ET

- The Long Arc of Justice: Tracing America's Civil Rights Evolution with Dr. Ashley Farmer, University of Texas at Austin

