

Aikin's Volunteers

Teenage boys become military men

Aikin's Volunteers formed on September 3, 1814. Aware of the impending attack, a group of teenagers, too young for military service, gathered in Plattsburgh. According to member Henry K. Averill, they wanted to "render all the assistance that lay in our power." After electing twenty-one-year-old Captain Martin J. Aikin as their leader, they quickly marched to meet the British in Chazy. "On this day, the heat of the sun was almost unsufferable to persons not accustomed to traveling on foot and carrying a heavy gun - of which description there were not a few in this company - however the scorching rays of the vertical sun were succeeded by a dark and rainy night."

The young boys worked to annoy the British troops as the troops marched along the Beekmantown Road (present day Route 22) toward Plattsburgh. Stopping at Culver Hill in Beekmantown, General Benjamin Mooers asked Aikin's young men "to strike through the woods into the east road, and annoy the enemy's flank..." Aikin's Volunteers were instrumental in aiding the militia forces. They were part of the force that took up defensive positions in an old sawmill on the Saranac River "where there was a constant firing kept up across the river." Aikin's Volunteers continued fighting as the enemy retreated across the Salmon River. They stayed in service until September 12, 1814; one member of the company was killed. After the British retreated to Canada, the unit disbanded.

General Alexander Macomb tried to issue military rifles to each member of the company, but was informed that he did not have the authority to do so. On May 20, 1826, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution awarding flintlock breech-loading military rifles to each member of Aikin's Volunteers "for their gallantry and patriotic services as a volunteer corps, during the Siege of Plattsburgh..." A silver plate was fixed to the stock of each rifle, bearing the name of its new owner. Rifles were awarded to Martin Aiken, Azariah Flagg, Ira Wood, Gustavus Bird, James Trowbridge, Hazen Mooers, Henry K. Averill, St. John B. L. Skinner, Frederick Allen, Hiram Walworth, Ethan Everist, Amos Soper, James Patten, Bartemus Brooks, Melancthon Travis, Smith Bateman, and Flavel Williams. These young men immortalized themselves in North Country history by serving their country for just ten days.

After reading this selection, read **Nine Days a Soldier**, pages 4 – 8 of **The Journal of H.K. Averill, Sr** and listen to Stan Ransom's song "*Boys at the Bridge*".

Questions for discussion:

When were Aikin's Volunteers formed?

Who was the leader of the group?

What was their job during the British invasion of Plattsburgh? (give 2 examples)

Where were the places Aikin's Volunteers marched to between September 4th and September 11th?

Did the boys see any fighting? If so, where?

Were any members of Aikin's Volunteers killed?

What action is Stan Ransom referring to in his song "Boys at the Bridge"?

How long did the boys serve?

What did the United States House of Representatives do on May 20, 1826?

Note – **The Journal of H.K. Averill, Sr.** , **Nine Days a Soldier**, and the CD: *The Battle of Plattsburgh: Music from the War of 1812*, Stan Ransom - The Connecticut Peddler are available from the History Shoppe of the Battle of Plattsburgh Association. Contact the Battle of Plattsburgh Association for purchase.

School Days

The School Year

Most of the time, the school district rented a space for the establishment of the school, supplied benches for the students, and announced when the term would begin. The winter term usually began after Thanksgiving and continued for approximately 10 to 12 weeks, the time when young men were not needed on the farm. The summer term usually began in May and was for young children and girls.

Schools were not usually co-educational except for young children, and in schools that were co-educational, boys sat on one side and girls on the other side of the school room. Students were not enrolled in grades but advanced according to their abilities.

Subjects

Education was memorization, and rote learning was standard. Books taught reading, spelling, and arithmetic, and were filled with lessons (religious in nature) on values, morals and patriotism/nationalism.

Schooling was necessary for women to be good daughters, wives, mothers, and teachers of their children. Benjamin Rush wrote in 1817 that women and children should be educated so they could be controlled.

School Shopping

Students provided their own books, made their own copy books, quill pens and inks. Students normally sat on backless benches, not desks as we know them.

Paper was scarce, and valuable. Lessons were sometimes scratched into the dirt floor of the schoolhouse, or done on a blackboard (a piece of blackened wood). Blackboards were not common in the classroom until after 1820.

Teachers

Before 1820, most instructors were males called "masters." Masters or teachers were often boarded by the district with the families of the students according to how many children in the family attended the term. A master would earn \$10 to \$12 dollars a month; a female teacher would earn \$4 to \$10 dollars a month.

Questions for discussion:

When did the winter term begin? How long did it last? Why didn't young men attend the summer term?

What was the seating arrangement in a co-educational school?

What subjects were taught?

What school supplies were students expected to bring?

Male teachers were called "masters". Where did they often live?

What was the pay for a master teacher and a female teacher?