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The Founder of the University of Vermont

A Centennial Oration

on the Life and Public Services of

General Ira Allen

Delivered

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The Life and Public Services of General Ira Allen.

The early history of the New Hampshire Grants presents few incidents which cannot be paralleled in other American colonies. But from the year 1764, the date of the Order in Council transferring the district to the jurisdiction of New York, the panorama, which hitherto had unrolled itself in quiet and orderly sequence, changes to an exciting drama with rapidly shifting scenes, an intricate plot, and an uncertain issue. So serious and so hazardous are the complications in which the interests both of the nascent state and of the individual actors are involved, that the feelings of the historical onlooker are stirred with alternate hope and fear as to the outcome. There are points in the unfolding action where the case seems simply desperate, knots which human ingenuity seems incompetent to untie or to cut, obstacles which no vigor or unanimity of effort is likely to evade or to overcome.

The danger threatens now on the west, and now on the east, and then on both sides at once, and again takes the ominous shape of hostile invasion from the north; appears sometimes as intestine dissension or revolt, and again as a spirit of distrust or positive hostility in the Continental Congress. The appeal is made successively to popular argument, to diplomacy, and, these failing, to the musket and the beech seal.

To the spectator, the case seems more than once already decided against the upstart republic. The odds are too great, the enemies of the would-be State too many and too closely united, save for that magnificent courage which was invincible, because it never admitted that it was worsted, whether by logic or by arms. During the more than quarter-century of the travail which ended in the first accession to the original family of thirteen States, the political Lucina sat perversely cross-legged, if so she might possibly thwart the benign purpose of liberty and the gracious decrees of fate. [1]

Most of the prominent actors on this stage have been treated with something like justice, and have had a niche accorded them in the temple of history. The prudent soldiership of Warner, the firm policy of Chittenden, the solid patriotism of the Robinsons and the Fays and the Brownsons, Bradley's brilliant career and Baker's untimely death,—these

[1] The case of Vermont was saved, so to say, by the dishonesty and injustice of the New York officials. If New York land jobbers had been less greedy, if New York governors—and Lieut.-Gov. Colden in particular—had not in their hunger for fees recklessly regranted lands in disregard of the king's mandate; if the rulings of New York courts had not been in defiance of law and facts; if the administration attempted by New York had been characterized by a fair measure of justice and an occasional regard for the chartered rights of the actual settlers; if Governor Clinton had not been unreasonably obstinate,—if any of these *ifs* had been facts, the dwellers between Lake Champlain and the Connecticut would to-day be contentedly paying taxes to New York, and rejoicing in the fame and power of the Empire State.

should be familiar themes to all Vermonters who care to know their political ancestry.

Most prominent of the whole group, like a comet moving athwart a constellation, shines the fame of Ethan Allen. Impulsive and imperious, prompt in decision and in action, self-confident, courageous even to rashness, he is the best known, if not the most admired, of all the figures of those early days. Indeed his military reputation has served to obscure his undoubted merits as a defender by reason and argument of the chartered rights of the settlers on the Grants. His services as envoy and agent of the State government are by no means to be overlooked in making up his record. He struck as effective blows for the liberties of Vermont with voice and pen sometimes as with the sword. Perhaps history has awarded him his full meed of honor. The American school boy can recite his exploits, and the pilgrim's homage is challenged by column and statue rising yonder above his honored dust, but comparatively few are acquainted with the part played in the same protracted struggle by Ethan's youngest brother.

The soldier's gaudy uniform attracts all eyes. His unselfish and absolute offering of life and fortune on his country's altar compels admiration. Yet the victories of the general may be of less moment than those of the diplomatist or the statesman, albeit the latter are won in the seclusion of the cabinet or the council chamber.

And yet Ira Allen, as well as a third member of this noted brotherhood, was also a soldier. Before he was twenty he had served as a lieutenant with the Green Mountain Boys. At the age of twenty-four in 1775 he assisted Ethan Allen in taking the British garrisons on Lake Champlain, as also General Montgomery in the taking of St. Johns and Montreal. A few weeks later we find him responsible for an important movement in connection with the unsuccessful attack upon Quebec. At the date of the Dorset convention of January, 1776, Lieutenant Ira Allen was with the army before Quebec. A month later he leaves the field of arms and the open contest with Great Britain to defend the imperilled rights of the settlers on the Grants against the aggressions of New York land jobbers, and to concert plans with others for the organization of a new State. In the following July he appears in the convention at Dorset, as delegate from the town of Colchester, and is assigned a place on important committees. In the September session his name is equally prominent, being associated in responsible duties with those of Jonas Fay and Thomas Chittenden. The declaration having been passed unanimously that the territory of the New Hampshire Grants ought to be free and independent, and the covenant signed, Allen is designated as one of two commissioners to traverse the counties to the east of the mountains, and commend to the minds of the people there the advantages of a separation from

the government of New York. Of the convention held the next October at Westminster, as also of that of the January following, Captain Ira Allen was clerk, and likewise an influential member of the committee selected to propose a plan for further action.[1] And once and again in the months which followed, his ready pen was put in motion to defend the convention and the people of the district against the arguments and the aspersions of the officers and agents of New York.

The affairs, civil, military and diplomatic, of the embryotic State, were directed by the Council of Safety, which ruled the Grants with an absolute yet benign authority, and watched with a sleepless vigilance the movements of British without, and of Tories within, her borders, and was alert to anticipate or to oppose the equally unfriendly attempts of New York politicians and speculators.

The guiding minds in this council were undoubtedly Thomas Chittenden, nineteen times elected pilot of the newly launched ship of state, and Ira Allen. To estimate the

[1] The intense earnestness which characterized these builders of a new State is very impressively exhibited by a mere list of the dates of their conventions previous to the adoption of the constitution. There were three conventions at Dorset beginning respectively January 16, July 21, and September 25, 1776; two at Westminster, October 30, 1776, and January 15, 1777; two at Windsor, June 4 and July 2, 1777. Five conventions within one year! In the five years, 1778-82, the assembly held fifteen sessions. New York was allowed to gain nothing by virtue of their inaction.

responsibility resting on these two men, we must recollect that Remember Baker's promising career had been suddenly closed by an untimely death, that Ethan Allen was at this time a captive in England, and that Seth Warner and Robert Cochran were serving with the continental army until the close of the Revolutionary war.

Chittenden was resolute, undaunted, a very rock for firmness, a tower of strength for his practical wisdom, qualities which were admirably reinforced by the foresight, the political sagacity, the fertility of resource, of his principal coadjutor.

An incident in the campaign of 1777 may be cited as indicative of the man's quality and influence with the Council. The evacuation of Ticonderoga by the American forces on the sixth day of July had spread consternation throughout New England, and especially through the Grants, which lay directly in the track of the invading army. The Vermont Council of Safety had hastened from Windsor, where, during the progress of that providential thunderstorm, the convention had just adopted the constitution "paragraph by paragraph," to Manchester, that they might take instant and appropriate measures for the defence of the frontier. The council assumed that the American generals had, of course, already sent off expresses to the authorities of Massachusetts and New Hampshire for immediate assistance.

Allen could not accept this view of the case. In this

emergency an hour's delay might bring irretrievable disaster. These same generals, he knew by his own personal observation when an envoy of the State the month before to the general in command at Ticonderoga, had been strangely, if not culpably, careless in regard to precautions against the enemy, and they might have been equally negligent in the present juncture. He withdrew from the council, wrote despatches to the governors of the states named, signed them as Secretary of the Council of State, prepared expresses, advanced money for their necessary expenses, and, this done, showed his letters, and prevailed on the council to authorize their transmission in its name. They proved to be the first official communications received by the authorities of these states.[1]

We all know the sequel. New Hampshire roused herself to meet the peril. Stark and his men gathered at Number Four[2] and made their forced march to Manchester. A few days later the battle of Bennington had been fought and won under the general and by the aid of the forces which Allen's missive had summoned.

It is due to Allen's memory to say further that the information obtained by him, and the counsel given by him to Stark, caused Stark to anticipate the engagement by one day,

[1] The letter to the governor of New Hampshire, and his reply, may be seen in Slade's Vermont State Papers, 79, 80.

[2] Now Charlestown, N. H.

and attack Baum just before he was to be reinforced by 1500 men. It is idle to conjecture what would have been the issue, but for the timely action of the secretary of the council and his sagacious advice, or if both Stark and the council had not disregarded Schuyler's peremptory orders to have the troops proceed with all haste to Saratoga. This was the first break in a long series of disasters, which began with the fall of Montgomery eight months before.

It is enough to know that the victory at Bennington rekindled in the continental army and in the whole country the hope and courage so nearly quenched by repeated reverses;—that it contributed directly to the surrender of Burgoyne a few weeks later at Saratoga; and that this surrender paved the way to that alliance with France (February, 1778) which went so far to turn the scales at last in favor of the revolted colonies—and further, to remember that this series of momentous consequences connects itself at two critical points with the quick decision of that young secretary of the Council of Safety who would leave nothing to uncertainty and delay.

The truth of history requires us to connect the name of Ira Allen with another operation which contributed to the surrender at Saratoga. The bold attempt about a month after Baum's defeat, and a month before Burgoyne's capitulation, to cut the British line of communication with Canada, also originated with the Vermont Council of Safety. The secretary

of the council does not hesitate to claim his share in the credit to be given for the taking of Mount Hope and Mount Defiance and the posts on Lake George, the liberation of the American prisoners taken at Hubbardton, and the capture of three hundred of the enemy. This movement alarmed the British at Saratoga and set them to intrenching. The project carried into effect by the hands of Colonels Brown and Warner and Captain Ebenezer Allen, had been entertained first by the agile brain of Ira Allen and accepted by the soldiership of General Lincoln.

One of the most serious difficulties confronting the infant State was the utter lack of one of the two main sinews of war. Gold they had none, nor could they devise any means to obtain it. The Council had not a shilling of public money, no credit, no power to lay or collect taxes, and were not personally able to advance any large sums from their private purses. For a whole day they discussed the situation, but found no light. Just before adjournment a member of the council moved, apparently with a touch of sarcasm, "that Mr. Ira Allen, the youngest member of the council, who insisted on raising a regiment while the majority were for only two companies of 60 men each, might be requested to discover ways and means to support a regiment, and to make his report at sunrising on the morrow." When the council convened the next morning, his scheme was ready. He proposed the ap-

pointment of commissioners of sequestration, the seisure and sale at auction of the goods and chattels of all who had [joined] or should join the common enemy, and the payment of the proceeds to the treasurer of the Council of Safety. His measure was adopted by the council and the regimental officers appointed. The effect was instantaneous. The government was at once possessed of all the funds it needed. Bounties were offered and paid at the expense of the enemies of the State of Vermont and of the United States. In a fortnight Vermont had a full regiment of rangers ready to protect the imperilled homes of the young republic. From this time till the close of the war there was no more stringency in the State treasury.[1] It was the resourceful brain of Ira Allen which first in the United States resorted to confiscation of the tories' estates to fill an empty or exhausted treasury.

No son of Vermont can read without mingled amazement and indignation the detailed history of those perilous years. Congress and its agents were swayed by the councils of New York. No provision was made for guarding the borders of the State. The military frontier was so drawn as to protect Albany, and cover the settlements along the Hudson, leaving

[1] When Ira Allen's accounts as State treasurer were audited in February, 1787, it was shown that, out of a total revenue from March, 1777, to October, 1786, of £327,987, the sum of £190,433 had been received from confiscated property, as against £66,815 for grants of land, and £45,948 from taxes.

Vermont without defence from invasion. Not a gun was left to the Green Mountain Boys, not a pick or spade, of all the munitions of war which their valor had taken at Ticonderoga and Crown Point. Their sole reward for acts of heroism and unfaltering loyalty to the common cause, was desertion and neglect. The more northerly settlements had been abandoned in the spring of 1776. Two years later it was a serious question whether there should not be a general exodus from all the western half of the district to places within the lines of the continental army. In the beginning of 1780 the dismemberment of Vermont seemed to be foredoomed. New York claimed everything up to the west bank of the Connecticut. New Hamphsire saw her opportunity, and pressed her claim to so much of the district as lay to the east of the central range of mountains. Massachusetts, disinclined to be a mere onlooker if the friendless would-be State was to be partitioned, revived her ancient claim to a large section on the south. A British army, 10,000 strong, was hovering on the Canadian border. Escape from so many and so powerful foes seems an impossibility.

But Vermont was no lamb in the midst of wolves, no maiden frightened into helplessness by the dragons that on all sides wait to devour. How to make reprisals, how to confound the plots of those who were confederated against her, is the sole study of her leading spirits. Again the fertile

brain of the secretary evolves a scheme to cope with the emergency.[1] The New Hampshire Grants assume the aggressive, and the so-called East and West Unions are organized. Twelve districts to the west of the Grants are detached from New York and welded to Vermont by their own deliberate action in convention. New Hampshire is weakened by the voluntary secession of 35 towns which have resolved to cast in their fortunes with the outlaws of the Green Mountains. The political pot is in furious ebullition by reason of this organized revolt of towns which had hitherto been outside the despised and persecuted, but defiant, republic. The war had been pushed into Africa, and with the desired result. Vermont asserted her claim to all the territory from Mason's line (which, it will be remembered, was drawn at a distance of but sixty miles from the sea) to the Hudson river. Her domain was doubled. Internal disaffection was silenced, and friends outside were emboldened to aid her now hopeful cause. The

[1] This may have been too positively stated. In a centennial address at Salisbury, Conn., in 1841, Chief Justice Samuel Church said, referring to the East and West Unions and the Haldimand negotiations: "In her dilemma, Vermont's most sagacious men resorted to the councils of her old friends of Litchfield county, and it is said that her final course was shaped, and her designs accomplished, by the advice of a confidential council assembled at the house of [brigadier general, afterward] Governor [Oliver] Wolcott, in the village of Litchfield." It will be remembered that the Allens, Chittendens, Chipmans, Galushas, Skinner, and other men of prominence in the early days of Vermont. came from Litchfield county, Conn. *Gov. and Council of Vt.* II. 133.

new accessions were enthusiastic over their change of allegiance. It is true, these Unions lasted less than a year. While Allen was absent on an important mission to the Continental Congress, the legislature, in the hope of obtaining immediate admission to Congress by following its rather imperative advice, dissolved both Unions with a haste which was not approved by the projector of this countercheck to the encroachments of Vermont's greedy and selfish neighbors. This bit of political strategy had however accomplished the chief object of its author. It had compelled the respect of the contiguous States, and raised the struggling commonwealth to a vantage ground which it never lost. It was a significant step in the difficult advance toward a position of recognized autonomy.

Naturally enough, this annexation of territory, though effected by peaceful means, was promptly confronted on either border by menaces of war. New York marched 500 men into the disputed territory, who were resolutely faced by as many Vermonters, both parties waiting only for the word that should begin a civil war. Allen was sent to negotiate between the two armies and restore peace if possible. His best endeavors proving fruitless, he gained a promise from the Vermont commander to await further orders from the council, whereupon, in accordance with his advice, an additional army of 500 mounted men with field pieces appears suddenly on the

field to reinforce the Vermonters, and the New York general deems it prudent to retire, honor safe and no blood spilled.

A like critical condition of affairs upon the eastern border was met and obviated by the vigor of Chittenden aided by the adroit management of Allen. Time forbids however a recital of the more indirect, but not less clever, expedients by which the threatened collision was obviated. For ticklish and doubtful emergencies Ira Allen seems always to have been the council's, and the governor's, most trusted agent.

Far the most important however of the diplomatic missions intrusted to him, and the one fraught with the largest results to Vermont and to the United States, is still to be named.

The isolated condition of the State, the hostility of her neighbors both on the east and west, the contempt with which the Continental Congress had treated her claims to statehood, the serious disaffection within her own borders; these, in combination with the daring and independent spirit which the Grants had always exhibited, and especially of late in establishing the East and West Unions, inspired a hope in the agents of Great Britain that the "Bennington mob" and their adherents might be detached from the league of the colonies, and so Vermont, recovered to her allegiance, form an important stepping-stone to the reconquest of the insurgent states. Once ranged on the side of the mother country, these Ver-

monters, whom Burgoyne—and he had occasion to know—had styled "the most active and most rebellious race on the continent," would be powerful allies of the king and a terror to the rebels.

The state of feeling in the Grants was well known to the British generals through their spies, both in the district and in Congress. If King George was disliked, New York was hated. Every blow struck by Vermonters for the general enfranchisement had served but to hasten the day when the slavery against which for ten years they had contended should be riveted upon them. Great Britain was a distant enemy, and besides, there was in the minds of no inconsiderable fraction of the inhabitants a strong affection for the land of their fathers. Life would still be endurable if the sway of the mother country should be reëstablished. Her rule took on a mild and maternal aspect, when compared with the exactions, robberies and insults caused or countenanced by the government of the Province and the State of New York.

As Allen put the matter in his first interview with the British commissioners:—"He should not deny but principle inclined him and Vermont in general for the success of America, but interest and self-preservation (if Congress continued to oppress them) more strongly inclined them to wish for the success of Great Britain, and to fight like devils against their oppressors, be they who they might."

Ethan Allen had been sounded on the matter in the summer of 1780, and in a letter to the Continental Congress soon after, he had frankly declared: "That Vermont had an indubitable right to agree on terms of a cessation of hostilities with Great Britain, if the United States persisted in rejecting her application for a union with them." Plainly, as Allen says, the Vermonters could not be expected to defend the independence of the United States, while at the same time the United States had full liberty to block and ruin the independence of Vermont.

Negotiations were at once opened with the British authorities, ostensibly to arrange an exchange of prisoners. The chief agent in the exploiting of this scheme was Colonel Ira Allen, assisted by Major Joseph Fay, though Ethan Allen, and later a few others, were associated with them in the responsibility.

After a few days' conference with the British commissioners on Lake Champlain, to the surprise and mystification of everybody except the few in the secret, the British forces retired to winter quarters in Canada, and the Vermont militia as quietly returned to their firesides. This, however, was but a temporary truce. In April of 1781, the British had a force of 10,000 men in Canada, ready to descend upon the frontiers. Vermont was utterly at their mercy. How could she meet the exigency? Jealousies had already been aroused by the

truce of the previous year, and the spies both of Congress and of the British were everywhere. To avoid suspicion, it was resolved to send but a single commissioner on this delicate and dangerous enterprise, and Ira Allen was the man selected.

His departure having been delayed for some days for reasons personal and political, Governor Chittenden, General Ethan Allen, and others, were so impressed with the unlikelihood of success, and the great hazard attending the venture, that, indispensable though it seemed to the safety, nay, to the very being of the State, they advised and entreated him to abandon the project. All concerned were in peril—governor, councilors, and particularly their emissary,—should any proof of such treasonable negotiations fall into the hands of the spies of New York, New Hampshire, or the American Congress. Both property and life were at stake.

Three times after he had mounted his horse on that critical first of May did Ethan Allen, anxious for his brother's safety, and mindful of his own sufferings in prison, detain him for further converse. The intrepid Ethan, reckless of personal peril, quailed at the thought of the risks which Ira was now to face. Ira Allen was firm against both doubts and fears. By this effort only was it possible to save the existence of the State. It was the sole remaining means of averting impending ruin. He had faith that he could find some means to accomplish the business intrusted to him. He assured his

friends that he was not afraid of present danger from the British, the United States, or the violence of parties in Vermont. He feared rather, as he said, that in case of success, of which he had no doubt, the British government would never forget nor forgive him; that all his life this powerful and intriguing nation would be against him; but, as the commissioner of a sovereign, free and independent State, he would assume all risks in a firm resolve so to conduct the business that no just cause of complaint could ever arise. So, facing an uncertainty and a danger which dismayed even the hero of Ticonderoga, he began his journey to the British camp.

After private conferences lasting through 17 days, a cartel was arranged and an armistice verbally agreed upon. But no pressure could induce the wary minister of Vermont to set down in writing the terms on which Vermont was to become the favored colony of the crown, though he averred that the people of the State were weary of the war and would sooner submit to the king than to the State of New York. As Governor Chittenden adroitly puts the case in a letter[1] to Washington in the following November, "Colonel Allen, while negotiating the exchange of prisoners, was treated with great politeness, and entertained with political matters, which necessity obliged him to humor in that easy manner that

[1] From the pen of Ira Allen, if one may judge by internal evidence.

might serve the interests of this State in its extreme critical situation."

This was in May. The General Assembly met in June, and the air was rife with rumors, and the legislators beset with spies from either side of the line. But all to no purpose. The legislature was as much in the dark as the rest of the world. An investigation of the matter was ordered. Governor Chittenden gravely admitted the arrangement for an exchange of prisoners, and referred the House to Allen for further explanation. So dexterous, so apparently unreserved, was his statement, that everybody was satisfied, legislature, council, people, and spies of all parties, and yet the momentous secret was not betrayed.[1]

Nor was this the only occasion on which the address and imperturbability of the Vermont plenipotentiary saved this

[1] There seems to have been one exception to the general fidelity of those who were privy to these negotiations. Writing in 1807, Allen says: "When his excellency Isaac Tichenor Esquire was brigade Major in 1781, he was confidentially by his General led into the private negotiations with the British in Canada; but he, Judas like, betrayed the secrets intrusted to him by the commandant of the troops of Vermont, in Castleton." And he significantly adds: "Surely there are sufficient men of candor and ability, to fill every office in the State of Vermont." Tichenor was at this time a candidate for the highest office in the State.

Tichenor was governor 1797–1806, and again in 1808, thrice U. S. senator, and five years judge of the Supreme Court. That Allen had no confidence in Tichenor appears elsewhere.

difficult and dangerous negotiation from premature disclosure and wreck.

The charge of treason to the cause of the colonies was afterward so often brought against all concerned in these transactions that Governor Hall finds occasion again and again [1] to defend even Governor Chittenden and other members of the Council of Safety from the suspicion of unpatriotic designs. It was indeed a desperate game to play. But Vermont was in peril of annihilation. The issue proved that both the measure and the man were matched to the emergency. Neither bribery nor intimidation—and both were attempted—availed to divert him from his aim. The threatened invasion was prevented, and the day indefinitely postponed when Vermont was to fall a prey to one or all of her enemies.

Now what were the results of this diplomacy? Not Vermont only, but the whole frontier was for two years saved from the horrors of invasion. One-third of all the British troops in North America were kept inactive and the concentration of their forces was prevented. Washington was able to cope with the armies operating in the more southern states, and ere long the surrender of Cornwallis made it unnecessary longer to match diplomacy against a well-equipped and formidable army. One life only was lost in the two years' con-

[1] In his Early History of Vermont.

test with the agents of King George, a contest maintained by Governor Chittenden and his trusted advisers, and engineered by the wisdom and the wit of Allen. Yet its far-reaching consequences may be traced in the decisive battle of Yorktown and the peace of 1783.

I have not attempted to make in the hour assigned me a full exhibition of the services rendered to the beleaguered and struggling State by our distinguished founder. Suffice it to say, by way of partial catalogue, that he was thrice deputed as special commissioner from Vermont to New Hampshire to compose the serious difficulties which had arisen between the two states; that he was sent on like errands to the states of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland to present before each the claims of Vermont to freedom and statehood; that he was twice delegated to press upon Congress the admission of Vermont as an equal member of the sisterhood of states; and that on one of these occasions he with Stephen R. Bradley drew up that dignified remonstrance in which they declined to be mere spectators at an *ex parte* adjudication of their cause, involving as it did, the very life of the State, and thereupon withdrew, with an "appeal to God and the world for the awful consequences that might ensue" if the controversy were attempted to be settled by Congress in the manner and upon the terms insisted on by New York. Was it desired to proclaim to New York and New Hampshire the invincible

determination of the Green Mountain boys never to relinquish their rights as self-governing freemen? It is the pen of Ira Allen which formulates their declaration of rights, and their declaration of independence as well.[1]

For the nine years ending with 1786 the Council of Safety was guided by his alert and provident counsels more than by those of any other mind.

Eight times between 1783 and 1794 he was chosen Representative to the General Assembly from Colchester, and in 1791 was a member of the Constitutional Convention.

For eight years, 1778-85, he was the Treasurer of the commonwealth, whose coffers were punctually replenished by methods of his own devising.

[1] In the account book of Ira Allen as treasurer of the state occur these items among others of similar import:

1777, Jan'y 17th. To 9 days, part at Westminster, in assisting to write a declaration for a State, and other pieces for the Hartford papers 4 1 00

1777, Nov. 2. To 15 days going from Salisbury to Williamstown and there with President Chittenden writing the Preamble to the Constitution, &c. from there to Bennington to confer with the Council respecting s'd Preamble—assisting to complete compiling from manuscript, the Constitution of the State 7 10 0

Expense money 3 2 8

1778, Oct. 23. To 2 days at Windsor drawing a plan for a State seal and getting Mr. R. Dean to make it 10s1 0 0

1778, Dec. 25. To 18 days assisting to revise Vt. Appeal wrote by S. R. Bradley Esq. &c. 9 16 0

In 1778 he was appointed Surveyor-general of the State and administered the office till 1787. The original book of charters had been carried to England by Governor Wentworth, but Allen was so far successful in collecting and recording the charters, that new grants of land could be made in 1780 without interference with previous grants or with each other, a measure deemed of special importance at that time for reasons both financial and political. In the same capacity he conducted surveys and opened roads to facilitate settlement and transportation of stores.[1]

When in 1790 New York had honorably yielded her claim to jurisdiction, Allen was one of seven commissioners on the part of Vermont to determine the boundary line between the two states. The line, as it was then settled and has ever since remained, was adjusted in exact accord with Allen's own proposition to Congress several years before.

Allen must be credited also with proposing the terms on which the long pending land controversy was at last satisfactorily settled. All New York titles were to become null and void upon the payment by Vermont of the small sum of $30,000 into the treasury of New York for the benefit of individual claimants,—a measure by which nearly 5,000,000

[1] His account rendered in 1788 shows an expenditure for surveys of £3018.96. There is a separate account for cutting roads in twenty-nine towns.

acres were freed from the delays, the dangers and the expense of protracted lawsuits.

In an act passed by the General Assembly in 1785, Allen is somewhat magniloquently but truthfully described as "agent and delegate to Congress, ambassador to sundry of the different States of America, and special commissioner to the Province of Quebec,"—titles which lose their strangeness when we remind ourselves that for fourteen years Vermont existed as an independent and sovereign state, owning and owing fealty to no man or nation on earth, and that this unique position among American states was due to no other man in so large degree as to him whom we seek to honor to-day.[1]

A few details of a more personal nature will be of interest at least to the dwellers in this region. Ira Allen was twenty-two years old, when with his cousin Remember Baker and five others he set out in the fall of 1772 from Skeensborough, now Whitehall, to explore the country lying about the Onion river. Three or four days' hard rowing brought them to the foot of the lower fall at Winooski. Here they found proof that a surveying party from New York had got the start of them. The two men whom they found were

[1] It is a tradition in the Chittenden family that Governor Thomas Chittenden thought Ira Allen had done more good work for the new State than any other two men.

promptly made prisoners, and their boat seized. The next morning two other boats came up the river with six white men and thirteen armed Indians. A fight seemed imminent, but by a happy combination of daring and diplomacy the Indians were made to see that they had no interest in the quarrel, and the New Yorkers surrendered at discretion, and were allowed to depart after a pledge never to enter the region again. His explorations completed, and his supplies reduced to but a single dinner for the party, Allen with four companions crossed the wilderness to Pittsford, seventy miles away, arriving on the fourth day, well-nigh exhausted.

The next spring Allen and Baker returned to the Falls, the latter bringing his family. Their first step was to construct a fort on the north bank of the river, a few rods east of the present iron bridge, on an eminence now mostly washed away. Fort Frederick was built of hewn timbers, two stories high, with 32 portholes in the upper story, and well supplied with the means of defence against the Yorkers, should they molest them. A surveying party from New York was discovered that summer at work farther up the river. Allen with three men from the fort went in pursuit of them, but they escaped in safety, never to venture again into so dangerous a locality. This year the Onion River Company, as they styled themselves, effected an overland connection with the more southern settlements by cutting a road through the forest

from Fort Frederick to Castleton, some seventy miles. Clearings and settlements were made in the vicinity of the fort, but in the spring of 1776, in consequence of military reverses in Canada, the defenceless state of the frontier, and the actual attacks of the Indian allies of the British, this and all the new settlements in this region were suddenly abandoned.

Seven years after, when peace had crowned the struggle for American independence, while that for the independence of Vermont had still eight weary years to run,[1] the fugitives of 1776 returned to their holdings about the Onion river. Allen built a dam at the Falls, two sawmills,[2] one on either bank, a grist mill, two forges with a furnace, where iron ore was converted into millirons, forge hammers and anchors, maintained a ferry above the dam and built a schooner on the river below, and in various directions greatly stimulated the settlement and development of the region.[3]

[1] In 1777, a report by a committee of which Allen was a member, styles this "the troublesome and aged conflict."

[2] In 1795 he had seven sawmills in operation on his lands, and owned 10,000 acres covered with pine.

[3] Allen's house stood to the east of the road which crosses the bridge, nearly on the site now covered by Winooski block, and Madame Allen's garden, which lay to the east of the mansion and extended down to the river, was a "paradise of fruits and flowers." At this house in 1785 sat the first county court ever held in this county. Mrs. Allen was the daughter of General Roger Enos, and her husband's wedding gift at her marriage had been the township of Irasburgh, 23,000 acres of land, which after his death became a means of support to his family, and later, the source of his son's wealth.

Allen early saw the advantages to Vermont of free commercial intercourse with Canada. The St. Lawrence, the Sorelle and Lake Champlain offered almost unimpeded water communication with Europe, and promised at no great expense to make good to the State the lack of a seaport. A ship canal of moderate cost would enable ocean vessels to unload their cargoes at the wharves in Burlington and at other harbors on Lake Champlain.[1] Not only would Allen's landed estate, lying mostly along the lake, of over 200,000 acres, be largely enhanced in value thereby, but the whole western half of the State would find a better market for its products, and pay less for foreign goods, by utilizing Lake Champlain as a commercial thoroughfare.

In the capacity of diplomatic agent, or minister, of the then independent republic of Vermont, Allen had opened negotiations with Canada, with a view to direct trade, immediately after the peace of 1783.

In 1795 he sailed for England to obtain, among other objects, both the authorization and the aid of the British government in constructing the proposed canal. But his efforts proved unavailing, as the finances of England were at this time heavily burdened by the war with France. The project

[1] This project was revived and pushed with some local enthusiasm, as many will remember, some years ago, under the name of the Caughnawaga canal.

was never relinquished by Allen, however, being urged by him in every hopeful quarter by tongue and pen for full thirty years.

He had another object in going abroad, partly commercial and partly patriotic. He was the ranking major general of the State, and the militia were but indifferently accoutred and equipped. General Allen declared that he would never review the troops again unless they could be properly armed and uniformed. So he obtained from Governor Chittenden a commission under the seal of the State to purchase abroad such guns and military supplies as were deemed necessary.[1] After some overtures to parties in London, he finally closed a contract, on better terms than could be had in England, with the French government for 20,000 stands of arms and an equal number of bayonets and twenty-four four-pound field pieces, most of which were shipped at Ostend on board a neutral ship named the Olive Branch for New York city. These supplies of war were intended for the militia of Vermont and

[1] In 1794 there had been some fear of an outbreak of hostilities between Great Britain and the United States. The Legislature of Vermont had repeatedly before this date had the arming of the militia under consideration. In the year named Governor Chittenden made several attempts to obtain arms, both by purchase and by loan from the United States arsenals, but without success. Washington made a requisition on the States for troops May 19, 1794, and on June 21 "Governor Chittenden had ordered 2,139 Vermont militia, to be organized, armed, equipped, and held in readiness to march at a moment's warning."

northern New York, and were to be disposed of directly to the citizen soldiers, who were responsible to the State for their military outfit.

Here begins a chapter of losses and misfortunes which ends only with the life of Allen. The Olive Branch with Allen on board was seized by a British cruiser to the west of Ireland and taken into port as a lawful prize. Under the rulings of a judge who cannot be charged with impartiality or even courtesy, the case dragged its slow way through the Court of Admiralty, the Court of Appeal, and the Court of King's Bench, and received final adjudication only in 1804, in spite of all the means employed by Allen to hasten a decision. Not even his fertility in expedients could avail against the prejudice and obstinacy of the old admiralty judge. Unfortunately England was at this time apprehensive of a revolt in Ireland, and had been somewhat disturbed by actual insurrection in the province of Quebec. No proof was ever attempted on the plaintiff's side of intent on Allen's part to aid the enemies of England, yet his demand for the restoration of his property was unheeded in spite of treaties, in spite of superabundant testimony, the efforts of eminent counsel, of whom Erskine[1] was one, and the interference of the American minister. In the course of the long conflict Allen was imprisoned both in London and in Paris,—six months in the latter

[1] Afterward Lord Erskine.

place, although no information was ever lodged against him. It would take too long to tell the story of the privation and abuse and indignity to which he was here subjected; of the attempt upon his life, as he believed; of his sudden release without the shadow of a trial, although he vehemently demanded a trial under the constitution and laws of France. Finally, after considerable delay and much annoyance, seeing no hope of justice on either side the channel, in 1801 he broke away from France and returned to America.

But on his return to his beloved Vermont he found intrigue and greed had made use of the forms of law to dispossess him of his large estate and other valuable properties estimated to be worth more than $1,000,000. The titles to nearly 300,000 acres of valuable land, lying between Ferrisburgh and the Canada line, partly his own and partly held by him for his brothers' heirs, had passed into alien hands by the operation of the tax laws.[1] Vexatious suits were begun against him, and counter suits instituted, but the conspiracy—for such he always insisted it was, a conspiracy not unconnected with his diplomatic successes of revolutionary days, but reinforced by the malice and the avarice of those whom he had

[1] In 1795 Allen held legal titles in his own right to a great part of eleven townships (besides large tracts in other towns). On these had been erected seven sawmills, three corn-mills, iron foundries, houses, etc. In 1801, scarcely an acre could be found which had not been rendered unsalable by "new patched up titles."

opposed in the course of his harassing admiralty suits; by the jealousies and hatred of rivals or opponents in the long conflict with New York; as also by the selfish greed of mean souls who saw an easy way to wealth by buying at the constable's sale the titles of an absent citizen,—the conspiracy proved too strong for him, and he finally retired from the lands which he had held by an undisputed title in 1795, and from the State[1] whose foundation no man had done more to

[1] Allen escaped from "Burlington prison" on a Sunday evening in [April ?] 1803, just as the ice had disappeared in Lake Champlain, went by boat to the head of Lake George, where he "purchased a horse, and took a long journey for his health." "It was certain death to remain there," he says, referring to the jail, "nor have I yet regained my health, although for much time constantly in the use of medical aid,"—so he writes in 1810. He returned to Burlington in January, 1804. In October of the same year he attended the sessions of the Legislature at Rutland for eighteen days, and attempted to get his case and his claims before the assembly. His petition for a year's exemption from arrest in civil suits was refused, though at this same session like immunity was granted to three other persons for three, four, and five years respectively. Later in the session, a resolution was introduced for a bill "authorizing Ira Allen, Esq., to apply to the President of the United States, to hire Gun-boat No. 1. of the American navy, for the purpose of importing arms for the use of the militia composing the alarm list of this State." This bit of sarcasm—for such it appears to be—indicates the temper of the house toward Allen.

The marshall with his posse surrounded his hotel to arrest him in the gray of a Monday morning, only to find in the afternoon, after much search, that he was really gone! He had exchanged his trunk for saddle bags, and, "his business requiring haste," ridden to Poultney, where he spent Monday with his "old friends, the Heroes of 1775," and

establish, to a community which even then had got beyond the barbarism of imprisonment for debt, the very State indeed whose constitution Vermont had twenty-five years before taken for her model. Had Vermont copied also Pennsylvania's legislation in regard to the collection of debts, she might have saved herself from what seems to me the darkest page in her history.

It is pathetic to read the exile's calm, earnest, manly appeals from his safe harbor in Philadelphia, that for the space of three years he be granted immunity from the operation of the merciless laws alluded to, in order that he might by just process of law come by his own again, or by bargain and compromise recover some portion of the property which had been wrested from him. I do not find that either governor or Legislature ever responded to these appeals, backed as they were by arguments of which chapter after chapter in the history of the State were the unimpeachable confirmation. Allen's theory of a conspiracy is the only one which explains this mysterious injustice and ingratitude. It was the day of Allen's enemies, of whom there were many, and of tax titles,

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on Tuesday took the turnpike for Troy, in order to put the line of the State of New York between him and the "law conjurers of Vermont."

October 18, 1810, a petition of Ira Allen for an act of suspension was read in the House and referred to the committee of insolvency, in which reference the Council concurred. I find no record of any action upon it. The committee seems to have taken the responsibility of suppressing the petition.

the law in regard to which had been changed, evidently with a purpose, after Allen had sailed for Europe. The unscrupulous avarice which stole his princely domain, and held it against him by such terms of statute law, in utter disregard of equity, may have found means to blind, or to control, a legislature.

Nor does it afford much consolation to know that Seth Warner, that stalwart soldier and patriot, was in like manner, while risking his life for the liberties of Vermont, cheated out of all his holdings by the same easy process of bidding off tax titles. Thus creatures with the souls of camp sutlers and renegades, under protection of the Legislature and the courts, robbed of their estates the very men whose unselfish devotion had made the State of Vermont, first a hope and a possibility, and then a solid fact.

I find record of one man who was granted freedom from arrest for five years, and of another who was given the same immunity for life; but for Ira Allen, I do not discover that any personal friend, or grateful son of the Green Mountain State, so much as suggested in the General Assembly the granting of a like privilege. It is true however that one year's exemption from arrest and imprisonment for most suits of a civil nature, had been voted by the Legislature of 1801.

The dignified, respectful, solidly reasoned appeals which I have mentioned, as well as Allen's narrative in his own

History of Vermont of such transactions as he was immediately concerned in, recalls a saying of Tacitus respecting certain worthies of Rome's republican days, who had left behind them accounts of their own share in the movements of their time. "Such writing revealed," says the Roman historian,[1] "neither presumption nor arrogance, but rather a just confidence in the integrity of their own character." The letters and other autobiographical writings of Allen testify everywhere to an honest faith in himself, and challenge from the impartial reader a generous recognition of his honorable purpose and of the value of his labors.[2]

Judge Chipman, contrasting the characters of Ethan Allen and Warner, says: "It is evident they were far more effective and more useful in defending the New Hampshire Grants than they would have been had they both been Allens or both Warners," and deems it not extravagant to add that

[1] Vita Agricolae, 1.

[2] Governor Hall, in his Early History of Vermont, criticises Allen for dependence in his history on the earlier work of Dr. Williams. It is quite likely that Allen had with him in London a copy of the first edition of Williams' history, which appeared the year before Allen went to England. Else he would have had to rely almost solely on his memory for both facts and dates. The real dependence seems to be of Dr. Williams on Ira Allen throughout the whole political section of his work. Allen's history, albeit not without slight lapses from perfect accuracy, is a vigorous defence of both the State and himself against bitter and unfounded aspersion. By a candid statement of facts he vindicates both Vermont and himself in the view of all who were amenable to reason.

"had either been wanting, the independence of Vermont might not have been achieved."

A calm survey of the multiform and critical offices discharged by Ira Allen will warrant the statement, that but for his shrewd political strategy, his insight into the characters and schemes of the men he had to deal with, and his forecast of the probable issues of every movement on the political chess board, his resourcefulness and his reticence, the more open and prominent parts of Ethan Allen and Warner and Chittenden might have been played in vain. Providence might indeed have raised up some other man to act the rôle taken by him, but he alone of the men of that day seems to have been fully qualified for its function. The written or the spoken word not seldom weighs more than the sword. The strategy of the cabinet prepares the way for the strategy of the field, or gathers up and conserves its victories.

The founding of the University of Vermont was but an incident, albeit a most important one, in Allen's contribution toward the building of the State. His sagacious mind clearly discerned the true relations between education on the one hand, and patriotism and politics on the other. A complete intellectual independence would tend to strengthen and consolidate that moral and political independence which should characterize a self-governing community. The proposal of the Dartmouth authorities, on consideration of certain

grants of land, to supply free collegiate instruction, and superintend the academies throughout Vermont, though well-meant and honorable, still left something to be desired. Vermont was dependent, and in a sense tributary, so long as her sons were obliged temporarily to expatriate themselves to obtain a well-rounded education. Such dependence upon outside aid touched the sense of manly self-respect, that central virtue in which loyalty and patriotism must be rooted, if they are to abide. That provision in the first constitution for "one grammar school in each county, and one university in the State, to be established by the direction of the General Assembly," probably came from the hand of Ira Allen, [1] though the only thing certainly known about it is, that he put in a claim for his services in drawing up the document as it was submitted to the convention. And this was one of the most significant additions to their model in the constitution of Pennsylvania.

Allen's connection with the University was so fully set forth in Mr. Benedict's oration one year ago as to make it superfluous to speak of it in detail to-day. It was his offer in 1789 of £4000, twice larger than the munificent offer of Elijah

[1] In an "Address to the Inhabitants of the State of Vermont," November, 1778, Allen writes thus :—"There is ample provision made [in the Constitution of this State] for the propagation of the Gospel, together with proper Seminaries and Schools of learning, which are among the greatest blessings God in his wisdom ever bestowed on the fallen race of man."

Paine, which determined its location at Burlington in 1791. The reasons he presented for the location—the distance from Dartmouth college, and the proximity to the Province of Quebec and the northern portion of New York, were abundantly justified in the earlier history of the institution. An inspection of its catalogues will show that before the founding of McGill and Cornell universities, it drew a good proportion of its students from the farther shore of Lake Champlain and from beyond the Canadian border. Harvard college rests upon an original appropriation by the colony of but £400, and its name is a magnificent monument to the man by whose will it received some £800 and a small library. Two years after the University was chartered, Allen offered an additional gift of 1500 acres of land, if the Legislature would allow the name of the institution to be changed. Again, in 1795, he proposed to bestow another £1000 in lands on specified conditions, and £1000 more in books and apparatus, in case the University should be called by his name. This proposition did not meet with favor in the Legislature, probably on account of certain conditions attached to the gift, though for such christening of the institution there were precedents enough in New England. Williams college had been so named but two years before.[1]

[1]In January, 1792, Ira Allen sent a memorial to the Governor and Legislature of New York, asking for the grant of a township ten miles square in Clinton County on these grounds : that the University of Ver-

Allen selected as a location for the future University a lot of 50 acres, one of the sightliest in all the Champlain Valley. Portions of it were alienated in the early days from time to time for reasons which one can recall only with mingled sorrow and indignation, until only an acre and a half remained.[1]

. One of the reasons which in 1797 Allen urges for the speedy determination of his suit before the Admiralty Court, was his desire to "erect public buildings for the University of Vermont," the materials for which he had already caused to

[1] It may not be generally known that if the College were again to recover her original domain, she would be possessed of a large section of the park, and of some of the dwellings and gardens to the west of it.

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mont, "established on the East Bank of Lake Champlain" would be "equally Convenient to the Northern Part of the State of New York as to Vermont;" that previous to establishing a university of her own, Vermont had "granted a township to the Corporation of Dartmouth college situated on the East Bank of Connecticut River;" and that the Legislature of Vermont, having granted their own lands, have it not in their power to grant a township to their own University; that [taken] "from the width and extent of the government of New York, one township will scarsely be persieved, but when added to the funds of this Infant Institution may make it so respectable that children yet Unborn will Bless the Donors."

Allen's petition was reinforced by another, dated Rutland, November 7, 1792, signed by Thomas Chittenden, President, in behalf of the corporation of the University. The request was presented and favorably reported on, but action was deferred until the following session of the Legislature. I have not learned what disposition was finally made of it.

be prepared. "These are kept," he says, "in a state of ruinous suspense by my absence." [1]

The eldest son of Ethan Allen was placed by him in the University, and in the family of President Sanders. A younger son of Ethan was taken into his own family, and along with his own sons put in the way of preparation for college. [2] Ira's eldest son was a member of the University for the two years 1808-10, but withdrew on account of ophthalmic difficulty. This was the Hon. Ira H. Allen of Irasburg, who had the opportunity to add to his numerous offices and honors that of representative in the national Congress, if he had not unqualifiedly declined the proposal. The younger son, Zimri, also began a course of study in the University, and read law with the Hon. Charles Marsh of Woodstock, finishing his legal

[1] In their Report to the Legislature, October, 1804, the Trustees of the University say that the subscriptions made in September, 1789, "include $13,333.33, made by Ira Allen, payable $3,333.33 in a lot of land to erect the buildings on and materials for the building, and the remainder in new lands." They report also that they have commenced a suit to recover what is still due from Allen, have "obtained judgment and levied the execution on lands in Plainfield, which will probably secure about $10,000 worth of those lands." His complicated financial embarrassments seem to have rendered necessary such decision by the courts.

[2] These two young men, Hannibal M. and Ethan H. Allen, were afterward, without the knowledge of their uncle Ira, removed to a military school, and later became officers in the U. S. Army.

studies at the law school in Litchfield, Conn., but died at the threshold of his profession.[1]

Tradition presents Ira Allen as a man "of middle stature, thick set, a ruddy and lively countenance, large black eyes, a fine form, genteel in manner, and naturally social." His features as represented by an engraving published some years ago, would of themselves suggest the resourcefulness and the power of comprehension and combination which characterized his political and his business enterprises. Those lips can keep the secrets of the state. The calm and thoughtful eyes above have power to penetrate the disguised sympathies and aims of other men. The face indicates the power of vigorous and apt expression, regulated always by a reticence which guards its own counsel, and keeps the initiative, so far as possible, in its own hands. It betokens a quick intelligence, a temper not easily ruffled, a dignity not incompatible with a generous sympathy, and an ambition not limited to personal regards. It gives the impression of reserved power, yet suggests that all powers are held always as in leash for instant and effective service.

If these serene, thoughtful, almost speaking features could look down upon us from the walls of the Library yonder,

[1]It will be of interest to add that a grand-daughter of Ira Allen is now living in the historic town of Lexington, Mass., and two great grand-daughters in this State,—one at Irasburg, and one at Derby Line.

in company with those of James Marsh and Joseph Torrey and Frederick Billings, no alumnus could ever gaze upon them without a thrill of personal gratitude toward the man who builded so generously and so wisely for the commonwealth after helping to lay its corner stone, and successive generations of undergraduates would receive inspiration and courage as they lifted their eyes to meet his look of greeting and benediction. We have hope that the family fireside will not long lack a fitting presentment of the man from whom she traces her being and development. A due filial piety calls upon us to make prompt amends for long neglect.

When Allen was sent in April, 1781, in behalf of the independent republic of Vermont, to arrange a cartel for the exchange of prisoners, and a truce with the British forces in Canada, he delayed his departure a little, as I have already said, for reasons partly personal. Whether it was a matter of mere sentiment, or whether there was a touch of superstition in his make-up, he chose to wait for the first day of May, as the most auspicious beginning of an enterprise fraught with so momentous possible issues. This day of good omen was the anniversary of his birth. Thirty years before he had begun his not uneventful career. So forth he fared, his heart freighted with glad and grateful memories, and buoyant with the hopes of what he might achieve for the sovereign State of which he was the accredited minister, and for the larger inter-

ests of the struggling, and at this juncture, despondent confederacy. Within a few days his diplomacy had gained both its objects.

If I venture to suggest to the honorable Board of Trustees the propriety of ordaining that from this time forward, the first of May, the natal day of Ira Allen, shall be set in the calendar of the University of Vermont as Founder's Day, to be observed as a holiday forever, significant at once of her origin, and of the new life pulsing continually in her veins of perennial and ever bourgeoning prime, I have small fear that any alumnus will enter his protest against the innovation, or that the undergraduate body will petition against such use of one day in the year in grateful recognition of our debt to our earliest benefactor.

A monument over his ashes we cannot raise, for alas, we know not where they repose. Ungrateful Vermont again and again refused to him the immunity which he so earnestly sought in order to a residence within her borders. The State which he contributed so much to establish and consolidate virtually banished him in 1804 and turned a deaf ear to his importunate entreaties for permission to return. By her laws she forbade him to institute the necessary measures whereby he might come by his own again. In hospitable Philadelphia he still planned for the future of his beloved Vermont; prepared an enlarged edition of his history of the State, though

never able to publish it; continued to advocate the construction of the ship canal of which in 1785 he had procured the survey; and kept up his old interest in the political movements on both continents. Here at last, after many years of poverty and distress, kindly death released him from the persecutions of his enemies and the bitterness of exile, on the 4th of January, 1814, in the 63d year of his age. His dust reposes in some ancient burial ground of the city of Brotherly Love, but no stone stands above it, and no man can point out the spot.

We can make no amends for the expatriation and sufferings of the closing decade of his life. There is the more reason, therefore, that we keep alive his memory, and signalize his eminent services to the Commonwealth and to the University, by giving special honors henceforth to the day which gave him to the world. Your wisdom, gentlemen, will determine whether such memorial would be wise and proper.

The Founder of the University of Vermont

A Centennial Oration

on the Life and Public Services of

General Ira Allen

Delivered

Commencement Day June 29 1892

By Prof. J. E. Goodrich

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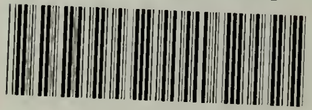
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