



## John Stark: Sources in this Set

<b>Map</b>	An accurate map of His Majesty's Province of New-Hampshire in New England, taken from actual surveys of all the inhabited part... with the adjacent countries, which exhibits the theatre of this war..., inscribed by Joseph Blanchard and Samuel Langdon, Portsmouth 21 October, 1761 / engraved by Thomas Jefferys.	New Hampshire Historical Society 912.778 B639
------------	--	--

In April 1752, while on a hunting trip along the Baker River with his brother, William, and two friends, Stark and his party were attacked by a group of Abenaki. Stark was captured and remained with his captors for nearly three months before being released in exchange for a ransom. This experience exposed Stark to both physical and mental hardship, though later he recounted his time in captivity as characterized by “more genuine kindness [...] than he knew prisoners of war to receive from more civilized nations.” This map, published nine years after Stark’s captivity, was made for Benning Wentworth, the Royal Governor of New Hampshire. By then Governor Wentworth had granted him a commission of 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant in the British Army as part of Roger’s Rangers to fight in the French and Indian War. Stark was so well-known that the map marked the location of his 1752 capture and his route into captivity. It also noted that “this river and lakes are drawn agreeable to his accounts,” because Stark had built a reputation as a reliable guide for expeditions to the North Country.



**Document** Commission, June 3, 1775.

New Hampshire Historical  
Society

1918.005.02.01.002

Following the completion of the Seven Years War, Stark left the army and focused his attention on maintaining his farm and mills as well as the settlement of a new township called Starkstown (now Dunbarton). He was appointed to the local committee of safety and was known as a person who was generally supportive of American independence. Upon hearing the news of the battles at Lexington and Concord in April 1775, Stark set out to raise volunteers to join the defense of the colonies. His dedication to the cause paired with his prior military experience resulted in his commission by the provincial congress of New Hampshire to colonel of a regiment of New Hampshire men.

**Map** The Seat of War, in New England by an American Volunteer with the marches of the several corps sent by the colonies towards Boston, with the attack of Bunkers Hill.

New Hampshire Historical  
Society

912.741 S441

Stark's commission as colonel arrived just in time for him to lead the First New Hampshire regiment in the Battle at Bunker Hill, near Boston, Massachusetts, in mid-June 1775. New Hampshire's troops comprised two-thirds of the American soldiers fighting in the battle. Stark and his men fortified a line of defense along the Mystic River and provided cover for retreating troops. The New Hampshire soldiers earned a reputation that day for their toughness in the face of overwhelming British numbers. Ultimately, the British took the American fortifications, but the British sustained such high losses that one British general quipped that one more such victory would cost them the war.

**Object** Hessian drum, sword and cartridge box.

New Hampshire Historical  
Society

In the summer of 1777, the British, with the aid of hired German troops known as Hessians, launched a massive offensive down the Hudson River Valley in New York, hoping to split the New England colonies from the rest of America and thereby quash the rebellion. The Battle of Bennington was a relatively small skirmish in that campaign, but it had enormous implications for the British effort. It took place on August 16, 1777, on the border between Vermont and New York when New Hampshire and Vermont troops under General John Stark's command surprised British and German troops looking for supplies. The ensuing battle was a rout, with the New England men capturing or killing almost the entire German force. Stark summarized his troops' achievement as follows: "We obtained four pieces of brass cannon, one thousand stand of arms, several Hessian swords, eight brass drums, and seven hundred and fifty prisoners. Two hundred were killed on the spot; wounded unknown." The three objects pictured were among the items Stark's troops gathered from the battlefield. The loss of so many German troops was a blow to the British campaign in the Hudson Valley and convinced Britain's Native American allies to abandon the effort. The American victory at the Battle of Bennington helped lay the groundwork for the British defeat two months later at the Battle of Saratoga, which is considered the turning point of the American Revolution.

**Document** Letter, General John Stark to the Committee of Safety  
of New Hampshire. August 18, 1777.

New Hampshire Historical  
Society

1918.005.01.01.010

In accordance with his responsibilities as a commanding officer, Stark wrote several detailed accounts of the Battle of Bennington, including this report sent to New Hampshire's committee of safety. The first part of the battle took place around 3 p.m., with the German troops quickly defeated. While about 1,000 German troops were wounded or captured, only about 70 of Stark's troops met such a fate.

**Document** Resolve, John Hancock to General John Stark, October 4, 1777. New Hampshire Historical Society  
1918.005.01.02.003

Stark's victory at the Battle of Bennington came at a critical moment for the colonies during the American Revolution. The British were in the midst of a major offensive through the Hudson Valley, intent on dividing New England from the rest of the colonies. A detachment of British and German troops was ordered to Bennington to gather supplies but they were surprised by Stark and his men. The German commander and more than 200 of his troops were killed, with another 700 men captured. Therefore, the battle reduced the size of the British forces moving down the Hudson Valley by about 1,000 men. The defeat also cost the British much of their Native American support and deprived them of needed supplies. More than anything else, it was a severe blow to British morale. All of these factors helped contribute to the British surrender at Saratoga in October 1777, which is widely viewed as the turning point of the war in the Americans' favor. In 1777, John Hancock was president of the Second Continental Congress. His letter to Stark emphasizes the significance of the victory at Bennington to the direction of the war through Congress's appointment of Stark to Brigadier General of the Continental Army.

**Object** Engraving New Hampshire Historical Society  
2010.501.0989

This portrait of John Stark by Alonzo Chappel (1828-1887) was published in Evert A. Duyckinck's *National Portrait Gallery of Eminent Americans: Including Orators, Statesmen, Naval and Military Heroes, Jurists, Authors, Etc.*, Vol. 1 (New York: Johnson, Fry & Company, 1862). Chappel was an American painter based in New York, best known for his depictions of people and events from the American Revolution. During the early years of the nineteenth century, as the founding fathers passed away, Americans began to revere the revolutionary generation and the sacrifices they had made to secure American independence. This image was originally a painting and then printed on paper using a steel engraving.

**Document** Letter, General George Washington to General John Stark, January 3, 1781

New Hampshire Historical Society

1918.005.01.15.012

As a general in the Continental Army, Stark was responsible for procuring food, clothing, and supplies, for his soldiers as well as payment for their service. He paid for these expenses from his own pocket and then requested reimbursement from his commanding officers. When General George Washington responded to this request from Stark in early 1781, funds for the Continental Army, which was never flush, were at a low. The Continental Congress did not have the authority to levy taxes and raise money to pay for the war, having to petition individual states to supply the necessary funds. These petitions largely went unanswered.

**Document** Letter, Thomas Jefferson to John Stark, 1805

Courtesy Library of Congress

Stark's contributions to the Revolutionary War continued to resonate with Americans. Thomas Jefferson said about the Battle of Bennington: "This success was the first link in the chain of events which opened a new scene to America. It raised her from the depths of despair to the summit of hope, and added unfaded laurels to the veteran who commanded." When he wrote this letter of appreciation, Jefferson was president of the United States and Stark was in his seventies.



**Document** Broadside, "Twelve Hundred Freemen Rejoicing in Commemoration of the Glorious Victory obtained by American Patriots Led on by the Veteran General John Stark Over the British, Hessians, Tories, and Indians on the Immortal Hills of Walloomsack, the Sixteenth of August, 1777" *Green-Mountain Farmer*, Bennington, Vermont, August 21, 1809.

In 1809, John Stark was invited to a dinner in Bennington, Vermont, to commemorate the battle that had been fought there on August 16, 1777, and Stark's victory there. In attendance would be many of the men who served under him that day. In the intervening year, Stark had become a revered Revolutionary War general, known as "The Hero of Bennington." Thus his presence at the event would be particularly significant. Unfortunately, Stark's advanced age and ill health prevented him from attending. Instead he sent a letter to be read aloud at the dinner, honoring the veterans. Famously, the letter included the statement, "Live free or die, death is not the greatest of evils," which would become emblematic of New Hampshire. Stark's original letter does not seem to have survived; however, before it disappeared it was reprinted in this publication, produced for the anniversary of the battle.

**Object** Desk New Hampshire Historical Society  
1974.012

This maple desk with brass hardware is one of two pieces made for John Stark in 1762 by John Kimball, then a 23-year-old joiner working around Derryfield (now Manchester). Kimball became a successful furniture maker and the property he settled in Concord is now the Kimball-Jenkins Estate. The desk features compartments called pigeon holes and drawers for storing documents and writing supplies. The pair of pigeonholes at the center are removable, revealing two hidden drawers, and there is a false bottom in one vertical drawer, with a secret compartment accessible from the back. Stark used this desk for his correspondence for much of his life and may have been sitting at it when he wrote the phrase, "Live free or die, death is not the greatest of evils." The phrase became emblematic of New Hampshire. The letter in which Stark used the phrase was addressed to a committee convened to organize a celebration to commemorate the Battle of Bennington.

**Object** Medal New Hampshire Historical Society  
1996.501.16

This medal, made of silk and brass, was created for the 1891 dedication of the Battle of Bennington Monument, a blue-grey limestone obelisk pictured on the medal. The dedication of the monument coincided with the 100th anniversary of Vermont’s admission to the Union as a state in 1791, which the reverse side of the medal depicts through an image of flags, cannons, and a shield.

**Object** Commemorative Ribbon New Hampshire Historical Society  
1996.506.36

Made of purple silk with words printed in black ink, this ribbon was one of several offered to guests at the 1890 dedication of the statue of John Stark that stands in front of the New Hampshire State House. New Hampshire’s government first considered creating a statue of Stark in 1885, but it was not until 1889, when the newly formed New Hampshire Sons of the American Revolution pushed for official legislation, that a resolution was passed by the state legislature and an official committee began to solicit bids for designs. The winning design was created by Carl Conrads, a German-born veteran of the Civil War. The statue was cast in bronze in Massachusetts and the granite pedestal was designed by Boston architect John A. Fox.

**Document** “Chapter 152: An Act Establishing the State Motto” in Laws of the State of New Hampshire. Concord, 1945 Courtesy New Hampshire State Library

Stark’s phrase, “Live Free or Die,” officially became the state motto of New Hampshire in 1945 as World War II came to an end. The motto is considered to summarize the ideals of the American Revolution, as well as the independent nature of the people of New Hampshire. In his 1809 letter Stark wrote, “As I was then, I am now, the friend of equal rights of men, of representative democracy, of republicanism, and the Declaration of Independence—the great charter of our national rights—and of course a friend to the indissoluble union of these states.”