Sites Near the UVM Green

2. Col. James Sawyer’s House Site

James Sawyer’s house and store once occupied part of the ground now occupied by UVM’s John Dewey Hall (built in 1905). As a young man, Sawyer (ca. 1761-1827) served in the Revolutionary War and saw action at Yorktown. He settled in Burlington ca. 1786, and became the county sheriff and a colonel of militia. Sawyer and his wife, Lydia, raised a large family of nine children.

During the War of 1812, three of his sons served in the military. Horace B. Sawyer U.S.N. (1797-1860) was captured near Ile aux Noix in Canada in 1813 and spent a year as a prisoner of war in Montreal, Quebec, and Halifax, Nova Scotia. Later paroled, he served aboard the famed USS Constitution. After the war, Horace Sawyer returned to Burlington and lived on Main Street opposite Edmonds’ School. George F. Sawyer (ca. 1787-1852) also served in the navy as a purser with Thomas Macdonough on Lake Champlain. He participated in the Battle of Plattsburgh on September 11, 1814 and remained in the navy until his death. Lt. Frederick A. Sawyer (1792-1831) served with the 11th U.S. Infantry from 1812 to 1815 and took part in the battles of Chippewa, Bridgewater, and Ft. Erie. Frederick Sawyer returned to Burlington after resigning his commission in 1819 and became the first lighthouse keeper on Juniper Island (1826-1829).

3. Barnard’s Tavern Site

In 1814, Ensign James Goodhue of the 11th U.S. Infantry set up a recruiting office in the tavern located on the southwest corner of Prospect and Pearl Streets (built ca. 1789), which was then run by Eli Barnard as the ‘Green Mountain House.’ Taverns such as the one located here were often used by recruiters because they were well established community gathering spots, they offered accommodations, and usually featured music and alcohol.

Taverns also were places to hold celebrations. In 1813, Eli Barnard hosted the July 4 festivities in Burlington. This party included a dinner for between 400 and 500 people (including many officers of the army and navy as well as most of the prominent civilians in town) all served under a ‘delightful bower’ built on the northwest corner of the UVM Green. The tavern burned down in October of 1838. The Catholic Church built the building now on the site as a hospital in 1923-1925.

4. Pomeroy Hall

Around the time the University of Vermont’s first medical school building (named for Dr. John Pomeroy) was being built (1829), the medical students were occasionally digging up the graves of War of 1812 soldiers in Burlington to acquire anatomical specimens.
Introduction
Prior to and during the War of 1812, the area near the head of Pearl Street and around the University of Vermont’s Green was a place of great activity with several residences, stores, craftsmen’s shops, a prosperous tannery, two taverns, and the University. As a population hub, this area and its inhabitants were inevitably drawn into the events surrounding the conflict.

1. The University of Vermont

The University of Vermont (UVM) was incorporated in 1791, but did not officially open until 1800. The Rev. Daniel Clarke Sanders served as the university’s first president. The inaugural graduating class in 1804 consisted of just four students. The college’s main building, a four-story brick structure built in 1801-1802, stood where the Old Mill is today. The original building included forty-six dorm rooms, a few lecture halls, a library, a museum, and some office space. By 1812, the institution had grown to about 70 or 80 students and employed five instructors offering classes in mathematics, natural philosophy, astronomy, Greek, Latin, natural history, chemistry, jurisprudence, medicine, anatomy, and surgery.

At the close of the war, UVM repaired its building and reopened. The old college building burned down on May 27, 1824 and was replaced by the Old Mill. The Old Mill, originally built as three separate structures, looked very much like a New England textile factory. UVM joined the three buildings together in 1846 and later remodeled them to their present appearance in 1883. In 1909, the United States Daughters of 1812 placed a marker commemorating UVM’s role in the War of 1812 on the western facade of the building.

About a year after the start of the war, in the summer of 1813, the U.S. Army deposited a large quantity of arms in the University’s main building and established a guard nearby to watch over it. Complaints soon came that the soldiers “tumultuous behavior at all hours” made the “regular course of instruction & study almost useless.” The soldiers also often entered the students’ rooms to pilfer “their books and other articles.” At President Sanders’ house, located near where UVM’s Williams Hall is today, they “laid waste” to the garden and fences.

In March of 1814, the army requested the use of the entire building for an “arsenal and barracks.” The University corporation agreed to lease it for $5,000, which forced the school to completely suspend its operations. UVM dismissed President Sanders and all of the professors. All of the students, then numbering about three dozen (except the medical students who stayed with Dr. John Pomeroy), were “turned adrift to finish their education in the best manner they can.” One departing student noted that the building soon became crowded with soldiers, ‘camp ladies,’ and even children. Among the students sent away were Thaddeus Stevens, later a U.S. Congressman who played a prominent role in the Civil War and the early Reconstruction era, and Wilbur Fisk, the founder of Wesleyan University.

The ‘College Cantonment’ lasted until March of 1815, principally under the command of Col. Elias Fassett of the 30th U.S. Infantry. During the Battle of Plattsburgh on September 11, 1814, soldiers and civilians alike climbed to the cupola of the college building, and with the aid of a spyglass tried to catch a glimpse of the battle that could be distinctly heard over the waters of Lake Champlain.

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Of the fifty-five men who had graduated from UVM prior to the War of 1812, several served honorably in the conflict. John Herman Bird (’09) served as midshipman in the U.S. Navy and became one of the first Americans killed in the war during the duel between the USS President and the HMS Belvidera on June 23, 1812. Lt. Frederick Augustus Sawyer (’10) served with the 11th U.S. Infantry throughout the entire war. Lt. Satterlee Clark (’07) served as an army paymaster (5th District). Nathaniel Read (’11) was a quartermaster sergeant in the VT militia and a volunteer at Plattsburgh. Joseph P. Russell MD (’10) served as a surgeon’s mate with the 4th U.S. Infantry 1814-1815. Although a civilian, Cassius Francis Pomeroy, MD (’06), son of UVM professor Dr. John Pomeroy, died early in 1813 while combating an influenza epidemic among the soldiers stationed in Burlington. Archibald W. Hyde (’08), another civilian, served as the ‘barrack master’ in Burlington from 1813 to 1814.