

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Valcour Bay

AND/OR COMMON

Valcour Bay

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

4 miles south of Plattsburgh on the  
west shore of Lake Champlain

CITY, TOWN

Plattsburgh

\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

New York

VICINITY OF

CODE

36

30

COUNTY

Clinton

CODE

019

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: Bay

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

New York State Conservation Department/Division of Lands and Forests

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Albany

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

New York

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Clinton County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Plattsburgh

STATE

New York

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

None

DATE

\_\_ FEDERAL \_\_ STATE \_\_ COUNTY \_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

### CONDITION

EXCELLENT                       DETERIORATED  
 GOOD                                 RUINS  
 FAIR                                  UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED      DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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#### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Valcour Island is about two miles long from north to south and approximately a mile and a quarter wide. It is rocky, high and wooded and, as seen from the west shore of Lake Champlain, probably looks much as it did when it sheltered Arnold's makeshift fleet. The sound, or bay, between the the island and the west shore of the lake is three-quarters of a mile wide. Although the shore of Lake Champlain has been built up to some extent, and Valcour Island is the property of several private owners, excepting the Clinton State Forest which occupies the major portion of the island, the island and the sound have suffered little loss of integrity. The Valcour lighthouse on Bluff Point constitutes the only major visual intrusion on the island. The only marking on the mainland is a small monument erected by the State, across from the southern tip of the island, on the lakeshore.

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES      October 11, 1776

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Benedict Arnold's daring fleet action off Valcour Island on October 11, 1776, had a far-reaching effect on the outcome of the War of Independence. Although the American force was defeated, its very presence on the lake and its stubborn fight proved to be a strategic victory. The British invasion of the northern colonies in 1776 was delayed while a fleet was built to engage Arnold's small flotilla, and by the time the lake had been cleared of American vessels the British commander concluded that the season was too far advanced to carry out his projected movement toward Albany. The invasion did not resume until the following year by which time the Americans were better able to meet and repulse it. This they did at Saratoga, the turning point of the Revolution. Alfred Mahan, the naval historian, wrote: "That the Americans were strong enough to impose the capitulation of Saratoga was due to the invaluable year of delay secured to them in 1776 by their little navy on Lake Champlain, created by the indomitable energy, and handled with the indomitable courage of the traitor, Benedit Arnold."<sup>1</sup>

Valcour Bay is located between Valcour Island and the western shore of Lake Champlain, about four miles south of Plattsburg, New York. Although the shore of Lake Champlain has been built up to some extent and Valcour Island is partially in the hands of private owners, the island, and more importantly the Bay have suffered little loss of historic integrity.

#### History

The naval engagement on Valcour Bay on October 11, 1776, marked the opening thrust of General Sir Guy Carleton's invasion of northern New York. The campaign, which followed the successful repulsion of the Americans' invasion of Canada in the winter of 1775, was designed to establish British control of the Lake Champlain-Hudson River waterways. Carleton's northern army and Howe's southern army planned to meet in Albany and thereby sever the New England colonies from the middle Atlantic.

As Carleton was preparing his fleet at St. John's in the early fall of 1776, the patriot army, based at Ticonderoga was busily taking active measures to block the invasion which they knew must come via Lake Champlain. Under the energetic direction of Benedict Arnold, a fleet was being built, despite the dearth of materials and the necessity of importing shipwrights and riggers from the seaports. The American navy consisted of three ships captured from the British; the sloop Enterprise and the

<sup>1</sup> Alfred T. Mahan The Major Operations of the Navies in the War of American Independence (Boston, 1913), p. 25.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Richard M. Ketchum, ed., The American Heritage Book of the Revolution (New York, 1958).  
 L. F. Hagglund, "A Page from the Past, The Story of the Continental Gundelo, Philadelphia," a pamphlet (Lake Geoge, New York, 1949).  
 Benson J. Lossing, Pictorial Fieldbook of the Revolution, 2 vols. (New York, 1859) I.  
 Alfred Mahan, The Major Operations of the Navies in the War for American Independence (Boston, 1913).

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1200 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,8	62,55,8,0	4,914,6,21,0	B	1,8	62,55,8,0	4,91,0,20,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	1,8	62,32,10,0	4,91,41,0,2,00	D	1,8	62,31,0,8,0	4,91,4,3,6,00
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See attach sheet)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Richard Greenwood, Historian, Landmark Review Task Force

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey

DATE

12/12/75

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street

TELEPHONE

523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL     

STATE     

LOCAL     

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

Designated JAN. 1, 1961  
 Boundary George J. Emery

TITLE

DATE

Feb-14, 1979

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

1/24/79

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

((NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS))

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schooners Liberty and Royal Savage, as well as the schooner Revenge, the cutter Lee, the galleys Trumbull, Washington and Congress, and 10 gondolas, all of which were hastily constructed at Skenesborough (now Whitehall) and Ticonderoga. Aside from the one schooner and the cutter, the Americans produced only the more quickly manufactured two-masted, round-bottomed galleys and the single-masted, flatbottomed gondolas.

While waiting for the British advance up the lake, Arnold set about training his crews which were generally inexperienced, at the northern end of the lake, where he could keep a look out for enemy activity. Finally, he decided on his most advantageous position, where he might best resist the superior British force. The roadstead he chose lay in Valcour Bay, between the west shore of the lake and the two-mile length of Valcour Island. In this narrow channel, where Carleton would have difficulty reaching him with more than a few ships at a time, the fleet anchored and waited for the British.

On October 11, the British fleet was sighted, bearing up the lake. Carleton's fleet of 29 vessels, under the command of Captain Thomas Pringle, consisted of the three-masted ship, Inflexible, the schooners Carleton and Maria, the gondola Loyal Convert, the radeau or floating battery Thunderer, four longboats and 20 gunboats. Only the radeau, the longboats and 10 of the gunboats were constructed at St. John's, the other vessels were simply reassembled there.

The British inauspiciously joined the battle by sailing down the outside--shore of the island, past the American fleet, and then struggling back against the wind to get at the Americans who had formed a crescent facing south, halfway up the length of the island. While the sailing vessels labored into position, the 24 car-propelled longboats and gunboats spread across the south entrance to the bay. These boats, which each had a single cannon and a score of soldiers and sailors under an artillery officer, carried the weight of the British offense while the larger craft maneuvered for position as best they could. In the opening blows of the engagement, the British Carleton passed through the gunboat line and anchored in front of the American fleet. Gondolas and the Royal Savage advanced to attack at close range. After sustaining considerable damage, the Carleton was freed and towed to safety with the aid of the Inflexible. As the Royal Savage attempted to return to the rest of her fleet, the Inflexible gave her a broadside. The American ship

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was rammed into the tip of the island and abandoned by her crew. The Royal Savage was later looted and burned by the Indians who swarmed over Valcour Island, shooting harmlessly at the American fleet. For the rest of the day, until the powder was spent by five o'clock, the duel continued between Arnold's fleet and the gunboats. Although approximately two thirds of the British fleet remained out of the battle, by the end of the day none of the American ships was undamaged, and 60 men had been killed or injured. The Royal Savage and the gondola Philadelphia were destroyed, and two other gondolas were scuttled. Though the British gunboats had been stationary only two had been sunk and one blown up, and crew losses were minimal. Thus, as the end of the day found Arnold's surviving vessels heavily damaged and low on ammunition, further fighting was out of the question. The British line still lay between Valcour and escape to the south, but in darkness and providential fog the survivors of the fight slipped past the left flank of the enemy line. In the next two days, Carleton's pursuing fleet knocked out ship after ship, and Arnold burned the rearmost ships just north of Crown Point, to keep them from enemy hands. Arnold and other survivors just escaped an ambush by Indians after abandoning their boats. Upon reaching Crown Point he discovered six remaining vessels, of the 16 that comprised the fleet before the battle, had reached safety.

While the Battle of Valcour Bay could not be termed an American victory, it proved to be a significant factor in the northern campaign, not due to its outcome but because it transpired at all. The physical existence of the American fleet forced Carleton to delay his invasion in order to <sup>to</sup> bolster ~~his~~ his own naval strength. Following the battle of Valcour Bay, Carleton spent the next month doing little more than reconoitring and occupying the abandoned works at Crown Point. By mid-November, Carleton decided the season was too far advanced for further hostilities and so retired with his army to Canada, thereby granting the American forces what proved to be a crucial respite.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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Beginning at Point A on the USGS map, proceed south along the western shoreline of Valcour Island to its southern most point; thence in a straight line west to the western shoreline of Lake Champlain; thence north along said shoreline to a point that is parallel to Point A; thence in a straight line line east to the point of origin. These lines enclose the scene of the Battle of VALcour Bay.