



LIBERTY TREE PARTNERS

Historically significant artifacts & properties

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About the Dunn Collection

BY [EFFIGY MAY 10, 2012 AMERICAN REVOLUTION, PROVENANCE](#)

Liberty Tree Partners has acquired about a hundred artifacts from the Dunn Collection, one of the largest privately held single collections of artifacts from [General Benedict Arnold's campaign](#) of 1775-1776.

Some of the most notable artifacts are from the [Battle of Valcour Island](#) in Lake Champlain of October 11-13, 1776.

General Arnold commanded the American fleet that challenged a far superior British force. Arnold's daring operation was a tactical defeat for the American cause but a strategic victory, in that it succeeded in delaying the British reinforcement of New York City from Canada for a year, allowing the Americans to resupply and force General John Burgoyne to surrender in 1777 at Saratoga.

The collection was amassed over many years by James Dunn, a New York historian and preservationist. Dunn made at least four artifact-collecting expeditions to the Lake Champlain area between 1932 and 1938, taking with him his young granddaughter, Maryanne Dunn, as a research assistant.

During those trips he hunted for relics on and around Valcour Island, and traveled the area visiting families, churches and other organizations possessing artifacts from the battle, from Fort Ticonderoga, Mount Independence, Skenesborough, Fort George, Crown Point and their environs. Families had passed artifacts down through the generations, some tracing provenance through written record and word of mouth.

Dunn amassed some 1,500 artifacts, each of which he documented in a meticulously written notebook. The details included a full physical description of the item, its provenance, occasionally photographs or sketches of the items and the places where they were found, and where he found items on his own. The sketchbook remains in the possession of Dunn's elderly granddaughter.

Many items from the Dunn collection are in excellent states of preservation, free of corrosion. Dunn purchased many of the artifacts from local farmers, a local historian in the town of Ticonderoga who was a major source of the detailed knowledge and origins of many of the items and the owner of a local museum of Revolutionary War artifacts. He also purchased salvaged items from Col. Lorenzo F. Hagglund, who raised the wreck of the schooner *Royal Savage* and the gunboat *Philadelphia*. Dunn also obtained artifacts from the chief diver of Hagglund's team, William Lilja, and excavated artifacts himself directly at Valcour Island, Fort Ticonderoga, Crown Point, Mount Independence and elsewhere.

Because of Dunn's work, the artifacts and their identifications – oftentimes including the names of the vessels and even the very individual American soldiers and sailors who owned them – were preserved.

Dunn even acquired furniture that the locals made from the salvaged hulls of sunken American warships, including both of Benedict Arnold's flagships, the *Royal Savage* and the row galley *Congress*. That furniture includes chairs and desks. Although Dunn did not acquire a grandfather clock made from wood from the hull of the *Congress* that sat in a Ticonderoga Presbyterian church, he did obtain the pendulum from that clock, which was made from a length of anchor chain and a cannonball from the *Congress* and is now in my collection.

Dunn's collection was displayed at local exhibits for decades. He died in 1966, and willed the entire collection to his granddaughter, Maryanne Dunn. Between about 2000 and 2011, Maryanne Dunn sold off the artifacts at antique gun shows and to private collectors. I acquired my items from the Dunn collection from her, through an intermediary, and every item has with it a letter of authenticity signed by her and a separate letter signed by the military antiquities dealer who acted as her intermediary. <http://libertytreepartners.com/?p=661>