



You're reading an excerpt from Serial Box and the Associated Press's new series, [1776: A World Turned Upside down](#)

Learn more about this project [here](#).

Between chatting up customers, Knox was also reading all he could lay his hands on about artillery. The "Boston Grenadier Corps" whose members had to be at least five feet ten inches tall to best show off their splendid uniforms, gave Knox, six feet or more, the post of second in command. Knox, a genial sponge, absorbed all he could of the military arts.

In addition to artillery power, he was captivated by the political confrontations and strife around Boston. He had been present at the Boston Massacre and had tried to prevent the British troopers from firing into the crowd. He had fallen in love with Lucy Flucker, daughter of the Loyalist Secretary of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Thomas Flucker, the father, offered his influence to get Knox a commission in the British Army, but Knox refused. The family's opposition to the marriage caused one Boston wit to rhyme:

But whoever heard

Of a marriage deterred,

Or even deferred

By any contrivance so absurd

As holding the boy and caging his
bird?

Stout Knox and the equally stout Lucy were wed notwithstanding, and she never saw her parents again. Meanwhile, Knox was spending more time with Nathanael Greene studying military science. When Revere stopped by to talk politics, the two would feign an argument to avert suspicion anytime a Loyalist entered the shop. After Lexington and Concord, Knox bundled himself and his sword beneath a cloak and by dark of night slipped over Roxbury Neck. Knox promptly offered to help design fortifications around Boston for the defending American rabble, and when Washington and Charles Lee, his third in command, inspected the work, “they expressed the greatest pleasure and surprise.” Washington had found a lifelong friend and his chief of artillery. Knox was only too happy, but where were the cannon? Then Knox remembered: Ticonderoga. Even before Congress, more militant now, approved the mission, Knox had set off with his younger brother, William, for New York. “No trouble or expense [should] be spared to obtain them,” Washington said in parting.

One story has it that Knox spent the night at Fort George on the way north where he met British Major John Andre, who had been captured by General Richard Montgomery. True or not, Knox five years later sat on the court martial that condemned Andre to death for his role in Benedict Arnold’s treason.

At Ticonderoga, Knox decided most of the captured guns were too worn for much use, and sorted out 59 cannons ranging from 4- to 24-pounders (the weight of the ball they fired). One was a fat mortar they nicknamed The Old Sow, which “hove bombs to an amazing distance.” By December 9, Knox had the guns aboard a selection of lake boats and set out down Lake George against the ice and snow. High waves sank William Knox’s boat “luckily near shore ... [so that] we were able to bail her out.” Henry Knox, up ahead, had reached the southern end of the lake and “went ashore and warmed ourselves by an exceeding good fire in a hut made by some civil Indians who were with their ladies abed. They gave us some venison, roasted after their manner, which was very relishing.” Knox, the gourmand, even in the wild.

Now began the overland trek, hauling the cannons, which weighed up to 5,500 pounds apiece, through the snow and along “roads that never bore a cannon before,” wrote Knox, “and never have borne one since.” These were the forests, marshes, and streams that later impeded British general “Gentleman Johnny” Burgoyne in his quest to sweep down from Canada and wipe out the Continentals. General Philip Schuyler, a senior American officer and wealthy landholder in the Albany area, sent fresh men and horses. Knox had organized

well, writing ahead to Committees of Safety along the route to have food and fresh oxen ready. He told Colonel Alexander McDougall, in New York, to be sure to have some 13-inch shells in Boston for the Old Sow to “hove” at the British. And to Washington, Knox wrote: “Three days ago it was very uncertain whether we should have gotten them until next spring, but now, please God, they must go ... trusting we shall have a fine fall of snow which will enable us to proceed further and make the carriage easy - if that should be the case, I hope in 16 or 17 days to be able to present your Excellency a noble train of artillery.”

It took 40 days.

Farmers were reluctant to supply teams at the 12 shillings per day Knox was offering. Squire Palmer, between Saratoga and Albany, wanted 24 shillings, whereby “the treaty broke off abruptly and Mr. Palmer was dismissed.” Knox spent Christmas Day breaking a trail on foot through snow over his knees, finally reaching Albany “almost perished with the cold.” He and his men devoted New Year’s Day 1776 to cutting holes in the ice across the frozen Hudson to flood and refreeze the ice to make it thicker for their crossing. The exhausted Knox had just sat down for dinner with Schuyler when someone rushed in saying that a cannon “had drowned,” crashing through the ice. Citizens and teamsters pitched in to fish the cannon up. A grateful Knox christened it “the Albany.” Knox’s men stood by the traces with axes to cut the oxen free should another gun go through. Another did. Some Albany folk paid for the privilege of helping to retrieve it. Now on the east bank of the Hudson, one of Knox’s massive sleds mashed a “handsome” pleasure boat. Knox pushed on, with “the idea that the country would pay all the damages ... the only sympathy we had at that time to bestow on the owner.”

The caravan began climbing through evergreen forests into the Berkshires over a crude road, then over a pass where there was no road at all. Across broken country, traversed only by Native Americans and deer, across gullies where chains lashed to trees eased the guns down the drops and pulled them back up to the next height. It was “almost a miracle that people with heavy loads should be able to get up and down such hills,” Knox said. A terse piece of paper is one of the surviving traces of Knox’s passage: “Received of Henry Knox 18 shillings of lawful money for carrying a cannon weighing 243 pounds from this town to Westfield, being 11 miles. Solomon Brown. January 13, 1776.”

At Westfield, near Springfield, where later at Knox’s successful urging the new nation was to build its first armory, townspeople who had never seen a cannon gawked over the strange sight. One and all became so spirited on cider and rum, they prevailed on Knox to touch off a blast from the Old Sow. Then everyone crammed into a local tavern and got really spirited. Beyond Springfield, the snow thinned out and a “cruel thaw” turned the ground to mud.

Homesick, the New York teamsters went back west and were replaced by Massachusetts men. Cold weather returned, and on January 18th, 1776, Knox and his cannon dragged the last miles into Framingham. Knox went on to Cambridge to report to Washington. He submitted his expense account for providing America's first detachment of artillery: 520 pounds, 15 shillings, 8 3/4 pence, more than \$20,000 in modern money. After Knox had arrived with guns in tow, Washington told him he now held the rank of colonel. The General was to see if books could make an artillery officer.

The Contest

- 1.) **Download** the Serial Box app [here](#).
- 2.) **Read or Listen to** the first episode of 1776 **for free!**
- 2.) **Tweet #1776serial and share something new you learned** from the episode
- 3.) We will pick one winner to **receive the entire series for free!**

Share this:

- [Email](#)
- [Tweet](#)
- 
- [Print](#)
- [WhatsApp](#)