HOW THE CIVIL WAR CAME TO ST. JOHNSBURY

In the historical room of the Fairbanks Museum is an old five-barreled pistol made by the Robbins and Lawrence Co., of Windsor and its mahogany case also contains a bullet mold, a powder pouch with the American eagle etched on the steel pouch and a few small bullets. This was carried by Governor Erastus Fairbanks through the Civil War on his frequent trips to Montpelier. It has been loaned to the Museum by one of his grandsons, Philip H. Stone, now residing in Pasadena, Cal.

Fortunate, indeed, it was that Vermont had in its War Governor one who visioned so clearly the irresistible conflict and made such adequate preparations for its advent. A deeply religious man he proclaimed a day of fasting and prayer on January 4, 1861, and another Fast Day on April 4, ten days before the fall of Fort Sumter. At the second Fast Day a service was held in the South Congregational Church with a stirring address by Rev. E. C. Cummings, pastor of the North Church and later chaplain of the Fifteenth Vermont.

No governor in the north excelled our honored executive in preparedness. On Vermont’s first Fast Day he wrote Governor Buckingham of Connecticut urging a convention of the free states if ‘the plans to seize the Nation’s Capital culminate.’ A special messenger from Governor Andrews of Massachusetts later brought the news by night that Washington was about to be taken. The secret service man was ill-named as he spread this news all the way from Montpelier to St. Johnsbury and it created so much excitement and newspaper publicity throughout New England that Governor Fairbanks felt himself justified in denying the whole affair as a war measure.

“General Order No. 10,” dated January 26, 1861, requested the Adjutant General to ascertain from town clerks if any vacancies existed in the 17 militia companies and if so to have the quota immediately filled. In every case but one there was a most gratifying response to military preparedness. One captain, however, resigned and was given a public reception and presented with a wooden sword for his bravery.

The same day that Governor Fairbanks received the telegram from the Secretary of War calling for one regiment for immediate service—April 15—a special session of the Legislature was proclaimed 24 hours ahead of any other Governor. In a four days’ session that Legislature had appropriated a million dollars as a war measure and Vermont had the honor of placing in service the first troops in response to the President’s call.

At its adjournment the New York World said: “Vermonsters are organizing in all parts of the State and there will be no more formidable men in the field. The pure atmosphere of the mountains develops the sternest breed of patriots.”