



Name of Vessel:	Blue Mountain Valley
Master of Vessel:	James Hamilton Dempster
Rig of Vessel:	Ship
Date of Capture:	23 January 1776
Place of Capture:	18 miles southeast of Sandy Hook, New Jersey
Captor:	Continental troops and New Jersey militia
Home Port:	
From What Port:	London, England
To What Port:	Boston, Massachusetts
Cargo:	Hogs, porter, coal, cheese, potatoes, sauerkraut
Tonnage:	300-400
Battery:	4x3-pounders
Crew:	16 [total]
Owners:	
Prize master:	Captain William Rogers
Prize crew:	
Ordered Into:	Elizabethtown, New Jersey
Into What Port:	Elizabethtown, New Jersey
Date Arrived:	24 January 1776
Date Tried:	2 March 1776
Date Sold:	18 March 1776
Action:	No
Recaptured:	No

Comments: British Transport Ship *Blue Mountain Valley* (James Hamilton Dempster) sailed from England for Boston in late October 1775, with a cargo of live hogs, cheese, sauerkraut, potatoes, porter and coal, in a convoy of thirty-six other transports. She was described as between three and four hundred tons, one hundred feet on the upper deck, sharp built and galley built without a head, yellow sides with blue quarter boards, and the "trophies of war painted on the quarter-boards." *Blue Mountain Valley* was armed with four 3—pounders on the quarterdeck and had a crew of sixteen. The ship had a long tedious passage of thirteen weeks, suffering much bad weather and damage to the ship and sails. Dempster was under orders not to enter any American port without first contacting a vessel of the Royal Navy. Dempster fell in with the land at Egg Harbor, New Jersey on 18 January 1776, still not having contacted a naval vessel. After being blown out to sea again, Dempster anchored off Sandy Hook on 21 January 1776. By now the *Blue Mountain Valley* was in need of water and repair. Dempster knew there were British ships in New York Harbor, so he wrote letters to the commanders and gave them to his mate, Joseph Woolcombe to deliver. Dempster promised to wait fourteen hours for Woolcombe. Woolcombe took passage for New York in a pilot boat commanded by William Dobbs. En route Woolcombe tried to persuade Dobbs to land him on one of the Royal Navy ships at New York, but Dobbs refused. As soon as the pilot boat arrived in New York (21 January) Dobbs and Woolcombe were seized and jailed by the city guard, acting for the New York Committee of Safety. The letters were found and examined by the Committee. The Committee immediately sent Captain William Rogers to Lord Stirling, the American commander in northern New Jersey, with this information. The Committee suggested he move fast and that Rogers handle the matter. The Committee also stressed that the information not be revealed as coming from New York, lest the warships before the city be provoked. By 22 January Captain Hyde Parker, Jr. of HM Frigate *Phoenix* knew of the transport ship's plight. A pilot boat was seized and a Lieutenant and fifteen marines and sailors put aboard and sent off to Sandy Hook. The New York Committee of Safety advised Lord Stirling, suggesting he use at least two vessels with fifty men each to take the transport and that the pilot boat be taken first.

William Alexander (Lord Stirling) had wasted no time. On the morning of 22 January he set off with a party of soldiers for Perth Amboy to take the vessel. Accordingly the warning from the Committee of Safety about the pilot boat missed him at Elizabethtown. The Committee of Elizabethtown opened the letter, met, and dispatched three boats and a hundred men to assist Alexander. Alexander arrived at Perth Amboy, impressed the pilot boat *York* (Michael Kearney) and put forty men aboard. Just as he sailed at 0200 on 23 January the boats from Elizabethtown arrived. They had about seventy-seven men, under Colonels Elias Dayton and Edward Thomas. Alexander pushed on and found the *Blue Mountain Valley* eighteen miles southeast of Sandy Hook at sunrise. She was boarded and seized without opposition. Dempster mistook the Americans for help sent out by the Royal Navy ships. Captain Rogers was the first aboard, being promised £100 by Alexander for that feat, which he never received. The ship was taken into the sound between Staten Island and New Jersey, and she was off Amboy by evening. The news arrived in New York on 23 January. Woolcombe was now discharged and his letters returned and he was allowed to board the British warships. Meanwhile the *Blue Mountain Valley* got aground and had to be partly unloaded before she got into Elizabethtown on 25 January. Here Captain Rogers took charge of her and began unloading, assisted by the British officers and crew. On 29 January the Continental Congress commended Alexander on the capture and, two days later, ordered the officers and crew released. However the Committee at Elizabethtown requested a better determination from Congress on

10 February 1776. Since there were no courts of Admiralty in New Jersey the matter rested with Congress. That body ordered the cargo landed on 27 February and held until further orders. The Provincial Congress of New Jersey took up the *Blue Mountain Valley* on 29 February. After hearing witnesses the Provincial Congress condemned the vessel on 2 March 1776 and ordered her sold. She was sold on 18 March 1776. On 26 March raiders from the British warships attacked Elizabethtown and set fire to the *Blue Mountain Valley*, which was extinguished however.

[NDAR, III, 902-903 and 903 note, 904, 920-923, 924-925 and 925 note, 925, 941-942 and 942 note, 942-943, 943, 943-944, 959-960 and 960 note, 978 and note, 979 and note, 1012-1014, 1014-1016 and 1016 note, 1016, 1026 and note, 1036 and note, 1037-1038, 1066 and note, 1066, 1086, 1101-1102, 1103, 1200-1203, 1203-1204, 1217 and note, 1303 and note; IV, 21 and note, 75 and note, 75-78, 97-98, 119-120, 140-141, 217 and note, 392-397 and 397 note, 397-398, 410-411, 540, 547 and note, 547, 966, 1103-1104 and 1104 note, 1115, 1310-1313]

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