

# Remembering the Revolution by Jim Johnson

On October 2, 1780, British Adjutant Maj. John André stood on a wagon at Tappan (Rockland County) preparing to die for Maj. Gen. Benedict Arnold's botched attempt to sell Fortress West Point to British Gen. Sir Henry Clinton. Gen. George Washington and a board of 14 officers had decided that André must pay the ultimate price for Arnold's treason and die not before the firing squad, as a soldier, but at the gibbet, as a spy. After tying a handkerchief around his eyes and placing the noose around his own neck, André spoke his last words: "I pray you to bear me witness that I meet my fate like a brave man." "The wagon being now removed from under him," wrote eyewitness Dr. James Thacher, "he was suspended, and instantly expired."

Washington had ordered Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene to convene the board for a trial on Sept. 29. He wrote that André had come "within our lines in the night, on an interview with Major-General Arnold, and in an assumed character; and was taken within our lines, in a disguised habit, with a pass under a feigned name, and with the inclosed papers concealed on him. After a careful examination, you will be pleased as speedily as possible to report a precise state of his case, together with your opinion of the light in which he ought to be considered, and the punishment that ought to be inflicted." After confirming the particulars with André himself, the death sentence was rendered.

And so on the morning of Oct. 2, André walked "between two of our subaltern officers, arm in arm" up the hill to meet his fate, reported Thacher, who noted that the major faltered only once, when he first saw the gallows: "Why this emotion, sir?" said an officer by his side. Instantly recovering his composure, he said, "I am reconciled to my death, but I detest the mode."

André's captors — John Paulding, Isaac Van

Wart, and David Williams — received (upon Washington's recommendation) silver medals inscribed "Fidelity" and a \$200 annual subsidy from the Continental Congress, as well as "the thanks of Congress for their fidelity and the eminent service they have rendered their country." Patriots' Weekend 2005 will thus honor these three committed New York militiamen who changed the course of American history.

The Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area and the Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist College commemorate the 225th anniversary of the Benedict Arnold-John André conspiracy at the George Washington Masonic Historic Site (de Wint House) at Tappan, and at Patriots' Park in Sleepy Hollow/Tarrytown (Westchester) on Oct. 1-2. The 21st Annual Colonial Day, sponsored by the Tappantown Historical Society at the de Wint House, runs from 11 a.m.-5 p.m. on Saturday and features an encampment by the Brigade of the American Revolution. The encampment continues on Sunday and will include lectures, demonstrations, and recreations of André's trial and execution. Also on Sunday, there will be ceremonies honoring John Paulding and Isaac Van Wart at their Westchester gravesites in the Old Van Cortlandville Cemetery (in the town of Cortland) and the Elmsford Reformed Church Cemetery (beginning at 9 and 9:30 a.m., respectively). Artillery will fire upon the *Vulture* (actually the *Clearwater*) from Croton Point Park starting at 10 a.m., followed by the recreation of the capture of André at Patriots' Park at 11:30 a.m.

For the complete schedule of events for Patriots' Weekend 2005, log onto [www.hudsonrivervalley.net](http://www.hudsonrivervalley.net) or [www.hudsonrivervalley.com](http://www.hudsonrivervalley.com).

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