

Remembering the Revolution by Jim Johnson

On September 26, 1780, Gen. George Washington wrote in the Continental Army's General Orders that "Treason of the blackest dye was yesterday discovered! General Arnold who commanded at West point, lost every sentiment of honor, of public and private obligation, was about to deliver up that important Post into the hands of the enemy." This was a particularly hard reversal of fortune for the commander in chief to stomach. He knew how valuable a fighter the American cause had lost with the defection of Maj. Gen. Benedict Arnold and feared that the news of the hero's betrayal might affect America's bid for independence.

Arnold's treachery had developed over the past year as he lost faith in the cause and nursed perceived slights and injustices. The tragedy started with Arnold's meeting on the night of September 21-22 with Maj. John André, Gen. Sir Henry Clinton's adjutant general, at the house of Joshua Hett Smith. (The Helen Hayes Hospital in West Haverstraw, Rockland County, now sits on the site of the so-called "Treason House.") Fate intervened: André was forced to make his way back to New York by land rather than water because Col. James Livingston, commander of Fort Lafayette at King's Ferry (Westchester), fired two cannons at the British sloop of war *Vulture*, forcing it to sail downstream without the adjutant general aboard. (One of the cannons' crew members was reportedly John "Rifle Jack" Peterson, an American of African descent from Peekskill. The "Patriot Cannon," purported to be one of those used, is on display outside the Peekskill Historical Society's Herrick House.) André's doom was sealed when three militiamen, John Paulding, Isaac Van Wart, and David Williams, mistaken at first as Loyalists by André, found the plans to Fortress West Point inside his stockings. André's decision to trade his regimentals for civilian attire led him to the gallows at noon on October 2 in Tappan, Rockland County.

Awaiting Washington's arrival (to visit the fortifications in the Hudson Highlands), Arnold fled to the *Vulture* himself once he received notification that André was in custody. The vaunted hero of Quebec, Valcour Island, and Saratoga had turned coat, becoming a wrathful agent of his former enemy.

The Hudson River Valley National Heritage

Area and the Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist College will commemorate the 225th anniversary of the Benedict Arnold-John André Conspiracy at the de Wint House in Tappan and Patriots' Park in Sleepy Hollow/Tarrytown (Westchester) from September 29 to October 2. The activities start on the 29th with a conference, "Treason!: Benedict Arnold, John André, and the Plot to Betray West Point," at Marist and continue with lectures on the 30th at the U.S. Military Academy and the Tarrytown Music Hall. They will culminate with Colonial Day at the de Wint House and ceremonies and recreations of the capture, trial, and execution of André at the Elmsford Reformed Church Cemetery, the Old Cemetery at Van Cortlandtville, Croton Point Park, Patriots' Park (all on October 1) and Tappan's Historic District (October 2). The events will highlight the actions of three committed New York militiamen who, by capturing John André, changed the course of history.

In July, the 5th New York Regiment and other members of the New York Line journeyed to Newport, Rhode Island, to participate in the 225th anniversary of the arrival of the French expedition *particulière* of almost 6,000 soldiers under the command of Gen. Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau. Rhode Island Governor Donald L. Carcieri, French Ambassador to the U.S. Jean-David Levitte, and best-selling author David McCullough led ceremonies and festivities for over 2,000 spectators and 150 re-enactors. This was the first of many events recreating the march of Rochambeau's French army to New York, where it linked up with Washington's troops for the march to Yorktown, Virginia. It supported the efforts of the National Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route Association to create a National Historic Trail to honor that decisive campaign.

To learn more about the Revolution in the Valley and upcoming events, log onto www.hudsonrivervalley.net and www.hudsonrivervalley.com. You may also subscribe to *The Hudson River Valley Review* by visiting hudsonrivervalley.net/hrvr; issue 21.2 has an account of the capture of John André.

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