

CONFIDENTIAL: THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION'S AGENTS OF ESPIONAGE

Information is power. People seeking to obtain power need information to influence people and the course of events. But in the competition for power, information is well guarded. Not all battles in the war to free the thirteen colonies from British control were fought on the field. Agent 711, as Spymaster George Washington was known, developed a highly successful information gathering espionage network. Washington's secret network of spies obtained and relayed intelligence needed to help defeat the British and win the war.

Those brave enough to work for Washington chose a hazardous duty. Errors were fatal and spies worked in secret. Even long after the war ended many spies lived out their days without recognition of their courage and contributions to the cause. This exhibition highlights several of the War's intrepid spies.

JOHN ANDRÉ

John André was born into a wealthy merchant family in London on May 2, 1750. He was well educated and entered the British Army in 1774 through the purchase of a commission. In 1778, British

Commander-in-Chief Sir Henry Clinton promoted André to adjutant general and soon gave him the charge of operating British intelligence.

Clinton tasked André with advancing the British control beyond New York City by gathering vital information. André had the perfect mole for the job. Continental General Benedict Arnold (1741-1801) had been working with André since 1779. In August of 1780, Arnold was given control of the key military fort of West Point, New York. In need of money and disgruntled with his service to the Patriot cause, Arnold was eager to obtain the twenty thousand pound reward offered by Clinton for the delivery of West Point and its garrison.

Would André make a fatal error?

"Major John André"

Ink on Paper

1784

Gift of Henry Darlington, Jr.

2004.04.024

On September 21, André secretly met with Arnold to discuss the details of relinquishing West Point. They spoke nearly till dawn. In the early hours of September 22, André and Arnold finished their

deliberations in the house of Joshua Hett Smith in West Haverstraw, New York.

"The Tempter and the Traitor: The Treason of Arnold on the Night of September 21, 1780"

Ink on Paper

19th Century

Gift of the Darlington Family

2004.04.006

After the meeting concluded, John André set out for British occupied territory. The forty-mile trek included a crossing of the Hudson River. Going against his instincts, but at the insistence of his companions, he changed out of his regimental uniform into civilian clothes. He tucked the documents from Arnold into his boot and started out through enemy territory.

"The Capture of André"

Ink on Paper

19th Century

Gift of the Darlington Family

2004.04.010

By mid-morning on September 22, André had reached Tarrytown, New York. He came across three armed Patriots—John Paulding, Isaac Van Wart and David Williams. He was asked to dismount.

André's cover as John Anderson was weak. When off his horse, Paulding and Williams mugged him.

"Capture of Major Andre"

Ink on Paper

1859

Gift of Louis Bach

1988.08.109

As André's captors assaulted him they noticed his fine English boots. They unshod André and saw his oddly shaped stocking. They quickly discovered the documents hidden inside. John Paulding, the only literate one of the three, read through the papers and realized André's documents incriminated him as a spy.

André's captors brought him thirteen miles northeast to the nearest commanding Continental officer, in North Castle, New York.

"Capture of Major John André"

Ink on Paper

1940

Gift of the Darlington Family

2004.04.008

On the morning of September 24, John André was transported farther north to South Salem, New York to prevent an easy escape.

It was there he met and was interrogated by twenty-six year old Continental Officer and Spymaster Benjamin Tallmadge. Despite André's efforts to maintain his cover as John Anderson, Tallmadge was unconvinced. André eventually confessed his true identity.

Tallmadge escorted André to his final destination of Tappan, New York. Here André stood trial by a board of senior officers such as the Marquis de Lafayette, Baron Von Steuben, Lord Stirling, and Henry Knox. On September 30, he learned he would be soon hanged as a spy.

"André"

Ink on Paper

1835 Facsimile of October 2, 1780 Original Self Portrait by John André

Gift of the Darlington Family

2004.04.017

In one of his last letters, he wrote to his commander, Sir Henry Clinton, "I am perfectly tranquil of mind, and prepared for any fate to which an honest zeal for my King's service may have devoted me." André was prepared to die but, as a military gentleman, he wanted the approved method of execution—a firing squad. He wrote to George Washington in an attempt to prevent receiving a spy's death at the gallows.

At 10am on October 2, André calmly dressed in his military uniform. He held a pleasant and composed conversation with his captors. Just before 12 noon he was escorted on the long walk to the spot of his execution. Since he had not received a response from Washington, he held the hope he would be granted his last wish. When André saw the gallows, he broke his composure.

"Last Moments of Major Andre"

Ink on Paper

19th Century

Gift of the Darlington Family

2004.04.016

At 12 noon on October 2, 1780, thirty-year-old Major John André was hanged in Tappan, New York as a spy. His last words were, "Only this, gentlemen, that you all bear me witness that I meet my fate like a brave man."

"The Unfortunate Death of Major André"

Ink on Paper

1783

Gift of Louis L. Bach, 1987

1987.01.112

BENJAMIN TALLMADGE

Benjamin Tallmadge was born on February 25, 1754 in Setauket on New York's Long Island. He attended Yale University where he met Nathan Hale. In 1771, the two teenagers got into trouble and were fined for damaging university property while intoxicated. The two friends did focus on academics and participated in debate societies, including arguing for the education of women. Graduating in 1773, Tallmadge took a teaching position in Wethersfield, Connecticut just twenty-six miles away from Hale's new residence in East Haddam, Connecticut.

Diploma of Benjamin Tallmadge

Ink on Paper

1773

MS29

Collection of Frances Tavern[®] Museum

After three years at Wethersfield High School, Benjamin Tallmadge resigned to join the Continental Army at the age of twenty-two. On June 20, 1776, he was commissioned as a lieutenant. After seven months he received a promotion as a commissioned captain in the Regiment of Light Dragoons commanded by Lieutenant Colonel

Elisha Sheldon.

Commission of Benjamin Tallmadge in the Regiment of the Light Dragoons

Ink on Paper

December 14, 1776

MS198

Collection of Fraunces Tavern® Museum

Tallmadge had served the Patriot cause well but George Washington wanted more. In the summer of 1778 he ordered Tallmadge to conduct intelligence gathering operations around New York City. Tallmadge dutifully accepted but did not receive training in spy craft or espionage.

Some of the information that Tallmadge was able to gather can be found in this letter. On September 23, 1778, Tallmadge wrote to Colonel Charles Pettit (1736-1806) quartermaster general who kept the accounts for the corps. Tallmadge asked for reimbursement of receipts. He also includes information on the movements of the enemy gleaned from a deserter, "I learned that transports are preparing for the reception of the Cavalry at New York...."

Two days after Tallmadge wrote this letter, Washington decided he needed more than the passive information collected by Tallmadge.

He requested that Tallmadge create a ring of agents stationed in British occupied New York. Tallmadge used his personal connections on Long Island to develop a trusted network. The Culper Spy Ring was formed. Tallmadge created codes and aliases. He would be known as John Bolton and his leading agents were Abraham Woodhull, Samuel Culper, and Robert Townsend Culper Jr.

Letter from Benjamin Tallmadge to Colonel Charles Pettit

Ink on Paper

September 23, 1778

MS168

The Culper Ring was extremely successful. Tallmadge's system of agents could obtain information inside the city and use covert operations to get that information back to George Washington. This letter from Washington was written a year after the Culper Ring was formed. It shows his dependence on Tallmadge's information and his respect for the delicate nature of intelligence gathering.

Should a certain operation take place,/ it will be necessary to establish a very regular/ communication with Long Island.

These plans/ are better settled personally than by letter, I/ shall be glad to see you at Head Quarters./ After learning from

persons who can be instrus/ ted with the Reg. of C— letters
and forwarding/ them and any observations when the found,/ be
pleased to ride over.

Letter from George Washington to Benjamin Tallmadge

Ink on Paper

October 9, 1779

MS216

Collection of Fraunces Tavern® Museum

The way the Culper Ring transported information was intricate. This covert operation started with a roughly sixty-five mile trip from Setauket, New York. This trip was made by either Jonas Hawkins or Austin Roe (Agent 724). Roe would meet Robert Townsend (Culper Jr.) at his store under the guise of purchasing supplies for his tavern. Townsend would give Roe an intelligence report. Once back in Setauket, Roe would bury the report in a box on Abraham Woodhull's (Samuel Culper) farm. Once Woodhull had the report he would use his telescope to check the laundry line of his neighbor Anna Smith Strong. Her laundry line was used as a code system to communicate to Woodhull about when and where, Caleb Brewster (Agent 725), would pick up the report. A former whale boatman, Brewster would row the report across the Long Island Sound (about twenty-five miles) to Fairfield, Connecticut. Then

couriers would bring the report to Tallmadge who sent it through a series of riders to George Washington's headquarters.

This dangerous and elaborate system did not always operate without incident. This letter details a skirmish on the Sound when the British attempted to intercept Brewster who was "...seriously wounded by a ball thro' his body." The British caused enough issue for Tallmadge to call off this particular mission attempt. This failed mission devastated him. "Among all the disappointments of my/ life, I never experienced such severe mortification/ before...."

Letter from Benjamin Tallmadge to George Washington

Ink on Paper

December 8, 1782

MS157

Collection of Fraunces Tavern® Museum

Bernard Ratzer was a British engineer. He was recruited by the British Army and commissioned as a Lieutenant and rose the to the rank of Captain working for the Army as a surveyor and draftsman, mostly surveying the New England coast.

This map is one of the best depictions of the City

before the Revolutionary War. It provides a birds-eye view of lower Manhattan Island, eastern New Jersey, and western Brooklyn. At the bottom of the map is a detailed panoramic view of New York harbor as seen from Governors Island. Ratzel included the city's important landmarks, many of which are listed in the legend or key.

Using arrows we have marked the locations of the stores and residents of some of Washington's most essential spies.

Plan of City of New York in North America

Cartographer: Bernard Ratzel (fl. 1756-1777)

Publisher: William Faden (1749-1836) & Thomas Jefferys (1719-1771)

England, 1776

Copperplate Engraving

2013.03.001

Collection of Fraunces Tavern® Museum

NEW YORK CITY PATRIOT SPY OPERATIONS

The United States declared independence on July 4, 1776. The next month, the British military invaded New York City in the War's first major battle. By August 30, the British had taken control of the major port city. Washington started creating an intelligence network to gather information on British military activity and plans inside the

city. On September 12, 1776, Washington sent behind enemy lines the newly-minted and untrained twenty-one-year-old Yale graduate Nathan Hale. Ten days later he was quickly discovered and sentenced to death without trial by the gallows.

Washington learned from the tragic mistake he made with Hale, He quickly worked to set up intricate spy rings.

ROBERT TOWNSEND

Robert Townsend was born in 1753 to a Quaker and Episcopalian merchant family in Oyster Bay, New York. In the 1760s he apprenticed at a New York City merchant firm during which he lived near today's City Hall Park. At the age of twenty, he opened a dry-good business at the bottom of Wall Street near Hanover Square. (See #1 on Map)

JAMES RIVINGTON

James Rivington was born in England in the year 1724. He came to the thirteen colonies in 1760 and eventually opened a successful print shop in New York City on Hanover Square. His paper was full of

gossip, Loyalist sympathies, and tabloid-style stories. The Sons of Liberty hanged Rivington in effigy. A mob burned his house and destroyed his shop. He left for England with his family only to return to New York City in 1777 as the King's appointed printer.

(See #2 on Map)

HERCULES MULLIGAN

Hercules Mulligan was born in Ireland in 1740. When Mulligan was around four-years-old, his family moved to New York City. He attended King's College (now Columbia University). In 1773, he met newly-arrived eighteen-year-old Alexander Hamilton through family connections in the merchant industry. Mulligan hosted Hamilton at his home and the two became friends and members of the Sons of Liberty. In 1774, Mulligan opened a fancy clothing and tailor shop at 23 Queen Street (now 218 Pearl St).

(See #3 on Map)

HAYM SALOMON

Haym Salomon was born in Poland in 1740 to a Sephardic Jewish family. In 1772, he emigrated to New York City. He started a business as a financial broker and joined the Sons of Liberty. When

the British took over New York in September of 1776, Salomon was captured and imprisoned. In order to improve his captivity and chance of survival he used his multi-lingual skills to secure a role as interpreter for the Hessians.

THE NETWORK

What do these four people have in common? They were all spies working together for the Patriot cause.

Robert Townsend knew Abraham Woodhull (Agent 722 Samuel Culper), through a distant family connection. The two boarded at the same house owned by Woodhull's sister and her husband, Townsend's distant relative Amos Underhill. The two men could meet at Townsend's Smith Street merchant store without raising suspicion because of their family relation and Woodhull would sell his farm's produce to Townsend. Woodhull recruited twenty-six-year-old Townsend (Agent 723 Culper Jr.), for the Culper spy ring.

Not long after the British occupied New York City, Townsend opened a coffee house, as the silent partner of James Rivington (Agent 726), a block away from his office. Townsend and Rivington

could regularly meet under the cover of conducting regular coffee house business. At these meetings, Rivington could provide information learned from his patrons like John André and other Loyalists who may have over-shared with the King's appointed printer.

Just three blocks up Queen Street from Townsend's merchant store was Hercules Mulligan's tailor shop. Mulligan was an agent run directly by George Washington. The connection between Mulligan and Washington was possibly made through Alexander Hamilton. Mulligan used his shop as a cover to collect intelligence for the Patriots. Mulligan provided tailor services to many of the high ranking Hessians stationed in New York City. Mulligan did not speak German. The soldiers used their captive secret agent Haym Salomon to translate communications with the tailor. Mulligan often used Cato, whom he kept enslaved, to courier correspondence with his clientele. Haym would receive Cato and translate the tailor's information for his captors. Haym could use his meetings with Cato to share information learned from his captors, which Cato would deliver back to Mulligan.

Robert Townsend employed Mulligan to make him a coat. This gave Townsend a good cover to meet with Mulligan. Once Townsend gathered all the information from Mulligan, Cato, Haym, Rivington, and any other still-unknown agents, he would encode it into a document and carry it out of the city. The intelligence had started its journey through the well-organized network where it would eventually reach George Washington.