

THE GILDER LEHRMAN  
INSTITUTE *of* AMERICAN HISTORY

*Inside the Vault:*  
*Treason in the American Revolution:*  
*Benedict Arnold and John André*

September 9, 2021

*The session will start shortly. Please note:*

- Your video and audio will automatically turn off.
- You can participate through the Q&A function.
- If you have technical difficulties, please email [collectionprograms@gilderlehrman.org](mailto:collectionprograms@gilderlehrman.org) so we can assist you.

## *Our Team*

- Allison Kraft - Assistant Curator
- Ron Adkisson - 2012 Kentucky History Teacher of the Year
- Ryan Scheb - History educator at Cristo Rey New York High School in New York City
- Alinda Borell - Senior Archivist

# *During the Session*



- If you would like to ask a question, you can **use the Q&A feature.**
- We will be answering audience questions throughout the session.

## **For Security and Privacy**

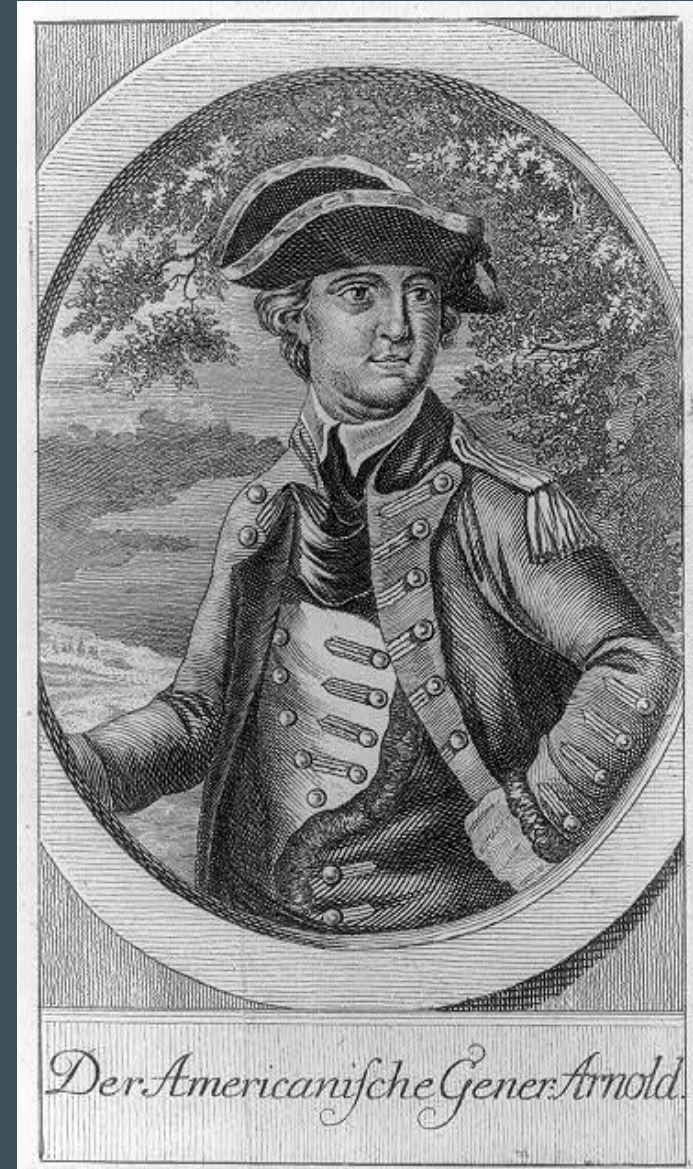
- Your microphone is automatically muted.
- Your camera is automatically turned off.

## *Today's Documents*

- A note from Alexander Scammell to John André
- A letter from Thomas Paine to Nathanael Greene
- A proclamation from Benedict Arnold
- William North's recollections of Arnold's and André's plot

# *Benedict Arnold (1741-1801)*

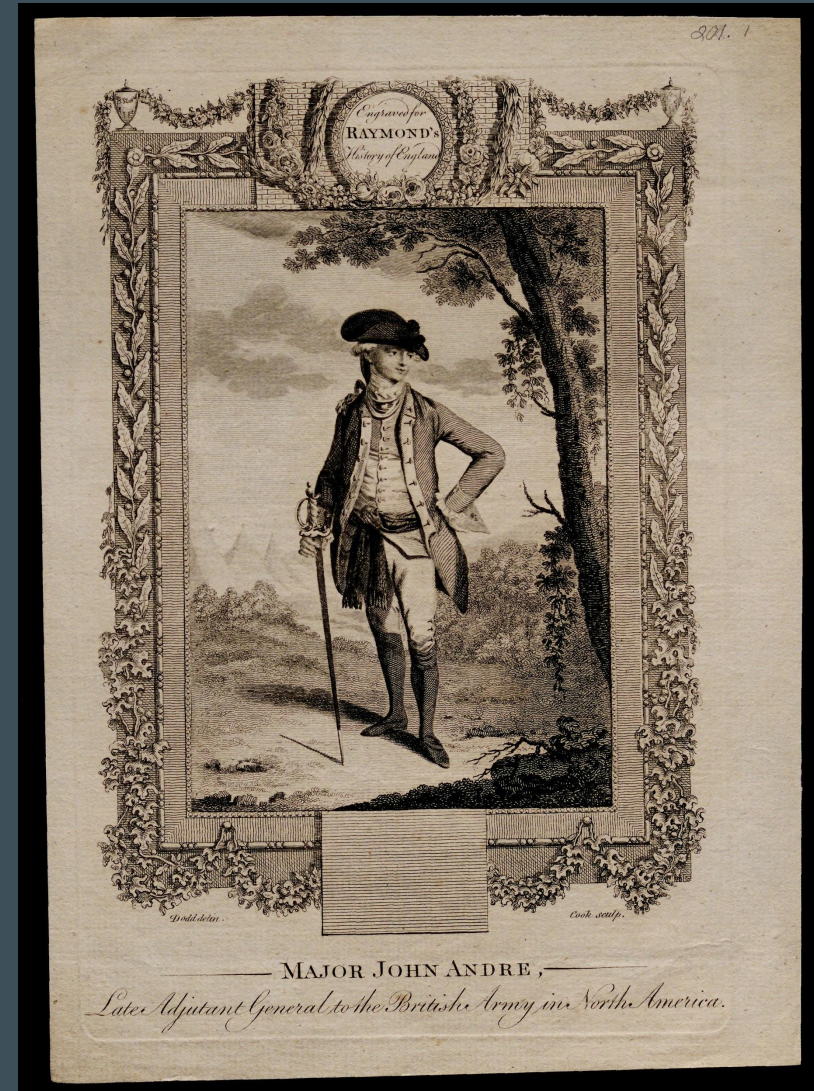
- Born January 14, 1741, in Norwich, Connecticut
- Rose to the rank of major general in the Continental Army
- Married loyalist Peggy Shippen in 1779
  - Introduced Arnold to John André, the head of British espionage systems in New York
  - Often relayed messages from Arnold to André
- Arnold promoted to command the fort West Point in July 1780





# *John André (1751-1780)*

- Born May 2, 1751, in London
- Served as adjutant general in the British Army and was appointed Head of Secret Service in America in 1779
- Began negotiating the capture of West Point with Benedict Arnold in 1780
- Arrested September 23, 1780, in Tarrytown, NY, after being stopped and searched by American officers



**May 1779**

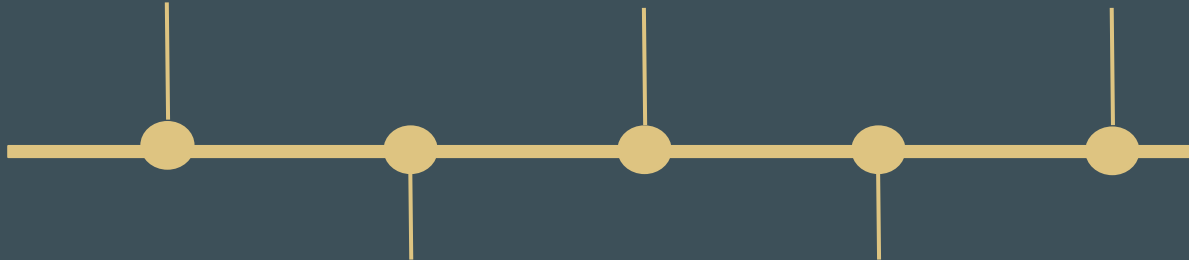
Benedict Arnold began corresponding with British Major John André, providing information about American army supplies and movements.

**September 21, 1780**

Arnold and André met, and Arnold provided André with a map of the fort, confidential military meeting minutes, and a pass with the pseudonym John Anderson.

**September 29, 1780**

George Washington convened a board of 15 senior officers to investigate André's crime.



**August 30, 1780**

Arnold was given command of West Point, a key American stronghold on the Hudson River.

**September 23, 1780**

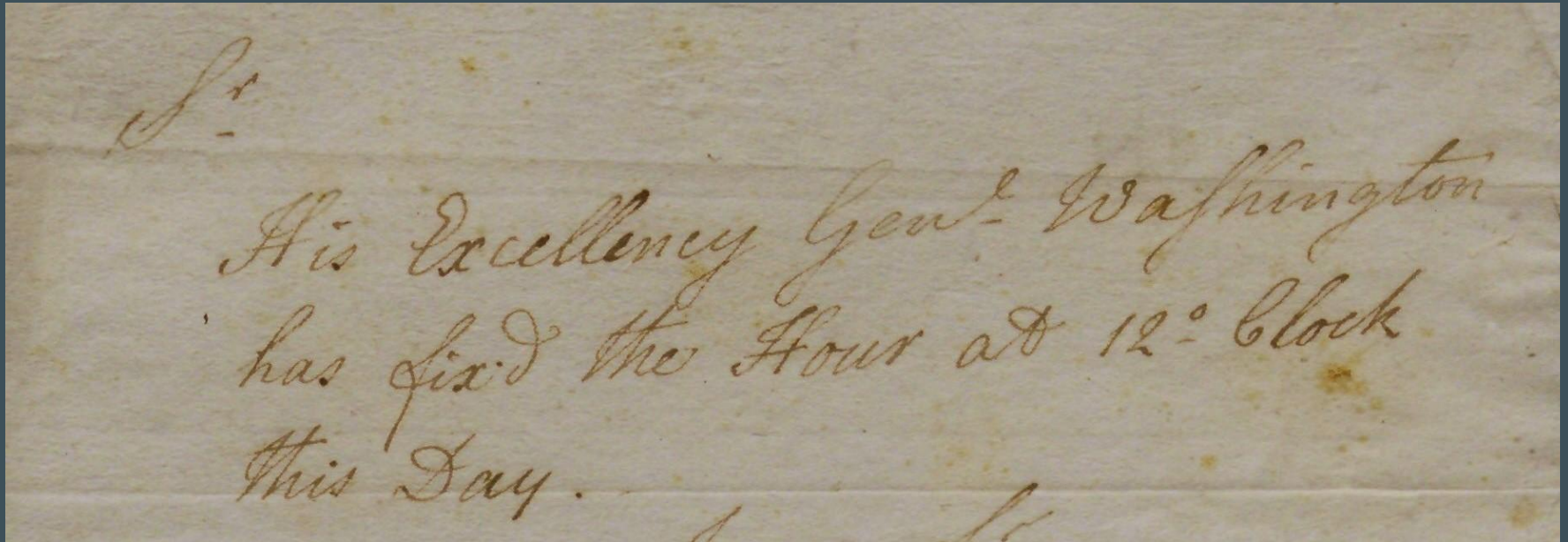
Major André was arrested by American militiamen in New York. Plans to capture West Point were found in his boot.

Alexander Scammell  
to John André,  
October 2, 1780

S<sup>r</sup>  
His Excellency Gen<sup>l</sup>. Washington  
has fix'd the Hour at 12<sup>o</sup> Clock  
this Day.  
I am S<sup>r</sup>  
Y<sup>r</sup> Most Obed<sup>t</sup>  
Serv<sup>t</sup>  
A Scammell A G<sup>e</sup>  
Maj<sup>r</sup> Andre.



## *Andre's execution set*



Sr.  
His Excellency Genl Washington  
has fix'd the Hour at 12 o Clock  
this Day.

Sr.

His Excellency Genl Washington has fix'd the Hour at  
12 o Clock this Day.

# Remembering John André

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Photo courtesy of Allison Kraft



Thomas Paine to  
Nathanael Greene,  
October 17, 1780

Philadelphia Oct. 17<sup>th</sup> 1780

Dear Sir

Thank God nobody can publish my letters after I am dead for I write none. and in the perfect uncertainty of empyson I feel determined to write none. thus much by way of apology for not writing sooner

God God what an escape have you had! Were I inclined to be superstitious, I should attribute the whole of this discovery to Providence. I see so many ~~ways~~<sup>chances</sup> the Troop had of succeeding and every chance opposed by an unconquerable something, that I almost feel myself a Predestinationian.

But how is it that Andra who did like a Roman should suffer himself to be taken as a coward would have been taken. — A man on horseback against three on foot had a chance of escaping especially as the pursuit could not have been far or long. Do you think an American Officer would have been taken by three Tories without a struggle for it? — but thus again comes on the answer — It was to be — and so be it!

But why, if Providence had the management of the whole did the late Arnold escape in October, to be hung afterwards by the Enemy for some act of treason which against them. In this case he will have no apology left and all Poster will call him what they now think him a Villain.

I suggest a hint — should Arnold send any more letters — return them unopened to General Clinton —

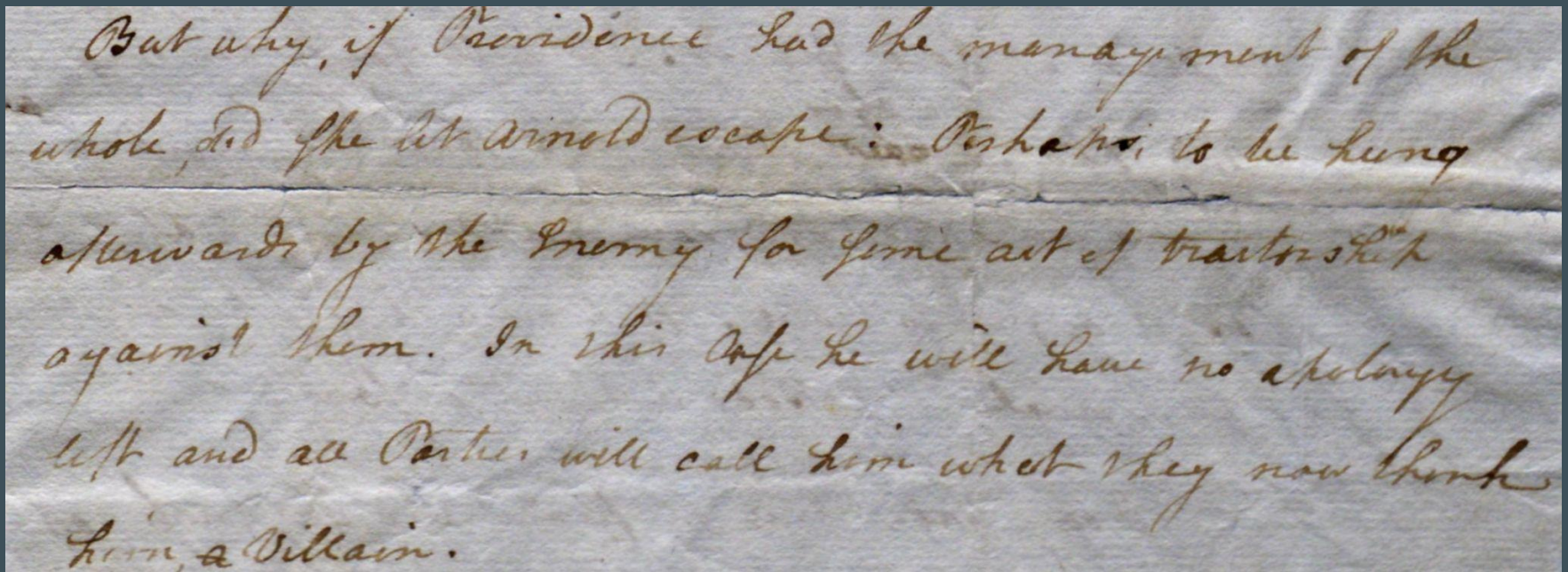
# “André who died like a Roman”

But how is it that André who died like a Roman should suffer himself to be taken as a coward would have been taken. — A man on horseback against three on foot had a chance of escaping especially as the pursuit could not have been far or long. Do you think an American officer would have been taken by three Tories within sight almost of his own lines without a struggle for it? — but there again comes in the answer — It was to be — and so be it.

But how is it that André who died like a Roman should suffer himself to be taken as a coward would have been taken[?] — A man on horseback against three on foot had a chance of escaping especially as the pursuit could not have been for so long. Do you think an American officer would have been taken by three Tories within sight almost of his own lines without a struggle for it? but there again comes in the answer. It was to be — and so be it.



## Arnold's escape

A photograph of a handwritten manuscript snippet on aged, yellowed paper. The text is written in a cursive script and reads: "But why, if Providence had the management of the whole, did she let Arnold escape: Perhaps, to be hung afterwards by the Enemy for some act of traitorship against them. In this case he will have no apology left and all Parties will call him what they now think him, a Villain." The paper shows signs of wear, including a horizontal crease and some discoloration.

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Proclamation by British  
Brigadier-General  
Arnold, October 20, 1780

B Y

Brigadier-General ARNOLD,  
A PROCLAMATION.

To the Officers and Soldiers of the Continental Army who have the real Interest of their Country at Heart, and who are determined to be no longer the Tools and Dupes of Congress, or of France.

HAVING reason to believe that the principles I have avowed, in my address to the public of the 7th instant, animated the greater part of this continent, I rejoice in the opportunity I have of inviting you to join His Majesty's Arms.

His Excellency Sir Henry Clinton has authorized me to raise a corps of cavalry and infantry, who are to be clothed, furnished, and paid as the other troops are in the British service, and those who bring in horses, arms, or accoutrements, are to be paid their value, or have liberty to sell them. To every non-commissioned officer and private a bounty of THREE GUINEAS will be given, and as the Commander in Chief is pleased to allow me to nominate the officers, I shall with infinite satisfaction embrace this opportunity of advancing men whose valour I have witnessed, and whose principles are favourable to an union with Britain, and with AMERICA'S LIBERTY.

The rank they obtain in the King's service will bear a proportion to their former rank, and the number of men they bring with them.

It is expected that a Lieutenant-Colonel of cavalry will bring with him, or recruit in a reasonable time,  
75 men, Major of HORSE - 50 men. Lieut. Col. of INFANTRY - 75 men.  
Major of ditto - - - - - 50  
Lieutenant of ditto - 15  
Captain of ditto - - - - - 30  
Corner of ditto - - - 12  
Serjeant of ditto - - - 6  
Lieutenant of ditto - - - - - 15  
Ensign of ditto - - - - - 12  
Serjeant of ditto - - - - - 6

N. B. Each Field Officer will have a Company.

Great as this encouragement must appear to such as have suffered every distress of want of pay, hunger and nakedness, from the neglect, contempt, and corruption of Congress, they are nothing to the motives which I expect will influence the brave and generous minds I hope to have the honour to command.

I wish to lead a chosen band of Americans to the attainment of peace, liberty, and safety (that first object in taking the field) and wish them to share in the glory of refusing our native country from the grasping hand of France, as well as from the ambitious and interdicted views of a desperate party among ourselves, who, in listening to French overtures, and rejecting those from Great-Britain, have brought the colonies to the very brink of destruction.

Friends, fellow soldiers, and citizens, arouse, and judge for yourselves,—reflect on what you have lost,—consider to what you are reduced, and by your courage repel the ruin that still threatens you.

Your country once was happy, and had the professed peace been embraced, your last two years of misery had been spent in peace and plenty, and repairing the desolations of a quarrel that would have set the interests of Great-Britain and America in its true light, and cemented their friendship; whereas, you are now the prey of avarice, the scorn of your enemies, and the pity of your friends.

You were promised LIBERTY by the leaders of your affairs, but is there an individual in the enjoyment of it, saving your oppressors? Who among you dare speak, or write what he thinks, against the tyranny which has robbed you of your property, imprisons your persons, drags you to the field of battle, and is daily deluging your country with your blood?

You are flattered with independency as preferable to a redress of grievances, and for that shadow, instead of real felicity, are sunk into all the wretchedness of poverty by the rapacity of your own rulers. Already are you disqualified to support the pride of character they taught you to aim at, and must inevitably shortly belong to one or other of the great powers their folly and wickedness have drawn into conflict. Happy for you that you may still become the fellow-subjects of Great-Britain, if you nobly disdain to be the vassals of France.

What is America now but a land of widows, orphans, and beggars?—and should the parent nation cease her exertions to deliver you, what security remains to you even for the enjoyment of the consolations of that religion for which your fathers braved the ocean, the heathen, and the wilderness? Do you know that the eye which guides this pen lately saw your mean and profligate Congress set traps for the soul of a Roman Catholic;—Purgatory, and participating in the rites of a Church, against whose antichristian corruptions your pious ancestors would have witnessed with their blood.

As to you who have been soldiers in the continental army, can you at this day want evidence that the funds of your country are exhausted, or that the managers have applied them to their own private uses? In either case you surely can no longer continue in their service with honour or advantage; yet you have hitherto been their supporters of that cruelty, which, with an equal indifference to yours, as well as to the labour and blood of others, is devouring a country, which, from the moment you quit their colours, will be redeemed from their tyranny.

But what need of arguments to such as feel infinitely more misery than tongue can express. I therefore only add my promise of the most affectionate welcome and attention to all who are disposed to join me in the measures necessary to close the scene of our afflictions, which, intolerable as they are, must continue to increase until we have the widows (shewn of late by Ireland) in being contented with the liberality of the Parent Country, who still offers her protection, with the immediate restoration of our ancient privileges, civil and sacred, and a perpetual exemption from all taxes, but such as we shall think fit to impose on ourselves.

B. ARNOLD.

NW-YORK, OCTOBER 20, 1780.

B Y

## Brigadier-General ARNOLD, A PROCLAMATION.

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## *Flattered with the hope of independence*

You are flattered with independency as preferable to a redress of grievances, and for that shadow, instead of real felicity, are sunk into all the wretchedness of poverty by the rapacity of your own rulers. Already are you disqualified to support the pride of character they taught you to aim at, and must inevitably shortly belong to one or other of the great powers their folly and wickedness have drawn into conflict. Happy for you that you may still become the fellow-subjects of *Great-Britain*, if you nobly disdain to be the vassals of *France*.

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# *To the soldiers of the Continental Army*

As to you who have been soldiers in the continental army, can you at this day want evidence that the funds of your country are exhausted, or that the managers have applied them to their own private uses? In either case you surely can no longer continue in their service with honour or advantage; yet you have hitherto been their supporters of that cruelty, which, with an equal indifference to your, as well as to the labour and blood of others, is devouring a country, which, from the moment you quit their colours, will be redeemed from their tyranny.

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William North's  
Account of the  
Execution of Major  
John André,  
September 18, 1823

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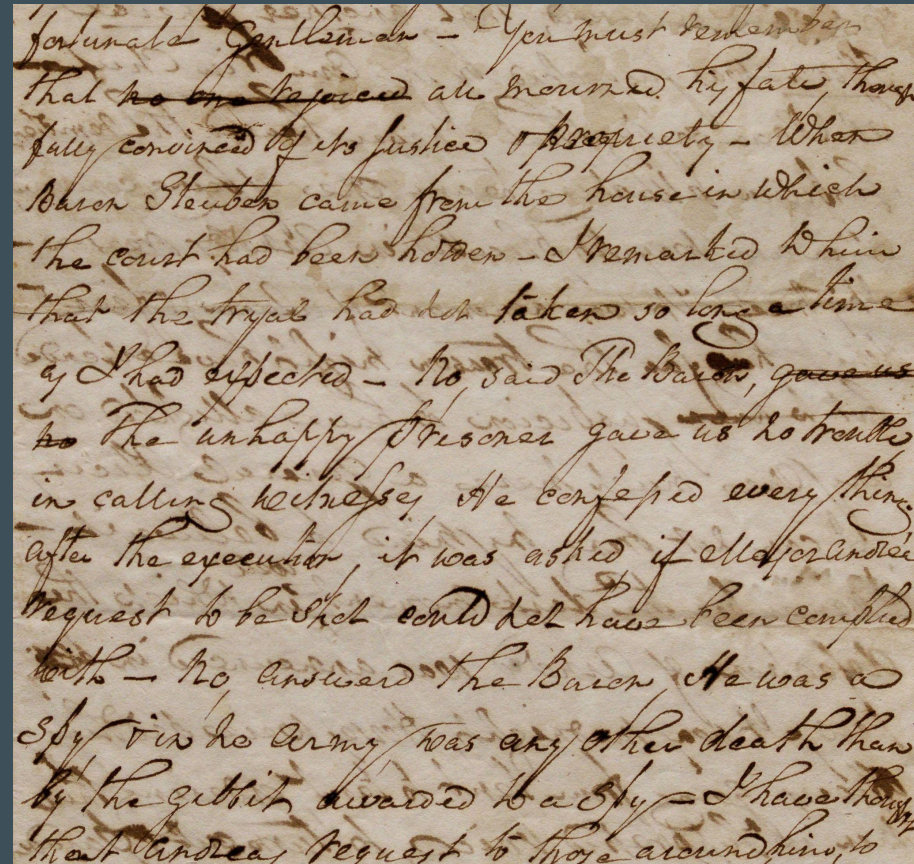
Recollections —

I was at Tappan with the Army when André  
was executed, but I did not attend his execution, nor,  
as I have always believed, did an great number of  
Spectators go to witness the execution of that  
fortunate Gentleman — You must remember  
that no one rejoiced at his fate though  
fully convinced of its justice & propriety — When  
Baron Steuben came from the house in which  
the court had been holden — I remarked to him  
that the trial had not taken so long a time  
as I had expected — He said The Baron, gave us  
no The unhappy Prisoner gave us no trouble  
in calling witnesses He confessed every thing  
after the execution, it was asked if Major André's  
request to be shot could not have been complied  
with — He answered The Baron He was a  
Spy in the Army was any other death than  
by the gibbet awarded to a Spy — I have thought  
that André's request to those around him, to



# “He died like a brave man”

You must remember that all mourned his fate though fully convinced of its Justice & propriety. When Baron Steuben came from the house in which the court had been holden- I remarked to him that the tryal had not taken so long a time as I had expected- No, said The Baron, The unhappy prisoner gave us no trouble in calling witnesses. He confessed everything. after the execution, it was asked if Major Andre’s request to be shot could not have been complied with No, answerd the Baron He was a spy & in no army was any other death than by the gibbet awarded to a spy- I have thought that Andre’s request to those around him, to witness “that He died like a brave man”, ought not to have been made.

A snippet of a handwritten manuscript in cursive script, likely from the late 18th or early 19th century. The text is written on aged, yellowed paper and is partially obscured by a dark, irregular shape, possibly a shadow or a mark. The visible text reads: "fortunate Gentleman - You must remember that no one rejoiced all around his fate though fully convinced of its justice & propriety - When Baron Steuben came from the house in which the court had been holden - I remarked to him that the tryal had not taken so long a time as I had expected - No, said The Baron, gave us no trouble in calling witnesses. He confessed everything. after the execution, it was asked if Major Andre's request to be shot could not have been complied with - No answerd the Baron He was a spy & in no army was any other death than by the gibbet awarded to a spy - I have thought that Andre's request to those around him, to witness that He died like a brave man, ought not to have been made."

# Arnold's treason

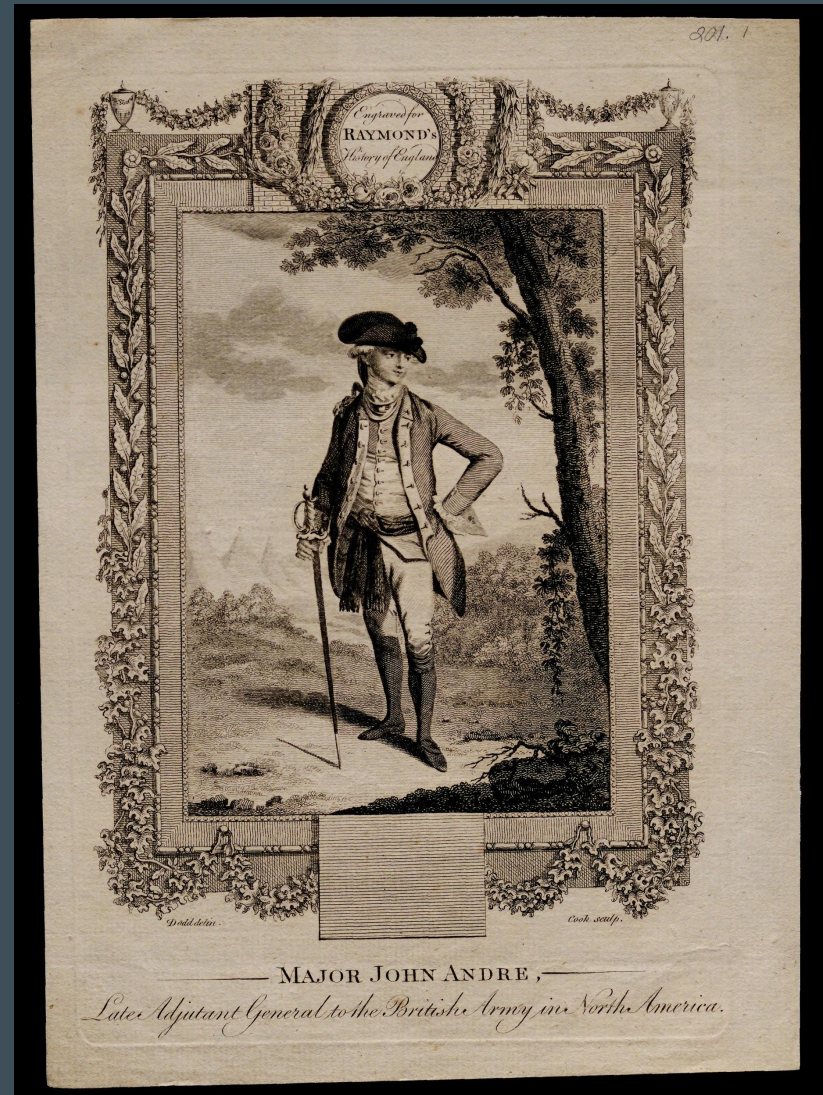
All I can say, that I never heard the remote  
 suspicion attaching to any one, of being concerned  
 or in any way implicated in Arnold's treason -  
 It is true, it was a moment of alarm & fear &  
 doubt how far the treason might have extended  
 but to have suspicion to have alighted on  
 any one much more a General Officer  
 I can not bring my mind to believe it -

I never heard the remote suspicion attaching to any one, of being concerned or in any way implicated in Arnolds treason – It is true, it was a moment of alarm & fear & doubt how far the treason might have extended but Suspicion to have allighted on anyone, much more a General Officer, I can not bring my mind to believe it





Gilder Lehrman Collection



Gilder Lehrman Collection

# *Upcoming Programs*

- *Book Breaks*, Sunday, September 12 at 2 p.m. (11 a.m. PT)
  - Ada Ferrer discusses her book *Cuba: An American History*.
- **EduHam Online**
  - The goal of the Hamilton Education Program Online is to help students in grades 6–12 see the relevance of the Founding Era by using primary sources to create a performance piece (e.g., a song, rap, poem, or scene) following the model used by Lin-Manuel Miranda to create the musical *Hamilton*. The program consists of classroom activities and digital resources that can be incorporated into a regular curriculum on the Founding Era. To register, teachers can visit [hamilton.gilderlehrman.org](http://hamilton.gilderlehrman.org)