

Introduction

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IF ANY BRITISH ARMY had chosen to play “The World Turned Upside Down” as it marched into captivity, it should have been Lieutenant General John Burgoyne’s Convention Army. With its surrender to the American Northern Army commanded by Major General Horatio Gates on 17 October 1777, the diplomatic world did turn upside down. On 6 February 1778 Conrad Alexander Gerard, representing King Louis XVI of France, signed a Treaty of Amity and Commerce in Paris with the three American envoys, Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane, and Arthur Lee. Not only did this document recognize the independence from Great Britain of the “United States of North America,” it also pledged that the French would be America’s principal ally should war develop between her and the British, “their common Enemy.” General George Washington would call Fortress West Point on the Hudson River in New York “the key of America.” From July 1776 until 25 November 1783, the Hudson River would be one of the most important strategic locations in the colonies. As the central seat of the war in the thirteen colonies, New York would be the center of political, social, and military activities throughout the war.

The North River Valley, as it was first known, was distinguished by its central role in the American Revolution, the region that George Washington referred to as the “Key to the Northern Country.” The region was prized by the British

for its strategic and tactical advantages, its central role in communication and trade, and its primary role as the major agricultural producer in North America. For the same reasons, the American revolutionaries mustered all of their resources to retain and control the region. From 1776–1780, the region was the central battleground of the Revolution, with major battles fought at White Plains, Saratoga, Fort Montgomery, and Stony Point. It also witnessed some of the most dramatic and memorable aspects of the war, including Benedict Arnold’s failed conspiracy at West Point, the burning of the New York capital at Kingston, the chaining of the river, and the over 600-mile march of General George Washington and the Continental Army and Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau and his French Expeditionary Corps—the *expédition particulière* to Yorktown, Virginia. All but three of the chapters in this volume have previously appeared in either the *Hudson Valley Regional Review* or *The Hudson River Valley Review*, published by the Hudson River Valley Institute. We have chosen 20 articles, from the more than 194 published in these two regional journals, which we believe illustrate the richly textured history of this supremely important place in the American Revolution. We hope that this anthology of representative pieces of writing about the Hudson River Valley will inspire you to enjoy many other issues of *The Hudson River Valley Review*.

OVERVIEW

“The American Revolution in the Hudson River Valley” by Dr. James M. Johnson and Dr. Thomas S. Wermuth provides an overview of the region’s important role in the Revolutionary War and the reasons that it was one of the most embattled areas in North America. Ultimately, as “the nexus of the conflict,” it was the region’s strategic importance, rich bounty, proximity to New York City, and leading role in trade that led both Revolutionaries and Redcoats to prize the region.

POLITICS AND LOYALTIES

Kenneth Shefsiek’s “A Suspected Loyalist in the Rural Hudson Valley” tells the story of New Paltz’s Roeloff Josiah Eltinge, who was accused of being a Tory by his neighbors and the conspiracy commissioners. His primary crime seems to have been disinterest in the Revolutionary cause as revealed by his refusal to accept Continental currency. As Edward Countryman has pointed out, Eltinge was by no means unique among people in the region and elsewhere, who chose no side in the conflict and preferred to watch the growing struggle from the sidelines. The term “Tory” was usually understood by generations following the Revolution to mean someone who stayed loyal to the Crown—a “Loyalist.” However, the term had much wider meaning during the war years and soon after. It connoted folks who were not “patriotic” enough or who simply seemed disinterested in the struggle. At times it referred to those who didn’t seem to do their share to win the war, while other times it might be used to describe a local price-gouger. In the story of Roeloff Eltinge, we see the difficult world of the Revolutionary Hudson and how a citizen could be driven into the Loyalist camp by the harsh treatment of his neighbors.

In his article, “Can you on such principles think of quitting a Country?’ Family, Faith, Law, Property, and the Loyalists of the Hudson Valley during the American Revolution,”

Michael Diaz, a former intern at the Hudson River Valley Institute and the recipient of the Open Space Institute’s first Barnabas McHenry Hudson River Valley Award, introduced the plight of key Loyalists (Tories) who sided with King George III against their neighbors, the Whigs, who were determined to separate themselves in a civil war from his control. Inspired by States Dyckman of Boscobel, Diaz looked at the most influential Loyalist families in the Hudson River Valley: the DeLanceys, the Philippses, the Van Cortlandts, the Coldens, the Van Schaacks, and the Robinsons. He concluded that rather than being “disaffected,” the politics of the men in these families “were determined by strong social forces such as family ties, religious conviction, and a respect for civil obedience, law, and order.”

Former West Point instructor Major Colin Williams in his article, “New York’s Committees in the American Revolution,” reveals the mysteries of the political system used by the Whigs during the *rage militaire* before the approval of the New York State Constitution in Kingston on 20 April 1777—the extra-legal committees of safety, “which ran the local governance in the colonies upstate counties.” After gaining “legitimacy by giving as many residents as possible a role in fighting the rebellion,” the committees “handled the challenges of local security, commodity distribution, military provisioning, and collecting the money needed to pay for the war.” Ultimately, committees for detecting and defeating conspiracies “became the government’s most powerful instrument in prosecuting New York’s civil war.”

Claire Brandt shows in “Robert H. Livingston, Jr.: The Reluctant Revolutionary” that Robert R. Livingston, Jr., “the Chancellor,” might not deserve to be mentioned among the names of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, George Clinton, and other prominent figures of the American Revolution. Nonetheless she gives him his due as she explores the numerous contributions that he made to the Whig cause in New York’s Hudson River Valley.

He was the chancellor of New York, a nominal member of the committee that drafted the Declaration of Independence, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister to France as the United States negotiated the acquisition of the Louisiana Purchase. For a leader of the democratic Whig cause in America's first civil war, he proved to be a reluctant revolutionary who regarded the masses "as irresponsible, immoderate, and injudicious" and thus not to be trusted with political power. According to Brandt, Livingston hungered "for recognition, fame, and power" and in the end achieved only political ruination.

Lincoln Diamant, in his article about Skinners in the Neutral Ground of Westchester County, answers the question in his title—"Patriot 'Friends' or Loyalist Foes?"—as emphatically Loyalist foes. Diamant provides a penetrating analysis that rejects the legend started by James Fenimore Cooper that Cowboys were affiliated with the British and Skinners with the Patriots. The name Skinners in fact can be traced to Brigadier General Cortlandt Skinner, commander of a New Jersey Loyalist brigade. His article is a cautionary tale for all historians—find the bedrock evidence and avoid the quicksand of hearsay.

Dr. Thomas S. Wermuth in "The Central Hudson Valley and the American Revolution," originally published in *The Other New York*, focused his research on the central counties of the Hudson River Valley: Dutchess, Orange, and Ulster Counties. He found that "The Central Hudson Valley was one of the most contested battlegrounds in the War for American Independence." Except for the entrenched institution of African slavery, the turmoil of war caused economic and political change as "a far more democratic, egalitarian society" emerged. In the central Hudson new leaders rose from the middling classes and used their political power to confiscate and to redistribute Loyalists' lands. This "dramatic" development "opened opportunities for land ownership and free-hold status," which were truly revolutionary.

SUFFRAGE AND SOCIETY

Denis P. Brennan provides insights into the Revolutionary era newspaper business in New York and the other colonies in his article, "Open to All Parties: Alexander and James Robertson, Albany Printers, 1771–1777." Of particular interest, Alexander and James Robertson published Albany's first newspaper, *The Albany Gazette*, from 1771–1772. Although they initially appeared "to have been most interested in the newspaper as a tool of the enlightenment and not as a weapon of the political wars," the Albany Committee of Correspondence thought their later printing trade to be overly supportive of the Crown, causing James to flee Albany and Alexander and his apprentice to be imprisoned. Brennan concludes that they "deserve more than a footnote in Albany's history."

Jonathan Clark in "Taxation and Suffrage in Revolutionary New York" reexamines the relationship between taxation and the franchise in Revolutionary New York based on its Constitution adopted in the capital of Kingston on 20 April 1777. Investigating poll and tax lists in Dutchess County, Clark concluded that "the suffrage requirements may not have excluded as many men as currently accepted estimates would have it." He discovered that the Revolutionary founders may have "held somewhat more democratic leanings" as they allowed those who voted for assemblymen, unlike for governor or senator only, to have to "own a bit of land or pay taxes." They thus came close to universal manhood suffrage with the next best thing—taxpayer suffrage.

William P. McDermott examined voting patterns in Dutchess County in his article, "The Right to Choose: Suffrage During the Revolutionary Era in Charlotte Precinct." He sought to answer the question: "Was the Revolution and the events which followed, such as the Constitutional Convention held in Poughkeepsie in 1788, treated as a significant social movement by the average individual in the agricultural communities of Dutchess County?" Not so

surprisingly, he revalidated the old axiom that all politics are local even among the Revolutionary English, Germans, and Dutch residents of the county. With votes on significant questions such as sending delegates to the Second Continental Congress, “a great majority of individuals in Dutchess County were opposed, neutral, or simply unwilling to commit themselves.” In fact, 60% chose neutrality. Over the period that he studied, he found that, in Charlotte Precinct, the residents were “focused on local conditions, and interested in maintaining the status quo locally.” Voting records led him to six other major conclusions about how those who cast ballots moved toward “more democratic representation in public office” and avoided class conflict as they aspired to social advancement themselves.

Dr. Thomas S. Wermuth’s “The women! in this place have risen in a mob: Women Rioters and the American Revolution in the Hudson River Valley,” tells the story of the popular disturbances and crowd actions that dominated Valley towns and villages in the years during the Revolution. While many crowd actions that occurred in the 1760s and 1770s were aimed at the Crown (Stamp Act Riots, Boston Massacre, etc.), it was far more common that eighteenth-century riots were aimed at local social and economic conditions. Boycotts of profiteering shopkeepers, “rough music” aimed at perceived social deviants, and riots against hoarding shopkeepers were not uncommon and in fact grew in number during the wars years. These riots, often related to economic woes and shortages of basic foodstuffs, were dominated by women who exerted their public voice around these issues. Although women did not fight on the battlefield, they were involved in important social and economic activities central to the Revolutionary process as “they threatened the ability of authorities to wage war.”

Former Marist College graduate, professor, and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Edward J. Cashin used his article, “Three Officers and a Lady: The Hudson Highlands and

Georgia During the Revolution,” to tie together pieces of his own heritage as a Georgian educated in New York who returned to Dixie to teach at Augusta State University for thirty-eight years. The three officers were Major General Anthony Wayne, Major General Nathanael Greene, and Lieutenant Colonel “Light-Horse” Harry Lee. The lady was Greene’s wife Catherine or Caty. While the inspiration for Cashin’s talk, which became this article, was the 225th anniversary of the battle of Stony Point in the Hudson Highlands won by Wayne on 15–16 July 1779, Greene and Lee make their reputations in the southern theater of operations. While these four individuals made signal contributions to victory in the War for Independence, Cashin determined that their lasting legacy to the United States, as they all ended up in Georgia after the war, was to influence Georgians to join “in a stronger federal union” and to make New Yorkers more accepting of Georgia. Following in their footsteps, Dr. Cashin, who also lived in both states and died in Georgia, helped to bridge the Mason-Dixon Line with his own academic work.

FORTRESSES, PRISONS, AND HUTS

In “Lewis Graham’s House in Pine Plains: A Revolutionary Log Building,” Neil Larson offers a detailed examination of a house in Pine Plains, New York, originally constructed of pine logs during the American Revolution. The Graham-Brush Log House—now restored—survives as an example of eighteenth century domestic architecture—log construction—that Larson found to be “a near intuitive solution for a settler in a forest.” Of interest to students of the War for Independence, the house appears “to be the only example of a log building built to military specifications during the Revolutionary War that retains sufficient architectural integrity to represent the character of the hundreds of log huts constructed by the Continental Army to house troops and refugees from Virginia to Maine temporarily, including the major

encampments at New Windsor, Morristown and Valley Forge.”

The fortress at West Point, called by General George Washington the “key of America,” started inauspiciously as Constitution Fort on what is now Constitution Island across from the present-day United States Military Academy. In his article, “The Flawed Works of Fort Constitution,” originally printed in *Engineer*, Colonel (Ret.) James M. Johnson found that the military engineer, Dutch-born Bernard Romans, produced flawed fortifications by improperly locating the works and by failing “to develop them effectively, expeditiously, and economically.”

Hudson River Valley Institute Advisory Board member and genealogist Frank Doherty in his article, “The Revolutionary War Fleet Prison at Esopus,” answered the call to research the prison ships on Rondout Creek. Using ships such as the *Camden* and the *Hudson* to incarcerate known or suspected Loyalists, the Committee for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies and the Albany Committee of Correspondence “reduced the Loyalist threat” and freed up space in overcrowded jails in the surrounding counties. At least 176 prisoners spent some time confined aboard the ships. Doherty found that the Fleet Prison had “served its purpose, but for a relatively short period of time—just under six months.” Aside for the uncomfortable confinement, he found that most Loyalists did not receive any harsher punishments.

BATTLES AND WARFARE

The Saratoga campaign of 1777 proved to be the turning point of the War for Independence and placed the Hudson River at the center of the naval action in 1776 and 1777. In November 1775, Congress passes a resolution authorizing the construction of a fleet of thirteen frigates to challenge the Royal Navy. New York would outfit and build the *Congress* and the *Montgomery*. As James M. Johnson argued in his article, “A Warm Reception in the Hudson Highlands,” originally published in *Sea History*,

these two ships, fighting and ultimately burning in the Hudson Highlands off Fort Montgomery, would contribute to Major General Horatio Gates’s far-off victory at Saratoga.

R. Beth Klopott, in “Civil War in Schaghticoke: A Footnote to the Revolution in Upstate New York,” ventures into the civil war between New York and New Hampshire within the larger civil war between Whigs and Loyalists over what would become the state of Vermont. She shows why “Schaghticoke residents split over support for Vermont or New York.” While the Crown had sided with New York in the Order of Council in 1764, the area between the Hudson River and the border with New Hampshire, including Schaghticoke, saw raids by “Vermonters” confronted by New York militiamen until 1782. The issue was not fully resolved until Vermont became a state in 1790.

One of New York’s greatest achievements during the 225th anniversary of the American Revolution was to reclaim Fort Montgomery near the Bear Mountain Bridge from the wilderness and to open it as Fort Montgomery State Historic Site. In “Interpreting the Battle for the Hudson River Valley: The Battle of Fort Montgomery,” Gregory Smith and James M. Johnson describe the battle fought there and at its sister Fort Clinton on the south side of Popolopen Creek on 6 October 1777 and their “decisive role in the Saratoga campaign of 1777, ‘the turning point of the American Revolution.’” Additionally, they explain the work of the Fort Montgomery Plan Team in clearing and interpreting the site’s ruins so that visitors can learn about the forts, the battles fought there, and the sacrifices made by the men who defended their works.

Thomas C. O’Keefe in his article, “Revolutionary Road: Incident on Gallows Hill,” focused on the former commander of the Hudson Highlands Department during the Saratoga Campaign of 1777, Major General Israel Putnam, to connect the Hudson River Valley to Redding, Connecticut. While General George Washington had assigned Putnam to command

the Eastern Wing of the Continental Army in 1778, he clearly had lost confidence in his subordinate after he failed to prevent Lieutenant General Henry Clinton from running free up and down the Hudson. While the Court of Inquiry chaired by Major General Alexander McDougall had absolved Putnam of “any fault, misconduct, or negligence,” Old Put was clearly under a cloud. During the harsh winter of 1778–1779, faced with a mutiny and threatened march on the Connecticut legislature in Hartford by troops from Brigadier Jedediah Huntington’s brigade, Putnam chose to shoot a convicted spy, Edward Jones, and hang a deserter, John Smith, as, according to O’Keefe, “sacrificial lambs,” to make an impression on the Connecticut troops. While he couched his conclusions as questions, O’Keefe clearly feels that General Putnam had “taken the hardest possible line,” treating the two unfortunate prisoners as ring leaders of a mutiny, which they clearly were not. While a paralytic stroke in December 1779 would end Putnam’s career, his legacy would be anchored on his earlier military service rather than the events at the Redding encampments.

Joseph Plumb Martin is perhaps the most famous enlisted soldier in the American Revolution because he published his experiences in the war. Another soldier, Moses Tuttle, from the Constitution State fought alongside Martin in the New York Campaign of 1776. In fact, William Sullivan in his article, “Soldier of ’76: The Revolutionary Service of a Connecticut Private in the Campaign in New York,” found that Connecticut provided over one-third of the men to defend New York against General William Howe’s invading British army. Tuttle served in

New York first as a militiaman and then as a levy in Captain Nathaniel Bunnell’s 7th Company of the 5th Connecticut Battalion. He saw action at Kips Bay, Harlem Heights, and White Plains. Sullivan argues that Tuttle’s “experience as a soldier during the campaign of 1776 demonstrates that while the performance of temporary troops proved dismal at times, their willingness to enter the field of battle against great odds and in spite of hunger, poverty, and disease helped sustain the Revolution through its early stages.” He concluded that “the militia and levies had performed a valuable role in the New York campaign.”

In his article, “Valcour Island: Setting the Conditions for Victory at Saratoga,” Major Gregory M. Tomlin reassesses the 1776 Lake Champlain Campaign that led to the Battle of Valcour Island. A pyrrhic victory that ended with the loss of almost all of Brigadier General Benedict Arnold’s fleet, the battle “delayed an earlier British attack in the fall of 1776, thereby providing the Americans with an additional year to prepare their defenses for the British northern invasion of New York.” He concluded that “This unique naval battle fought on Lake Champlain . . . should be considered the opening phase of the Saratoga campaign, making it a relatively obscure engagement that deserves greater attention by students of the American struggle for independence.” The Battle of Valcour Island thus “proved critical for setting the conditions for victory” in the turning point Saratoga Campaign the next fall, 1777. It also foretold the British military strategy in 1814 that would culminate in the American victory at Plattsburg.