

American Judas, Or, Whatever Happened to Benedict Arnold?

by ALEXANDER ROSE

Back in 2003, while I was investigating the secret world of the American Revolution and unearthing the elusive leads I needed to track the Culper Ring—the espionage network that would eventually star in my book, *Washington's Spies: The Story of America's First Spy Ring*—I became interested in the case of General Benedict Arnold.

A traitor of the absolute blackest dye I of course knew him to be, but it occurred to me, as I accumulated masses of material from the archives about the British and American intelligence war, its spycraft, and the spymasters, that from the *British* point of view Arnold could be defined, in the modern sense, as a defector. Here he was, probably the most talented of the enemy's commanders, switching horses halfway through a war. If one happened to be a British intelligence case-officer, simultaneously bagging Arnold and poleaxing Washington would

certainly have been cause to break open a bottle of Champagne.

Considering the fame, or notoriety, of Arnold to this day, I was rather surprised to realize that I had no idea what happened to him afterwards. When did he die? Did he live to enjoy his ill-gotten gains? Did he change his name and move to Florida? Then, when I quizzed several knowledgeable acquaintances, including a veteran reference librarian, an economist, and a couple of well-rounded historians, about Arnold’s fate none of them knew either. One guessed that he might have been hanged, another that he had died in battle, but all confessed that, like me, they had never actually thought about it before.

Of course, in this age of instant online information such questions can often be answered following a visit to your favorite search-engine, but, even so, there is astoundingly little covering Arnold’s life after that fateful day in October 1780 when, realizing the jig was up, he scarpered to his British keepers.

After a moderate amount of digging in the library, I concluded that Arnold suffered the unenviable fate of other traitors who “got away with it” and escaped to the Other Side. Their utility exhausted, their friends now enemies, and their covers blown, they descend into total irrelevance and obscurity—a most dreaded destiny for these opera stars among secret agents—but, perhaps still worse, social exclusion and personal excision by even the people who first purchased their loyalty. It is difficult, after all, to predict how long turncoats will stay bought, and by betraying their friends and allies, they have already demonstrated their fickle and untrustworthy natures.

For successful traitors, put briefly, the price of their treachery is all too often higher than any reward gained. Ultimately, many of them end up living in a Hades of their own making. Take Kim Philby, the British intelligence officer and long-time Soviet mole who defected to

Russia in 1963. Despite persistent newspaper rumors that he was living high off the hog in Moscow, in fact Philby was quickly pensioned off by his “grateful” KGB employers, given a modest apartment, barred from serious intelligence work, and watched constantly by his minders in case he decided to make a break for the West. He spent much of his time reeking of vodka while waiting for his pathetic little packages of English marmalade and copies of *The Times* to arrive—all tiny, niggling reminders of the comfortable, bourgeois life he’d once enjoyed. He died in 1988, just a year before the Berlin Wall was torn down. At that moment, every sacrifice he had made for the Cause was rendered suddenly worthless.

As for Arnold, another low, sly Iago among traitors, no matter how often he proclaimed his actions were motivated by exalted principle, Arnold labored under the relentless—and justified—suspicion that he was a slick chancer, an opportunist who did it for the money, a speculator who gambled that an American defeat was in the offing and sold out at the height of the market. From the day his treachery was uncovered to the day he died, Benedict Arnold never could escape his past.

In the epilogue to *Washington’s Spies*, I included a few paragraphs on Arnold post-1780, but the advent of these Amazon Shorts allows me the opportunity to expand on that material and fill in some of the necessary omissions. For a more detailed narrative of Arnold, his flight, and the world of intelligence, especially as regards his pursuit of the Culper Ring, *Washington’s Spies* is the best place to start (if I do say so myself).

Monday morning, September 25, 1780. Arnold is waiting nervously for George

Washington to appear at West Point for their scheduled breakfast and a tour of the fortress defenses. Today is the day. Through Major John André, his glamorous British spy handler, he has promised General Sir Henry Clinton, commander-in-chief of the British forces, that he will not only surrender West Point but also deliver the American leader unto him. With George Washington in British hands, the Revolution will collapse and Arnold will be a rich man. His thirty shekels—£20,000 for West Point and its 3,000-man garrison, with a guaranteed minimum of £10,000 should the plot fail but he came over anyway—might easily be doubled if Washington were added to the pot.

Alexander Hamilton, Washington’s young aide, trots in and tells Arnold that the general has been delayed and to start breakfast without him. He’ll be along soon. Arnold sits down, only to be disturbed by a messenger bearing a letter marked for his urgent attention. Opening it, Arnold pales at its contents yet wills himself to be calm: His treachery has been discovered.

Captured by volunteer militiamen (or patriotic muggers, opinions differ), André—dressed as a civilian—was carrying letters from Arnold and the general’s sketches of West Point hidden in his stockings. André’s captors, probably intending to steal his boots, had seen Arnold’s bold signature on the letters and, assuming they had been stolen, forwarded both the captain and his incriminating package to Colonel Jameson, the local commander. Jameson, despite entreaties by Benjamin Tallmadge (the Culper Ring’s spymaster) to permit him to arrest Arnold, feared being court-martialled if Tallmadge’s hunch about his superior officer’s treasonous actions proved baseless, insisted on sending a note to Arnold mentioning that a certain “John Anderson” (André’s none-too-clever alias) had been captured. Moreover, he added, he’d taken the liberty of sending the package found in André’s boot directly to Washington.

At that exact moment, Arnold realized the game is over. He was lucky if Washington had

not already ordered his arrest, and Tallmadge (whom he'd always disliked) he knew to be in the area. Arnold rushed upstairs as fast as his wounded leg would take him to converse with his wife Peggy. Downstairs again, after directing his adjutant to bring his horse, he told his subordinates that sudden business had arisen at West Point and that he would be back soon. He wasn't. Instead, Arnold galloped away and made his escape.

In the meantime, Washington (still none the wiser) had arrived and was being given the tour by John Lamb, Arnold's deputy. As the commander-in-chief scanned the defenses for vulnerable points, Alexander Hamilton received the package from Jameson, as well as a confession written by André. Shaken, he handed the documents to his chief, who was shocked but recovered quickly enough to order Arnold's arrest and to call out the garrison to man the defenses for a possible British surprise-attack.

Despite the failure of Arnold's plot, Clinton was exultant, writing to his sisters that “the defection of one of their best generals they have at this time has thrown them into great confusion.” As for André, he was soon after hanged, though Washington had previously offered Clinton the option of exchanging him for Arnold. Clinton, though a great mentor to André, felt honor-bound to refuse it. Washington's anger at Arnold, however, remained unquenchable and less than a month later he authorized Sergeant John Champe to undertake a covert mission to enter British-occupied New York, find Arnold, kidnap him, and spirit him back to American territory. He made one stipulation: Arnold was to be brought in alive. Since Washington's intention was, as he wrote, “to make a public example of him,” he wouldn't remain that way long, but Washington wanted to look into his frightened eyes one final time. (*Washington's Spies* contains the full account of the Champe Affair.)

Despite his blessed ignorance of the existence of the intrepid Sergeant Champe, Arnold

still had many troubles to overcome. Though he had sacrificed his properties and his income, his reputation and his career, in the expectation of a lavish bounty from the British, Arnold was obliged to settle for £6,000 plus a £360 yearly pension. He did receive, however, a much-desired royal army commission at the rank of brigadier-general, which brought a tidy £650 salary so long as hostilities lasted. For the next several months, Arnold commanded his new American Legion, which consisted mostly of Tories and deserters (and, for various reasons, the indefatigable Sergeant Champe, incidentally, for whom Arnold had ironically conceived a liking), but made no significant mark on military history. He took to low-level raiding—quite a comedown for this first-class battlefield commander—whipping the Virginia militia during one sojourn down the Chesapeake and subsequently pillaging the Connecticut town of New London. For a time he turned spy-hunter and tried to track down American spies, including members of the Culper Ring (who all had gone to earth).

In one particularly bizarre moment, he even wrote Benjamin Tallmadge, his avowed enemy and the man trying to protect the Ring, a letter of such mind-boggling impudence that the latter immediately passed it on to Washington. (At the time, also partly explaining Tallmadge’s haste to get rid of the note, anyone even remotely connected to Arnold was suspected of being a possible turncoat.) Arnold encouraged Tallmadge too to turn traitor by “invit[ing] you to join me with as many men as you can bring over with you. If you think proper to embrace my offer you shall have the same rank you now hold.”

Lord Cornwallis’s surrender at Yorktown in October 1781 did not spell the end of British

dreams of holding America. Despite his defeat, Cornwallis himself believed the war would and should continue, as did Arnold, who was convinced that if London summoned its strength, redoubled its efforts, and threw more men and money into the fray it could smash the rebels. To this end, Cornwallis and Arnold left for England in December aboard H.M.S. *Robuste*.

Initially, Arnold was toasted with great fanfare in London. His admirers and supporters included, most importantly, King George III, but also Queen Charlotte, the Prince of Wales, Lord George Germain (the Colonial Secretary), and Lord Amherst at the War Office, who, Arnold bragged to Peggy, “promised me that I could be promoted.” Sir Walter Stirling, a royally connected banker and relative of his wife (who had been allowed to join Arnold some months after his flight), introduced them to court while the king’s privy council judged him “a very sensible man.”

From his diplomatic base in Paris, Benjamin Franklin could only bitterly report to his masters that “we hear much of audiences given to Arnold. And his being present at councils [with the king].” Indeed, so “in” was Arnold with the In Crowd that by February 1782, the *Daily Advertiser* was claiming that Arnold would soon be heading back to America as commander of the Loyalists.

The newspaper had gravely over-estimated Arnold’s sway. Though feted in high society, he was merely a circus attraction in whom fascination would eventually fade. The harsh reality was that he was unemployed and concerned more with supplementing his income than in risking his life leading a paltry band of Tory guerrillas. For that reason, he proposed to the politician Lord Shelburne (who had once, he excitedly told Peggy, “promise[d] me his friendship”) that the government provide him with £30,000 to build a frigate of 40 guns that he would crew with Irish landsmen and take on privateering cruises; the profits would be shared with his official backers.

Shelburne was, unfortunately, reluctant to countenance the scheme and his librarian placed Arnold’s entreaty into the file reserved for cranks euphemistically labeled “Projects and Proposals.”

Arnold had better luck when he was invited by the king to advise him on “colonial” policy. Arnold submitted a paper entitled “Thoughts on the American War.” It was a mixture of commonsense, nonsense, and senselessness. Sensibly, he advised the British to undertake (to use an anachronism) nation-building in the areas under their control by introducing civil government and buttressing the Loyalist population. And he was probably right in judging that the French would use another defeat inflicted on Washington by the British as an excuse to cut their losses drastically, thereby potentially forcing the Americans to open negotiations with London.

Arnold, rather less sensibly, also observed that the Loyalists comprised a silent majority desiring “a renewal of the royal government and the reunion of the empire.” They were merely waiting for the British to give them proof that they were serious about defeating Washington, whereupon they would emerge from their hide-outs and drive the Revolutionaries into the sea. In sum, Arnold argued that the king should forget Yorktown (which he dismissed anyway as “a French victory”) and send an enterprising, accomplished commander (*i.e.*, himself), a fleet, and a first-class army of 15,000 troops. Victory would be his within the year, Arnold promised. He would smite Washington and smash the Continental Army in a single, ferocious campaign.

Once upon a time, to be sure, such a plan might have worked, but Arnold had not accounted for the tumultuous sea-change in London’s political waters, while his idea that George III would place him, an American, in command of a British army was curiously naïve. Politically speaking, Washington was, it was true, in some straits, but in March 1782 the pro-war Lord North and his ministry had sunk under the weight of Cornwallis’s Yorktown defeat, taking down

with it the hardline Germain and all Arnold’s friends in high places. Now the pro-peace Rockingham Whigs were in control. Envoys were quickly dispatched to meet Franklin in Paris, and the king essentially capitulated in a December 1782 speech to Parliament, offering, through clenched teeth, to declare the former colonies “Free and Independent States.”

The fall of North and Germain had made Arnold vulnerable to attack, especially since he was strongly identified with the king’s war policy. He began to be hissed at the theatre and the press mounted a poison-pen campaign. The *Gentleman’s Magazine* complained about “placing at the King’s elbow a man perhaps the most obnoxious to the feelings of the Americans of any in the King’s dominions at the moment the House was addressing his Majesty to put an end to the American war.” The *General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer* carried a piece by a peer, writing under the pseudonym of “R.M.,” that described him as a “mean mercenary” who had “adopted a cause for the sake of plunder.” Arnold’s vaunted bravery stemmed more, it seemed, from “the brandy bottle [than from] his heart. He does not at least seem to feel himself bold in this country, or else he would not patiently put up with all the personal reflections that are cast upon him.” Unfortunately, Arnold could never return to the United States for fear of hanging, but then again, cattily added the author, “as to hanging, he ought not so much to mind it. He thought the risk of it was but a trifle for his friend Major André to undergo.”

André had become Arnold’s personal albatross. To the war-tired public, Arnold was a man who slimily served the highest bidder, but André was everywhere feted as the handsome, doomed, romantic hero. Anna Seward, a poetess inexplicably popular at the time, composed her *Monody on Major André* to great acclaim. Treacly and purplish it certainly was, but the poem well encapsulated the spirit of the era:

“Loud howls the storm! the vex’d Atlantic roars!

Thy genius, Britain, wanders on its shores!
Hears cries of horror wafted from afar,
And groans of Anguish, mid the shrieks of War! . . .
O'er his damp brow the sable crape he binds,
And throws his victor garland to the winds; . . .
With one pale hand the bloody scroll he tears;
And bids his Nation blot it with their tears;
And one, extended o'er the Atlantic wave,
Points to his André's ignominious grave! . . .”

More irritating for Arnold than a silly poem was the marble monument dedicated to André that was erected in Westminster Abbey—ancient burial chamber of sovereigns and warlords—and the bestowal of a knighthood on his brother, just for being related. Arnold, by way of contrast, instead inspired public doggerel along the lines of:

“Our poor troops by Arnold thoroughly were banged,
And poor St. André was by Arnold hanged;
To George a rebel, to the Congress traitor,
Pray, what can make the name of Arnold greater?
By one bold treason, to gain his ends,
Let him betray his new adopted friends.”

Worse was to come. With the arrival of peace, Arnold's army pay was reduced by two-thirds and the bounty he'd received in New York was running low. Thankfully, a present of a £500 annuity from Queen Charlotte to Peggy arrived; it, together with Arnold's peacetime salary, if invested conservatively, would bring in £750 yearly. That was enough to maintain a

respectably middle-class living, but was nowhere near what Arnold, always a lavish spender, needed to run in courtly circles. He really needed to find a job.

Banished from government circles, in July 1784 Arnold approached George Johnstone, a newly appointed director of the East India Company, that empire within an empire answerable to no one but its shareholders. He offered to serve as a senior officer in the company’s private army. Arnold had good reason to feel bullish about his prospects: He was an experienced soldier, and better still, Johnstone was an old Loyalist. The latter was sympathetic to Arnold’s position but could not help. Johnstone told Arnold the unvarnished truth about his position in London: “Under an unsuccessful insurrection all actors are rebels. Crowned with success, they become immortal patriots. A fortunate plot holds you up as the savior of nations, a premature discovery brings you to the scaffold or brands your fame with dark and doubtful suspicions . . . Although I am satisfied of the purity of your conduct, the generality do not think so. While this is the case, no power in this country could suddenly place you in the situation you aim at under the East India Company.” Arnold’s post-war stock, in other words, had fallen so low the other directors had essentially blackballed him from employment with “John Company.”

In 1785, Arnold’s next tactic was to apply for compensation as a Loyalist refugee. Though certainly eligible for recompense, Arnold’s own greed disqualified him when he was caught barefacedly lying about the amounts owed. His confiscated property in Pennsylvania and Connecticut were worth—“at a moderate computation”—£16,125. In fact, he had exaggerated their valuation by several thousand pounds. He claimed that Congress had promised him lands worth £5,000 and owed him £2,731 to boot, plus another £1,125 from Connecticut, and then on top of all that, there was the small matter of £4,050, which Arnold estimated as the lifetime total of the half-pay he would have made had he stayed with the Continental Army after the War. The

nadir of Arnold’s invoice was surely the £20,000 he demanded as compensation for the money Congress had awarded General Nathanael Greene when he was appointed commander of the Army in South Carolina, a job Arnold said he had turned down owing to his treacherous engagement with Sir Henry Clinton. Arnold had omitted three vital facts on this particular point: First, he was never offered the post; second, Greene had spent most of the money given to him keeping his army in the field; and third, the sum awarded to Greene had been a great deal less than £20,000. All in all, Arnold billed the British government the princely sum of £45,175, more than \$1.5 million in current dollars. Under advisement, Arnold withdrew his wildly inflated claim before genuinely penniless, ragged Loyalists who had fled to Britain publicly shamed him.

Arnold’s time in London was reaching its distasteful end. Every door was closed to him. His highly placed “friends” had drifted away, as much embarrassed by Arnold’s inability to find an adequate income as irritated by his imprecations to aid him acquire one. One observer said he “saw General Arnold the other day at Court . . . His name was called over, and he passed in a hurry; he is taken very little notice of.” The same man then cuttingly remarked that “his lady was not there . . . By all accounts she is an amiable woman, and was her husband dead [she] would be much noticed.”

It was time for a change of scene. In the fall of 1785, Arnold, aged 44, sailed to New Brunswick—in what is now eastern Canada—to seek his fortune.

That part of North America was not unfamiliar to Arnold. Before the Revolution, he had thrived as a trader (and part-time smuggler), plying his way up and down the St. Lawrence River

and throughout Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland. Nowadays, there were still lush pickings to be had. Merchants in British Canada enjoyed a monopoly on the Caribbean-London trade because the Royal Navy was enforcing a ban on American ships entering colonial ports. From Arnold’s point of view, moreover, New Brunswick promised him at least a friendly reception owing to the thousands of newly arrived American Loyalists setting up shop there. In this respect, Arnold had woefully miscalculated: Loyalists there certainly were, but the reason many of them were there in the first place was because Arnold and his Revolutionary friends had torched their farms and looted their businesses. When he arrived in Halifax in late 1785, for example, Sampson Blowers, a Loyalist who was now attorney-general of Nova Scotia, wrote to a friend in St. John, in New Brunswick: “Will you believe General Arnold is here from England, in a brig of his own, as he says, reconnoitering the country. He is bound for your city, which he will of course prefer to Halifax, and settle with you. Give you joy of the acquisition.” Blowers was clearly no fan of the turncoat.

He was right, though, to believe Arnold was heading for St. John, a bustling, hustling boomtown. It was a Wild West settlement with a classy British element to it. Along its river spread 130 miles of shanties, cabins, and tents housing 12,000 Loyalist refugees, some of whom had served in Arnold’s American Legion. The town itself was divided into the Upper Cove and the Lower Cove. The former was where the nobs lived, on streets named King and Prince William; they included gentry folk like Jonathan Bliss, the attorney-general, and Solicitor-General Ward Chapman, who had, after leaving the thirteen colonies, secured royal appointments in London before returning to North America. On the Lower Cove, at the bottom of the hill, where the streets were named Water and Dock, the majority of Loyalists clustered. Upper Cove stores sold books for edification and gunpowder for sport while the Lower Cove

ones dealt in more practical goods, like the nails and timber one needed to build a shack.

Arnold would have loved to live in Upper Cove, but he couldn't afford it. So he lived on the Lower Cove through necessity, but managed to mingle in Upper Cove society. He had not been favored with an auspicious arrival: His gout had been playing him up and he suffered agonies when the fool of a captain ran aground at the harbor's entrance; Arnold was carried into town, reeling with pain, in a litter. Nevertheless, the old Arnold initiative soon kicked into gear and he established a warehouse and store on the waterfront, built a modest house, speculated in land along the river, and bought a plethora of businesses (including a lumberyard, a shipyard, and an interest in a trading sloop). At one point, dozens of employees were in his pay, he was expanding operations to St. John's satellite towns, and, since “Benedict Arnold” was not a name Americans tended to trust, he used middlemen to cover his tracks when shipping goods to the new independent country to the south. Along with a mistress—the first and only time he would be unfaithful—Arnold acquired a business partner, a certain Munson Hayt, a former Connecticut Loyalist who in turn would be faithless to him.

By donating money to the fire brigade and public wells, Arnold turned himself into a good public citizen. So optimistic was he of the riches to come, he commissioned a noble ship, the *Lord Sheffield*, constructed of white oak. The local *Royal Gazette* praised his “laudable efforts to promote the interest of this infant colony [which] have, during his short residence, been very productive to its commercial advantage, and as such deserve the praises of every well wisher to its prosperity.” Provincial St. John wasn't London, to be sure, but Arnold hadn't heard such acclamation for years, and he was, finally, happy. Sometimes, being a sizeable fish in a small pond was preferable to being a bottom-feeder in the greatest.

Leaving Hayt in charge of Arnold Incorporated, he sailed the *Lord Sheffield* to the West

Indies to pick up some merchandise for the store, dropped it off in St. John, and then left for London on a packet to pick up his wife and children. In his absence, poor Peggy had been fending off the lawsuits that everywhere dogged Arnold (including one from John Holker, the French consul in Philadelphia, who was suing for the £12,000 he claimed he had lent Arnold, who was eventually forced to pay £900 out-of-pocket to settle) and even before he'd left for the Indies, his “solid citizen” reputation was under assault. The *Lord Sheffield* builders, still waiting for much of their money, put it around that Arnold was holding out on them. When Arnold countered that he had deducted from the shipyard's invoice an agreed-upon fee for late delivery, the yard counter-counter-claimed that Arnold's own constantly changing specifications had caused the late delivery in the first place. Worse still, his mistress bore a son, one John Sage, which did set tongues a-wagging in Upper Cove drawing-rooms.

Arnold, with family in tow, returned to St. John in July 1787. Setting aside his legal problems, he was now blessed with some capital thanks to the *Lord Sheffield* voyage and he bought a splendid house at the corner of King and Canterbury Streets (in Upper Cove, but of course). Peggy and he stylishly furnished it with blue damask sofas, “excellent Feather beds,” “an Easy & Sedan chair,” leatherbound books, card tables, desks, chandeliers, “Nankeen china,” glassware, and “Wedgewood gilt ware” imported from England.

But business was not as buoyant as Arnold had expected, even if he could be counted as among the settlement's most successful capitalists. The central problem was that no one in St. John had any money, literally. So little actual cash was circulating that business was conducted almost entirely on credit. When one debtor failed to pay, his creditor was obliged to renege on his own contracts and open a lawsuit against the offender. Thus, quite often, Arnold was involved in a dozen petty suits *simultaneously*, but that was a common situation for any

Brunswickian businessman of means at the time.

Far more damaging to his financial well-being than the *contretemps* with the *Lord Sheffield* shipyard was the revelation that his mistress had borne him a child. The first was easily dismissed as yet another legal pothole every merchant had to endure, but the second hurt his reputation by exposing him as a dishonorable cheat. Extending credit to a businessman beset by a few lawsuits was one thing; extending it to a man fundamentally immoral and dishonest, quite another.

Arnold could still redeem himself by raising ready cash: With hard currency in hand, he could pay off his creditors and his mistress, and slowly rebuild his reputation as a man you could do business with. For that reason, Arnold left for London in early 1788 with a cargo of goods to sell. While there, he took the advice of some friends, and involved himself in the newly created insurance market. He took out policies for the warehouse in Lower Cove for £1,000, its inventory for £4,000, and the merchandise in his new King Street store for £1,000. Returning to St. John later that year he discovered that in his absence a fire had broken out and destroyed the warehouse and stock. Of course, there were rumors that it was arson, and the insurance underwriters in London refused liability. And then Peggy learnt about Arnold’s out-of-wedlock son. Lovingly, she forgave him, but never again referred to him in her letters as “the best of husbands.”

To make matters worse, Arnold had fallen out with his partner, Hayt, who started a whispering campaign against him. He alleged that in 1787, Arnold had defrauded him of £700 and, more venomously, further claimed that Arnold had been bragging publicly that he had “burnt [his] own store.” In this instance, Arnold was more sinned against than was typical with him—though that’s not to say that Arnold was innocent of vastly overinsuring his property, so

the fire may have come as a nice surprise. Retaining Upper Cove stalwarts Jonathan Bliss and Ward Chapman as his lawyers, in September 1790 he sued Hayt—who hired the radical lawyer Elias Hardy to fight his corner—for slander in what would be St. John’s most sensational case.

In the proceedings, Arnold produced IOUs from Hayt for £2,000 that the latter had craftily avoided paying. It was demonstrated that when Arnold had been chasing him for payment, Hayt had chosen to slander him. When it turned out that Arnold’s son and an employee had accidentally started the warehouse fire, Hayt was found guilty of defamation. Arnold had been rubbing his hands in anticipation of massive damages from Hayt, but the judges awarded him a risible twenty shillings. Though the jury was stacked against him (several of them had previously been taken to court by Arnold), the judgment was as fair as could be expected. While Arnold didn’t stand a chance of extracting the £2,000 out of the odious Hayt, his name had been cleared and he had been deemed innocent of arson, all of which meant the London insurers would have to pony up £5,000.

Not that the troubles went away. The year 1791 was a particularly wretched one for Arnold. Hayt was still hanging around, surreptitiously spewing lies about him. The commoner residents of St. John’s had grown unenamored with Arnold’s flashiness and arrogance—exacerbated by his recent legal victory—and what’s more, they still believed he *had* started that fire (despite Arnold’s being at sea when it happened). Finally, riled beyond endurance, a mob congregated in front of his house and burnt him in effigy while shouting—a nice touch, this—“Traitor!” Peggy and the children were terrified, and after troops arrived to read the Riot Act Arnold decided there and then that St. John’s was a dead loss. He wanted out. Though he never talked of his past, Arnold was gradually discovering that he could never escape it.

In December 1791, the contents of his grand house were auctioned off and the Arnolds

set sail for England. He would never again set foot in North America. Arnold was undoubtedly bitter at Lady Fortune: Had he stayed true to the cause, he would now undoubtedly have risen to power and wealth. Among his old comrades-in-arms, George Washington was president, Alexander Hamilton secretary of the Treasury, and Benjamin Tallmadge was a successful investor who would go on to have a distinguished career in Congress. Even Lord Cornwallis had done well: He was off being governor-general of India. Everyone, in short, was doing well, everyone but Benedict Arnold.

Despite his travails and another bout of gout, Arnold remained upbeat, writing to Jonathan Bliss from London on February 26, 1792 that “we had a very rough and disagreeable voyage home, but our reception has been very pleasant, and our friends more than attentive since our arrival. The little property that we have saved from the hands of a lawless ruffian mob and more unprincipled judges in New Brunswick is perfectly safe here, as well as our persons from insult, and tho’ we feel and regret the absence of the friends we had there, we find London full as pleasant! And I cannot help viewing your great city as a shipwreck from which I have escaped.”

Speaking of shipwreck, within months Arnold found himself in the midst of a tempest. On May 31, the Earl of Lauderdale—a Whig who delighted in pricking the Tory government—had given a speech attacking the Duke of Richmond’s recent army promotion during which he remarked off-handedly that “if apostasy could justify promotion, [Richmond] was the most fit person for that command, General Arnold alone excepted.”

Arnold demanded a public retraction, but Lauderdale blew him off with a non-apologetic

apology. The general challenged the earl to a duel fixed for 7am on Sunday, July 1. Arnold's second was Lord Hawke; Lauderdale's the Arnold-loathing politician Charles James Fox. At the appointed time, Arnold fired but missed, and steeled himself to feel the shock of lead. Lauderdale, however, caused him to blush with shame when he refused to raise his pistol and return fire. Hawke called upon Lauderdale to shoot for the sake of honor, but he said he had not wished to offend Arnold's feelings. And then, deliberately plunging the knife deeper, he declared that Arnold might fire again if he so wished. As Lauderdale well knew, to have done so would have destroyed Arnold's reputation and given him a new one as a cowardly cad. Hawke again insisted he either fire or apologize, but Lauderdale still refused. Arnold even beseeched him to aim his weapon, to no avail. Fox then conferred with Hawke and hammered out a *via media*: Lauderdale stated categorically that he had not meant to impugn Arnold's character, and Arnold stiffly accepted this as an apology of sorts. Even then *The Times* misreported that Lauderdale had neither fired *nor* apologized.

Still, Arnold exulted in the attention the half-duel earned him. He took the opportunity to importune William Pitt, the Tory prime minister who was certainly no friend of Charles James Fox, nor of Lauderdale. “From my private fortune and the high rank I held in the American army, I was amply provided for . . . [and] no officer of my rank stood in higher estimation in the States or had fairer prospects of ease, honor and independence,” Arnold wrote in a letter to him. “[But I have since then] experienced the most unmerited and mortifying abuse not only from my own countrymen but from many persons in England.” “I now find myself deprived of my fortune and rank,” he continued, “and so far from being able to provide for and educate a numerous family of six sons and one daughter, that it is barely in my power to support them decently.”

There was no reply for four months. At the time, Pitt was grappling with the

imprisonment of King Louis XVI, the September Massacres in Paris, and the French declaration of war on the Habsburg Empire, so he may have had other things, apart from this hapless human relic of a past defeat, weighing on his mind. Arnold was in despair, but then a letter arrived asking him to come see the prime minister. Pitt was “surprised at the small sum I had received and seemed inclined to do something for me,” Arnold chortled to his wife. Asking how much Arnold needed to set himself up comfortably, the general cheekily plucked the number £25,000 from the air. Pitt raised his eyebrows, pursed his lips, and said nothing. The silence continued for more than six months.

Driven mad with worry, Arnold besieged Pitt with letters begging for news and a fanciful request to be appointed governor of Dominica, in the West Indies. Then on July 20, 1793, the long-awaited envelope bearing the prime minister’s seal arrived. Ripping it open, Arnold was disappointed to read that £100 per annum had been earmarked for each of his sons. There was nothing for him, not a penny.

Frustrated yet again by his inability to extract funds from the Great and the Good, Arnold sought to earn the money he needed by himself. He’d once made a living in Canada using his own wits; there was no reason why he could not do so again. This time he intended to seek his fortune in the West Indian sugar trade.

Before he sailed, a saturnine Arnold waited at a tavern in Falmouth for the winds to calm. Quite by chance, the devious French bishop-turned-diplomat-cum-exile Charles Maurice de Talleyrand Périgord, who was on his way to seek sanctuary in America, decided to take dinner there. He recalled that

“the innkeeper at whose place I had my meals informed me that one of his lodgers was an American general. Thereupon, I expressed the desire of seeing that gentleman, and, shortly after,

I was introduced to him. After the usual exchange of greetings, I put to him several questions concerning his country, but, from the first, it seemed to me that my inquiries annoyed him. Having several times vainly endeavored to renew the conversation, which he always allowed to drop, I ventured to request from him some letters of introduction to his friends in America.

‘No,’ he replied, and after a few moments of silence, noticing my surprise, he added, ‘I am perhaps the only American who cannot give you letters for his own country . . . all the relations I had there are now broken . . . I must never return to the States.’

He dared not tell me his name. It was General Arnold! I must confess that I felt much pity for him, for which political puritans will perhaps blame me, but with which I do not reproach myself, for I witnessed his agony.”

Picture this extraordinary meeting. Sitting on one bench, a dejected Arnold whose name reeked of treachery, and across the table a man whose legendary ability to change sides garnered him office under five successive regimes and whose most famous saying was, “[treason] is a matter of dates.” Little surprise that Talleyrand felt pity: He immediately understood Arnold. To him, Arnold’s blunder—not crime—was to have chosen the wrong moment to turn his coat. One wonders whether Talleyrand mentioned his views to his friend Alexander Hamilton. Probably not; he was far too tactful.

Arriving in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, Arnold was bedeviled by bad timing. In early 1794, the British had acquired the territories after French planters asked them for protection from Haitian rebels, but when Arnold was there the new Jacobin government in Paris sent a fleet to get them back. The French, under the command of Victor Hugues, a revolutionary fanatic who had executed 1,200 Royalists, took him prisoner.

Arnold was in dire danger. Suspected as a spy, he was taken aboard a French vessel for

interrogation by one of Robespierre’s torturers. Arnold claimed he was one “John Anderson” (which just happened to have been the late André’s alias), an American trader. Still, despite his accent confirming his provenance, the French were suspicious. A few days later, a guard told him that his identity had been discovered and he was due to be hanged. Thankfully, however, before being captured Arnold had had the presence of mind to secrete a few gold coins in his clothes and he used these to bribe the sentries.

Lowering himself in the dead of night from his cabin window to a makeshift raft, Arnold silently paddled it between the crevasses formed by the towering French hulls until he found a dinghy moored to one of them. After cutting the rope, he was spotted by a patrol boat. Arnold bobbed and weaved, ducked and dived, darted and skirted, through the maze of ships until he finally shook off his pursuers. A few hours later, at four in the morning, he reached the *Boyne*, the flagship of the British fleet that had recently arrived to blockade the French one.

Ever resourceful, Arnold obsequiously attached himself to Sir Charles Grey, the British commander-in-chief, and pestered him for employment, citing his impressive military record. Grey, rather snobbishly, believed his “American” experience counted for nothing and refused to commission him a brigadier, though, desperate to get shot of him, made him Victualler to the Army. One officer remembered that Arnold “fastened himself on to Grey with a tenacity which the General’s undisguised disgust was powerless to shake.” Even while organizing supplies for Grey’s men, Arnold worked on the side as an agent for the West Indian planters in the hope it would pay off in the long run.

It wasn’t a bad idea. Before Arnold departed for London in mid-1795 to tend to Peggy, who had fallen very ill, the powerful Standing Committee of the West India Planters and Merchants cheered him to the roof after a speech and asked London to send him to the islands

“in a military character.” Belatedly, Arnold looked likely to be a success after all. “I have made and lost a great deal of money here, but I hope to return to England in April, a gainer, upon the whole,” he bragged to Bliss, still in New Brunswick.

But it wasn't to be. The War Office turned down the West Indian request to appoint Arnold their military protector. Those sorts of positions were generally reserved for men of aristocratic pedigree, whereas Arnold was a common colonial, and besides which, there was a waiting-list of officers senior to Arnold for filling the plummier imperial posts. To add insult to injury, the Treasury was delaying paying his invoices for the £10,000 he had borrowed to victual Grey's army, even as he faced rising interest on the principal. And then, after the Treasury grandly announced it would furnish him with £8,500—perhaps the mandarins had cottoned on to Arnold's predilection towards padding his claimed expenses—it stated that owing to the current war with France, there was no money to honor the debt.

Amazingly, despite the succession of painful kicks in the teeth, Arnold kept trying. Over the next four years, Arnold made four different proposals for military service. Pitt received a plan in 1796 asking for 5,000 men to go to the Spanish West Indies under Arnold's command to encourage the natives to rise against their masters. Not a bad plan, as it happened, but the government wasn't interested. In 1797, he asked the Admiralty to give him charge of a British fleet to defend against a French invasion. The Sea Lords gently pointed out that “there are many officers [already in the Navy] who would most cheerfully carry through any enterprise” of that nature. Next up was a letter to the Duke of York asking for a senior commission in any army sent to fight Napoleon on the Continent. No luck. And lastly, there was a useless plea to Lord Liverpool for a domestic position in the corps then being raised to defend London from possible attack.

One last time Arnold tried his luck with an ambitious appeal to Pitt, but the latter lost his letter with all its attached documentation. It was this single act of carelessness that ultimately shattered Arnold’s spirit. Whereas once he had been a man to whom people wrote letters, he had become a man whose letters to people they mislaid. Now desperate to pay his spiraling debts, Arnold indulged in his old habit of rampant speculation, this time in the eighteenth-century equivalent of 1990s dotcoms: privateers. But his captains, like the stock-jobbers of the Internet era, defrauded him massively. On January 14, 1801, Peggy told her son Edward that “he is, at present, in the most harassed wretched state that I have ever seen him. Disappointed in his highly raised expectations, harassed by the sailors who are loudly demanding their prize-money, when in fact their advances have greatly exceeded anything that is due to them, without the health or power of acting, he knows not which way to turn himself.”

Unsurprisingly, Arnold’s health fell into rapid decline. He had caught an asthmatic cough in the West Indies and could catch maybe two hours’ sleep a night. One leg was greatly swollen (gout), while his other (wounded in battle) ached terribly. He hobbled everywhere on a cane, his face flabby and waxen, his broad shoulders rounded. He was “incapable of the smallest enjoyment,” wrote Peggy.

In early June 1801, he fell sick with dropsy and his throat grew so hellishly inflamed he could barely draw breath, let alone speak. Delirious, and stumbling in and out of consciousness, he finally called upon the Lord to bless his family. At 6.30 on Sunday, 14 June, he, “after great suffering, he expired . . . without a groan.”

The papers barely noticed his death. A week after it, according to a brief mention in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, a grim cavalcade of four carriages and seven mourning coaches brought his body to Brompton church in central London. Or did they? In the Register of Burials for the

Brompton district there is no record of him and no one who desired to visit his grave ever found it. We know now what happened to Benedict Arnold in life, but whatever became of him in death?

It was only in 1927 that John Taylor, a local historian, solved the mystery. Arnold had been buried not in Brompton, but in *Battersea*—the *Gentleman's Magazine* reporter had mistaken the name—a village just south of London (today, the city has swallowed it up). His coffin had been taken to St. Mary's, a then-new church blessed with a spacious basement crypt, where it was placed above ground. Though some families were fortunate enough to have their own, separated vaults, Arnold's impecuniousness forbade any such luxury, and his leaden coffin—the cheapest available—was deposited on the floor with only a small metal plate to identify it.

Whereas in Arnold's day, the crypt had been virtually empty, by 1854 it was, quite literally, packed to the ceiling and visitors had to negotiate treacherously narrow aisles between the stacks of coffins. In that year, the church authorities ruled that no more burials could take place. From time to time thereafter, one of the piles collapsed and spewed out its grisly contents. Until the church could be aired out, the resulting stench made it impossible to hold services upstairs. Finally, in 1875, in the interests of sanitation, it was decided to inter the crypt's 424 coffins beneath a new concrete floor.

Before the renovation began, clerks checked the parish's registry and noted the inscriptions on the coffin-plates to confirm that none of the skeletons, in fleshly form, had

belonged to anyone notable. Once done, the vicar muttered a quick blessing over the haphazard jumble of coffins and they were buried.

How could Arnold’s name have been missed? Answer: By the merest happenstance, and entirely by human error. When the general’s corpse had first arrived at St. Mary’s, Ezekiel Penington, a parish clerk whose literacy skills were somewhat wanting, recorded it as one “Bendick Arnold, 59” (Penington also got his age wrong; Arnold was 60). During the 1875 interment, to further confuse matters, yet another parish clerk carelessly misread the coffin-plate’s inscription (or misheard his colleague’s calling it out) and wrote down “Frederick Arnold, 59.”

Since no one had ever heard of either Bendick Arnold or Frederick Arnold, no one bothered correcting the mistakes or marking the location of his last resting-place beneath the crypt’s cold floor. It was a fittingly ignominious end to an ignoble man.

Postscript

In the mid-1970s, Vincent Lindner of Morristown, New Jersey, a history buff and founder of the now defunct (as far as I can gather) Arnold Society—a body intent on rehabilitating the general’s reputation—paid for a \$1,600 stained-glass window at St. Mary’s. “The two nations whom he served in turn in the years of their enmity have united in this memorial as a token of their enduring friendship,” states part of the window’s inscription. The Rev. John Morris, who had never heard of Arnold before he came to St. Mary’s, sent an invitation to the American ambassador to view the window but was politely refused. “They said they couldn’t take official notice of such an act.”

In 1988, an ambiguously worded plaque dedicated to “Major General Benedict Arnold, American Patriot” was affixed to his house in Gloucester Place, London, yet all there was at St. Mary’s was just a painted sign on the basement wall, a souvenir of Taylor’s investigation in 1927. In May 2004, that was rectified when 28 Americans affiliated with the Norwich Historical Society in Connecticut flew to London to supplement the sign with a plaque of Vermont granite. Their head, Bill Stanley, who had been suspended from the Norwich Free Academy in 1948 for an essay declaring Arnold the most important figure in American history, had spent nearly a quarter of a century trying to give the disgraced soldier a proper marker. The headstone reads: “The two nations whom he served in turn in the years of the enmity have united in enduring friendship.”

Considering the way he treated the two nations “he served in turn,” and the way in which they treated him, were Arnold still with us he might well smile ironically at his modern admirers’ insistence that he represents the selfless Anglo-American ideal of eternal alliance. Indeed, if Benedict Arnold served anybody, it was himself.

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