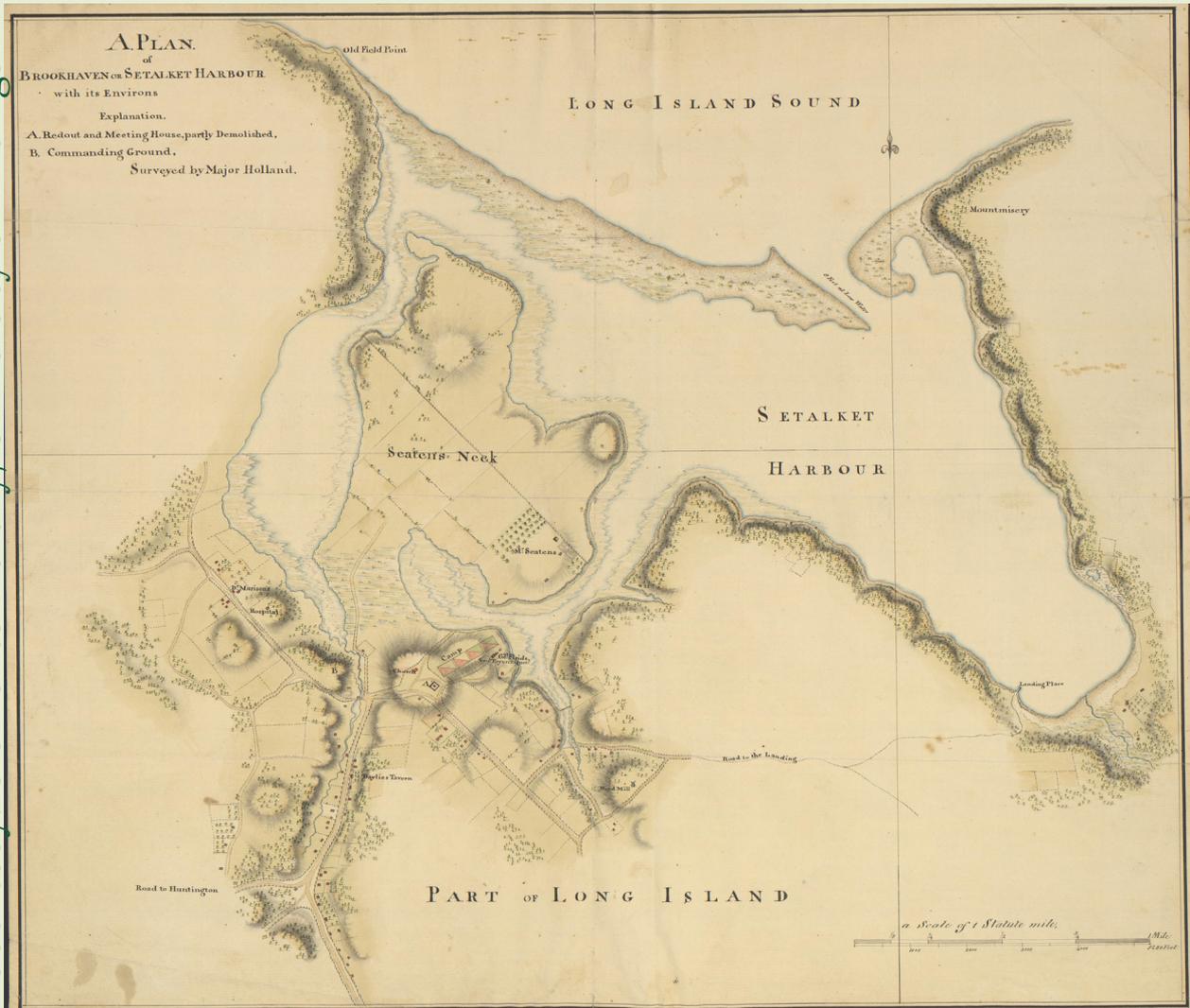




Spies and the American Revolution

Courtesy: Clements Library, University of Michigan



Students will:

**Discover Selah Strong and the Culper Spy Ring
Explore the documents Benedict Arnold tried to hand
over to the British**

Access learning activities at:

<https://considerthesourcenyc.org/magazine-educator-guides/fall-2022-educator-guide>

Historical Background

On September 15, 1776, General William Howe's Redcoat Army invaded Manhattan Island. George Washington's Continental Army had managed to escape after their defeat at the Battle of Brooklyn earlier that month. They left New York in Loyalist hands, and retreated north to Harlem Heights. To control New York had been Howe's primary motivation due to its strategic location at the mouth of the Hudson River. It would be, for the British, the only way they could prevent American rebellion. As it turned out they completely underestimated the Patriot passion for freedom.

The role of intelligence and counterintelligence had a significant impact on how George Washington's Continental Army won the war. Spies and counterspies, invisible ink, codes and ciphers that contained covert missions within secret messages were used. Members of the Culper Ring, the "mole" in the Sons of Liberty, and women spies fighting secretly behind Patriot and Loyalist battle lines were important information gatherers and transmitters. Washington's spymaster role reveals a completely different side of America's first president.

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Courtesy: Library of Congress

Guided Reading Questions for *Selah Strong*

1. What was the Culper Spy Ring?
 2. How was Selah Strong's role in the spy ring discovered?
 3. Why did historians conclude that Selah Strong had not been a part of the spy ring?
 4. How are assumptions made by previous historians proven wrong?
 5. According to this article, where was Selah Strong during the time the spy ring was in operation?
 6. What document reveals Selah Strong's involvement in the spy ring?
 7. What did most Americans die from during the Revolution?
 8. How do historians continue to make new discoveries about the past?
 9. Why are these new discoveries important to include in our understanding of history?
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Guided Reading Questions for *Finding Liss*

1. Why was the story of Liss overlooked by historians?
2. What document did the researchers start with in their search for Liss?
3. What happened to Liss after she left with the British?
4. Why does the author mention "355" of the Culper Spy Ring?
5. What documents show that Liss remained connected to Robert Townsend after she left with the British?
6. Why did Liss return to live with Robert Townsend?
7. What happen to Liss and her son after they left Robert Townsend' home?
8. Who was Robert Palmes?
9. Why was Liss' return to the Townsends the second time "fraught with legal difficulties"?
10. What happened to Liss and her son?
11. How does Liss' story show the complexity of history?

Learning Activities

"Treason of the Blackest Dye:" Investigating the Documents from John Andre's Boot

Historical Background:

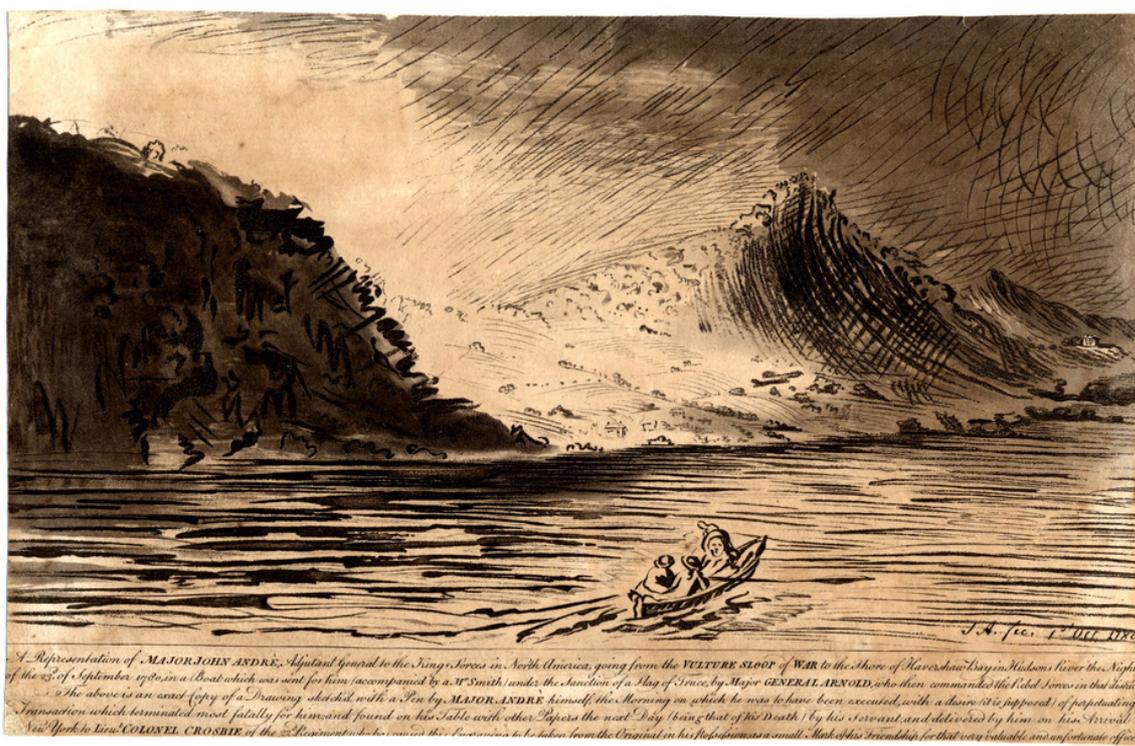
In 1780, near the present-day Tappan Zee Bridge, a major spy drama unfolded, changing the course of the American Revolution. Major General Benedict Arnold secretly attempted to help the British capture the fort at West Point. He had grown resentful of the American Army for not rewarding him for his many military victories. On the night of September 21, Arnold gave British Major John André documents detailing the fortifications and troop strengths at West Point. As André headed towards the British lines with the documents tucked in his boot, he was captured near Tarrytown on September 23. If he had reached the British command in New York City with the information Arnold had given them, the British would likely have taken the fort at West Point. West Point was crucial to controlling the Hudson River, so a British capture could have changed the outcome of the entire war.

Thirty-year-old André was hanged as a spy on October 2, 1780. Benedict Arnold escaped to New York City, eventually commanding British troops for the remainder of the American Revolution. He died in London in 1801.

Compelling Question: Why do some people switch sides during a conflict?

Primary Sources:

- Benedict Arnold to Colonel Varick (Special Collections, United States Military Academy Library)
- Benedict Arnold Oath of Allegiance (Special Collections, United States Military Academy Library)
- Benedict Arnold letter offering West Point (Clements Library, University of Michigan)
- Estimate of the Forces at West Point (New York State Archives NYSA_A4681-99)
- Andre Pass (New York State Archives NYSA_A4681-99)
- Andre in the boat (New York State Library)
- Treason of the Blackest – Samuel Frost Diary (Special Collections, United States Military Academy Library)



Courtesy: New York State Library

Andre in the Boat

The Need for Secrecy: Gathering and Communicating Information during Times of War

Historical Background

Secret communications and spy networks were a very important part of the process of intelligence-gathering during the Revolutionary War. Coded letters and spies often conveyed information that was pivotal to the outcomes of individual battles and the whole war itself. These documents show some of the ways in which officers were able to gather and communicate information secretly, as well as prevent the enemy from communicating intelligence.

George Washington used a network of spies, known as the Culper Gang, to spy on the British Army in New York City. The Culpers used a very complicated scheme involving many people to relay information from behind British lines in New York City to Washington in New Windsor, New York. Washington's letter of June 27, 1779 in this set was intercepted by the British. Because of this, the Culper Gang began communicating in code in later letters.

British Commander, Henry Clinton, wrote the letter in this set to General John Burgoyne using a mask that could be sent separately. The letter reads very differently with the mask than without the mask. If the letter was intercepted and read without the mask, it would provide the enemy with misinformation.

The undated, unsigned letter in this set is thought to have been written by Major Drummond of the British Army about Ann Bates, a female spy who gathered intelligence about soldiers and weapons while selling supplies in the American camp. Intelligence that she gave to the British about American troop movements led to the Americans' withdrawal from Rhode Island in August of 1778.

Miss Jenny was another female spy for the British who infiltrated the camp of the French soldiers fighting for the Americans and gathered intelligence about the Americans' plans to attack New York City. Because of this information, the British decided to keep their troops in New York, leaving Yorktown with too few men to defend it. When the Americans decided to attack Yorktown instead of New York City, the British surrendered the battle, leading to their disgrace and the eventual end of the war.

N.B. For more information about the Clinton letter, the Culper Gang, Miss Jenny, or Ann Bates, see the Clements Library University of Michigan website at <https://clements.umich.edu/exhibit/spy-letters-of-the-american-revolution/stories-of-spies/>

Compelling Question: How did information travel in secrecy during the American Revolution?

Primary Sources:

George Washington Letter (New-York Historical Society)

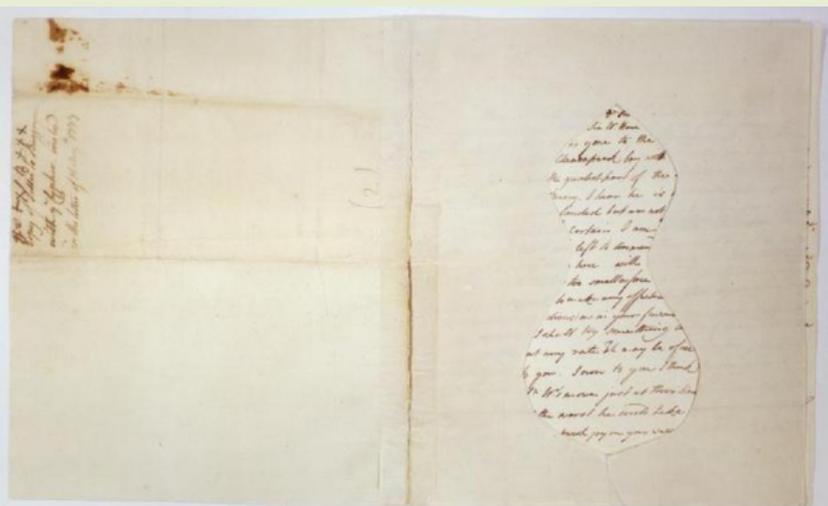
Clinton Letter with mask (Clements Library, University of Michigan)

Baron von Ottendorf re: Jenny (Clements Library, University of Michigan)

undated/unsigned (female spy) (Clements Library, University of Michigan)

Page from the Culper Code (Library of Congress)

Courtesy: Clements Library, University of Michigan



Clinton Letter with Mask