

ALVIN DEVEREUX
876 PARK AVENUE
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021
(212) 288-6253

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Mr. Henry Forster
169 East 78 St.
New York, N. Y. 10021

Dear Harry:

As I briefly explained to you last night on the telephone, a few days ago at the Union Club I picked up on the current book table a copy of Hamilton Fish's book about the Revolutionary War in New York State. I was particularly interested in reading the part about Benedict Arnold and his effort to betray West Point to the British. In that connection, it occurred to me that Fish would be interested in the facts about the capture of Major Andre as set forth in an address made by my grandfather, Alvin Devereux II in 1897, to a Post of the Grand Army of the Republic, up near his home at Deposit, New York. This address was published in a local newspaper at the time. I have had a Xerox copy made of the same as it appears in a family scrapbook and I enclose the Xerox copy which I would thank you to forward to Fish, perhaps with this letter, as I do not know his address in the country.

From my point of view, this entire matter has been my "Bicentennial" in the sense that as a little boy I knew my grandfather and he, in turn, as a small boy heard the story of the capture of Major Andre from the lips of the Mr. Williams who was one of the three captors of Andre, which makes the 200-year connection.

My grandfather was born and was living, at the time of the Williams incident, at his home at Preston Hollow (Albany County), New York, near Rensselaerville. My grandfather was born on November 16, 1820, and as the address states that he was 7 years old when he listened to Mr. Williams, the conversation between the two must have taken place in 1827. My grandfather graduated from Williams College in the Class of 1841 and a few years later moved to Deposit (Broome County), New York, where he established and operated as sole proprietor, a large tannery on the banks of the Delaware River, until his retirement in the late 1890's.

I think that you yourself will be interested in reading the account. Please tell Fish that I think his book is very interesting.

Hoping that you have a good summer, as we expect to have at Perry, Maine, my summer home on the shore of Passamaquoddy Bay.

Sincerely,



AD:FG

P.S. -- I enclose a stamped envelope for you to send on the data to Fish and would thank you to address the same to his country address.

It is not surprising my camp-fire talk I want to say to you that I do not feel that I deserve any credit in procuring the handsome volume which we are to present to you this evening. You are to give the credit to a very good-looking and attractive woman, who is blessed with a very smooth, persuasive tongue.

You are not to wonder that young men like Storr and Knapp should yield to the seductive talk of this lady, but the wonder comes in that two old grizzled veterans, like Col. Wheeler and myself, should be carried off our balance by pleasant smiles and sweet talk.

I do not know whether she is married but if I was situated as the Colonel is I think I should have asked. If she is married her husband never did a wiser thing than to stay at home and tend the babies and send out his wife as a canvasser.

Having relieved my conscience, I want to make some deflatory remarks about the private soldier, and tell you a little story about my acquaintance with an old soldier, which was made before any of you were born.

I often think that the men who enlisted as privates, to fight for less compensation than they would have received for their work if they had staid at home, deserve more praise than the officers who had large pay and the prospect of winning renown and glory on the battle-field. The man who has to go on picket duty and stand as sentinal through storm and darkness, exposed to cold and heat, liable to be deprived of regular rations, eating hard-tack and cold junk, marching night and day through mud knee-deep, glad of a little filthy water to quench his thirst, doing all this from love of country, deserves all praise and honor at our hands. How seldom does it ever happen that the private soldier performs an action that is even mentioned by his commanding officer, much less, that is ever enrolled upon the pages of history, to give his name immortal glory to an admiring posterity? Still such things have happened in the history of our country, and it is of one such soldier that I want to tell you in this camp-fire talk.

In my earliest school-boy days I was, I suppose, a precocious youngster, as my mother had bought me a history of the United States, which I was studying at seven years of age. My enthusiasm over the battles of the revolution was unbounded, and in reading to my mother the story of the capture of Major Andre, the British spy, by the three soldiers, Paulding, Williams and VanWert, I had many questions to ask, and when she told me that one of them was still living, and only a few miles from our own home, my excitement was at a fever heat. I fired so many questions at her and so fast, about David Williams, that in self-defense, she said that sometimes Mr. Williams came to see his adopted son, Judge Murphy, who was our nearest neighbor and that when he came again she would ask him to come in and tell

his annual visit. My mother had no power until she saw him and brought him into our house.

Seventy years have elapsed since that day, but the little armchair in which I sat at the old man's feet, leaning with my arm on his knee, and gazing with my whole soul in the old man's face, as he told the immortal story, is just as vivid to me as if it happened yesterday. I have often wished that it could have been taken down just as he told it, although it did not vary much from the tale that history records.

Six men were sent out as scouts to watch certain roads. Three took one road and their names and deeds are unknown. Three took the other, and before the sun went down, covered one of the brightest pages in American history, and made their names immortal.

Such are the chances of war. Mr. Williams said that when they reached a place where they could see the road for a long distance, they sat down behind a stone-wall and went to playing cards. They were engaged in their game when they heard the rapid hoof-beats of a horse, and immediately sprang into the road, in time to stop the rider. They made him dismount, after refusing all his bribes, which were sufficient to enrich three poor soldiers and make them comfortable for life. One of the bribes which Williams said he offered was several thousand yards of cotton cloth, which at that time was a great treasure. History does not record this, but does say they were offered large quantities of dry goods. They tied his horse and took him over the fence into the field, where they were partially concealed, and proceeded to search him. They found nothing in his pockets to incriminate him, but when they pulled off his boots, they felt a paper in his stocking, which they at once secured. Paulding examined the paper and exclaimed, "My God, the man is a spy." Yes, there was the whole plan and plot for the betrayal of West Point, in the traitor Arnold's own hand-writing. They immediately took Andre to their commanding officers, with the documents found on his person. The immortal deed was done: three obscure soldiers, in one short hour, wrote one of the brightest pages of American history, and their names are held in grateful memory by the mighty hosts of a great nation.

Washington had these men brought before him and thanked them personally for their patriotic conduct. In a letter to congress he uses this language: "Their conduct merits our universal esteem, and I beg leave to add that I think the public would do well to allow them a handsome gratuity. They have prevented, in all probability, our suffering one of the severest shocks that could have been meditated against us." Had the plot succeeded the way would have been open for Sir Henry Clinton to have led a large, well-disciplined army to march to the relief of Burgoyne, which, in all probability would have changed Gates' glorious victory of the heights of Saratoga into a disastrous

David Williams lived only a few years after he told me the story of the capture of Major Andre, and I well remember attending his funeral. All the old soldiers, with their flint-lock muskets, were on hand to bury the old man with military honors. The funeral was preached at his home, which was a common story and a half farm house, furnished in the plainest manner. Then a long procession of wagons followed his remains for several miles to the village of Livingstonville, Schoharie county. Here at the cemetery were gathered a vast crowd and the coffin was opened, and all the medals, gold-headed cane, silver cup and other presents which had been given him, were placed on top of the coffin. Finally the coffin was lowered into the grave, and a volley fired from the old muskets ended the ceremonies. Col. John Niles, my wife's father, was the officer of the day. The remains have since been removed to Schoharie, where a suitable monument has been erected. The old man, during his life, received many attentions. At Fourth of July celebrations he was a great show piece. He once visited New York and was made welcome to the city by the common council and presented with a gold-headed cane. A shrewd theatre man introduced a play entitled "The Capture of Major Andre," and at one point in the play the old man was brought on the stage. Then from pit to dome rose one universal cheer, which made the roof of the old building tremble. The theatre people gave him a nice horse, which afterwards came into possession of Judge Murphy, and which outlived the old man by twenty years. Many a ride I had with the Murphy boys behind the old Williams gray horse.

I have often thought how great a stretch of history the life of this man whom I knew, and my own has covered. Born in the reign of George II, he grew to manhood under the reign of George III, who was not only King of Great Britain but of these American colonies: saw the American Revolution to its end, also the war of 1812 with England, and all the wars of Napoleon. Our two lives cover 159 years of American history—from a few feeble colonies to one of the mightiest nations of the earth.

I recollect only one other instance of a private soldier achieving great distinction in our revolutionary war, and, strange as it may seem, that was a woman. Molly Pitcher was the wife of a soldier who belonged to a company of artillery. At the battle of Monmouth she was busy conveying water to the soldiers who suffered intensely from the heat of one of the hottest days New Jersey had ever experienced. The battery was fiercely engaged, when Molly's husband was struck by a shot and killed. The officer in command said he had no man to take his place, and was about to order the cannon to be withdrawn. Molly exclaimed, "Not so, I will take his place, and I will avenge the death of my husband." She perfectly understood the duty, and without flinching, amid a storm of grape shot and cannon balls, she loaded and

