

CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE:
A CRITICAL ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE
NEW YORK CITY PRISON LETTERS OF ST. JOHN DE CRÈVECŒUR

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract**CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE:
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Drew Moore

Adviser: Professor André Aciman

The present study is a critical edition and translation into English of the New York City prison letters of St. John de Crèvecoeur. The letters were first published in French in the 1784 and 1787 editions of *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain*. Until now, these five autobiographical stories of the author's 1779 incarceration by the British during the American Revolution have been unavailable to English readers. Consisting of a critical introduction, annotated translation, photographs, illustrations, and an appendix, this dissertation fuses the literary with the historical. St. John de Crèvecoeur's suspenseful, impassioned account of the most harrowing experience in his life is amplified by historical research that fleshes out wartime events and the actual lives of his fellow sufferers in the notorious Provost Gaol.

The critical introduction identifies themes that course through the prison stories, and indeed much of St. John de Crèvecoeur's work as a whole: the horrors and contingencies of civil war, along with the perils of neutrality and artificiality of allegiances. The introduction then examines the generic properties

of the prison letters: they share qualities of the epistolary, sentimental, and captivity narrative. Finally, the stories are placed into historical context, followed by a discussion of the implications of this prison episode in the assessment of St. John de Crèvecoeur's life and work.

The letters themselves begin with the "The Generous Daughter," a story of a man whose daughter's efforts to secure his release inspire wonder and admiration in all the inmates. "Anecdote of Sergeant B. A." anatomizes the movements, countenance and behavior of a man about to be executed. "The Ill-Fated Father" is the portrait of a defiant old man whose sons are wantonly murdered. "Circumstances" is principally the author's own story, recounting the torments he suffers, as well as the kindnesses bestowed on him, during his three-month confinement in the Provost. "Last Letter" recreates the suspenseful night on which the author discovers that he will finally be released from prison. Acts of benevolence that defy partisan expectations elicit his wonder as readily as acts of arbitrary vileness.

Acknowledgments

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helped me track down documents on the life and career of Colonel Josiah Smith; as did Ned Smith, Librarian of the Suffolk County Historical Society in Riverhead, Long Island; and Ross Robert, a descendant of the Colonel. I am also extremely grateful to the staff of the New York Historical Society, The Morgan Library, The New York Public Library, The Library of Congress, and the National Archives of the United Kingdom, for granting me access to their extensive holdings on my topic.

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encyclopedia of literary knowledge, and an inspiration from the time that we plumbed the rich depths of Shakespeare together in Nashville's Centennial Park. And Rafael Rodríguez has been the perfect model of discipline, hard work, and academic success. His constant friendship, advice and support are indispensable.

Dad, you are St. John de Crèvecoeur's ideal "citizen of the world," and my first model of a scholar and "a man of feeling." Jean, Dee, David and the rest of my family, thanks for your constant interest in my undertakings and for never doubting their merit. Mom, you were the consummate "woman of feeling," and I am sorry I never had the pleasure of hearing you say, "My son the Doctor."

*For Peter Avery OBE (1923-2008),
translator, scholar, mentor, friend . . .*

Preface

With the 1782 London publication of *Letters from an American Farmer*, St. John de Crèvecoeur¹ enthralled English readers with his portrait of a Pennsylvania farmer whose idyllic existence is shattered by civil war. By 1784 his audience had changed. He had repatriated to France, and the American colonies had won their independence from England. His translation, adaptation, and considerable elaboration of *Letters from an American Farmer* into *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain*, first in 1784 and then again in 1787, evinced a shrewd awareness of his new French audience.² Whereas the English edition inclined more toward British loyalism than American patriotism in its tone, the French editions were decidedly pro-American Independence and catered to a public who held an overly sentimental view of American life.³

The 1782 English edition contained twelve letters; the 1784 French edition was reworked and expanded into two volumes to include sixty-seven letters; and the 1787 edition grew to three volumes of eighty-eight letters. An English

¹ Throughout this dissertation, I follow Pierre Monette in referring to our author, born as Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur, as St. John de Crèvecoeur rather than Crèvecoeur. In his newly published book *St. John de Crèvecoeur et les Lettres d'un fermier américain*, which is both a biography as well as a critical French translation of the 1782 *Letters from an American Farmer*, Monette devotes an entire section to the most detailed analysis yet of St. John de Crèvecoeur's ever-changing name. He includes a fascinating triangular exchange of letters between Benjamin Franklin, Madame d'Houdetot and our author, which exemplifies the frequent confusion over St. John de Crèvecoeur's different names (265-310).

² I distinguish between the 1782 English edition of *Letters from an American Farmer* and the 1784 and 1787 French editions of *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain* with the abbreviations *Letters* and *Lettres*. I distinguish between the two French editions by the abbreviations *Lettres-1784* and *Lettres-1787*.

³ For a comparative study of the English and French editions of *Letters* and *Lettres*, see Bernard Chevignard's dissertation "Saint John de Crèvecoeur: *Letters from an American farmer* et *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain*. Genèse d'une oeuvre franco-américaine."

translation of the French editions has never been published. Consequently, a large number of these epistolary essays and sketches of late eighteenth-century American colonial life have never been available to English readers.

This dissertation provides the first English translation of the five letters from *Lettres-1787* that pertain to the author's 1779 incarceration in a New York City British-run prison during the American Revolutionary War.⁴ Although the letters' descriptions of the atrocities perpetrated against prisoners in the dungeons of the notorious Provost Gaol contribute to the French editions' generally anti-British and pro-Independence slant, the narrator's various accounts of treachery and capture, mercy and benevolence, betrayal and torture reveal St. John de Crèvecoeur's nuanced understanding of the contingencies of civil war. Besides making them available in English for the first time, my annotated translation of these important letters will amplify themes that are fundamental to much of St. John de Crèvecoeur's English and French work: an obsession with the savageries of civil war, the perils of neutrality, and the artificiality and arbitrariness of allegiances.

To date, I have found no reference to St. John de Crèvecoeur's prison letters in historical accounts of the Provost Gaol; and among literary critics and St. John de Crèvecoeur biographers, no more than a few pages—most often in French—have been devoted to the prison letters.⁵ Because my annotations document pertinent historical episodes and flesh out the real lives of men and

⁴ See A Note on the Translation (77) for an explanation of why I used *Lettres-1787* rather than *Lettres-1784* as my source.

⁵ See especially Rice, pp. 159-62.

women who are characters in these stories, St. John de Crèvecoeur scholars will have a fuller context against which to evaluate his prison stories. On the other hand, Revolutionary War scholars will have a compelling eye-witness account of events pertaining to the infamous Provost Gaol on the site of today's City Hall Park in New York City, which will add to the historical record alongside other contemporary but much more abridged accounts, such as the account in Ethan Allen's *A Narrative of Ethan Allen's Captivity*. In sum, this dissertation combines the literary and historical in such a way that scholars from both fields will benefit from its cross-disciplinary approach.

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Introduction

Wisdom sits in places. It's like water that never dries up. You need to drink water to stay alive, don't you? Well, you also need to drink from places. You must remember everything about them. You must learn their names. You must remember what happened at them long ago.

--a Western Apache place-maker

Wisdom Sits in Places, by Keith Basso

1. *A Tortuous Path: The Life and Letters of St. John de Crèvecoeur*

Born into the petty nobility in Caen, France on January 31, 1735, Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur received a Jesuit education and moved to England to live with relatives when he was an adolescent.⁶ Scholars have yet to determine exactly why he went to England or why he left England a few years later. We only know that by 1758, when he was twenty-three years old, he was a lieutenant in the French army in the regiment of La Sarre, Québec. Historical evidence suggests that he was present during the capture of Fort William Henry in August 1757, an episode during the Seven Years' War that proved devastating to the British and that was later popularized by James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*.

St. John de Crèvecoeur was apparently a skilled engineer because King Louis XV himself recognized his expertise as a surveyor and cartographer.

⁶ Biographical details are taken from Mitchell, Monette, Philbrick, and Rice.

However, after the French defeat at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759, he left the army under mysterious circumstances and went south to the colony of New York. Little is known about his life in the 1760s except that he traveled extensively throughout the English colonies as a merchant and surveyor; became a naturalized citizen of the colony of New York in 1765 under the name of John Hector St. John; and in 1769 married Mehitable Tippet, daughter of a prominent Tory from Yonkers, with whom he settled on a 120-acre farm in Orange County, New York.

The next decade of his life inspired the essays and sketches that would become *Letters from an American Farmer*. These are the years during which he started a family and cultivated his farm Pine Hill. But the rising tension between the colonies and the Crown, Whig and Tory, interrupted his pastoral paradise. On one hand his farm was susceptible to British-provoked Indian raids; on the other hand, he was *persona non grata* as a Tory sympathizer in a predominantly Whig community. In early 1779 he left Pine Hill accompanied by his oldest son in order to return to France, leaving behind his wife and two children. British authorities in New York City, however, suspected him of espionage and cast him into prison. Months later he was released but continued to suffer privation and medical hardships in New York City for the next year. In September 1780 he finally sailed on a fleet bound for the British Isles, only to be shipwrecked near the coast, but at last reached Dublin in October, and by May 1781 was in London, where the manuscripts that he had managed to carry with him all the way from Pine Hill were trimmed down and shaped into the 1782 and 1783

English editions of *Letters*. The prison letters did not appear in the English editions. While no French or English manuscripts of the prison letters have ever been found, Howard C. Rice infers from a separate manuscript that St. John de Crèvecoeur must have started drafting them in English while still living in New York City (57).⁷

Letters was well received in England and was even translated into German and Dutch. These sketches fed the appetite of an audience hungry for vivid images of rural American landscapes and narratives of the noble savage. Years later romantics such as Coleridge, Shelley and Hazlitt would also embrace *Letters*. St. John de Crèvecoeur's Homeric metaphors and incantatory rhythms elevated the farmer's life to mythical status, from its sweetest domestic joys to its fiercest struggles. The narrator's vision of a democratic land of "no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings, no bishops" (67), where "individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men," (70) inspired readers' utopian fantasies. Even before the first letter begins, the reader is keenly aware of the work's transatlantic dialogue with important Enlightenment figures of the age. The English edition is dedicated to the Abbé Raynal, whose *Political and Philosophical History* inspired St. John de Crèvecoeur to believe in "a secret communion among good men throughout the world, a mental affinity connecting them by a similitude of sentiments . . ." (37). Our author was soon to enjoy direct communion with European intellectuals. His success followed him to France, where he had finally returned in August 1781 after a 27-year absence. Encouraged by his new Parisian friends, such as those in the salon of Madame

⁷ See note 49.

d'Houdetot, he translated *Letters* into French under the title *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain*, more than quadrupling the number of letters for the 1784 edition, and adding almost another twenty letters for the 1787 edition.

Immediately after the American Revolution ended in November 1783, St. John de Crèvecoeur returned to New York City. His literary celebrity had paved a path to the vaunted halls of Versailles and enabled him to serve for most of the 1780s as the first French consul to New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. In this capacity he worked diligently to promote French trade with the U.S. and launched a packet-boat service between the two countries. His Parisian friends had also given him access to American luminaries such as Washington, Jefferson and Franklin, with whom he became a regular correspondent. Unfortunately on his return to America, just over three years after his departure in September 1780, he learned even before his arrival at Pine Hill that his house had been burned, his wife was dead, and his two children had been taken away. He found his children under the care of a Boston family.⁸

St. John de Crèvecoeur's writings enjoyed some popularity in the United States during the last two decades of the 1700s. In fact, certain sketches that appeared in *Lettres* but not in *Letters* were published in several U.S. newspapers throughout the 1780s. He left the U.S. for his ancestral home in Normandy in 1790, never to return, and remarkably survived the Reign of Terror, which so many of his friends like Brissot de Warville and Louis-Alexandre, duc de la Rochefoucauld d'Enville, did not. His fame began to wane in the final two

⁸ Monette argues that St. John de Crèvecoeur's wife was not murdered during the incident in which the house was burned, as scholars have usually assumed, but died of some other cause previous to that episode (314-15).

decades of his life, both in the United States and Europe. However, he remained active, tending to his farm, writing many articles, traveling around Europe and following the diplomatic careers of his children. In 1801 he published *Voyage dans la Haute Pennsylvanie et dans l'état de New York*. But the death of his son Ally in 1806 deeply saddened his final years, followed by the death of his beloved friend Madame d'Houdetot in January 1813.⁹ His own death on November 12, 1813, went largely unnoticed by the public.

St. John de Crèvecoeur was hardly read in the nineteenth century. *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America* was the title given by editors Bourdin, Gabriel and Williams in 1925 to a dozen new English sketches that Bourdin discovered in St. John de Crèvecoeur's manuscripts among the possessions of his descendants in Normandy. These sketches (including one drama in six scenes) had never before been published, and the 1920s scholarship that accompanied them tended to accentuate their anti-utopian aspects: the drudgery and hardships of rural life as well as the greed and bloodthirstiness of frenzied and opportunistic American patriots. In 1995, Dennis D. Moore published *More Letters from the American Farmer*, a critical edition that included even more unpublished English letters from the Normandy manuscripts. Unlike the 1925 edition, the 1995 edition reproduced the manuscripts exactly as written, including the author's strikethroughs, interlineations, and errors.

⁹ St. John de Crèvecoeur wrote about his friendship with Madame d'Houdetot in "Souvenirs consacrés à la mémoire de Madame la Comtesse de Houdetot." (Published in Chevignard's "Les souvenirs de Saint-John de Crèvecoeur sur Mme d'Houdetot." The Pierpont Morgan Library owns the autograph manuscript.)

It was D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923) that catapulted St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters* into the U.S. literary canon.

Lawrence calls him a true artist in spite of himself. His dark passages that dramatize nature's deadly struggles, such as the graphic accounts of fighting snakes and a kingbird devouring a colony of bees, belie his idealistic "blarney" about the noble savage and the "innocence of toil" (26).

St. John de Crèvecoeur's place in American letters has been secure ever since. Now with these newly-translated stories, his English-speaking readership will be introduced to a series of letters that he wrote about an experience in his life more agonizing than most people will ever have to experience, even though in today's political climate one cannot help but think, while reading them, of the men and women who currently *are* undergoing a similar experience. What is remarkable about the author of these letters, however, is his lifelong knack for coping with hardship and prevailing over the most hopeless circumstances, including his three-month captivity in New York City's Provost Gaol.

2. *The Contingencies of Civil War*

An indecisive Long Island man harassed by loyalists and patriots alike¹⁰ . . . a New Jersey farmer tormented by his decision to join the king's forces . . . a "simple colonist" wrongly imprisoned on suspicion and innuendo—

¹⁰ In this dissertation a "loyalist" is synonymous with "royalist" and specifies a North American colonist who remained loyal to the British Crown during the American Revolution. "Patriot" is synonymous with "rebel" and specifies an American who supported the cause of independence from the British Crown. Loyalists were also called Tories, and patriots were also called Whigs.

these are the main characters of St. John de Crèvecoeur's five stories, which are set principally in a British-run prison in New York City during the American Revolution. "I don't know what to do," the indecisive Long Island man frankly admits to a party of pleading, hungry men whose motives are suspect; so he goes inside to consult his wife. The New Jersey farmer-turned-sergeant, condemned to death by his own superiors, laments that he would have been better off staying with his own countrymen in Morris County: "If I had the chance to do it all over again, I'd act much differently." The simple colonist, who "had lived all his life in the bosom of rural peace and tranquility," scorns partisan allegiance and wishes only to cultivate his fields and cherish his family. That colonist is St. John de Crèvecoeur himself, in the character of Mr. St. John, the narrator and author of these letters. Far from the bold, resolute individuals who often populate stories of a nation's beginnings, these men are hesitant to act, fraught with anxiety, racked by doubt, tortured by fear, and thus supremely human. Suspended before us are the dreadful moments before their lives take an irrevocable turn. We witness the violent breakdown of the Long Island man's attempt to remain neutral; we peer into the psyche of the New Jersey farmer as he awaits his death sentence and execution; and we observe the dark spiritual transformation of Mr. St. John.

An obstinate truth keeps emerging in these narratives, as it does in many of St. John de Crèvecoeur's English essays as well: no conflict is as personal, cruel, brutal and bloody as civil war. The struggle between England and her thirteen North American colonies, which is the larger setting in which the prison

stories are set, became known as a revolution; but St. John de Crèvecoeur's work reveals that this conflict had all the characteristics of civil war. To be sure, anti-British sentiment and anecdotes of British cruelty and sanction of cruelty are plentiful, and it is certainly British barbarity and machination that turn American Tories "into hungry wolves who devour, pillage and destroy everything"; but it is the author's depiction of internecine treachery and violence that is most affecting, especially when the victims are caught in the crossfire between opportunistic American partisans. The political environment in and around New York City during the time of St. John de Crèvecoeur's imprisonment was rife with paranoia. There was a witch-hunt atmosphere in which the most casual accusation of "Whig" or "rebel" could land a person in jail.

In the first prison letter "The Generous Daughter," the Long Island patriarch Colonel Smith relates his dilemma to the British commander-in-chief, General Sir Henry Clinton, who is using the colonel's house as a temporary residence:

"As you see, I'm caught in the crossfire. Several who know my situation call me a Whig so they can come and carry away my cattle; on the other hand, the Americans from Connecticut call everyone who submitted to your domination Tories, and they often come to demand large sums. That's my situation and in spite of the wealth I enjoyed before the war, I'd scarcely be able to live without the fish that we catch every day." (87)

A few weeks later the old colonel's greatest fear is realized when a party of loyalists set the trap for him to be robbed and dragged to prison. The most disturbing moment is the one in which we realize that this proud man will become the prey of his greedy countrymen no matter what action he takes.

At the beginning of "Anecdote of Sergeant B. A.," St. John writes, "the slightest suspicion under a military government and in the midst of a civil war suffices to deprive a man of freedom and often of life" (102). The title character is a New Jersey farmer who gives up his sizable plantation to fight for the British, only to become the scapegoat for the shameful military conduct of his superiors during a disastrous battle. His fate lies in the hands of a British war council. He despairs to his cellmates that the war councils "have returned several [verdicts] that indicate all the partiality of civil war. The members of these councils seem to be American Tories led astray by their zeal, and they condemn all who are called Whigs" (115). So while his British superiors are certainly enablers of injustice, his likely executioners are his own countrymen.

The colonel who had recruited this sergeant to his New Jersey battalion is a rabid royalist, Colonel Abraham Van Buskirk, whose dark portrait appears in the prologue to the third letter, "The Ill-Fated Father." Both he and General Clinton are the objects of St. John's antipathy and consternation:

Can I neglect to show you, at a remote perspective, a feeble sketch of adversities of every kind that cruelty, greed, and partisan hatred (that demon of civil wars) produced among us? My friend, these are the principal agents that for seven years sharpened so many

bayonets, caused so much blood to stream, and concealed the most ghastly crimes under the name of loyalty and duty. . . . At the outset of the war, among the royalists who took up arms against their country, Colonel B. K. distinguished himself by his courage and zeal. He constantly proposed to headquarters some new plan, which he was often in charge of executing. What could have been the designs of a general naturally good and humane? It is surprising that insouciance, that predominant sentiment, did not sometimes deter his weakness for authorizing so many fires and pointless murders. (133)

Even the British general (“naturally good and humane”), the individual ultimately responsible for these conquests, is less despicable to St. John than the bloodthirsty American colonel. Van Buskirk is feared and hated by his former Bergen County neighbors, whose family members are killed and whose houses and barns are burned on his many rampages. One particularly devastating expedition to the “neutral ground” of northern New Jersey on the night of May 10, 1779, is the setting for the story of “The Ill-Fated Father.”

The fourth letter “Circumstances” is St. John’s own story, which is to say St. John de Crèvecoeur’s story.¹¹ The letter’s focus is on St. John’s imprisonment, psychological torture and persecution, caused and exacerbated by fellow Americans such as the royalists who visit him daily with insinuations that he will die by the cord, or the “cruel souls (the kind that civil wars produce)” who

¹¹ In this dissertation, “St. John” refers strictly to the narrator of the prison letters; whereas, “St. John de Crèvecoeur” refers to the author of *Letters* and *Lettres*.

tell St. John's son that his father will be executed. His trauma leads to a dark epiphany: "At the sight of all these horrors and evils I suddenly became a Manichaeian" (144). Life now appears to him as a dualistic struggle between the forces of good and evil, in which evil is almost always the victor.¹²

It is not until "Last Letter" that St. John's torments in prison come to an end, thanks to his dear New York friend William Seton, but thanks also to British officers: the sympathetic Town Major as well as the British commandant. Commandant Pattison always believed in his innocence but was forced to act on accusations lodged against St. John by American Tories.

St. John de Crèvecoeur's prison stories evoke one of the earliest literary expressions of the contingencies and catastrophic impact of civil war: the ancient Greek historian Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War*. Early in the 27-year-long conflict between Sparta and Athens in the year 427 B.C.E., the island of Corcyra off the western coast of Greece becomes the stage for a systematic, large-scale slaughter of civilians. However, the perpetrators of the slaughter are not Athenian or Spartan soldiers; they are Athenian-backed Corcyrean democrats whose vengeful, partisan passions are unleashed against Spartan-backed Corcyrean

¹² In St. John de Crèvecoeur's sketch "The American Belisarius," which went unpublished along with other English-language sketches until the 1920s publication of *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America*, the narrator is pushed to the brink of Manichaeism when he witnesses the gradual persecution and ruin of a good man at the hands of his greedy, hypocritical Whig neighbors:

. . . surely this points out the absolute Necessity of future Rewards & Punishments, was not I convinced of it, I would not suffer the Rebukes, the Taunts, the daily Infamy to which I have conscientiously exposed myself, I'd turn Manichean like so many others, I'd worship the Dæmon of the Times, Trample on every Law, break every Duty, neglect every Bond, overlook every Obligation to which no Punishment was annexed, I'd set myself Calamniating my rich Neighbours, I'd call all passive inoffensive Men by the name of Inimical, I'd plunder or detain the entrusted Depositor. (D. D. Moore 228-29)

oligarchs. In this scene of civil strife, fathers kill their sons, debtors kill their creditors, and countless others are killed on account of private hatred and greed. In the course of narrating the events of Corcyra, Thucydides describes the reversal of values and thus the moral elasticity that great human crises such as civil wars engender:

During peace and under good circumstances, both cities and civilians are more reasonable because they are not reduced to involuntary want; but war is a violent teacher because as it diminishes people's daily abundance, most of them act in accordance with their new condition. . . . Thus heedless courage was judged to be manly devotion to one's faction; whereas, cautious delay was thought to be a cover for cowardice, and moderation the cloak of the unmanly. . . . A raging man was always trustworthy, but the man who opposed him was suspect. Anyone whose plot succeeded was considered intelligent, and anyone who detected a plot was even more cunning. But whoever took measures so as not to stand in need of doing either was said to be driven by the enemy into sabotaging his own party. Simply put, any man was praised if he anticipated another in committing some crime, or if he encouraged another man who had no intention of committing a crime to do so. (3.82.2-5)¹³

Many of the episodes and remarks in St. John de Crèvecoeur's prison letters are Thucydidean in their depiction of moral ambiguity and perversion. When a group

¹³ All translations in this dissertation—Greek, Latin and French—are my own.

of scheming loyalists disguised as refugee patriots from Connecticut appear on Colonel Smith's Long Island farm and begin to gauge his partisan allegiance, he snaps, "How do you claim to know what my political opinions are? I'm old. I no longer have any" (88). The next day they return, having lifted the veil from their base intentions, and they taunt him and defend their methods of entrapment:

"Isn't everything fair game for the sake of exposing concealed rebels? Besides, we've been authorized by superior orders."

"I have absolutely no doubt about that, gentlemen. But how unfortunate that it's reserved for the partisans of King George to drive the exaltation of evil to the point of forcing humanity to become its own foe, converting a purely charitable act into a crime."
(90)

Although the colonel begins the war at the head of an elite American regiment, his advancing age and dependent family force him to deploy a nonpartisan survival tactic, but that tactic fails. During Colonel Smith's imprisonment in New York, he asks a humane English officer who regularly visits the American prisoners how thieves can "triumph with such impunity," and the officer replies that it is British policy not to discourage the loyalist refugees from their pillaging expeditions. When St. John indignantly asks if Americans are "monsters that can no longer demand the lowliest rights of humanity," the officer replies, "However right you may be, those gentlemen aren't necessarily all wrong" (101). It is quite fitting that the more removed English officer, rather than an American partisan,

wisely utters this work's most explicit statement of moral ambiguity, for he speaks from the distanced perspective of a relative outsider observing the more personal enmity between fighting American factions.

This English officer's suggestion that a party's moral rectitude may vary depending on one's perspective is made concrete in the next letter, "Anecdote of Sergeant B. A.," whose loyalist hero is sympathetically portrayed as a victim of circumstances and British callousness. In this letter, loyalists in general are not the villains but the victims. The sergeant humanizes loyalists with his own account of how they are ensnared into British lines and then driven to acts of terrorism against their former neighbors by unfulfilled British promises:

"The ingratitude, contempt and neglect that all these men have suffered, who with the best faith in the world have taken refuge here, revolts me every time I think of it. Half have already died of grief; the others, peaceable farmers abandoned to the sting of all their wants and a useless repentance, have become madmen who insult and tarnish the cause they've adopted. The barbarous conduct of the government, which scarcely gives them rations, has turned them into hungry wolves who devour, pillage and destroy everything." (116)

So the moral relativism swirling through the prison stories continues to be exemplified in this second letter by the very fact that, unlike the first letter, its sympathetic hero is a loyalist. Even though marauding loyalists are often the targets of bitter criticism from characters in the prison letters, in this particular

anecdote and passage, loyalists are humanized, at the expense of scheming, callous British commanders and military governors who are blamed for driving them to starvation and madness.

St. John de Crèvecoeur's Thucydidean depiction of war's disruption of all social conventions echoes a theme in the work of the Scottish philosopher David Hume, who died in 1776 just after the American Revolution broke out. Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* includes a discussion on the malleability of morality and justice during times of war and duress. Hume begins his chapter "Of Justice" by positing that in a world of natural abundance, civil justice is unnecessary. "Why call this object *mine*, when, upon the seizing of it by another, I need but stretch out my hand to possess myself of what is equally valuable? Justice, in that case, being totally USELESS, would be an idle ceremonial, and could never possibly have place in the catalogue of virtues" (13).¹⁴ At the other end, he posits a society plunged into the most extreme need and suggests that in the consequent misery, the strict laws of justice would be suspended "and give place to the stronger motives of necessity and self-preservation" (15). Furthermore, if a virtuous man happens to fall into a society of ruffians in which rapaciousness and injustice prevail, a regard for justice is no longer in his own interest, so "he must consult the dictates of self-preservation alone, without concern for those who no longer merit his concern and

¹⁴ Compare this relationship between abundance and law to a similar one in an idyllic passage of "What Is an American?" in *Letters*. Farmer James describes what a European immigrant sees when he arrives in America: ". . . he sees happiness and prosperity in all places disseminated; he meets with hospitality, kindness, and plenty everywhere; he beholds hardly any poor; he seldom hears of punishments and executions . . . he involuntarily loves a country where everything is so lovely" (80-81).

attention” (16). Hume’s point is that justice is motivated by utility, by its benefit to humankind, and that wartime provides the clearest example of “a suspension of justice” by parties who perceive “that this virtue is now no longer of any *use* or advantage to them” (16). As a result, the rules of justice are dependent on the particular state or condition of the society in which an individual lives; therefore, the rules vary across place and time. So lying in the middle, between the two extreme states of natural abundance and scarcity of resources is the condition in which the traditional laws of justice are most useful; but at the two extremes, the traditional laws of justice are not useful to a society. Thucydides makes a similar comment about this middle zone in which civil justice is most useful, but in addition to opposing a society of abundance against a society of scarcity, he opposes states with an equal balance of power to states with an imbalance of power. In his Melian dialogue, the Athenians attempt to convince the Melians that their surrendering to Athens will be in their best interest because it will protect the Melians from wholesale slaughter by the Athenians. And to preempt any appeal to justice that the Melians will make, the Athenians declare that they will dispense with moral arguments and simply tell the truth: two parties only talk about justice when both sides are relatively equal in power; but when one side is clearly more powerful than the other, as the Athenians are, then the most powerful party will disregard the usual rules of justice and exert its strength to get what it wants, a fact that the weaker party must simply accept (5.89).

When placed against the background of Thucydides’ and Hume’s philosophical ruminations on the breakdown of civil order and traditional justice

during wartime, St. John and his fellow cellmates are plainly thrown into relief as victims of arbitrary, contingent justice; and they discover that what they once considered virtuous may just as easily be viewed as cowardly or criminal by others. Sergeant B. A., for example, driven by a sense of duty and loyalty, thought he was being brave by going against the tide of his patriot neighbors and crossing into British lines to support the king; but British soldiers tell him, on the contrary, he's a fool. They also teach him that any evil they can do is legitimized as long as it is done to the Americans. The fierce patriot Paul Leger, cast into the prison dungeon with scant rations, pleads with his hard-hearted overseer, "What a fate for a prisoner of war! How would you treat me if I were a criminal?" His tormentor replies, "You are a criminal—that's for certain—since we treat you like one." To transform a perception into reality, in other words, one need only act on the perception with conviction.

An apt metaphor for the variable nature of perceived reality in the prison letters is St. John de Crèvecoeur's ironic reversal of the usual connotations of darkness and light at the end of the work. In most of the stories, darkness and blackness are fearsome, menacing, and portentous of pain, torture and death. Physical darkness parallels the dark state of a mind and body in distress. For example, the sergeant retires into a "dark, isolated room" (118) after he is condemned to be hanged; and St. John condemns himself to "eternal darkness" (122) if he neglects to carry out a dying wish of the sergeant's. English soldiers and loyalists often paint themselves black before marauding expeditions. In "Circumstances," the underground dungeon to which the notorious rebel Paul

Leger is relegated is “as dark as original Chaos” (145). Leger despairs of the eternal night when he cries out to his tormentor, the first sergeant, “. . . the solitude, the darkness, and these irons!” (146) Finally, in “Last Letter,” when St. John finally learns of his imminent release, the sounds of ponderous keys and bellowing hinges and approaching footsteps are “made more sinister by the profound silence and darkness” (177). On the other hand, light is a salve, a welcome relief, a respite from darkness. It is refreshing, rejuvenating and offers hope. On the very first page of these stories, St. John explains that he has “selected only the least atrocious scenes, those, at any rate, in which virtue, spreading its sweet light, diminishes the darkness and horror of the crime” (82). The regular visits, for instance, of Colonel Smith’s daughter inject light into a somber environment. “She enlivened our meals, and the pleasure that she spread around her, like a soft light, diminished the dark melancholy of our plight” (96). Furthermore, when the sergeant asks St. John to swear to him to fulfill his dying wish, he asks him to swear on a single ray of sunlight shining in the dark cell. And when St. John receives the fortunate news of his impending release, “it was a ray of light that suddenly brightened the darkest dungeon” (169).

However, these conventional roles of darkness and light are not sustained until the very end. They undergo a reversal in their associative values in the last letter when St. John and his cellmates hear the footsteps of their approaching jailer. Now, light is an evil portent. When the jailer opens the door of the gallery, “a slight glimmer becomes noticeable under our door.” When the steps grow nearer, “the light expands” (177). Light is menacing because it signals the

midnight approach of their fiendish jailer, who usually brings with him torture and doom. It is not until the jailer conducts St. John to a friendly face in the downstairs gallery that his psychological torture is only partially relieved. When St. John receives the good news from this English officer of his future release from prison, and afterwards returns to his dark prison cell, he closes the prison letters by describing not the sinister quality of darkness, but its restorative property, for it allows him at last to sleep:

Finally, after he had counted us and closed the door again, he left us in our former darkness. But this same darkness was no longer dismal or appalling. Just the opposite, it appeared to me as the symbol of tranquility, calm and repose. Next I was groping for the hands of my dear companions, which I grasped in mine with every expression of affection and gratitude. And responding to what they demanded of me, I recounted everything that had just happened. Exhausted by the toils of such a peculiar, tiring scene, I threw myself onto my bed, where out of pity, Nature finally deigned to pour some drops of poppy onto my burning eyelids. (183)

One experience has completely changed St. John's perspective on the value of darkness. Whereas it used to inspire fear and helplessness, now it heals, and marks the beginning of his path to freedom.

3. A Question of Genre: Epistolarity, Sentiment and Captivity

I have selected these five stories that pertain to St. John de Crèvecoeur's New York City confinement in a British-run prison from volume one of his three-volume *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain adressées à W^m. S...on, Esq^f. depuis l'année 1770 jusqu'en 1786*, published in Paris in 1787. The title itself reveals the author's epistolary conceit for the work. The recipient of these letters is his New York City friend William Seton,¹⁵ whose tireless efforts were largely responsible for St. John de Crèvecoeur's release from prison. It is entirely possible, and indeed probable, that our author wrote private letters to William Seton, but we have no record of them.

While it is clear from the title that Seton is the implied recipient of all the "letters"¹⁶ in the three volumes of *Lettres-1787*, I will be concerned primarily with the five prison letters. St. John opens each one with a second-person reference

¹⁵ See Mitchell, pp. 88-100, for a biography of Seton. William H. W. Sabine's brief profile of William Seton follows:

William Seton (d.1798), a Scotsman of good family who held several minor posts in the British administration of New York, including that of secretary to Andrew Elliot in his capacity of superintendent general of police. Seton's Loyalism did not debar him, after the war, from the post of first cashier at the newly instituted Bank of New York. His son, William Magee Seton, married Elizabeth Bayley (now known as Mother Elizabeth Seton in the Roman Catholic Church), daughter of the Loyalist Dr. Richard Bayley. (W. Smith 133n)

¹⁶ When one surveys all eighty-eight "letters" in the three volumes of the work, it becomes evident that many of them lack the traditional formal properties of a letter. Sometimes the "letter" is a dialogue rather than a personal narrative, or purports to be a translation from a manuscript in St. John's possession, or consists of a collection of short, discrete narratives—some of them only a few lines—of notable people and events of the American Revolution. And some pieces are "hardly more than translations of American newspapers" (Rice 94-95).

"Origin of the Settlement of Socialburg" in volume three of *Lettres-1787* is an example of a dialogue that St. John claims to have translated, and the piece "Forty-Nine Anecdotes" is a collection of very brief narratives describing notable people and events of the American Revolution. Ed White has recently translated both of these pieces into English for the first time. "Eleventh Letter: An Account of Several Interesting Circumstances That Preceded and Followed the Triumphant Entry of George Washington into the City of New York . . ." is an example of a piece borrowing heavily from an American newspaper account.

to his recipient: (1) “These personal anecdotes, chosen with discernment, will reveal to you the nation. Faithful to my promise, I have depicted only what I have seen . . .” (82); (2) “The story of a few of my companions will be the only account that I give you . . .” (102); (3) “If on the one hand I fear that the blackness of my portraits may revolt a soul as compassionate as yours . . .” (132); (4) “My friend, doesn’t your affection lead you astray? . . . You demand of me an extremely distressing task” (139); and (5) “Brass quickening into the mold does not receive a sharper or more durable impression than that which was engraved on my imagination by the painful scene whose details you demand” (176). In all of these prologues, Mr. Seton’s prior requests are the justification for St. John’s recording his thoughts and experiences.

Writing letters to a close friend that are intended for a public audience is part of a Western literary tradition whose roots go back at least to classical antiquity. In this tradition the letter is often called an “epistle,” from the Greek and Latin words for letter, *epistole* and *epistula*, respectively. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “epistle” as a “communication made to an absent person in writing; a letter. Chiefly (from its use in translations from L. and Gr.) applied to letters written in ancient times, esp. to those which rank as literary productions, or . . . to those of a public character, or addressed to a body of persons.” The content of epistles may range from personal anecdotes, to political essays, to religious and philosophical treatises. For example, approximately eight hundred letters of the first-century BCE Roman orator Cicero are extant. While some of them relate trivial family matters or personal revelations intended solely for the

recipient, many of them are obviously crafted for a wider audience. According to Friedrich and Desan, Cicero was the Roman master of “introducing private, intimate speech and casual subjectivity into prose literature” (355). Both his *Epistulae ad Familiares* and *Epistulae ad Atticum* have inspired the autobiographical writings of legions of writers after him. But Cicero’s letters are hardly limited to the autobiographical. His “letter can discuss all possible questions, whether political, scientific or concerned with moral philosophy in an informal alternation that is held together only by the unity of the one writing it” (Friedrich and Desan 355). A Roman writer of the Silver Age whose work owes a considerable debt to Cicero is Pliny the Younger, and his letters are even more self-consciously public than Cicero’s. Not only do Pliny’s letters, which are addressed to an array of friends, form a lively document of aristocratic Roman life of his era, they display “a constant expression of the depth of feeling which the author has for the profession and practice of literature” (Singer 6). His vivid description of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, which killed his uncle Pliny the Elder, remains one of his most memorable letters.

Alongside the “familiar letters” tradition in antiquity, there flourished other epistolary documents that were created for public consumption, such as the sermons of the Apostle Paul. Patricia A. Rosenmeyer emphasizes that the Pauline letters are far from being “untouched by literary or rhetorical conventions,” as so many biblical scholars of the twentieth century believed; they were written for a wide audience and were designed to “outlast their author” (6-7). Godfrey Frank Singer, too, notes that Paul’s “exhortations and exegeses . . .

are particularly worthy examples of the early art of letter writing” (3). Their influence on the writings of the Church Fathers and the ecclesiastics of the Middle Ages was as significant as Cicero’s influence on the public letters of Renaissance humanists such as Petrarch and Erasmus.

In the seventeenth century, possessing the grace of Cicero—and much more wit—is Blaise Pascal’s *Lettres provinciales*, an epistolary polemic against Jesuit casuistry in defense of Jansenism. The work is structured as a sequence of eighteen letters to a friend in the provinces. Their pseudonymous author Louis de Montalte writes to his friend about heated philosophical and theological debates raging in Paris. Besides playing an influential role in a polarizing controversy brewing within the Catholic Church, Pascal’s letters anticipate the worldly charm and caustic satire of prose stylists of the next century such as Voltaire and Rousseau.

St. John de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters* and *Lettres* fall within this long, lively European tradition that precedes them. However, another tradition into which they fit is the epistolary novel, whose form was perfected in the eighteenth century. St. John de Crèvecoeur was writing *Letters* during the decade of the 1770s when the public’s appetite for the epistolary novel was at its absolute peak. Samuel Richardson was certainly not the first person to write an epistolary novel, but his *Pamela* and *Clarissa* were such groundbreaking successes in the early to mid-1700s that he became acknowledged as its English father, and was imitated (and parodied) *ad nauseam*. For the next several decades there was a mania for the genre, which did not begin to wane until the late 1780s and 1790s

(Singer 99-110). In France, the form gave rise to such classics as Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, Rousseau's *La nouvelle Héloïse*, and Laclos' *Les liaisons dangereuses* (Altman 3).

Janet Gurkin Altman's influential *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* provides a thorough discussion and analysis of the formal elements of epistolary narratives.¹⁷ Her focus is the epistolary novel, but many of the epistolary elements that she identifies may apply to epistolary literature in general. By "epistolarity," she means "the use of the letter's formal property to create meaning" (4). Some of the properties that she identifies are devices at work in St. John de Crèvecoeur's prison letters. First of all, entrusting one's intimate thoughts to a dear friend and confidant in a letter lends the contents an air of authenticity (6). And St. John is emphatic about his letters' authenticity. Observe how careful St. John is to establish the veracity of his report on the first page of the prison letters: "Faithful to my promise I have depicted only what I have seen, as Heaven is my witness" (82). The question of authenticity often arises in discussions of *Letters* and *Lettres*. One of St. John de Crèvecoeur's earliest critics, the British Museum librarian Samuel Ayscough, published a scathing essay in 1783 impeaching *Letters*' authenticity: ". . . I am induced to lay my sentiments before the public in a most candid and dispassionate manner, anxious to expose an attempt of a late author to mislead the people, and to shew that the publication is a fraud, artfully disguised, and hostile to the happiness of the nation" (3). Besides attempting to discredit the author's identity as the simple Farmer James, he

¹⁷ For other discussions of epistolary narratives, see Beebee, Black, Bray, Gilroy and Verhoeven, Jost, Mylne, Rousset, and Thelander.

lashes out at the author's "pleasing, romantic manner . . . calculated to work upon the passions" of disgruntled English readers. "The pen of this writer would make an Irish hut appear a palace most devoutly to be wished; surrounded with a potatoe garden; their cow flowing with healthful lacteal springs, their care by day, their companion by night . . ." (6). Such indictments on the authenticity of his work may have prompted St. John de Crèvecoeur's repeated claims to authenticity that the form of the letter allows.

Another epistolary device has to do with William Seton's role in the prison letters. Altman writes of the passive recipient who serves "an auxiliary purpose by his mere ineffectuality . . . by his inability to extricate or entice the hero or heroine from the locus of his trouble to the peaceful locus from which the confidant writes" (82). Therefore, in addition to "triggering the exposition" (50), Seton functions as a reminder of St. John's helplessness during his incarceration. In response to Seton's apparent demands to hear St. John's story, St. John, now safely across the ocean in the seat of Dublin hospitality, addresses him thus at the beginning of "Circumstances":

Moreover, if your friendship could add some interesting nuances, some degree of importance to the circumstances in which I found myself, your desire would have some pretext. . . . Your compassionate tears and the tenderness of your heart, which would have been the most precious balm for me in those bitter moments, would fortunately be useless today. (140)

It was during St. John's confinement that he really needed Seton's tears and compassion, not now, when he would like to put the episode behind him and look toward the future. Elsewhere in the stories, too, St. John makes us aware of "the peaceful locus" from which he now writes. In a rather Wordsworthian moment evocative of "Tintern Abbey" in its observation of the heightened emotional intensity of recalling an experience in later tranquility, he writes in Letter 2, "It is only today in the bosom of liberty and repose that all these sensations are renewed even more keenly than when I was witness to these sad scenes" (26).

Ironically, Seton was St. John's most important friend during his imprisonment, but St. John never acknowledges that Mr. Seton, the letter recipient, is the same man as Mr. Seton who is a character in the stories. He visits St. John in prison; he writes a letter (a portion of which is printed word-for-word) to the British commandant, pleading St. John's case and offering to post bail for him; and even the villainous jailer Cunningham remarks on Seton's incomparable friendship. Yet St. John merely refers to Seton, the active character in the story, as "my good friend," as if this good friend and the good friend to whom he is addressing these letters are two different people, which they definitely are not.

In summary, the epistolary context in which St. John de Crèvecoeur's letters were published may be viewed both from a diachronic and synchronic standpoint. Diachronically, they fit into a longstanding Western tradition of epistles covering a wide range of topics, addressed to an individual but with a larger public in mind: from the letters of Cicero, St. Paul and Pliny the Younger to

the letters of Petrarch, Erasmus and Pascal. Synchronically, their “epistolarity” fits into an exceptionally popular and attractive form for a late eighteenth-century public hungry for epistolary novels.¹⁸

Another context in which “Caught in the Crossfire” may be read is against the background of the eighteenth-century sentimental novel. St. John de Crèvecoeur critics as early as the publication of *Lettres* have noted this work’s sentimental qualities, both positively and negatively. One 1787 reviewer attributed the success of the book to the writer’s singular talent for “pouring all his feelings into the soul of the reader; these feelings are full, lively and abundant: nothing resembles less the petty, superficial, dry sentiments of our *beaux-esprits*¹⁹ currently in vogue” (*Journal de Paris* No. 229). In 1933, the St. John de Crèvecoeur biographer and critic Howard C. Rice was less forgiving of his sentimentality: “Crèvecoeur knew how to look at nature in a realistic fashion, which he sometimes did, and we owe his best pages to this attitude; but very often he allowed himself to fall into vague and sentimental speculations, and slightly naïve outpourings of the heart” (80). It was primarily this sentimental quality, influenced largely by the editorial advice of new Parisian salon friends such as Madame d’Houdetot, Saint-Lambert, and Lacretelle, that Rice blamed for

¹⁸ It should be noted that Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook emphatically treats St. John de Crèvecoeur’s English work *Letters* as an epistolary narrative. However, she does not dwell on the formal elements of epistolarity; rather, she reads the arc of *Letters*’ narrative as a metaphor for the end of republican values and the epistolary genre in the late eighteenth century. The fact that a transatlantic correspondence between the Pennsylvanian “farmer of feelings” and his cultured English friend Mr. F. B. “can circumvent class and national differences” (158) is a validation of Enlightenment republican values; but the civil chaos and the uncertainty of Farmer James’ future in the last letter herald their eclipse. *Letters*, she asserts, “exposes the challenges to the ideology of cosmopolitan citizenship that arise when the meanings of ‘private’ and ‘public’ are rewritten in the political context of the 1770s and 1780s” (154).

¹⁹ “clever wits”

the inferiority of the French translations when compared to the original *Letters*. He lamented the loss in French of forceful, concrete vocabulary describing the natural life of a uniquely American place, and criticized the sentimentality and American patriotism aimed at a French audience hungry for an idealized version of America where virtue and rural tranquility flourished (80-81). In “Mémoire et creation dans les *Letters from an American Farmer* de St. John de Crèvecoeur,” Bernard Chevignard makes an additional case for why the French editions are replete with nostalgia and sentiment. His thesis is that St. John de Crèvecoeur is refashioning Farmer James of *Letters* through the filter of his own harrowing experiences during the war. The war thrusts between him and his blissful rural life of the early 1770s a series of life-changing experiences that alter his vision of those distant years. Through the filter of his personal experiences in the American Revolution, he imagines the early 1770s on his farm Pine Hill as a lost utopia. The new persona is more a product of his yearning imagination. St. John de Crèvecoeur reshapes the character from the perspective of an author looking back on a pastoral paradise whose innocence was shattered by civil war and is forever irretrievable. But upon the character of Farmer James, St. John de Crèvecoeur superimposes more autobiographical material (such as the prison letters), and changes the name of the hero from James to St. John (his own name), making a greater claim on authenticity.

In *Translations of French Sentimental Prose Fiction in Late Eighteenth-Century England: The History of a Literary Vogue*, Josephine Grieder discusses the meaning of “sentimental” as it applies to French sentimental fiction of the

1760s to 1790s, of which the two French sentimental novels *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) by Rousseau and *Paul et Virginie* (1788) by Bernardin de St.-

Pierre are perfect models:

Roughly, it may be said that as its primary philosophical assumption, sentimentality held that the heart should take precedence over the head—in other words, that innate, spontaneous emotional impulse was a better guide to proper action than rational, detached analysis, although reason should subsequently be consulted. Following one’s own inclinations—or, to use the contemporary and more accurate term, one’s *sensibilité*—would necessarily produce the most desirable moral behavior: sincere piety; filial and parental affection; virtue and fidelity; recognition of the individual, no matter what his rank; benevolence extended to the less fortunate. (3-4)

Rousseau especially, Grieder states, established *sensibilité* as an ingredient of sentimental fiction, a quality that “is constantly at war with reason” but whose “possession is essential, for it remains, always, the mainspring of virtue” (10). And it is because of the hero or heroine’s delicate sensibility that he or she is inclined “to tremble and to suffer more keenly than others . . .” (77).²⁰

St. John de Crèvecoeur’s prison letters abound with these characteristics of the sentimental novel. Take, for example, Grieder’s phrase “benevolence extended to the less fortunate.” What distinguishes these stories about one of the most notoriously cruel British prisons of the Revolution (mainly because of its

²⁰ For other discussions of the sentimental novel, see Abrams and Harpham, Braudy, Brown.

proprietor, evil-incarnate Provost Marshal William Cunningham) from historical accounts of the Provost are unexpected acts of benevolence for unfortunate individuals who often should be the benefactor's enemy. These episodes are what give texture and literary value to a work that could have easily devolved into a familiar litany of acts of barbarity perpetrated by Cunningham and his subordinates at the Provost. On page one of the first letter, St. John writes that he has "selected only the least atrocious scenes, those, at any rate, in which virtue, spreading its sweet light, diminishes the darkness and horror of the crime" (82). After all, the title of the first letter is not "Colonel Josiah Smith" but "The Generous Daughter." The colonel's gallant daughter visits the prisoners constantly and has a singular effect on St. John's heart. "I gratefully own, it is to the satisfaction of seeing and hearing her, to her cheerfulness, the good news that she brought us, that I owe a balm that served to soothe the bitterness that was consuming me" (96). And in the same letter, St. John mentions an act "that brings honor to a young Scottish lieutenant" (97) whose compassion, at odds with the orders of his ruthless superiors, saves an American unit from being butchered. Moreover, in the second letter, the passions of a fervent patriot officer overrule his reason when he writes a petition on behalf of his fellow prisoner Sergeant B. A., who should be his enemy, in an attempt to save him from execution. The patriot officer says to the sergeant, ". . . under this roof, misfortune has made us brothers and rendered us equal" (127). These prison walls dissolve partisan allegiance. "Remember," says Colonel Smith to Sergeant B. A., that under this roof there are neither Whigs nor Tories; we are no more

than prisoners” (109). The one story that depicts unrestrained British and Tory bloodthirstiness is “The Ill-Fated Father,” but St. John’s “pencil refuses to sketch the needless atrocity” (134) of the terrible act at the center of the story. In “Circumstances,” when an English-born loyalist, mistakenly imprisoned, vows to rescue St. John’s sick child as soon as he is released from prison, St. John exclaims, “What! You’re English and you’re a guardian spirit sent to my rescue at the moment of my greatest distress!” (168) Even the leading architect of the war against the Americans, General Sir Henry Clinton, “is naturally good and humane when he is informed of the true state of things” (127), and St. John’s captor the arch-villain William Cunningham is also endowed with an ounce of humanity, which is absent from the historical record of this man.

One of St. John’s most notable character traits is his self-avowed sensitivity to “impressions,” a common word in sentimental narratives. The British Museum librarian Samuel Ayscough ridiculed this very quality in his scathing tract about the fraudulent and propagandistic nature of *Letters*, writing that “if all the inhabitants of America were alive to such delicate impressions as this farmer, the whole continent might become inhabited only by snakes, hornets, and wasps, and the produce of it destroyed by poultry” (12). St. John in the prison anecdotes is equally as delicate as Farmer James in *Letters*. He is “even more sensitive to the impressions of evil than to those of good” (102). No circumstance in his life, he avers, ever “struck” him as did the one in which he witnesses the physical and emotional changes that afflict Sergeant B. A. as he awaits his execution. Also, the visit to the Provost dungeon to see Paul Leger, a prisoner so starved and

emaciated that he is a mere specter in chains, ripped his soul apart, “a soul already too sensitive to adversity” (146). But we witness his most delicate state when he discovers that his young child is sick and about to be kicked out of his boarding house. St. John is so distressed that he is unable to cry, he cannot sleep, he takes three grains of opium, he wanders around the cell aimlessly, he ponders suicide, he has convulsions, he drinks a large glass of brandy, he is on the brink of madness and delirium, when finally, “an abundant dew of tears” and the compassionate promises of an old fellow prisoner restore his spirit. Finally, in “Last Letter,” the impression made upon him by news of his release is metaphorized: “Brass quickening into the mold does not receive a sharper or more durable impression than that which was engraved on my imagination by the painful scene whose details you demand. Can you possibly doubt that its features and nuances will never be effaced?” (176)

But the deep impressions that were made upon St. John de Crèvecoeur after his confinement turned out to be much more than metaphorical. His three months in the Provost permanently damaged his health. He often attributed his subsequent poor health to the debilitating effects of this episode in his life. During the seven years that he was French consul to New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, he had to take long leaves of absence in France due to illness, and some biographers blame his death in 1813 partially on the trauma he suffered during prison.²¹

²¹ His great-grandson Robert de Crèvecoeur writes, “. . . he succumbed to the heart disease that he had contracted more than thirty years before in the prisons of New-York” (278).

It seems almost superfluous to speak of these letters as a captivity narrative, but what warrants their examination from the perspective of this genre is the fact that their tone and themes represent a departure from those of the traditional captivity narrative of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century North America.²² The foundational North American work in this genre is the autobiographical *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682). The Puritan heroine Mary Rowlandson casts her eleven-week captivity in the hands of the Narragansett Indians during King Philip's War as a story of Christian redemption demonstrating God's grace. Emory Elliott describes the genre and its most notable exemplar:

Captivity narratives usually follow the jeremiad design, with the victim reflecting upon the period of his or her life preceding the capture and discovering personal faults that had brought on God's punishment. During the time of captivity, the repentant victim searches within the self and vows to return to earlier piety, a decision that appears to be rewarded when the captive is freed. . . . Creating, perhaps, what would become the formula for the captivity narrative, Rowlandson declares that she was moved to write of her experience because it was evident to her that God had used her for His purpose and that she wanted to convey the spiritual meaning of her experience to others. . . . With personal feelings and Puritan rhetoric competing to control the text, the work is characterized by

²² For discussions of captivity narratives, see also Burnham, Derounian-Stodola et al, and Toulouse.

an internal tension resulting from the author's effort to reconstitute painful personal experiences in language and at the same time to construct her narrative in accordance with the religious expectations and demands of Mather and her fellow Puritans. . . . She reports that on the first Sabbath of her captivity she began to recall her sins: "I then remembered how careless I had been of God's holy time, how many Sabbaths I had lost and misspent, and how evilly I had walked in God's sight." . . . the captivity period thus becomes the opportunity for Mary to prepare her heart for grace, to search out the corruption in her nature, and to rediscover the glory of God in His scriptures. (263-266)

St. John's captivity is roughly the same duration as Mary's; he repeatedly tells us that he was in prison for three months. Like Mary, he suffered privations and psychological torment at the hands of his captors. Also like Mary, he witnessed his captors' unspeakable torture of others. However, unlike Mary, he does not view his captivity as a providential experience that affirms his religious faith; rather, it implants in him a perspective of the world "as an assemblage of lions unleashed on the weakest party" (144). Captivity derails his faith in God.

St. John de Crèvecoeur's spiritual transformation most likely did not begin in the Provost. Farmer James' inner religious turmoil in *Letters* during the first years of the conflict between England and her North American colonies is a good indication that the author's own theology was undergoing severe trials at that time. The following passage from "An Happy Family Disunited by the Spirit of

Civil War,” written during his Pine Hill days, evinces the disillusionment of a man bereft of spiritual hope:

I am become a Predestinarian we little insignificant individuals
 which fortune regards so little, what are we? what have we to do in
 this grand dispute, nothing but to suffer, our Lott is to be the
 victims, the sport of Fortune throughout all the winding mazes of
 the Wheel, I had never before entertained so contemptible an
 opinion of myself, we are but the Herrings of a large Scool, drove
 here & there & devoured by the great Porpoises of the Sea
 (D. D. Moore 17).²³

By the time he was jailed by the British in the Provost, he had already been witness to countless torments and atrocities, and had even been put in jail by his patriot neighbors in Orange County. Therefore, his heart and mind were already fertile ground for religious questioning.

Before elaborating on St. John de Crèvecoeur’s prison letters as captivity narrative, it will be useful to mention the most famous narrative set partially in the Provost Gaol during the Revolutionary War: the autobiographical *A Narrative of Ethan Allen’s Captivity*. Allen published his narrative in 1779, the year of St. John de Crèvecoeur’s captivity. Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys from Vermont became heroes for their role in the 1775 surprise and capture of Fort Ticonderoga, and Allen’s popular account of his wartime experiences later

²³ Dennis D. Moore’s *More Letters from the American Farmer: An Edition of the English Essays Left Unpublished by Crèvecoeur*, reprints the sketches exactly as they appear in the manuscripts, including extra spaces, words that St. John de Crèvecoeur crossed out, and words that he inserted interlineally. The entire passage above was crossed out in the manuscript, but for ease of reading I have not printed the strikethroughs.

established his fame. His captivity by the British between the years 1775-1778 included confinement on various prison ships, parole in the City of New York and on Long Island, and imprisonment in the Provost where St. John de Crèvecoeur was later confined. Upon St. John de Crèvecoeur's return to New York as French consul, he and Allen became good friends, and Allen even had a Vermont town, St. Johnsbury, named after his friend (Mitchell 145).

Edwin G. Burrows' 2008 book *Forgotten Patriots* is an indispensable historical account of the American prisoners of war during the Revolution. He devotes several pages to Allen's memoir in the context of other captivity narratives well known to late eighteenth-century audiences, such as those about Mary Rowlandson, John Smith, Gulliver, and Robinson Crusoe. But then he explains how Allen's captivity is an innovation on the archetypal story of the captive who is transformed and redeemed. Far from being awakened to any moral shortcomings or embarking on a voyage of self-discovery as a result of his capture, Allen's captivity affirms his American identity and makes him more defiant. Burrows writes,

Indeed, instead of making him conscious of his own shortcomings, captivity awakens him to those of his enemies. His encounters with haughty, malicious officers, venal ship captains, and foul-mouthed guards teach him that British civility is a hoax. . . . So when he finally regains his liberty at the conclusion of the *Narrative*, it is not because his odyssey through British jails and prison ships made

him a different person but precisely because he managed to remain the same person, a “full blooded Yankee,” to the end. (162-63)

St. John does not have the physical constitution or the defiant swagger of an Ethan Allen. His experience at the same prison has weakened rather than strengthened him, both emotionally and physically. But like Allen's, the story of his captivity is a departure from the Christian narrative of the hero's sinfulness, punishment and redemption through the grace of God. On the contrary, this experience so disturbs him that his religious faith is forever damaged, perhaps even destroyed. St. John asserts in “Circumstances” that he became a Manichaeon, the principle tenet of which is a belief in the ongoing struggle between the spiritual Lord of Light (good) and the material Lord of Darkness (evil). Dishearteningly, St. John's daily existence in the Provost reveals that the Lord of Darkness is most often triumphant, as the light of his spirit is gradually sucked away by the dark torments to which he and his cellmates are subjected. His fellow prisoner the sergeant turns cynical too. When St. John suggests that Sergeant B. A. call in the prison chaplain on the night before his execution, the sergeant replies, “. . . what could he tell me? A few official platitudes? Dry, frigid, ineffectual words without the balm of genuine compassion? . . . It's too late on the eve of death to take refuge in hypocrisy or the catechism” (119). When St. John assumes the role of counselor and confessor, the vision of death that he lays out for the sergeant is hardly compatible with the Catholic vision of an afterlife with which St. John de Crèvecoeur was raised: “And after all, what is death, so fearsome and dreadful to our eyes? It is the sleep of nature, the

inaction of matter, the moral peace of mind” (120). Moreover, there is no supreme judge to award or condemn him after death. The only judge is his individual conscience. “Your conscience acquits you. That is the only judge whose sentence ought to console or distress us” (121). In other words, death is nothingness, a dreamless sleep, not a heavenly paradise or a frightful hell. When the sergeant nevertheless invokes the “Being of Beings, Universal Father” to protect his widow and orphans, St. John deflects his appeal, “Let’s view life as an ocean voyage: the shorter it is, the better off we are” (123). A few times in the letters, St. John does invoke a higher power using the same Deistic appellations that the sergeant used, such as when, in “Last Letter,” he thinks he is being led to his own death and like the sergeant, commends his wife and children to the Supreme Being. However, the overall impression left upon the reader about the condition of St. John’s religious faith may best be summed up by his own words to the English friend who comes to tell him the good news that he will be released: “I’m not my old self anymore, the one you knew during the time of my freedom and good fortune” (181).

At the end of the story St. John returns to his cell, whose “darkness was no longer dismal or appalling,” but rather “the symbol of tranquility, calm and repose” (183). Although the prison stories end on this note of relief, the reality for St. John de Crèvecoeur is that the trauma has been grave enough that subsequent events in his life will collude to complete his spiritual transformation to agnosticism and perhaps even atheism.

When considering the horrors that St. John de Crèvecoeur experienced during the American and French Revolutions, the upheavals in his life owing to the Napoleonic Wars, and the death of numerous people who were dear to him, one begins to realize the sum of his sorrows and understand the decline of his religious faith. In *Esquisse de ma vie depuis ma sortie de prison*, which he wrote in the late 1790s or early 1800s about the events of his life during the harsh winter in New York City after his release from prison, he has some abrasive words for his native religion and valorizes the quintessential Quaker ethic that his kind hostess Mrs. Pickering possessed: “. . . doing good was her only religion, and she did it in fact or intent with the same zeal that Catholics carry out the ridiculous, puerile ceremonies of their religion” (Chevignard *Annales* 172).²⁴

Biographical evidence of our author’s waning faith appears in his great-grandson’s book *Saint-John de Crèvecoeur: Sa vie et ses ouvrages*. Robert de Crèvecoeur writes of the joy that St. John de Crèvecoeur’s correspondence with his granddaughter Sophie Otto brought to his final years. But however much he venerated this bright, vivacious and pious girl, he confessed in his letters to her that he had the misfortune of not sharing her faith. Robert de Crèvecoeur writes, nevertheless, “. . . he was careful not to reveal to the child so confident, so imperturbable in her belief, the bitterness and rebellions of a heart long-since broken” (274). Robert de Crèvecoeur states that his great-grandfather was more Deist than Christian, but in a footnote he admits to not sharing fragments of the

²⁴ The full title of this autobiographical manuscript of St. John de Crèvecoeur is *Esquisse de ma vie depuis ma sortie de prison à New York le 17 septembre 1779 jusques à mon retour dans la même ville comme consul de France le 17 novembre 1783*. It has been published only in Chevignard’s article “St. John de Crèvecoeur à New York en 1779-1780.”

correspondence between grandfather and granddaughter that are too intimate. One wonders if those fragments reveal the thoughts of a non-believer. Robert tries to rehabilitate his great-grandfather's faith, claiming that St. John de Crèvecoeur

believed firmly in God and the immortality of the soul; his poetic and enthusiastic spirit admired the Creator in his works; but a prolonged stay among the Protestants of America had detached him from Catholicism, and later the mocking skepticism of his friends of the salon of Houdetot had succeeded in extinguishing any memory of his childhood faith. His misfortunes had embittered his soul; the horrors of the Revolution, which he had seen from so close, had left upon him an ineffaceable impression, and he had fashioned for himself a sort of sorrowful philosophy that terribly saddened his final days. (278)

But citing evidence found in St. John de Crèvecoeur's Munich notebooks, Chevignard inclines toward the belief that he finally became a religious skeptic and even non-believer. In *Michel Saint-John de Crèvecoeur: Au miroir de la mémoire*, Chevignard writes that "his Munich notebooks abound in notations of a dark pessimism revealing a deism sliding toward agnosticism, even atheism" (111).²⁵ In this context, it is little wonder that the prison letters were not immediately translated into English for American readers. This particular captivity

²⁵ For a discussion of the role of religion in St. John de Crèvecoeur's life and writing, see the following essays of Bernard Chevignard: "St. John de Crèvecoeur: Jalons d'un itinéraire spirituel" and "Une apocalypse sécularisée: Le quakerisme selon Brissot de Warville et St. John de Crèvecoeur."

narrative does not merely fail to tell a story of Christian redemption; it actually dramatizes the hero's loss of faith. The times were hardly ripe for such a narrative.

4. Historical Non-Fiction: St. John de Crèvecoeur in the City of New York

We have placed "Caught in the Crossfire" into three narrative genres: epistolary, sentimental, and captivity. Over two hundred years later, we may also read it in another light, as "historical non-fiction." What the tautologous coupling of "historical" and "non-fiction" evokes are associations with two genres: historical fiction and literary non-fiction. Like historical fiction, "Caught in the Crossfire" imaginatively and dramatically transports today's reader to an authentic historical setting, the American War of Independence. Like literary non-fiction, it recreates the dialogue, situations and personal dramas of actual people, if not faithful to every word and turn of event, then at least faithful to their spirit. (We cannot assume that the conversations our author recreates are word-for-word transcriptions.)

"Caught in the Crossfire" does not qualify wholly as historical fiction because, as my research has proven, the characters are real people who indeed were imprisoned along with St. John de Crèvecoeur in the Provost Gaol, and the historical events that he describes actually happened in the way that he describes them. Sometimes, the names are changed or the dates are not

precise—St. John de Crèvecoeur is notorious for his incorrect dates²⁶—and he may conflate two prison episodes of a character into one episode in the fashion of literary artists; but for a man about whose work the historical authenticity has been so often debated, and whose life has been so impenetrable and enigmatic, “Caught in the Crossfire” is remarkably autobiographical and historical, as the documents in my annotations demonstrate. It might be called literary non-fiction *avant la lettre*, but for us modern readers of the prison stories, the term “literary non-fiction” does not entirely convey the historical nature of the stories. The combination of the two terms into the new term “historical non-fiction” suggests that “Caught in the Crossfire” is both historical and factual, while also attributing to the work an aura of literariness that it merits.

The marriage of the historical and the literary bestows untold pleasures, not least among which are pathos and poignancy. Would *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* have been so popular and acclaimed if it had been a work of fiction? Its literary value is unimpeachable, but the fact that it is a true story endows it with additional gravitas and immediacy, perhaps even inspires a pilgrimage to Anne Frank’s house so that one may reify the imaginative pleasures of the literary experience. Would the chronicle of battles, diplomatic maneuvers, and speeches that made up the events of the Peloponnesian War have remained with us today if not for Thucydides’ ability to dramatize the contradictions of human behavior, provide his orators with the language of poetry, and frame Athens’ hubristic, imperialistic conduct and subsequent

²⁶ Biographers as early as his great-grandson Robert de Crèvecoeur in 1883 have commented on St. John de Crèvecoeur’s incorrect dates, both intentional and unintentional (38n).

downfall as a tragic play? By itself, historical reality is elusive. Try as one may to give texture and dimension to an historical person, place or event, those qualities are so slippery and elusive that one is left with only a shadow, a flat portrait, a series of lifeless facts.

So it is one thing to read in diaries and newspapers that Provost Marshal William Cunningham, the malevolent warden of St. John's prison, was a monster like no other, that he wantonly starved and executed his captives; but it is quite another to see St. John dramatize the man's malice and depravity in the following passage:

He is a man whose heart, molded by a dreadful implacability, seems to delight in whatever grieves those whom he can call rebels, and seems to find pleasure in implementing a system of barbarity that he calls duty. From my window, how many women did I not count tied to the stake to be flogged? Each time, I saw this executioner armed with an ox's pizzle mercilessly lacerating his Negro when he noticed that the arm of that African, less savage than his own, diminished, out of pity for a woman, if not the number then at least the weight of the blows that she had to receive. (104)

The narrator does indeed paint a terrifying picture of Cunningham. But he does so not merely by telling us that he beat or killed a man; rather, by suggesting how considerable this man's capacity for torture and evil must be if he is willing to mutilate his own property, the Negro, for his unwillingness to be as barbarous as his master. At the same time, St. John skillfully links Cunningham's barbarity to

what is usually an admirable trait, dutifulness; so Cunningham's parading his barbarity under the banner of the word "duty" makes him even more reprehensible. Also, the author does something else with this character that no historical account that I have ever read has dared to do, and it makes the man scarier because it makes him more real: there are moments in the course of these stories in which Cunningham discloses a hint of his humanity—maybe not kindness, but cruelty abated. So ironically, this literary work has endowed the figure of Cunningham with a degree of reality that he has not achieved in purely historical accounts. Even Cunningham cannot sustain the level and intensity of evil that is so easy to attribute to him—no living person could.

If the portrait of Cunningham is an example of history made palpable through literary craft, the setting of the stories in today's City Hall Park in lower Manhattan is an example of literature enlarged by history. Standing at the flat tip of City Hall Park in springtime, one looks out over a tapestry of tulips and hedgerows. Stone paths lined by benches and gas lamps pay homage to a majestic fountain. From behind the fountain rises a backdrop of gnarled branches in new leaf, a scrim through which the marble and sandstone patches of municipal authority are visible. The deliberate beauty of this place belies its mournful past. During the American Revolution, instead of the fountain one would have looked out over the Common, where British regulars marched in formation during their daily drills. In the footprint of the Tweed Courthouse stood the soldiers' barracks and the gallows. In the place of City Hall stood the almshouse. To the left of the almshouse was the Bridewell, where the British confined

American military prisoners. On the other side of the almshouse was the Provost, where the British confined American officers, notorious rebels, and a wide assortment of civilians, both innocent and criminal. Built in the mid-1750s, the Provost was the city's second jail and was hence named the New Gaol, but because so many of its inmates were jailed on account of their debts, it soon became known as Debtors' Prison, a name it retained well into the nineteenth century. It was during the Revolutionary War that it took on the name "Provost" after its warden Provost Marshal Cunningham. After receiving a major renovation and serving for decades as the Hall of Records, it was finally demolished in the early 1900s during excavation for the new subway station under Park Row at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge.²⁷

The Provost was a forbidding three-and-a-half-story building made of stone, with iron-grated windows and a rooftop cupola. It was all the more intimidating because of its outside adornments: the stocks, a cage, a whipping post, and Hessian sentinels. St. John de Crèvecoeur spent the summer of 1779 within the confines of this dreaded place. Its proprietor ruled it so tyrannically—often without the interference of his military superiors—and developed such a reputation of cold-hearted cruelty, that loyalists ironically dubbed it "Hotel Cunningham." The Provost was only one of many prisons in the city. The City of New York was the location of British headquarters during the American Revolution. Its resources were stretched so thin by British troops, as well as by loyalists from all the colonies who had sought refuge there, that the American

²⁷ I have gathered information regarding the various forms and uses of this prison, as well as the changing landscape of today's City Hall Park over the centuries, from Bogart, E. H. Hall, and *The Old Martyr's Prison*.

prisoners of war, being at the bottom of the pecking order, were subjected to the most deplorable conditions of overcrowding. Starvation and disease became so rampant in the jails, and in the makeshift prisons on ships and in churches and sugarhouses, that approximately 15,575-18,000 prisoners in and around the City of New York are estimated to have died while in British custody (Burrows 200). Grisly details abound in contemporary accounts of emaciated, dying men lying in their own excrement, without sufficient clothing, suffering from dysentery and dementia, driven to eating wooden splinters and chips from the walls and floors.²⁸

While conditions at the Provost were not the worst among the city's land prisons—stories of atrocities, for example, about captives held in the Old North Dutch Church on William Street and Livingston's Sugar House on today's Liberty Street actually make the Provost seem mild in comparison—the Provost became the most notorious because of the cruelty of Provost Marshal William Cunningham. Cunningham's unsavory past had prepared him for this crowning appointment in his career. An Irishman who had made his living recruiting unwitting immigrants into indentured servitude in America, he himself immigrated to New York in 1774 and made a name for himself as a rabid Tory (Dandridge 33-34). In a September 10, 1831 article in the *New-York Mirror* entitled "The Old Jail," writer John Pintard recalls the horrors of the Provost. He attributes Cunningham's vengefulness to a certain incident that took place in the Common. (Pintard used to visit the Provost during the war; his uncle Lewis Pintard was a

²⁸ Accounts of horrific crimes perpetrated against American civilians and prisoners of war in New York City during the American Revolution abound in contemporary journal entries, letters, poetry, newspaper articles and official reports (see Allen, Boudinot, Fell, Fitch, Freneau, *New-Jersey Gazette*, *Connecticut Journal*), as well as in historical works on the subject (see Burrows, Metzger, Dandridge, Onderdonk) and in works of historical fiction (see Robson).

New York merchant and an agent for American prisoners.) In the article, John Pintard recounts,

On one occasion Cunningham, a stout, double-fisted Irishman, after a bloody scuffle, was compelled by the “liberty boys” to kneel down and kiss the liberty pole: an indignity that rankled in his heart, and was afterwards avenged with unrelenting severity on the American prisoners; when, as a reward for his loyalty, he was *dignified* with the post of provost-marshal. A more cruel tyrant could not be found, except in his deputy, Serjeant Keefe,²⁹ who was one of the most cold-blooded monsters that ever existed.

Pintard goes on to describe how Cunningham humiliated well-known prisoners for his guests’ entertainment: “In the drunken orgies that usually terminated his dinners, the captain would order the rebel prisoners to turn out and parade, for the amusement of his guests; pointing them out, ‘this is the d____d rebel, Colonel Ethan Allen—that a rebel judge, an Englishman . . .’”. St. John, in fact, writes in the prison letters about Cunningham’s “daily intoxication,” and other activities that corroborate the historical record of this infamous villain.

St. John’s interior descriptions of the Provost also match the historical records. In “Circumstances” St. John informs us that he was able to obtain the privileges of the ground floor, where the wardens themselves were quartered.

Pintard describes the layout:

On the right hand of the main door was Captain Cunningham’s quarters, opposite to which was the guard-room. Within the first

²⁹ Sergeant O’Keefe.

barricade was Serjeant Keefe's apartment. At the entrance-door two sentinels were always posted by day and night, which were grated, barred, and chained

Besides the visual aspects of the Provost that both Pintard and St. John de Crèvecoeur record in their respective accounts so faithfully, they both capture the sinister sounds of the place. Pintard writes,

What with the bristling of arms, unbolting of bars and locks, clanking of enormous iron chains, and a vestibule as dark as Erebus,³⁰ the unfortunate captive might well shrink under this infernal sight and parade of tyrannical power, as he crossed the threshold of that door which possibly closed on him for life. . . .

Note the resemblance to St. John de Crèvecoeur's evocation of the jail's foreboding sounds in "Last Letter": "The ponderous keys whose sound we knew so well were heard and the crossbars at the foot of the stairs fell. After this noise, made more sinister by the profound silence and darkness, there followed the sound of bolts and the bellowing of hinges" (177). Sounds are what turn his confinement on the ground floor from a blessing into a curse. The cries of agony that he hears in the dungeons below, and his solitude, compel him to ask Cunningham to move him upstairs to a room with other civilians. Cunningham obliges, and his new cell is the place where he meets most of the characters that populate these stories, men who were, "like him victims of the war without being

³⁰ In Greek mythology, Erebus is deep darkness, physically located between the earth and the underworld Hades. Erebus is personified in Hesiod's *Theogony* (*Birth of the Gods*) as the sister of Nyx (Night) and the offspring of Chaos, the first entity of the universe. In Letter 4, St. John compares the Provost dungeon to Chaos (145).

guilty” (Rice 161). The characters of Lieutenant Blewer (Letter 2) and the handsome cornet (Letter 1) are confined in “Congress Hall” in the northeast corner of the second floor. Congress Hall earned its derisive name because American officers who had violated their parole were placed there, losing their freedom to move about more freely on Manhattan or Long island. Pintard also describes Congress Hall:

The north-east chamber, turning to the left, on the second floor, was appropriated to officers, and characters of superior rank and distinction, and was called Congress-hall. So closely were they packed, that when they lay down at night to rest, when their bones ached on the hard oak planks, and they wished to turn, it was altogether by word of command, “*right—left,*” being so wedged and compact as to form almost a solid mass of human bodies.

On July 8, 1779, a New York lawyer named William Smith wrote the following entry in his diary: “As I passed the New Jail Yesterday Afternoon, I saw Mr. Hector St. John looking out of a Window, and at Mrs. Mortier’s one Beavan, a young Lawyer, came to me to inform me that he was committed to the Provost” (W. Smith 126). Perhaps this was the same window from which St. John de Crèvecoeur described seeing Cunningham beating his Negro as the Negro was flogging his victims. Thanks to the meticulously written journals of Mr. Smith, we have a fascinating view of the plots and schemes that sent our author to jail and prolonged his captivity. According to Smith’s entry, he would have spotted St. John de Crèvecoeur looking out the window on Wednesday afternoon, July 7, the

earliest date that we have evidence of his being in the Provost. Other clues suggest, however, that he might have been jailed in June, one of them being that in the prison letters St. John repeatedly writes that he was in prison for three months, and the date that he gives for his release in *Esquisse de ma vie* is September 17, 1779. What the diaries shed light on, as much as the actions and personality of St. John de Crèvecoeur, are the jealousies, suspicions and rivalries among the New York officials upon whom his fate rested. We see that they were torn over his fate in part because of personal enmities festering within their own small circle, and in part because of St. John de Crèvecoeur's extraordinary skill at manipulating facts and appearances. Examining the backstage intrigues surrounding his imprisonment will provide us with possible motives for his confinement; insights into his personality and reputation; and an understanding of the witch-hunt paranoia that lurked in loyalist New York during these years.

William Smith was chief justice of the colony of New York. After developing a reputation as a fence-sitter in the current conflict, he finally left the Manor of Livingston in upstate New York where he had been living and moved to the City as a loyalist refugee in October 1778. He was extremely well connected and friendly with most of the city magistrates. He frequently visited Governor Tryon and also had occasional access to General Clinton himself. For a short time beginning in May 1779, he and St. John de Crèvecoeur were living in the same country house located in the Bowery and owned by Nicholas Stuyvesant,³¹

³¹ According to the editor of William Smith's journals, William H. W. Sabine, this house would have been located on today's St. Mark's Place between First and Second Avenues in the East Village. Smith had been living in Nicholas Stuyvesant's mansion adjoining the church St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery, but fire destroyed it in October 1778 right after he moved in. The British

the great-grandson of Dutch Governor Peter Stuyvesant (Dubois 57:10).

However, Commandant James Pattison's July 8, 1779 letter to General Sir Henry Clinton, which describes St. John de Crèvecoeur's arrest in rich detail, reveals that by the time of his arrest he had moved to the house of his friend Rev. Mr. Brown (NYHS *Collections* [1875] 90; rpt. in Mitchell 54-55); and indeed, Smith's diary suggests that Smith and St. John de Crèvecoeur had not spoken for awhile by the time that Smith first spotted him in the window of the Provost (128).

St. John de Crèvecoeur's first mention in William Smith's journal in 1779 is several months earlier on February 15, 1779, when Smith writes that St. John de Crèvecoeur dined with him.³² He relates that his friend left his Orange County farm on February 3 with the intention of going to France.³³ Smith picked up various items of information from him about conditions in the countryside, such as the prices of goods and the people's general exhaustion from war and their desire for peace. Smith also learned that St. John de Crèvecoeur "has conversed with the Marquis De la Fayette and General Conway. They are gone to France. The Reason, that France has been imposed upon by false Representations." He ends this entry by referring rather condescendingly to the writings of St. John de Crèvecoeur. These writings happen to be the raw material of *Letters*, which in just

commander-in-chief himself, General Sir Henry Clinton, vacated the above Stuyvesant house so that Smith could occupy it (ix).

³² William Smith's account of this episode in St. John de Crèvecoeur's life appears on the following pages of Smith's journals: 74-76; 126-28; 133-34; 146-47; 151.

³³ Mitchell discusses St. John de Crèvecoeur's urgent need to return to France: ". . . as St. John had married outside of the kingdom, married a Protestant woman furthermore, and engaged a Protestant clergyman to perform the ceremony, the right of his children to succeed to their grandfather's property was questioned under the rigid law which then prevailed in France" (41). But clearly he was also trying to escape an extremely precarious situation in the countryside. He had attempted to leave in early 1778, but suspicious neighbors were successful in convincing American officials not to allow him to enter British lines (Mitchell 47).

a few years' time will make him a literary celebrity and dramatically change the course of his life: "St. John has kept Accounts of petty Events as the best Marks of the Spirit of the Times. He has 24 Books of 4 Sheets each to shew petty Tyrannies. He brought them with him in the false Bottom of a Box of Earth with natural Curiosities" (74-75). Three days later on February 18, Smith reports writing to Mr. William Eden (a commissioner that the British government had sent to America to negotiate peace) and General Robertson,³⁴ giving them "Part of the Intelligence by St. John" (75). He also mentions that St. John de Crèvecoeur had dined at the American General McDougall's tent in White Plains, an occasion about which St. John writes in Letter 4 (141). It was at this dinner in the latter half of 1778 that he also talked "with the Marquis de la Fayette and many others" (76).

So already, in these initial entries about St. John de Crèvecoeur, we learn that Smith passed on to British officials intelligence that he had received from St. John de Crèvecoeur about the rebel camp. It is difficult to know for certain St. John de Crèvecoeur's motives. Was he an agent for the loyalist cause? He must have known that anything he passed on to Smith would have made its way to British officials. Perhaps his patriot neighbors in Orange County were justified in trying to convince Governor Clinton not to let him travel to the City of New York (Mitchell 47). Or was our author acting as a double agent? Was he "a sly Fellow" (W. Smith 127), as the New Jersey loyalist refugee, Isaac Ogden, confided to Smith? Had he also been forging ties, as letters from his neighbors had purported, with the Marquis de la Fayette, the French envoy Conrad-Alexandre

³⁴ See Note 101.

Gérard, and others from the rebel camp, in order to assure himself a good future position in case the Americans were victorious? Was he indeed in the pay of New York Governor George Clinton and French envoy Gérard (127)?

When Smith learned of his friend's incarceration, he was convinced of his innocence, at least at first, writing a letter on his behalf for Major-General Pattison to deliver to General Clinton.³⁵ But when Smith began to press city magistrates for answers, he quickly discovered that he was stepping into a minefield of secret allegiances and enmities. The anonymous letters from the country had apparently been based on intelligence from St. John de Crèvecoeur's friend and Orange County neighbor Mr. Wickham, a prominent lawyer.

³⁵ Smith recorded the letter in his journal (128-29).

New York, 8 July 1779

Sir,

My information concerning Mr. St. John is this: He came from England in 1760 odd, and as I understand in the Service of his Cousine, the late Sir Samuel Fluyder of London. He has remained here ever since, and has been naturalized.

In the Country he sustained the Character of an obstinate Tory, the Name given to all the Loyalists; and I heard he was imprisoned for his Fidelity.

Since his coming down last Winter with Leave to quit the Country, I have conversed with him, and never heard a Syllable from his Mouth inconsistent with the Character of a good Subject; but obtained Intelligence from him, which I thought worth communicating to Government, and which will be confirmed if Mr. Girard soon leaves Boston for France.

It will, I imagine, be a pleasing Article to the King's Enemies in Orange County, where he resided, to hear that he suffers here.

Mr. Cadwallader Colden, who was his Neighbour, can give the fullest evidence of his steady Attachment to the King's Cause during the present Troubles.

I beg Pardon for this Interruption, to which I am prompted merely by Motives of Justice and Humanity, and am, Sir,

Your Excellency's

Most obedt. Servt.

W. Smith

It so happens that Gérard did depart for France about two months later, but only to be replaced by his successor the Chevalier de la Luzerne (Henderson 259).

In an editorial footnote, Sabine informs us of the identity of "Sir Samuel Fluyder, Bart. (1705-1768), a self-made man who became lord mayor of London in 1761. He was great-uncle of Sir Samuel Romilly, who was of French ancestry on both sides; this may indicate the direction in which Fluyder and Crèvecoeur were related" (128).

In one camp, William Franklin, Mayor David Mathews, and New Jersey loyalist refugees Isaac and Nicholas Ogden, believed the intelligence and were squarely set against St. John de Crèvecoeur. William Franklin was the estranged and illegitimate son of Benjamin Franklin; he was a loyalist refugee now living in the City of New York, and he was the man instrumental in having our author put in prison. Franklin claimed to have learned from the intelligence that St. John de Crèvecoeur's experience of being jailed in the countryside for his loyalist sympathies had frightened him over to the patriot cause: he had been fraternizing and trading intelligence with American and French generals and other officials, especially after General d'Estaing sailed from France in the spring of 1778 to assist the American cause. William Franklin's influence with General Clinton apparently sealed our author's fate. Smith surmises one of the reasons Franklin might not have liked St. John de Crèvecoeur: "St. John has spoken slightly of Governor Franklin's Father as a false Reporter to France as from La Fayette. Perhaps the Governor has heard this" (134).³⁶ So American loyalists, rather than British officials, effected St. John de Crèvecoeur's imprisonment in the Provost—not an unusual occurrence. It is difficult to declare with certainty whether St. John de Crèvecoeur was guilty or innocent. The New York Commandant James Pattison seemed inclined to believe in his innocence. Our author never went before a war council and was never formally charged.

In the other camp opposite Franklin, Mathews and the Ogden brothers were Smith's friends: Superintendent General of Police Andrew Elliot and Police

³⁶ St. John de Crèvecoeur and Benjamin Franklin later became acquainted through Madame d'Houdetot.

Magistrate Peter Dubois. They seemed to believe in St. John de Crèvecoeur's innocence—after all, the contents of St. John de Crèvecoeur's papers that were seized suggested that he was a victim of the Whigs, not a traitor to the king. What was troubling to Smith, however, was that Police Superintendent Elliot was not being forthright with him, which made Smith suspect that his own sleuthing on St. John de Crèvecoeur's behalf was aggravating a power struggle between Elliot and Franklin. Elliot and Franklin did not like each other because Elliot had openly disapproved of Franklin's being appointed head of the loyalist refugees.

Meanwhile, Elliot and Pattison had added the names of Smith and Cadwallader Colden to the names of William Seton and a Mr. Peters as candidates for posting bail for their friend. This fact troubled Smith and Colden because they were concerned about raising the suspicions and ire of loyalist refugees. As noted above, Smith's own loyalist credentials were not rock-solid. Furthermore, all the insinuations of their friend's guilt had begun to shake their own belief in his innocence. They refused to sign until they were told the formal charges against him, which never materialized. In "Circumstances," St. John writes of mean-spirited royalists who come to the prison to taunt him with accusations "of having corresponded with General Washington, of having drawn the map of the harbor, and of having persuaded a certain person to take the oath of fidelity required by the new government of the state of * * *" (149).³⁷ St. John indignantly maintains his innocence throughout the letters. He also notes his friends' circumspection in regard to signing the bail order: "This particular order

³⁷ The asterisks and others marks that stand in for letters of proper names are printed just as St. John de Crèvecoeur published them.

signaled a suspicion on his [Clinton's] part that intimidated my friends. They didn't know what to think or do" (169).

On the evening of Sunday, August 1, 1779, Smith writes in his journal that Police Magistrate Dubois was having tea at Smith's house, where Mayor Mathews was criticized for the dangerously unhygienic state of the town, and St. John de Crèvecoeur was pitied for "being the Sport of the Vindictive Rage of the Refugees" (146). Upon leaving, Dubois asked Smith to accompany him to the gate and confided in him about the anonymous "Paper" that was "put into his Hands" three months ago and came "from the Country." It purported that

St. John had acted the Part of a loyal Subject and was at length confined – That a General Stevens got him released and afterwards he was less frank – That when D'Estaigne arrived he talk'd favorably of the Issue of the Rebellion and reconciled some to it who had been as averse from it as himself – That he was 6 Weeks in the Rebel Camp with La Fayette – That he and other French Officers were at his House – That he corresponded with Gerard – That he was promised a Place of Consequence at the End of the Troubles – That he was now here with the Consent of the Whiggs as a Resident. (W. Smith 146)

Dubois told Smith that he recognized the handwriting to be that of a particular loyalist who "had Access to the Rebel Chiefs," but that when reporting the matter to General Clinton, Dubois told the general that everything in the letter was just hearsay. Clinton then expressed the inappropriateness of ordering "St. John to

be taken up for a long Time,” considering the trouble that Dubois had gotten into himself over an intercepted letter to his wife.³⁸ Finally, Dubois revealed that Governor Franklin was ultimately responsible for having St. John de Crèvecoeur put in jail. Furthermore, Dubois spoke of the unprincipled Mayor Mathews, who had even included Superintendent Elliot on a list he sent to Pattison of suspected rebels; and of the vindictiveness of the Ogden brothers Nicholas and Isaac (146).³⁹

Smith believes Dubois to be solidly in St. John de Crèvecoeur’s camp. However, it appears that Dubois was not as sympathetic to St. John de Crèvecoeur as he pretended to be in front of William Smith. Dubois had sent a report to General Clinton sometime between early May and early July of 1779, after receiving the “Paper” from the country. Besides providing an abundance of biographical details and a survey of St. John de Crèvecoeur’s many entrepreneurial activities in New York and other colonies in the 1760s, Dubois discusses his capriciousness, unreliability and secrecy. Dubois attests to the subject’s impressive, elegant map of Orange County, New York, yet states that St. John de Crèvecoeur “Now pretends he knows nothing about the Geography of the Country in Which he has so long Resided.” Additionally, Dubois writes,

He appears to be a Man of Extensive knowledge, Well read
in Phisic, Skilled in Botany and the Mathematics; Indeed in the Arts

³⁸ Peter Dubois had written a letter to his wife that disparaged the New Jersey loyalist refugees in New York. It had been intercepted and its contents revealed. The fact that St. John de Crèvecoeur had spoken kindly of Dubois was one reason Smith surmised that the New Jersey loyalists disliked him (W. Smith 128).

³⁹ The loyalist brothers Nicholas and Isaac Ogden, friends of Governor William Franklin, were the sons of Judge David Ogden of New Jersey (W. Smith 146n).

and Sciences, Nothing is new to him. But it is said in his Temper and Disposition he is often Violent, as well as Capricious, and will at times affect an Ignorance of what he Realy knows; Many Occurrences in Which he has been Consulted, have proved him to be a Man of Penetration, Art and Stratagem.

In a Small House he built upon his farm he had many private places artfully Contrived (as he told his Carpenter) to Secret his Effects when he went abroad. In case at any time he might have dishonest servants about him.⁴⁰

And then Dubois remarks on the same writings of St. John de Crèvecoeur that were mentioned by Smith: the papers hidden in boxes under a pile of dirt. He ends the report to Clinton by writing that he is enclosing a “Sketch of His Political Character since the present Commotions which I have Every Reason to think true” (Dubois 57:10).

Is this “Sketch” one in the same as the letter that Dubois described at Smith’s gate, which Dubois downplayed to Smith and said he represented as “hearsay” to General Clinton? If so, Dubois lied to Smith and appears to have sided with St. John de Crèvecoeur’s detractors in the estimation of his trustworthiness. As for Smith, the end of his journal entry about the chat with Dubois reveals his disgust with the whole matter, as well as his relief not to have posted bail for his friend:

⁴⁰ Bernard Chevignard has transcribed Peter Dubois’ report in his article “St. John de Crèvecoeur in the Looking Glass: *Letters from an American Farmer* and the Making of a Man of Letters.”

The Information from Dubois confirms the Propriety of Mr. Colden's Conduct and mine in declining to be Bail for St. John till we could know what the Charge was. . . . I perceive also a Confirmation of my Suspicions that Elliot was anxious to bring in Colden and myself for Bail to gratify his Resentment against Mathews and the Ogdens who speak ill of him, but if Mr. Elliot knew the Evidence against St. John, he ought not to have declined his Advice when I asked it nor diswaded me from Objections before General Pattison, but to have approved rather my previous Enquiry into the Cause of the Commitment, as well to avoid the Suspicions of Governor Franklin and the Refugees as out of Deference to Sir H. Clinton.

At such Times and this surrounded, the greatest Circumspection is necessary, and one should keep but little Company and of the best Sort. (146-47)

We finally learn in "Circumstances" that St. John's good friend William Seton writes a letter to headquarters that is successful in reducing the required number of bails from four to two. Seton and a "Dutch colonist in Flatbush" (170) post bail, and our author is finally released from prison on September 17, 1779, if the date he gives in *Esquisse de ma vie* is correct. After dining with his "benefactor" (probably Seton), he borrows "a horse from another friend no less zealous, although more timid—he was afraid lest in taking too open an interest in my fate he would make it more severe" (171). That timid friend must be William Smith, although St. John attributes to him a nobler motive than he deserves, since Smith

was more concerned about his own safety than his friend's freedom. St. John de Crèvecoeur and his son Ally endure a year of dreadful cold and scarce provisions in the City of New York before they are able to embark on a fleet of ships bound for the British Isles on September 4, 1780.⁴¹ After spending several months in Dublin and London, where St. John de Crèvecoeur makes arrangements to publish *Letters*, he and his eldest son Ally finally reach France in August 1781.

What the above excursion into Smith's journals reveals is how artfully history and literature are merged in "Caught in the Crossfire." The journals confirm some of the facts that St. John relates in his prison letters. They provide a day-to-day grittiness that lends the letters their credibility and their richness. Conversely, readers of Smith's journal entries that pertain to St. John de Crèvecoeur, if they read "Caught in the Crossfire," will appreciate, in heightened dramatic form, what was going on *inside* the Provost as Smith was maneuvering *outside* the Provost. The same mutual benefit between history and literature applies to other events and characters in these stories, whose historical counterparts are documented in the annotations. Paul Leger, Nathaniel Fitz Randolph, Lieutenant Blewer, and Rev. John Mather are the fiercely patriotic Americans in these letters, and the stories of their real-life counterparts are found in local histories, newspapers and poetry. The historical Colonel Smith, his daughter Julie, the handsome cornet, Sergeant B. A., and the "ill-fated father" have also left behind pieces of their lives in histories, letters, legal and financial documents, and a family Bible. And of course the battles and generals that loom so large in this work have been immortalized in countless histories and artistic

⁴¹ See note 209 regarding the exact date.

representations. What ties all these people together is how their lives merged in and around the Provost.

When excavation began for the east-side subway in Manhattan around the turn of the last century, workers discovered human skeletal remains in the vicinity of the Provost (Kelly 55). It was not unusual during the Revolutionary War for dead prisoners to be buried in shallow graves behind the prison houses. In 1999 during renovations of City Hall Park, more skeletons were found in both northern corners of the park near Chambers Street, including those of two children (Anderson). The bones of that excavation were thought to belong to the poor residents of the eighteenth-century almshouse, perhaps also to prisoners of war, or to African-Americans who were buried in the African Burial Ground, whose border was the northern edge of today's City Hall Park. Walking through the park with a knowledge of some of the people who have walked, marched, fought, protested, rejoiced, prayed, starved, and died on the same patch of earth, makes one feel similar to how the famous theoretical physicist Niels Bohr must have felt when he spoke at Kronberg Castle in Denmark in 1924:

Isn't it strange how this castle changes as soon as one imagines that Hamlet lived here? As scientists we believe that a castle consists of stones, and admire the way the architect put them together. The stone, the green roof with its patina, the wood carvings in the church, constitute the whole castle. None of this should be changed by the fact that Hamlet lived here, and yet it is changed completely. Suddenly the walls and ramparts speak a

different language. The courtyard becomes an entire world, a dark corner reminds us of the darkness of the human soul, we hear Hamlet's "To be or not to be." Yet all we really know is that his name appears in a thirteenth-century chronicle. No one can prove he really lived here. But everyone knows the questions Shakespeare had him ask, the human depths he was made to reveal, and so he too had to be found in a place on earth, here in Kronberg. And once we know that, Kronberg becomes a quite different castle for us. (Basso 4-5; also quoted in Bruner 45).

Even Shakespeare's Hamlet has to be concretized. "He too had to be found in a place on earth." The difference with the prisoners of the Provost is that they do not have to be found. They are already present in City Hall Park.

5. *St. John de Crèvecoeur: American Anti-Hero*

If the degree to which St. John de Crèvecoeur has eluded modern attempts to pin down his political ideology is any indication of how well he negotiated partisan demands during his own lifetime, then he was highly successful, because scholarship of the last quarter-century has positioned him and his literary alter egos all across the political spectrum. According to Myra Jehlen, for example, our author is paradoxically a "monarcho-anarchist". On one hand, she argues, he demonstrates the Hobbesian belief in the necessity of a

strong central authority, best embodied in an absolute monarch.⁴² On the other hand, he carries “the notion of the political integrity of the individual to its logical conclusion. . . . he could see in the accommodations of majority rule no advantages but only a loss of freedom for each individual” (221). Doreen Alvarez Saar claims that *Letters* reveals Farmer James’ Whiggish leanings. The caged slave in Letter 9 symbolizes British oppression of the colonies, and the reader witnesses James’ progression from political neutrality to rejection of monarchy.⁴³ Marcus Cunliffe calls St. John de Crèvecoeur a divided loyalist. The fact that he has been tagged with such disparate labels substantiates Christopher Iannini’s

⁴² Several critics have commented on *Letters*’ political philosophy as an echo of Thomas Hobbes’ theory of the natural state of man, *bellum omnium contra omnes* (a war of all against all). (Interestingly, Hobbes felt such a kinship to Thucydides that he published his own English translation of *The Peloponnesian War*.) Pierre Monette, however, sees the Hobbesian belief in a strong central authority in a passage not usually read as Hobbesian: Farmer James’ story of the king-bird that devours a colony of bees, some of which come back to life and fly away when James kills the king-bird and opens up his craw. Whereas many critics have attributed to this passage an anti-monarchical sentiment, correlating the king-bird to a tyrannical King George III and the bees to industrious American colonists, Monette reads the king-bird not as a particular monarch, but as State power in general. The king-bird on the farm is a necessary evil, a protector against other more destructive animals, just as the authority of the State is a protector for citizens against other destructive States. Instinctive communal and individual justice must be sacrificed to formal state justice, just as the bees fall prey to the king-bird.

Therefore, the anecdote of the king-bird and bees is not a metaphor of the battle between the American colonists and the crown of England, but of the struggle that does not cease to oppose citizens to every form of authority and power of the State: a confrontation shown, all things considered, in a relatively optimistic light insofar as the bees literally succeed in getting out, escaping from the grip of the tyrant, which is to say the State, that sovereign entity that Hobbes represents under the figure of the Leviathan. (455)

⁴³ Commentators often cite this letter as demonstrative of its author’s enlightenment values because of its indictment of slavery. But an unpublished collection of observations and philosophical musings from the last decade of St. John de Crèvecoeur’s life, which was sold at a 2001 Christie’s auction, is another indication of his great capacity for conflicting or changing views. In a very “unenlightened” passage, he writes, “Slavery is indigenous in most parts of Africa...look at the history of the Congo...the law is founded on the trade of men...one can observe only weakness, apathy, laziness; they know nothing of desire or ambition.” His estimation of American Indians in the same set of documents is equally demeaning. (Christie’s 2001, Lot 32).

claim that he navigated identities and avoided dogmatic allegiance to any one ideology. Iannini writes that St. John de Crèvecoeur

. . . transformed from a French lieutenant during the French and Indian War to a loyalist British subject and farmer in rural New York during the 1770s, to a British prisoner, to a French trade consul to the United States in 1784. Throughout his life, Crèvecoeur treated identities and allegiances as provisional strategies designed to ensure his continued mobility and prosperity. (201)

St. John de Crèvecoeur possessed an extraordinary survival instinct. He lived through four major wars: the Seven Years' War, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars. All of them significantly affected his life; the first three seriously threatened it, yet he survived. Not only did he survive; with his return to France in 1781 and the publication of *Letters and Lettres* in the subsequent years, his prosperity surged. He became a literary celebrity in Europe. His entry into the Parisian salon circle of Madame d'Houdetot, who was an old friend of his father, not only brought him into close contact with French luminaries such as Saint-Lambert, Louis-Alexandre, duc de la Rochefoucauld d'Enville, and the Baron de Breteuil, but also introduced him to the American statesmen Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. His new literary fame and connections helped launch his diplomatic career. In November 1783, just as the American Revolution ended, he returned to America—as a

French diplomat he had to give up his American citizenship—to serve as consul to the states of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.⁴⁴

It was not without tremendous personal loss and suffering that he prospered, but he prospered nevertheless. And one of the keys to “continued mobility and prosperity” throughout his life is that he became a master of disguise, committed only to temporary allegiances as his survival depended on them. The contradictory biographical details that have come down to us through various sources, from William Smith to the reports of Police Superintendent Peter Dubois and Major-General James Pattison, to other historical documents, attest to his changing stories about his own identity. In the political arena, when St. John de Crèvecoeur could no longer remain neutral, he acted in whatever manner guaranteed his survival. However, he was not always as convincing as he should have been in the roles he played—hence his incarcerations. As Howard C. Rice writes, “The world wanted him to choose, to label himself a ‘patriot’ or a ‘loyalist,’ but he couldn’t do it sincerely. The dilemma was agonizing” (145). His agony is palpable in the following passage from “An Happy Family Disunited by the Spirit of Civil War,” which was first published in the 1920s with other essays under the title *Sketches of Eighteenth Century America*. The sketch depicts the ferocious division of a once harmonious family who are neighbors of the narrator. The division breaks the father’s heart. The four sons of this neutral, peaceful patriarch adopt different political views:

⁴⁴ Biographical details are taken from R. Crèvecoeur, Rice, Mitchell, Monette, and Philbrick.

. . . two went to the Right, two went to the Left, & to compleat the misfortune of that family, their wives adopted opinions quite opposite to ~~that~~ [those] of their Husbands . . . as there was no umpire left among them, their Passions reigned uncontrouled, it would be too tedious to recount all the evil it produced, their Father seeing the insignificancy of his admonitions, withdrew from them & shut himself up — from that hour all his Mirth, all his antient Glee abandon'd him, he dropped the chearfull Pipe, when his friends wanted to raise his spirits & [Endeavoured] to make him forget the Calamities of his family, they only caused the heavy sigh to rise, which seem'd ready to burst his antient heart

(D. D. Moore 16-17)

One senses the anguish of our author in the portrait of the above patriarch whose magnanimous spirit has been crushed by civil war. *Letters, Lettres, and More Letters* are rife with such examples of the corrosive effects of civil war on the community, the family, and the individual. The following passage from the last chapter of *Letters*, “Distresses of a Frontier Man,” hauntingly captures the dilemma of a man caught in the crossfire. The narrator Farmer James laments,

I am a lover of peace; what must I do? I am divided between the respect I feel for the ancient connexion and the fear of innovations, with the consequence of which I am not well acquainted, as they are embraced by my own countrymen. I am conscious that I was happy before this unfortunate revolution. I feel that I am no longer

so; therefore I regret the change. This is the only mode of reasoning adapted to persons in my situation. . . . shall I renounce that name, that nation which I held once so respectable? . . . On the other hand, shall I arm myself against that country where I first drew breath, against the playmates of my youth, my bosom friends, my acquaintance? (204-05)

As the historical evidence reveals, at different times he acted the parts of monarchist, patriot and republican. The difficult questions to answer, at least for the period during the war, are “exactly when?” and “to what degree?” Or perhaps he simply assumed whichever role behooved him from one moment to the next, making these questions impossible to answer.

Whatever the case, he was jailed by both Whigs and Tories. The portraits of his cellmates in the Provost prison letters are, in a way, portraits of himself. They document his own internal struggle. The act of recounting Colonel Josiah Smith’s struggle to decide whether or not to help a gang of desperate men who show up on his property is doubtless an exorcism of his own demons, as he remembers similar circumstances at Pine Hill when he was forced to act the part of patriot or loyalist. The generosity shown by the fervent patriot prisoner Lieutenant Blewer for the condemned loyalist who should be his enemy—a type of generosity characteristic of the late eighteenth-century sentimental novel—is precisely the generosity and mercy that St. John de Crèvecoeur seeks. St. John implores the sergeant, “I beg you, don’t forget that good young man, the generous Pennsylvanian” (130). St. John’s champions are men like the

Pennsylvanian who defy or suspend partisan allegiance. They dot the landscape of the prison letters: men such as the humane Scottish lieutenant in Letter 1 who has the audacity *not* to slaughter a unit of Virginia dragoons asleep in their quarters; the compassionate Town Major Hewetson who brings St. John the good news of his release; the British-born loyalist prisoner Henry Perry who rescues St. John's son Ally. We may infer St. John de Crèvecoeur's most ardent wish in the words spoken by Colonel Smith to Sergeant B. A.: "Remember that under this roof there are neither Whigs nor Tories; we are no more than prisoners" (109). It is as if St. John de Crèvecoeur is saying, "In this universe there is neither patriot nor loyalist, neither American nor Englishman nor Frenchman; we are no more than citizens of the world."

Nevertheless, the hard reality remains that in times of trial like those through which St. John de Crèvecoeur lived, one who does not remain doggedly loyal to a cause is called a coward, a deserter, even a traitor. Again, it is difficult to say definitively whether he was a traitor to one side or the other, or even a double agent. But it is easy to understand why people who knew him might have thought so. The adjectives that Police Superintendent Peter Dubois and others use to describe St. John de Crèvecoeur are not always flattering: capricious, violent, ill-tempered, sly—among others; and his close association with prominent patriots as well as prominent loyalists makes him an easy target of suspicion. What is certain is that he was imprisoned no less than *three* times in his life for possible treason or treasonous intent. In his 2009 book, Pierre Monette has uncovered remarkable documents that provide us with new facts about St.

John de Crèvecoeur's life in New France in the late 1750s, when he was a French lieutenant during the Seven Years' War. The most intriguing document is a letter written in his own hand, his earliest-known extant writing. The contents are astonishing. In this letter to British army officer Robert Monckton dated October 20, 1759, and written in French from l'Hôpital Général de Québec, St. John de Crèvecoeur reveals that he was ordered to prison by General Montcalm for seeking an opportunity to betray his country. At the time the letter was written, he was no longer in prison and had resigned from the army. And because he had to come to the hospital owing to an illness, he had missed the packet-boats bound for Europe and sought Monckton's help to go either to England to join his relatives, or to Boston if there were no vessels going to England.

Apart from the revelation that he was suspected of treasonous intent, as would be the case years later in New York, what is also astonishing is that his maps are what rouse the suspicions of his French superiors (he was accused twenty years later by loyalists of making a map of the New York harbor). St. John de Crèvecoeur writes in this letter to Monckton,

. . . I was suspected and accused by jealous persons of wishing to misuse [my collection of maps]; and of looking for an opportunity to betray my country. On these appearances, without further examination, I was put in prison by order of this general; all my effects and papers of every sort were seized. I came to the General Hospital only because of an illness that prevented me from being able to take advantage of the packet-boats. (351-53)

Other letters cited by Monette confirm that St. John de Crèvecoeur embarked on Monckton's convoy to New York on October 26, 1759. After that, concrete evidence of his whereabouts is lacking until December 23, 1765. On that date, his name appears on a list of a dozen individuals who were naturalized as citizens in the colony of New York (356-57). A little more than a decade later, he was jailed near his home in Orange County for acting "the Part of a loyal Subject" (W. Smith 146); and a couple of years after that, he was jailed in the Provost by British officials on tips from his Orange County neighbors that he was disloyal. Of how many men can it be said that they were jailed by three different groups of seeming allies for treasonous intent or behavior? And to give credit to St. John de Crèvecoeur's adroitness at treating "identities and allegiances as provisional strategies designed to ensure his continued mobility and prosperity" (Iannini 201), of how many of those men can it be said that they escaped with their lives all three times? The myriad collection of names that our author used, both legal names and pseudonyms, to identify himself throughout his lifetime, is a perfect symbol of his shifting identities.⁴⁵

Clearly, when St. John de Crèvecoeur returned to New York as French consul in November 1783, he was careful to cultivate his pro-Independence and French monarchist credentials, and also careful to avoid men who might be able to besmirch them. One of his most intimate friends in the 1780s was the reformist pamphleteer and future leading Girondist, Jacques Pierre Brissot de Warville. Brissot de Warville's *Mémoires* do not always offer a flattering portrait of his friend. Julia Post Mitchell mentions an episode in the *Mémoires* in which Brissot

⁴⁵ See note 1.

de Warville was miffed by St. John de Crèvecoeur's receiving him at his home in New York for only one night; after the first night St. John de Crèvecoeur found lodging for his friend nearby. This act hurt Brissot de Warville; he wrote that St. John de Crèvecoeur was more concerned about his position than about his friend. Mitchell comments, "This is somewhat unjust, yet it must be remembered that since Brissot had become an out and out revolutionary he was perhaps not an altogether convenient guest for the consul of His Most Christian Majesty" (276). In *Mémoires*, Brissot de Warville also writes about his friend's deep sadness. He depicts a somber, melancholy man, one who always appeared to be carrying a heavy burden, a burden that Brissot de Warville supposed was his fear of being found culpable for his wartime stances. Charting St. John de Crèvecoeur's American political positions from neutralist to royalist to reconciled republican, Brissot de Warville states that his friend was fearful of associating with men who might have been aware of his prior activities and statements. "They regarded him, if not as a dangerous man, then at least as a man without strength and character . . . with good reason they were surprised that the French minister had given the first consulate of America precisely to an enemy of the revolution and of American independence" (qtd. in Monette 417). And certainly he must have carried an enormous amount of guilt from having abandoned his family during the war in order to return to France, later to learn that his wife had died during his absence.

However, St. John de Crèvecoeur's works reveal a man deeply sensitive and sympathetic to those around him. The people who knew him attest to his

compassion. His Boston friend Samuel Breck writes in his memoirs of “a most benevolent philanthropist. His writings, his conversation, each of his actions revealed the sentiments of a humane goodness; he was always ready to serve and eager to please” (qtd. in Monette 394). A collection of unpublished letters portrays a man tenderly devoted to his children, closely involved in their education, constantly giving them tidbits of advice, and doing whatever possible within his means to win their approval and satisfy their needs (Christie’s 2001, Lot 25).

In order to assess St. John de Crèvecoeur’s work and its place in the national literature of the United States, however, one need not brood over the finer points of his character. Excellent starting points for the assessment of his literary output are the remarks of D. H. Lawrence and Albert E. Stone. In 1923 Lawrence wrote, “Franklin is the real *practical* prototype of the American. Crèvecoeur is the emotional” (24). In 1981 Stone wrote, “American literature, as the voice of our national consciousness, begins in 1782 with the first publication in England of *Letters from an American Farmer*” (7). So why is St. John de Crèvecoeur not more widely known and read today? Many educated readers report familiarity when they hear his name, and the title *Letters from an American Farmer* usually registers more familiarity on their faces. His essay “What Is an American?” sometimes appears on undergraduate syllabi in early American literature classes. But for a man who has received such accolades, his name is little recognized among the general reading public today. His perspicacious cultural criticism of American life anticipates that of another Frenchman, Alexis

de Tocqueville. Below is St. John de Crèvecoeur's observation on the religious practice of a generation of North American colonists less zealous than their parents:

Persecution, religious pride, the love of contradiction, are the food of what the world commonly calls religion. These motives have ceased here; zeal in Europe is confined; here it evaporates in the great distance it has to travel; there it is a grain of powder inclosed; here it burns away in the open air and consumes without effect.

(Letters 76)

His Homeric similes of the natural world, such as this description of an ant colony in "Ant Hill-Town," are riveting. This extended simile offers a foretaste of the social satire of Proust. But it also contains a whimsical quality all his own:

. . . I observed a great number of Ants decorated with Wings — but this gaudy attire did not appear to add any celerity to their Flight, they never Expanded them, like the preposterous dress of some Ladies it served to only to render them more conspicuous than the Rest — upon a closer Inspection they appeared more Inactive & wholly deprived of that quickness of Motion for which the unwinged sort are so remarkable —. Perhaps they were the Matrons of the Republick, never departing from that formal Gravity appointed to their Rank by Nature; perhaps they were Young damsels Embarrassed by the Rule of Modesty & decorum, perhaps they were Young ones Just hatched, not having as yet ventured to

Traverse the air in order to harden their Limbs in the aspect of the
Sun (D. D. Moore 119)

Perhaps St. John de Crèvecoeur's ability to attain the heights of canonical American writers such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine and Washington Irving has been eclipsed by his biography. The finer points of an author's character are not always easy to disregard when estimating his literary value. His personal narrative is too spotty. How can a man repeatedly imprisoned on suspicions of treason, ambiguous in his political allegiances, a man who left his wife and children behind during the American Revolution in order to flee to France, and who relinquished his American citizenship—how could such a man be embraced alongside the patriotic figures of Franklin, Jefferson and Paine? He is not a typical American hero. He and his literary alter egos are anti-heroes. As anti-heroes, often betraying their weakness and confusion, they would be more at home in twentieth-century narratives alongside Arthur Miller's Willy Loman and Kurt Vonnegut's passive protagonists, "reflecting modern man's ambivalence toward traditional moral and social virtues" such as courage and honesty ("anti-hero," *Columbia Encyclopedia*), not next to Ethan Allen's eponymous hero. We tend to look to the eighteenth century for defiant, courageous and resolute "founding fathers," or at least to men who have the reputation for those qualities. St. John de Crèvecoeur's nuanced understanding and expression of the contradictions and hypocrisies of the human heart do not inspire a patriotic sentiment.

Those who may be quick to condemn the man's actions should look instead to his writing, and there witness his courage—and stunning ability—to write about those actions and inactions. In particular, look to the following passage from “The Distresses of a Frontier Man”:

Self-preservation, therefore, the rule of Nature, seems to be the best rule of conduct; what good can we do by vain resistance, by useless efforts? The cool, the distant spectator, placed in safety, may arraign me for ingratitude, may bring forth the principles of Solon or Montesquieu; he may look on me as willfully guilty; he may call me by the most opprobrious names. Secure from personal danger, his warm imagination, undisturbed by the least agitation of the heart, will expatiate freely on this grand question and will consider this extended field but as exhibiting the double scene of attack and defence. To him the object becomes abstracted; the intermediate glares; the perspective distance and a variety of opinions, unimpaired by affections, present to his mind but one set of ideas. Here he proclaims the high guilt of the one, and there the right of the other. But let him come and reside with us one single month; let him pass with us through all the successive hours of necessary toil, terror, and affright; let him watch with us, his musket in his hand, through tedious, sleepless nights, his imagination furrowed by the keen chisel of every passion . . . let his alarmed imagination predict to him the night, the dreadful night when it may

be his turn to perish, as so many have perished before. Observe, then, whether the man will not get the better of the citizen, whether his political maxims will not vanish! (*Letters* 206)

A Note on the Translation

There are advantages and disadvantages to translating into English the work of an author who himself wrote in English, and indeed whose English writings we still possess. In fact, at the time he prepared the prison letters for *Lettres-1784* (with the assistance of literary friends he had met through the salon of Madame d'Houdetot), St. John de Crèvecoeur's English was better than his French. He had left his native France as an adolescent and had spent most of the intervening three decades in England or British North America. Therefore, when reading his French, one can occasionally see him thinking in English, misspelling the word "fantôme," for instance, as "phantome." It was St. John de Crèvecoeur who introduced the word "instinctif" into the French language (Monette 455). But even beyond spelling and individual words, there are certain word patterns and expressions unique to English that he renders directly into French. These anglicisms are a welcome feature for a translator whose native language is English, and they are also a good reflection of St. John de Crèvecoeur's hybrid nature.

Another advantage to possessing St. John de Crèvecoeur's English writings is that they serve as a guide to translating some of his French expressions. For instance, when St. John de Crèvecoeur uses the expression, "mon pinceau se refuse à peindre," one can turn to his frequent use of the words "pencil" and "sketch" in similar contexts in his English writings to serve as a guide for rendering it "my pencil refuses to sketch" rather than "my brush refuses to paint."

The primary disadvantage for the modern translator of having St. John de Crèvecoeur's English writings available is that the translator's own English phraseology, syntax and diction are at risk of competing with the author's (not in the case of the prison letters, of which there is no trace in English, but in the case of *Letters*, for example). Fortunately, what mitigates this difficulty is the fact that the author wrote in the eighteenth century, and it would be a futile and ludicrous task for one to attempt to mimic the English of that period, with its abundance of arcane expressions such as "methinks," "whither," "who hath" and "'tis." I have retained, however, the word "alas," which is more familiar and less jarring to modern readers than the previous list of words, and which also helps to evoke a sense of the historical period during which the stories are set.

As for my broader philosophical approach to this translation, I have inclined toward creating a document that readily speaks to a modern audience rather than creating a museum piece that is slavishly faithful to every eighteenth-century orthographic peculiarity (such as capitalizing common nouns in the middle of a sentence and using the ampersand for "and"). I have not been faithful to every colon, semicolon and em-dash, or to the precise order of every clause, or to the strict meaning of each word—if doing so would have sacrificed the work's legibility, comprehensibility, and the spirit of the meaning for the modern reader. If a reader wishes to check these details in the original French, the document is easily accessible online, which is also why I have not included the original French letters as part of this dissertation. I have utilized modern conventions for representing quoted dialogue (where our author often provides

minimal or no punctuation to signal a change of speakers), and I have often used contractions when characters speak to each other, if not using them would have made the conversation sound stilted and cumbersome.

There are certain passages that sound slightly awkward in English when translated literally: those passages in Letters 4 and 5 in which St. John de Crèvecoeur employs the historical present tense to endow a scene with more immediacy. I have left them intact. The historical present tense narrates events of the past in the present tense. Ancient languages such as Greek commonly employ it, as do many modern languages, including English. Our author integrates it with the past tense in a slightly confusing way, but because his use of it is a significant authorial choice, I have retained it in English.

Overall I have remained faithful to St. John de Crèvecoeur's French and his prose style. Particularly because this work is the first English translation of these prison stories, I want the reader to experience the narrative of St. John de Crèvecoeur rather than a twenty-first century re-imagination of his narrative. Therefore, I have retained his long, sinuous sentences, his series of parallel clauses, his frequent use of anaphora, as well as the sentimental and decorous short expressions so characteristic of the author's era.

In locating my translation on Peter Newmark's continuum (adapted by Hervey and Higgins) between the extremes of a "literal" and "free" translation (literal > faithful > balanced > idiomatic > free), I would position it mainly around "faithful," with occasional slides into both "literal" and "balanced" (Newmark 39; Hervey and Higgins 21). Consequently, "le crime que tu cachois avec tant de

soin” is rendered not literally as “the crime that you concealed with so much care,” but rather as “the crime that you so carefully concealed.” The typically French nominal expression is adverbialized.⁴⁶

The source that I have chosen for this translation is *Lettres*-1787 rather than *Lettres*-1784. In my footnotes, I have pointed out differences in the two sets of prison letters when appropriate. Most of the differences are relatively minor. However, one of the primary reasons for my choosing the 1787 edition is that the fifth letter, which St. John de Crèvecoeur entitled “Last Letter,” did not appear in the 1784 edition. Also, he and his editors corrected numerous grammatical and spelling errors that appeared in the 1784 edition (but even the 1787 edition is not free from errors). In both editions of *Lettres*, the prison letters appear at the end of the first volume.

I have used a combination of three source texts: (1) primarily, the Library of Congress edition available on Gale’s online database of literary works; (2) an edition from the New York Historical Society’s library collection; and (3) an edition from the Pierpont Morgan Library’s collection.^{47 48}

Finally, I have distinguished between the footnotes of author and translator by italicizing those of the author.

⁴⁶ For additional discussions of translation practice and theory, see Armstrong, Malmkjær and Baker, Schulte et al, Venuti, and Vinay and Darbelnet.

⁴⁷ Also, the prison letters from the 1784 edition may be freely accessed on the Gallica website of the Bibliothèque nationale de France at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k73713d.image.r=%22st+john+de+Crèvecoeur%22.f347.langEN>

⁴⁸ The primary lexical resources consulted for this dissertation were Deletanville, “Dictionnaires d’autrefois,” Fox, Tarver, and Tocquot.

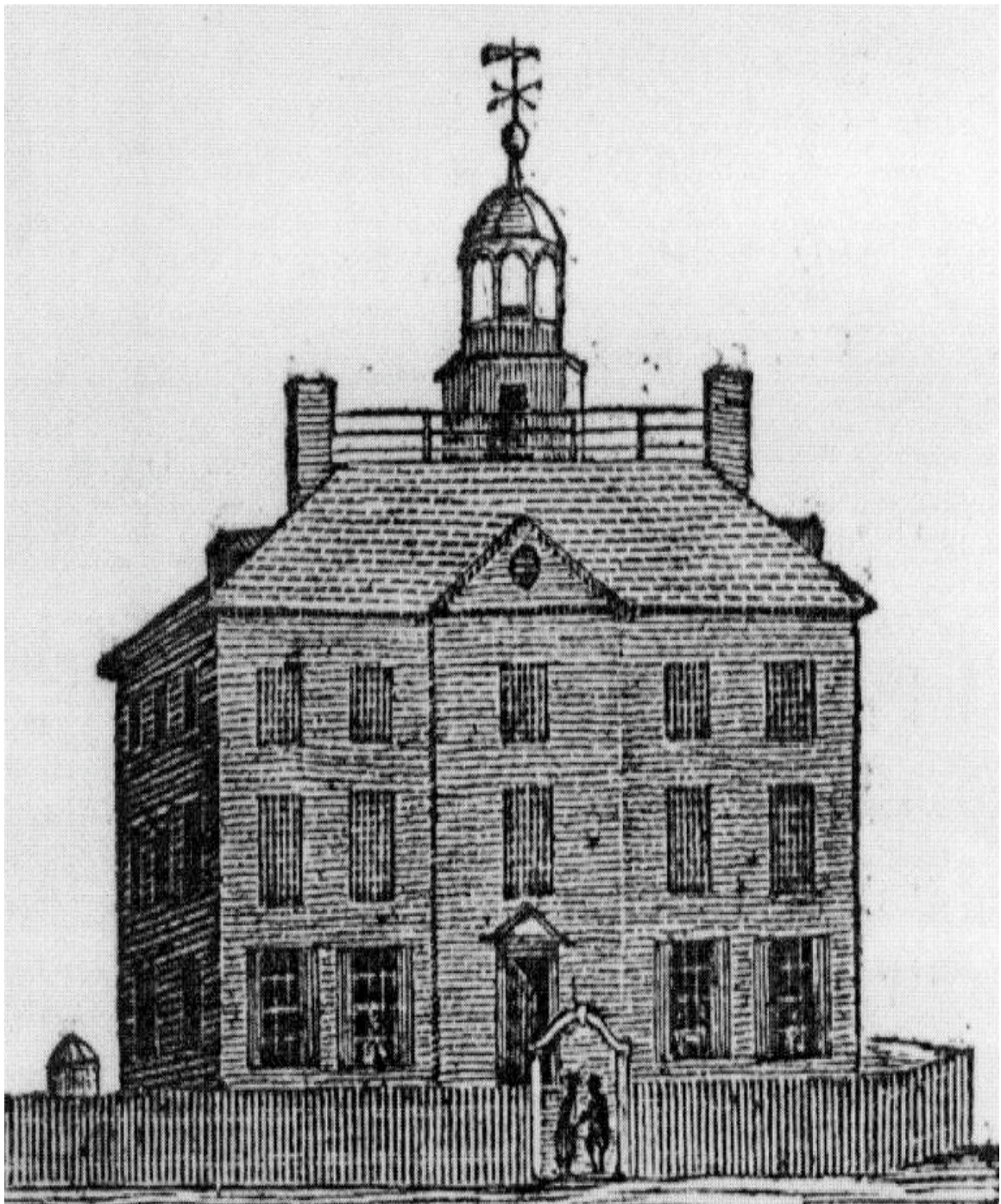


Fig. 1: The Provost Gaol (“Hotel Cunningham”) was reserved for criminals, notorious rebels, and American officers who were denied parole. It stood on the site near the current 4-5-6 subway station in New York City, just east of City Hall.

At the New York prison, 4 August 1780.⁴⁹

1. The Generous Daughter

The boldness of the enterprise, the wisdom of the schemes and designs, the courage and perseverance in the conduct and execution of this great renewal—such are the features that characterize our legislators and brave warriors. These personal anecdotes, chosen with discernment, will reveal to you the nation. Faithful to my promise I have depicted only what I have seen, as Heaven is my witness. I have selected only the least atrocious scenes, those, at any rate, in which virtue, spreading its sweet light, diminishes the darkness and horror of the crime.

Colonel Josiah Smith was confined in the prisons of New York when I was there myself. Chance had it that we inhabited the same room. He was a very rich colonist, descended from one of the first European families that landed on

⁴⁹ Perhaps for dramatic purposes, St. John de Crèvecoeur dates his imprisonment in these letters a year later than his actual imprisonment, so that it immediately precedes his actual departure for Europe in September 1780. Or it could be that he merely made a mistake, which he corrected in another narrative: in the manuscript of *Esquisse de ma vie*, written during the last years of the French Revolution, the author scratched out his prison release date of 1780 and replaced it with 1779.

If St. John de Crèvecoeur's September 17, 1779 release date given in *Esquisse de ma vie* is correct, his confinement would have begun in mid-June 1779, since he asserts repeatedly in these letters that he was confined for three months. He was definitely in the Provost by July 7, according to William Smith's diary (126). New York City Commandant James Pattison's July 8, 1779 letter to General Sir Henry Clinton describes St. John de Crèvecoeur's arrest in rich detail (New York Historical Society (hereafter NYHS) *Collections* [1875] 90; qtd. in Mitchell 54-55).

I have found no reason to disagree with Howard C. Rice's supposition that St. John de Crèvecoeur first began drafting the prison letters in English in early 1780, while still living in New York City (57). Rice cites as evidence the author's statement in *Esquisse de ma vie* (the sketch of his life in New York after his release from prison) that he was "finally able, in the moments of calm, to remember those thoughts and commit them to paper."

Nassau Island.⁵⁰ He lived in the district of Southampton in Suffolk County, the easternmost part of this island. Although sixty-seven years of age, he was nevertheless hale and hearty. Following our custom, the day after his arrival we implored him to tell his story.⁵¹

“For several years,” he began, “I was a magistrate and colonel of the militia of our district. I took up arms at the beginning of this war and led the elite regiment of the American army shortly before it opposed the landing and advance of English troops under General Howe.⁵² You know the outcome of that fatal day of— when the discipline of the mercenaries outstripped courage, zeal and patriotism.⁵³ Dear Heaven! Should a European at six pence per day be able to conquer and destroy citizens fighting nobly for their country and get away with

⁵⁰ *Long Island.*

⁵¹ Colonel Josiah Smith (1723-1786) was actually 55 years old at the time of this episode. He was a descendant of Major Richard “Bull” Smith, the patentee and founder of Smithtown on Long Island. Josiah inherited the Patentship of Moriches and lived in the hamlet of East Moriches (Town of Brookhaven) in a house that still stands. His possessions also included a house that he purchased in the Town of Southampton for his daughter Hannah from his father-in-law David Howell. (Genealogical information on Col. Smith and his family is taken from Pelletreau (both *Record* and *Records*), Mather, F. K. Smith, Ross, Thompson, Wood, NYHS *Collections* [1905].)

⁵² General Sir William Howe (1729-1814) was commander-in-chief of the British Army in North America in 1776-1778.

⁵³ Col. Smith was Treasurer of Suffolk County from 1764 until his death in 1786. In 1775 he was on a committee to raise the First Regiment of Suffolk County. In 1776 he was appointed Colonel of the Regiment of Suffolk County Minute Men (February 20) and was subsequently appointed Colonel of Nassau (Long) Island troops to be raised by draft (July 20). He was ordered before the August 27, 1776 Battle of Long Island (Battle of Brooklyn) to march his troops to western Long Island and take orders from General Nathaniel Greene, and then to serve under Brigadier-General Nathaniel Woodhull. The Colonel was never able to reach Woodhull, but he did see action in this battle, which was disastrous for Washington’s forces. In the following days, he retreated with other American troops to Manhattan and then to Westchester, but upon hearing that Long Island was being abandoned to the British, his regiment disbanded. Some joined other regiments, some went home to protect family, and some became refugees in Connecticut. (Col. Smith’s military activity before, during and after this battle is documented in his “Diary,” “Logbook,” Papers, Colonel Josiah Smith Collection, and Robert Collection; and in Mather and Thompson. See Burrows and Johnston for vivid, detailed narratives of the battle.)

it? A few days after the battle, the English general published a proclamation inviting all the inhabitants of our island to lay down their arms and sign an agreement that would guarantee them peace and the protection of the English army.⁵⁴ My wife, my two daughters, and my age all forced me to submit to this harsh extremity. Oh, if only I had been ten years younger, I would have acted as so many others who abandoned their house and property to cross into the state of Connecticut and join those who had not yet borne the yoke.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ As early as August 29, 1776, inhabitants of Long Island began submitting to British authorities by signing declarations condemning town committee proceedings and taking oaths of allegiance to the king, promising “never to be concerned in any manner with his Majesty’s rebellious subjects in America” (Mather 116). On November 30, 1776, Admiral Richard Howe and General William Howe issued a proclamation “for restoring Peace to His Majesty’s Colonies and Plantations in NORTH-AMERICA” with “speedy Remission of past Offences.” By signing a declaration promising not to take up arms against the king or encouraging others to do so, inhabitants would “obtain a full and free Pardon of all Treasons” and “reap the Benefit of His Majesty’s paternal goodness in the Preservation of their Property, the Restoration of their Commerce, and the Security of their most valuable Rights . . .” (*New-York Gazette*, Dec. 2, 1776).

⁵⁵ According to Mather, Col. Smith and his family did take refuge in Connecticut from November 1776 to October 1778. As evidence, Mather includes a statement from Col. Smith’s descendant Robert S. Pelletreau that the Colonel’s “papers were in my father’s house when I was a boy; and they showed that his place was overrun by the British and Tory marauders” (572, 987). However, this fact does not preclude Col. Smith’s having remained in his house. Mather also bases Col. Smith’s refugee status on Onderdonk’s unsourced listing of the petition of one Josiah Smith in New London, Connecticut (*Revolutionary Incidents* 79); but there was at least one New London inhabitant at that time (not the Colonel) named Josiah Smith (Marshall 121). Also, Col. Smith was confined in the Provost in New York for the first time during 1777 (Onderdonk, *Revolutionary Incidents* 219), which means that he could not have been in Connecticut during that time. Pelletreau may have assumed from the above-mentioned papers that his ancestor was a patriot refugee in Connecticut when in fact he was not, if Col. Smith’s claim in this story is correct. Moreover, Col. Smith’s Account Book, preserved at the Suffolk County Historical Society, reveals a steady stream of business activity with his Long Island neighbors throughout the war years (Robert Collection, Box 4, 182.91.16), making it even less likely that he was a patriot refugee in Connecticut. On the other hand, if in fact he did flee to Connecticut and St. John de Crèvecoeur was aware of this fact, perhaps the author omitted it from his story because aligning Col. Smith more firmly with the patriot refugees in Connecticut would have weakened his portrait of a man “caught in the crossfire” between patriots and loyalists. But unless evidence surfaces that suggests otherwise, I am more inclined to believe that Col. Smith remained on Long Island, as the character asserts.



Fig. 2: The East Moriches house of Col. Josiah Smith was built in 1692 by his grandfather Richard (son of Richard “Bull” Smith, founder of Smithtown) and still stands on Moriches Avenue, although with minimal original materials. Col. Smith’s remains lie in the family cemetery behind the house on Paquatuck Avenue. For nine generations, from 1692 until 1941, the house remained in the Smith family.



Fig. 3: General Sir Henry Clinton (c1762-1765), commander-in chief of the British Army in North America, 1778-1781. (From the American Museum in Britain. Portrait attributed to Andrea Soldi.)

“This past April, General Cl__on⁵⁶ came to hunt in our districts and chose my house as his residence.⁵⁷ It’s situated at the back of a bay whose fisheries and neighboring lands belong to me.⁵⁸ I’m protected from the sound⁵⁹ only by a rather expansive peninsula. One day I was at my door with this general and he remarked,

‘I admire the location of your house and fields. You must lead a happy life here: the game, the fish, the sailing, the fertility of your lands—everything, it seems to me, concurs to make you rich. How many children do you have?’

‘Five. But only two daughters are with me.’⁶⁰

‘Aren’t you at all exposed to incursions from people in Connecticut, who, according to what they tell me, often cross the sound to come pillage?’

‘As you see, I’m caught in the crossfire. Several who know my situation call me a Whig so they can come and carry away my cattle; on the other hand,

⁵⁶ General Sir Henry Clinton (c1730-1795) was commander-in-chief of the British Army in North America in 1778-1781.

⁵⁷ This Long Island house still stands on Moriches Avenue and is the oldest house in East Moriches; however, no exterior details of the original structure remain, only “original hand-hewn native timber” on the inside. It was built by Col. Smith’s grandfather Richard (son of Richard “Bull” Smith, founder of Smithtown) in 1692. Col. Smith is buried in the family cemetery behind the house (“Col. Josiah Smith House”).

It is true that Gen. Clinton brought 2500 troops to neighboring Southampton in late March 1779 (*American Journal*, March 25, 1779) and very well could have stayed at Col. Smith’s East Moriches residence. Interestingly, however, Josiah’s brother Dr. William Smith’s Southampton house is frequently mentioned as the headquarters of Gen. Sir William Erskine, who served as commander of British troops on eastern Long Island during the winter of 1778-79 (Mather 176, 571, 577). Our author might have conflated details of the two British generals’ Long Island excursions.

⁵⁸ The cove near the house is now called Tuthill Cove, in Moriches Bay.

⁵⁹ *New England Sound* [now called the Long Island Sound, between Long Island and Connecticut].

⁶⁰ He actually fathered a total of seven children in two different marriages, but two daughters had already died by this time (Pelletreau, *Records* 468).

the Americans from Connecticut call everyone who submitted to your domination Tories, and they often come to demand large sums. That's my situation and in spite of the wealth I enjoyed before the war, I'd scarcely be able to live without the fish we catch every day.'

'Your condition is truly unfortunate,' he continued. 'If anything ever happens to you, I'll repay you.' A short time later, His Excellency departed.

"On the twentieth of the following month around six o'clock in the morning, I was busy cleaning flax in the barn with my Negroes when at a distance I noticed seven persons poorly clothed and apparently very distressed. They were walking toward me.

'Who are you, my friends?' I asked them. 'Where are you coming from and where are you going?'

'We come from Connecticut, where we'd very much like to return. We embarked three days ago at Guilford with the intention of taking *** prisoner. Governor Tryon⁶¹ gave him the plantation that I abandoned. He was informed of our approach and defended himself through the windows of the house. Three of our companions were killed and four were wounded; they're now under the care of two of our companions. We know at the bottom of your heart you're a good American, despite the fate that's placed you under English domination, so we've

⁶¹ William Tryon (1729-1788) was a British Army officer and colonial governor of North Carolina (1765-1771) and New York (1771-1780). Although his power as governor was substantially weakened with the establishment of military rule, he soon became infamous among the opposition for supporting and directing devastating raids on the farms of Long Island and coastal towns of Connecticut. Apparently he was equally abusive of the property of loyalist Americans. St. John de Crèvecoeur's loyalist friend William Smith writes about a meeting with Tryon in his February 10, 1779 journal entry: "On my asking, 'Is it right to destroy the Property of the King's Friends?' he answered, 'They will be paid for it.' 'Will they?' said I. 'May be so,' says he, 'after the War is over' – with a smile. Tryon sacrifices his Civil Character to gain a Reputation in the Army . . ." (74).

come to beg for your assistance and ask you for a little cloth to bandage their wounds, and also for some provisions.'

'How do you claim to know what my political opinions are? I'm old. I no longer have any. Besides, my situation exposes me to the ravages of two parties. I don't know what to do. Wait here for a moment.' I went to consult my wife and told her all about the circumstances of this affair.

'What can you do, old man?' she asked. 'You must give them willingly what they're able to take by force. They're seven armed persons, aren't they? Trust me. Take this ham and two pies and beg them in the name of God never to return. Can they not know the harm they're doing to their own country under the pretext of gratifying their private lust for revenge? The English are delighted to have such a hollow excuse to practice their brigandage.' I took the provisions to them, along with the opinions of my wife, and they were earnest in their gratitude.

The next day at the same hour, as I was busy at the same task, I noticed five persons walking from the same direction. They had on the uniform of the refugees from Lloyd's Peninsula.⁶² That ill-omened outfit put me in a terrible fright.⁶³

⁶² *A large peninsula of Long Island* [more commonly called Lloyd's Neck, and now part of the Village of Lloyd Harbor on Long Island's North Shore].

⁶³ American colonists loyal to King George who fled their own colonies to seek asylum in British-controlled regions such as the City of New York and Long Island were given the name "refugees," not to be confused with Long Island patriot refugees who left their homes and fled to Connecticut. Long Island's loyalist refugees often occupied their abandoned farms. Lloyd's Neck was a base of operations for various loyalist regiments during the course of the war, each having its own uniform. (See Chartrand.)

‘What now?’ I said to my Negroes. ‘These folks are like turkey buzzards.’⁶⁴

They appear only where there’s prey and carnage.’

‘Do you recognize us?’ one of them asked.

‘Yes, you’re the same people I gave meat and bread to yesterday at this hour.’

‘Meat and bread?’ he repeated. ‘Cowardly Rebel!’⁶⁵ You would’ve given us your blood if we’d asked for it. You weren’t satisfied with being a traitor to the best of kings; you also betrayed the promise you made when you signed the proclamation not to assist the enemy: you assisted us yesterday when you took us for people from Connecticut. You old trickster! You old wretch! So you thought your sneakiness and hypocrisy would be hidden from all discovery. Come pay for your crime in the prisons of New York, the crime that you so carefully concealed. Order your Negroes to harness your horses to the wagon and drive you there under heavy escort.’

‘If the cause of the best of kings is the best of causes,’ I replied, ‘why do you support it through lies and deceit? I know what your motive is, but don’t think that the timidity of old age and the regrets of a sexagenarian will boost your triumph. I’ve been groaning more than four years waiting for happier days.’

‘Isn’t everything fair game for the sake of exposing concealed rebels? Besides, we’ve been authorized by superior orders.’

⁶⁴ *Birds of prey.*

⁶⁵ The epithet “rebel” has lost the abusive force that it had when used against American patriots. Today the word “terrorist” more ably captures the feeling of utter revilement and degradation that it conveyed.

'I have absolutely no doubt about that, gentlemen. But how unfortunate that it's reserved for the partisans of King George to drive the exaltation of evil to the point of forcing humanity to become its own foe, converting a purely charitable act into a crime.'

'What are you saying, old Puritan?'⁶⁶ Shouldn't the punishment fit the crime?'

'At least let me pack some clothes, Mr. Royalists.'

"Scarcely had they entered my house when they began pillaging and packing up everything they found valuable. They broke into a large desk, but not finding any gold in it, they took their revenge on some papers that they tore to pieces.

'For the love of God,' my wife said to them, 'if you're determined to destroy our belongings, at least respect those notebooks.'⁶⁷ They concern the estates of several children whom the bayonet of your friends has turned into orphans. Aren't they miserable enough?'

'Not as miserable as they deserve to be. This is a nursery for republicans, which Great Britain will do well to root out.'

⁶⁶ The inflammatory power of this epithet was reawakened during the American Revolution. James C. Spalding discusses how opposing sides cast this struggle as a renewal of a previous struggle in his article "Loyalist as Royalist, Patriot as Puritan: The American Revolution as a Repetition of the English Civil Wars."

⁶⁷ The September 24, 1779, entry of "Items from Col. Josiah Smith's Account Book" (shortly after his release from prison) reveals how meticulously he kept financial records. He lists the stolen property and itemizes the expenses incurred during his capture, confinement and return home. He also writes down the names of his assailants: "William Chandler and Ioseph Booth." See the Appendix for the full transcription of this Account Book entry.

“At last they opened a coffer where they found 383 piasters.”⁶⁸

‘Is that what you’re looking for, gentlemen?’ I asked them. ‘I’m really sorry I don’t have more.’

“Meanwhile my daughter Julie⁶⁹ entered her room to take out 30 guineas that she had hidden and wanted to give me.”⁷⁰ One of these rogues, who had

⁶⁸ A piaster, also known as a piece of eight, was a Spanish or Spanish-American peso or dollar, originally equal to eight *reals*. The Spanish milled dollar was the model for future U.S. currency. However, there was a wide variety of currency in colonial and Revolutionary America:

Coins from England, Spain, France, Portugal and Holland were legal tender in Colonial America. Spanish coins, minted in the New World, predominated, but monetary accounts continued to be kept in England [sic] pounds (\$4.80 to \$5.00), shillings (\$.20 to \$.24), and pence (\$.02) until about 1800 in America. . . . At the end of the American Colonial era, an average family in Boston, Massachusetts could live comfortably on forty pounds (\$200.00) a year. (“Numismatics of the American Revolution”)

⁶⁹ Col. Smith did have a daughter named Juliana from his current marriage, who would have been 19 years old at the time of this episode. Most likely she is the Julie Smith of this story. But what makes her positive identification somewhat problematic is that Col. Smith also had a daughter living with him named Hannah, age 24, the youngest of four daughters from his first marriage; and Onderdonk relates how indefatigably Hannah fought for her father’s release: “His daughter Hannah, in her labors and excursions to procure his release, caught a cold that brought on a deafness, from which she never recovered” (*Documents and Letters* 92).

However, this was Col. Smith’s second confinement in the Provost. His first confinement is recorded in the May 27, 1777 diary entry of New Jersey colonist John Fell: “Rev. Mr. Hart and Col. Smith brought to Provost from L.I.” (Onderdonk, *Revolutionary Incidents* 219). And Mather seems to link Hannah’s story, which he received from Onderdonk, with the first confinement (573). Therefore, it may be that Hannah’s younger half-sister Juliana followed her sister’s example two years later during her father’s second confinement.

Another reason to believe that Julie Smith of the anecdote is his youngest daughter Juliana is based on an item from Col. Smith’s notebooks copied by Brookhaven Town Historian Osborn Shaw in April 1938. The item is a pass dated September 21, 1779, (around the time of his release) allowing Juliana Smith to travel from New York to Flushing and Moriches:

Pursuant to his Excellency Sir WILLIAM HOWE’S Proclamation of the 17th July, 1777. PERMISSION is hereby given to Juli^a. Smith to Carry to Moriches & ffushing [sic] Eight Yd.^s Mantua Eight Yd. silk, Twelve yd. Linen Eight Yd.^s Lan, Three yd.^s Mode as small [sic] Trunk Wear^g: Apparell, Thirty shil^gs: Medicines/. He [sic] having complied with the Directions contained in the above-mentioned Proclamation. New-York, Superintendent’s-Office, 21 Sept. -----1779. To the Officers attending. [Signed] Lamb-^t Moore D. S. (Town of Brookhaven Historian’s Office, Osborn Shaw Misc. Documents, Book II 54)

This pass does confirm Juliana’s movement between the City and her home on Long Island. The above-mentioned July 17, 1777 proclamation prohibited illegal trade with the rebels (*New-York Gazette*, July 28, 1777).

⁷⁰ “The English gold guinea was valued at \$ 5.00 and became famous during the Revolution as reward money paid to spies for General George Washington” (“Numismatics”).

followed her with his eyes, grabbed hold of her arm just as she withdrew it from the coffer, and threatening her with his naked sword, ordered her to let go of the purse that she was holding.

‘Can’t I rescue from your hands enough to aid my poor father in the prison where you’re going to take him?’ she proudly asked.

“Without replying he grabbed her by the hand and tried to wrench away his prey, but encountering a level of resistance that he wasn’t expecting, he struck her with his sword above the wrist. Despite the loss of blood, she still resisted and threw the purse out the window to a Negress who had witnessed this scene. Chagrined, he was about to strike her again but luckily we all entered. His comrades were ashamed by this act and stopped him.

‘So you’ve come to wage war with old men and girls? Look, Father. Look at what this man has done to me. But my courage won’t flow out with my blood.’

“At that moment, a fit of madness that seized all my Negroes threatened to cause a bloody scene. Fearing the consequence of delay, the royalists hastily loaded my wagon and took me away with them—after they had tied my hands behind my back.

‘You win today,’ my daughter said to them, ‘but soon I’ll make you repent of your wickedness.’

‘Come to New York if you dare,’ they answered. ‘Rebel women are no more exempt from prison than men. Follow us if you dare.’

‘I’ll risk everything for my father. What crimes can your war councils reproach me with? I’ll go defend him in New York even if it means risking my life.’

“Picture, if you can, the state of my poor wife. As for me, I was almost suffocated by anger and indignation. I begged my daughter to stay behind because of her wound. We arrived at Setauket⁷¹ in the evening, where I had an acute kidney stone attack. One of the royalists seized on the moment of my cruelest suffering when he came to tell me he wanted only for me to go back to my house. Because I was rich, they would conceal my crime if I gave them three hundred and fifty guineas, apart from what they already had with them, which was only a just reward for their troubles.

‘Three hundred and fifty guineas!’ I exclaimed. ‘In different times, I’d give you the answer you deserve, but today I submit to my fate, such as it may be, such as I can expect from a nation that makes sport of the fundamental laws of nature.’

“We finally arrived here, where by now everything resounded with the gossip of their expedition. James Rivington⁷² had already published the following paragraph, as you were able to see in his *Gazette*:

They write to us from the eastern part of Long Island that the Refugees of Lloyd’s Peninsula, ever tireless in the service of His Majesty, have caught *Josiah Smith, formerly Esquire*, assisting

⁷¹ A village on Long Island’s North Shore where patriots and loyalists often clashed. In August 1777 American troops unsuccessfully attempted to regain control of it.

⁷² James Rivington (1724-1802) was an English-born American who was appointed the king’s publisher and rabidly attacked the patriot cause in the *Royal Gazette* and other newspapers he published. A lightning rod of controversy, he was despised by many Americans but managed to remain in New York after the war, perhaps, some suspect, because he was a spy for George Washington. Ironically, he was jailed in debtors’ prison near the end of his life, most likely in the same building where this story is set. He died on the 4th of July (“Rivington, James,” *American National Biography Online*).

people from Connecticut who had come to pillage the loyal subjects of the King. They took the old rebel away with them under heavy escort, and His Excellency will probably send him to lodge at Hotel Cunningham,⁷³ the delightful abode of many other arch-rebels like him.

“I’d hardly touched my foot to the ground when a guard led me here. I don’t know when and how I’ll get out. That, in a few words, is the story that you have demanded of me.”

Fortunately, his gallant daughter found a savage in the vicinity from Montauk⁷⁴ who dressed her wound. She arrived here five days after her father. With difficulty she obtained permission to see him. Even this favor she owed only to her noble appearance and the gentle firmness of her bearing. She is tall, fine-figured and pretty without being beautiful. She wonderfully combines the bashful modesty of the country with the polite assurance of the city, but she had never even come to the city. I must confess, the dignity of her figure, her happy countenance, her arm in a sling, her courage, the animated protestations that she made to her father about never abandoning him, all had a singular effect on my heart. I could not see her without joining to the pleasure that the sight of her inspired in me, a great deal of admiration. In a word she became in my eyes, as to those of all the prisoners who were admitted into our room, an infinitely fascinating object. Such is the effect of beauty when it is united with virtue.

⁷³ *The Provost.*

⁷⁴ *The easternmost point of Long Island.*

The day after her arrival, I wrote a petition on behalf of her father addressed to the commander-in-chief. I went into detail about his adventure, reminding him of the promise that he had made in April and demanding justice. His daughter endured countless difficulties at headquarters. I will not repeat all of the remarks they made to her. At last, she was admitted to see the assistant of Major André, the general's favorite aide-de-camp.⁷⁵ After having read the petition, the general coldly replied to her that it would not be long before her father would be examined before a war council, and that he was entirely unaware of the stated promise. However, he granted her the liberty of seeing her father as many times as she wished.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Major John André (1750-1780) was Gen. Clinton's chief intelligence officer. On his return from West Point after having secretly negotiated its surrender with the American general Benedict Arnold, he was caught, tried and hanged as a spy by an American board of officers appointed by Washington. André was a charismatic, talented young man whose case stirred the hearts of people on both sides of the war ("André, John," *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*). His story has inspired letters, plays and poems from the pens of Americans such as Alexander Hamilton, William Dunlap and Philip Freneau, among others. One scholar writes,

Hamilton wrote of André's downfall as a Greek historian might, in terms of the inexorable pattern of apex and nadir which also finds its way into the emotional structure of Greek myth and drama: "But in the height of his career," Hamilton pondered, "flushed with new hope from the execution of a project, the most beneficial to his party that could be devised, he was at once precipitated from the summit of his prosperity, and saw all the expectations of his ambition blasted, and himself ruined." (Arner 54)

St. John de Crèvecoeur's phrase "the general's favorite aide-de-camp" is intriguing because there is a tradition in popular fiction, as well as among some historians, that Major André was homosexual, and possibly even the lover of Gen. Clinton. See Arner, Decker, Flexner, Harr.

⁷⁶ At least Commandant James Pattison, who arrested St. John de Crèvecoeur but believed in his innocence, attempted to obtain justice for Col. Smith. Pattison's aide-de-camp Captain Adye wrote the following letter dated August 6, 1779, to Brigadier-General De Lancey:

Dear Sir, I am directed by Major Gen Pattison to send you enclosed the Names of such Witnesses as can give Testimony against those complained of by M^r Josiah Smith, as also those whom he accuses of being concerned in the Robbing of him: And the General desires that you will be so good as to order them to be in Town on Monday Evening or Tuesday Morning early, in order to attend the Board of Enquiry which meets on Tuesday Morning." (NYHS *Collections [1875]* 240-241).

The pleasures, the good cheer, the fortunes and the insouciance that were the tutelary divinity of this household were soon all forgotten and Colonel Smith remained locked up. Hardly a day passed in the space of three months that this brave, dignified girl did not come to console her father. She often spent entire days with us. She enlivened our meals, and the pleasure that she spread around her, like a soft light, diminished the dark melancholy of our plight. I gratefully own, it is to the satisfaction of seeing and hearing her, to her cheerfulness, the good news that she brought us, that I owe a balm that served to soothe the bitterness that was consuming me. Often she carried letters that I wrote to my friends, hiding them in her bosom. She was always respected, even by the barbarous Cunningham.⁷⁷ She became the center of our society, which several American officers from another room joined. We were all equally surprised to see and feel how her presence lightened the weight of our chains.

The admiration of one of these officers turned into the strongest love. One day he declared it to her father and provided us with a very fresh and interesting scene within these sad walls. His energy and the happy enthusiasm of his expressions did not surprise me in the least. At his age, I feel that my admiration and esteem for her would have driven me to love as well. The remarkable fate of this young man rendered the scene even more interesting to our eyes. He was a cornet of that unfortunate company of Virginia dragoons, who, fatefully surprised in their quarters at Tappan,⁷⁸ were murdered in cold blood by General Grey. The

⁷⁷ See my introduction on this notorious villain, Provost Marshal William Cunningham (45).

⁷⁸ *Or Orangetown, on the North River [Hudson River] thirty miles from New York.*

circumstances of this slaughter make one tremble. What sort of fanaticism dictated such orders, and where did he find men barbarous enough to execute them? Inconceivable!⁷⁹

A party of English soldiers with bayonet and torch in hand entered the room where this young cornet was sleeping. They ran toward his bed to pierce him with the deadly dagger when one of them cried out, "What a shame to kill such a beautiful boy!" This sole reflection suspended their blows. At that moment he awakened and hurriedly got up. Fortunately for him the author of the first sentiment repeated it more vigorously and persuaded his comrades to take him prisoner. Such were the circumstances that favored the life of the young officer who made his vows to Miss Julie Smith.

I cannot help mentioning an act that brings honor to a young Scottish lieutenant whose name I have unfortunately forgotten. Before the nocturnal surprise of this regiment, the general who contrived it ordered all the gunflints to be delivered to him. He divided his party into a certain number of squads and ordered the commanding officers to kill everyone. One Scottish lieutenant discovered fourteen of the Americans inside a barn in a very deep sleep, but far from carrying out the barbaric orders of the general, he said, "My friends, we are soldiers, not butchers; make them prisoners of war. What would we say if Americans came during the night in this fashion to stab us in our quarters?"

⁷⁹ The massacre occurred near Old Tappan in today's township of River Vale, New Jersey in Bergen County, just over the state border from Tappan, New York, where Major André was hanged. After six skeletons of victims were discovered in tanning vats in 1967, a formal excavation and re-interment ensued, and today the burial ground is an historic site and public park commemorating this episode in the war ("River Vale History: The Baylor Massacre").

These fourteen dragoons were the only ones who avoided the carnage except for those who had the luck to escape.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ This September 28, 1778 slaughter was named Baylor's Massacre after George Baylor (1752-1784), colonel of the Third Regiment of Continental Dragoons, an elite cavalry force consisting primarily of sons of Washington's personal friends. Narratives of the surprise attack were widely disseminated in contemporary newspapers, but there were considerable discrepancies in the number of casualties. Following is one modern report of the toll taken on Baylor's 116 officers and other troops, who were sleeping in several houses and barns near Old Tappan that night: "The result of this slaughter was that of the one hundred and sixteen men of the regiment, eleven were instantly bayoneted to death, seventeen left behind covered with bayonet wounds and expected to die, and thirty-nine were taken prisoners, eight of whom were severely wounded. The rest of the troopers escaped in the darkness. All the arms and seventy horses were part of the booty captured" (Westervelt 117).

A reference to the humane "Scottish lieutenant" appears in a contemporary newspaper account:

It appears, indeed, that *one* of their light infantry Captains, had the feelings of remorse, and ventured to disobey his orders; he gave quarter to the whole fourth troop, and not a man of them was hurt, except two that happened to be on guard: For the honour of humanity it is to wished [sic], this gentleman's name had been known. (*New-Hampshire Gazette*, December 1, 1778)

General Charles Grey (1729-1807) had earned the sobriquet "no-flint Grey" because he sometimes ordered his men to remove the charges from their firelocks and take out the flints so that they "might be constrained to use their bayonets only." Many waking dragoons who asked for quarter were met with replies such as "skiver him," "take no prisoners," and "goddamn your Rebbel soul we will give you quarter." Newspaper accounts do not mention the cornet whose beauty saved his life (*Norwich Packet*, October 20 and December 7, 1778; Maurer 129-147).

Most of the prisoners taken to the City of New York were exchanged in late October 1778 (*New-Jersey Gazette*, November 4, 1778). However, John Kelty (also Kilty or Kelly) was one of those who remained confined in the Provost or paroled on Long Island. In Maurer's *Dragoon Diary*, documents list Kelty variously as "cadet," "volunteer" or "paymaster" up to the time of the massacre. But one record in Maurer's book also mentions the debts that "John Kelty, Cornet," accrued while on parole on Long Island (376). Also, he is listed as a cornet in the Return of Rebel Officers in the Provost, October 31, 1778: "Corps: 3 L^t. Dragoons; Rank and Names: Cornet John Kelty; Where Taken: Tappan." In the November 1, 1779 Return, he is listed as having been confined in the Provost on October 1, 1778, for breach of parole ("Returns of the Provost" 44:35; 73:28). This man must be the beautiful cornet of our story, for the only cornet from Baylor's regiment listed in the Provost returns available between October 31, 1778, and November 1, 1779, is John Kelty. It is true that a captain named Peregrine Fitzhugh was also a cornet taken in the Baylor Massacre, but he appears to have spent all or most of his time while in British hands on Long Island, based on returns of the Provost, as well as returns of American officers on parole on Long Island (Maurer 139).

Following is the record of service for John Kilty of Maryland, printed in the *Historical Register of Officers*: "Ensign Maryland Battalion of the Flying Camp, July to December, 1776; 2d Lieutenant 4th Maryland, 10th December, 1776; taken prisoner at Germantown, 4th October, 1777; 1st Lieutenant, 6th November, 1777; Captain 3d Continental Dragoons, 1st July, 1778; retired 9th November, 1782" (331). He had a distinguished career after the war, serving on the Maryland Council, 1785-1791. George Washington appointed him supervisor of the revenue for Maryland in 1795 (*The Diaries of George Washington*, vol. 6, 103).



Fig. 4: Portrait of a Dragoon from Col. Baylor's Third Regiment of Continental Light Dragoons. (Bergen County Department of Parks, Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs)

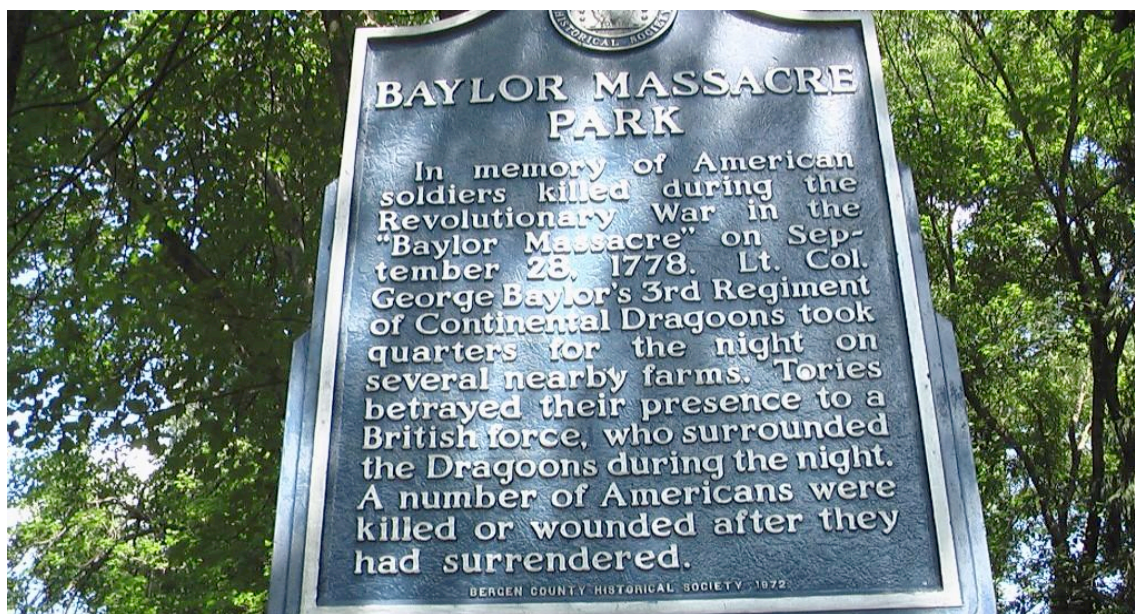


Fig. 5: Historic Marker of the Baylor Massacre on September 28, 1778, in River Vale, New Jersey.

Almost three months passed during which Julie Smith was unable to obtain anything for her father, who during that interval had two very bad kidney stone attacks. At last she obtained his return home on the condition that things would remain in the same state in respect to the refugees who had captured him, and that he would find a bail of five hundred guineas to ensure that he would no longer assist the people of the province of Connecticut.⁸¹ Swear as she might that this point was false, she had to submit to it. His illness, his fatigue, the entreaties of his wife and children, all these factors absorbed his courage and made him forget the resolution that he had made to remain in prison until he had obtained justice. Alas, he would be there even now!

One day he asked Colonel Cosmo Gordon⁸² (the only English officer who had the humanity to visit the prisoners), "Is it possible for thieves to triumph with such impunity?"

"It's unfortunate, indeed, my poor American, but that's the way it is."

"Why?" asked Colonel Smith.

⁸¹ These details of his release accord almost exactly (except for the guineas/pounds distinction) with Commandant Pattison's recommendation to Major André, written by Pattison's aide Captain Adye in a letter dated September 9, 1779: ". . . Josiah Smith who is also confined in the Provost being ill, General Pattison is inclined to admit him on good Bail for £ 500 Sterling which he offers, provided the Commander in Chief has no objection" (NYHS *Collections* [1875] 262).

⁸² One lively anecdote after another attaches to the name of Col. Cosmo Gordon (1737-1813). When British troops evacuated Philadelphia on the morning of June 18, 1778, Gordon was left behind because he overslept, "stupid, no doubt, from the debauch of the previous night" (Stryker 49). In August 1782 Gordon was tried and honorably acquitted for cowardice and "Neglect of Duty before the Enemy on the 23rd of June, 1780" at the Battle of Springfield, New Jersey ("The Trial of the Hon. Col. Cosmo Gordon"). But on September 4, 1783 he "shot and killed his accuser Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Thomas" in a duel held in Hyde Park, London (Stryker 49; Gilchrist 133-134). Over a century later, charges of cowardice continued to plague the Gordon family name. First-class passengers Sir Cosmo Duff Gordon and his wife jumped into "Boat 1" as the *Titanic* was sinking, and Gordon promised to pay the crewmen £ 5 each. They were accused of ordering the crewmen to row the nearly-empty boat away from the drowning passengers (Barczewski 102-109).

“Because it’s an axiom of the present reign not to discourage the refugees at all from whatever harm they can do.”

“So have the Americans become animals, monsters that can no longer demand the lowliest rights of humanity?” I asked Colonel Gordon.

“However right you may be, those gentleman aren’t necessarily all wrong. And that’s precisely why you haven’t gone before the war council. The president, who is an honest soldier, wouldn’t be able to prevent himself from rendering you some justice—which is something he mustn’t do. I pity you, poor American.”

I myself got out of prison two weeks after Colonel Smith, and I am unaware of the course of his destiny.^{83 84}

⁸³ *I have had the pleasure of seeing him since at his home. His daughter was married and had two children. They were all living with her father.*

⁸⁴ Col. Smith died in 1786 at the age of 62, and his daughter Juliana Smith died in 1808 at the age of 48.

From the New York prison, 20 August 1780.

2. Anecdote of Sergeant B. A.⁸⁵

A short time after entering New York, where as you know I came with the intention of embarking for Europe, I was put in prison as a consequence of the arrival of the French fleet at Rhode Island, and an anonymous letter received at headquarters about which I have since learned.⁸⁶ As you know, the slightest suspicion under a military government and in the midst of a civil war suffices to deprive a man of freedom and often of life. If ever I had the occasion to be reflective, it was under this roof of torments, for I am even more sensitive to the impressions of evil than to those of good. The first is a corrosive acid, the other a balmy oil that leaves behind only the sweet perfume of its parts. I will not sully our correspondence with the disgusting details of the atrocious crimes, deadly mishaps and misfortunes, and the acts of tyranny, injustice and cruelty that I witnessed during my three-month stay. The story of a few of my companions will be the only account that I give you because I believe that it characterizes the miseries of civil war, as well as the manner in which the English, blinded by their perverse destiny, conducted this same war. One can say of them, in general, that

⁸⁵ "Sergeant B. A." is St. John de Crèvecoeur's pseudonym for Sergeant John Taswell, Fourth Battalion, New Jersey Volunteers.

⁸⁶ See my introduction on the web of intrigue surrounding St. John de Crèvecoeur's arrest and detention (49-60).

the story of what they have done and what they ought not to have done would be much longer and more unpleasant to write, than the story of what they have not done and what they ought to have done. Oh, you sad echoes of that dreadful prison! Are you not tired of rehearsing the moans and groans that have been voiced for so many years within the confines of those walls? Let the ones who speak to us about the humanity of the English go to New York; let them consult the records of their dungeons and sugar houses;⁸⁷ let them read the history of pointlessly cruel acts committed in our countryside; let them survey the list of houses burned down so as to plunder them, under the pretext of extinguishing the flames, etc.; and if they are not yet convinced, let them be transported to Bengal.⁸⁸ On their return, their tears will efface—I am sure of it—the story that they will want to relate after their observations, or they will be forced to draw a curtain over that hideous prospect.

The Tartarus⁸⁹ where I did my time is presided over by a man unique to his species, I hope.⁹⁰ The organs of his body and the sensations of his soul seem to have been matched expressly for the terrible occupation for which he was destined. He is a callous man if ever there was one, upon whom the tears of sorrow and misfortune, the cries of chastisement, and the machinery of

⁸⁷ *Buildings where American prisoners were locked up.*

⁸⁸ Bengal experienced one of the worst famines in history from 1769-1771. One-third of the population perished (10 million people). The calamity prompted fierce criticism of British colonial policies in India (Johns 81-112).

⁸⁹ In ancient Greek and Roman mythology, Tartarus was the region of the Underworld located in the center of the earth, where wrongdoers and enemies of the Olympian gods were eternally confined and tortured.

⁹⁰ Provost Marshal William Cunningham.

punishment have no effect. He is a man whose heart, molded by a dreadful implacability, seems to delight in whatever grieves those whom he can call rebels, and seems to find pleasure in implementing a system of barbarity that he calls duty. From my window, how many women did I not count tied to the stake to be flogged? Each time, I saw this executioner armed with an ox's pizzle⁹¹ mercilessly lacerating his Negro⁹² when he noticed that the arm of that African, less savage than his own, diminished, out of pity for a woman, if not the number then at least the weight of the blows that she had to receive. I also saw an artillery soldier flogged on the same principle.

On the night of August 14th⁹³ we heard gunshots. You can imagine the degree of curiosity that this noise excited, but fear of the dungeon prevented us the next day from asking the slightest question of the man who came to open the door of our room and count us. Two days later, a sergeant from the regiment of Colonel B.-----K.⁹⁴ was brought under our roof. Chance led him to our room even though it was for civilians.⁹⁵

⁹¹ A bull's penis (literally "nerve of the bull"), dried and used as a rattan or small truncheon.

⁹² Most likely his henchman and hangman Richmon(d), an escaped "mulatto" slave from Pennsylvania, who, according to a newspaper advertisement, escaped from Cunningham as well:
 One Guinea Reward. RUN AWAY black man named Richmon . . . All master of vessels are warned against harbouring him at their peril, he being the Common HANGMAN. The above reward will be paid to any person who will secure said negro, so as the Provost Marshal may have him again, by Captain CUNNINGHAM, Provost Martial. (Dandridge 101-104; *Royal Gazette*, August 4, 1781)

⁹³ Actually the night of August 18th-19th, 1779.

⁹⁴ Lieutenant Colonel Abraham Van Buskirk, Fourth Battalion, New Jersey Volunteers, was a prosperous doctor from Bergen County, New Jersey, who raised a loyalist regiment that inspired terror in New Jersey colonists. He burned many a barn and church belonging to his old neighbors, and served under Benedict Arnold in the brutal raids along the Connecticut coast (Van Buskirk 177; *Report on American Manuscripts* vol. 3, 329).

“I hope my presence here doesn’t bother you too much, gentlemen. I won’t disturb you for long.”

“So what did you do?” asked Colonel Smith, one of our company.⁹⁶

“My duty,” he replied. “But I believe there’s another who didn’t do his. I’m afraid I’ll have to pay with my head for his mistake or misfortune.”

“Well, who are you? What’s your story?” asked the same person.

“I’m a sergeant in the regiment of B.----K.⁹⁷ Before the war, I owned a fairly sizeable plantation in Morris County.⁹⁸ Driven by the feeling of loyalty and obedience to the stirrings of my conscience and, frankly, believing I was performing my duty, I abandoned everything I had at the beginning of the war to come take refuge behind the lines of the king with my wife and eight children. As soon as I had arrived, some people approved of my conduct, telling me that all Americans should do as much, and that I was a brave man. Others told me,

‘You’re a big fool, B. A.,⁹⁹ not to have stayed with your countrymen and to have left your property behind to come here and die loyally of hunger and grief.

In the newspaper article “The Old Jail,” Pintard says of Buskirk that “his influence seduced many young men, to their ultimate grief and sorrow, to abandon their house, and join the British standard against their country.” He also relates an anecdote about Buskirk’s rapid about-face from patriot to loyalist as soon as British troops arrived in America, and about his treacherous treatment of his old Bergen County friend, John Fell, who served time in the Provost (Pintard).

⁹⁵ Perhaps to keep him in a separate room from the enemy soldiers he had just faced. A captain and six privates from among the “fugitive rebels” of this battle had also been “lodged *en Provost*” (*Royal Gazette*, August 21, 1779).

⁹⁶ Colonel Josiah Smith (1723-1786). See Letter 1.

⁹⁷ Buskirk.

⁹⁸ In northern New Jersey.

⁹⁹ The text actually reads “A. B.”

Didn't you know that all merit, all American obedience, such as it is, is supremely scorned behind these lines? Nothing is good, praiseworthy and rewarded except among the English and Scottish. True, Parliament generously fixed a large sum to be distributed to the neediest, and they intended to give provisions to everyone; but this sum disappeared in the hands of the treasurers, and the greedy commissaries are denying us these very provisions or stealing half of them. Often, they give us food that's spoiled and we can't take it. That's what our fine distributors rely upon; then they fatten their pigs with it.'

'But hasn't the government published several proclamations inviting faithful subjects of the king to come here where every kind of protection is promised them?' I asked.

'Obviously, you've only just arrived, since you attribute to these public documents a virtue they don't possess. Listen once and for all. They are relics offered for our veneration to deceive us, which is ordinary under these circumstances. They are despised by all who come near them, just as they are by all those who publish and display them for the admiration of men. There is nothing in the world as deceptive as these proclamations. They used this crude charm to allure the Americans' very own Negroes, and they weren't ashamed to spread around a swarm of false promises before their very eyes. It was nine days ago, I believe, that captains of war vessels forced some of them into a terrible impressment in New York under pretence of completing their ships' companies. They abducted more than three hundred and transported them to the islands where they sold them, just as they've done with all those whom they've stolen in

Virginia and the two Carolinas since the beginning of this war. By another proclamation, officers were ordered to spare the harvests of colonists on York, Nassau, and Staten Islands.¹⁰⁰ However, Milord R-----n¹⁰¹ conducted an exercise on a cornfield the other day, even though the owner of the field showed him this public document. You have no idea of the lack of moral and physical discipline of this army. All the evil they judge fit to do is legitimized as soon as they do it to the Americans.’

“These details surprised me, I confess, but they didn’t discourage me. I was full of zeal then. A short time later, Colonel B.----K., whom I’d known before the war, made me a sergeant in his regiment and obtained rations for my family. Seven months ago, I lost my eldest son at my side in a skirmish near New York. I’ve always behaved like a gentleman; I’ve simply done my duty without adding any cruelty to the horrors of our profession; I’ve always been a brave soldier. Am I wrong, gentlemen, to call myself brave? Look at the wounds I received on board the *Admiral Mathews* in the Mediterranean.¹⁰² But it won’t be long before I’m hanged.”

¹⁰⁰ Manhattan, Long Island and Staten Island. On March 8, 1779, Gen. Clinton published such a proclamation for the protection of *all* farms and gardens in the North American colonies. A year later on March 11, 1780, Lieutenant-General Knyphausen published a similar proclamation specifically for the above islands (*Royal Gazette*).

¹⁰¹ Major-General James Robertson (1717-1788), a Scotsman who rose from the rank of enlisted soldier to lieutenant-general in the British Army during the course of his career, and also served as the royal governor of New York from 1780-1783 (“Robertson, James,” *American National Biography Online*).

¹⁰² Admiral Thomas Mathews (1676-1751) was appointed commander-in-chief of the British Royal Navy in the Mediterranean in 1743. Perhaps our sergeant fought in the Battle of Toulon off the coast of France in February 1744, in which Mathews attacked the rear of a Franco-Spanish fleet and suffered heavy losses. This first naval battle in the War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748) resulted in Mathews’ court-martial and dismissal from the Royal Navy (Potter et al. 20-21).

“Hanged?” I said. “Oh, no! What’ve you done, my friend? Certainly the English won’t hang a man who abandoned a plantation of two hundred acres to enter their service.”

“Still, gentlemen, I *will* be, and all to make amends for the mistake or misfortune of Major S * * .”¹⁰³

“What connection can there possibly be between you and this major?” asked Colonel J. S.¹⁰⁴

“Don’t you know,” he continued, “that the post of Paulus Hook¹⁰⁵ was taken three nights ago by five hundred Americans commanded by Major Lee?”¹⁰⁶

At that moment the mystery was revealed. We learned through this news that the gunshots heard on the night of the 14th ¹⁰⁷ had been fired in the attack

¹⁰³ Major William Sutherland seems to have inserted himself into a string of crucial roles in Revolutionary battles. Lieutenant Sutherland, 38th Regiment of Foot, was approaching Lexington, Massachusetts on April 19, 1775, and reported that a rebel attempted to fire at him, which persuaded Major Pitcairn to order his men to load their muskets. Pitcairn’s men shortly thereafter fired their muskets at minutemen on Lexington green (Cain 64-65). Later that day, Sutherland was slightly wounded while trying to hold Concord Bridge, where the “shot heard round the world” was fired. Sutherland wrote a narrative of the day’s events, contained in *Late news of the excursion and ravages of the king’s troops on the nineteenth of April, 1775: as set forth in the narratives of Lieut. William Sutherland of His Majesty’s 38th Regiment of Foot and of Richard Pope of the 47th regiment*.

¹⁰⁴ Josiah Smith.

¹⁰⁵ *Opposite the City of New York, on the other side of the Hudson River.*

¹⁰⁶ Major Henry Lee (1756-1818), also known as “Light-horse Harry,” was a descendant of the celebrated Lees who were so prominent in the government of colonial Virginia, and his son was the famous Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Henry attended the College of New Jersey (Princeton), and when the war broke out he raised a cavalry and eventually rose to the rank of lieutenant-general, serving subsequently as a major-general in the War of 1812. From 1791-1794 he was the governor of Virginia. He also authored the famous words about Washington upon the latter’s death: “first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen” (Long and Wright 17-23; “Lee, Henry,” *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*).

¹⁰⁷ 18th-19th.

and capture of that post. Paulus Hook is a peninsula on the western bank of the Hudson River where there was a large ferry¹⁰⁸ before the war.

“But once again, how can it be that you, a simple sergeant, are being punished for the mistake of your commander? Tell us all about it, in good faith. Remember that under this roof there are neither Whigs nor Tories; we are no more than prisoners.”

“I *am* going to tell you, gentlemen. Around eleven o’clock on the night of the 14th,¹⁰⁹ Major Lee, at the head of five hundred Americans elites, crossed Salt Marsh to the northwest of the post. In a short time, they surmounted all the obstacles of mud, water and trenches that were defending us on that side. They overtook our detachment without firing a single gunshot. Such were the boldness of their enterprise, the swiftness of their march, and their perfect discipline, that they took more than two-thirds of our garrison prisoners. And in striking contrast to English rapacity, they left our officers’ gold watches alone, which were hanging from the head of their beds. The rest of our garrison withdrew into the small blockhouse from where they fired some gunshots. At daybreak a detachment of English guards crossed the river but it was too late. The surprise of a post so important and so close to headquarters stung His Excellency Sir H. C.¹¹⁰ very deeply. He recently ordered inquiries and I don’t know what the result has been. But I imagine the conduct of our commander has been blamed because they say

¹⁰⁸ Located directly across the river from the World Financial Center, Paulus Hook is now part of Jersey City, New Jersey, and even today is the site of a ferry terminal.

¹⁰⁹ 18th. But the main action did not occur until 3:30-4:00 a.m. on the 19th.

¹¹⁰ Sir Henry Clinton.

that he was neither in the blockhouse nor among the number of prisoners. They say he is going to leave to command the Invalids and undoubtedly vex the poor inhabitants of the Bermudas, where most likely he won't run any risk of being surprised by the Americans. It was resolved at the same time that I was not at the post where I should have been, that I behaved badly, and that all the blame for the surprise should fall on me, a humble sergeant who was not even on duty that night and who even had the good fortune of taking two American prisoners armed with only my bayonet. You know as well as I, gentlemen, what the life of a soldier is worth when compared to the honor and reputation of an officer."¹¹¹

¹¹¹ The Battle of Paulus Hook was a triumphant moment for the Americans. For his "warlike skill and prowess," Major Lee was awarded one of the only six gold medals ordered by Congress during the whole war (Farrier 80-81). According to his own report to Washington, Lee took command of four hundred Virginia and Maryland infantry (one hundred of whom became separated in the hills, or defected because they rejected Lee's command) and one troop of dismounted dragoons, conducting a "rapid march of thirty miles, through mountains, swamps, and deep morasses . . . So rapid was the movement of the troops, that we gained the fort before the discharge of a single piece of artillery." Another point of agreement between Lee's report and St. John de Crèvecoeur's story lies in the conduct of the troops once inside the fort: "Having gained the fort, such was the order of the troops, and attention of the officers, that the soldiers were prevented from plundering, altho' in the midst of every sort." Lee's *coup de main* occurred around 3:30-4:00 a.m. With daylight approaching, and fearful of the enemy's sending additional troops to thwart their retreat over the marshy and hilly terrain, Lee took his prisoners and hastily withdrew, encountering some resistance ahead but overall suffering very minor losses. He maintained that there were so many women, children and sick people that he was prevented from burning the barracks, and that he was unable to find the key to the magazine, which he did not have time to destroy (*Pennsylvania Packet*, September 2, 1779).

Nevertheless, Col. Gist and other affronted officers of the Virginia regiment had Lee court-martialed on a host of charges, including failure to destroy the fort's ammunition, failure to make prisoners out of a party of enemies in the redoubt, and misrepresenting the date of his commission in order to take command over a senior officer. Lee received the ardent support of Washington and Congress and was acquitted of all charges (Farrier 82-83).

Meanwhile, the British were simultaneously humiliated and astonished. General Pattison wrote to Lord Townshend, "What was nearly as Extraordinary as the Enterprize itself and the success of it, is that the Enemy, tho' in full Possession of the Fort, did not Spike a Gun, destroy the Ammunition or do the least Injury to any of the Buildings". The troops that normally garrisoned Paulus Hook were Colonel Buskirk's Fourth Battalion under Brigadier-General Cortland Skinner's Provincial Brigade, together with a portion of the Invalid Battalion commanded by Major William Sutherland. However, earlier in the evening Col. Buskirk had marched out a detachment to surprise a party of one hundred rebels who were trying to block the passage of provisions, leaving Major Sutherland in command of the fort. For that reason, Pattison had earlier sent over a captain and fifty Hessians from Knyphausen's regiment.

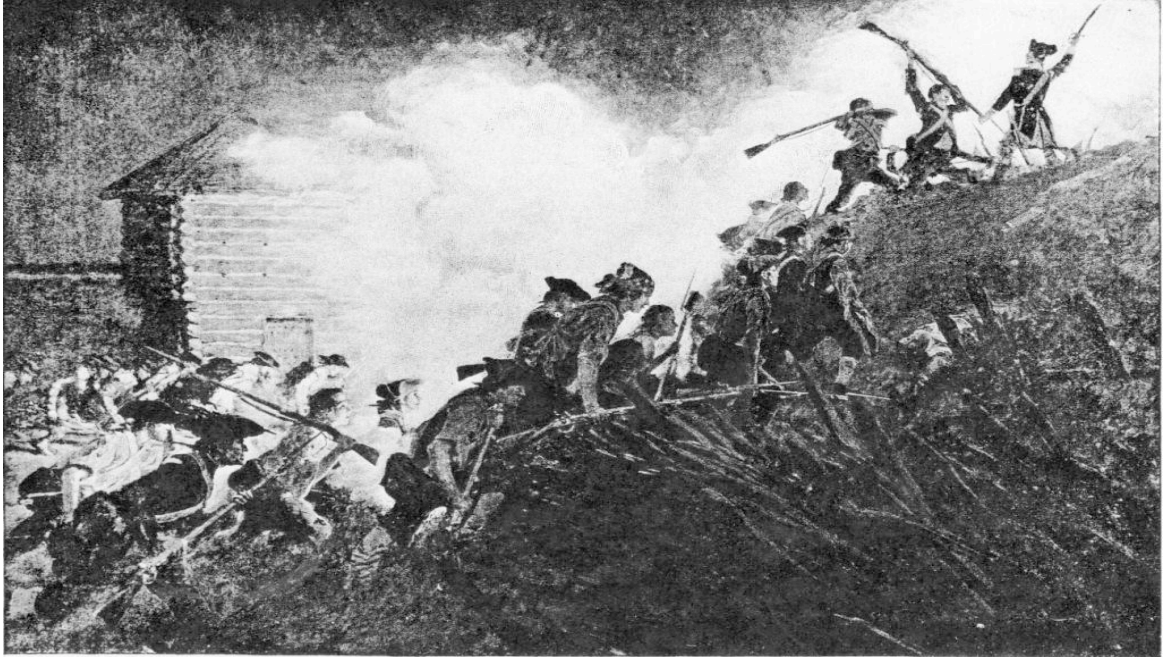
“I know your commander very well,” said Captain B. (one of our companions).¹¹² He’s a rather comical man, one of those untutored Englishmen who firmly believe that every creature not born on their island is of an inferior species. While still an aide-de-camp, he was sent by his general on some business to the home of M. P. S. As he was approaching the house on horseback he broke a window of the room where this colonist was, simply to let

Pattison wrote to Lord Townshend that during the assault by Lee’s troops, a messenger arrived in New York City and delivered Pattison a shocking letter from Major Sutherland, . . . saying that the Enemy having got thro’ the Abbatis had taken the right-hand and center [northerly] Block-Houses & the Principal Fort, but that the Round Redoubt in which was himself with a Captain & 25 Hessians had been defended, that the left [southerly] Block-House was likewise safe and that the Enemy had retreated carrying off with them the Guards of the two Blockhouses which (tho’ almost impregnable except by Cannon) were shamefully abandoned, the Detachment of Artillery from the Fort, and such Officers and Soldiers as were in the Barricks. . . . I thereupon without loss of Time sent over the Flank Companies of the Guards with 100 Men from the Brigade and nearly the same Number of Hessians with a party of Artillery under the Command of the Field Officer of the Day, Lieut. Colonel Gordon. [Colonel Gordon was “the only English officer who had the humanity to visit the prisoners” (111) in Letter 1.]

But Lee’s forces had already departed with their prisoners. Major Sutherland pursued them and managed to capture a captain and several privates—the ones later delivered to the Provost prison. Gen. Pattison reported to Townshend that of the two hundred British troops in the garrison, 9 were killed, 2 were wounded, and 113 were missing or taken prisoner. Gen. Clinton ordered a board of inquiry to assemble at Paulus Hook on the following day to investigate the affair. The board’s conclusions led to the arrest and court martial of Major Sutherland on the charge of general misconduct (NYHS *Collections* [1875] 99-102). Lee had reported to Washington that Sutherland “saved himself by a soldier’s counterfeiting his person” (*Pennsylvania Packet* September 2, 1779). However, on September 4, 1779, in another letter to Lord Townshend, Gen. Pattison wrote that Major Sutherland had been “honourably acquitted by the Opinion of the Court Martial” (NYHS *Collections* [1875] 108).

Major Sutherland did, in fact, go to Bermuda, and scandal followed him there. He was apparently withholding or misallocating funds. On March 22, 1781, Gov. Bruere wrote to Gen. Clinton that the acting engineer of the fort would be ruined if he were not reimbursed, and that Major Sutherland’s conduct “has injured the garrison” (*Report on American Manuscripts* vol. 2, 260). Thus St. John de Crèvecoeur seems to have had perfect hindsight when he supplied the character of Sergeant B. A. with the presentiment that Major Sutherland would “undoubtedly vex the poor inhabitants of the Bermudas” (110).

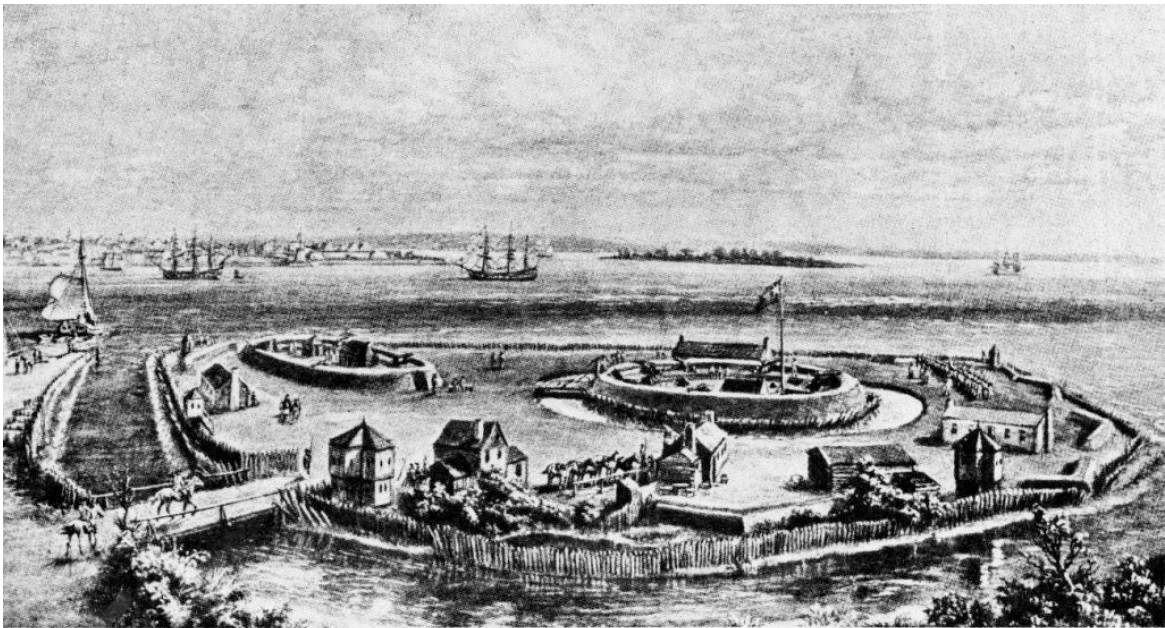
¹¹² Captain Brown of Bergen Point, now part of the city of Bayonne in Hudson County, New Jersey. See Letter 4.



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From "*The Story of the Revolution*",
by Henry Cabot Lodge.

THE CAPTURE OF PAULUS HOOK BY MAJOR LEE
"Up they came out of the ditch and into the works"

Fig. 6: Illustration of the Capture of Paulus Hook



THE BRITISH POST OF "PAULUS HOOK"
From the painting by Edward L. Henry, N. A.

Fig. 7: Painting of the Post of Paulus Hook

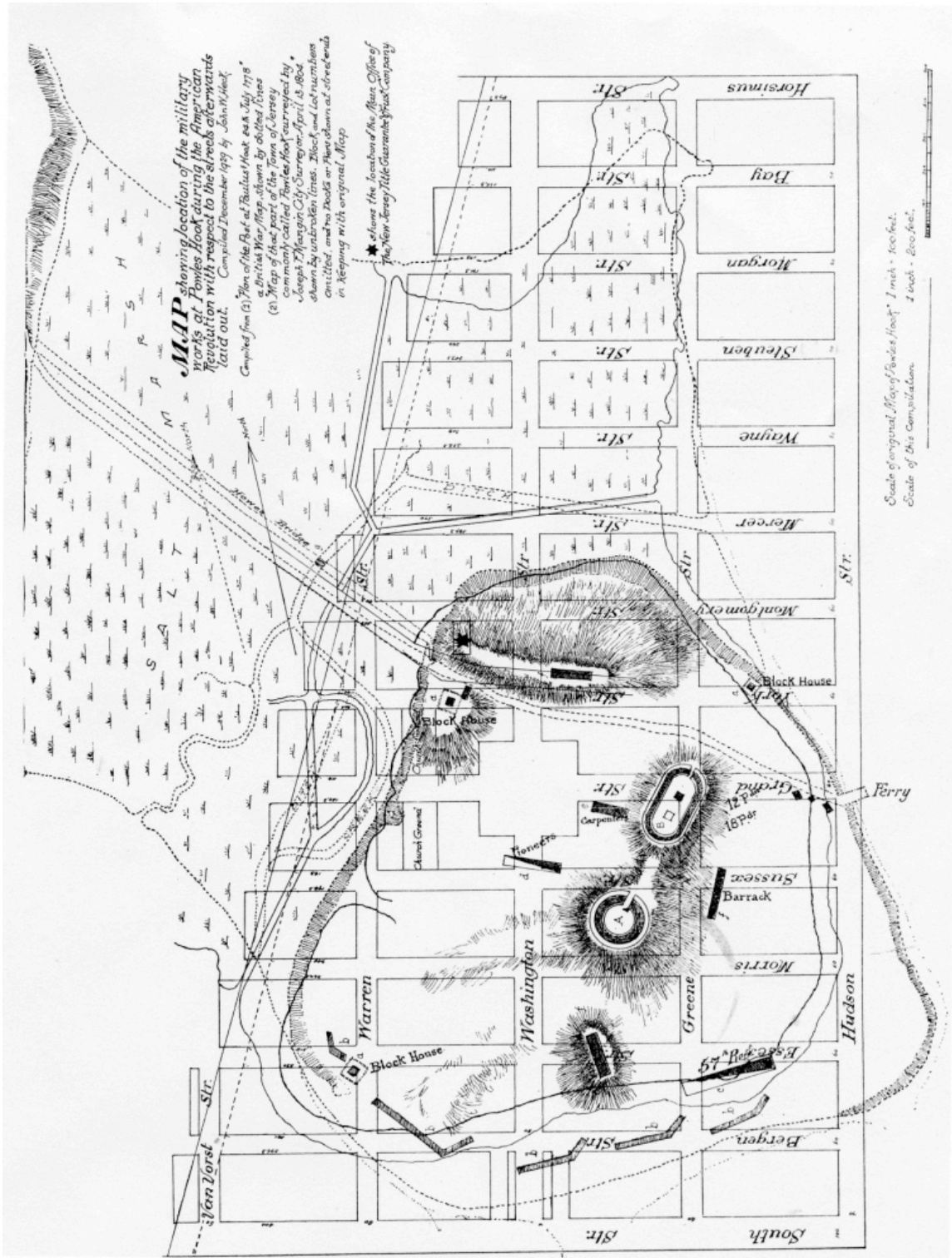


Fig. 8: Map of the British Fort of Paulus Hook superimposed on the later street grid of Paulus Hook in Jersey City.

him know that he, an English major, was there, and that the colonist had to come and speak to *him*. You see, following the maxims that they brought to our country, the act of knocking on the door would have been to treat a respectable American with too much complaisance. So here you are now, poor Sergeant, doomed to atone for the fault of this renowned major. You're like the goat burdened with the curse. But instead of releasing it into the woods as the Jews do (therein more philosophical than the English), which would be only a light punishment, you say they're threatening that you'll lose your life?"¹¹³

"So my comrades have informed me," answered the sergeant. "God will dispose of me as he wishes. Still, it's very hard to be punished as a criminal for the fault of another, having nothing for which to reproach oneself."

"But perhaps things will take another turn," replied Captain B. "You have yet to be tried by the war council. Among those gentlemen, they say, are men of the highest integrity, who would blush to spill innocent blood."

"Gentlemen, you *do* have a high opinion of our war councils, don't you?" the sergeant retorted. "Don't you know the history of their verdicts? They have returned several that indicate all the partiality of civil war. The members of these

¹¹³ With the goat's release into the woods, it became the "escape goat," or scapegoat, carrying on its back the collective sins of the community. William Tyndale coined the word "scapegoote" in his 1530 English translation of Leviticus 16, in which the man who leads the goat away is to "let the goote goo fre in the wilderness" (Douglas 3-12). Subsequent Western-language translations have followed Tyndale's interpretation. Ironically, however, the English were acting in perfect accord with the ancient Jewish ritual if their intention was to execute Sergeant B. A. According to Talmudic exegesis of the Hebrew passage from Leviticus, this goat was led to the wilderness and thrown off a rugged cliff to its death (Yoma 67b). The two different fates of the goat stem from Tyndale's attributing to the Hebrew word *azazel* a meaning of departure or removal or escape, instead of the interpretation of most Jewish scholars as an evil spirit of the wilderness, or a rugged cliff. In ancient Greek society, the "scapegoat" (*pharmakos*) was a man, not a goat, who was paraded through the village and ritually cast out—sometimes even meeting his death—so that the village might be cleansed of its moral pollution (*miasma*).

councils seem to be American Tories led astray by their zeal, and they condemn all who are called Whigs. Our garrison councils are especially excessive in their blindness, haste, indifference, and everything you can imagine. Although I'm a mere sergeant, my former estate as citizen compels me to make a thousand reflections on what's transpiring and what I'm seeing."

"It's true," resumed Colonel Smith, "that the spirit of infatuation, dissipation and cruelty seems to have infected the whole English army. They look upon us as wild beasts that don't deserve to enjoy the most ordinary rights of humanity. Hence this demon of cruelty and plunder that justifies the most atrocious crimes; hence this tyrannical and absurd system that will forever tarnish the English name among us and make the honest people of Great Britain blush at the orders of their ministers and the all-too-faithful execution by their satellites. Alas, poor Sergeant," continued Colonel Smith, "why didn't you stay on your plantation? Why did you seek to bathe in the blood of your new countrymen, this adopted land that had nourished you for so many years and on which you had begotten your numerous family?"

"Oh, gentlemen!" answered the sergeant. "I admit, I was wrong. If I had the chance to do it all over again, I'd act much differently. The ingratitude, contempt and neglect that all these men have suffered, who with the best faith in the world have taken refuge here, revolts me every time I think of it.¹¹⁴ Half have already died of grief; the others, peaceable farmers abandoned to the sting of all their wants and a useless repentance, have become madmen who insult and

¹¹⁴ The loyalist refugees.

tarnish the cause they've adopted. The barbarous conduct of the government,¹¹⁵ which scarcely gives them rations, has turned them into hungry wolves that devour, pillage and destroy everything."

"That's why they tolerate them," added Colonel Smith, "that's why they find great profit in everything they do."

"If I don't disturb you too much, gentlemen, I'll gladly stay with you. It's a consolation before dying to speak with an open heart and to be with honest people." But hardly had we given him our consent when one of the subalterns of the provost marshal came and ordered him to withdraw into a room that he indicated.

The story of this sergeant compelled us to make a thousand reflections. "If a fine man like him is condemned to death," I said to these gentlemen, "then what will our fate be?" But soon this sad scene was forgotten as a result of the profound sense of our situation and our own misfortunes. All sensibility was now concentrated on our own souls. The ill fortune of others made only light impressions on them. It is only today in the bosom of liberty and repose that all these sensations are renewed even more keenly than when I was witness to these sad scenes.

Four days later the sergeant was led before the war council, and on his return he confirmed for us all of his fears.

"They weren't at all willing to listen to my defense," he told us. "My colonel,¹¹⁶ because he was not at the action, was not even summoned to appear

¹¹⁵ On the Errata page at the end of *Lettres-1787*, the word "Gouverneur" was corrected to read "Gouvernement."

for fear that the testimony he might give about my prior conduct would serve to soften some of the members. I'm a man past all hope." Two days later he was led again before the same tribunal and he did not harbor any greater expectations. Toward the afternoon of the following Saturday as I was walking in the gallery with this man, the provost called out to him through the iron bars that confined us and spoke the following words:

"Sergeant B. A., if you have any affairs to settle in this world, on my soul, hurry up, because, by God, tomorrow at eleven o'clock I'll take you out of it faster than you entered it. That's the sentence of the war council. You hear me, Sergeant?"

"Yes, I hear you," he replied weakly. "Unfortunately, I don't have any affairs at all to settle here below. I abandoned everything I possessed for the cause of the king. I have only to ask God for resignation and courage."¹¹⁷

No circumstance in my life has ever struck me like this one. I still remember the motionless posture and the countenance of that wretched man, a

¹¹⁶ Buskirk.

¹¹⁷ The Orderly Books of Clinton's New York headquarters contain an entry dated September 6, 1779, with the findings of the tribunal:

Serg't John Taswell [St. John de Crèvecoeur's "Sergeant B. A."], of the 4th Battalion New Jersey Volunteers tried by the General Court Martial of which Lt. Col. Leland, Foot Guards is President, for quitting his Post, at the Left Hand Block House at Paulus Hook in a shameful and scandalous manner on the night between the 18th and 19th of August, is found Guilty of the Crime alleged against him, in Breach of the 13th Article of the 14th Section of the Articles of War; and, is therefore Sentenced to suffer Death by being Hanged by the Neck untill he is Dead. The Commander in Chief approves the Sentence.

Strangely, the left blockhouse is the one that Pattison reported was successfully defended. The central and right blockhouses were the ones captured by Lee's men. This discrepancy gives credence to Sergeant B. A.'s claim that he was "not even on duty that night" (110).

An entry in the Orderly Books on the following day, September 7, sets the date of the sergeant's execution: "Serg't John Taswell of the 4th Batt'n, New Jersey Volunteers, under Sentence of Death, is to be executed on Thursday next, the 9th Inst., between the Hours of Nine and Twelve, within the Garrison of Paulus Hook" (NYHS "Orderly Books, 1776-1779").

picture of terror and fright. The elongated features of his face, the position of his body suddenly arrested as if by a superior power, and his attitude, which was the embodiment of horror, all announced the profound impression that his last sentence had just made on his organs. Every type of animal movement was halted. His eyes were fixed on the ground; his nerves, losing their ordinary spring, allowed his arms to fall perpendicularly on each side; his chest swelled higher than I had ever seen a man's chest, in order to make room for the sudden anguish that filled it. This mass of bitterness would have suffocated him if it had not finally evaporated into deep sighs. He made no complaints. I observed that those who surrounded him and whose future lot was perhaps not any better looked at him with fixed eyes from which large tears silently trickled down.

As soon as this dreadfully painful moment had passed, he withdrew into a dark, isolated room and shut the door. Imagine our surprise, when an hour later he came to find us again looking very calm and serene. "I come," he said to me, "to beg you to spend an hour with me."

"An hour with you, my friend?" I asked. "Oh dear, what service can I possibly render you?"

"One that I need—your conversation and counsel can help me keep away the torture that awaits me, all the horror that that first moment inspires."

"Your choice distresses me much more than it flatters me. I myself am enveloped in clouds of the most melancholy sadness. My senses are numbed by misery, my faculties dulled by the excess of my reflections, my nerves weakened by the most violent shocks. From what spring am I to draw these lessons and

consolations? Unfortunately, they dried up a long time ago. I no longer have the energy that supplies the means—and even the courage—to inspire others.

Wouldn't you do better to send for the chaplain of this prison?"

"I don't know him," he replied. "Besides, what could he tell me? A few official platitudes? Dry, frigid, ineffectual words without the balm of genuine compassion? Only an unhappy man like you can put yourself in my situation and lighten my sorrows by sharing them. Perhaps he would question me about religious principles that I was raised on. Unfortunately I've forgotten them all! It's too late on the eve of death to take refuge in hypocrisy or the catechism. All my life, I can confidently say I've been an honest man, a good worker, a good husband, a good father and a brave soldier. Would God refuse me his repose for having forgotten a few details of my education?"

"You've made a good choice," said Colonel Smith to Sergeant B. A. "Mr. St. John preached so well the other day to a poor English soldier condemned to receive five hundred lashes that this same soldier has since confessed to us that he owed the courage and silence with which he endured his punishment to that conversation. And all things considered," continued Colonel Smith, "it's much harder to receive five hundred blows on the bare back than to die by the cord. That's one of the simplest acts on this earth."

"It's all the simpler because it's the last," added Mr. * * * (an inhabitant of Georgia and one of our company).¹¹⁸

At last I followed the sergeant. His room was very dark, as I mentioned.

¹¹⁸ Of the nine core occupants of St. John's prison cell in these five letters, this unnamed Georgian and a prisoner identified as P. S. S. in Letter 5 are the only two prisoners whom St. John leaves without any character sketch or anecdote.

“It’s not the act of dying that makes me tremble,” he said to me with animated eyes. “I’ve seen death several times in my life without fleeing from it or fearing it. But to die unjustly, to abandon a wife and seven children to all the necessities of nature, the hardness of the captain, the insults of soldiers, the greediness of the commissaries who immediately after my death will stop giving my family the pittance of provisions that they enjoy . . . that’s what makes me sick, that’s what drives away my resignation, the calm courage that I seek, that’s ultimately what makes tomorrow’s ceremony so dreadful to contemplate.”

“Oh, my friend,” I said, “are you the first who has been condemned unjustly since this cruel war began? Are you unaware that several hundred men, women and children have been burned and murdered on our frontiers by the orders of your ministers? They were at least as innocent as you. In all of the English expeditions throughout our land, how many victims of a useless cruelty have you not seen? How many people pierced through with bayonets have perished amid torments and insults, who no more deserved death than you? And after all, what is death, so fearsome and dreadful to our eyes? It is the sleep of nature, the inaction of matter, the moral peace of mind; it is the primitive state of this same matter; it is perhaps a simpler and more natural state than that of existence because in order to exist there must be movement, a more particular order, in short, an organic arrangement. They say life is a voyage that leads good people to happiness. Well, this is the end of that voyage. Perhaps it *is* easier to die than to be born. Death is the consolation of the wretched; it is the boundary beyond which despotism and injustice are unable to reach. Brave soldier that you

are, haven't you always been prepared to die from the time that you were in arms? It's only the trappings of death that frighten you. Tell me, weren't you at risk of being killed every time you were at your post? Doesn't Nature, which gives birth to us in the midst of all its plagues, clearly announce that each of us is always at his post, since each of us is always exposed? To die by the cord is humiliating, I admit, but why should this circumstance distress you? You will no longer BE as soon as it tightens around you, and who cares what they say after that? Would you cherish the phantom of an opinion even after the source of your opinions is forever dried up? Your conscience acquits you. That is the only judge whose sentence ought to console or distress us. As for the condition of your wife and children, I confess that it's heart-rending for a good father to leave behind a part of himself, exposed to all the wants and all the evils that proceed from them. That, my friend, is the chain that holds back so many fine men under this roof. Without that, would they endure, as they do, the injustices, the tedium, the languor of captivity? Your wife has only one course of action to take, and that is to withdraw to the interior of the country and establish all her children as apprentices in various trades. You know as well as I that knowledge of a good trade is considered here to be equal in value to a hundred acres of land. She herself will go and spin in the home of a good colonist for half a piaster per week, where she'll be well fed and well lodged. If you like this advice, write to her, and I'll take care of forwarding your letter through Dr. B. the first time he pays a visit.¹¹⁹ What do you say?"

¹¹⁹ Dr. Bard, the prison physician, whom St. John de Crèvecoeur saw for his illnesses while in New York during the year after his imprisonment (*Esquisse de ma vie*).

He sighed deeply. "This happy idea comforts me," he replied. "I accept your plan. But when I'm dead, you'll no longer be interested in my family. You'll no longer think about the deplorable condition of my poor, crushed widow. Promise me now, before God, to do everything you can to deliver her the letter that I'm going to write, and to add to it another one in which you explain to her the favor you've just done me."

"Yes, my dear Sergeant, I promise you before God, the protector of the unfortunate."

"Swear to it," he repeated, "on this ray of sunlight, which at this moment shines on our hands."

"Yes, I swear on this ray of sunlight. May these eyes of mine cease to gaze at this divine reflection of the Creator, may they be condemned to eternal darkness if I forget, or if I neglect, to carry out what I've just promised you."

"I'll die more contented," he said. "Oh, Being of Beings, Universal Father, whom I can neither see nor comprehend, will you deign to become the protector of the widow and orphans that I'm about to leave behind me? Accept the sacrifice of my life. Pardon the sins and errors that I've committed. Give me the means to forget everything that still attaches me to earth and allow me to suffer my fate with decency and courage." He then thanked me for my kindness and wished me a short captivity.¹²⁰

"Alas," I said, "perhaps I'm destined to suffer the same fate. They think I'm guilty of several things, which, following the customary practice here, lead to

¹²⁰ If St. John de Crèvecoeur correctly dated his September 17 release, he was actually released from prison about one week later (*Esquisse de ma vie*).

death. Tomorrow you die; in a few days it may be that I'll die too. So let's arm ourselves with resignation and courage. Let's view life as an ocean voyage: the shorter it is, the better off we are. Conversely, why should we believe that life is happy only when it is long? Farewell, Sir, for the last time."

"Farewell, Sir, forever. Would to Heaven that I had only a few minutes that I had to wait for the end of the tragedy! What a painful and terrible night I have ahead of me! If only I could sweeten its bitterness by spending it with my wife and children!"

As soon as I had left him I entered Congress Hall, where American officers were confined, the ones deemed unworthy of being on parole with other officers at their assigned places on Long Island.¹²¹ My heart was swollen with a thousand sensations and my imagination was full of sad, dismal images. I recounted for these gentlemen the preceding scene without forgetting the smallest detail.

"What a shame," I told them, "for a good man like this sergeant to perish at the hands of injustice, and after having encountered so many dangers, to come here and end his career in such a cruel and appalling manner! Was it worth the grief to be a loyalist, to have abandoned the ease and abundance that he enjoyed on his plantation? Oh gentlemen, if only you had heard him recount his story as I did! If only you had seen, as I did, his scars, his noble attestations of bravery and service!

¹²¹ "Congress Hall" was the derisive name given to the cell where American officers were confined. Captured American officers were often granted parole, which allowed them to move about somewhat freely within prescribed boundaries on Long Island, often in the village of Flatbush. Breach of parole frequently led to confinement in the Provost.

“And why didn’t he show them to the members of the war council?”

sharply asked John Blewer (Lieutenant of the Third Pennsylvania Brigade).^{122 123}

¹²² *He has since been killed in South Carolina.*

¹²³ “John Blewer” is most likely Lieutenant George Blewer of the Fourth Pennsylvania Regiment, who was captured at Germantown on October 4, 1777, and imprisoned in New York until his exchange on January 29, 1781. He was transferred to the First Pennsylvania Regiment on January 1, 1783, and, according to the *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army*, served until the end of the war (Heitman 107). I have yet to find a record of his death.

In the November 1, 1779, return of the Provost, signed by William Cunningham, “Geo. Blewer L.^t” is listed as having been confined in the Provost on July 12 for breach of parole (“Returns of the Provost” 73:28), less than a week after the July 7 date by which St. John de Crèvecoeur was confined in the Provost.

George Blewer is a colorful figure, several of whose controversial life episodes are preserved in the historical record. He first surfaces in an incident as a student from the Class of 1777 at The College of New Jersey (Princeton). He spent only one term at the college: November 1774 to April 10, 1775. One of his classmates was John Pintard, author of the 1831 newspaper article describing the Provost prison during the war (see my introduction). According to Harrison’s *Princetonians 1776-1783*, when the two of them along with other classmates “took to playing cards and drinking eggnog in violation of the College rules,” their behavior was discovered by their tutors and reported to President Witherspoon. They all denied the charges except for George Blewer, who confessed everything. All nine boys were publicly reprimanded and the incident was put behind them—but it ended Blewer’s Princeton career. In a January 28, 1817, letter to his eldest daughter, Pintard describes how Blewer burst into tears and confessed all when the president pressured the boys to speak. Although Blewer avoided punishment, he “lost his character, no one spoke to him or w^d. associate with him and after spring vacation, a high spirited youth he came no more to College.”

During the war when Pintard was assisting his uncle Louis Pintard, Deputy Commissary General of prisoners in New York, “among the prisoners he met was George Blewer, his erstwhile college friend, who had been captured at Germantown. Blewer ‘burst into tears & hung round my neck & asked pardon for having betrayed us.’”

By the time of his release from prison on January 29, 1781, he had been promoted to first lieutenant. “The next indication of his service finds him among the troops engaged in the siege at Yorktown, Virginia, where on the night of September 23, 1781, he seems unwisely to have sought an amicable settlement to a quarrel between two other officers, only to have one of them seize his pistol and ‘snap’ it at him.” That officer was court-martialed and discharged, but Blewer fortunately escaped charges of misconduct.

Sometime after Cornwallis surrendered on October 19, 1781, Washington apparently sent Blewer to General Nathanael Greene’s Southern Army. “He was at Halifax, North Carolina, on March 20, 1782, when he was described by a fellow officer as being of the Fourth Pennsylvania, serving as an officer with the Maryland Line. Presumably, he subsequently joined General Greene in South Carolina.” (South Carolina is the place where St. John de Crèvecoeur indicates in a footnote that Blewer died.) Harrison continues, “On January 1, 1783, he was a lieutenant in the Pennsylvania First Regiment, but a return for that unit on the following September 23 does not list him among its officers. His service thus probably had ended during the preceding summer.”

In the fall of 1825, Blewer’s nephew and heir George Ord applied to the federal government for a pension or land warrant. In the same year, two female acquaintances of Blewer affirmed that Blewer had “died single and without having Children or Brother or Sister and that his mother’ was heir to him as the ‘next of kin.’ She had died in 1801.”

St. John de Crèvecoeur’s indication in his footnote that Blewer died in the 1780s may be valid, for Blewer was not mentioned in the will of his father, which was proved on August 25,

If they refused him the liberty to speak, wouldn't the sight of his faithful scars have been a powerful advocate for him? What an argument, indeed, in favor of a soldier, especially in front of fine officers!"

During the course of my narration I had observed that this young man listened most attentively. I had equally observed that his face was inflamed, his animated eyes expressing regret and anger. The indignation, spurred on by the effervescence of youth, seemed to boil in his veins.

"Was he sentenced?" he quickly asked me.

"Yes," I replied. "Tomorrow he dies."

"Great God, to what length of blindness, cruelty, and horrible indifference have you permitted these proud Islanders to push things! When will you help us drive these oppressors out of our continent? Haven't they bathed it in our blood enough? Haven't they sullied it with their crimes enough?"

"I have an idea," he continued, "a good one, I believe. Isn't there still time to send a petition on behalf of this unfortunate man to His Excellency Sir Henry C.?¹²⁴ What do you think?"

1789. Blewer's father was Captain Joseph Blewer, a shipmaster and large property owner in Philadelphia whose mercantile business extended down the coast to the West Indies. He also served on the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, which helped to prepare a defense of the city. (Harrison 90-91; 151-54. John Pintard's letter to his eldest daughter belongs to the John Pintard Papers at the NYHS.)

The American Historical Register and Monthly Gazette sheds light on why Blewer left General Greene in 1782 and in 1783 appears as a lieutenant in the Pennsylvania First Regiment. Captain Armstrong arrested him on November 30, 1782 and had him tried by the General Court on December 5, 1782, for "drunkenness when on duty" and for "neglect of duty." The proceedings of the court-martial were referred to the Board of War and in 1783 General Greene ordered his transfer to Pennsylvania. In an August 30, 1783 return, "vice Lieutenant Blewer" is stated to have retired on half-pay (Browning and Philbrook 58, 243-44, 247, 461).

¹²⁴ Clinton.

“It’s a generous and magnanimous thought, my dear Lieutenant,” I said. “The act is all the nobler since this man is a royalist, even more of a criminal against our country than a European earning six pence a day. But how will you persuade the provost marshal to take care of this petition?”

“It’s the hour of his daily intoxication,” replied the lieutenant. “This could be a favorable circumstance. Who knows? After all, isn’t that barbarian the son of a woman? Couldn’t he feel some quiverings of an involuntary humanity after the wine has expanded his heart? Couldn’t the thirst and intoxication of his senses postpone the eagerness to punish that’s so natural to him?¹²⁵ I want to give it a try. I have to write this petition, and then we’ll have the sergeant sign it. The faint glimmer of hope that this petition will be able to offer him will at least serve to take the edge off the bitterness of the night he’s about to spend. My friend, it’ll be a faint lamp that we will have placed in the corner of his cell, which I hope will banish the images of death and the frightening dreams.”

“Fine fellow,” I said, “your idea is good and saintly. You can say that you’re truly inspired—yes, you are, because you’re seeking to save the life of a man who’s your enemy.”

He wrote the petition in less than half an hour. It was conceived in all the warmth of his generous heart. I swear, I’ve never heard anything that equaled the expressive power and sublime terseness of that piece. We went to the sergeant’s room.

¹²⁵ John Pintard writes that Cunningham curtailed and sold prisoners’ rations to support his lavish evening entertainments. “In the drunken orgies that usually terminated his dinners, the captain would order the rebel prisoners to turn out and parade, for the amusement of his guests . . .” (*New-York Mirror*, September 10, 1831).

“You’ll pardon me,” I said, “for coming back to interrupt you. The account I gave of your misfortunes to this young Pennsylvanian filled his soul with a sincere indignation. He has conceived a felicitous plan and has come to tell you about it.

“Sergeant B. A.,” said the lieutenant, “when you and I served under our respective flags, we were enemies because you defended the cause of your king, now our tyrant, and I defended the cause of the country. But under this roof, misfortune has made us brothers and rendered us equal. I’ve just written a petition to the general in your name. You need to sign it. I presume to have enough influence over the mind of the provost marshal to persuade him to deliver it to headquarters himself this very evening. Sir H. C.¹²⁶ is naturally good and humane when he is informed of the true state of things. Perhaps the poignant story that I fashion out of your service, your injuries, and your large family will touch him? At least I hope so, from the bottom of my heart. A humane general is like a good king: he can diminish the calamities of war and do a great deal of good without straying from the rule of duty.”

“Good Pennsylvanian, if I shed any tears, it’s your unexpected generosity that compels me, it’s your magnanimity that draws them out of me. Dear Heaven, I thought their source was dried up. I know all too well about the capriciousness of the spirit to harbor the faintest hope. That sentiment died out along with nearly all the others. Fine young man, ornament of your country, may this generous act bring you the blessing of Heaven, the patrimony of good souls. Like a celestial beam, may it light up all your steps and sanctify all your actions. May the course

¹²⁶ Henry Clinton.

of the war spare your life. I'm signing it because you want me to, and if I survive this fatal sentence, the end of my life will be the end of my gratitude."

"Sergeant, perhaps you *will* owe me a debt, but I insist that it end the moment our captivity ends; I insist that it extend no farther than these walls, because if we ever return to our flags, I'll forget the misfortune of the prisoner and see in him only the enemy of my country."

"What, you'll see in me only your enemy? As for me, I swear never to see you as anything but my benefactor. Whatever the case, my military duty will never stifle my gratitude. I'll spare you. I'll also see to it that my neighboring soldiers spare you, even at the most decisive moments. And if necessary in order to save your life, I'll betray for a moment the cause of my king in order to obey the cause of nature. And you'll see in me only your enemy? Actually, you won't owe me a thing. I'll be the one indebted to *you* for a life that my own officers have refused me." We retired.

This good lieutenant, just as he had presumed, discovered the secret of persuading the provost marshal to deliver the petition to the general at once, but our hopes were in vain. Imagine our distress when the next day we saw this unhappy sergeant led to the other side of the Hudson River,¹²⁷ where his sentence held that he would be executed. As you know, I got out of prison myself two weeks later¹²⁸ and rested for some time at the house of my worthy friend, Mr. Henry Perry, until news of the fleet's departure forced me to return to New York

¹²⁷ *Paulus Hook*.

¹²⁸ Actually eight days later, if the date of September 17 that St. John de Crèvecoeur gives in *Esquisse de ma vie* is correct.

to obtain my passage.¹²⁹ One day I was walking down a street in this city while reading a letter that I had just received from my child, when a man with a brown coat and high-cropped hair¹³⁰ tapped me on my shoulder and said, “Don’t you recognize me?”

“No,” I said, “I don’t recognize you.”

“What! Is it possible? You don’t remember Sergeant B. A.?”

“What? Is that you, dear Sergeant? Is that really you I’m speaking to? Oh my, I thought you were dead and hanged three weeks ago.”

“Actually I was hanged. But the cord was cut as soon as the wagon left me in the air. I learned that the general had read the petition sent by the generous Pennsylvanian. Consequently, he had ordered that the rope be cut immediately after the execution.¹³¹ I left the regiment and they granted me a place among the lieutenants of the provost marshal. If ever your unlucky star brings you back under that roof, I’ll render you all the services in my power.”¹³²

“My astonishment is boundless, dear Sergeant! This isn’t a dream, is it? What fate! What a strange destiny! What a sequel of events! So now here you

¹²⁹ See Letter 4 on Henry Perry, and note 49 on St. John de Crèvecoeur’s dates.

¹³⁰ Presumably, his hair was cut in preparation for his hanging.

¹³¹ From a September 9, 1779, order from headquarters:
In Consideration of the former Good Character of Serg’t John Taswell, (who was to have been executed this day,) and at the Recommendation of the President and Members of the Court Martial, His Excellency, the Commander in Chief is pleased to grant him Free Pardon, and orders him to be Discharged from his Majesties Service. (NYHS, “Orderly Books, 1776-1779”)

¹³² After his pardon “he was immediately picked up by the militia and lodged in Morristown Jail, from which he escaped in 1780 and made his way back to the battalion. Allowed to rejoin the corps, he finished the war as a corporal” (Braisted 72).

are, one of the deputy-governors of the same dwelling where scarcely five weeks ago we were both prisoners and you were condemned to death. I'm embarking for Europe in two days. I'll never see this city again unless she has a new master.¹³³ I beg you, don't forget that good young man, the generous Pennsylvanian."

"Me? Forget him? As Heaven is my witness, I'd sooner forget to satisfy the most pressing needs of hunger and thirst! He lacks only his freedom, and I can give it to him!"

"By God, Sergeant, doesn't life seem good to you?"

"Oh, how sweet it is, indeed, when you receive it in such an unexpected way!"

"I was faithful to my promise: your wife received the letter that you had written her forty-eight hours later."

"I know, and I thank you a thousand times. My poor wife! She thought she was losing her mind, first from excessive sorrow, and then from excessive joy. Goodbye, my dear Mr. Saint-John. May you avoid the dangers of the winds and waves, and your dear child Ally too, whose illness gave you such anxiety during your captivity."

Farewell, St. John.

¹³³ He returned to New York from France in November 1783 to serve as French consul to New York (Mitchell 84).

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Head Quarters the 9th Sept. 1779

Sir

His Excellency the Commanding writing
 that the innocent Wife and Children of John Taswell
 may not be the victims of his ill behaviour desire,
 you would relieve this distress by giving a
 Guinea to the Woman and sending her with
 this Letter to Col. Morris which shall entitle
 her to receive rations from him for herself
 and family Three Rations

I am with Regard

Sir

Yours most obedt Servant
 J. André Aid de Camp

Fig. 9: Letter from Gen. Clinton's Headquarters authorizing Col. Morris to pay one guinea to the family of Sergeant John Taswell, dated the day of Taswell's scheduled execution: Head Quarters the 9th July Sept. 1779. Sir: His Excellency the Commanding writing that the innocent wife and children of John Taswell may not be the victims of his ill behaviour desire, you would relieve this distress by giving a guinea to the woman and sending her with [sic] this Letter to Col. Morris which shall entitle her to receive rations from him for herself and family Three rations I am with regard . . . J. André Aid de Camp (The National Archives, United Kingdom PRO 30/55/18, Paper 2263)

From the New York Prison, 25 August 1780.

3. The Ill-Fated Father

If on the one hand I fear that the blackness of my portraits may revolt a soul as compassionate as yours, on the other hand, can I omit such striking anecdotes whose narration will leave you to judge the nature of the calamities against which we dared to fight? Can I neglect to show you, at a remote perspective, a feeble sketch of adversities of every kind that cruelty, greed, and partisan hatred (that demon of civil wars) produced among us? My friend, these are the principal agents that for seven years¹³⁴ sharpened so many bayonets, caused so much blood to stream, and concealed the most ghastly crimes under the name of loyalty and duty. Oh well, perhaps we never would have embarked on this painful course if we had been able to foresee all of these horrors (Ignorance is bliss!). That was the price of our freedom.

At the outset of the war, among the royalists who took up arms against their country, Colonel B. K. distinguished himself by his courage and zeal.¹³⁵ He constantly proposed to headquarters some new plan, which he was often in charge of executing. What could have been the designs of a general¹³⁶ naturally

¹³⁴ St. John de Crèvecoeur is violating his own chronology, since he dated this letter 1780, and in this paragraph he is speaking of the war as if it has already ended.

¹³⁵ Colonel Van Buskirk. See Letter 2.

¹³⁶ General Sir Henry Clinton.

good and humane? It is surprising that insouciance, that predominant sentiment, did not sometimes deter his weakness for authorizing so many fires and pointless murders. Could he have imagined that they were part of a grand scheme of conquest over which he presided? Could he have believed that this continent would return to obedience to the king through acts whose frequency and atrociousness could serve only to ripen and hasten the scission and darken his reign? Often for entire months, they occupied themselves in New York amid luxuries and amusements, while sending out from all sides parties of arsonists who, in their bloodthirsty imaginations, forever predicted some important conquest.¹³⁷ More than one time I saw them come back laden with bloodstained spoils, conducting mutilated prisoners whom they led to the hospital only after having paraded them in the streets as victims of a barbarous triumph. If you doubt my veracity, I recommend that you read the gazettes of James Rivington.¹³⁸ You will see on every page an account of their expeditions. Among these was an expedition led by Colonel B. K.***.¹³⁹ Should I or can I pity him? Today he is the unhappiest of men. Abandoned to useless remorse, he will soon

¹³⁷ The diary of American soldier Jabez Fitch teems with indignation upon Fitch's hearing of one of these amusements: General Howe's lavish celebration of the queen's birthday. Fitch writes in his entry of January 19, 1777:

. . . Mr. Merry . . . gave us an acct. of the grand Entertainment given last Night by Genll. Howe to all the Regular Offrs. in Town, he Represents that there was more than 200 Different Dishes prepared for the Table; Query, whether it would not have been more Honourable to the British Army, to have had (at least) part of this Extraordinary Expense, bestow'd on the poor Prisoners who have perished for want, in such vast numbers. (103)

¹³⁸ *The king's printer.*

¹³⁹ Buskirk.

flee his country. Will he ever be able to call Great Britain by this name, where in peace he will find only contempt and poverty?¹⁴⁰

At daybreak an English party arrived near a small district of New Jersey called Scrawlenburg.¹⁴¹ They set fire to the great mill and dwellings of **, an old Dutchman¹⁴² who possessed a considerable estate, and hid behind some trees after making a great noise. Suddenly awakened, the colonist and his two boys hurriedly got out of bed and appeared at the door only in their shirts to see what it was. A volley of gunshots killed the two children without touching the father. My heart pounds, my hands tremble, my pencil refuses to sketch the needless atrocity of that act and the inexpressible horror of that terrible moment. Pitiful colonist, ill-fated father! In the name of Heaven, what had you done to be exposed at your age to a state of affairs that is impossible to think about without shuddering? The blood gushing out of the wounds of the two children stained his

¹⁴⁰ After the war, Col. Buskirk moved to Nova Scotia where he served as mayor of Shelburne in 1784. He received half-pay and died in Nova Scotia (Sabine 661).

¹⁴¹ Schraalenburgh in Bergen County, New Jersey, was known as “the neutral ground” and repeatedly played host to troops on both sides of the war. Both patriot and loyalist partisans devastated the land, its buildings and inhabitants in numerous raids. The now-extinct district of Schraalenburgh became modern-day Dumont, Bergenfield, Demarest, and a section of Closter. The settlement of Closter developed a reputation for being home to violent rebels (Altshuler; Leiby, *Huguenot Settlement* 40; Leiby, *Revolutionary War* 207).

¹⁴² Samuel P. Demarest (1724-1808), who lived in the section of Closter that today belongs to the borough of Demarest. His maternal line was Dutch, but the American patriarch of the Demarest family was David des Marest, a French Huguenot who immigrated to New Amsterdam in 1663 after having been a refugee in Holland and Germany. David des Marest lived on Staten Island and in New Harlem before securing the French Patent, which included all of the New Jersey lands between the Palisades and the Hackensack River, and between the present-day River Edge and Closter (Demarest 1-7, 32, 66-68).

shirt in several places. Motionless and overcome by the weight of an unimaginable grief, he was led to New York.¹⁴³

This venerable colonist was one of the nine who composed our room. My greatest surprise was seeing that he had survived such a fatal catastrophe. This unfortunate citizen was the emblem of the most mournful sadness that I had ever seen: he wore the gloomiest countenance; a dense veil seemed to envelop his soul; his eyes were continually fixed on the ground and he never opened his mouth. I respected his predicament and age too much to dare ask him any

¹⁴³ St. John relates that two sons were killed. Actually, Samuel's 26-y-o son Cornelius was killed, and his 29-y-o son Hendrick was wounded but did not die, in this large-scale Tory raid on May 10, 1779. About 100 of Buskirk's men destroyed numerous houses and barns. Following is an extract of a letter about the raid written by an eyewitness, dated Closter, May 10, 1779:

This day about one hundred of the enemy came by way of the New Dock, attacked the place, and carried off Cornelius Tallman, Samuel Demarest, Jacob Cole, and George Buskirk; killed Cornelius Demarest; wounded Hendrick Demarest, Jeremiah Westervelt, Dow Tallman, etc. They burnt the houses of Cornelius Demarest, Matthias Bogert, Cornelius Huyler, Samuel Demarest's house and barn, John Banta's house and barn, and Cornelius Bogert's and John's Westervelt's barns. They attempted to burn every building they entered, but the fire was in some places extinguished. They destroyed all the furniture, etc., in many houses, and abused many of the women. In their retreat they were so closely pursued by the militia and a few Continental troops that they took off no cattle. They were of Buskirk's corps—some of our Closter and Old Tappan neighbors, were joined by a party of negroes. I should have mentioned the Negroes first in order to grace the British arms. (Westervelt 344)

Leiby gives a description of the character of Samuel P. Demarest, based on genealogical records, that matches the character of St. John's cellmate:

Samuel Demarest and his wife Margaritie Brinkerhoff Demarest lived in a large house about a mile south of the Closter Dock Road on the old Closter Road, and Samuel operated a mill on the small brook that ran by the house on its way to the Tenakill. He had been an elder in Domine Romeyn's Schraalenburgh church (and now lies buried there). Afraid of no one, local people told for years how he stood in the doorway of his house and defied Van Buskirk's men as they came up the Closter Road. They seized him as a prisoner, applied the torch to his house, killed his son Cornelius and wounded his son Hendrick.

The women buried Cornelius' body near the farmhouse and watched Samuel Demarest . . . and others carried off to prison in New York. Hendrick's life was saved only because one of the women of the household rushed to his rescue as he fell to the ground and boldly protected him from further injury. (Leiby, *Revolutionary War* 208-209)

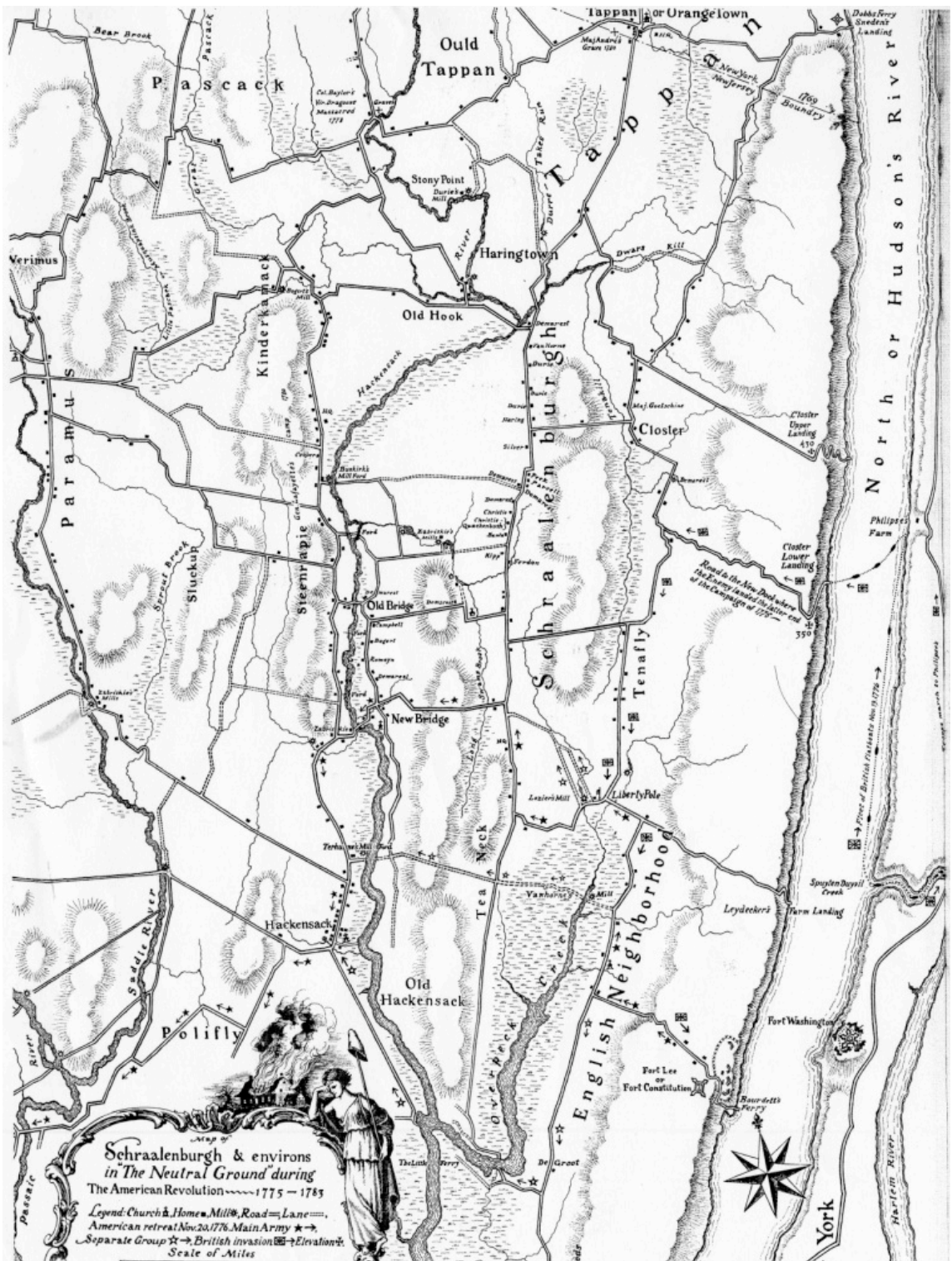


Fig. 10: Map of Schraalenburgh. This map of the now-extinct Schraalenburgh and environs (“The Neutral Ground”) in Bergen County, New Jersey, contains the sites of the Closter farm of Samuel P. Demarest (the “ill-fated father”); the Baylor Massacre in Old Tappan (Letter 1); and the home of John Lozier (“Paul Leger”) in Haringtown (Letter 4).

details about this frightful tragedy. One morning, Cunningham¹⁴⁴ entered our room and made him the following offer:

“In consideration of your age, the commander permits you to go back among your own, on the condition that you swear not to take up arms against the subjects of the king and to remain peaceful.”

“Have you and your general lost your memory? Is it because I’m an old man that you despise me so? Tell him that the desire for vengeance has made me young again. At this very moment, I feel my former strength coming back to life as I listen to your propositions. What! Do you actually think I would promise you not to avenge the murder of my children? Ha! What would Heaven say, who made me man and father? (*He fishes around in his trunk.*) Look! Here’s my shirt stained with their blood. Take that to your general. It makes my story indisputable. This shirt will serve as my reply.”

“Keep it, keep it, it’s dyed only with rebel blood. Oh, if only we had shed all of it!”

“That’s what all your Redcoats will never be able to do. But I gladly offer mine. If I could make it useful to my country by mingling it with the blood of twelve Englishmen, I would gladly watch it stream.”

“You feeble, helpless old man. What do you dare to say?”

“What I would do if I were free. I still feel strong enough to kill a dozen of your cruel countrymen. You propose that I remain peaceful? As soon as I get back, I’m going to hug my old wife for the last time. Next, I’m going to look for the opportunity to avenge the death of my good children on the first party I meet.”

¹⁴⁴ *The grand provost.* [In the British Army, the title is provost marshal.]

“Rebel! Ungrateful old man! Don’t you know that I have the key to the dungeons, which are eight feet underground?”

“Dig ’em a *hundred* feet deep if you like. I swear by this bloody shirt that their depth won’t weaken my resolve one bit. The cowards who seized me tied me up for a quarter of an hour and forced me to stare at my burning estate in order to increase the sum of my sorrows. They were mistaken. The death of my two boys was the summit of my losses.”

The courage of this old man deserved at least the esteem of the commander: it served only to prolong his captivity.

Dublin, 18 December 1780.

4. CIRCUMSTANCES

**in which the author found himself during his stay in New York,
where he had come with the permission of
Generals Washington and Clinton
with the intention of embarking for Europe**

My friend, doesn't your affection lead you astray? What interest could you possibly take in gloomy and melancholy details that can neither amuse nor instruct you? You demand of me an extremely distressing task. I would like instead to forget all those painful scenes and concern myself today with only the most useful, the most consoling event that has ever happened to the human species. I would like instead to forget all my sorrows and feast on the universal joy that will soon fill all American hearts. Why not impose upon me, rather, the task of planting weeping willows on the tombs, and erecting a few feeble monuments to the spirits of our brave compatriots whose blood is going to cement our rise to the rank of nations. Why not impose on me the task of finally singing on my simple reed pipe the praises of the noble sovereign who, by the impetus of his troops and the strength of his counsel, is going to establish our

independence and help us drive back the yoke of our cruel mother country.¹⁴⁵

You know that my suffering and sorrows have neither added to the development nor accelerated the progress of this encouraging revolution, although they have been the result of it. It is in the story of our leaders and legislators that one meets with a thousand moving and instructive anecdotes. Oh, how I wish I had the talent to compose them! Moreover, if your friendship could add some interesting nuances, some degree of importance to the circumstances in which I found myself, your desire would have some pretext. I have to delineate for you the image of a father's grief even more than that of my own misfortunes. Your compassionate tears and the tenderness of your heart, which would have been the most precious balm for me in those bitter moments, would fortunately be useless today. So wouldn't it be worth more to reserve the treasures of your affection and the perfume of your kindness to help me dispel this taste, this propensity for melancholy that I have contracted during the course of this war? Since you demand it, I will obey, but this will be the last unhappy story that I'll relate. As soon as I arrive under your roof, I'll occupy myself only with singing our nascent freedom and the approach of peace.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ One can see in this sentence St. John de Crèvecoeur's efforts to conform to his epistolary framework. To prevent anachronism in this letter dated 1780, he revised the perfect tense of the 1784 edition (*a fixé*, "has established") to the near future tense in the 1787 edition (*va fixer*, "is going to establish"), since American independence was not won until 1783.

¹⁴⁶ St. John de Crèvecoeur lived with William Seton for at least one or two months in November 1783 upon his return to the City of New York to serve as French consul to New York (Mitchell 88-92).

I easily obtained permission from Major-General MacDougall¹⁴⁷ to enter British lines and to embark at New York after having communicated to him and General Washington the reasons that I was obliged to visit Europe.¹⁴⁸ I found him in the company of his wife tending to slices of beef on the grill, which I shared with him. It was the most philosophical and informative meal that I had had for six months, in several respects. He employs his time studying the art of war and the character of the men whom he commands, and enlightening himself through reading. There is not an American who does not know that this citizen general is the Catinat¹⁴⁹ of our hemisphere.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Alexander McDougall (1732-1786) was a New York City merchant born in Scotland who immigrated to America with his family in 1738. He was a founder of the Sons of Liberty and was appointed colonel of the first New York regiment in 1775 and later promoted to brigadier and major-general. McDougall served twice in the Continental Congress (1781-1782, 1784-1785) and was president of the Bank of New York. He was a member of the New York State Senate at the time of his death. Interestingly, he spent time in the Provost in 1770-1771 (known then as the New Gaol or Debtors' Prison) for libel. He had published a broadside attacking the New York General Assembly ("McDougall, Alexander," *Hutchinson Encyclopedia of Biography*). MacDougall Street in New York City's Greenwich Village is named after him.

¹⁴⁸ Ostensibly to secure his children's rank and position in his father's line of Norman succession, and therefore title to his property. St. John de Crèvecoeur's having married a Protestant woman in 1769, Mehitable Tippet of Yonkers, had made the question of the legitimacy of his children more urgent because of France's rigid inheritance laws at that time. (Philbrick 24; Mitchell 36-41).

¹⁴⁹ Nicolas Catinat (1637-1712) was a prominent seventeenth-century French general who distinguished himself in the Franco-Dutch War and the Nine Years' War, and also served in the War of Spanish Succession. He was noted for his concern for his troops, merit-based promotions, efforts to spare civilian populations, and his philosophical bent ("Nicolas Catinat," *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*; Bell 50).

¹⁵⁰ St. John de Crèvecoeur had attempted to go to France at least a year earlier, but some of his Whig neighbors expressed concern to Governor George Clinton (1739-1812) that he might supply the British with intelligence on the region. However, other neighbors endorsed his trip, and Governor Clinton and General McDougall, whom he met at the encampment in Fishkill, New York, allowed him to enter British lines under several conditions, including his traveling down the west side of the Hudson River (Mitchell 47-50).

I took with me an eight-year-old child.¹⁵¹ He carried the parliamentary flag. Every time I met an armed party, I sent him ahead with our papers. Already I observed that he would serve as a friend and companion. After spending some time in New York I prepared to set sail on a fleet bound for England when the arrival of the French squadron at Rhode Island provoked a general disturbance. A few days later, I received a letter from J. R.,¹⁵² Secretary of Major-General J. P., Commandant of the City.¹⁵³ He informed me that this general wished to see me the next morning at eleven o'clock.¹⁵⁴ As soon as I entered his apartment he said to me:

“I have an order from the commander-in-chief, Sir H. C.,¹⁵⁵ to send you to prison.”

“May I ask Your Excellency what the reasons for this could be? Because you undoubtedly know that I entered British lines with his approval and with the sole intent of taking advantage of the first fleet bound for Great Britain.”

“I’m unaware of that, but I must obey. Captain A***,¹⁵⁶ conduct this man to the Provost.”

¹⁵¹ His eldest son Guillaume Aléxandre (“Ally”) would have been six-and-a-half years old at this time, but of course St. John de Crèveçœur dated these episodes one year later than they actually occurred. See note 49.

¹⁵² John Le Chevalier Roome, a distinguished lawyer in colonial New York City. He moved to London in 1783 (Shenstone 66; White 67).

¹⁵³ James Pattison (1724-1805).

¹⁵⁴ See Mitchell 54-55 for the full text of Pattison’s letter to General Clinton dated July 8, 1779, describing Crèveçœur’s arrest. This letter may also be found in NYHS, *Collections [1875]* 90.

¹⁵⁵ General Sir Henry Clinton.

Although I easily obtained the liberties of the ground floor, which was inhabited only by Cunningham¹⁵⁷ and his lieutenants,¹⁵⁸ it did not take long to feel that a dark dungeon would have been a less appalling habitation. Oh, my friend, I was at the center of captivity, of daily castigation and miseries of every kind. Hardly a day passed without some horrible flogging, whose lacerating blows I could not prevent myself from hearing along with the cries of the victims. I could seldom reject the pleas of certain wretched soldiers who begged me to wash their bloodied shoulders with pokeweed leaves.¹⁵⁹ What a position for a man like me, who had lived all his life in the bosom of rural peace and tranquility. At the

¹⁵⁶ Captain Stephen Payne Adye, “an able and energetic staff officer, and an old acquaintance of his chief, under whom he had served in Portugal, and won a name honored to this day in the Artillery” (NYHS, *Collections [1875]* xvi). He was Pattison’s aide-de-camp.

¹⁵⁷ *The name of the English grand provost.* [provost marshal]

¹⁵⁸ Cunningham’s deputy Sergeant O’Keefe was equally notorious for his cruelty to prisoners. In the September 10, 1831 issue of the *New-York Mirror*, John Pintard tells the following story about O’Keefe and the final days of British occupation:

At the evacuation of this city by the British, twenty-fifth November, 1783, the main guard in the city-hall, head of Broad-street, and the provost guard were the last that abandoned their stations. As General Washington, with a small body of continentals and a numerous escort of citizens, restored to their long deserted homes, was moving down Chatham-street, and turning into Pearl-street, to proceed to the old fort, Serjeant Keefe considered it time to retreat. A few British subjects remained, for various crimes, in his custody. As he was stepping over the threshold, one of them inquired,

“Serjeant, what is to become of us?”

“You may all go to the d___l together,” was his reply, as he threw the ponderous bunch of keys on the floor behind him.

“Thank you, serjeant,” was the answer: “we have had too much of your company in this world to follow you to the next.”

¹⁵⁹ *A type of herb very good for wounds.* [In *Lettres-1784* St. John includes treatment with buttermilk: “. . . who begged me to wash their bloodied shoulders with buttermilk and then cover them with pokeweed leaves” (392-393). Applied topically, buttermilk can reduce the wound pH and therefore stunt bacterial proliferation and the odor that accompanies it (Sussman and Bates-Jensen 480). Pokeweed is a tall plant whose roots, leaves and blackish-red berries can be toxic to humans, but nevertheless have long been used for folk remedies. The berries were used for ink by the Indians of Connecticut and early American settlers (Kowalchik et al. 417).]

sight of all these horrors and evils I suddenly became a Manichaeian.¹⁶⁰ I thought I saw in humanity a degree of wickedness that I had never suspected. Ahhh! What a picture of human nature I sketched! What impious questions I dared to address to the great Creator when I contemplated society as an assemblage of lions unleashed on the weakest party, although the most numerous! Why so much evil, why so many tragedies and crimes on a stage where man must appear for only such a short time?

I slept in a cellar in the midst of rats a hundred times more fortunate than the abject humans whose food they came to pilfer. Still, this dismal, infested room could have become a place of rest by force of habit, but it was divided only by a thin barrier from the general abyss of human miseries, Tartarus,¹⁶¹ where the despised and most unfortunate of men were locked up. The ones already condemned waited there for the moment of their execution; the others, for their final judgment.¹⁶² How could sweet Sleep have come to close my eyes, he who visits only sanctuaries of silence and spreads his poppies on calm and tranquil spirits? As if the days were not long enough for my torture, I was condemned by the cruelest insomnia to hear the conversations of my ill-fated neighbors. What a singular mixture of mournful, plaintive tones, deep sighs, shrill cries, futile repentance, curses and blasphemies!

¹⁶⁰ Manichaeism, a dualistic religious philosophy and early Christian heresy, asserts that the two forces of good and evil are in a constant battle for supremacy.

¹⁶¹ See note 89.

¹⁶² A return of the Provost signed by Provost Marshal William Cunningham, dated November 29, 1779 (about two months after St. John de Crèvecoeur's release), lists eleven prisoners as sentenced to death, most of them having been confined for over 120 days. Seven prisoners were waiting, as St. John puts it, for their "final judgment" ("Returns of the Provost" 77:40).

“Do you want to go down with me to the underground?” First Sergeant *** asked me one day.¹⁶³ “I’m going to take a pound of bread and bottle of water to an American prisoner.”

“So what did he do?” I asked.

“No questions.”

I follow him.¹⁶⁴ Soon we enter a room as dark as original Chaos, damp and putrid.¹⁶⁵ The door was scarcely open before I noticed with the help of a candle I was carrying a pale, emaciated specter on top of a small pile of straw, his hands and feet in chains. He came toward us with slow steps, supporting his final hobbles with the help of his handkerchief. His only garments were a striped shirt and long breeches. He was a young man of twenty-five years¹⁶⁶ and an inhabitant of New Jersey.¹⁶⁷

“For the love of God,” he said to the sergeant, “give me a little meat. I’m so weak!”

¹⁶³ Probably Sergeant O’Keefe. See note 158.

¹⁶⁴ St. John de Crèvecoeur writes the first two sentences of this paragraph in the historical present tense. This passage is one of several in Letters 4 and 5 in which he alternates between the historical present and past tenses.

¹⁶⁵ St. John de Crèvecoeur’s word for “Chaos” is “cahos,” which was an alternate spelling of “chaos” in eighteenth-century French (“cahos”). In the *Theogony (Birth of the Gods)* of the ancient Greek poet Hesiod, Chaos is the first entity in the universe. Its Greek meanings are “infinite space, the expanse . . . the nether abyss, infinite darkness” (“ΧΑΟΣ”).

¹⁶⁶ *Paul Leger, French in origin and son of a good colonist. He was later exchanged. Such was the thirst for vengeance that drove this young man and the terror that he had inspired in certain partisans that they did not stop searching for him and attacking him until they were fortunate enough to kill him. After having fallen, his body received thirty-seven bayonet stabs.*

¹⁶⁷ *The province neighboring New York, which is separated from it only by the Hudson, or North, River.*

“I have positive orders not to give you any.”¹⁶⁸

“So the general wants me to die here? Every night the rats carry away the little that you give me, despite all my efforts. I can hide my bread only in the straw that I sleep on, and they punish me for it by biting me and carrying away both my straw and my bread into their holes.¹⁶⁹ What a fate for a prisoner of war! How would you treat me if I were a criminal?”

“You are a criminal—that’s for certain—since we treat you like one.”

“Ohhh, Sergeant * *, don’t you know I’ve been groaning in this dark dungeon for—I believe—eleven weeks. Even if I had just a single ray of light in here, it would console me . . . but the solitude, the darkness, and these irons! Won’t the Supreme Being take me now into his repose?”

This sad visit ripped my soul apart (a soul already too sensitive to adversity), aroused in me a hundred reflections, and forced out a thousand useless sighs.^{170 171}

¹⁶⁸ This reply is reminiscent of prisoner Ethan Allen’s story about Sergeant O’Keefe’s response when Allen offered him eight dollars for a meal after three days of being deprived of food: “all I could get out of the sergeant’s mouth, was, that by God he would obey his orders” (97-98).

¹⁶⁹ Prisoner Jacob Ritter reported that in the British Provost prison in Philadelphia (also known as the Walnut-street prison), over which William Cunningham also presided for a brief interval during the war, “it was common to see several [prisoners] watching for the chance of rats from the rat-holes, which, when captured, were eaten, both for staying hunger, and also to make reprisals upon an enemy that often disturbed their sleep, and otherwise annoyed them” (Watson v. 2, 301).

¹⁷⁰ It is worth including here another note about Paul Leger that St. John de Crèvecoeur added to the end of his footnotes in *Lettres-1784*. There is no mention of his being murdered by thirty-seven bayonet stabs in this first edition:

I cannot end these notes without providing you a small detail about the fate of this brave young man, Paul Léger, whose frightful captivity caused such a stir in this part of America. It is a monument of cruelty that I wish to preserve, as they sometimes preserve the most hideous reptiles in ethanol.

Through his courage and activity, Paul Léger had become the terror of certain people who were smuggling goods to the English in spite of the country’s explicit laws. The public voice of New York accused him of having killed a certain unarmed person coming out of the lines. He was finally caught and without any

examination put in a dungeon eight feet underground for nearly four months.
(422)

¹⁷¹ “Paul Leger” is St. John de Crèvecoeur’s name for John Lozier (1740-1805), a “dangerous rebel” from Bergen County, New Jersey. He was confined in the Provost on July 23, 1779 (weeks after St. John de Crèvecoeur’s imprisonment), and the returns of the Provost dated November 1 and 8, 1779, indeed list him as being “in the Dungeon in Double Irons” (“Returns of the Provost” 73:28, 74:19). *The New-York Gazette* reported his capture:

A Detachment from the Garrison of Paulus Hook, of which Major Sutherland is Commandant, on Friday Morning last took Prisoners, the noted John Loshier and David Ritzema Bogert. A third of this Banditti escaped very narrowly, by throwing away his Arms and swimming the Hackensack. Loshier is safely lodged (No. 1449, July 26, 1779).

Several months later, Captain Adye wrote the following letter on November 15 to William Cunningham regarding Lozier:

Sir, I am directed by Major Gen^l Pattison to signify to you, that notwithstanding the many Crimes laid to the charge of John Lashier [sic], and for which he ordered him to be put in Irons; as he has remained so long in that Situation the General desires that he may be now Released from them, and put upon the same Footing, as the other Prisoners under your Charge. (NYHS, *Collections* [1875] 300)

Clearly in reaction to the above letter of the same day, the November 15 return of the Provost signed by Cunningham has the phrase “in the Dungeon in Double Irons” crossed out (“Returns of the Provost” 75:36). The returns of the following weeks merely have the phrase “A Dangerous Rebel” next to Lozier’s name (76:30, 77:40, 79:22, 80:15).

But just like several of the men in these stories, this was Lozier’s second confinement in the Provost. According to Adrian C. Leiby in *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley*, John Lozier and Abraham Brouwer, both belonging to Major Goetschius’ Bergen County Rangers, were “solid Jersey Dutchmen of the kind that made up the backbone of the patriot forces of the neutral ground” (144). In fact, Lozier lived in the vicinity of that other fearless Dutchman from Closter, Samuel P. Demarest, the ill-fated father (see Letter 3). On January 29, 1778, Lozier and Brouwer were sent down to intercept Tory commerce between New York and New Jersey and to scout out the British post at Paulus Hook. They captured John Richards, a loyalist refugee who was returning to New York after visiting a sick family member in New Jersey. There are radically different versions of what happened next. Whether Richards was maliciously robbed and murdered, or whether he was killed while trying to escape while being taken in for questioning, there is no doubt that a struggle ensued and John Richards was killed, probably by Brouwer. Tory New York cried out for the heads of Lozier and Brouwer, a sentiment that James Rivington inflamed in the pages of his gazette, and large rewards were offered for the two men’s capture. Brouwer was captured a week later on February 5 by one of his former neighbors, and Lozier was seized on March 27. Both men were confined in the Provost. A return of the Provost for July 8, 1778, indeed lists them both as being confined “for the murder of Captain Richards” (“Returns of the Provost” 36:38). At first Tories despaired that General Clinton was being too lenient with them, but “Sir Henry’s rule of New York ended at the door of his prisons” (Leiby 148). Major Goetschius received word of the brutal treatment they were receiving at the hands of Cunningham, deprived of food and “pinned down on the floor” (149).

Six months having passed, on November 6, 1778, the American Commissary of Prisoners, Elisha Boudinot, retaliated against the cruel treatment of both Lozier and Captain Nathaniel Fitz Randolph (Letter 4) by ordering equal treatment of an unfortunate loyalist prisoner in American hands, one Colonel Billop. And on December 26, Gen. Washington wrote to Gen. Clinton requesting that Lozier and Brouwer be treated as

“Calm down,” W S-** said to me the next day, (that true friend in whose energetic kindness I had so much faith). “I can’t return to see you for fear of being suspected myself. Rest assured, I’ll neglect nothing in order to obtain your freedom. Don’t write me at all, even if you’re allowed to.”¹⁷²

A few days later three persons, whose sly treachery I knew about and who, as great royalists, believed they were authorized to perpetrate every possible evil against their antagonists, came to visit me under the pretext of pity to offer me their purses. The traitors! They had no other intention than to distress and humiliate me by the story of the public malice that was already circulating about me.

“What humanity can our councils of war show if all of these allegations are proven?” they asked. “You run a great risk of losing your life.”

“I hope I’ll be examined before your court of inquiry, and if there’s the faintest spark of justice, God and my innocence will give me the strength to defend and the means to vindicate myself.”

proper prisoners of war. Clinton went further than that and immediately had the two prisoners exchanged, incurring the wrath of New York Tories.

The two ex-prisoners vigorously returned to their militia activities, and Lozier was recaptured and confined in the Provost again on July 23, 1779, just weeks after St. John de Crèvecoeur was confined. Clearly from the returns quoted above, he received the same atrocious treatment from Cunningham the second time around. St. John relates that after finally being exchanged, “Paul Leger” was brutally murdered. However, Leiby tentatively quotes records (Harvey 604) that place Lozier’s death in 1805 (144-151).

¹⁷² This is most likely William Smith, with whom he lived in the house of Nicholas Stuyvesant in the Bowery when he came to New York in early 1779, but who refused to post bail for St. John de Crèvecoeur for fear of his own safety. If St. John de Crèvecoeur means William Seton, the man to whom these letters are addressed, he would be blatantly violating his epistolary framework, speaking of him in the third person, which he certainly does at the end of this letter. See my introduction for more on both William Smith and William Seton and the behind-the-scenes intrigue so meticulously recorded in William Smith’s memoirs.

“But don’t you know that prisoners don’t have the right to speak? The only way you’ll be able to explain yourself is through a barrister, and where will you find one who wants to take up your case?”

“And why won’t I find one as good as the others?”

“Because one must have the soul of a rebel and a great deal of recklessness to dare, within British lines, to defend a man accused as you are of having corresponded with General Washington, of having drawn the map of the harbor, and of having persuaded a certain person to take the oath of fidelity required by the new government of the state of * * * .

Despite the inmost persuasion of my innocence—despite that feeling, which is often the sole consolation of the unfortunate, for several nights I dreamed only of the spectacle of the gallows and the cord. I even made several attempts to ensure myself against the pain and effect of such torture. “What!” I said to myself, “Must I now perish unjustly by the punishment of thieves and murderers after having led an honest, industrious and useful life? What will become of those I leave behind me? Will they be able to endure the shame of an infamy they don’t deserve? What will become of that poor child, now so distant from his paternal roof, whom I promised so much joy in Europe?” He was living on Long Island¹⁷³ in the vicinity of a school. I flattered myself that he was unaware of the sad fate of his father; but cruel souls (the kind that civil wars produce) had already informed him. And they had even proclaimed that his father

¹⁷³ In Flushing, which is now in the borough of Queens. In St. John de Crèvecoeur’s time, the phrase “Long Island” designated not only today’s Nassau and Suffolk counties, but the entire island, including Brooklyn and Queens.

would soon be hanged. This poor child wrote me a letter that I still save, and which my cruel guards allowed to reach me only because they knew it would rend my heart.

[St. John de Crèvecoeur's French Translation of Ally's Letter]¹⁷⁴

Ah! mon père, qu'as-tu donc fait, pour que les Anglois te fassent mourir? Est-ce que je ne te reverrai plus jamais, jamais? Pauvre père, cher père! Ils me disent que tout le monde me haïra quand tu seras mort; ne vaudroit-il pas mieux qu'*Ally* mourût aussi? Je ne puis plus écrire à cause de mes larmes.¹⁷⁵

[St. John de Crèvecoeur's Transcription of Ally's Letter in English]

Is it true, dear father, that the red coats have confined you? what have you done them then? shall Ally see you never never more? They say as how they will hang you; poor father, dear father. — when you are dead, they say as how every body will hate me; would¹⁷⁶ it not be better that Ally shou'd die also. — J. Cannot write

¹⁷⁴ At this point in the text, St. John de Crèvecoeur continues in French, quoting his son Ally's letter. Then he inserts a footnote transcribing Ally's letter as it was written in English. By having the two French editions of *Lettres* to compare, one gets a good, if rare, glimpse at the artifice of the author, because this letter of Ally, "a letter that I still save," changes from one version to the next. See below.

¹⁷⁵ The letter of Ally in this 1787 edition is packed with more sentiment. The sentences "Pauvre père, cher père!" and "Je ne puis écrire à cause de mes larmes." were not in the 1784 version. Also, St. John de Crèvecoeur did not provide an English original in *Lettres*-1784 (397-398).

¹⁷⁶ In the Errata section of *Lettres*-1787, Crèvecoeur changed "vou'd" to "would."

for crying. — Your dear son Ally St. J.— Flushing, 19 June
1780.¹⁷⁷

They would not let me write to him. Oh, what I would have given to obtain that liberty! My sufferings became more acute, more intolerable, and the reply that I wanted to make faded into painful sobs. Crushed by a fatigue more oppressive than the hardest labor, unable to eat or sleep, exasperated by the injustice of my detention, and exposed to the coarse sarcasms of the tyrant whose rod I was under, I finally made up my mind that a more cramped prison cell was preferable to the useless freedom of the ground floor. To this end, I spoke to Cunningham one morning:

“Would you be able,” I asked him, “to grant me a favor that is of no consequence?”

“That word is not in my job description,” he replied. “What do you want?”

“I wish to be confined upstairs in the civilian room.”

“If that’s all, I can oblige you.”

The doors open, I walk up, and I enter the upstairs gallery. It was filled with a large number of prisoners whom ill fortune, tragedy, suspicion, theft and desertion had driven there. A feeling of shame seized my soul when I found

¹⁷⁷ Besides setting the action of these letters a year later than it actually occurred, St. John de Crèvecoeur clearly rearranges events within the time of his imprisonment, since this scene occurs after the “Paul Leger” episode, and Leger (John Lozier) was not imprisoned until July 23, 1779. On the other hand, this June date may be a clue that St. John de Crèvecoeur was put in prison in June 1779. We know from William Smith’s July 8 journal entry that he was in prison by July 7, but we do not know how long he had been in prison by that time. A June imprisonment would accord with his frequent assertion that he was a prisoner for three months, that is, if his September 17 release date in *Esquisse de ma vie* is correct.

myself thrown together with this class of men for the first time in my life. At last, after both avoiding and answering a thousand grievous, impertinent questions, I withdrew into the room that had been shown to me. As I expected, I found seven individuals there who were respectable in regard to their education, fortune, and even ill fortune.¹⁷⁸ Tender compassion was written all over their faces. They spoke to me only when they saw that the embarrassment and confusion of the first moment had dissipated a bit.

“You’ve done well to end up among us,” they said kindly. We sincerely hope that our company will relieve your sorrows, whatever they may be. We have our own sorrows, whose details won’t be your least consolation. A great deal of philosophy is necessary to bear injustice and captivity. You’ll find among us only victims of the war and not a guilty soul.”

“I had anticipated all your kindness and hospitality. I don’t know what I based this feeling on, but I was morally sure that among you I would lead a much less sorrowful, unhappy life than on the ground floor.”

To be sure, it did not take long to feel that their conversation and company provided me with a small appetite. I was sleeping better because I no longer

¹⁷⁸ These seven cellmates were Colonel Josiah Smith from Long Island (Letter 1), Captain Nathaniel Fitz Randolph from Woodbridge, New Jersey (Letter 4), Reverend Moses (“John”) Mather from Connecticut (Letter 4), Captain Brown from Bergen Point, New Jersey (Letter 4), Samuel P. Demarest (“the ill-fated father”) from Schraalenburgh, New Jersey (Letter 3), and the barely-mentioned prisoners “P. S. S.” (Letter 5) and “inhabitant of Georgia” (Letter 2). St. John de Crèvecoeur was the eighth, and Sergeant John Taswell (“Sergeant B. A.” of Letter 2) was the ninth. Or the ninth could be Henry Perry of Letter 4. Both he and the sergeant have only brief stints in their cell. Lieutenant George (“John”) Blewer (Letter 2) and Cornet John Kelty (Letter 1) are from the neighboring room for officers, “Congress Hall.”

heard the voices of the wretched, and the only nocturnal enemies¹⁷⁹ that I had to combat were much less formidable than the ones that ravaged the downstairs cells.

“You see that crop of corn?” asked Nathaniel Fitz Randolph.¹⁸⁰ He was one of the prisoners in our company. “Two times I’ve seen it planted since I’ve been under this miserable roof.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ *The mice, of which there were an unbelievable number until one of the prisoners contrived an extraordinary machine that destroyed almost all of them.* [See “18th Century Mousetrap” for a replica of an American mousetrap of that era, constructed from solid hardwood blocks, string, nails and glue.]

¹⁸⁰ *A captain in the New Jersey Militia* [First Regiment, Middlesex County].

¹⁸¹ The veneration and patriotism that Nathaniel Fitz Randolph (1747-1780) inspired is palpable in one nineteenth-century historian’s description of him:

One of the most conspicuous men for dash and daring, who lived in Woodbridge during these stormy times, was Capt. Nathaniel Fitz Randolph. Authentic tales told of his extraordinary courage recall the days of Roman valor and savor of the chivalric period of which Virgil wrote: *Arma virumque cano* [“I sing of arms and the man”]. His was one of those lives in which grand achievements are accomplished within brief seasons; for he was only thirty-two years old when he died. He is described as “active, bold, and intelligent”; the antithesis, physically and mentally, of his brother Ezekiel, who often fell asleep on his butcher’s cart as he made his round in serving his customers. (Dally 251)

Dally’s pages are filled with anecdotes, both apocryphal and factual, that attest to Fitz Randolph’s physical strength, courage and nobility (251-256). When once offered a far better position in the British ranks, he replied, “The King is not rich enough to buy me” (Papas 86).

According to the New England Historic Genealogical Society, President Obama is a direct descendant of the Fitz Randolph family (*Cape Cod Times*, January 18, 2009). The President and Nathaniel Fitz Randolph are second cousins, eight generations removed. Their common ancestor Edward was the Fitz Randolph patriarch who immigrated to Plymouth Colony in 1630, but moved from Massachusetts to Piscataway, New Jersey in 1669 because of the fervid patriotism and strict religion of New England. His descendants were some of the most prominent Quaker families of colonial New Jersey, one of them instrumental in establishing the College of New Jersey (Princeton), whose main gate still bears the family name (Randolph 1).

This was Nathaniel’s second confinement in the Provost. An event from his first confinement was recorded in the October 14, 1777 diary entry of his fellow prisoner John Fell: “Sergeant Keath [O’Keefe] sent Lt. Mercer and Mr. Nathl. Fitzrandolph to the dungeon for complaining their room had not sufficient water” (Onderdonk, *Revolutionary Incidents* 222). When the American Commissary General of Prisoners, Elias Boudinot, reported on the condition of prisoners in February 1778, he wrote that Captain Fitz Randolph had been confined for eleven months “for want of a Commission. At the time of Captain Randolph’s Capture Commissions were not granted to Militia Officers, but only Certificates of their Election. Captain Randolph has allways [sic] been acknowledged of that Rank since his Captivity” (Boudinot 389).

The Revolutionary hero Ethan Allen, famous for leading the 1775 capture of Fort Ticonderoga along with Benedict Arnold, was also a Provost prisoner and wrote about Nathaniel

“So what did you do?” I asked.

“I zealously served our country in many engagements. James Rivington¹⁸²—I don’t know why—singled me out in the English gazettes as a famous partisan. I defended myself one day, alone and on foot, in a field against two well-mounted English dragoons, although I had no defense except for my musket. And it cost

in his best-selling memoir. He, too, noted Fitz Randolph’s abuse at the hands of the sergeant: “The capts. Flahaven, Randolph and Mercer, were the objects of his most flagrant and repeated abuses, who were many times taken to the dungeon, and there continued at his pleasure” (Allen 105-106). Allen also writes that the captain suffered a year’s confinement merely for the bravery with which he distinguished himself in the action that led to his capture (101). Nathaniel’s countrymen officially recognized his valor in 1778: “We hear that the Legislature of this State have ordered a genteel SWORD to be presented to Captain NATHANIEL FITZ RANDOLPH, of Woodbridge, in consideration of his merit and services” (*New-Jersey Gazette*, December 16, 1778).

One of the brilliant operations that earned him this accolade was described in a letter dated June 6, 1778:

“Last night, Capt. Nathaniel Fitz Randolph of Woodbridge, with a party of 15 volunteers landed on Staten-Island, surprised and made prisoners 13 of the militia of the Island who were on guard; also Col. Christopher Billop Farmer, Lieut. Daniel Winants, and one more not on duty, without firing a musket, or any accident happening [sic] him or his party. It ought to be mentioned in commendation of this worthy officer and his followers, that altho’ the law of retaliation would have justified their marking their route with devastation and ruin, they were careful not to do the least injury to any peaceable Inhabitant” (*New-York Gazette*, June 22, 1778)

His second capture by a party from Buskirk’s regiment in February 1779 is described in another published letter written on February 10, 1779:

“Last Tuesday about 3 o’clock in the morning, a party of the New-Levies from Staten-Island, came over into Woodbridge, and marched up into the town undiscovered, to the house of Charles Jackson, in which there happened to lay that night a scout of Continental troops from Bonem-Town, consisting of twelve men.—The centinel did not discover them till they had well nigh surrounded the house, it being very dark, when he fired and ran off, making his escape; the rest being unfortunately asleep, were taken by surprise without making any resistance. Their principal object was Captain Nathaniel Fitz Randolph, who lived at this house.—He had just returned from Staten-Island, having been over there with a small party chief of the night, and was but a few minutes in the house before he was alarmed by the firing of the centinel, when they instantly rushed into the house and seized him and Mr. Jackson, with the scout as above. . . . the men were restrained from plundering by their officer, said to be a Captain Ryerson, of Buskirk’s regiment, who seemed actuated by principles of honour and humanity; and upon this occasion, imitated the laudable example of Captain Randolph, who has not only distinguished himself by his activity and bravery, but by his politeness and generosity towards such as he hath taken prisoners, never allowing his men to plunder” (*New-Jersey Gazette*, February 17, 1779)

¹⁸² *Printer to the king*. [See note 72.]

me dearly.¹⁸³ With the help of this weapon, I parried all their thrusts except two, which struck me and covered me with blood. Despite their efforts, I gradually retreated toward the neighboring fence¹⁸⁴ and jumped over it. They were forced to pull back so that their horses could leap over it, which fortunately gave me the advantage of getting ahead of them and running into the neighboring woods. My prolonged resistance was published in the gazettes and no doubt it displeased headquarters, because after the cowardly refugees surprised me in bed two months later, I was refused parole on Long Island.¹⁸⁵ Soon it'll be fourteen

¹⁸³ *In this unique action, this brave man suffered two sword blows, one to the head and one to the shoulder.*

¹⁸⁴ *All the fields are enclosed by fences four-and-a-half feet high.*

¹⁸⁵ St. John de Crèvecoeur seems to have conflated the circumstances of the captain's two different captures. From letters that Fitz Randolph wrote to his wife while in the Provost the first time, he complains of dangerous arm and head wounds, and this episode does indicate such injuries. Fitz Randolph also suggests in these letters to his wife that he had to surrender to the enemy (Johnston 490-491), which is not how he was captured the second time. The second time he was surprised in bed, as St. John describes and as the letter extract in note 181 indicates.

One of his letters written from the Provost to his wife, dated relatively early in his first confinement on March 10, 1777, describes his surroundings:

. . . I remain close Confined in the Provost Goal but in vain might attempt to describe in a particular manner the misserys that attend the Poor Prisoners Confined in this Horrid place, they are dying dayly with (what is called here) the Goal fever but may more properly be called the Hungry fever which rages among the prisoners here confined in goals they being deprived of almost every necessary of life. As to the treatment I have received since a prisoner has been varrious Sometimes like a Gentleman and other times like a Ruffin, have been for a week without a Surgeon to attend me. (Johnston 492)

In most of the returns of the Provost available during the dates of his second imprisonment, Fitz Randolph is described under the "Crimes" heading as "A Free Booter" ("Returns of the Provost" 76:30).

months that I've been perishing from boredom in this house of misery.¹⁸⁶ Oh, why did I let them put me in chains! If ever in life they seize me again—!¹⁸⁷ ¹⁸⁸

“Be patient like me, my dear fellow, said the Reverend John Mather, pastor of Greenwich.¹⁸⁹ ¹⁹⁰ I have only one feeling that consoles me, and may it become the feeling of all those who suffer for the cause of liberty!”

“Well, what is this feeling you're talking about?” asked Nathaniel Fitz Randolph. The hope of success?”

“It's not possible that Providence has destined us to be the slaves of Great Britain.”

¹⁸⁶ In reality, he and St. John de Crèvecoeur would have been having this conversation in the fifth or six month of Fitz Randolph's second confinement.

¹⁸⁷ *He was true to his word. A short time after being exchanged he died at the head of an American party, after having killed several Englishmen and having exhibited extraordinary daring and courage.*

¹⁸⁸ After almost sixteen months of confinement, Fitz Randolph was exchanged on May 26, 1780. However, he was fatally wounded at the Battle of Springfield in New Jersey less than a month later on June 23, and died on July 23, 1780 (Dally 255). The following contemporary account reports that he died

. . . of a wound he received . . . in pursuing the enemy on their retreat from Springfield. The ball entered his left arm, below the shoulder, penetrated his body, and came out at the right breast. It may justly be said of him, that he was a kind and tender husband, and indulgent parent, a worthy citizen, a sincere friend, a brave and valiant soldier, possessed of honour and humanity, as acknowledged by his enemies. During this contest he had been twice wounded before the fatal one which terminated his life; and twice a prisoner, and was confined in the provost of New-York for upwards of two years. His remains were interred on the Thursday following, with the honors of war, attended by a large concourse of respectable inhabitants from the neighbouring townships. He has left an amiable wife and two lovely children to bewail his loss; and is much lamented by all that had the pleasure of his acquaintance. (*New Jersey Archives* IV, 476-77)

¹⁸⁹ *One of the principal towns of the state of Connecticut, east of New York.*

¹⁹⁰ “Rev. John Mather” is St. John de Crèvecoeur's pseudonym for Rev. Moses Mather (1719-1806), of Middlesex parish, now known as the town of Darien, Connecticut, located between the cities of Norwalk and Stamford.



Fig. 11: Tombstone of Nathaniel Fitz Randolph (1747-1780), second from right, in the cemetery of First Presbyterian Church of Woodbridge, New Jersey.

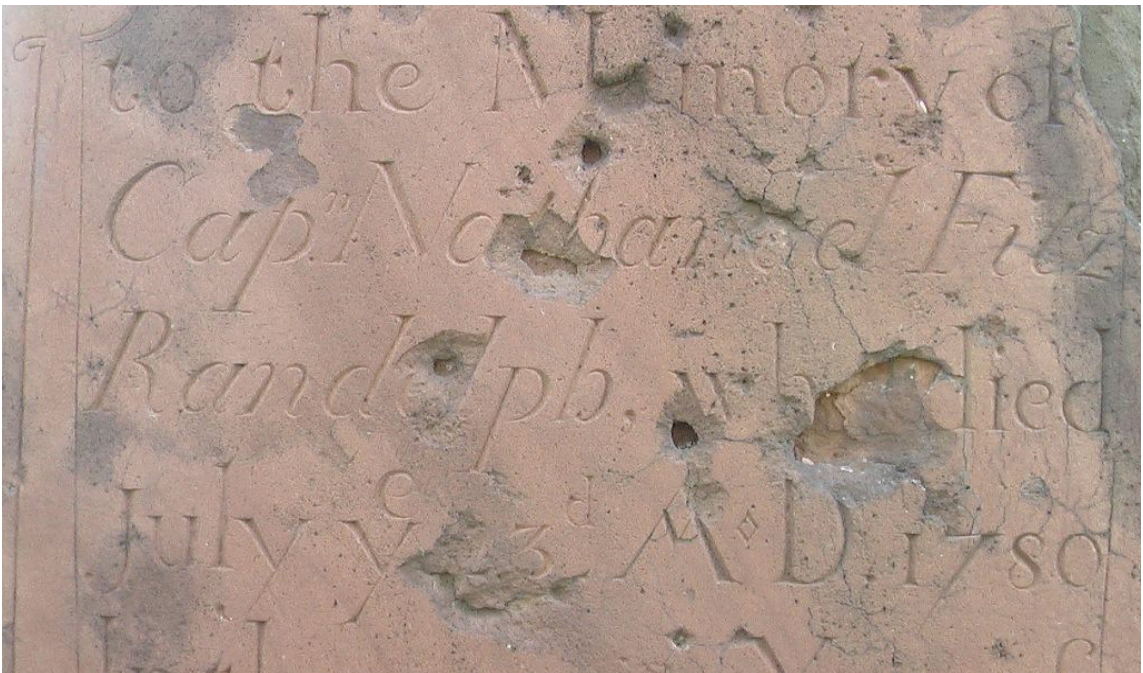


Fig. 12: Tombstone Inscription of Nathaniel Fitz Randolph: “. . . to the Memory of Capⁿ Nathanael Fitz Randolph, who died July y^e 23^d A D. 1780 . . .”

“How is it possible that you’re a prisoner,” I asked him, “being a priest and advanced in age!”

“The refugees take all, as you know, and this abyss swallows all. I had been represented to headquarters as a fanatic and insurgent of the first order because every Sunday I would go to church armed with my musket and bayonet. James Rivington himself amused the public at my expense. He published many a joke about me, a simple priest from Connecticut.¹⁹¹ He said that my pulpit was an ecclesiastical drum and that I was using it to recruit soldiers for the army of General Washington. He couldn’t have done more to incite the vindictive animosity of the refugees.¹⁹² Not content with having seized me in bed next to my wife, as well as my two boys, they plundered my house entirely and left the rest of my family in the greatest distress. Next they dressed me in a smock before conducting me to headquarters. They cruelly separated me from my poor children, who are now prisoners in the sugar house.¹⁹³ Despite all that I’m calm. I eat and sleep fairly well. A lofty faith, inspired by a good cause and the moral certainty of success, helps me endure all these evils with patience and resignation.”

¹⁹¹ *The province east of New York.*

¹⁹² *Some of his parishioners, indignant at the affront to their pastor, crossed the sound that separates the continent from Long Island, and in the midst of English troops’ quarters, took a leading Royalist magistrate prisoner, whom the proud English were never able to obtain without exchanging Rev. Mather. Never have I known a man who believed in Providence more than he, and who was more favored by circumstances. He arrived among us almost naked, and unknown persons of the City of New York clothed him, sent him money, etc. He left the Provost better supplied and possessing more gold than he had ever had at one time—at least that’s what he told us.*

¹⁹³ *A place where they refined sugar before the war, which became one of the prisons where they detained American prisoners of war.*

“Why did you go to church armed?”

“In compliance with a law of the province passed more than a hundred years ago, which orders—under heavy fine—all ministers as well as their parishioners not to go to church without their muskets.”

“What could the purpose of that law be?”

“Defending against incursions from savages, who once used that day to destroy our new settlements.”^{194 195}

¹⁹⁴ *In the infancy of this colony, the savages destroyed several settlements, attacking the colonists at the time of divine service.*

¹⁹⁵ Rev. Mather’s wartime experiences have been commemorated in numerous poems, inscriptions, newspaper accounts and books, both in his own era and afterwards. He possessed a charismatic personality that commanded tremendous love, respect and veneration. The above episode was only his first confinement in the Provost. His second, much more sensational capture, occurred in July 1781.

As for his first capture in July 1779, Rivington’s report in the *Royal Gazette* corresponds with details from St. John de Crèvecoeur’s narrative. Note, however, that four sons were taken prisoner, as opposed to two sons reported by St. John.

On Wednesday evening [July 28] a party of Refugees from Long-Island, landed at Middlesex, between Norwalk and Stanford, in Connecticut, proceeded five miles into the country, and brought off a mischievous Puritan Priest, named Mather, who has *long carried arms*, and from his Pulpit bitterly inveighed against his sovereign. Four of his sons were made prisoners with him. Mather has made a practice of carrying his Musket with him into the pulpit. (July 31, 1779)

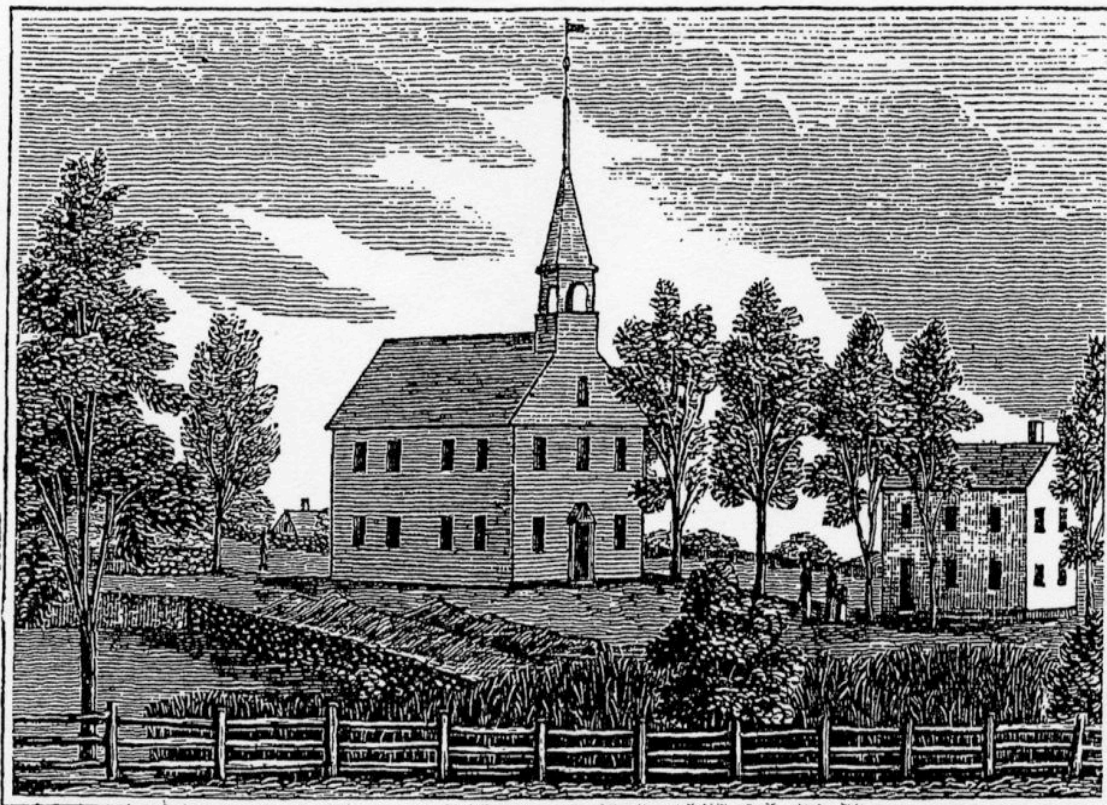
His release several weeks later is described in the *Norwich Packet* and underscores the personal, divisive nature of this civil war:

The Reverend Mr. Mather, of Stanford, and two of his sons, are lately returned from captivity at New York.—Mr. Mather was taken from his own house about five weeks since, with four of his sons, by a gang of eight tories, five of whom had been his parishioners. The other two sons are not exchanged. (September 14, 1779)

One generation after the death of Rev. Mather, Connecticut historian John Warner Barber wrote this lively account of his second capture:

. . . On Sunday the 22nd day of July, 1781, a party of British troops, consisting chiefly of refugees, surrounded this church and took the congregation prisoners. The Rev. Moses Mather, D. D. was at this time pastor of the church, a divine distinguished for his piety, learning, and most exemplary life. . . . While the congregation were singing the first time, the refugees, commanded by a Capt. Frost, sprung over the fence and suddenly surrounded the house. . . . The men of the congregation were taken out of the church, tied two and two, and Dr. Mather was placed at their head. . . .

Some of the congregation who were taken off, never returned; these probably perished in prison, others were paroled, and some returned after having suffered severely by the small pox. . . .



Southwestern view of the Congregational Church, Darien.

Fig. 13: Rev. Moses Mather's Church in Darien, Connecticut: “. . . a party of British troops, consisting chiefly of refugees, surrounded this church and took the congregation prisoners” (Barber 376).

Dr. Mather having been taken into New York, was confined in the Provost prison. Here his food was stinted, and wretched to a degree not easily imaginable. . . . Here also he was insulted daily by the provost marshal, whose name was Cunningham, a wretch, remembered in this country only with detestation. This wretch, with other kinds of abuse, took a particular satisfaction in announcing, from time to time, to Dr. Mather, that on that day, the morrow, or some other time at a little distance, he was to be executed.

But Dr. Mather was not without his friends; friends, however, who knew nothing of him, except his character. A lady of distinction,* having learned his circumstances, and having obtained the necessary permission, sent to him clothes and food, and comforts, with a very liberal hand. *According to the information obtained in Darien, this lady was the mother of Washington Irving, the American poet.

Barber closes his story of the renowned Dr. Mather with a poem that dramatizes this famous episode in Darien history: “Poetical Relation of the capture of the Congregation at Middlesex . . . with an Account of their sufferings, &c. while in captivity, by Peter St. John.” Rev. Mather was released in late December 1781 (376-379).

A few days later, I learned—I don't know how—that my child was sick, but my surveillance was so severe that I could never find out the details. The uncertainty of his fate intensified my fear and anxiety. I lapsed into my original melancholy. The society of my new friends suddenly lost all its charm. One day the provost marshal brought me a note that had already been opened. Alas! He had that fatal complaisance only because he was announcing the saddest news. I suspected it, for my heart palpitated involuntarily as I opened the note. P. H.,¹⁹⁶ the daughter of his landlord, informed me that her father had died, the fever of my child was very high, and she begged me to find another boarding-house for him, etc.¹⁹⁷

It was then that an impatient fury seized my soul. I would have sacrificed years of freedom for the pleasure of going to see that dear child. My heart became prey to the most stinging sensations. I pictured him sick and neglected, he who all his life had seen me anticipate all his needs. His image accompanied me everywhere saying, "Father, I ask for you and you don't come! I call out to you and you don't answer! Where are you?" But one must be a father to comprehend the extent of my suffering. Nature carefully hides from those to whom she has given no children these intimate relations, this powerful sympathy that often makes us favor their life and good fortune over our own.

¹⁹⁶ Patience Hallett (Hughes and Munsell vol. 5, 19).

¹⁹⁷ The landlord was a merchant, Mr. Thomas Hallett, whom St. John de Crèvecoeur identifies in *Esquisse de ma vie*. Our author's chronology ("a few days later") is impeccable on this matter, since Rev. Mather was captured on July 28, and indeed two weeks later, estate records indicate that the will of Ally's landlord, Thomas Hallett of Flushing, Queens County, was signed on August 11, and proved on August 16. Also, Hallett instructs in his will, "My executors are to sell all real and personal estate at public vendue and pay all just debts and funeral charges" (NYHS *Collections* [1900] 88-89). This fact corroborates St. John's report of the urgency of Hallett's daughter to empty the house of boarders.

What course was left for me now? None. I was unable to beg for anyone's mercy. Jailers don't understand those words, and my companions were as unfortunate as I. What I would have given at that moment to be alone, at leisure to feast on lugubrious ideas furnished by my imagination! My heart was ready to break. I still remember the bitter pain that I felt. I was unable to cry. I blamed my destiny and I blamed Providence, which the world over allows the guiltiest to prosper and submits justice and virtue to the caprices of power and force. I couldn't understand why it was persecuting me—me, a simple colonist, who all my life had industriously cultivated my plantation and tenderly cherished my family. It was then that I thought of life as a terrible, worthless gift; and death as the door of emancipation, a sweet repose, the shade of a large tree under a burning sky. But is it possible for me to depict for you all the wanderings of an exasperated spirit? That was one of the longest, cruelest nights that I had ever spent. I resorted to a new expedient: I took three grains of opium, and I would have taken more if my companions hadn't stopped me. Would you believe it—the fever of my mind and the bitterness that had penetrated me produced an effect superior to the illusory, soporific power of the narcotic. Nothing could calm me. I wandered here and there during that eternal night. My agitation and restlessness kept my companions awake until daybreak. More than one time I was tempted— But the love of my children— Ahhh, without this powerful attraction, without this irresistible motive— Perhaps it's to them that you owe your friend. . . . Perhaps it's to them that I owe the pleasure of having survived this cruel war, and of contemplating the dawn of this grand new epoch. I still tremble, I still shake,

when I remember the convulsions and the various degrees of frenzy that made this the longest, most terrible night that I had ever spent. Alas, why do the wings of time seem to grow heavy to prolong the pain of unhappiness; and why, conversely, do they grow swift to abridge the joy of happiness? As soon as daylight appeared, I gulped down a large glass of brandy, a common remedy that I'd never tried. My companions were surprised. The extreme rigidity of my nerves entirely prevented any effect, and the return of the light brought no change to my situation. I was on the brink of madness, even delirium, when my friends forced me into my bed. Nature, who again watched over my preservation, finally diminished the corrosive bitterness of my anguish with an abundant dew of tears. I wept bitterly for a long time: a precious elixir, a soothing remedy that I didn't yet know because during my childhood I had not suffered a single misfortune capable of eliciting tears. Captain Brown,¹⁹⁸ a venerable old man and prisoner for nine months, approached my bed when he saw that I was calmer.

“What's the matter, my friend? Nothing can console you?” Here, take this gold. Use it as you wish.”

“Keep your gold.” I told him. “I need only the riches of your friendship and the resources of your counsel.”

“Now open your heart and talk to me as if I were your father.”

¹⁹⁸ From Bergen Point, New Jersey, now part of the city of Bayonne just south of Jersey City. St. John de Crèvecoeur's “Captain Brown” could be Charles Brown, listed in the January 1, 1779, Provost return as an “inhabitant” who was confined by Major Sutherland for “decoying Soldiers to Desert and changing cloaths with them.” As of January 1, 1779, he had been confined for 157 days (“Returns of the Provost” 50:1). It was, after all, Captain Brown in Letter 2 who launched a tirade against Major Sutherland in the scene with Sergeant B. A.

“Don’t you know the condition of my son? At this very moment, perhaps he’s calling my name—if he’s still alive—and I can’t go to his rescue. What hasn’t he suffered since the death of his landlord, who was both his friend and mine! His landlord’s heirs are undoubtedly afraid of losing their money because I’m a prisoner. What can I do, tell me, I beg you, good father, hindered as I am by these damn walls, detained by these eternal bars?”

“There’s nothing that money can’t buy you here except for freedom. I’ve acquired a certain credit with Cunningham; I give him presents from time to time. What is your wish?”

“What is my wish! What! You’re a father, and you’re asking me a question like that? I wish for all the faculties of my mind, I wish for this child to be transported here (whatever the expense may be), I wish to see him and embrace him so that he doesn’t carry to the grave the notion that his father could have forgotten or abandoned him. If he must die, I wish that he may expire in my arms. Then again, if we can cure him, will it be such a pity for him to remain a prisoner with us, since he’ll make the captivity of his poor father a great deal lighter?”

“Now calm down, your wishes will be easily accomplished. He’ll be here within forty-eight hours. I have a nephew in the city—I’m going to send him the most precise orders. Count on my fervor and his exactitude.”

“Oh, my dear Captain,” I said, clenching him in my arms with all the force of gratitude. “What have I done for you? What motive can possibly spur you to take such a lively interest in my fate? You love me that much, Captain? I’ve

known you for only such a short time. Your title to my friendship and to the keen interest I take in you is only too sufficient. It's a debt we owe everyone."

"Aren't you even more unfortunate than I am? Alas, I don't have any children left; they were all killed in the first campaign. I consoled myself over their loss by telling myself, 'You were too old to defend your country, but your own family stood in your place and they didn't flee.' We're companions in captivity, aren't we? We suffer for the same cause, don't we? So aren't we brothers? You're not the first person I've helped during my stay under this roof. It's the only good that I've been able to do for our country torn apart by these damned Britons."

"Bring back my child, and I'll call you—we'll call you—'father' our whole life. I swear before you and the face of Heaven to preserve the memory of this generous act for as long as I live. I swear that my affection and respect will be from this moment the surety of my gratitude. Starting today I replace one of the sons that you lost, and Ally replaces another."

This esteemed old man had scarcely restored the hope of calm and serenity to my soul when Cunningham brought a prisoner into our room. It was about ten o'clock in the morning. He was pale, confused and so shaken that he could barely walk. This cloud of sadness didn't surprise me at all. Out of consideration for this newcomer, no one looked at him nor even spoke to him. That's the nicest compliment one can offer an unfortunate man during the first moments of his arrival. The two of us walked in opposite directions in the most

perfect silence until it was time to eat. As soon as the food was ready, I anxiously asked him if he wanted something to eat.

“Nothing at all,” he answered. “You go a long time without being hungry or thirsty when you come to a place like this,” and he kept walking.

As soon as I had eaten a few mouthfuls (I ate only in order to stay alive), I joined him again.

“You’re hardly eating, yourself,” he said to me.

“Oh, Sir, I just had a repast whose bitterness hasn’t yet faded.”

“How long have you been here?” he asked.

“Nine weeks.”

“What! Nine weeks, and you still aren’t eating? You’re not condemned, I hope?”

“No, I haven’t even been tried yet. Besides, it’s not on account of my own troubles that I’ve lost my appetite.”

“What’s the matter?”

“What I have to say couldn’t interest you.”

“Why not? At least tell me the reasons for your detention.”

“I don’t know them. And yours, Sir?”

“Neither do I. But I’m morally certain that it’s a mistake. I don’t believe I’ve done anything—or even *thought* anything—against the government. I’ve been retired from business for two years, and I farm the land of Mr. ** at Hell Gate,¹⁹⁹ which this same government gave me.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ *A strait between the island of Manhattan or New York, and Nassau or Long Island, which at low tide presents a terrifying spectacle by the violence of the current and the placement of the*

“God willing,” I told him, “you’ll obtain your freedom shortly! I’ve lived under this roof long enough to know that it’s a lot easier to get in than it is to get out. One is sent here without due process on a suspicion, an anonymous letter, a tip from an informer, a lie. The English generals know no other remedy than prison and chains, similar to certain overseas governments about which I’ve heard. On the other hand, to get out you have to wait your turn, then be examined by the court of inquiry, and finally be tried by their war councils when Messieurs Officers have the time.” He pressed me to relate the cause of my sorrow, about which I finally informed him—all the circumstances of my situation.

“Don’t worry,” he said, “as soon as I’m back home, I’ll send my Negro after your child.” You can count on my wife, who is naturally good and compassionate, to take care of him as if he were one of our own.”

“What!” I exclaimed. “You’re married? You’re a father? Oh, I’m sure you’ll share my sorrows and lighten them! So there still are virtuous and humane souls? The ferocity of this cruel war hasn’t yet turned all men into tigers? Who

rocks. Good pilots, however, have conducted English frigates through it. [Today, the strait in the East River between Astoria, Queens on the east and Ward’s Island on the west.]

²⁰⁰ It was customary for the British military government to temporarily give the abandoned New York homes of American patriots to British officers and loyalists. Interestingly, months later Major-General Pattison ordered one Mr. Perry to vacate the house that had been made available to him, in a letter from his aide dated March 14, 1780 (NYHS *Collections* [1875] 378):

New York, March 14, 1780.

Sir,

Major Gen^l Pattison having occasion for the House on the East River, which he indulged you with last year, he has directed me to signify this to you, and to desire you will take your measures so as to quit it the 15th of next Month,—as you cannot but be sensible of the Indulgence hitherto granted you, the General is persuaded you will not hesitate to comply with his Wishes, and has ordered me to give you this timely Notice, in order that you may be put to as little Inconvenience as possible.

I am Sir, &^c

S.P.A.

are you? Are you English or American? This land witnessed your birth, I'm sure of it, since you sympathize with my plight."

"I'm English. They're not all degenerates like the ones under whose rod we groan."

"What! You're English and you're a guardian spirit sent to my rescue at the moment of my greatest distress!"

"I'm only a man and a brother. If I can be of use to you, I'll not regret having been led here." He was released around four o'clock on the same day.

Shortly before the doors of our rooms were shut, they called me to the prison gate. It was this fine man. "A simple error led to my imprisonment, just as I had imagined. My wife was at headquarters and obtained an explanation, which has spared me perhaps a month of captivity. I stopped here in passing to repeat and confirm my promises to you. Tomorrow you'll have news of your son. As soon as he gets better, I'll bring him here to see you. I have enough credit with the commandant to obtain this permission." A surplus of gratitude choked my expressions, and the words vanished on my trembling lips. Through the bars, I gripped his hands in mine but was unable to bathe them with my tears.

Indeed, the next day around five o'clock in the evening, the Negro of Mr. Henry Perry²⁰¹ came on his master's behalf to announce the arrival of my child under his roof, and the remedies that they were preparing to give him to speed up his recovery. I would have embraced this good Negro as my best friend if I had been at liberty to do so. What ridiculous questions I put to him!

²⁰¹ *A young English merchant established in New York before the war. I had never known him before.*

“Tell me, my friend, is it really true that you’ve seen him, this dear child, and that you’ve spoken to him? What did he say about his father?”

“He cried as soon as I mentioned you.”

The same pencil that has just sketched for you the pain of sorrow and the frenzy of despair—can it also depict the convulsive tremors, the varied feelings of delight that this fortunate news brought me? It was a ray of light that suddenly brightened the darkest dungeon. It was a balm that spontaneously healed the deepest wound that I have ever received. My excessive joy was nearly fatal to me.

During this long interval, my good friend was secretly working to have me tried before a war council or to procure my release on bail. My innocence became obvious as soon as they deigned to make the necessary inquiries. However, General Sir H. C.²⁰² did not want to release me on less than four bails of five hundred guineas each.²⁰³ It was an obstacle that certainly should have kept me in prison until the end of the war. This particular order signaled a suspicion on his part that intimidated my friends. They didn’t know what to think or do. For more than two weeks my fate was uncertain. Meanwhile, I was informed of everything that was transpiring by Captain Hewetson, Town Major, to whose charity I owe a great deal.²⁰⁴ May destiny, which plays with men while

²⁰² *Sir Henry Clinton.*

²⁰³ *No matter the innocence of a prisoner, there had to have been a crime for him to be sent to the Provost in the eyes of the very ones by whose order he had been sent there. He could never get out without two valid people answering for his conduct, each one posting a bond of five hundred guineas, which would be confiscated for the profit of I know not whom on the first suspicion that the bonded person aroused.*

²⁰⁴ Captain Brinsley Hewetson, Town Major of New York.

leading them about on this stage, offer me the pleasure of meeting him again and holding him in my arms. My good friend William Seton, through his diligence and zeal, at last arranged for me to get out of prison on only two bails. So then I wrote to a Dutch colonist in Flatbush on Long Island, who a short time before had offered me his purse. Following is one portion of the letter that my good friend wrote to the commandant:

The slightest inquiries will easily convince Your Excellency of the fortune that I possess here. I offer it entirely to the government as a guarantee of the innocence and good conduct of my friend St. J. Therefore, accept me as the sole surety, or at least permit me to beg for your intercession with the commander-in-chief so that, in consideration of St. J.'s innocence and the duration of his detention, he might be willing to retract the order he has given and demand only two sureties. If what I possess in the city is not sufficient, I offer Your Excellency my good name and reputation, etc.

“Such a friend,” said the commandant, “is not bought too dearly by three months of prison. Major Hewetson, go to the provost marshal and inform St. J. of the letter that I’ve just received. Tell him that I’ll speak to the commander-in-chief.”

Five days later I finally got out on two bails of five hundred guineas each,²⁰⁵ and to the gift of having procured my liberty, my friend even added the politeness of being the first to bring the order to the jailer.

“You are no longer my prisoner,” Cunningham came to tell me. “A friend, like no other, is waiting for you downstairs. Follow me.”

Just imagine the effect of these words. I go downstairs, I clasp my friend in my arms, he clasps me in his, and tears replace our words. Never was discourse more eloquent. After dining with my benefactor, I borrow a horse from another friend no less zealous, although more timid—he was afraid lest in taking too open an interest in my fate he would make it more severe²⁰⁶—I ride to Hell Gate to embrace Mr. Henry Perry as well, and to see my child again, the cause of so many concerns and palpitations.

The house was full of officers. I caught sight of a servant. “I’m the father of the sick child whom your master sent for from Flushing a few weeks ago. I’d like to avoid the company who are dining here. Please, lead me to his room.” I found him in a violent fit of fever, his eyes wandering. He got up halfway.

“Ah! Father, is that you? Come let me feel you. Is it really true that this is you—you yourself, Father?” And he started to laugh and cry convulsively.

“Yes, it’s me. It’s me myself. It’s me, your poor father, who is NOT and has NEVER been guilty, although unjustly accused by an anonymous letter, and a

²⁰⁵ The currency was more likely pounds than guineas. See note 81 on Col. Smith’s release on £ 500 bail.

²⁰⁶ Most likely William Smith. See introduction.

prisoner for three months. We will no longer be separated, my little friend. We'll live together or we'll die together."

For more than a half-hour, we held our cheeks against each other, bathing them in tears. But no description can depict for you a scene so touching. It had inexpressible charms. It was the end of all my ills. It restored my health and happiness. Also, such was its effect on the weakened organs of this child that his fever disappeared and never came back. The presence of his father was more powerful than nine doses of quinine that he had taken earlier.

I don't know how the company was informed of my arrival. Our initial rapture had hardly passed when they entered the room where we were, preceded by the master and mistress of the house, who were young, fresh, and attractive. Already better, Ally²⁰⁷ got up, embraced them, and said, "Here's my father—just as you said."

My faculty for thinking and the sound of my very voice failed me at this unexpected moment. I could only shed tears, gripping their hands in mine and placing them on my heart. The officers, who were witnesses of this scene and had been informed about my story, seemed moved by it even though they were English. We became the objects of their attention and despite my entreaties, the child was placed on a sofa next to me in the room where they were dining. But intoxicated with the genuine happiness of a father and sated with the delicious feast that I had just held, I couldn't eat a thing. Mr. and Mrs. Perry, adding further to their extraordinary generosity, offered me asylum under their roof until the

²⁰⁷ *The name of the author's child, who was only eight-and-a-half years old at this time. [Actually, he was just over seven years old.]*

departure of the fleet. I stayed there for two weeks and then we returned to New York.

I no sooner enjoyed my liberty than I took the first opportunity to procure for Captain Brown²⁰⁸ the liberty of returning home on his own bail. It would be useless to give you details of the extraordinary means I used. Nevertheless, so great is the jealous, distrustful authority of the English that it was impossible for me to see him. This worthy old man, claiming to owe me more gratitude than my zeal deserved, positively wanted me to send my child to him until the departure of the fleet. I obliged him, although with the greatest resistance, and it didn't take long for me to regret it. Because this good old man lived on the western bank of the Hudson River, I was accused of corresponding with the rebels and nearly went back to prison. However, I had taken the precaution of sending my son to the police station to obtain permission to leave British lines. A few days later a party of English soldiers, painted black, knowing that Captain Brown had returned home and that he was rich, broke down his door during the night and carried off his most valuable possessions. And because this brave old man defended himself, they sliced off one of his ears and put his eye out. Don't be at all surprised by this act. This war has furnished a thousand examples of the cruelest barbarity and rapine ever. Imagine my child's fright. I made him come back as soon as I was informed, for the plantation of this unfortunate American was situated on Bergen Point opposite New York on the west bank of the Hudson River.

²⁰⁸ *Former captain of a merchant vessel who possessed an ample fortune before the war that was acquired by his industry. Today that fortune has been almost entirely destroyed by the English.*

A short time later, we embarked on a fleet of 190 sails bound for England, Scotland and Ireland.²⁰⁹ After six weeks of sailing, I disembarked at Dublin, where I'm writing you. Five days after our arrival in this capital, a singular circumstance obtained for my young companion the acquaintance and friendship of a very respectable lady, as if destiny wished to compensate him for his former torments. He lived with this amiable person for my entire stay in this kingdom. For my part, although I had no letter of recommendation, circumstances no less fortunate caused me to experience the charm of Irish hospitality. I will never forget the politeness, frankness and humanity of the people whom I had the good fortune of meeting. I finally arrived in my country, which I had not seen for twenty-seven years. The sensations of joy and pleasure that I have since felt are beyond all description.²¹⁰

May Heaven grant after so many years of murders and conflagrations and after such a terrible tempest, that courage, wisdom, and the perseverance of the Americans may finally be crowned with victory and rewarded by the establishment of liberty and independence! A revolution so successful, so inestimable, will make amends for all of our ills and heal all of our wounds. The keen interest and the treasures that one of the most powerful nations of Europe

²⁰⁹ Biographers of St. John de Crèvecoeur have dated this fleet's departure as September 1, 1780, taken from the author's own date in *Esquisse de ma vie*. However, contemporary records have not turned up a September 1 fleet departure, but there is evidence that a fleet departed on September 4, 1780. Among the passengers was Major-General James Pattison, who had recently resigned as commandant of New York. The following was printed in *The Mercury*, September 4, 1780: "The Fleet for England Sailed this Day under Convoy of the Renoun &c. &c., Captain Hawkes" (*The Journals of Hugh Gaine, Printer* 98).

²¹⁰ Again, St. John de Crèvecoeur is not adhering strictly to his epistolary conceit, since this letter is dated Dublin (not France), 18 December 1780; although one could rationalize that he merely began the letter in Dublin but finished it in France.

bestows upon it assure this felicitous event, a thousand times more interesting than all those that until now have served only to stain the earth needlessly with the blood of its inhabitants.²¹¹

May that happy day come! This is the wish of all good people in Europe, and even in England.

Farewell, St. John.

²¹¹ This patriotic passage is emblematic of the pro-American Independence tone that pervades *Lettres-1784* and *Lettres-1787*, and its teeming optimism about American victory betrays that it was likely written long after the date at the head of this letter.

Dublin, 30 December 1780.

5. Last Letter²¹²

How I remember it even now! Brass quickening into the mold does not receive a sharper or more durable impression than that which was engraved on my imagination by the painful scene whose details you demand. Can you possibly doubt that its features and nuances will never be effaced?

It was last August the 24th around eleven o'clock at night. All around were darkness and silence. The drowsy prisoners no longer felt the weight of their chains. In the arms of sleep they forgot that they were miserable and under the rod of Cunningham. The Hessian guards who were keeping watch around our prison had stopped singing the hymns and songs of their country, and all were sleeping except for the sentinels. Colonel Smith was the only one in our dungeon who was still talking, and even his conversation consisted of no more than a few broken, sluggish monosyllables. I alone was unable to close my eyelids. The sleep that I long invoked seemed constantly to escape them.

Around eleven o'clock, the profound silence of our mournful dwelling was suddenly interrupted. The ponderous keys whose sound we knew so well were heard and the crossbars at the foot of the stairs fell. After this noise, made more

²¹² This letter was not in *Lettres-1784*.

sinister by the profound silence and darkness, there followed the sound of bolts and the bellowing of hinges.

“Great God,” said my neighbor, “no doubt they’re bringing some poor wretch under this roof of captivity.”

A mixture of sympathy and terror suddenly seizes and shakes me. Involuntarily, my mind counts the footsteps they make on the stairs. Soon afterwards, the noise of the bars of the second gate is repeated by the sad echoes of the gallery that we’re in. It opens, and a slight glimmer becomes noticeable under our door.

“Alas, where are you going to conduct this new companion of ill fortune?” muttered the old Captain Brown.

“What if it’s one of us they came to get?” asked Rev. Mather.

Meanwhile the sound of the steps approaches and the light expands.

“But maybe they’re going to take him to the neighboring cell,” said Mr.

P. S. S.

All of a sudden the light stops, and the keys applied to the iron lock of our door dispel all doubts and fill our souls with terror and dread.

“Alas, which of us is going to be called?” my neighbor asks.

These words had barely been articulated when my name was uttered. I recognize the voice of Cunningham and the door opens.

“My poor friend,” Colonel Smith said to me softly, gripping my hand with the vigor of the last goodbye. The agitation that took hold of me became so violent that I could not respond. Offended by my silence, the jailer, in the most

barbarous language, repeated the order for me to get up and follow him. I made an attempt, I tottered, I fell, I made another attempt. Finally, I leaned against the wall and put on my clothes, persuaded—I don't know why—that it was for the last time.

I still remember it well. I dared to lift my soul toward the Supreme Being, and after commending my wife and children to him, I begged him to grant me some remnant of my former energy so that I could suffer my fate with strength and decorum. I enter the gallery, barely able to hold myself up. But what was my surprise and delight—yes, I dare to use that expression—when I noticed that the tumultuous excitement of my nerves abated, and my palpitating heart grew calm and peaceful. It is a circumstance as real as it seems perhaps extraordinary to you. Would excessive derangement have been able to restore the equilibrium in my frail machine?

However, I see no attendants and Cunningham was alone. What did he want to do with me? Why all this mysterious display amid silence in the middle of the night? I say to myself, "It will undoubtedly be in the lower gallery that I'll be delivered into the hands of new agents." Crossing the gallery, I look all around and I observe only the same silence and mystery. Then I was convinced that my fate would be decided in the great hall toward which he was leading me. How mute, inexpressive and insufficient are the combination and use of even the most energetic words! How sluggish, feeble and tardy are the movement, power and shades of their brushes, compared to the turbulent vivacity and the swift, violent

passion with which my restless spirit conceived and formed a thousand different impressions.

The decisive moment finally arrived. I entered the large apartment, which my eyes scanned with the immediate swiftness of lightning. But how shall I depict my soul's surprise and joy at the sight of the auspicious emptiness that I observed? How shall I depict the extremes to which I traveled in an instant? For I dare not tell you what I was expecting to see, nor upon what this fatal premonition was founded.²¹³

But far from my sinister, criminal imagination and those unjust, deceitful conjectures, a single person was there waiting for me. It was Captain Hewetson, Town Major,²¹⁴ who was seated near a table on which a bottle of wine had been set, reading some papers. The unexpected, consoling presence of a friend, of a protector like him, made such a deep impression on my spirit that I was obliged to sit down and ask him for a glass of water. Never before had I felt that the effects of joy so resembled those of sorrow. My face broke out in a cold sweat; an especially painful anguish seized the region of my heart; I thought I would faint and my palpitations started up again.

²¹³ In 1792, a confession by William Cunningham was published in a Philadelphia newspaper. He allegedly made the confession on the eve of his execution in London on a conviction of check forgery. The confession claimed that he had starved to death 2000 patriot prisoners during the war and had executed 275 prisoners on the gallows behind the Provost late at night under the cover of darkness. In *Forgotten Patriots*, Edwin G. Burrows argues that this confession, assumed to be authentic for over 200 years, was itself a forgery. He bases his argument on a combination of factors: the timing and nature of the American newspaper article that revealed the confession; the lack of historical evidence of Cunningham's execution; and the lack of contemporary accounts of these "midnight murders" (255ff). Whether or not the confession is a forgery, there is no doubt that Cunningham was responsible for a large number of prisoner deaths, largely through starvation. Furthermore, St. John's insinuations in this letter that he feared he was being led to his death lead one to suppose that he knew of prisoners who had fallen victim to late-night executions.

²¹⁴ See Letter 4.

“What’s the matter?” this officer asked me.

“What’s the matter? Alas, if I told you, you would never forgive me,” I replied.

“As noble and good as you are? I don’t understand,” he continued. “What do you mean? When a friend like me comes to see you, how can you even think of being anxious?”

“As Town Major,” I said, “aren’t you superintendent of this place? Haven’t you come here this evening much later than usual?”

“So, what bizarre inference are you able to draw from that?”

“None at all, but don’t you know that the ill-fated always believe they see the imprint of misfortune in everything that surrounds them, and that even the assistance of the most generous friendship withers and wilts as they approach it? Haven’t I already experienced this numerous times?”

“You worry me,” answered the Major. “Please, explain yourself.”

“I can’t, and out of pity for me don’t ask me to. Instead, pardon an unfortunate friend. Put yourself in my place for a moment. Why so much silence and mystery, and why didn’t they tell me you were the one asking for me? The mere pronunciation of your name would have prevented my alarm and anxiety; and for the first time, Cunningham would have carried consolation and light into our cell.”

“Who could have foreseen these harmful, lugubrious premonitions? I wasn’t looking to cast any mystery. I was overburdened with business all day long and couldn’t come see you sooner.”

“Generous friend,” I told him, “forget everything that’s just happened and everything you thought you comprehended. My wits have wandered off since I’ve been under this roof, especially since I’ve learned about the illness of my child. There’s a faint ray left. It alone guides me and often leads me astray. I’m not my old self anymore, the one you knew during the time of my freedom and good fortune.”

“I would like to forgive and forget everything,” he answered as he shook my hand, “on the condition that we drink this bottle of wine together. In a little while, I hope to obtain from headquarters your release on bail of a thousand guineas, and your good friends Mr. ** and Mr. *** are ready to sign the document.²¹⁵ The commandant²¹⁶ feels sorry for you and even believes you’re innocent. So try to be a little happier and stop letting your imagination concoct such dark and even sinister ideas.”

“This is too much all at once, my dear Major. Let me linger here for a few more weeks in order to atone for what’s just happened. Then you’ll cap your generosity when you bring me the seal of my liberty and your pardon on the same day. May the memory of this generous act temper the future moments of bitterness to which you may be exposed, and if your dearest friends ever experience similar misfortunes, may souls as generous as yours render them a hundred times what you’ve just rendered me!”

²¹⁵ William Seton and the “Dutch colonist in Flatbush” (Letter 4). The unnamed surety may be one Mr. Peters, whom William Smith identifies in his diaries as one of the two men willing to post bail for St. John de Crèvecoeur along with Mr. Seton. See my introduction (55).

²¹⁶ Major-General James Pattison.

We chatted about the events of the war and several other things until nearly an hour past midnight. But during that long interval, my poor companions, whose hearts and souls had been ripped apart by doubt and anxiety, were listening, listening with the most scrupulous eagerness for the noise they thought they heard in order to fix on this very noise the different notions that each of them were forming about my fate.

“Alas,” said Colonel J. Smith, “the punishments inflicted in this place are like decrees of death, which daily strike and remove their victims when they least expect it, whether of French origin, American origin, etc., etc.”

At that point in their conversation, the sad echoes of the prison repeated the same noise. The same light appeared under their door, and the keys applied to the iron lock announced the return of the jailer. Just as before, their hearts were seized with terror and dread, each of them believing they would be the second victim that Cunningham was going to claim. Fortunately, anticipating the heart-rending anxiety that this return (made in the same silence and mystery) would have caused them, and wishing to shorten the moment, I addressed them as soon as the door was open. Never were the feelings and sympathies of eight people more striking, energetic and flattering. When they saw me come back, they all got up halfway and congratulated me and expressed the pleasure that they felt. Cunningham, far from imagining what all this movement meant, paid no attention.

Finally, after he had counted us and closed the door again, he left us in our former darkness. But this same darkness was no longer dismal or appalling.

Just the opposite, it appeared to me as the symbol of tranquility, calm and repose. Next I was groping for the hands of my dear companions, which I grasped in mine with every expression of affection and gratitude. And responding to what they demanded of me, I recounted everything that had just happened. Exhausted by the toils of such a peculiar, tiring scene, I threw myself onto my bed, where out of pity, Nature finally deigned to pour some drops of poppy onto my burning eyelids.

Farewell, St. John.

Appendix

**Colonel Josiah Smith's Itemization of His Plundered Property
and Expenses Incurred by His 1779 Imprisonment in the Provost
(Transcribed by Osborn Shaw)**

Items from Col. Josiah Smith's Account Book. 56

Memorandum Nouember th 21 -1778-

On the 21 of No^{br} aboute seuen oclock in the Evening Ebenezer Dalton Captain of A priuateear Broughte into My House by force of Armes fore Wounded Men one Named Iohn Cobet and he Died the th 27 Day of Nouember - & one named Truman Loueland & one Named Gedion Alling both of these men wors Delieured [by] Magor Olevver Delace magor of the Lite Dragunes on the th 28 of Nouember and he put them on Bord A Uessel & one named Elisha White & he died the 7th of February 1779 Aboute seuen in the Evening -- all of them from Conedicut --

September y^e 24th -1779-

Memorandum of the time that I Josiah Smith wors taken from hum by William Chandler and Ioseph Booth, and thare party and Caryed to the Prouste at New York Likewise of the mony it Coste me while gone and an accunte of what thay Plundered me of When thay tuck me from hum --

They tuck me from hum the Firste Day of Iuly and I Returned Hum the Twenty thurd of September --

| | £ | S | D |
|--|----|----|---|
| It Coste me While gon from hum in cash | 64 | 01 | 2 |
| To Eyghte weeks Bord and fule at Mr. Franklins | 08 | 00 | 0 |
| To Sixtens Days Bord and my Self at the Same place | 06 | 08 | 0 |

September ye 24th -1779- Memorandum of what William Chandler and Ioseph Booth and thar party Plundered me of When thay tuck me from hum and Caryed me to the Prouste Gard at New York --

(here follows a list of the cost of the items listed below)

2 horses, 1 mare & colt, 2 saddles & bridles, 1 purse of gold amounting to 26/10/8/, 2 pair of silver shoe buckles, 1 odd buckle, 1 pair of silver knee buckles, 17 yds. of holand, 9 yds of "Fustion" & buckrum, 1 pair of velvet briches, 2 holand shirts, 1 pr of saddle bags, 2 pr stockings, 8 silk hankerchiefs, 5 linen hankerchiefs, one set of

(2) 56

instruments to draw teeth with, 1 shot mold, 5 curious pocket knives, and 1 horse whip, Also the following articles belonging to different persons.

Captain Mann: 1 pr silver shoe buckles, 6 "fee Spures" & one large spur;

William Bovers or Bowers: 20 yds of homemade cloth.

Daniel Reeve: one beaver hat, one silk hankerchief.

Jacob Conklin: one coat, 2 "Iasotes", 2 pr breeches, 2 fine shirts, 2 socks, 2 pr. stockings.

Nathaniel Conklin: Cash, £1.

John Conkling: Cash, £1.

Col. Platt Conkling: £4, 5s.

Cash paid to Josiah Reeve for going to New York, £7, 4s.

TOWN OF BROOKHAVEN
HISTORIAN'S OFFICE

Copied by Osborn Shaw, January 1939, from the account book of Col. Josiah Smith, of Moriches Patentship, now owned by Riley P. Howell, Esq., East Moriches.

"Items from Col. Josiah Smith's Account Book." 24 Sept. 1779.
Osborn Shaw Misc. Documents, Book II 56.
Town of Brookhaven Historian's Office: Brookhaven, N.Y.

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Autobiographical Statement

Drew Moore's life reflects a measure of the hybridism that characterizes his author's life. St. John de Crèvecoeur was a Frenchman and an American, a farmer and a man of letters. Drew has been a small-town Tennessean and an urbanite, an actor and an academic.

Early in his career, he worked as an actor in Nashville, Chicago and Los Angeles after graduating in theatre from Northwestern University. Subsequently, he earned a bachelor's degree in Greek and Latin at the University of Tennessee, and worked as a freelance writer in New York City before enrolling in graduate school.

Most recently, Drew completed an M.A., M.Phil., and Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at the City University of New York's Graduate School, specializing in ancient Greek and early American literature. He is currently on the Classics faculty of Brooklyn College, where he teaches Classical Cultures as well as The Greek and Latin Roots of English.

Drew lives in Manhattan.