

John Paulding

Commemorative Essay by Claire Royston, Sleepy Hollow

Sleepy Hollow High School, May 23, 2012



Claire Royston is a sophomore at Sleepy Hollow High School. She is 15 years old and lives in Sleepy Hollow with her parents and her two older brothers. Claire has been involved with music and the arts for her entire life and wants to continue with them. Claire thanks her family and friends for supporting her in everything she does and for always being there and she is very honored to have been given the opportunity to write about her home town.

John Paulding

1758-1818



John Paulding was born on October 16, 1758. He is extremely deserving of a place in the Tarrytown-Sleepy Hollow Hall of Fame due to his brave actions and accomplishments during the Revolutionary War. Paulding, along with two other soldiers found and captured Major Andre, a spy for Benedict Arnold, near what is now known as Patriots Park in Tarrytown. His bravery helped foil Arnold's plan and greatly helped America. He died in 1818 and a school was named after him on the hill above where the capture took place.

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Many people have lived or passed by the small villages of Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow. There have been many great men and women who made differences in these two towns and history has been made time and time again. The towns have prospered with the contributions of many important people, from great mayors and leaders, to small business owners and soldiers. One such soldier was named John Paulding and his place in history represents one that will never be forgotten. John Paulding was from New York and he fought during the American Revolution. Paulding is known for the famous capture of Major Andre which helped change the course of the American Revolution. His extreme bravery and loyalty to his country prove him worthy of being in the Tarrytown-Sleepy Hollow Hall of Fame.

The American Revolution came about from conflict and tensions between Britain's thirteen colonies and the British crown. Americans across the colonies wanted independence and soon enough a war was being waged. John Paulding had three brothers, each of them joining the revolution along with him. He was from a poor farming family and some thought him uneducated and unable to be successful in life. At 22 years old, John Paulding had been captured twice in action and escaped back to his unit, the First Westchester Volunteer Militia, both times. On one time, he had been on patrol in Tarrytown with his company and became outnumbered by British soldiers who imprisoned him in a walled composite in Manhattan. He cleverly escaped by befriending local maids to hide him and stealing a boat to avoid captors looking for him. When he was back in Westchester, he and two privates were placed on patrol by the roadside, a little outside of Tarrytown. The two companions with Paulding were David Williams and Isaac Van Wart. The men weren't dressed in standard military

form and Paulding still had on his green Jaeger coat (Hessian coat) which helped him conspicuously make his escape from New York City. He wanted to confuse the enemy, who might think them Tories or sided with the British. Here, beside the road, Paulding and the others confronted a man racing by on horseback, whom they soon find out to be Major Andre, a British spy. At first, when Andre saw Paulding's green jacket he was relieved, for he believed Paulding to be British. But when Paulding insisted of searching Andre for anything suspicious, Andre knew they were not on his side. Major Andre worked with Benedict Arnold and he was on his way to ask for the West Point command so they could betray it and crush the rebellion. Owning West Point would mean control over most of the Hudson River and therefore eventually control of the colonies. Andre couldn't wait for the Crown to have power once more. The revolutionaries found nothing on Andre at first but when they checked his boots they found papers which were details about West Point and communications with Benedict Arnold. Andre pleaded with them, offering them any amount of money they asked for, but Paulding did not waver in his decision. He told Andre, "No, by God, if you would give us ten thousand guineas, we should not stir a step" (Paulding). They claimed Andre a spy and took him to the Continental Army. He was hanged soon after.

Paulding, Van Wart, and Williams were claimed as heroes to the American cause and were awarded with the Fidelity Medallion and pensions of \$200 a year. John Paulding was looked at in awe by Americans for his intuitiveness and quick decision-making skills. Another militiaman might have believed Andre's quickly made up story of being on their side and let him go. Another man also might have accepted the riches Andre offered him and went along on his merry way, but Paulding knew that the fight for his liberty, that would remain forever, was much more important than money, no matter how much,

that would eventually run out. Letting Andre go would have proved disastrous due to the high casualties Andre would have helped cause if he had gotten past those three soldiers. No one looked at John Paulding as a poor farmer any longer; he was idolized and thanked by many who wanted American independence from the Crown. Some still looked in disbelief at what Paulding did and refused to look at the saviors as anything more than rough brigands but despite the slight division, they still became majorly popular throughout the colonies. In Tarrytown, as a tribute to Paulding's deed, an elementary school near Patriot's Park where the capture happened was named after him.

John Paulding ought to have more recognition by being placed in the Hall of Fame because although most people who live in Sleepy Hollow and Tarrytown have some idea of what he did, not everyone knows of his importance and how his dauntlessness and bravery determined the outcome of the war and in a long term case, determined American independence.

Works Cited

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