

# ARTIFACT OF THE CORRIDOR

## Benedict Arnold and Solomon's Lodge No. 1

by Catherine Walter, Curator

### Benedict Arnold: Freemason and Traitor

Benedict Arnold's history shows that he was an ardent Patriot in the beginning of the War, his eagerness probably fueled by the trouble that the British were causing for colonial businessmen. In 1761 Benedict Arnold had opened a general store in New Haven, CT. With the sale of family property in 1764 Arnold became a merchant trader and began to travel to Canada and to the West Indies, where it is believed he became a Freemason. On April 10, 1765 Benedict Arnold affiliated with Hiram Lodge No. 1 in New Haven, where the minutes read: "Brother Benedict Arnold is by Right Worshipful [Nathan Whiting] proposed to be made a member of the Right Worshipful Lodge and is accordingly made a member in this Lodge."

In 1767 Benedict Arnold married Margaret Mansfield, the daughter of a fellow Freemason, Samuel Mansfield. Arnold had begun building a large house near his store in 1770, which was completed in 1771. His involvement in this project, and with a lawsuit he was engaged in, may explain why he was able to attend a meeting at Solomon's No. 1 on June 12, 1771, instead of beginning the season's shipping travel.

### Freemasonry in Poughkeepsie

On April 18, 1771 Provincial Grand Master George Harison issued a warrant to Solomon's Lodge No. 1, Poughkeepsie's first Masonic Lodge. The Lodge was re-numbered three times: once in 1797 when it surrendered its Provincial charter and was issued a new one as No. 56; once in 1800 when it was changed to No. 5, and finally in 1819 when it was changed to No. 6. In 1828, after the Morgan affair, the Lodge disappeared; in 1832 the Grand Lodge forfeited their warrant.

In 1852 the second Lodge in the area was warranted as Poughkeepsie Lodge No. 266. This Lodge is still in existence and is celebrating its 155<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in June of 2007. In 1879 a third Masonic Lodge was warranted and named Triune Lodge No. 782; and in 1922 a fourth, named Obed Lodge No. 984, was warranted. In 1986 these two Lodges merged to become Triune-Obed Lodge No. 782, which celebrates its 128<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in September of 2007.



Solomon's Lodge 1, Minute Book

### Revolution, Treason and Aftermath

When the Revolution began on April 19, 1775 Benedict Arnold aggressively joined the fight against the British. His wife Margaret died on June 19<sup>th</sup>, two months after the Revolution began. Arnold then spent the next four years fighting valiantly for the Revolution. In June of 1778 he was given command of Philadelphia.

It was here in Philadelphia that he met his second wife, Peggy Shippen, who was a Loyalist and who was formerly loved and courted by Major André. Peggy's ambition is credited as one of the main reasons for Arnold's treason, another being Arnold's huge dissatisfaction with the treatment he was receiving from the new government, where he felt he had been passed over for promotions. He also felt unjustly charged with mismanaging his post in Philadelphia, where he had begun to live extravagantly. He was later court-marshaled in Morristown, NJ in June of 1779 for misuse of both funds and army personnel. His sentence was a reprimand by the commander-in-chief, George Washington, a sentence confirmed by Congress on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1780. For Arnold, who felt wrongly accused, to be reprimanded by his friend Washington was not only embarrassing, but he thought it extremely insulting to all of the sacrifices he had made for the war effort.

At this point, Benedict Arnold had already made his first overture to the British. After his humiliating censure, he turned down an active command position and convinced Washington to give him command of the strategically located West Point. On September 23, 1780, Arnold's traitorous plot to turn West Point over to the British

was discovered by the capture of a British soldier, Major John André, by three Patriots: John Paulding, Isaac Van Wart, and David Williams. Paulding and Williams would later become Freemasons, with Paulding joining Cortlandt Lodge No. 34 in Cortlandt, NY in the 1790s and Williams joining Lotus Lodge No. 31 in 1827, serving as its first Junior Warden.

Benedict Arnold escaped to a British ship and later fought for the British against the Revolution. He died in poverty in London in 1801. André was killed by hanging, as regulations relating to a spy required, but he presented so sympathetic a figure that General Hamilton was moved to comment, "He died universally esteemed and universally regretted."

On May 16, 1781 Solomon's Lodge No. 1 passed a resolution which states: "Ordered that the Name of Benedict Arnold be considered as obliterated from the Minutes of this Lodge, a Traitor." His signature in the list of visitors to the Lodge on June 12, 1771 is crossed out in a way that allows identification of the name beneath. Next to the statement of the 1781 resolution is a small drawing of a hand, with a finger pointing at the word "Traitor."

Two years after the death of Major André, George Washington visited Solomon's Lodge No. 1 on December 27, 1782. At the meeting, part of an address read to the Commander-in-Chief was recorded in the minutes as follows: "We the Master, Wardens and Brethren of Solomon's Lodge No. 1 are highly sensible of the Honor done to Masonry in general by the countenance shown to it by the most Dignified Character...."

At the time of Washington's visit to the Lodge, the Revolutionary War was almost over. Britain declared an end to the hostilities on February 4, 1783 and the United States Congress declared an end to the war on April 11, 1783. The British did not evacuate completely from New York City, however, until almost a year after Washington's visit to Solomon's Lodge No. 1, leaving on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1783 as Washington entered the city in triumph. ■

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