

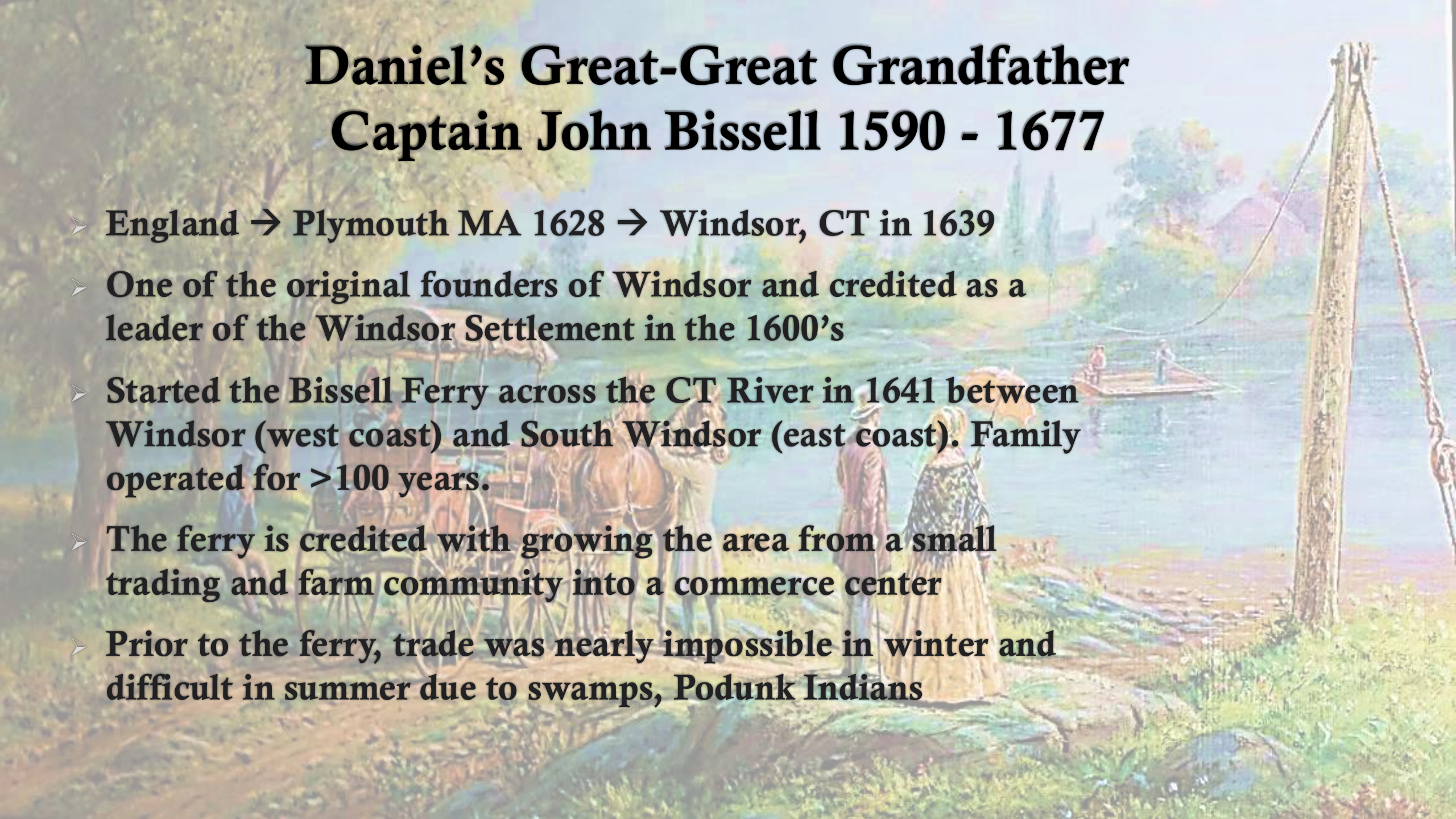


Daniel Bissell

*Undercover Agent For Washington
In Our War For Independence*

Daniel's Great-Great Grandfather Captain John Bissell 1590 - 1677

- **England → Plymouth MA 1628 → Windsor, CT in 1639**
- **One of the original founders of Windsor and credited as a leader of the Windsor Settlement in the 1600's**
- **Started the Bissell Ferry across the CT River in 1641 between Windsor (west coast) and South Windsor (east coast). Family operated for >100 years.**
- **The ferry is credited with growing the area from a small trading and farm community into a commerce center**
- **Prior to the ferry, trade was nearly impossible in winter and difficult in summer due to swamps, Podunk Indians**





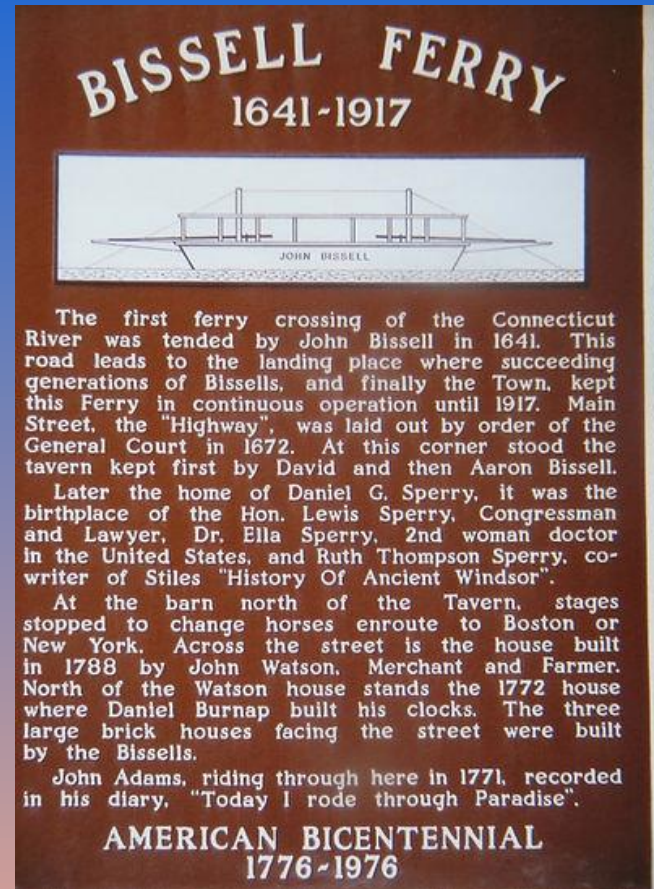
**RATES OF TOLL
OF WINDSOR FERRY**

footman	03 cts
horse wagon & over	12 1/2 c
wagon 2 horses driver	25 c
led horse	06 1/2 c
ox or other neat line	06 1/2 c
sheep swine or 7 mills	
ox team 2 oxen river	29 c
each additional horse, other beast same as above.	
TRUST.	

In 1648, the Bissell family was granted a monopoly to run the ferry for 150 years, running it for >100 years.
It operated from 1641-1917.

John's Legacy

- Likely the first ferry service in the Colonies.
- 47 grandchildren (39 during his life).
- The original house dates to 1658/59. The farm is still active.
- It's a brief walk to the river if you visit the site.
- More information can be found at the Windsor Society.
<https://windsorhistoricalsociety.org>



Bissell Farm



John Bissell Homestead



Capt. Ebenezer Fitch Bissell



Bissell Tavern

Family homes and the Bissell (Stage)
Tavern can still be seen in Old Windsor

Daniel Bissell 1754-1824

➤ **Role in the Revolutionary War**

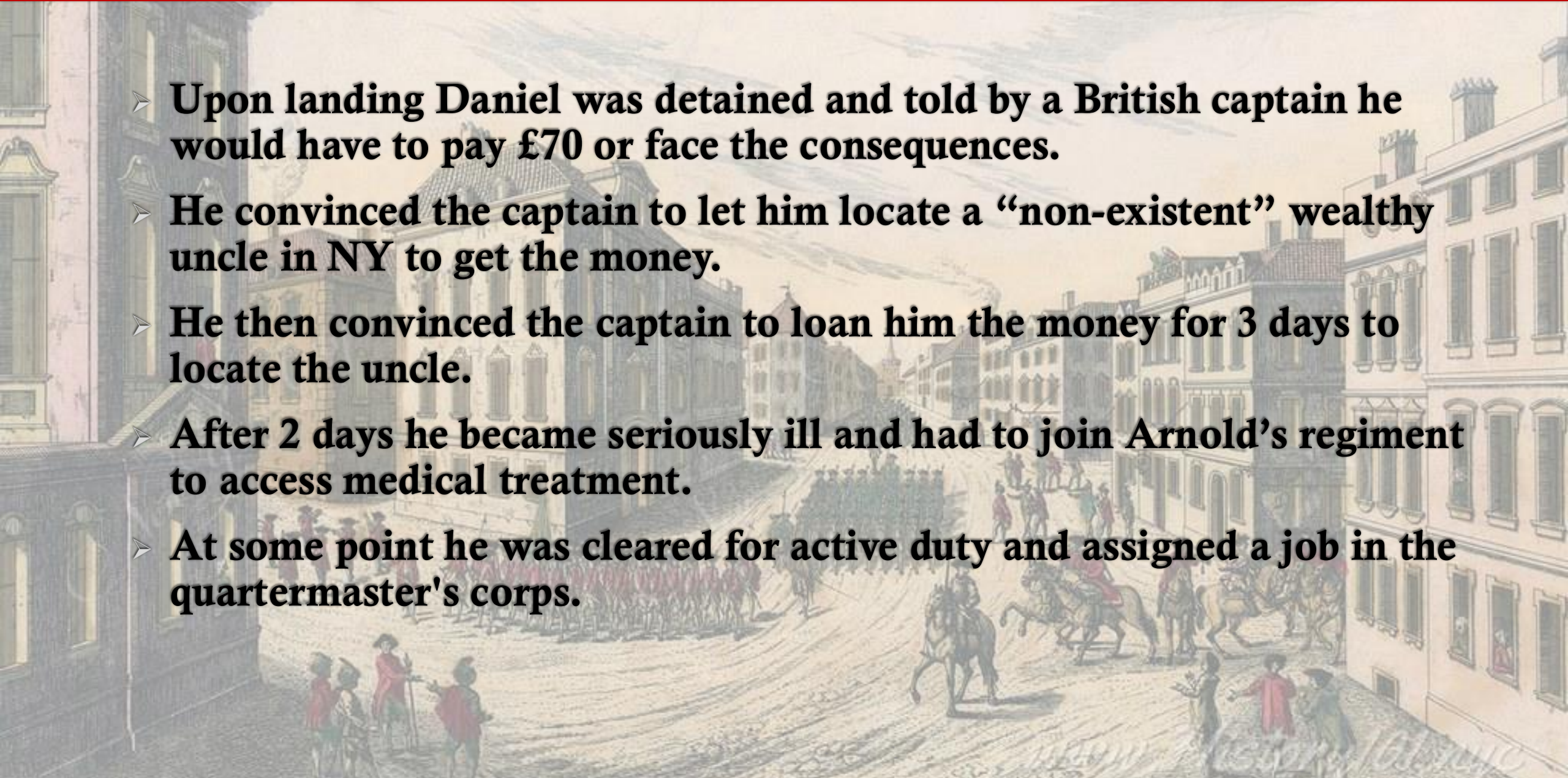
- **Enlisted for the duration as a corporal on April 1, 1777, in the 5th Connecticut Regiment, 18 days before the Battles of Lexington and Concord.**
- **Became a Sgt on September 1, 1777.**
- **Served for 6 years during the war including at the battles of Germantown, Monmouth and wintered between the two at Valley Forge.**
- **End the war with the 2nd Connecticut Regiment.**
- **Recruited by George Washington's Aide-de-Camp Lt. Col. Robert Harrison to spy for the Continental Army on August 14, 1781.**

Daniel Bissell - Spy

- **His mission was to enter NYC posing as a deserter to gather intelligence on British military strength in NYC which Washington needed to formulate an attack on the city.**
- **Only Washington's closest senior officials knew of Daniel's role. His friends and family believed he was a traitor to the cause until after the war.**
- **The Plan?**
 - **Enter NYC on August 15, 1781, and be picked up a week later in Whitestone, Queens NY (the site of the Whitestone Bridge).**
- **The problem?**
 - **The British often detained Americans. They were offered a choice: join the army or navy; pay a large sum of money; or face jail**
 - **The British Navy and Benedict Arnold's regiment were thought to be elsewhere making it less likely Bissell would face problems, but they weren't.**

Daniel joins Benedict Arnold's Regiment

- Upon landing Daniel was detained and told by a British captain he would have to pay £70 or face the consequences.
- He convinced the captain to let him locate a “non-existent” wealthy uncle in NY to get the money.
- He then convinced the captain to loan him the money for 3 days to locate the uncle.
- After 2 days he became seriously ill and had to join Arnold's regiment to access medical treatment.
- At some point he was cleared for active duty and assigned a job in the quartermaster's corps.



Espionage

- **The quartermaster's corps oversees the receipt and movement of supplies. A perfect position for a spy**
- **The British were looking for spies, so he had to destroy his notes and memorize the information**
- **Befriended British service members, visited ports and forts in Queens, Manhattan, Staten Island and elsewhere to:**
 - **Determine the number, condition, and type of ships; deployments; the number and size of guns; where the guns were deployed and aimed; etc.**
- **He continued the deception until his second "desertion". This time from the British**

Escape to NJ

- During a celebration of King George III's coronation in September 1782, he, with a trusted friend and headed to the Hudson River
 - Deceived an outpost by claiming they were “on a grocery run”
 - Evaded an approaching search party by hiding in a swamp
 - Hijacked a smugglers boat by faking he had a gun
 - Evaded a patrol boat and made it to NJ
- Still wearing his British uniform and hunted as a deserter from both sides he made it to American lines and to Washington's staff to report.

Awarded The Badge of Military Merit

- **The Badge of Military Merit was created by Washington after the war to recognize noncommissioned officers and regular soldiers of the continental army**
- **Awarded to Daniel for his service in June 1783**
 - Daniel was the 3rd and last recipient
 - The other two recipients were also from Connecticut
- **Considered America's first such military decoration, and the second oldest in the world (after the cross of St. George)**
- **It would later become the Purple Heart**



The design is attributed to G. Washington but was originally inspired by an incident involving Daniel and his wife.

Letter From Washington

I George Washington, Commander
in Chief of the American Army
&c &c &c. To all to whom these
presents shall come Sendith Greeting
Whereas it hath ever been, an
Established maxim in the American
Service, that the road to glory
was open to all, that honorary
rewards and Distinctions, was the
greatest Stimulus to virtuous
actions, and whereas Sergeant
Daniel Bissell of the Second
Connecticut Regiment, has
performed, Some Important
Service, within the Immediate
knowledge of the Commander
in Chief, in which his

fidellaty perseverance and good
Sense, were not only conspicuously
manifested, but his General
line of conduct throughout a
long ~~part~~ of course of Service,
having been not only unspotted but
highly Deserving of Commendation.
Now know ye therefore, that the
aforesaid Sergeant Bissell, hath
fully and truly deserved, and
hath been properly invested with
the honorary Badge of Military
Merit, and is entitled to pass
and repass, all guards and
Military Posts, as fully and as
amply as any Commissioned

officer whatever, and is furthermore
recommended to that favourable
Notice, which a Brave and
faithful Soldier Deserves
from his Countrymen.

Given under my hand and
Seal, In the Highlands of
New York this fifth day of
June A. D. 1783.

② Signed, George Washington
Registered
Jonathon Trumble Secretary

Life After the Revolutionary War

- **Washington offered to release Daniel from the Army but he declined.**
- **Served in the US Army during the Quasi War with France.**
- **Commissioned as a First Lieutenant in the 16th Infantry Regiment on March 3, 1799.**
- **Discharged on June 15, 1800.**
- **Married; had 4 children; moved to Vermont; and later to Allens Hill, NY, on an 18-acre parcel of land.**

Daniel's Pension Problems

- **Fire destroyed his official papers and his Badge leaving him with no records of his service and little but his small farm.**
- **1818: Congress grants pensions to veterans of the Revolutionary War.**
 - **Daniel was denied a pension as he was still listed as a deserter.**
 - **Appealed to former aides to Washington and finally cleared his name. He received \$8/month.**
 - **In 1820 a new regulation required recipients to verify their need for assistance.**
 - **Total net worth listed is \$57.25 net of his land and debts.**
- **He died four years later.**

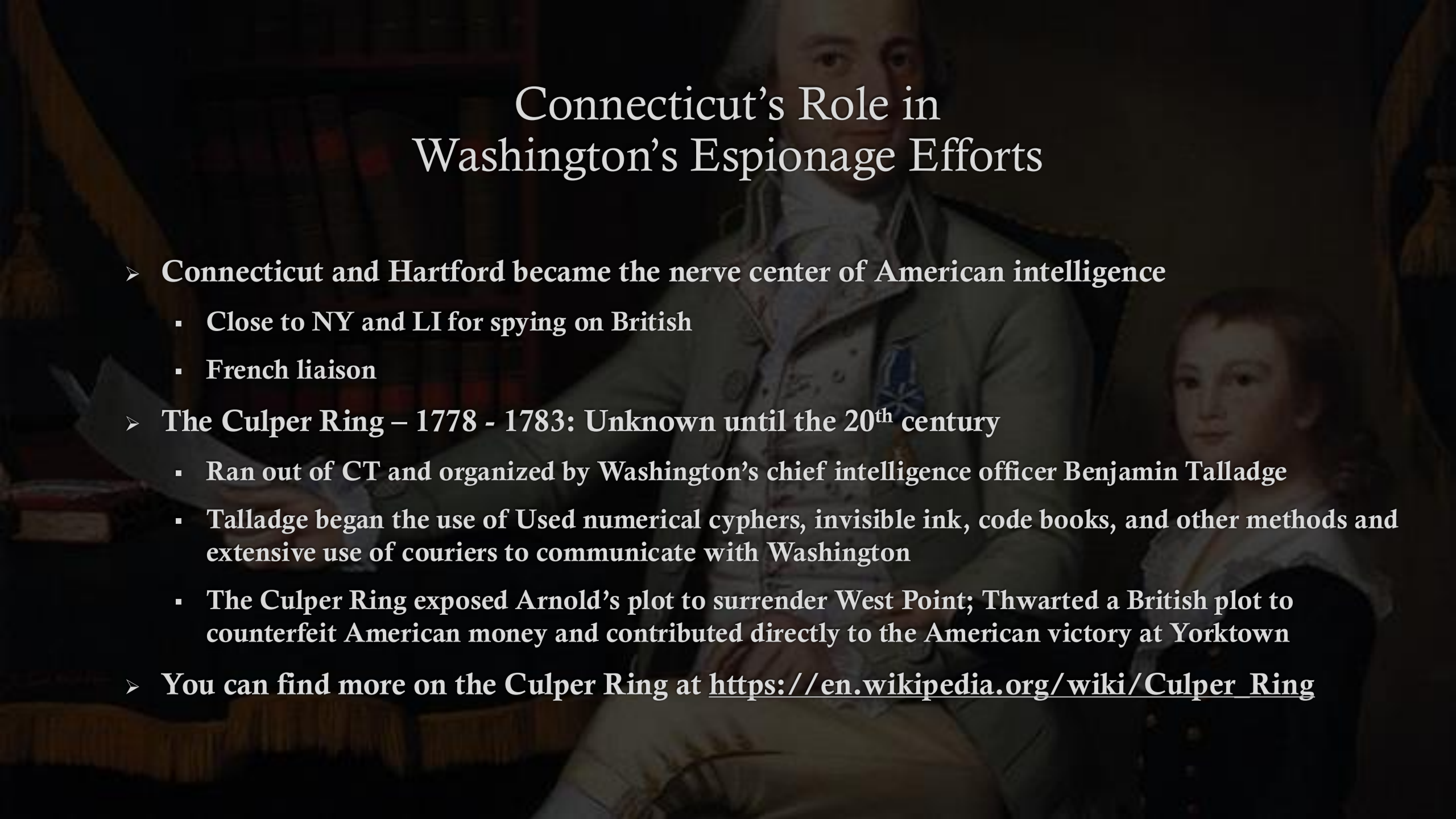


900 Palisado Av. Windsor, CT

“In the memory of Daniel Bissell - Died August 5, 1824, Aged 70 years - He had the confidence of Washington and Served under him.”



Allen's Hill Cemetery, Belcher Rd, Richmond NY



Connecticut's Role in Washington's Espionage Efforts

- **Connecticut and Hartford became the nerve center of American intelligence**
 - Close to NY and LI for spying on British
 - French liaison
- **The Culper Ring – 1778 - 1783: Unknown until the 20th century**
 - Ran out of CT and organized by Washington's chief intelligence officer Benjamin Talladge
 - Talladge began the use of Used numerical cyphers, invisible ink, code books, and other methods and extensive use of couriers to communicate with Washington
 - The Culper Ring exposed Arnold's plot to surrender West Point; Thwarted a British plot to counterfeit American money and contributed directly to the American victory at Yorktown
- **You can find more on the Culper Ring at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culper_Ring**

Bissell's Report to Washington

➤ Bissell's original account is in Series 4 of the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress

“Substance of Information given by Sergt. Bissel of the 2nd Connecticut Regt., who was sent into N.Y. for the purpose of obtaining Intelligence in the month of Augt. 1781 by Col. H—— and made his Escape from Staten Island on the 27th of Septr. 1781.”

➤ *“He reports, that on his arrival in the City, there being a hot press to man the Kings Ships & finding no other means to avoid it, or escape, he enter but by entering into the land Service; he enlisted in Arnolds Corps, and never has had an opportunity of getting off until Thursday last, tho he has frequently made efforts to effect it^[5] – in the mean time he has exerted his utmost care & ability in obtaining information of the strength & state of the Enemy’s Force, which from his own knowledge & observation as well as the Information of others he believes to be nearly as follows viz.*

No. of men

<i>{22nd Regt. British</i>	<i>340</i>
<i>On Staten Island {57 Regt. Do.</i>	<i>320</i>
<i>{2 Compys. British Grenads.</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>{Arnold's Corps</i>	<i>125</i>

885

NB The strength of these Corps he knows positively from his own observation having drawn provisions & done duty with them.

<i>{7th Regt. British</i>	<i>300</i>
<i>{37th Regt. Do.</i>	<i>360</i>
<i>{40th Regt. Do.</i>	<i>300</i>
<i>On York Island {42nd (two Battalions)</i>	<i>600</i>
<i>{British Grenadiers not</i>	
<i>{ joined their Corps</i>	<i>400</i>
<i>{17th Light Dragoons</i>	<i>260</i>

- NB This is the most accurate account he could obtain from Sergts. & others with whom he conversed – he cannot be positive as to the 7th Regt. which has lately arrived from Savannah, {38th Regt. 300*

On Long Island {54th Regt. Do. 350

650

Total 3755

Deduct Arnolds 125

Total British 3630
- Battalions of Delanceys Brigade 600*

Skidders Brigade 700

Kings American Dragoons 300

Pensylvania Loyalists 160

Arnolds Corps 125

Total New raised Corps 1885
- German Troops to the best of his knowledge 4000*

three hundred & fifty of which at Pawlis Hook

- *The method he took to obtain a knowledge of the strength of the several Corps, was by enquiring of the Sergts. & others with whom he was acquainted and by comparing repeatedly the force at different Posts, from the fuel Returns &c. He has also overheard Major Menzies (commandant of Arnolds Corps) say that there were about 10,000 Troops in all this Department exclusive of Militia, 4000 of which were Germans. He has himself very frequently upon collecting intelligence, made memorandums, & compared the several Reports together, but after Sir Guy Carletons arrival & intimation being given that any Persons being discovered to have written Information would be treated as Spies; he was forced to destroy his Papers & Estimates.*
- *Sergt. Bissel further says, there are 24 sail of the Line now lying in New York Harbour, that they are all of them refitting or have been repaired since they came into Port. That a fleet sailed last Week, consisting of two Ships of the Line, one Frigate & twenty five Transports, said to be bound to Charles Town, to effect the evacuation of that Garrison.*

- *That when he left Staten Island, four Ships had just come too, against the Light House, one of which was a Prize under Jury Masts. He adds, all Vessels (Private Property or not) which have been stript of their sails, & laid up for a long time are now refitting for Sea. He believes there are more than 100 Transports in the Harbour. Notwithstanding the preparations, &* a Certainty that the Heavy Artillery has been removed from the Park, as to the amount of Twenty Peices of Brass Cannon (24 & 18 Pounders) which were supposed to be put on Board Transports in the East River near the Ship Yards. Yet it is not the opinion of the Officers or Citizens in general, that New York will be evacuated until next Spring. In the mean time a number of Refugees are preparing to go to Halifax, the number is reported to be 200, but he did not hear of any British that were to sail except the Officers & Non Commisds. Officers of Lord Rawdons Corps, who are to go to Ireland. As to magazines of Fuel & Forage he observes, tho considerable, they are not sufficiently large, but that the Enemy are daily encreasing them. It is expected whenever the British abandon New York, the New Corps will be sent to Canada. Annexed is a plan of the Enemy's works.*
- **This fact he knows from his own observation.*
- *The Main fort on Staten Island is from East to West is about one Hundred & Forty feet Through and about one Hundred feet from the North Side to the South. The Intrenchmt. is About Ten feet Wide & Six Deep With a Row of pickquets Set Up in the Senter of the Intrenchment, the Tops of the piquets About Level With the Surfice of the Earth. A Row of Abattis about Two Rod, in front of the Intrenchment and About one Rod Through & about Breast High.*

- *Their is a Row of piquets all Around the Breastwork Upon the Top of the Timber Which is Level With the Ground*
- *The fort Will Contain fifteen Hundred men the Heigth of the Breastwork is a Bout Five feet High and about 18 feet Through.*
- *The Gate is on the South Side of the Fort Next to the Warter. The Door of the Bumproof is facing that. Their is Fourteen Ambrasures in the fort & Twelve Twenty four pounders Mounted in it, four pointed against the Warter Two Upon the North Side Two Upon the South Side Four Upon the West Side. If the fort was to be atacked it Would be Best Upon the South Side of it Next to the Warter by the Gate.*
- *As you Enter the Gate Upon your Rite hand their is mounted Two Twenty four pounders Within fifhteen Rod South of the Gate their is a three Gun battery With Three Twenty four pounders.*

- *About Twenty Rod Below that Their is a Nother Two Gun Battery With one Twenty four & one Eighteen pounder. One Nine pounder their Not mounted.*
- *About Forty Rods below that is a Nother 3 Gun Battery With 2 Twenty Four pounders & one Thirty Two.*
- *The Other fort Lies Southwest of the former it is four Squair With Much Such an Intrenchment Picketed Abatiss With Two peses in the fort one 24 one 12 pounder. The Gait is Upon the East Side of the fort the platform the peses Stands Upon is on the West Side of the fort.*
- *The Ditch or Coral Runs in front of Byards Hill is a bout 14 Feet Wide and Ten Deep it Runs along Just in front of old fort Bunker Hill from the North River to the East River from the Top of the Hill at the East River it Runs a Long South Upon the East River Bank.*

- *There is a Nother Coral Runs from What was Call'd Cobble Hill at Brookline along Upon the Edge of the Hill Till it Comes Down to the Water Up against the Old Ship Jersey in A Direct Line With that on York Island.*
- *The Grand Battery at New York is of Late Ben Repair'd, it is Ben Drawn in Less Compers but in the Same manner they have Now Mounted On the Grand battery In New York. Sixty Three peses of Cannon the Most part of them are Twenty Four pounders the Rest Eighteens & Nines."*

--END OF REPORT--