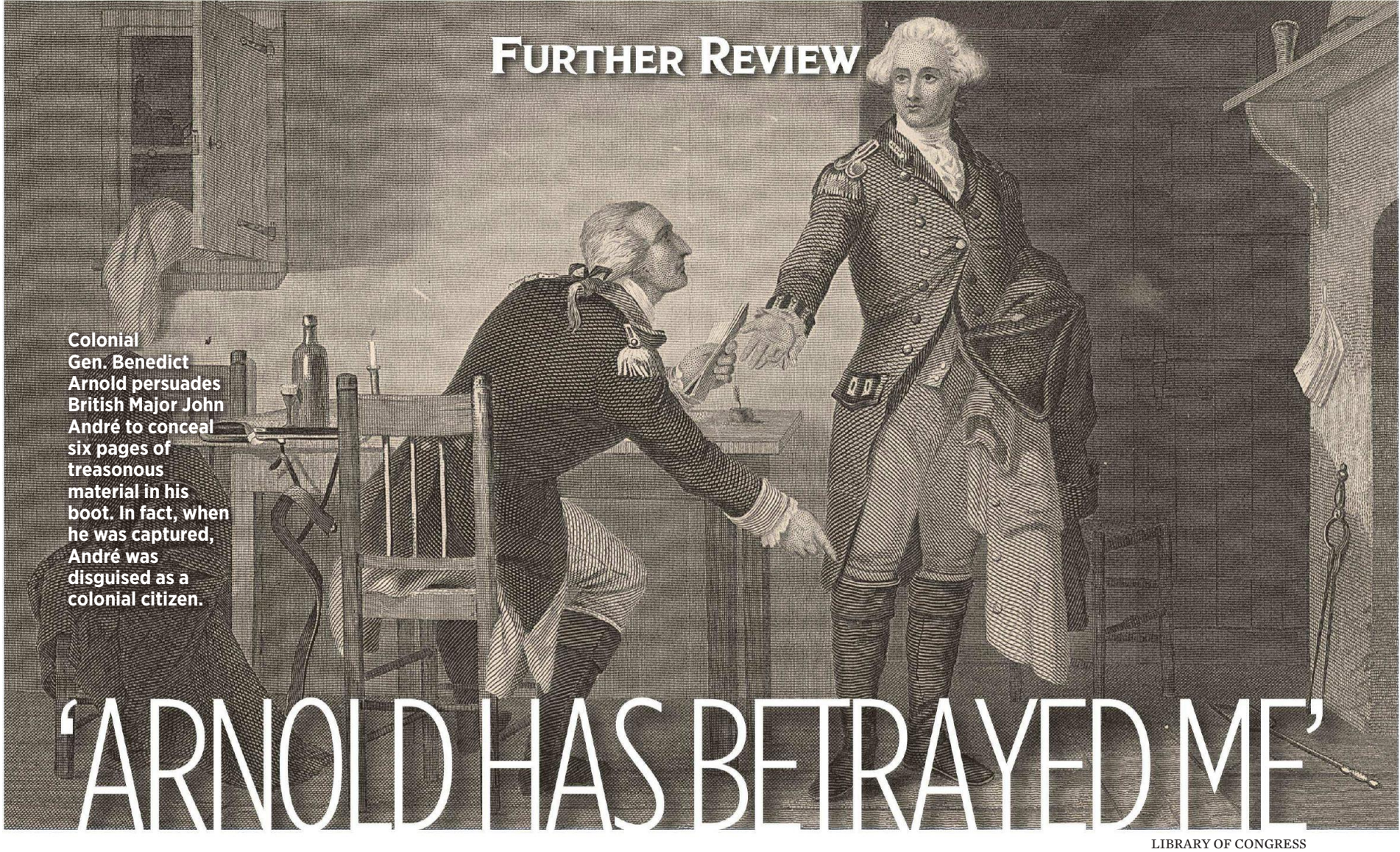




Colonial Gen. Benedict Arnold persuades British Major John André to conceal six pages of treasonous material in his boot. In fact, when he was captured, André was disguised as a colonial citizen.

‘ARNOLD HAS BETRAYED ME’

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Benedict Arnold was a general in the Revolutionary War, a good friend of George Washington and had earned a reputation as a military hero for leading a campaign in Quebec. He was shot in the leg during the Battle of Saratoga in 1777, which took him out of battlefield duty.

But then Arnold betrayed his friends and colleagues and the entire Revolutionary effort by attempting to surrender a key Colonial fort to the British.

Arnold turned into a traitor on Sept. 21, 1780: 245 years ago today.



BROWN UNIVERSITY

BENEDICT ARNOLD, WAR HERO

Born in Norwich, Connecticut, in 1741, Benedict Arnold earned a reputation as a savvy businessman in his 20s after opening a general store and then using that as a springboard into the shipping business.

Like a lot of the colonial economy, however, that dried up in the 1760s with the British imposition of extra taxes like the Sugar and Stamp acts. Arnold shifted into smuggling, became a leader in a Sons of Liberty chapter and took charge of a company of Connecticut militiamen.

By 1775, Arnold was leading his company

into battles and played a key role in the capture of Fort Ticonderoga. The British Secretary of State called Arnold “the most enterprising and dangerous” of all the American generals.

Arnold was wounded in a valiant attempt to capture Quebec and was later shot in the thigh while leading a charge at the Battle of Saratoga in 1777. As he recovered in a military hospital, however, He found that another general was given the credit — and a special medal from the Continental Congress — for the victory at Saratoga.

Arnold’s pal, Gen. George Washington, promoted him to major general and offered him military command of the city of Philadelphia. There, however, Arnold clashed with Joseph Reed, President of the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council, who spread lies about Arnold and his actions.

Reed launched an investigation into Arnold’s conduct and had him brought up on charges — most based only on rumor. A court martial would find Arnold innocent of all but two minor charges. An angry Arnold planned to quit the army.

THE TURNCOAT TURNS HIS COAT

Arnold’s wife had died while he was in battle in 1775. He had since met the young daughter of a prominent Philadelphia man who was opposed to the war — a loyalist — and had married her in 1779.

Arnold had lost his prewar business and had been badly wounded in battle. He had seen younger, less-deserving leaders promoted ahead of him and had not been given proper credit for his military valor. He wrote Washington in May 1779: “Having become a cripple in the service of my country, I little expected to meet ungrateful returns.”

And he wanted money — enough money to buy his 19-year-old wife the kind of

house to which she was accustomed. British agents had already reached out to Arnold, offering cash for military intelligence. In the summer of 1779, Arnold was sending colonial troop locations and strengths and locations of supply depots to British officers, via letters written in code and in invisible ink.

After Arnold resigned his post in Philadelphia, Washington offered him the command of West Point, a key fort north of British-occupied New York City. In June 1780, Arnold inspected West Point and reported his findings to his new British friends.

There was a snag, though: How much the British would pay



Arnold for his treason. They had offered £10,000. He wanted twice that. They’d eventually agree to pay that.

Arnold officially took command of West Point on Aug. 3 and systematically began weakening defenses and deploying the fort’s military strength in ways that would be ineffective. So many supplies disappeared that other officers wondered if the rumors about Arnold were right after all and that he was selling materials on the black market.

On Sept. 21, 1790, Arnold and a young British officer, Major John André, met in Stony Point, New York, to discuss Arnold’s reports and his eventual surrender of the fort

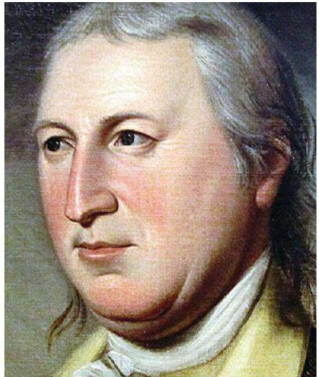
to the British. Afterward, a small skirmish nearby caused André to abandon his plan to travel back to New York by ship and to go by land instead.

But André was captured by colonial soldiers near Tarrytown on Sept. 23. They found the secret papers hidden in his boot and arrested him.

Arnold was told about the arrest the next morning as he prepared to have breakfast with a visiting Washington. He immediately bolted away and fled to New York, where he wrote Washington and begged for save passage for his wife.

“Arnold has betrayed me,” Washington said. “Whom can we trust now?”

THE BENEDICT ARNOLD ROGUES’ GALLERY



NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

GEN. HORATIO GATES

Also a close friend of Washington’s, Gates had multiple personality conflicts with Arnold and would file unflattering reports of Arnold’s command decisions. Washington appeared to not take Gates’ criticisms seriously, but Arnold was tremendously offended when Gates received most of the credit for the Battle of Saratoga in which Arnold was wounded.



NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

JOSEPH REED

A prominent lawyer before the Revolution, Reed served as an aide-de-camp for Washington until the commander in chief found Reed was expressing doubts about Washington and his decisions to other generals. Later, Reed became a political leader in Philadelphia and conducted a vicious rumor campaign against Arnold and brought false charges against him.



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

PEGGY SHIPPEN

The Shippens were a prominent Philadelphia family that included two city mayors. After the British captured the city in September 1777, the Shippens — who were loyalists to the crown — held social events at their home. Young Peggy met and was, briefly, wooed by British officer John André. She married Arnold in April 1779 when she was 19, and later introduced Arnold to André.



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

MAJOR JOHN ANDRÉ

André served as head of British intelligence during the war and was captured ferrying Arnold’s documents to New York. André was wearing civilian clothes and using an assumed name, so the colonial militia men considered him a spy. Washington offered to swap him to the British for Arnold, but the British leaders declined. André was hanged as a spy on Oct. 2, 1780.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

BENEDICT ARNOLD

Arnold fled to New York, accepted a commission as a brigadier general in the British army and commanded loyalist troops. At one point, Washington launched a failed plan to kidnap Arnold and bring him back to colonial-held territory. Arnold led raids on Richmond, Virginia and New London, Connecticut before moving to London. He found himself scored by society there.

Sources: “The Tragedy of Benedict Arnold: An American Life” by Joyce Lee Malcolm, “The West Point History of the American Revolution” by the U.S. Military Academy, “The American Nation: A History of the United States” by John A. Garraty, “The Mental Floss History of the United States” by Erik Sass, “American History Revised: 200 Startling Facts That Never Made It Into Textbooks” by Seymour Morris Jr., Smithsonian magazine, American Heritage, Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Battlefields.org, National Park Service, Library of Congress, History.com