

Horology 1776: Part 1

by Bob Frishman, FNAWCC (MA)

Horology 1776 is the theme of our 2020 NAWCC Ward Francillon Time Symposium. Focusing on timekeeping and timekeepers during the U.S. War of Independence, the historic event will take place October 1–3 in Philadelphia at the Museum of the American Revolution.

No conference until now has addressed this unique subject, and an impressive roster of international speakers has been recruited. We will consider not only watches and clocks from the period, but also many references to timekeeping found in private journals, ship's logs, and battle reports. This is not just an American story, so we will hear about the British, French, and Hessians. In the *Watch & Clock Bulletin*, I will preview a few of the many related tales and objects. Readers also may look in the September/October 2017 issue at my *Horology in Art 34*, which features Howard Pyle's painting of Thomas Jefferson, with tall clock behind him, drafting the Declaration of Independence.

Everybody knows the name Benedict Arnold. We learned how this American war hero became an infamous traitor by attempting to betray our fort at West Point. Fewer of us have heard of Major John Andre, his high-ranking contact and chief British spymaster whose capture on

September 23, 1780, revealed the plot and led to his execution. But who knows the key role of a pocket watch in the affair? This circa 1845 Currier & Ives lithograph portrays the scene.

We see Major Andre displaying his gold watch and chain. Near Tarrytown, NY, he was intercepted by soldiers claiming to be Hessians. Disguised in civilian clothing and attempting to prove that he was a British officer, he dangled his costly watch. The soldiers, also in disguise, then disclosed that they actually were Americans. We see them examining the incriminating papers found in Major Andre's boot, evidence that was fatal to the officer and to Benedict Arnold's treasonous plans.

This is just one of many intriguing stories of horology in the American Revolution. More are coming in these pages and at the symposium. Please save the dates and watch for registration details.

About the Author

Bob Frishman chairs the NAWCC Ward Francillon Time Symposium Committee. *Horology 1776* will be the fourth symposium he has created and organized for the NAWCC. See more about him at www.bell-time.com.

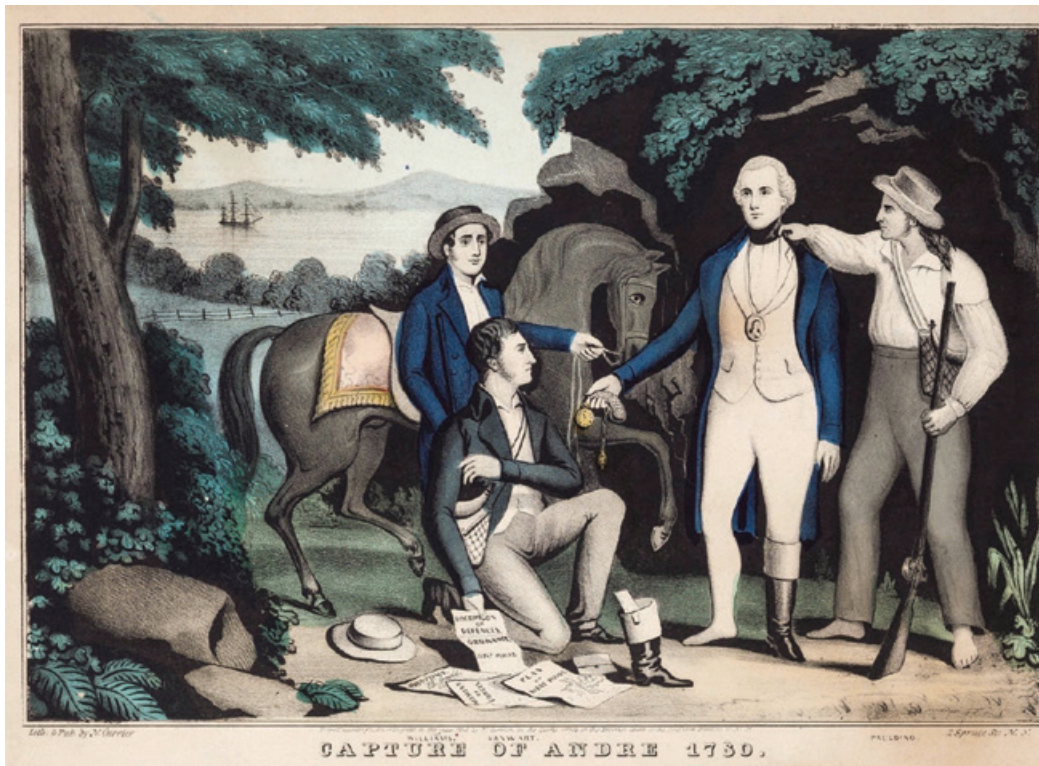


Figure 1. Currier & Ives lithograph ca. 1845. PUBLIC DOMAIN.