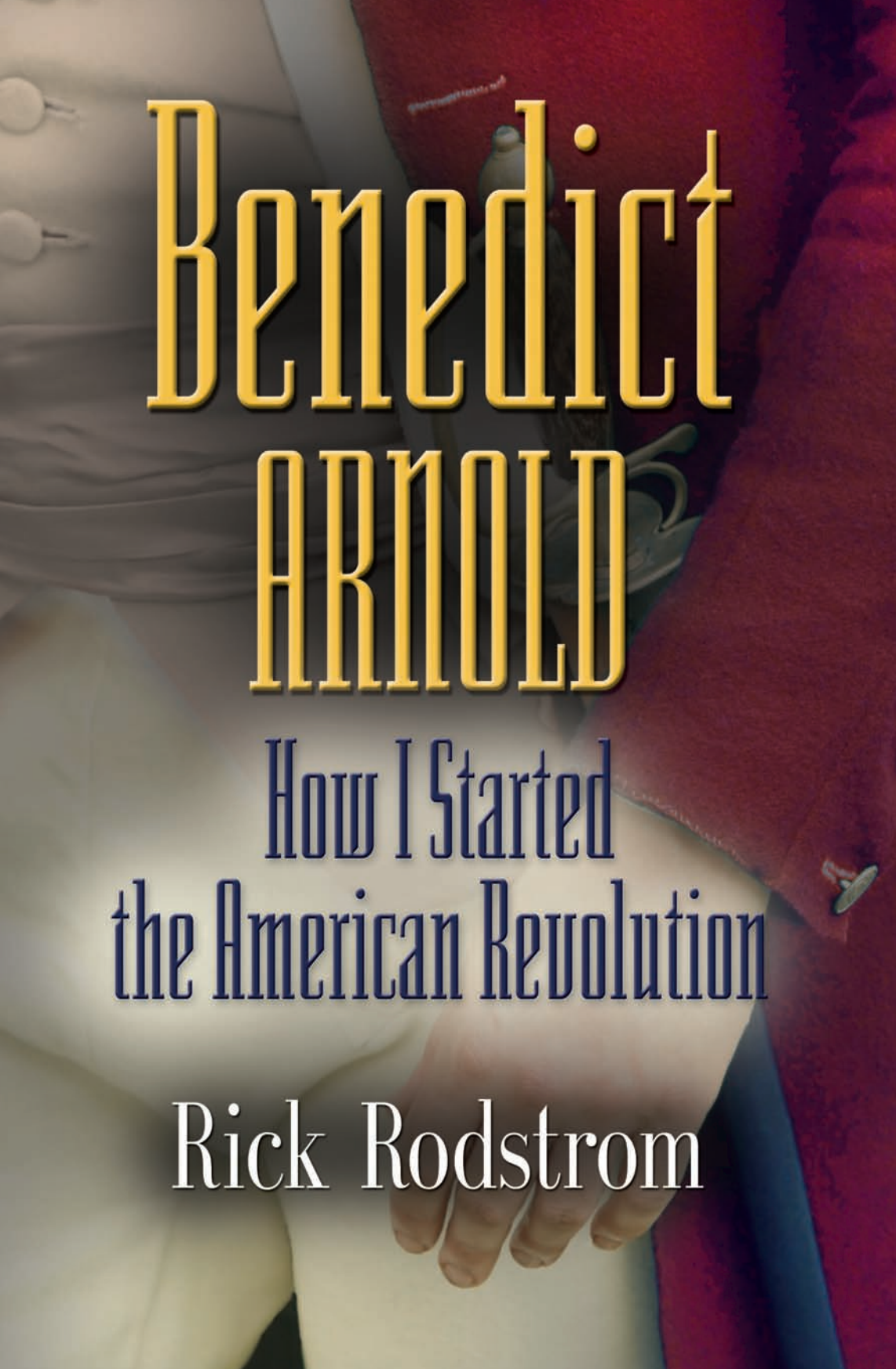


The first months of the American Revolution are chronicled in this "memoir" by Benedict Arnold. From his raid on the New Haven powderhouse to his capture of Fort Ticonderoga, Arnold realized that Lexington and Concord was no local conflict, but rather the opening volley to a war for independence. In his boldness and foresight---mixed with his greed and hot temper---Arnold would find that his enemies were not only British, but American as well.

Benedict Arnold How I Started the American Revolution

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Benedict ARNOLD

How I Started
the American Revolution

Rick Rodstrom

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Chapter 2

Later that afternoon, the *Fortune* finally docked in New Haven harbor, albeit floating considerably higher in the water than she did at dawn. Hiram Stubbs, the Royal Customs Inspector, was sitting in the cramped quarters of the forecabin with my ship's docket and his ledger book in hand.

Mr. Stubbs was a short round man wearing black oval spectacles to give him an even more partridge-like appearance. He was one of the civil servants sent over from England by the Prime Minister to crack down on corruption. Sailors sneeringly called such men "*land-waiters*."

Earlier, one of His Majesty's strapping young ensigns had searched the hold, opened the boxes, and weighed the items, and now Mr. Stubbs was tallying up the damages. His mouth was half-open in a grimace, and he spoke in high nasal tones with the perpetual air of indignation.

"Books, maps, prints, silks, jewelry, powders, musks, perfumes, elixirs, potions, creams, spices, bandages, surgical supplies...all with the proper bondings and clearances...As far as I can ascertain, everything is perfectly in order."

The Customs Officer sounded disappointed, as well he should be, for in addition to his salary, the King granted him a one-third share of all dock seizures---a healthy tip for a land-waiter.

"So, is there any problem?"

"Oh, there's no problem, *per se*," he sniffed, as he handed me a bill listing the duties to be paid. "But it is curious. You've got a rather large boat just to carry some medicines, toiletries and a few luxury items."

"Well you see, I trade for them using lumber and oats. That's why I need all that cargo room," I lied, as I counted out the silver coins I needed to pay the man.

"And you wouldn't need the same cargo room on the way back for something like, say, rum?"

"I don't deal in rum, governor, it says so on that bill of lading. As for my own wares, believe me, I'd stock her to the gills for the trip back home, but times are tough these days. Folks are strapped for cash. So if I cater to the rich with these *luxury items*, as you call them, well, they're the only customers who can afford to pay your tariffs."

Mr. Stubbs looked down his spectacles at me, and said "Oh, spare me the sermon, please. Services demand payment, even in this primeval continent. So don't act surprised. Somebody's got to pay for the troops protecting you."

"Ah yes, protecting us from the French menace, mm-hmm...That's mighty nice of you, governor, offering us protection like that," I said, peering into a crate whose lid had been torn off, then glancing at the Ensign standing behind it. "Problem is, who's going to protect us from your troops?"

"What, if you're suggesting---"

"I'm not suggesting anything. Just a joke my friend, just a joke. Here, have a sugarplum."

I offered him a box of candied fruits. The fat man plucked out a sweet, then held out his other hand for payment. Reluctantly, I deposited a stack of coins in it.

Mr. Stubbs counted them, then stamped my import papers with the Royal Seal, as I signaled my mate with a wink to start unloading the rest of the cargo.

Over the next two days, I went over the inventory with my young clerk Eli. Whereas the barrels of molasses had

been safely hidden in the cellar (ready to be picked up by anxious rum dealers with stills to feed), above board in the store, however, the rest of the cargo needed to be catalogued and displayed.

As we were re-stocking the shelves, we were joined by my wife's father, Samuel Mansfield, the county Sheriff. The Sheriff (or *Shrieve*, as he was more commonly known) was a tall, angular man who favored black clothes and little else. When he wasn't overseeing the county jail, he collected the Governor's fees for such services as registering deeds, issuing licenses, and surveying land, moneys which he generally pocketed for himself.

Strange as it may seem, it was a handy arrangement for a smuggler to have the Sheriff for a father-in-law, particularly one who was as crooked as he was thin. Old Shrieve Mansfield was all too happy to look the other way in return for a cut of the profits. It was what he did best, really. Which was the reason for his visit to my shop this morning; he always made sure to let me know when he was looking the other way.

"Benedict, my boy! Glad to see you back home safe and sound."

"Morning, Shrieve."

The old sheriff walked with a silver handled cane engraved in German (an heirloom he had inherited years ago from a property forfeiture). He pointed to the wharf with it, and said "I was taking my morning constitutional, when as Fate would have it, I spied the *Fortune* docked over yonder. Seeing that the Good Lord had delivered you safely again to our bosom, I simply had to pay my respects."

"Uh huh...Much obliged..." I said, as I continued writing down items in my ledger book.

"So, how was the voyage? Fair winds I hope."

"Smooth sailing the whole way."

"Thank heavens for that. 'Tis a long journey even so," said old man Mansfield. "Must have been nice spending the winter down in the Caribbean, though---nice and warm. 'Twas colder than a witch's tit up here."

"It was all business, I assure you. I'm just happy to be home."

"And I daresay my daughter was delighted to see you, eh lad? Dear child... 'tis a pity, but poor Peg's been having a rough go of it recently..."

"So I heard."

"Much as I love her, Ben, I have to say, that whole house goes all to shambles when you're gone---the help gets all uppity with you away, if you take my meaning."

"Oh, I don't know, everything seems fine to me...and of course Hannah does a wonderful job minding the young 'uns."

"'Tis all well and good, but if you ask me, a family needs a strong man's hand at the tiller---Wouldn't you say so, Captain?"

"Aye..." I nodded. "It's good to be home."

The Shrieve pulled on the lapel of his full-skirted black jacket (out of fashion since the Salem Witch Trials), peered over the inventory list lying beside a set of scales, and cleared his throat.

"You had a profitable voyage, I presume?"

"In due time, Shrieve, in due time..."

Amos Dunne the candle-maker was still wearing his tallow-coated work-apron when he burst into my store like his hair was on fire. The hot-headed Dunne was a fellow Son of Liberty, and so typically his appearance at my door was to report on some fresh British outrage. Accustomed as I was to his outbursts, however, I had never seen him so wild-eyed before.

"Hear the news?"

"What news?"

"More shooting in Massachusetts!"

"Ye gods, not another massacre?" I exclaimed, recalling how only a few years earlier, five civilians had been cut down by British soldiers in Boston.

"This one's worse. Much worse. At least fifty men shot," said Amos, his face shining. My clerk and I looked at each other, aghast at the news. Before we could speak, however, Amos added, with obvious pride, "Only this time we shot back! Gave better than we got, we did."

I dropped my quill onto the ledger book in shock.

"Shot? At the Army? With guns?" gasped Eli.

"Picked off hundreds of 'em! Had those yellow-bellied Redcoats running for their bloody lives!"

"Holy---!"

"Firing on officers of the Crown?" Sheriff Mansfield squawked. "Outrageous! Impossible!"

While the Shrieve was more than happy to divert the royal tariffs into his own pocket, he was in every other way a loyal subject of the King, and the melee up in Boston disturbed him as greatly as if the rioters were looting his own house.

As for me, the report that my fellow countrymen had finally stood up to the British butchers and actually prevailed on the field of combat filled my heart with righteous ecstasy.

"It's about time!" I cried. Young Eli, however, was less enthusiastic.

"You mean, they actually fired on the British army?" Eli asked, dumbstruck. "Killed British soldiers...Are you sure?"

"Izzie Bissel just rode down with the news!" replied Dunne. "He says General Gage marched his men up to Concord to clean the Yanks out of powder. Well, those

Redcoats got their powder all right---and a belly full of shot to go with it!"

"Sweet Jesus!" groaned Eli from behind the counter, staggering. "Now they've done it! The chickens are really going to come home to roost now---you'll see!"

"Give 'em a lick with the hickory stick, that's what I say!" growled the Sheriff.

"You only say that because you get twenty shillings a flogging."

The Sheriff waved his cane menacingly and said "By thunder, I'd go up to Boston today and do it for free. That rabble deserves to be taught a lesson---some *oil of hickory* will cure their squealing!"

"It was bound to happen!" I shouted, steering the stick away as I paced up and down, growing ever more agitated. "Nobody likes being occupied. All those soldiers up in Boston, getting in people's faces, looking for trouble. It was only a matter of time before somebody snapped."

"I still can't believe it..." Eli said, shaking his head. "I know people up in Boston are crazy, but not *that* crazy."

"I never thought I'd live to see the day. *Tarnation!* Killing the King's Men! Fellow Britons! The villains! It's lunacy---sheer lunacy is what it is. I say they're bewitched!"

"You want to hear madness, how's this---Izzie says that once the fighting started, the royal guards started torching people's houses---with women and children trapped inside!"

"The bloody-backed savages!"

"Ah, they can burn down all of Boston, for all I care. Brand them to Hell for their deviltry!"

"Yeah, but just you wait, Gage'll make it plenty hot for everybody before this thing boils over," wailed Eli, grabbing his head and whining, "I've got a sister in

Roxbury---cousins in Cambridge. Lord, I pray they're safe!"

"No one is safe in Boston now," warned Amos, wagging his waxy finger. "Soldiers looting, told to shoot any rebel on sight..."

"Shooting's too good for them, if you ask me!"

I thought about the money that I'd been required to pay to that pompous British customs collector earlier. It was bad enough when my taxes were used to support an island an ocean away, but now I felt like I was financing my own murderers.

"And they have the nerve to say they're protecting us," I grumbled. Amos snickered.

"They're having enough trouble protecting themselves! All New England's up in arms now. Sir Thomas is already begging for reinforcements. *Oh help! Help me! Somebody please help me!*" he quipped, mimicking Gage's mincing aristocratic accent.

"Good! Send in the whole fleet! That'll teach those Whig bastards! Hunt them down and string 'em up on every street-corner!"

"You can't go on hanging everybody, Shrieve. Because it's not just about Boston, it's about New Haven---about Connecticut---about all the colonies---all of us suffering under the same British rule. It always comes down to the same question---Are we to be free or live as slaves?"

The Sheriff waived his hand as if he was fending off a fly.

"Oh poppycock. You've been reading too many pamphlets. You're no slave. You *own* slaves. You're a rich man."

"And nearly ruined by that detestable Stamp Act."

"Which was repealed! For the life of me son, sometimes I don't understand you. It's not like you're one of those Grumbletonians up in Boston crying to King George

because you're too lazy to make it on your own. No, I'm proud to say that you're a *good hardworking businessman*," he shouted, pounding his cane to emphasize the words.

"By all rights, you should be a Tory, a Peer of the Realm like your grandfather, Governor Benedict Arnold! Now there was a man who knew how to deal with troublemakers! I guarantee that if Governor Arnold were running Boston today, he would have hanged that devil Adams and his whole croaking crew long before any shooting started. That's right---Nipped it in the bud, he would have."

"Yes, yes, I have heard about Governor Arnold all my life. He was a great man, no question," I acknowledged; then I closed my ledger book and tapped it with my knuckles. "But times have changed. It's not about loyalty to the Crown anymore, it's about business. About money. Taxes, tariffs. Freedom to trade for *whatever* we want, with *whomever* we choose. To do our own manufacturing for once. Why, if the British keep robbing us blind, strangling our trade, soon I'll be lucky enough to stock talc!"

"Nonsense! You don't know how lucky you are, m'boy. It just so happens that we are citizens of the greatest empire on God's green Earth! By George, I am proud, mighty proud to be an English subject!"

"Subject to English taxes, is all."

"Oh hell, I collect taxes for the Americans and the British, and nobody wants to pay any of them," harrumphed the Sheriff.

"It's just that we took it once already when they massacred us in Boston, and look what's happened since. More troops and more taxes. Now they're killing our people again. When will it stop? We've got to do something. We've got to fight back."

“Hit ‘em with everything we got,” exclaimed Amos. “An eye for an eye, that’s not vengeance. A face for an eye--- maybe they’ll listen.”

“You know what the penalty is for treason?” cried the Shrieve, his skin stretched tight around his mouth, as he shook his cane at Amos handle-end first. “Being drawn and quartered, that’s what! Grant ye, it’s messy, but split a few of that mob to bits and they’ll think twice before shooting an officer again!”

I was dangerously close to venting my spleen upon the Shrieve, but reason persuaded me to turn my back on the old man, and while the Sheriff huffed and puffed, I took a deep breath and looked out the window at the unfolding scene on Water Street.

Bells were ringing, shops were closing, handbills were being nailed to posts, and the streets were thronged with people barking like seals. The very air seemed to be buzzing with energy, as news of the outrage had spread like wildfire, and it seemed like every man was holding a club or a blade or a gun.

I thought of all the moorings in the rain at Rock Point, and of all the bribes I had to pay to the Shrieve and all the taxes I paid to the Crown, and I knew what had to be done. If the British were calling for reinforcements, then the Americans were going to need troops too.

It was time to round up the Foot Guards.

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