

## DESTINATIONS

# THE TURN OF THE REVOLUTION: WASHINGTON SPY TRAIL

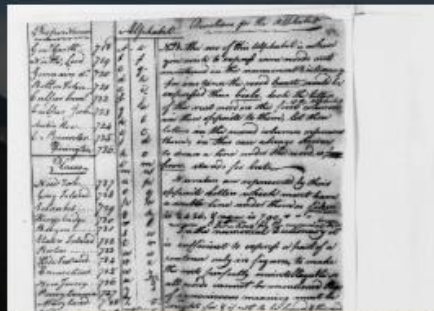
*Once Used By George Washington's Spies To Defeat The British And Gain Independence During The American Revolution*



On April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1790 George Washington took a two-day trip out to Long Island. It wasn't a "getaway" weekend by the shore or a break from the hustle and bustle of city life. Washington was traveling along a particular road with a particular purpose: to thank the patriots and spies who literally turned the tide of the Revolutionary War. Only a handful of people knew of the existence of Washington's intelligence operations on Long Island. Even today most people are unaware that what became known as the Culper Spy Ring along the Washington Spy Trail may have been the lynch pin that allowed the colonies to defeat the British and gain our independence.

Today you can visit the homes, places of business, and frequent haunts of the handful of patriots who risked their lives to help their fellow colonials break free of British tyranny. You can even tour the area with historians who will relay the intimate details of this fascinating story while you follow in the footsteps of spies and soldiers by foot, bike, or even kayak.

Margot Arceri, founder of Tri-Spy Tours is one of those historians. Her job, as she puts it, is "bring the story to life in an outdoor adventure". Arceri grew up on the North Shore and first heard the stories about Washington's spies from the Great-Great Granddaughter of Anna Strong, one of the actual members of the Culper Ring. Arceri explains, "I grew up in Strong's Neck. It was my playground and I loved hearing all these stories so starting this tour business was natural for me."



According to Arceri most of Long Island existed under British occupation during the Revolutionary War. Washington desperately needed information about troop movements, numbers, and strategies so he turned to Major Benjamin Tallmadge, a native of the town of Setauket on the North Shore. Tallmadge's job was to compile a group of patriots who could be trusted and devise a method of communication that would allow them to pass information back to General Washington in New York City. For Arceri his choice of co-conspirators was clear. She explains, "If you were asked by your boss to put together an espionage ring who would you go to? Strangers? No, you would ask your childhood friends." That just what Tallmadge did and soon he had recruited life-long confidants such as Abraham Woodhull, Robert Townsend, and Caleb Brewster. Anna Strong provided signals using her clothesline and various bits of laundry as warnings to the other spies. According to Arceri, "If Strong hung a black petticoat it meant that it was safe. If she hung a red one it meant

danger. A specified number of handkerchiefs corresponded to specific meeting places as well.” Tallmadge’s own sister, Mary Underhill, soon became involved. Living in the city she provided Tallmadge with an excuse to travel to NYC and deliver information. Arceri notes the inherent danger. “Remember that Long Island was under British occupation at the time. You couldn’t just travel around as you pleased. You needed a good reason and actual papers to go to New York City.”

In the end, the Culper Spy Ring made it possible for Washington to make a fateful meeting with Marshal Rochambeau, the commander of the French forces that would result in an alliance between the two armies. This singular event changed the outcome of the revolution by giving Washington and his meager army enough support to drive the British out forever.



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Today visitors can travel the route and see the actual sites of this momentous time period. According to Kristen Matejka, Director of Marketing for the Long Island Visitors Bureau, there’s still a lot to see. “The main roadway for going back and forth to the city back then still exists today. It’s route 25A and there is a lot to see as many of those places are still here.” Arceri agrees, “I show people the actual sites. The oldest homes, the oldest graves, the taverns where they met. I even show them where Anna Strong’s famous clothesline hung.” Matejka adds, “Go to Execution Rocks Lighthouse where the British used to chain patriots to the rocks until the tide came in and drowned them. It’s a creepy place.”

Lately the area has experience a surge in activity due to a television show called, Turn: Washington’s Spies. This AMC network drama detailing the people and events surrounding the Culper Ring is in its third season. Matejka acknowledges the impact. “The show has really brought people around. We’ve seen quite an increase in visitors. They are interested and want to know more about what happened here.”

History buffs and fans of the show alike will find something in the Setauket area and the locals are happy to share their unique part in this historical tale. Perhaps Arceri says it best, “The community is our museum and I’m taking visitors on an outdoor museum adventure.”



#### Michael Quinn

A graduate of St. Louis University in Communications with a focus in Advertising & Promotions, Michael has worked for Blue Man Group, Oito Zero Oito and Counts Media among others. His interests include DJing and Lawn Mower Disrepair.



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