



# The Narrative of the Captive, George Avery, 1780–1782

*George Avery's wry humor, distinctive voice, and unique experience as a Revolutionary War captive provides an eyewitness account of the ways of Mohawk warfare and treatment of prisoners, British military medical practice, and Jews in Canada, and it sheds light on a little known facet of the American Revolution on the northern frontier.*

By NEIL GOODWIN

**I**n 1846, at the age of eighty-eight George Avery wrote an account of his experience as an eyewitness to a devastating surprise attack by a combined British, Mohawk, and Abenaki war party that descended on Royalton, Vermont, at dawn, October 16, 1780. He was one of thirty-two men and boys captured and marched off to imprisonment in Canada, and his extended narrative illuminates both his captivity experience and a much larger picture of the Revolutionary War on the northern frontier.

The Royalton Raid was one of the largest assaults on Vermont during the Revolution and the only one like it to strike east of the Green Mountains. Although by 1780 the war had moved south, Lake Champlain

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NEIL GOODWIN is the author of *We Go As Captives: The Royalton Raid and the Shadow War on the Revolutionary Frontier* (2010). He has written two other works of non-fiction, *The Apache Diaries* and *Like A Brother*. Originally trained as an architect, he has been writer-producer-cinematographer of historical and wildlife documentary programs for public television since 1975.

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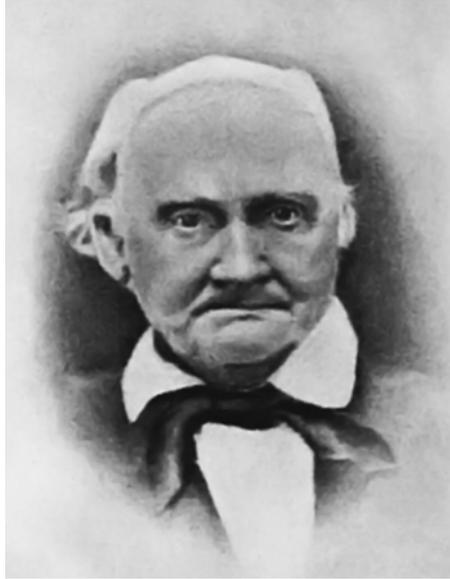
and the Connecticut River Valley remained strategic waterways for transport, travel, and communication. In particular, Lake Champlain was the crucial middle third of the Hudson-Champlain-St. Lawrence waterway that joined British headquarters in New York with British headquarters in Québec City. This made Vermont of particular interest to both the United States and Great Britain, though Royalton itself was of little strategic value.

In fact the attack on Royalton was a mistake, a last minute change of mission for a massive war party tasked with the destruction of Newbury, Vermont, a garrison town on the Connecticut River that was of legitimate military value. This change of plan was brought about by intelligence that Newbury was too heavily defended for the British to attack without sustaining serious losses. Thus warned en route, near present-day Montpelier, the war party set its sights on a new target, Royalton: a poorly defended town of some fifty families, where an attack could do a lot of damage.

This new objective, although less strategic, would serve the British purpose of terrorizing the frontier, and destroying housing and food supplies, thus driving inhabitants back toward the seaboard where they would depend on the scarce resources there. The action would give the British Indian allies an opportunity to take captives and plunder; and it would show that northern New England, a likely route for another U.S. invasion of Canada, was not safe from the British war machine, poised all along the northern border where it controlled the waters of Lake Champlain, the St. Lawrence, and the Great Lakes.

As Colin Calloway stated in *North Country Captives*, “The narratives recorded by redeemed captives represent one of the oldest genres of American literature, and they helped to establish enduring stereotypes of Indians as cruel and bloodthirsty. More recently, scholars have looked again at captivity narratives as sources of information on Indian societies and cultural interaction on the American frontier.”<sup>1</sup>

There are scores of Revolutionary-era captivity narratives, but Avery’s is one of a rare handful that is an eyewitness to a British and Indian frontier raid. What makes it even more unusual is his account of the Canadian captivity experience that inevitably followed for those hapless hundreds marched back to Indian villages and British detention in all its variety. Thousands of sailors and soldiers were taken prisoner by both sides in battles in the Revolution; but, like George Avery, those taken on the northern frontier were overwhelmingly non-combatant civilians, many of them women and children. Taken by Indian allies raiding as far away as the Ohio River Valley, these captives were herded north to Montréal and Québec, where they were often more trouble



*George Avery, date unknown. From <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=5006186>. Courtesy of Karen Avery Miller.*

than they were worth. As long as the war was on, the British could not send them back, but had to improvise some way of confining and housing them until they could be sent home.

Avery's is one of three extended narratives written by captives taken in the Royalton Raid. The longest and first into print (1818) was written by Zadock Steele; the other was assembled and published in 1843 by K.M. Hutchinson, the grandson of the captive, Abijah Hutchinson. There were others, much briefer, that appeared in the *History of Royalton* (1911).<sup>2</sup> The Avery narrative appeared first in a shortened version in *Genealogical Record of the Dedham Branch of the Avery Family in America*, in 1893.<sup>3</sup> It appeared at full length in the *History of Royalton, 1911* and has since been republished in Calloway's *North Country Captives* (1992). What follows is very nearly Avery's entire text fleshed out with biographical and historical information. The Avery passages are indented and not attributed. Those not by Avery are so identified. I have retained Avery's spelling, but have taken some liberties with the original punctuation in the interest of comprehension. A second, unpublished version of the narrative, also written in 1846, is in the possession of Avery's descendants, and passages from that are so identified. This text is part of a manuscript addressed to his son Thatcher and contains not only Avery's account of his captivity, but, of much greater importance to Avery, a multi-page meditation on his deep religious faith.

The Second Great Awakening was sweeping the country and seems to have swept Avery along with it, away from his Congregationalist roots and into the Baptist church.

Avery's captivity was totally different from that of the other Royalton prisoners and accordingly, provides insights into such disparate items of experience as Canadian Jewish family life and British military medical practice. Avery's was a distinctive and colorful voice and the following attempts to bring his two years in Canada as fully to life as possible.

#### GEORGE AVERY'S NARRATIVE

I was 21 years old Jany 23rd day AD 1780. I had left my parents care and their good rules and admonitions. I was an unsteady youth, and leaving strict discipline, seemed to be set more at liberty from its yoke. This was in the time of the Revolutionary war that separated the American provinces from Great Britan. I was a soldier stationed at Milford, Connecticut that winter. The next summer in august I was in Sharon Vt clearing land intending to be a farmer.<sup>4</sup>

OCTOBER 15, 1780. George Avery was, in a sense, free as a bird for the first time in his life. He had recently turned twenty-one and he had finished five years of military service in Revolutionary War units in both Massachusetts and Connecticut.<sup>5</sup> He had left his provincial Cape Cod hometown of Truro and the watchful eyes of his locally prominent family far behind.<sup>6</sup> He had recently moved out of his older sister's house in Windsor, Connecticut, where he had lived off and on in late 1779 and 1780, and in August he had gone north to stake a claim on the Vermont frontier and begin a new life.<sup>7</sup>

A giddy youth with vain expectations to be something in the world. I compare myself to the words of the poet. "Through all the follies of the mind, he smells [swells] and snuffs the empty wind."<sup>8</sup>

It was October 1780 and he had been living in a cabin in Sharon, Vermont, with a few other loosely tethered lads for about two months.

Since the Revolutionary War had moved south of New England, it felt relatively safe in Vermont, which had been a self-declared independent political unit since 1777. At that time it had unilaterally broken away from New York but was denied admission to the United States by the Continental Congress.

The British planned to overcome the rebellion through a war of attrition and victory in the south while harassing the northern frontier from military bases in Canada.

A force of 150 Vermonters had recently gathered at newly built forts in the Champlain Valley towns of Pittsford and Castleton, the most

likely area for the next British attack on Vermont.<sup>9</sup> The British had been using Lake Champlain to launch attacks on New York's Mohawk Valley already this year, and hit-and-run raids had kept Pittsford on edge. In the two previous years there had been devastating attacks on Onion (now Winooski) River and Otter Creek settlements. The British strategy, devised by General Frederick Haldimand, the British commander in chief in Canada, was to devastate the American backcountry from northern New England to the Ohio River Valley. This offensive was largely a war on civilians, but they were also producing the harvests and the livestock that fed the Continental Army.

The war had not been going well for the revolutionaries in 1780. In February, a joint British and Indian force had invaded Kentucky and taken many captives. The British had captured Charleston, South Carolina, on May 12. In mid-August the rebels suffered a disastrous defeat at Camden, South Carolina, and at the same time the village of Barnard, Vermont, was attacked by a small Tory and Indian raiding party from Canada.

How much of this Avery was aware of as he set out from the safety of his sister's house in Connecticut we do not know; but as soon as he arrived, he would have found the populace abuzz with alarm about the Barnard raid and news of a new fort being built there, to be called Fort Defiance. What's more, the alarm was such that the fort at Royalton was being dismantled and all the timbers taken to build a new one at Bethel, on the very edge of the frontier and more exposed to attack. It was to be called Fort Fortitude. There was a militia, but Avery makes no mention of joining it, though virtually all able-bodied men did so. The erection of this fort was to prove a vain effort, for on September 21 a raiding party from the Mohawk village of St. Regis on the St. Lawrence River struck Bethel, capturing two hapless farmers, David Stone and Silas Cleaveland.

Avery's narrative does not say whose land he was working, but since he arrived so late in the season it probably was not his. The land was on the south side of the White River just upstream of Broad Brook. One of those plots belonged to David Rowlands of Windsor, Connecticut, an absentee owner, and quite possibly a neighbor or friend of Avery's sister. Rowlands might have hired a crew of adventurous local lads to go north, clear, cultivate land, and build a cabin. Avery might simply have been hired as a late arrival.

October 15 was a Sunday. A group of bear hunters was camping with Avery and spent the nights prowling the cornfields where bears were ravaging the crop.<sup>10</sup> Avery and his chums had been picking corn themselves and were not in church.

I was too regardless of the Sabbath, lived a careless loose life with other comerads of the same cast, which I resided with, occupied in the same way. One Sabbath forgetting the day of the week, we went at work, at husking corn. An old lady passed by us with solemn countenance going to meeting.

She never chid us, but I began to think there was something wrong, and told my mates, I guessed it was Sabbath day. Why they replied. My reply was, The old lady had on her Sabbath day mouth; It was my rudeness altho I had strong convictions of our carelessness forgetting the Sabbath.

Even so, there they were: young men, scandalously at work on Sunday, as was not the custom in this or any other strict Congregationalist town along the Upper Connecticut River Valley in 1780. Nor would Avery have been caught like this at home in Truro where, from 1708 to 1754, his grandfather had been the town's first pastor and his father was a prominent citizen and church member. How often George went to meeting he never says, but in Royalton there was no meeting that day.<sup>11</sup> The grimly devout woman, if she was en route to meeting, would have been attending the one in Sharon, farther away than the Royalton meeting and across the river, up a long hill beside Quation Brook—perhaps explaining the lads' absence.<sup>12</sup> Whether or not George dwelt on this lapse during the day, it could have been what troubled his sleep that night.

That night following I slept with my comerads on the floor of the shantee. I dreamed I was beset by serpents the most hideous and numerous that I ever saw, and awoke in the horrible fright; but my fears soon vanished, and I was soone asleep again, and dreamed of being besett by Indians and as frightfully awakened as before—But having no faith in dreams, my fears soone vanished, it was now broad daylight.

That morning I went to a neighbor for our bread, while my mates cooked breakfast. When I returned I met my companions affrighted running to the woods, but I did not apprehend so much danger as they did from Indians. I thought of going to the camp and save my cloaths. I made light of it, and told them I would get my breakfast first.

OCTOBER 16, 1780. The closest George had ever been to actual combat was when, as a member of a company aiding a ship driven ashore by a British man of war at Truro in 1778 or '79, he came under sustained cannon fire.<sup>13</sup> The last thing he expected on this quiet October morning in remote Vermont was surprise attack by Indians and, unlike his thoroughly alarmed cabin mates, George was inclined to look after his belongings and his appetite rather than run for his life.

I went and got my cloaths and hid them. I but tasted the breakfast. I saw others flying for safety, and spoke to one. He said some had

turned to go and fight the Indians. I thought of going a very short distance from us, and I should know if they had. But turning a few rods I was surprised by the sight of two Indians very near me. The foremost one with tomohok in hand. We were face to face—suddenly both stopped. He waved his hand: Come Come. I answered the Indian: Come.

And [I] took to my heeles and ran for escape, followed the road on the River bank but a little, Jumped into the bushes on its bank out of his sight and made for foarding the River. [T]he two followed me; the tommahok one caught me in the back of the collar of my cloaths and gave me a few blows with his instrument and a few greeting words How How (that is Run Run). Here I was as really affrighted as I was in my dreams but a few hours before (But the dreams did not here occur to my mind) The two Indians stripped me of my outside garments, I being lame at that time.

In the space of a few moments George's nightmares had proven all too true, but his attention was far too focused even to think of them or why he paid them no heed. His "lameness" was more than a case of sore joints and muscles; it was caused by an infection that would later affect the entire trajectory of his coming captivity.

His captors wasted no time with his companions. The warriors had been racing downstream, but once they captured Avery they turned around and hurried back the way they had come.

They took me by each arm and I ran between them, to return to their company which they left that were destroying Horses and cattle and had taken prisoners. They had killed two of the inhabitants in pursuing them viz Pember and Button.<sup>14</sup> They spent the chief part of the day in burning and killing property.

With Avery and other prisoners in tow, the raiders returned to a rendezvous at the mouth of the First Branch of the White River near the site of present-day South Royaltown village. It was only then that the magnitude of the attack became apparent to George and the others. The raiders had put every dwelling, barn, and shed they found to the torch. The raid coincided with the completion of the fall harvest and all of the grain, corn, hay, fruit, vegetables, nuts, berries—all of it went up in flames.

Then the air crackled with gunfire. Shots echoed up and down the valley. The raiders had commenced a great slaughter—all the cattle, sheep, and pigs to be found, all were shot. That left a village of some fifty families with desperately little to eat for the coming five and a half months of winter.

As George would soon discover, this attack was part of a major offensive against the northern frontier that would strike settlements

stretching from Vermont across upper New York State, western Pennsylvania, and out the Ohio River Valley.

By two o'clock in the afternoon the raiding party was moving north. Avery was one of twenty-six men and boys, halters around their necks, being driven north at a rapid pace. They made camp that night not far from present-day East Randolph.

The night they encamped near the place of their destruction. This first encampment was in Randolph Woods the 16th of Octr 1780. About 350 Indians and 26 prisoners. The Indians made fires and shelters of Hemlock boughs to encamp by for the night as many as 20 or more. The prisoners had different masters at different camps.

The prisoners were striped of outer garments by their masters and collected at the chief officer's encampment. We stood huddled together (like sheep shorn)<sup>15</sup> the fier between us and the officer.

The raiding party consisted of 265 Kahnawake Mohawk and Odanak Abenaki warriors under the command of Lt. Richard Houghton of His Majesty's 53rd Regiment of Foot. In addition there was a grenadier of the 21st Regiment and three French Canadian interpreters.<sup>16</sup> They had been marching for several days from the mouth of the Onion River and had camped in Tunbridge the night before in silence. The attack had come as a complete surprise. Not a shot had been fired nor a war cry uttered.

Once settled, Lt. Houghton summoned the prisoners to his campfire so he could get a head count and take their measure before the Indians assumed possession. He gave them instructions, warnings, and even a few words of reassurance. Each prisoner had a different Indian captor and each was subject to different treatment.

An Indian came to a prisoner took him by the hand to lead him off. The head officer told the prisoner to go and bade fare well; A prisner nearby me whispers, I believe he will be in another world. I asked why. He replied He had continental cloth and was a soldier when taken. By this I was frightened.

This was very probably David Waller, still just a lad, who had been a waiter, a sort of dogsbody, to Elias Stevens in the Royalton militia. He was wearing the only coat he owned, a regimental coat, part of the uniform of a Continental soldier, causing him to be viewed as more than an innocent settler.<sup>17</sup>

Then others were led off in the same way. I think my turn might be about the 6th or 7th. I am not able to express [my feelings] in any other way but by confusion in thoughts, like one to die violently. I expect I became quite fantick. When I was led a short distance through woods to the camp where the Indians were cooking, all looked calm and peaceable to my view and astonishment.

The silly phantick thought struck my mind They'l fat me before they kill me. Soone however they brought a strong belt to bind me, aimed It at my body to put it around me, then took me to a booth (or shelter) I was laid down under it feet to the fier, Stakes drove down in the ground each side of me, my belt tied to them stakes. Thus I was staked to the ground: To look up there was long Indian Knives fastned to the boughs. This condition looked frightful.

Still here is no Safety. They gave me here of their supper but I cannot tell the relish of it that night. After supper 4 Indians lay on my belt that tied me to the stakes, two upon each side of me so that I could not move but that they all would feele the belt move. When I looked at the fier there was the guard, an Indian Smoking.

Reports of this method of staking a prisoner to the ground were repeated again and again by captives taken by Mohawks or other tribes during the Revolution. Avery's arms were free, but in other cases, prisoners were spread-eagled so that they could not so much as twitch. On this frigid October evening, they were all staked to the ground near a fire that was kept burning all night by the guard.

OCTOBER 17, 2:00 A.M., HOUGHTON'S FIRST CAMP. The war party knew that the trail they left would not be hard to follow and the glow of the campfires could be seen from a distance. They fully expected a spirited pursuit, so they set out a perimeter guard and settled in for the night, ready to pull out at dawn or sooner if need be.

At two in the morning, October 17th, some 364 men under the command of Col. House of Hanover, New Hampshire, closed on the raiders' encampment, but the militia didn't realize just how close they were.<sup>18</sup> George remembered the gunfire and the sudden ferocity of the Indians as they made ready to fight and retreat at a moment's notice.

In the morning The Vermont Mellsha routed them. They fired on the Indian out guard. The Indians in confusion and rage onstaked there prisoners.

My belt was taken and put round my neck and tied to a sapplin; another I see bound to a tree while they packed up. Their eyes looked like wildfier.

One uttered to his prisoner bumby bumby (as tho death at hand).

Lt. Houghton wrote in a report filed a week and a half later: "[O]ne of my out Posts was attacked and a little after, our Camp. We were ready to receive them & had some brisk firing for a few minutes untill they retired a little."<sup>19</sup>

Col. House backed off after an initial exchange of musket fire. It was to be a controversial decision. Many would criticize him for not pressing the attack. The break in the firing gave the war party time to

get organized. There were captives to be made ready for a pell-mell retreat, and there was plunder, food, and other supplies and equipment to be gathered. In the confusion, Houghton made a simple calculation. He would release one elderly prisoner, Edward Kneeland, to deliver a message to Col. House.<sup>20</sup> Kneeland was to tell him that if there were to be any further attack or pursuit all the prisoners would be killed instantly. Kneeland's two sons were prisoners of the raiding party, so he had ample incentive to deliver the message faithfully.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, Houghton took stock of his position: "I had but one Indian wounded. What mischief we done them I cant say as they were too strong for us to look for scalps, but as they came on in great numbers & we had the advantage of the moon should suppose we killed a good many of them."<sup>22</sup>

In fact Houghton's gunners had killed none, though one militia man, Charles Tilden, was wounded.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the Indian Houghton reported as shot, though able to travel, would eventually succumb to his wound.<sup>24</sup> Avery recalled the extreme danger of the moment:

After ready to march I was loosed from the Sapplin, loaded with a pack and led by the halter on my neck and my leader with tomahok in hand and to follow after my file leader.

Each master of a prisoner (as I understood afterward) had orders to kill his prisoner if closely persued and then they could take their flight from their enemies in the woods. In this case no one could predict the result; life and death is set before us.

As the encampment emptied of 270 raiders, Col. House did not make a move to pursue. He considered the message brought by old Edward Kneeland, and waited with his men in the frigid darkness. At dawn, House entered the deserted camp, and found the bodies of two men, Joseph Kneeland and Giles Gibbs, bound to trees, tomahawked, and scalped: an object lesson in case Col. House doubted the threat that Edward Kneeland had delivered.

Kneeland was to provide the first eyewitness account of the withdrawal of the war party. It is a handwritten manuscript that inventories the body count: Edward's son Joseph and Gibbs, but also two others who were in fact quite alive—Experience Davis and none other than George Avery. The word spread fast and was widely published; so from this moment on, as far as friends and family were concerned, Avery was no more. It would be months before he knew of this report.<sup>25</sup>

Each of the captives became the property of a specific captor. Once the warriors saw that the prisoners were likely to be docile and cooperative, they became actually solicitous, and with good reason. They would be rewarded upon their return for captives who arrived in good health. The tribe considered suitable adoptees a precious commodity, and if not adopted, captives could be sold to the British for money. What was

more, the British had extracted promises from the Indians not to mistreat prisoners unnecessarily and to harm neither women nor children during the course of the raid. In exchange for these promises, the British pledged valued trade items: weapons and large quantities of rum. This lethal combination often made their Indian allies as dangerous to the British as to the Americans, and as General Burgoyne noted about the most assimilated of the Indians, especially the Mohawks:<sup>26</sup> “The most mischievous and treacherous nations are those nearest to European influence; they acquire only our vices and retain their ferocity.”<sup>27</sup>

The prisoners, however, did not know that the Indians had been somewhat constrained. The deaths of Button, Pember, Kneeland, and Gibbs were chilling reminders of the brutal years of the French and Indian War, so George Avery turned to the source of salvation to which so many other prisoners fetched north had turned before him.

Here must follow a multitude of thoughts which none can know but by experience. Such feelings I never had before in my life brought to my view; my sins roled over me like the waves of the sea,

Here I am lord, do as thou pleasest. I saw and felt that myself and the Indians were in the hands of God to do his pleasure. I felt calm. These words came to mind “We was lead as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb dumb before his shearer”. I felt the Indians could only do what [He] permitted them to do.<sup>28</sup>

I had at this time the Holy Bible and Watts Hymn Book in my bosom, that we used to read and meditate, which I took from a house that the Indians burned. The Indians would take these from my bosom to see what I had, and return them. In one of our stops, reading the 88th psalm as applicable in part to our case.<sup>29</sup>

We had no where to look but to God in our troubles.

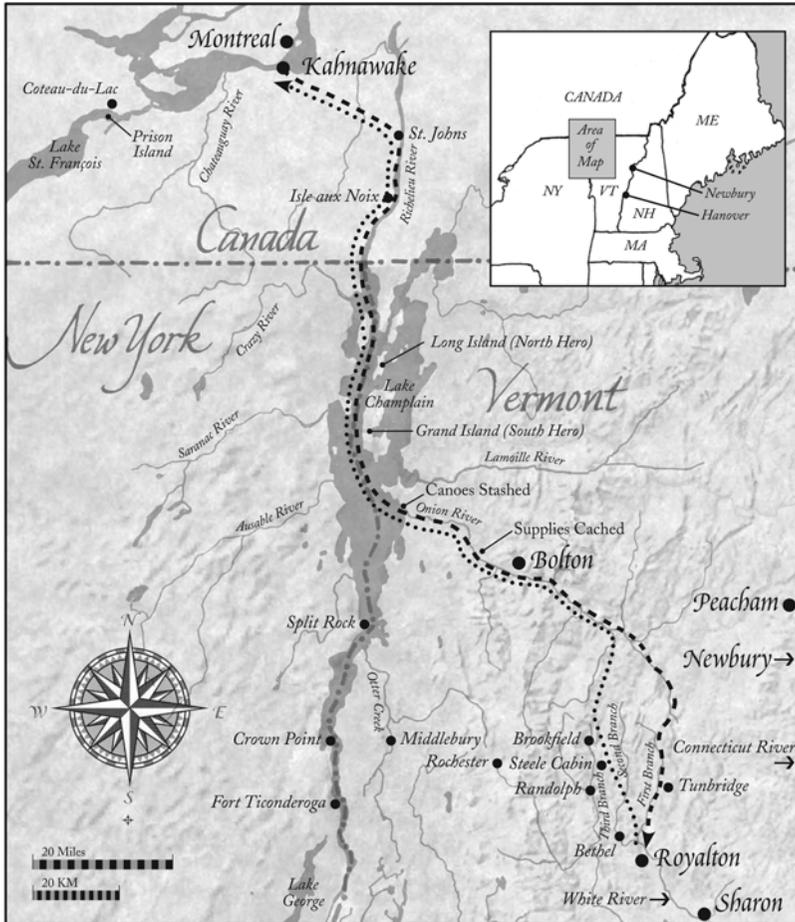
Why is it thus with me, was my enquiry?<sup>30</sup>

The 88th Psalm echoes the old Puritan creed that misfortune is visited on the sinful by a wrathful God and that it is both penance and trial. If they are to be delivered from their current adversity, then it must come from a provident almighty. Throughout, the psalm is a Job-like cry of desperation and a plea for redemption and salvation:

Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry  
For my soul is full of troubles and my life draweth nigh unto the  
grave

Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance  
into darkness.

With the militia standing down, Houghton’s war party made an orderly withdrawal with prisoners and plunder. The following day, five more captives were taken in Randolph, including Zadock Steele, who wrote his own extended narrative about the attack and his subsequent prison experience.<sup>31</sup> From Steele’s hut on the Randolph-Brookfield



*“Route of Raiders from Kahnawake to Royalton and back,” from Neil Goodwin, We Go as Captives: The Royalton Raid and the Shadow War on the Revolutionary Frontier (Barre: Vermont Historical Society, 2010).*

line, the party moved quickly to the Onion River, which it followed to Lake Champlain and the hidden armada of water craft.

I traveled with them 5 days. Taken by them on monday Octr 16th we came to Lake Shamplan on friday 20th.

They had killed two of the inhabitants in persuing them viz But-ton and Pember. Allso the camp the first night they killed two of their prisoners viz Kneeland and Gibs.

Nothing further transpired thus far that is very interesting to relate.

Though some of the Odanak Abenakis had come in their own twenty- to thirty-foot canoes, most traveled in *bateaux*, high-sided thirty-five-foot craft of French-Canadian invention, designed for carrying cargo on the rivers and lakes of the region.<sup>32</sup>

They left the mouth of the Onion River under the watchful eyes of the men aboard the *Carleton*, a British warship that had been anchored just off shore since October 19th. In the distance George might have seen the British ship *Liberty* and two gunboats going north far out on the lake. The vessels had left Crown Point on the 19th, loaded with other captives, loyalist families, and the wounded from the British attacks on Fort Edward and Fort George on October 12.<sup>33</sup> Houghton's war party made the crossing from the mouth of the Onion River to Grande Isle before a light breeze. Once on the water they had nothing to fear from pursuit or counterattack. Following the initial terror of the journey, and perhaps fortified by reading his Bible, George Avery had taken things in stride.

We went down the Lake . . . to The Ile o Noix Saturday 21st tarried there that night for refreshment by victuals & rum.

The closer they got to home, the more alarming the Indians became, and their insistence on transporting so much plunder so far was now clear to George and the others. Although Isle aux Noix, twelve miles down the Richelieu River from Lake Champlain, was a British outpost under military control, it was also a place with enough private enterprise for the warriors to trade plunder for rum. It hosted a dense revolving population of French Canadian farmers, artisans, traders, Indians, Tories, and spies as well as British soldiers. The land not occupied by the military was intensively farmed for hay, cattle, and horses.

All the shipping moving into Lake Champlain had to pass this post, making it the only garrison on the lake equipped to handle such a large number of men. It was first fortified by the French prior to 1760, and now there were earthworks, two blockhouses, barracks for the men, and quarters where officers could enjoy a well-stocked wine cellar and superior cuisine—perquisites they could not imagine doing without for any length of time. Even captured rebels of the officer class were wined and dined in relative luxury, though none of the Royalton captives saw the inside of the fort or the officers' quarters. Lt. Houghton almost certainly did, leaving the captives outside with the inhabitant throng and the roistering warriors.<sup>34</sup>

By the time they reached St. Johns, George Avery had already been accepted, decorated, and reclothed by his captors. His "master" then assigned him to sit next to a pile of plunder. North-bound loyalists

shopping for items among the booty very nearly took him for a Mohawk, as he wryly remembered:

Sabbath 22, we arrived at St. John's Cannada where was more Rum, that day and a market for their plunder.

I was dressed drolely. I had on an Indian blanket with my head poked through its middle, hanging over my body, with a high peaked cap on my head, my face painted with red streaks. Being smoked over their fires, [I] looked very much like an Indian, being sett at a parsell of thier plundered goods.

The refugees [loyalists] at St. John's came to the parsell that I was sat at to buy. Looking at me one of them says to his mate is that an Indian? his mate replied no, his hair is not Indian.

When the Revolution began in 1775, perhaps 20 percent of Americans were loyal to the king and willing to fight against the rebels. The remaining portion of the population was split between revolutionaries and those not attached strongly to either side.<sup>35</sup> Thousands of loyalists from New York and New England made their way north to Canada. They were lucky to have escaped with their lives from persecution at the hands of the rebels who were once their friends, neighbors, or even relatives. Many had to abandon vast properties and in most cases they would never reclaim them. Slowly and furtively, loyalists like those mistaking George Avery's lineage had been making their way north to the shores of Lake Champlain, hoping to be rescued by British ships.

As George Avery was all too aware, the tableau that he described represented a painfully ironic reversal of fortune, a turning of the tables that was not fully appreciated by these loyalist refugees. There was a good chance these Tories had been driven from their homes in New York State or Vermont and that they had come north across Lake Champlain at about the same time Avery did. They were bargain hunting in St. Johns, where they were considering household goods plundered from rebel homes in Vermont, carried north by rebel captives, the erstwhile owners of these very goods.

OCTOBER 22, 1780, ST. JOHNS. Until their arrival at St. Johns, all the captives shared a more or less common fate; but this was a prisoner processing center, and from here they would be going in dramatically different directions. Of the thirty-two captives taken from Royalton and Randolph, most were marched overland to Kahnawake, a Mohawk village on the St. Lawrence River that had supplied over 200 warriors for the raiding party. Others would be going to Odanak, downstream on the St. Lawrence, and some directly to Montréal.

Even though an official British policy had been established in June 1780 to discourage the Indian practice of adoption, the officers at

St. Johns in charge of prisoners of war must have viewed the departing warriors with their scores of captives with some relief.<sup>36</sup> The British had virtually no place to put the captured rebels. General MacLean, the commander at Montréal wrote to General Haldimand's secretary, Robert Mathews on October 16: "Lt. Delgarno brought 48 prisoners from Detroit among them 23 women and children; as the provost was full I had to put them in tents on the isle St. Helena."

And again on the 23rd: "we have so many prisoners here that I don't know what to do with them."

And again on the 30th: "we are rather disagreeable situate here at present on account of the number of prisoners we have got, and more coming."<sup>37</sup>

The fate of the prisoners no concern of his, Lt. Richard Houghton took his leave of the war party at this point and left for Montréal. He and the three French Canadians had served together since early in the war on frontier raids and this one would not be the last for them.

Adorned in St. Johns for the humiliation and uncertainty of ceremonial entry into the Indian village, George Avery, like the other captives, was set by his master on the last leg of the journey. The road the Royalton prisoners followed led straight across the dead flat of the St. Lawrence valley and in an extended ragged procession they shared the rutted, muddy route with forty other mostly barefoot captives from New York and some two or three hundred warriors who were in a state of high excitement and advanced inebriation.

The Indians this day (Sabbath) take up their march for thire Home Cahnawaga, many of them very drunk and often those loaded down with their plundered goods would sowed down in mud as road was much soaked by the snows melting of[f] at this time. Some of those loaded drunken Indians in this plight were three days travelling 25 milds.

What plunder they had not sold for money or traded for rum at St. Johns the warriors were by now carrying themselves, for a display of booty signified exploit, achievement, and stature that the villagers would recognize and celebrate. The hapless prisoners had been stripped of most of their outer clothes and had instead only blankets against the cold. Some were forced to trade shirts with the warriors and what they got in exchange were filthy and infested with lice.<sup>38</sup>

As the disorderly column approached the village, the dense forest began to thin and finally disappear, cut as fuel for the fires of the Kahnawake. Normally women would have been in the forest gathering firewood and packing it on horses, but that day the forest was deserted. Word had gone ahead that the war party was returning and all the people were gathered waiting for it.

Even before the village came into sight, George and the others would have heard the water. As the St. Lawrence River approaches Montréal it drops dramatically in a series of violent rapids, and the village takes its name from the raging water tumbling past: *Kahnawake*, the place of the rapids. When the French first saw it they named it *Sault St. Louis*, the Falls of St. Louis. Since settling here in 1670, the skill of the Kahnawakes as river men and runners of rapids had become legendary.

These people had not always lived here but had been attracted from upstate New York by Jesuit missionaries and converted to Christianity in the late seventeenth century. The monument to this conversion would have been what the prisoners first saw: a towering steeple on a magnificent stone church at least as grand as anything they had ever seen in New England. In form, this was a familiar sight that otherwise might have given them a sense of relief—the possibility that they might be within a circle of civilization once more. Except, of course, that this was a Catholic church, embodying everything that New Englanders reviled.

I was taken by my Master Indian to Cahnawaga at his home. We arrived on monday or tuesday from St. John's. I tarried there at my keepers two or more days when all the party or the scout of Indians came in.

Then the Sachem Fooumo came to my quarters, and took me to the centre of Village. Where the Indians and Squaws gathered around I was on a seat at the Chiefs feet . . . painted up and wampum over my shoulders.

He stood on a raised step above me. The Indians gather around a short distance to hear. He spak to the audience with a stress at the end of sentences.<sup>39</sup>

I sat in suspence, not knowing his language or designs, I had fears as might be to run the gauntlet or some evil.

Avery's memory for the man's name was not far off considering he was writing at a remove of sixty-six years from the event. The "Sachem" was Thomo or Thomas Orakrenton, an influential Kahnawake warrior. One of the leaders of the war party, he was identified by Zadock Steele as his personal captor. He had spent his boyhood hunting and fishing along the shores of Lake Champlain, and was likely to have been with Lt. Houghton in attacks along the Otter Creek in 1778 and 1779.<sup>40</sup>

Thomo was in fact announcing and enacting the process by which captives were adopted into the tribe, in spite of British disapproval. The process would, in the eyes of the Kahnawake people, utterly transform the identities of the captives. Once adopted into the tribe, a prisoner would no longer be who he once was; he would from then on inhabit the identity of a tribal member who had died, sometimes recently,

sometimes in the past. Thus, an adoptee would eventually assume the social position, rights, and responsibilities of the one whose place he was taking. If a prisoner replaced a person of influence, wisdom, and courage, great things were expected from him and he was treated with deference. On the other hand, from someone who was replacing a person of low esteem nothing of value would be expected and he would be used accordingly.<sup>41</sup>

There was a time among the Kahnawake when an adoptee would undergo an elaborate physical transformation as well. All the hair would be plucked from his head save for a small circular scalp lock; his nose and earlobes would be slit for rings or plugs; his face would be tattooed and painted; he would be treated to a sweat bath, baptized to wash out all his white blood; finally he would be given new clothes and jewels. But for the Royalton captives this had been a short-form ceremony.<sup>42</sup> Avery had no idea what was happening to him except that for the moment it would not be violence, and he was led away by a young boy.

My suspence soone ended. I was led off by an Indian lad past the Spectators to the door of a house and meet by Squaws with a Blanket & hat, and Water and soap to wash; and found that was the place of my residence.

Now the paint and the grime and soot could come off. Avery was pleased with that and with a new blanket and a hat; but it was not until he met a fellow adoptee that he realized what his new status was.

I found another young man a prisoner to them. I enquired of him if he understood the meaning of this last manover I had passed through. He said he did. He had experienced the same. We were both of us (by this Seremony) adopted into that family to fill the places of two Indians which had recently died there and we made up their loss. I enquired of him how he knew. He answered the Indian interpreter Stacey told him.

But what I saw afterward, which was more affecting, they displayed the Scalps of our prisoners (those they killed) in the same seremony.

The "Indian interpreter" John Stacey had been captured as a boy in 1759 in upstate New York and had elected to remain with his captors, while keeping a foot in both worlds like so many of his kind. By 1780 he was operating a trading post at the village and was at times on the British payroll as a commissary in the Québec Indian Department, so he would have been an important source of information for the British about prisoners and their treatment.<sup>43</sup> Since the British did not want the Indians to keep their prisoners indefinitely, one of Stacey's roles was to facilitate redemption, ransoming, and indenturing as much as possible.

In the meantime, life in Kahnawake was a far cry from the dreaded experience Avery expected.

I had there my liberty to walk the village with other prisoners there. They were kind and treated us well with Indian fare. How long I was there I know not —not two months.<sup>44</sup>

Stacey led some of the Royalton captives to believe that their chances were reasonably good of being assigned as a servant on parole to a private household where they could live in relative comfort. On that basis, Zadock Steele and all the others opted for British custody and were sorely disappointed when they landed in a great stone prison called the Provost. What Steele did not understand was that parole was available almost exclusively to officers who could assert rights to privilege and who then had to give a solemn gentleman's oath not to escape.

George Avery was the only Royalton man not offered the chance to join the others in the Provost. He had been captured by a man who was somehow different from the others.

I lived with them untill my owner belonging to another tribe came for me, and took me to Montreall to take his bounty for me. I was dressed decently by two old squaws.

Avery is not writing about Thomo, but rather a warrior who apparently chose to make a separate deal with the British. It is reasonable to assume that his captor was a resident of the Kahnawake village since he had a home there and Avery was adopted there, but if, as Avery says, he was a member of another tribe (but living at Kahnawake), that might well have given him an incentive and a right to act autonomously. In any case, by ancient custom, a captor could always do as he pleased with a captive.

As soon as I was sold and Delivered to the Brittish a prisoner I was stripped to the shirt by my former Indian owner. I was taken thence to the guard house allmost naked. They covered me with an old thin blanket coat in the cold season of the last of Novr. kept under guard naught to eat for 2 or more days before I had orders for rations.

From thence I was taken to Grant's land near the City. A Rany night followed. The prisoners was in tents then in cold winter weather.

Sir William Grant, who was a paymaster in the British Army, was building a mill on the island of St. Helena, which he owned as a result of his advantageous marriage to the wealthy French Canadian widow, Marie-Anne-Catherine Fleury Deschambault.<sup>45</sup> By sending prisoners to this island the British solved two problems at once. The mill was an important project for the war effort and the prisoners would provide

cheap labor, though not quite slave labor since Grant paid them a shilling a day.<sup>46</sup> Best of all, the British believed, prisoners were not likely to escape from an island in the middle of the frigid, roaring St. Lawrence River. When Avery arrived with a few other prisoners they were issued canvas with which to make tents, as had the other prisoners already there.

We had no tent pitched for the night. we roled ourselves in the tent cloth for a cold wet night. I never drew rations on the Island.

With no way to erect them in the slashing rain that night, George and the other new arrivals did the best they could; but his health, already compromised by an unhealed leg injury, took another blow.

I complained to the officer of prisners of lameness, and carried from thence to the Hospital half starved the next day, being shifted from place to place without provision. I was allmost starved. I was lame when I was taken with a scrofulous humor in my legg. A surgeon and phisian tended the Hospital. They were kind to me, especially the Doctor.

Avery went to the hospital with a badly infected wound or ulcerated open sore on his leg, possibly an infection of a lymph gland. There were no effective treatments for bacterial infection, though wounds were frequently washed liberally with wine. People did survive, the good doctor assured Avery, but everyone knew that an infection could be fatal.<sup>47</sup>

WINTER, 1781, MONTRÉAL. Given the conditions in the Provost it was no wonder that prisoners made up a quarter to a third of the patients in the British hospitals.<sup>48</sup> At the end of the year ten out of thirty were prisoners, and one of those was George Avery. His condition was serious enough for both the surgeon and the physician to look after his infected leg, and the British physician was especially attentive.

His injury improved and the doctor then offered to take George on as a servant in his home instead of sending him back to prison where his health would continue to weaken. Discharged from the hospital, he was taken through the frigid streets of Montréal:

When I got better of the sore leg the phician ment to take me to his House to serve him. I was both very dirty and naked. From thence I was conducted in such a plight in a cold winter day to the commesarys, (by the Orderly man of the hospital) for cloathing, and got none.

From thence to the Doctor's, lef there for the night chilled with cold, fatigued and sick—hardly able to rise next morning. I was called upon by the Doctor, examined by Him, and sent back to the Hospital, a mile to travill in a cold N Wester.<sup>49</sup>

His release from the hospital was apparently premature. He was still weakened from the infection, and was now exhausted by exposure to the cold walking from the General Hospital, outside the city walls, to the commissary. When he got there, George was told there were no clothes for him, and he was sent to the doctor's offices where he spent a cold night. The next morning, he staggered back to the hospital, and by the time he had made the mile-long walk through the icy December streets of Montreal, George was as sick as he had ever been.

I went directly there and took my place in the Bunk. I was soone senseless of all that passed. The time was lost to me, for a space and deranged views and thoughts followed. When I had come to reason or sense of feeling I had acute pain in the head, my eyes seemed as if theyd be thumped out. In this case the Doctor ordered half of my head shaved—the left side.<sup>50</sup>

He had a pounding headache, was passing in and out of consciousness, and was delirious. He had probably been overcome by a combination of hypothermia, dehydration, malnutrition, and multiple vitamin deficiencies. The doctors shaved his head so that poultices could be applied to open the pores of the brain and “give free passage to the spirits,” thus drawing the toxins to the surface.<sup>51</sup>

Three blister plasters were applied on my head neck and back—that on head and neck never blistered—and the back one scarce a blister.

The poultices on George's shaven head may not have drawn out the spirits as intended, but neither did they kill him.

The two hospitals in Montréal were clean and well supplied. One was owned and staffed by the order of the Gray Nuns, and if the General Hospital (owned by and rented from the large landowner and entrepreneur, William Grant), where George was convalescing, was anything like the Nuns' Hospital, it was spotlessly clean with neat rows of beds separated by green curtains.<sup>52</sup> The mattresses were of straw and there were blankets and sheets and pillows. There were stoves in the wards for which some fifty cords of wood had been cut and hauled and stacked. Every day local suppliers delivered four gallons of milk and quantities of sweet oil, hog's lard, and cabbages.<sup>53</sup>

The hospital had people who did the washing and cooks who produced three meals a day for the patients, hardly sumptuous, but better than the Provost diet and probably not a great deal less nourishing than what George had been eating last summer as a bachelor back in Royalton. The official full hospital diet was: thin rice porridge with sugar and butter for breakfast; a pound of fresh beef, mutton, or veal with greens for dinner; and two ounces of butter or cheese for supper. Each patient

received a pound of bread every day, three pints of spruce beer in the summer, and a quart in the winter. Rice water was given as the common drink in case of the fluxes, or diarrhea, and barley water for fevers; wine and vinegar were also prescribed.<sup>54</sup>

On this regime of rest, care, comfort, and nourishment, George survived this close brush with death, but he was much reduced and his doctor was not about to let him return to the Provost.

When I had got to know myself I was amasiated to a Skilleton. My nose and face peaked and dirty and lowsy as if one ded. I used to bake the rags of my shirt on the stove when I had got so much strength, better to kill lice off.

On the way to recovery, but still beset by lice, which prevailed against any measures the hospital might take, George had his own way of ridding his clothes of the universal pests. It was by now February 1781; he had been in the hospital for well over a month and his doctor, no longer needing him for a servant, made a proposal.

The Doctor sought for places for my abode. One was to live with a Jewess in Montreal, the other, to live with a Jew at Barkey [Berthier, between Montréal and Québec]. I put it to the Doctor to choose for me. He thought it best to go to Barkey in the country away from the city. The refugees often complained of the prisoners at liberty in the city and got them into prison again.

It was well for George Avery to be out of Montréal. As rebel prisoners were brought in from remote outposts, loyalists, British soldiers, and pro-British Indians frequently taunted them as “damned rebels” and worse. Some even came directly to the Provost, where they took some satisfaction in the plight of the captives, some of whom had been their former persecutors in New York State.<sup>55</sup> Of course, any insults hurled at rebels in Montréal paled in comparison with the brutal and humiliating treatment of Tories in the colonies.<sup>56</sup>

Many rebels were in fact at large on parole or in service in the city, at least thirty as servants in private homes and at least another 125 on parole in the city and in the surrounding suburbs.<sup>57</sup> Even so, once the doctor had George safely out of prison and out of the hospital, he wanted him out of Montréal. Avery’s health was clearly too fragile now for a stint in jail.

FEBRUARY, 1781. George Avery was more fortunate by far than any other Royalton prisoner. The nameless English doctor, who almost certainly saved his life, took a personal interest in Avery and used his considerable influence to remove him permanently from prison and place him on parole in a private home of a Jewish merchant in Berthier.

The Jew was a country trader with but very little learning but of strong memory and head to cast up accounts without the use of figures or writing. He had and did employ frenchmen to make up his accounts. Very shortly after I went there I kept his accounts.

When the Doctor chose this place for me to live I told him I should loose of being exchanged, being so far from other prisoners, or of writing to my parents; he answered that could be accomedated by writing to Mr Jones.

Reassured that the Montréal Provost Marshal William Jones could notify him if he was to be released, Avery went to Berthier.

Both of the doctor's choices for placing Avery were with Jewish families. There were almost certainly no Jews in Canada when it was French and Catholic, but when it became an English possession in 1760, English-speaking Jews immigrated in numbers. Aaron Hart arrived in Canada as a lieutenant under Lord Jeffrey Amherst in 1760 and later, as a protégé of Frederick Haldimand, became a dominant figure in the fur trade centered at Trois Rivières.<sup>58</sup> The British army had a long-standing relationship with the Jewish merchant community in Canada on whom they relied for a variety of supplies. Avery's doctor must have had business, personal, or professional connections with the Canadian Jewish community. Perhaps Jews were eager to have American prisoners on parole. In any case, a Jewish man named Barnett Lyons lived in the village of Berthier, forty miles downstream of Montréal, who was only too happy to take Avery.

Lyons had taken up business affairs in Berthier only recently, having spent several years as a fur trader in the backcountry, though he had apparently kept a *piéd à terre* in Montréal since 1769.<sup>59</sup> As of 1779, Lyons was doing business with well-connected people who apparently were ignoring their debts to him and he needed to pay close attention to his paperwork. Only a little more than a year earlier, Lyons took one Ezéchiél Solomons to court over an unpaid note. Solomons was a wealthy, influential Jewish merchant who was represented by none other than William Grant, owner of the rain-swept island where Avery first became so ill, as well as the hospital in which Avery had recovered.<sup>60</sup>

Lyons already had a French accountant, but he gave more and more work to George. As of mid-February 1781, Lyons was going to court again, this time for a debt he himself had not paid.<sup>61</sup> He was going to need the best bookkeeper he could get, for he was moving into the real estate speculation business.<sup>62</sup> He was also going to have to do something about Avery's appearance.

When I went to live with the Jew my clothing was but poor—an old blanket loose coat, the rag of a shirt that I burned the lice from,

and overalls. And a prisoner died, and I had his old shoes when I went with the Jew to live.

A shirt was the first I most needed, and the first thing I was supplied with from him, and that was made from ozinbrigs [coarse linen cloth] washed in cold water and dried for me to put on by an old matron, the Jews housekeeper. When I put this shirt on, the meanest I ever wore except the old dirty lousy ragged one, it daunted my Spirits; otherwise I had better fare, and when better acquainted, he needed my assistance to keep his accounts and in his store.

George's diet had improved and as he and Lyons got to know each other, he was not only doing accounts, but he was also working in his employer's shop. Things were looking up for both of them.

He married a wife soon after I went there to live; She was a Jewess. His family before was the old French woman & twin children he had by a squaw when a trader with the Indians which he was obliged to leave in Upper Cannada. But after he married I fared better for cloathing; by her means I was dressed descent.

Lyons had spent several years among the Indians of the interior or the Great Lakes—long enough at least to acquire and then abandon an Indian family. But Lyons was moving up in the world, something that could only be hindered by an Indian wife and *métis* children. In addition to his activities as a merchant, he was speculating in real estate and he was active in the local Jewish congregation, Shearith Israel.<sup>63</sup> He had married a Jewish woman, who paid more attention by far to Avery's wardrobe than the old French matron.

In the late spring of 1781, just as Avery was settling in with the Lyons family, a prisoner exchange between Canada and Vermont was being negotiated. What only a select handful of people knew, however, was that, though genuine, the exchange negotiations constituted a cover for a series of top secret discussions between Ira Allen of Vermont and Justus Sherwood of the British Secret Service, designed to detach Vermont from the rebellion and entice it into allegiance with Great Britain. Vermont had been denied admission to the United States and was exploring its foreign policy options. While the negotiations continued, there was an effective cessation of hostilities between Vermont and British forces in Canada, which suited both sides and gave the Continental Congress great cause for concern. At the moment, however, the only settled matter was the prisoner exchange.

The terms were very clear. The British would accept from Vermont, in exchange for her people, only regular army British soldiers. Most important, since this was a transaction designed to benefit only Vermont, "no prisoners will be delivered who are in the Continental Army or are from any of the United States."<sup>64</sup>

Haldimand had a firm policy not to do business with the Continental Congress on prisoner exchange because of what he considered past breaches of faith in such matters on the part of the United States.<sup>65</sup> So a list of nineteen British soldiers held prisoner by Vermont was drawn up. In return a group of eighteen Vermont prisoners would be selected and presented by the British.<sup>66</sup>

I tarried with them until the next August (1781). The Jew left home for Quebeck. While gone I wrote to Mr Jones informing him where I was, and to know if there was any exchange of prisoners, or that I could write to my parents. I wanted the benefit of it.

Mr Jones wrote immediately to the Jew. This letter came when Mr Lions the Jew returned from Quebeck, and I was absent from home, on an errand. When I returned in the evening The Jew enquired of me what I had been about while he was gone to Quebeck.

“Why?” I answered.

He responded, “I have received a Letter from Mr Jones at Montreall and I dont know what they are going to do with you—it may [be] to put [you] to Jaile.”

Lyons could not read, so he handed the letter to Avery, who ripped it open.

He wanted me to read it to them. I took it and looked it through, and then read to them, gladly, that I was exchanged to go home and that he must send me directly to Montreall

George Avery was as overjoyed as Lyons was dismayed.

Then says he what shall we do, for you have kept my books while here. You and Mrs. Lyons must sett up all night and she must write over the head of each man’s account his name in Hebrew characters, for she did not know how to write english or french well enough, and we spent the night in this way.

At dawn George set out for Montréal and walked all day, resuming again the next morning. When he arrived, he went straight to Mr. Jones who told him he

... might have been at home by this time. That I was exchanged by name and 17 others, and that they had gone in a carteele home and that I had to wait there untill another carteele of prisoners might go.

He told me I could draw provisions (and have my liberty) and be biled with prisoners that were on parole untill I could go.

So I lived with others drew my provisions weakly and worke out as I pleased. I thus employed myself to gain something to cloathe and to spare to the poor sick prisoners in the hospital that I before suffered in.<sup>67</sup>

Instead of going back to Berthier and the risk of missing another boat, George was allowed by Jones to remain at large in Montréal on

parole with other prisoners: any captive's dream. While he waited for another party of prisoners to be drawn up, he would be a guest of the British government, drawing provisions as needed, free to come and go, earn a little money, and visit sick prisoners in the hospital with gifts of money, clothing, and food. During Avery's ten comfortable months that followed, Zadock Steele and a few other Royalton Raid prisoners languished in a ghastly prison camp on an island in the middle of the St. Lawrence River, forty miles upstream.

On May 13, 1782, Frederick Haldimand issued a directive to Richard Murray, the commissary of prisoners, to forward "all prisoners whatever belonging to that district [Vermont] without loss of time to Chambly where further orders will be given concerning them." Among these was George Avery.<sup>68</sup>

The next June (1782) a carteele of prisoners came into the state and I with the rest and was landed at the head of Lake Champlane, at what is now Whitehall N York.<sup>69</sup>

An easy passage the length of Lake Champlain landed them at Whitehall, New York. From there George made his way to his sister Elizabeth's house in Windsor, Connecticut, where, like so many others, he had long since been given up for dead:

for they knew nothing but that I was dead and scalped untill they saw me. for by mistake my name had been returned, and published as dead.

The erroneous report of George's death originated with the written account attributed to Edward Kneeland, Sr. It then found its way into several newspapers, including the *Providence Gazette and Country Journal* of November 29, 1780, and the *Norwich Packet and Weekly Advertiser* of November 11, 1780.

I tarried at Windsor through that summer, and wrote to my parents in Truro Mass. I worked and bought me horse to go Home; on the first of Sept (1782) following I sett out for Truro.

When I arrived in the neighbourhood I sent a neighbor to notify my mother and sister that I had come. I was afraid to come sudden to see her.<sup>70</sup>

If only Avery had lingered in Windsor a month and a half longer, he might have heard of the return of two other Royalton prisoners to the neighboring town of Ellington. Zadock Steele and Simeon Belknap, having escaped from prison in Montréal, had made their way home together and, completely unexpected, burst through their families' doors on October 16.

Having learned from the jolt that his arrival had delivered to his Connecticut sister, George wasted no time in writing to his parents with the

news of his survival and safe return. Even so, when he arrived in Truro, he decided to go first to the house of one of his parents' neighbors. After they had recovered from the shock, they went next door to deliver the news of his arrival to the family.

When I came in they were gathered in a room to see the unworthy son. My mother left the room at sight. I cannot write or express it now (this meeting) without flowing tears. My father was to work in the salt marsh a-haying at this meeting.

He had heard of my arrival before he came home that evening with his mind more composed.<sup>71</sup>

This was a scene repeated hundreds of times throughout the country as captives, long given up for dead, materialized miraculously and without warning. By the same token there were plenty of families whose sons simply disappeared, never to be heard of—lost at sea, in battle, in ambush, and perhaps never even accounted for. The Averys had counted themselves among this number for two years. George's sudden appearance apparently unhinged his mother's customary emotional control. Not about to lose her grip in front of the family, not to mention the prodigal George, she fled to the next room to compose herself. Likewise, Avery's father seems to have kept his distance until confident his self-control would not fail him and that he would be able to give his son a stoic's welcome. Avery, not often at a loss for a wry or ironic turn of phrase, just gives us the bare, though vivid, outlines of a scene that still had the power to move him at the age of eighty-eight. But he cautioned his son, Thatcher, for whom he wrote a narrative, that his account was no more than "an old layman's repetitions . . . that is not sentiment nor substance, and to be put by." In other words: What he had written was hardly more than an entertainment.

For Avery, "Truth and Substance and good sentiments are not to be trifled with," and they are the lessons to be derived from his story. "These," he insists, "you must examine by the Holy Bible which is unerring." His recall of the 88th Psalm in the early days of his captivity was only one instance of the bedrock faith that underlay his captivity experience and in retrospect, was the agency of his survival. He calls himself a "careless youth" at the outset of his narrative and recalls his neglected faith and his devil-may-care disregard for his mates' prudent fright while he considered instead his unfinished breakfast. Even so, with his life in the balance, he was possessed of a reassuring sense of calm and a Puritan's trust in Providence. He even speaks of "the necessity of the new birth" and "a new heart," implying strongly that surviving captivity brought about a religious rebirth, entirely consistent with the Second Great Awakening and his apparent embrace, later in life, of the Baptist church.

Whether George Avery ever considered returning to Sharon, Vermont, or even passed that way again, we may never know, but he was not about to stay on Cape Cod in 1782 any more than he was in 1780, though four of his seven siblings lived out their lives in Truro. Instead, he made his way to Plainfield, New Hampshire, where he married Mary Sanborn of neighboring Danville on January 11, 1787, and where the first of their twelve children was born on June 17 of the same year. A member of the Baptist church, he spent much of his later years writing on religious subjects as well as his experience as a captive of the British during the Revolution. He died in 1857 at the age of ninety-eight.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Colin Calloway, ed. *North Country Captives: Selected Narratives of Indian Captivity from Vermont and New Hampshire* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1992), vii.

<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Lovejoy, *History of Royalton Vermont, With Family Genealogies, 1769–1911* (Burlington, Vt.: Free Press Printing Co., 1911), Garner Rix, 178; Joel Blackmer, 150.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Greenough, Avery Carter, and Susie Perry Holmes, *Genealogical Record of the Dedham Branch of the Avery Family in America* (Plymouth, Ma.: Avery & Doten, 1893).

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from *George Avery's Narrative*, in Calloway, *North Country Captives*, 150ff.

<sup>5</sup> George Avery pension application, W. 23477, BLWT. 26129-160-55, frame start: 752, frame 754, United States National Archives (USNA).

<sup>6</sup> William Richard Cutter and William Frederick Adams, eds., *Genealogical and Personal Memoirs Relating to the Families of the State of Massachusetts*, Volume 2, (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1910).

<sup>7</sup> Avery's sister was Elizabeth McAlpine of Windsor, according to the Avery family Bible, a copy supplied by Avery descendant, Karen Miller.

<sup>8</sup> Isaac Watts, *The Psalms and Hymns of Isaac Watts*, Hymn 2:170. "God Incomprehensible and Sovereign," Hymns and Spiritual Songs; "Born like a wild young colt he flies Thro' all the follies of his mind, And swells and snuffs the empty wind."

<sup>9</sup> In reference to the planned attack on Vermont, the British cite intelligence from Bennington that Vermonters are prepared for an attack; Sir Frederick Haldimand to Gen. Powell, Haldimand Papers (HP) 21,796, reel 63, 208–209; A.M. Caverly, *History of the Town of Pittsford, Vt.* (Rutland: Tuttle & Co., 1872), 164.

<sup>10</sup> From an unpublished handwritten manuscript written by George Avery, addressed to his son, Thatcher, and currently in the possession of a descendant.

<sup>11</sup> Lovejoy, *History of Royalton*, 144; The minister was away: "Daniel Clark Diary," Daniel Clark folder, Document Box 37, Vermont Historical Society, Barre (VHS).

<sup>12</sup> Lewis Cass Aldrich and Frank R. Holmes, eds., *History of Windsor County* (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason & Co., Publishers, 1891), chapter 26, "History of the Town of Sharon."

<sup>13</sup> George Avery pension application, USNA.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Button and Samuel Pember were the only two killed during the raid. Lovejoy, *History of Royalton*, 147.

<sup>15</sup> The phrase "like sheepe shorne" is from an unpublished version.

<sup>16</sup> Grenadier Richard Hamilton, identified in a British Secret Service intelligence report from St. John's, 23 September 1780, HP 21,741, reel 92, p. 130; the French Canadians were: la Magdaline, Verneule Lorimier, and la Mothe, Campbell to Haldimand/Mathews, Montreal, 5 October 1780; HP 21,772, p. 223.

<sup>17</sup> David Waller pension application, roll 2481, frame 0331-0349, VT S14.793, USNA.

<sup>18</sup> Lovejoy, *History of Royalton*, 168; Elias Stevens pension application Vermont, roll 2284 frame 0157-0208 Conn. W.9314, BLWT.6022-160-55, USNA.

<sup>19</sup> Houghton to Haldimand, 26 October 1780, HP 21,772, reel 50, p. 249.

<sup>20</sup> Lovejoy Papers, Royalton Historical Society, Kneeland folder. There is a family tradition that, at 56, Edward Kneeland, Sr. was weakened by illness and hard work.

<sup>21</sup> Handwritten statement by Edward Kneeland, "The Destruction of Royalton, Oct 16, 1780," *Unpublished Papers of Jonathan Chase*, New Hampshire Historical Society (NHHS). Kneeland



states that he “interceded with Capt. Philips to be released.” See Zadock Steele, *The Indian Captive; Or a Narrative of the Captivity and Sufferings of Zadock Steele, Related by Himself* (Montpelier, Vt.: The author, 1818); and K.M. Hutchinson, *Memoir of Abijah Hutchinson, A Soldier of the Revolution* (Rochester [N.Y.]: William Alling, Printer, 1843). These narratives, as well as contemporaneous newspaper accounts and Vermont state and town histories, all agree that a message of warning not to pursue was delivered; contemporaneous account, “Daniel Clark Diary,” VHS.

<sup>22</sup>Houghton to Haldimand, 26 October 1780.

<sup>23</sup>John Goodrich, *Rolls of the Soldiers in the Revolutionary War, 1775–1783*, Vermont State Archives and Records Administration (VSARA), contains a bill from Dr. Laban Gates for removing the ball from Phineas Parkhurst’s abdomen and for attending to Tilden, who was “hurt in night attack on Indian camp at Brookfield.”

<sup>24</sup>Steele, *Narrative*, 11.

<sup>25</sup>Houghton’s report claims four scalps. After those of Pember and Button in Royalton, the only two other possibilities are Kneeland and Gibbs. Gibbs is described in the Royalton history as having been found with a tomahawk buried in his head. Lovejoy Papers, Royalton Historical Society, Kneeland folder: A family tradition that Joseph was killed for insisting on clothes for his brother, Edward, Jr.; Edward Kneeland statement, “An Account of the Persons Killed at Royalton by the Indians Ye 16th October, 1780,” Jonathan Chase Papers, NHHS; *Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, 29 November 1780; *Norwich Packet and Weekly Advertiser*, 14 November 1780.

<sup>26</sup>Peters To Haldimand, 11 August 1778, Public Archives of Canada (PAC), states that he was having trouble with his Indians; Ida Washington and Paul Washington, *Carleton’s Raid* (Canaan, N.H.: Phoenix Publishing, 1977), 10, 24; Campbell to Haldimand, 1 February 1779, HP 21,772, reel 49, p. 49.

<sup>27</sup>Richard Hadden, *Hadden’s Journal and Orderly Books*, Horatio Rogers, ed. (Albany N.Y.: J. Munsell’s Sons, 1884), 15.

<sup>28</sup>From an unpublished version, 4.

<sup>29</sup>In the published version it is the 38th Psalm, but that is probably a misreading of an original handwritten manuscript. In the unpublished handwritten version, it is clearly the 88th Psalm and the text is more applicable, so I will quote the 88th here.

<sup>30</sup>Phrase from an unpublished version, 4.

<sup>31</sup>Steele, *Narrative*, 44; Neil Goodwin, *We Go as Captives: The Royalton Raid and the Shadow War on the Revolutionary Frontier* (Barre: Vermont Historical Society, 2010).

<sup>32</sup>Russell P. Bellico, *Sails and Steam in the Mountains: A Maritime and Military History of Lake George and Lake Champlain* (Fleischmanns, N.Y.: Purple Mountain Press, 2001); picture and description of a bateau, 80; Abijah Hutchinson, *Memoir of Abijah Hutchinson*, reference to the canoes used to travel along the shore and descend the Sorel River.

<sup>33</sup>Capt. Chambers Journals, Returns, HP 21,802, reel 69, p. 268.

<sup>34</sup>Steele, *Narrative*, 60; “Journal of Thomas Johnson While a Captive,” entry for 12 March 1781, in Frederick P. Wells, *History of Newbury, Vermont* (St. Johnsbury: The Caledonian Company, 1902), 385, and many others.

<sup>35</sup>Ray Raphael, *A People’s History of the American Revolution* (New York: The New Press, 2001), 145, referring to Paul H. Smith, “The American Loyalists: Notes on Their Organization and Numerical Strength,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 25 (1968): 269.

<sup>36</sup>Haldimand to Claus, 5 June 1780, HP 21,774, reel 51, p. 116.

<sup>37</sup>MacLean to Mathews, Montreal, 16 October 1780, HP 21,789, reel 59, pp. 177, 183; 30 October, 1780, p. 185.

<sup>38</sup>Abner Barlow pension application, Number W. 3919, B.L.Wt. 19616-160-55, frame 508, USNA.

<sup>39</sup>Unpublished version, 6.

<sup>40</sup>Caverly, *History of the Town of Pittsford*, 170–174. In Carter and Holmes, *Genealogical Record of the Dedham Branch of the Avery Family in America*, “Fuuomo” is correctly identified as “Thomo” in a shorter, alternate version of the Avery captivity narrative.

<sup>41</sup>E.J. Devine, *Historic Kahnawake* (Montréal: Messenger Press, 1922), 244; Benjamin Peart and Thomas Peart’s Narrative in *The Narrative of the Captivity of Benjamin Gilbert and His Family*, William Walton, ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1975); Josiah Priest, *Life and Adventures of Isaac Hubbell* (Albany, N.Y., J. Munsell, 1841; reprint, Garland Publishing, 1977), 31.

<sup>42</sup>Anna Dill Gamble, “Col. James Smith and the Kahnawake Indians,” *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* (1938): 9, 28.

<sup>43</sup>HP 21,772 Reel 49, p. 49; State of Pay Due to the Officers, Interpreters and others in the Indian Dept. From Jul. 1 1778 to 24th Dec. 1778.

<sup>44</sup>Unpublished manuscript, 7.

<sup>45</sup>*The Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*: www.biographi.ca/EN/.

<sup>46</sup>Josiah Hollister, *A Journal of Josiah Hollister, A Soldier of the American Revolution and a Prisoner of War in Canada* ([Chicago?]: Romanzo Norton Bunn, 1928), 24.

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<sup>47</sup>The term “scrofulous” is often used to describe tubercular sores frequently affecting the lymph system, but in the eighteenth century this term could have applied to an open ulcerated sore of another kind.

<sup>48</sup>Microfilm reel B-2864, Return of Hospitals in Canada, War Office (WO) 28/6, PAC, p. 42.

<sup>49</sup>Lovejoy, *History of Royalton*, 154.

<sup>50</sup>Dr. Monington was an apothecary at the General Hospital, but according to Scudder he was the senior doctor, making him the most likely candidate: *The Journal of William Scudder, 1794* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977).

<sup>51</sup>William Sloan, *Praxis Medica, The Practice of Physick*, 1716; personal communication, Dr. Norman Selverstone, MD. November 25, 2004.

<sup>52</sup>Scudder, *The Journal of William Scudder*, 61.

<sup>53</sup>Schedules of Expenses for Hospitals in Canada, 1780, 1781; HP 21,857, reel 92, pp. 115, 140, 181.

<sup>54</sup>Reel B-2864, WO 28/6, p. 52, PAC.

<sup>55</sup>Lemuel Roberts, *The Memoirs of Captain Lemuel Roberts* (1809; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969), 69, 83; Priest, *Life and Adventures of Isaac Hubbell*, 31; Hollister, *Journal of Josiah Hollister*, 22.

<sup>56</sup>*Andover Review* for May 1889, from the *Montreal Star* of June 1889 referenced in J. F. Pringle, *Lunenburg, or the Old Eastern District* (Cornwall, Ont.: Standard Print House, 1890).

<sup>57</sup>Various Returns of Prisoners, HP 21,843, reel 93.

<sup>58</sup>Entries for Aaron Hart, William Grant, Lucius Solomons, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography On-line*. <http://www.biographi.ca/index-e.html>.

<sup>59</sup>Lyons Family History, [http://www.sylvainbazinet.com/Genealogy/Articles/publications/lyon\\_lyons.pdf](http://www.sylvainbazinet.com/Genealogy/Articles/publications/lyon_lyons.pdf).

<sup>60</sup>Archives Judiciaires de la Cité de Montréal, Cour des plaidoyers communs, - civils- district de Montréal (1764–1791), 30 November 1779. Action on note in the cause Barnet Lyons, plaintiff, against Ezéchiel Solomons, of Montréal, défendeur (represented by William Grant and Robert Ellice).

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 16 February 1781. Cour des plaidoyers communs, Action on draft in the cause William Bernett, plaintiff, against Barnet Lyons, of Berthier, defendant.

<sup>62</sup>Archives Judiciaires de la Cité de Montréal, Actes des Notaires, 20 July 1781, Faribault Barthélemy, notaire, (voir copie papier), Vente de terre.

<sup>63</sup>Jacob Raphael Cohen, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography online*: [www.biographi.ca/EN/](http://www.biographi.ca/EN/).

<sup>64</sup>Letter from Col. Dundas at Isle Aux Noix to Ira Allen, 21 May 1781, HP 21,835, reel 88, p. 70.

<sup>65</sup>Mathews to Capt. Wood, 9 August 1781, HP 21,843 reel 93, p. 187.

<sup>66</sup>Certifications Vermont prisoners for exchange, 19 September 1781, HP 21,836, reel 88, p. 229.

<sup>67</sup>He probably also had to report every day to the authorities, as did another prisoner, Stephen Hawkins, who boarded with John Sawes. See Stephen Hawkins pension application, series: M805 roll: 410 image: 544 file W19700, USNA.

<sup>68</sup>Mathews to Murray, 13 May 1782, HP 21,843, reel 93, p. 236.

<sup>69</sup>This might have been the sloop, *Victualler*, known to have brought released prisoners to Whitehall on May 22, 1782. See: Samuel Blowers pension application; roll 0274, frames 0756–0784, NY S.12245, USNA; see Samuel Swift, *History of the Town of Middlebury, in the County of Addison, Vermont* (Middlebury: A. H. Copeland, 1859), 93; Ben Stevens goes home to Whitehall, June 1782.

<sup>70</sup>Unpublished manuscript, 10.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*