



Revolution in Richmond: Part II

By Bert Dunkerly

In Part I we learned how the British under General Arnold captured Richmond. In the meantime Governor Thomas Jefferson had fled, along with members of the legislature. The British occupied the town for 24 hours, destroying supplies and wrecking the Westham iron foundry, west of the village.

This iron works produced cannon, ammunition, and other military supplies for the Continental war effort. Hessian officer Johann Ewald describes his actions: "I had left half of the men under arms in the hills, and with the other half I damaged and made unserviceable as much of the machinery and tools found at the smelter as possible. During this time the artillery officer blew up the powder magazine, consisting of seven hundred barrels of powder and two mills."

Ewald noted, "Toward ten o'clock in the evening, Colonel Simcoe sent an officer to me with instructions to fall back to Richmond as quickly as possible. I assembled my men at once, of whom two thirds were drunk because large stores of wine and beer had been found in the houses. They were now so noisy that one could hear us two hours away. Meanwhile, I ran into Colonel Simcoe about half way back, whereupon we withdrew to Richmond, where General Arnold and his men were cantoned in sweet repose. We were quartered here in order to rest up." It had been a long day, and as adrenaline subsided and the sun began to set, the exhausted British and German troops sought shelter in the town, among the open spaces above and below Main Street, camping throughout modern day Shockoe Bottom.



Lt. General Johann Ewald



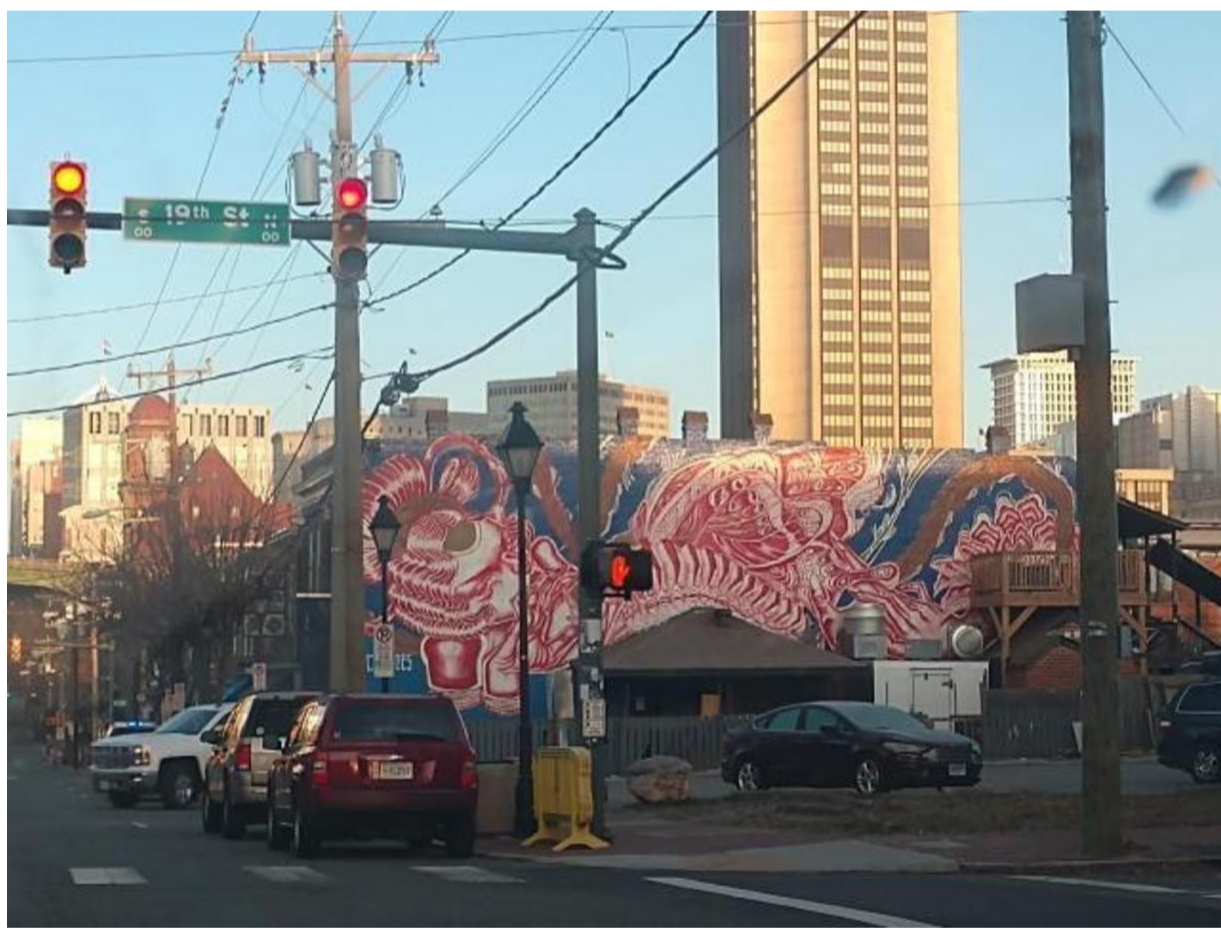
Lt. General John Graves Simcoe

The damage to the Westham Foundry and Richmond's fledgling industry was significant, as Governor Jefferson noted,

"they burnt that, the boring mill, the magazine, and two other houses, and proceeded to Westham, but nothing being in their power there, they retired to Richmond. The next morning they burnt some buildings of publick and some of private property, with what stores remained in them, destroyed a great quantity of private stores and about 12 o'clock retired towards Westover, where they encamped within the neck the next day. The loss sustained is not yet accurately known. At this place about 300 muskets, some soldiers clothing to a small amount, some quarter masters stores, of which 120 sides of leather was the principle article, part of the artificers tools, and 3 waggons, besides which five brass 4 pounders, which had been sunk in the river, were discovered to them, raised and carried off. At the foundry about 5 tons of powder was thrown into the canal. . . . Part of the papers belonging [to] the Auditors office, and the books and papers of the Council office, which were ordered to Westham, but in the confusion carried by mistake to the foundry, were also destroyed. The roof of the foundry was burnt, but the stacks of chimnies and furnaces not at all injured. Within less than 48 hours from the time of their landing and 19 from our knowing their destination they had penetrated 33 miles, done the whole injury, and retired."

Arnold himself stayed at Galt's Tavern at the corner of 19th and Main Streets, later known as City Tavern, and torn down in the 1850s. They raiders departed the next day, January 6, having occupied the capital of the Commonwealth for less than 24 hours.

Revolution in Richmond, Part III, concludes on Friday, February 7th, 2020.



Site of Galt's Tavern, corner of Main and 19th streets, Richmond.

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