

In Defense of John Honeyman The Spy of General Washington. By Deborah J. Honeyman

CIA agents wrote an essay defaming my ancestor, John Honeyman. This essay is entitled “The Spy Who Never Was” by Alexander Rose

<https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol52no2/the-spy-who-never-was.html>

To stream line things I have copied the Essay (printed in Black) and interspersed my comments (in parentheses in this type.)

(Here I have to apologize to my readers. Our branch of the family had a copy of A. Van Doren Honeyman’s book has disappeared. I read the story my self in this copy which was in my Grandma Anne’s possession, several months after my marriage. However after grandma’s death no one in the family can find the book. All of us have moved several times and I read it over 30 years ago in 1971. I wonder how two or three letters could have been misplaced a hundred years after their creation? One can see the Library of Congress copy of the family history which includes all of Van Dyke’s writings on the matter, from The American Libraries Internet Archives website. Please read for yourself if Van Dyke swabbed a thick layer of typically Victorian sentimentality and romanticism over the Honeyman story. Please, also evaluate A. Van Doren Honeyman’s scholarship and research in the depth and breathe of this tome. Please, don’t just rely on the snippets and prejudice presented in this essay. I can not make copies of the places I would like to reference so I will direct you to the page where you can read it in context.)

<http://www.archive.org/details/honeymanfamilyho00hone> *(to see actual book including pictures use this link. This copy is hard to read in places because of poor photocopying however this is one of the Library of Congress’ copies.)*

http://books.google.com/books?id=aFIVAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA6&lpg=PA6&dq=history+of+honeyman+in+scotland+and+america&source=bl&ots=Y_1BmcId2V&sig=EGgKv-t6rxQU52Npm00UmFy5EJQ&hl=en&ei=naIRS_HgFYHWIAevurmZBA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CAwQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=history%20of%20honeyman%20in%20scotland%20and%20america&f=false *(this is an easier reading copy. The genealogy of the Spy for Gen Washington starts on Chapter 6 this can be easily reached by clicking on “Contents” on the bar above the displayed page. However click on the link that begins on pg. 94. This copy can be downloaded in a pdf format.)*

John Honeyman is famed as the secret agent who saved George Washington and the Continental Army during the dismal winter of 1776/77. At a time when Washington had suffered an agonizing succession of defeats at the hands of the British, it was Honeyman who brought the beleaguered commander precise details of the Hessian enemy’s dispositions at Trenton, New Jersey.

The problem is, John Honeyman was no spy....Key parts of his story were invented...and through repetition have become accepted truth.

Soon afterwards, acting his part as double agent, Honeyman informed the gullible Col. Johann Rall, the Hessian commander, that the colonials were in no shape to attack. Washington’s men, he said, were

suffering dreadfully from the cold and many were unshod. That bitingly cold Christmas, nevertheless, Washington enterprisingly crossed the Delaware and smashed the unprepared (and allegedly drunk) Hessians. Three days into the new year, he struck again, at Princeton, inflicting a stunning defeat upon the redcoats. Though Washington would in the future face terrible challenges, never again would the Continental Army come so close to dissolution and neither would dissension so gravely threaten the Revolution's survival.

The problem is, John Honeyman was no spy—or at least, not one of Washington's. In this essay I will establish that the key parts of the story were invented or plagiarized long after the Revolution and, through repetition, have become accepted truth. I examine our knowledge of the tale, assess the veracity of its components, and trace its DNA to the single story—a piece of family history published nearly 100 years after the battle. ¹ *(Well that is what we are about to see. Do they establish any facts? Or do these statements have to be taken on faith? Are they closer to the truth 200 years from the events than the published accounts of the Family History 100 years from the events? By the way the author of the essay do not trace it to a single story, A. Van Doren Honeyman does. See page 97 footnote.)*

These historical explorations additionally will remind modern intelligence officers and analysts that the undeclared motives of human sources may be as important as their declared ones—particularly when, as readers will see here, a single source is the only witness. *(While this maybe true it is also important to know that a single source may be your only witness in many cases, and a deeper analysis is necessary, not being brushed aside as lies, just because there is the only one source. So let's begin a deeper analysis. Lets look at how "modern intelligence officers and analysts" work.*

In John Honeyman's defense, I would like to put forward the following arguments:

It is true that the first published article about John Honeyman was in print about a hundred years after the events. But does this time frame make one automatically conclude that the Honeyman family history is false? Even Scripture was written years after the birth and death of Christ. This family history was written down by a family member and includes friends that knew the Honeyman family who lived through the events. "Montcalm and Wolfe" sited below was written 100 years after the fact. But be that as it may.

The first "evidence" that the essay puts forward is a good pedigree to the family history. In fact in the following paragraphs of the essay all but two historians (including other CIA sources) give credence to John Honeyman being one of Gen Washington's spies. In fact only one modern historian is quoted as "not being sure, though the history may be true" and the other is given credence by the author, because he did not mention Honeyman in his history.)

Origins and Evolution

The Honeyman story has a substantial pedigree in published histories. First publicly appearing in 1873 in a New Jersey journal, the tale has since 1898 been a mainstay in Revolutionary War histories. In that year, William Stryker, president of the New Jersey Historical Society, published the authoritative *Battles of Trenton and Princeton*, in which he announced that it was *already* "a well-established tradition that the most reliable account of Colonel Rall's post at Trenton was given by Washington's spy, John Honeyman." ² Soon afterwards, Sir George Otto Trevelyan's *The American Revolution* chimed in that

the “conversation on a winter night between Washington and John Honeyman settled the fate of Colonel Rall and the brigade which he commanded.”³ *(See pg 112-113 to see exactly what Stryker wrote and quoted by A. Van Doren Honeyman.)*

A generation later, in the 1920s, Rupert Hughes’s inspirational biography *George Washington* declared that “a splendid monument glorifies Nathan Hale and his name is a household word in America, though he failed in his short mission; but for John Honeyman, who made the first great victory possible, there is oblivion.”⁴

In 1948, Alfred Bill’s *The Campaign of Princeton* helped rescue Honeyman from that awful fate by declaring him “one of the ablest of Washington’s spies.”⁵ Even so, Hale retained his crown, while Honeyman’s fame remained confined to Revolutionary War buffs.

That changed in 1957, when Leonard Falkner, a features editor at the *New York World-Telegram & Sun*, published “A Spy for Washington” in the popular history magazine *American Heritage*.⁶ The piece brought widespread attention to Honeyman’s exploits and cemented his reputation as Washington’s ace of spies in Americans’ minds. Two years later, John Bakeless, a former intelligence officer and author of *Turncoats, Traitors and Heroes: Espionage in the American Revolution*, portrayed Honeyman in the most glowing terms.⁷

In March 1961, as part of NBC’s *Sunday Showcase* drama series, Honeyman’s adventure was celebrated before a national audience. Titled “The Secret Rebel,” the special tantalized viewers with the advertising line, “It was tar and feathers for the ‘traitor’ who claimed to know George Washington!”⁸ A decade later, Richard Ketchum’s bestselling history of the Trenton and Princeton campaign, *The Winter Soldiers* (1972), again paid lavish tribute to Honeyman.⁹

As recently as 2000, Thomas Fleming, a Fellow of the Society of American Historians and an extraordinarily prolific narrative historian, reasserted Honeyman’s essential contribution to Washington’s Trenton victory. Until that battle, “New Jersey had been on the brink of surrender; now local patriots began shooting up British patrols, and the rest of the country, in the words of a Briton in Virginia, ‘went liberty mad again.’”¹⁰ The Wikipedia entry on Honeyman reflects this view.

More recently, however, the Honeyman story has diminished in importance, at least among general historians. Perhaps owing to its broad canvas, David McCullough’s *1776* omits him, while *Washington’s Crossing*, David Hackett Fischer’s exhaustive examination of those remarkable nine days between 25 December 1776 and 3 January 1777, hedged on the question of authenticity. “[The story] might possibly be true, but in the judgement of this historian, the legend of Honeyman is unsupported by evidence. No use of it is made here.”¹¹

Intelligence historians, perhaps paradoxically, tend to give more credence to Honeyman’s achievements. George O’Toole’s *Honorable Treachery: A History of U.S. Intelligence, Espionage, and Covert Action from the American Revolution to the CIA* repeats the traditional story.¹² The CIA’s own useful history, *The Founding Fathers of American Intelligence*, notes that Honeyman’s intelligence work “came at a critical time for the American side” and permitted “a strategic victory in political and morale terms.”¹³

While these two author, Fischer and McCullough, are eminent, the fact that one omits him and the other feels there is no evidence to warrant inclusion in their histories still begs the question, is no evidence, evidence to the contrary? Because a murder leaves no evidence at a crime scene, does that

mean he didn't do it or just that you can't prove he did it? Is all evidence concrete or is circumstantial evidence worth mentioning? Did all of the other authors blindly follow the family history of the Honeyman's or did they too do research? It seems unlikely that only Fischer and McCullough looked into the case, but that seems to be what is implied. Did each of these two historians include every other piece of information they found in their research of their histories or were other details "omitted" during their writing? And are just two historians considered "general historians"? This phase among others, seem to show prejudice against Honeyman, not a neutral research and analysis of the data.)

Deconstructing Honeyman

The Honeyman story may be partitioned into the five fundamental components that repeatedly appear in accounts of his heroics. Linked together in a narrative, they may be defined as the "Ur-version" of Honeyman's espionage career. *(What is an Ur-version? I can not find it in dictionary or thesaurus? I can only assume that the term is used to show prejudice.)*

Claim: John Honeyman, of Scottish ancestry, was born in Armagh, Ireland, in 1729 and was a soldier in General James Wolfe's bodyguard at the battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759, where the British victory eventually led to the creation of Canada. He helped bear the fatally wounded Wolfe from the field. Honeyman, however, was never a willing recruit and disliked being dragooned as a redcoat. Soon after Wolfe's death, Private Honeyman was honorably discharged and made his way south. He reappears in Philadelphia in 1775. In the interim, he became a weaver, butcher, cattle-dealer, and the husband of Mary Henry. In early 1776, they and their young children move to Griggstown, New Jersey. *(See page 99. He learned these trades before coming to the North American Continent not in the years between service with Wolfe and his arrival in Philadelphia, which is implied here. Honeyman was 29 upon arrival. Hardly a kid.)*

Evaluation: At the time of Honeyman's birth, there was no record of a family of that name living in the Armagh area, making the circumstances of his birth difficult to certify. Alternatively, he may have been born in Fife, Scotland, though one genealogist *(It is interesting that the name of the genealogist is not given here. The author knows it. It is A. Van Doren Honeyman, one of the men he is trying to discredit.)* has speculated that he was the son of a Captain John Honeyman, who had arrived in New York sometime before 1746 and embarked on a small expedition against Quebec that year. Honeyman the future spy was indubitably a Protestant, and almost definitely a Presbyterian. Despite the uncertainty of his birthplace, he appears to have taken the king's shilling in Armagh and to have sailed with Wolfe to Canada in 1758.¹⁴ *(Is the author here leaving the impression that since Van Dyke says he was born in Armagh and in his evaluation: no Honeyman birth records can be found, as if this is from his own research, when in fact it is from the Family History its self. And in the same paragraph, the author of the essay seem to imply with this reference in their lengthy addendum to it (see directly below), that while this account exists it is not to be taken seriously because there are "other claimants" for the honor." They give a reference: See F. Parkman, Montcalm and Wolfe (London, UK: Macmillan & Co., 2 vols., but this also is mentioned in the family history see page 107 by A. Van Doren Honeyman, what they failed to mention was that the story of John being the soldier on that field was told to Van Dyke by John himself. As we continue we wonder, did the author do any research himself? (Reference move here by me.))*

14. A. Van Doren Honeyman, *The Honeyman Family* (Honeyman, Honyman, Hunneman, etc.) in *Scotland and America, 1548–1908* (Plainfield, NJ: Honeyman's Publishing House, 1909), 94. The story that Honeyman aided the stricken Wolfe to the rear might be true. Francis Parkman, the 19th century American historian and author of *Montcalm and Wolfe*, noted that after the general was hit for the third time "he staggered and sat on the ground. Lieutenant Brown, of the grenadiers, one Henderson, a volunteer in the same company, and a private soldier, aided by an officer of artillery" carried him out of danger. The anonymous "private soldier" might have been Honeyman, though there are several other claimants for the honor. See F. Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe* (London, UK: Macmillan & Co., 2 vols., 1885), II, 296. Regarding Honeyman's religion, in addition to the other evidence we possess, we know he is buried in Lamington Presbyterian Church Cemetery, Somerset County, New Jersey. *(Have we seen "other evidence" or any evidence that he says is in his possession? Pictures of the grave stones are in the published Honeyman Family history.)*

F. Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe* (London, UK: Macmillan & Co., 2 vols.) 1884 edition

Chapter 27 @ Footnote 781 (towards the end of footnote.)

Here Wolfe himself led the charge, at the head of the Louisbourg grenadiers. A shot shattered his wrist. He wrapped his handkerchief about it and kept on. Another shot struck him, and he still advanced, when a third lodged in his breast. He staggered, and sat on the ground. Lieutenant Brown, of the grenadiers, one Henderson, a volunteer in the same company, and a private soldier, aided by an officer of artillery who ran to join them, carried him in their arms to the rear. He begged them to lay him down. They did so, and asked if he would have a surgeon. "There's no need," he answered; "it's all over with me." A moment after, one of them cried out: "They run; see how they run!" "Who run?" Wolfe demanded, like a man roused from sleep. "The enemy, sir. Egad, they give way everywhere!" "Go one of you, to Colonel Burton," returned the dying man; "tell him to march Webb's regiment down to Charles River, to cut off their retreat from the bridge." Then, turning on his side, he murmured, "Now, God be praised, I will die in peace!" and in a few moments his gallant soul had fled.

(Some other information in between the end of the above paragraph and this note.)

NOTE: There are several contemporary versions of the dying words of Wolfe. The report of Knox, given above, is by far the best attested. Knox says that he took particular pains at the time to learn them accurately from those who were with Wolfe when they were uttered.

(Please note that the author of this historical work took the words of Knox who heard it from the men who were there. Funny that is exactly what Van Dyke did in our history. And Van Dyke also quoted people who were actually there.)

There is no evidence, however, that he was reluctant to join the army and, if nothing else, the faith Wolfe reposed in him indicates that he performed his duties with alacrity and enthusiasm. If his father were Captain Honeyman, the colors would have been a natural avenue for the young man. *(See page 118 Notes. Although a weak case is made for this genealogical connection by A. Van Doren Honeyman, he makes a much stronger one for James Honeyman of Monimial.)* The unsubstantiated belief that Honeyman was suborned into donning a uniform is almost certainly a later embellishment intended to demonstrate that this Scotch-Irish "outsider" was secretly disaffected from his English overlords decades before the Revolution—and thus explaining his future actions on Washington's behalf. In truth, if

Honeyman were alienated from the Crown during 1775–76, it would most likely be owed to his being a Presbyterian (so antagonistic were his co-religionists toward established authority that King George III once joked that the Revolution was nothing but a “Presbyterian War.”)¹⁵

(Seems this would be another good reason for Honeyman’s animosity towards English. Because one performs a duty to the best of his abilities is not evidence that one relishes such duty. The essay writer establish that John was a Presbyterian Scripture says:)

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” [Ecclesiastes 9:10](#)

(If John was angry that he was conscripted into the British army might he be smart enough to keep that anger to him self during his time of service and live out his faith performing his duty well?. Remember the lack of evidence is not evidence to the contrary. The assumption that this is an embellishment, opinion of the essayists must be taken on as much faith as the Honeyman family tradition that he did not like his English overlords and would want to be out of the British army, and would want to support his new county against them. He is not the only Scotch-Irish in that time period to feel the same resentment of the British. IE James Thomson Chllender.:)

James Thomson Callender

Birth: 1758, Scotland
Death: Jul. 17, 1803
Richmond
Richmond City
Virginia, USA

Journalist, Political Pamphleteer. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries he was known as a political pamphleteer and newspaper writer. He acquired no formal education during his years in Scotland, but by the age of 30 he had developed a talent for political protest and the writing of incendiary articles and pamphlets against the British Crown. He had to flee Scotland in 1793 or face trial for sedition. He sought asylum in America where he understood that there would be no barriers to his expression of opinion. He chose to settle in Philadelphia, the seat of the newly developing American government.

<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=29049969>

(Were John and James the only ones in Scotland or America to feel oppressed by the English? Did the English conscript men into their service? Are we more likely to believe a person who was acquainted with John Honeyman and his family to accurately voice his beliefs or someone one 200 years after the events who so far have only voiced his opinions? “He appears to have taken the king’s shilling in Armagh and to have sailed with Wolfe” or he appears to have been forced to sail with the English in the army. We have no “proof” of one or the other, but we have the Honeyman Family History to back up the later. And only author’ opinion that he wasn’t for the former.)

As for his wife and young family, the traditional story tends to stand up to scrutiny. Mary Henry was from Coleraine, another Protestant part of Ireland, and records indicate that she was eight years his junior. Honeyman also had seven children, of whom at least three were born before the family moved to Griggstown (Jane—the oldest—Margaret, and John.)¹⁶

(It is good to know that A. Van Doren Honeyman did do research for his published Honeyman family history.)

Claim: In early November 1776, as Washington's battered forces were retreating from New York and New Jersey into Pennsylvania, Honeyman arranged a private meeting with the general at Fort Lee, New Jersey. He had gained access by brandishing a laudatory letter of introduction from Wolfe and declaiming his attachment to the cause of independence. The meeting was a necessarily hurried one, but (in the words of the chief 19th century source) the two men decided that Honeyman "was to act the part of a spy for the American cause" while playing "the part of a Tory and quietly talk[ing] in favor of the British side of the question."¹⁷

The Honeyman story was retold in October 1941 in True comics Number 5. The full issue can be found in the digital collection of the Michigan State University library. ***(There was also a cartoon based on John Honeyman, I saw it myself as a child on TV.)***

In other words, Honeyman was to present himself as a Loyalist while the Americans were nearby, but once Washington had departed and the British occupied the rump of New Jersey, his mission was to collaborate with the enemy, selling the army cattle and horses and supplying its soldiers with beef and mutton. He was to operate behind enemy lines, travel alongside the army, and leave his wife and children at home. As a camp follower, Honeyman would be in an excellent position to observe British movements, dispositions, fortifications, and logistics, plus gain advance knowledge of the enemy's designs. ***(In the author of the essay's "other words" or opinion, that he is to present himself as a loyalist while the Americans were near by but once Washington departs to act like a Tory. To do such a thing would doom the project from the start. He only needed to convince those he needed to, to secure a meeting with Washington and this was not necessary for his meeting in Philadelphia. He moves his family to Griggstown, near the British encampment, thereafter. Since no one knew him there, it is easy to "be British". To be too free with his patriotism would risk failure. Washington would not be the only one with spies. And as a camp follower with a letter from Wolfe, he would be in a good position to obtain information from and disseminate misinformation to the British if or when it becomes necessary.)***

Evaluation: Washington's movements affirm that such a meeting could have taken place. The general was based at his headquarters in White Plains, New York, between 1 and 10 November and thence Peekskill between 11 and 13 November, ruling out Honeyman's recruitment in that period; upriver from Manhattan, White Plains and Peekskill were quite a trek from Griggstown. However, Washington was at Fort Lee, only 50 miles away) from 14 November to the 17th or 18th.¹⁸ The chronology therefore fits the story. However, it might fit only because Honeyman's later popularizers checked the dates and applied them to the tale for authenticity's sake. ***(Or it might be an accurate account in the family history. This is pure opinion about popularization. Washington was also in Philadelphia while Honeyman and family lived there.)***

Also plausible, perhaps surprisingly, is that such a meeting—between a walk-in volunteer and the commander of an army—would take place. The 18th century world was a smaller and more intimate one

than our own. Washington might well have set aside a few minutes for one of Wolfe's veterans and suggested that he glean what information he could and transmit it to him.

There is no record, however, of this meeting and not once is John Honeyman mentioned in Washington's voluminous correspondence and papers. Even so, it could be argued that so informal was the gathering that no record was kept, though, considering Honeyman's alleged centrality to Washington's surprise victory, his total omission, especially after the triumph, is suspicious. ***(What did Washington attribute his surprise victory too? Did he give credit to every person or persons who delivered intelligence to him throughout the whole war? Every battle could be a turning point, depending on if it's won or lost. It is only when we can look back at the war from the vantage point of wars end do we see that one or another battle was the turning point. It was not the last battle just one that he won after a line of defeats, and then quickly went on to fight another. What would be more important to Washington, fighting to win the war or acknowledging a small but useful piece of intel?)***

More troublesome is the question of historicity: Does Honeyman's plan to remain permanently behind enemy lines in plain apparatus as an agent-in-place accord with what we know of Washington's rudimentary intelligence apparatus at this time? Is this detail an anachronism that unwittingly demonstrates its own falsity? ***(No. More troubling is this conjecture! What does Washington's rudimentary intelligence apparatus have to do with the simple plan of being a mole to deliver information for a limited period of time and then split till the enemy lines move and it becomes again safe to return to his family and private life. Is it so hard to understand that a man conscripted into an army, would hate that government so much as to be willing to do anything in his power to see its demise?)***

In these years, Washington lacked any kind of "secret service," let alone the experienced "case officers" needed to run networks of operatives in hostile territory. ***(None of which would be needed for this plan to succeed. Is the author saying that there were no other spies before Honeyman and do they present proof of that?)*** Hitherto, uniformed soldiers (often junior officers) had probed the enemy lines and fortifications and reported back to their units' commanders, who sometimes relayed pertinent information to Washington. Occasionally, these agents would don civilian garb and attempt to get behind the British lines—but with the intention of returning home within a day or two. A few months previously, Nathan Hale had been one of the latter, and his doom serves as a reminder of just how risky such missions were. In sum, there were no long-term agents, masquerading as sympathizers, with realistic cover stories, operating in British-held territory. It was a concept whose time had not yet come. ***(Again opinion, maybe the apparent success of this mission inspired the appointment of Nathaniel Sackett. See below. No facts are presented here by the essay author, just his opinion that its time had not come.)***

It would come soon—but only after Washington's appointment of Nathaniel Sackett as de facto chief of intelligence in February 1777. Sackett, a wholly forgotten figure, should justly be counted as the real founding father of American intelligence-gathering. He would last only a few months in the job, but it was he who conceived the idea of embedding agents among the British. Major John Clark was among the first of these remarkable individuals. He spent some nine months living undercover and unsuspected on Long Island, all the time making precise observations of British troop strength. It is important to realize, however, that Clark's success was almost certainly unique. ***(Again just opinion.)*** Sackett's few

other agents tended to last about a week, having either switched sides or suffered exposure. *(If Sackett's agents switched sides or only lasted a week, he was not much of a master of intelligence gathers. He didn't last long in that position and it is easy to see why. Perhaps finding conscripted English soldiers that left the army would have been better choices, just my opinion. Perhaps Washington was so impressed in December of 1776 with the success of Honeyman's mission that as soon as he could thereafter appointed Sackett. Let's examine the time line a little closer here:*

1. *1775 John Honeyman and family are living in Philadelphia.*
2. *1775 Gen Washington is in Philadelphia.*
3. *1775 Washington assumes command of the Continental Army*
4. *1776 early in year Honeyman family move to Griggstown.*
5. *1776 later in year Washington and troops are near Griggstown*
6. *1776 November Washington and Honeyman meet (Family history say this took place author of essay say it could have taken place.*
7. *1776 December a few days before Christmas, Honeyman is captured by Washington's army and they meet again. Family History.)*
8. *1776 December 25 Washington crosses the Delaware.*
9. *1776 December 26 Washing defeats Hessians.*
10. *1777 January 3 Washington victorious at Princeton.*
11. *1777 February Washington appoints Nathaniel Sackett as de facto chief of intelligence.*

Please remember this time line again when Aunt Jane is accused of lying. How lucky for her that all these facts exist to help her craft her lie, which of course in the author of the essay's opinion would be number 7. Or do all these facts lend weight to the truth of number 7?)

Clark's achievement was actually a strike *against* adopting the agents-in-place policy. As success was so unlikely, Washington would not be convinced that replacing reconnaissance, the traditional form of spying, was worthwhile until as late as *September 1778*. In that month, he cautiously authorized one of Sackett's successors to "endeavour to get some intelligent person into the City [of New York] and others of his own choice to be messengers between you and him, for the purpose of conveying such information as he shall be able to obtain and give."¹⁹ *(Again it is just opinion that Clark was unique and a strike against Honeyman. Clarks time as a spy is half the amount of Honeyman's, 9 months vs. 18, but Clark would continually provide information putting himself in constant jeopardy, Honeyman conveyed information only once. Good ideas evolve, and yet the author of the essay are sure this good idea couldn't have started with Honeyman but are sure it sprung up quickly there after. The above time line lends weight for Honeyman. Still it is all opinion where are his facts to disprove the family history or to prove any thing he is saying?)*

In this light, the claim that Washington was discussing precisely such matters with an untried civilian like Honeyman two years before, in November 1776, looks distinctly weak. This impression is confirmed by Washington's correspondence of that month. At the time, Washington was more concerned about the Continental Army's lack of soldiers, food, and even shoes, stemming desertion, and keeping

his militia under arms than he was with aggressively acquiring intelligence of British movements in New Jersey for a battle he was in no state to wage. (*And yet one month later he did wage it, sort of spontaneously?*) Upon meeting Honeyman, a veteran of the British army, Washington would have been more likely to recruit him as a sergeant than as a spy. (*Again this is all opinion. Why would Washington be more concerned about a spy than the Continental Army's lack of soldiers, food, and even shoes, stemming desertion, and keeping his militia under arms? Those are high priority but if, in a half hour meeting a man comes to you and offers you a service and probably for no pay, but who knows we only have his family history to go by, would you take a few minutes to consider it and say yes go a head? What would Washington lose if he said yes and Honeyman were captured or killed by the British? Washington did not "aggressively acquiring intelligence of British movements" from Honeyman. Honeyman went to him and offered his unique services because he had this letter and reputation of being Wolfe's man. If I were Washington I would accept and not even worry about making him a sergeant. In the same paragraph the author calls Honeyman an untried civilian, not counting his service to Wolfe, but would offer the private, a sergeant's commission because of it!)*

Claim: Apparently, once Honeyman had acquired sufficient intelligence from the British, he was to "venture, as if by accident, and while avowedly looking for cattle, go beyond the enemy lines as to be captured by the Americans, but not without a desperate effort to avoid it," in the words of the 19th century account of his espionage work.²⁰ By this stratagem, Honeyman would be able to maintain his cover as a Tory sympathizer when word of his arrest reached the British. To add verity, Washington was supposed to offer a reward for his arrest, on condition that Honeyman was captured alive and brought directly to his headquarters.

So it was that late in December 1776, having ascertained the British deployments around Trenton and "aware that the discipline [there] was very lax, and knowing too that the holidays were approaching, when a still greater indulgence would probably be permitted," Honeyman resolved to recross the line and pass his intelligence to Washington.²¹ Keeping to the plan that he and Washington had cooked up, Honeyman walked to the Delaware and pretended to be in search of his lost cattle. After some time, he espied two American scouts and a prolonged pursuit ensued. Honeyman was captured only when he slipped on the ice as he tried to jump a fence. Even then, he violently resisted capture, but with two pistols pointed at his head he surrendered. (*Are today's modern agents good actors? I should hope so or their capture would be secured. Has this essay so far shown that the author is a good analysts?*)

Dragged directly to Washington's tent, Honeyman continued his masquerade by theatrically trembling and casting his eyes downward in shame. Washington instructed his aides and guards to leave and held a private debriefing with Honeyman before ordering the spy to be locked in the prison until morning, when he would be hanged following a court-martial. By a remarkable coincidence, a fire erupted in the camp that night and Honeyman's guards left to help put it out. When they returned, nothing seemed amiss, but Honeyman had made good his escape. The fire, according to this account, had been set on Washington's orders to permit the spy to flee, and Washington himself feigned extreme anger that the "traitor" had escaped custody.²²

Evaluation: The story of Honeyman's escape from prison is plainly ridiculous, and the entire set-up for his capture inordinately complex. (*Complex? A butcher and cattle man chasing an escaped animal? How more simple could you get? Ridiculous escape? Diversionary tactics are used even today!*):

There is no record of any of it happening. Still, a lack of documentation in these situations is not uncommon and, in fact, in late 1776 and throughout 1777—menacingly dubbed the “Year of the Hangman” for the resemblance of its three sevens to gallows—hundreds of suspected Tories were rounded up (and usually hanged following a courts-martial).²³ ***(Please remember this statement about Tories being rounded up and hung. The author contradicts this when it comes to court cases involving Honeyman.)***

It is therefore more than possible that Honeyman fell into the hands of American scouts. But why? It could be that he looked willing to alert a British patrol that enemy troops were in the area, or that he might even have been probing the American pickets for information to sell to the British. His determined struggle to avoid capture might have been prompted not by a desire to keep intact his cover as a well-known Tory but by the fact that he *actually was* a well-known Tory. He knew the penalty for collaboration. ***(Still this is the opinion of the author. And this is opinion, not fact coming 200 years away from the event. It is possible to make up 10, 20 or more possible theories. It makes none fact.)***

Once Honeyman was in Washington’s camp, the general would have been most interested in quizzing him about the British positions and possible preparations for an assault. After all, at the time Washington had been warning his senior commanders to remain vigilant against a surprise attack. More proactively, he asked them on 14 December to “cast about to find out some person who can be engaged to cross the River as a spy, that we may, if possible, obtain some knowledge of the enemy’s situation, movements, and intention; particular enquiry to be made by the person sent if any preparations are making to cross the River; whether any boats are building, and where; whether any are coming across land from Brunswick; whether any great collection of horses are made, and for what purpose.”²⁴

Honeyman advocates have suggested that the spy Washington intended to “cross the River” was Honeyman, but this is to misinterpret the letter.²⁵ It was not sent to *one* commander asking him to find a spy (and, in any case, if Washington and Honeyman were so chummy, why didn’t the general ask for Honeyman by name?), ***(That would surly put Honeyman in jeopardy!)*** but to at least four field officers requesting that they “cast about” among their units for someone suitable with military experience. This is exactly what he had done earlier that summer when Nathan Hale volunteered for service. Washington, in short, did not have *any* agent readily to hand, let alone the civilian Honeyman. Moreover, Washington assumes that the spy is to cross the river *from the American side*, in Pennsylvania, and sneak through the British lines to elicit intelligence and come back. Honeyman, however—as the established story specifically states—was already based on the *British* side, in New Jersey. ***(Or Washington was getting anxious for information. Honeyman was not at Washington’s beck and call. Honeyman would come to Washington when he had information worth going through the capture /escape plan. The plan would only work once. Because Honeyman had not yet arrived Washington would have had to get some one to cross the river to get the intelligence he desired, since he could not go summon Honeyman who was on that side of the river, it would put Honeyman in jeopardy.)***

Claim: News of Honeyman’s escape enraged his family’s Patriot neighbors in Griggstown. “It was well known there that he had gone over to the English army, and he had already received the title of ‘Tory John Honeyman,’ but now, ‘British spy, traitor and cutthroat,’ and various other disagreeable epithets, were heard on every side,” declares the primary source account.²⁶ An indignant, howling mob surrounded his house at midnight, terrifying his wife and children. Mary eventually invited a former

family friend (now the crowd's ringleader) to read out a piece of parchment she had hitherto kept safely hidden. **(See page 104 & 109 John Baird. Also there is a John Baird buried 21 miles from Griggstown in Tennent. At the Old Tennent Church Yard. B. Unknown D. Oct. 26, 1834)** Upon it was printed:

To the good people of New Jersey, and all others whom it may concern,

It is hereby ordered that the wife and children of John Honeyman, of Griggstown, the notorious Tory, now within the British lines, and probably acting the part of a spy, shall be and hereby are protected from all harm and annoyance from every quarter, until further orders. But this furnishes no protection to Honeyman himself.

Geo. Washington

Com.-in-Chief

Stunned by this revelation, the crowd grew silent and dispersed. His family was henceforth left alone.

Evaluation: This famous "letter" of Washington is the most bizarre and sensational twist in the Honeyman tale, but there is not a whit of substantiation for it. ***(Again just opinion! Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence! John Honeyman could have destroyed the letters why would he have thought they would be necessary or be a large part of history. They could have been buried with him. His motive for spying on the British was revenge for conscription not to try to insert himself into history. It is only in hindsight that events become spotlighted; to him this was a small event, it was what he could to and it was over.)*** No such letter has turned up in the Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, even though the general enjoyed a most efficient secretarial staff that retained copies of all correspondence leaving his headquarters and dutifully filed that arriving. Though apparently a treasured Honeyman heirloom, it has since disappeared. ***(If this letter existed it was given to Honeyman at the first meeting. It is said to be had written totally by Washington's hand, no other person was at the original meeting so why would there be a secretarial staff copy unless Washington himself wrote it twice. It is possible that he wrote it twice in the short half hour meeting but is it likely? Do we only have letters from Washington because they are in his secretarial staff's possession?)***

If Washington did write such a letter, it could only serve as proof of Honeyman's service if one understands the words "acting the part of a spy" to mean in the service of Washington, an interpretation only possible if one ignores the letter's pointed exclusion of the "notorious Tory" Honeyman from the general's "protection." Indeed, since the letter was evidently written some time before, it only lends weight to the suspicion that Honeyman had long been known as a pro-British activist. ***(Or since it says "now within the British lines, and probably acting the part of a spy" it is saying that he is acting a spy for the British" and he is not protected by this order but his family are to be protected. Also by saying this Washington is protecting Honeyman while he is in Tory territory. War back then was not fought against women and children as the next two paragraphs state by the author. As suppositions go, mine makes more sense and comes closest to the family history.)***

It has been traditionally assumed that the letter's magnanimity toward Mrs. Honeyman and her children verifies the Honeyman-as-spy story. But the seeming contradiction between its generosity toward the family and the exclusion of Honeyman from protection was not uncommon either in the day or for

George Washington. Benedict Arnold's treachery was, for instance, of the darkest dye, and yet Washington allowed his wife and children to join the disgraced general in New York, even as he set in motion secret plans to kidnap Arnold and bring him back for execution.

Likewise, Washington took a surprisingly benign view of James Rivington, America's first yellow newspaperman and, as proprietor of the New York-based *Royal Gazette*, a sworn enemy of his during the war. Rivington's publishing house had been the "very citadel and pest-house of American Toryism," and his rag packed with the grossest and most incredibly libelous accusations against Washington.²⁷ And yet, once the British evacuated the city in 1783, Washington directed that Rivington and his property be protected from mob violence. Though there are some who say that Washington's decision was prompted by Rivington's alleged spying on his behalf later in the war, a more or equally likely explanation was the general's dislike of social disorder and his firm attachment to the principle of press freedom.²⁸

Claim: After his escape, Honeyman surrendered to the British and entered the enemy camp. Astounding guards with tales of his derring-do, he demanded to be taken to Colonel Rall immediately. ***(It wasn't Tory Honeyman's enemy camp he was well known there. I doubt he had to astound the guard with any thing, and to request to see Rall would have been a natural thing to ask and be granted.)*** The Hessian commander was dutifully amazed and asked him question after question about the whereabouts and strength of the Americans. Honeyman accordingly spun a tale about Washington's army being too demoralized and broken to mount an attack, upon which Rall exclaimed that "no danger was to be apprehended from that quarter for some time to come." It was a fatal error.

Honeyman, knowing his ruse could not last long once Washington crossed the Delaware and understanding that "there was little if any opportunity for the spy to perform his part of the great drama any further," then vanished until the end of the war. In 1783 he "returned to his home the greatest hero of the hour. The same neighbors who had once surrounded his humble dwelling and sought his life, again not only surrounded it, but pressed vigorously for admittance, not to harm, but to thank and bless and honor him, and to congratulate and applaud his long suffering but heroic wife."²⁹

Evaluation: There is not a shred of proof to this tale. It is hardly likely that an officer as shrewd and as experienced as Rall would have fallen for such an obvious ruse, and the entire structure of the tale is based on the assumption that Washington sent Honeyman in to lull the opposition several weeks before by posing as a Tory, Washington's ultimate intention always being to mount an attack. Hence the elaborate scheme to allow him to "escape" back across the enemy line. But had he? ***(Opinion again. absence of evidence is not evidence to the contrary. "Hardly likely" does not mean it couldn't have happened as the family history states it did. They are not producing evidence that refutes the family history but expressing an opinion that it probably didn't happen as written. And why wouldn't Rall except Honeyman's word? Wasn't he Wolfe's personal body guard and honorably discharge British soldier? Wasn't Washington threatening his life for being a British spy? Wasn't Honeyman providing intel to Rall about Washington's condition albeit false, he had just been in their camp to see them up close. Whose assumptions are harder to believe? The author seems to have the opinion that every thing is ridiculous, unbelievable or too complex. Yet his historicity and convoluted "side of the river" argument are shown to be ridiculous, unbelievable or too complex. Below is a report that a spy did talk to Grant. And he warns Rall of the impending attack. And Honeyman's name is mentioned!***

Papers Show Spy Knew of Delaware Crossing

Posted on: Wednesday, 2 July 2003, 06:00 CDT

Through a spy, the British were tipped off that George Washington would be making his famous Christmas night crossing of the Delaware, but the information went unheeded, according to newly reviewed papers of the British commander.

The papers from the archive of Gen. James Grant were found in the tower of his Ballindalloch Castle, northwest of Aberdeen, Scotland.

A day after Washington's 1776 victory at Trenton, Grant wrote what apparently was a draft of a report to an unnamed superior. He said that he had relayed good information on Washington's plan at 5 p.m. Christmas Day to Col. Johann Rall, who commanded the Hessian garrison at Trenton, but that Rall had failed to take precautions.

"It is some comfort to me that I gave them previous notice," Grant wrote. "It was rather better intelligence than I could be expected to have so soon after I was appointed to this command. No man in America knows the channel through which it came except the Genl. who I let into the secret before this cursed affair happen'd."

Grant's spy is still unidentified.

Some historians say Washington had a spy of his own, John Honeyman, who supplied food and liquor to the Hessians for a Christmas party. There is no mention in Grant's account of the party or its effects, usually given as a cause of Washington's easy success early next morning.

After the war, a British intelligence officer said Washington had not been militarily superior to the British commanders but had prevailed because he had a better spy network.

Three weeks after the Battle of Trenton, Grant drafted another letter saying his worst fears after the British surrender there had come true. Washington, who had foreseen possible disaster before Trenton, got reinforcements and was on his way to attack Princeton. After a short campaign he won back New Jersey, which he had given up the autumn before.

Grant seems to have run several spies on Washington's headquarters. Another of his papers records:

"Mr. Wharton is gone to Philadelphia for Intelligence will be at Washington's tomorrow. Lowrie is to meet him there, will be in the Jerseys next (day?) & I shall hear from him immediately. Lowrie is to purchase Rum to the amount of twenty thousand Dollars at Philadelphia with Continental money & to store it there till the (money?) arrives."

He also records information "given by Genl. Mercer's deputy." American Gen. Hugh Mercer died at the Battle of Princeton. Wharton and Lowrie are not identified on this page of short notes. Nor do they say what was to be done with the rum.

The Library of Congress learned of the collection at Ballindalloch in 1999. Its owner, a descendant of Grant, said the library was welcome to look. James Hutson, head of the library's manuscript division, went to Scotland and had Grant's 12,000 papers copied onto 50 rolls of microfilm now at the library.

http://www.redorbit.com/news/general/14244/papers_show_spy_knew_of_delaware_crossing/index.html

As one can see Honeyman is identified by some historians as Washington's spy in this article. This author never questions if Honeyman were Grants spy. But could he be Grants? I am sure that, had the author of this essay included it, he would say, yes! And he could have been, or not. To blacken a persons name because of lack of evidence, which is done in the essay throughout, is wrong in every case. It is just as likely that the spy was one of the ones named in other letters of Grants. If we play the essay game- Perhaps Rall got conflicting reports from Honeyman and Grants spy. He had to chose whose info was more credible. He chose wrong as evidenced by Grants letter and history. The most important point is that both sides had spies and more than one during this period of time. It is interesting that in the family history it never says that Honeyman told Gen. Washington that the Hessians would be having a party, in fact it never says what the information was. More likely it was where the tropes were stationed, how many at each post and their condition.)

Washington in fact seized an unexpected and risky opportunity to surprise Rall. The raid luckily paid off in spades. He despatched three columns across the Delaware to arrive simultaneously at dawn. In the event, just one made it successfully and it was by the greatest of good fortune that Hessian patrols did not discover the invasion sooner. Washington's was a makeshift scheme, not a strategy plotted with

grandmasterly skill and executed thanks to Honeyman's predetermined mission to mislead Rall. *(Really? Washington just said lets do this on a whim? If he got the intel from Honeyman it would be a makeshift plan the party was Christmas only days away. And can't a make shift plan also show grandmasterly skill or are they mutually exclusive? Are the author now saying that Washington was not a skilled general but a haphazard one, in the author own words "Washington was more concerned about the Continental Army's lack of soldiers, food, and even shoes, stemming desertion and keeping his militia under arms" but Washington decides to just hop into some boats. Honeyman did not have to help devise the plan that takes advantage of the information. It was his job to provide the information such as troop strength and dispersement, conditions and activities. Would Washington attempt such a plan with out some information?)*

Regarding Honeyman's sudden disappearance after deceiving Rall, a rather more probable explanation is that he, a known collaborator, feared falling again into the hands of the revolutionaries. Honeyman, in fact, did not completely vanish but flitted in and out of sight in for the rest of the war. According to court records, for instance, on 10 July 1777—more than six months after his “disappearance”—he was the subject of an official proceeding to seize his property “as a disaffected man to the state” of New Jersey.³⁰ *(Does one have to be present for this? His wife held his property. The court record of his property inventoried at this time shows a family of very modest means for a family which included a wife and 3+ children.)* In early December of that year, another record shows that he was actually caught, jailed, and charged with high treason by the state's Council of Safety.³¹ Honeyman was again lucky: the “Year of the Hangman” fervor for prosecuting suspected Loyalists had already subsided and two weeks later he was temporarily released after pledging a bond of £300.³² *(Here is the contradiction I noted earlier. Didn't the author earlier say many loyalist where arrested tried and hung in rather quick time? Was it luck or intervention? Where did a rather poor man get £300 bond. That was a rather large sum of money for a man on the run. And wouldn't a man want to come back to check on his family hoping he could do it with out detection?)*

Then, on 9 June 1778, he was indicted for giving aid and succor to the enemy between 5 October 1776 (about two months *before* he allegedly performed his patriotic service) and June 1777.³³ He pleaded not guilty, and no further action was taken, but in March 1779 he was threatened with having his house and property sold as a result of the indictment.³⁴ The sale, like the trial, never took place, leading his supporters to assert that “highly placed authorities were able to prevent actual trial, a trial which would have endangered his usefulness” as an American double.³⁵ *(This makes perfect sense. He could have been tried and hung he wasn't, his property could have been taken at lest twice, it wasn't. Before he performed his patriotic service he would have given aid to the enemy he was suppose to be one of them. See pg. 113 for a list of his property. Not exactly a rich man's possessions.)*

Perhaps, but a less conspiratorial interpretation might be that, given the administrative chaos of those years, the constantly shifting allegiances of the population, the carelessness with which law clerks kept records, the Council's habitual concessions to expediency, the lack of hard evidence against such a relatively minor collaborator as Honeyman, and the diminishing enthusiasm of the revolutionary authorities to pursue low-level instances of “disaffection,” Honeyman was slapped on the wrist and warned to keep out of trouble. *(But an interpretation or opinion again presents its self. Perhaps the author's interpretation is correct or perhaps the family history of the events is correct, could go either way. Either way does not prove or disprove Honeyman was a spy for Washington, it only shows that*

he was thought to be a British spy or sympathizer which is what he wanted and all his cases never were acted upon by the courts when other's had their property taken and were hung or left the country for England.)

This type of response was by no means unique. By 1778–79, New Jersey's punishment system had become little more than pro forma as the British threat receded. Furthermore, property confiscations for loyalty to the Crown were rarely executed after 1777, as Patriots discovered that such cases were difficult to prove and, just as pertinently, they realized that personal quarrels, official graft, and greed were leading all too often to false accusations. (The head of the New Jersey confiscations department, for instance, ended up in the enviable position of "owning" several lovely properties formerly belonging to accused Tories.)³⁶ ***(Can we believe these all were just clerical errors? Lucky fellow! See pg 114.)***

As for Honeyman's "triumphal" return, sometime after Lord Cornwallis's 1781 surrender at Yorktown, passions had cooled, and he would have gone home and reconciled himself to the reality of Washington's victory, as did many thousands of displaced Loyalists and former Tory militiamen. ***(Or he and his family celebrated it with his neighbors as many patriots did.)***

So concludes the tale of John Honeyman. How and when did this story originate? Therein lies the solution to the mystery. ***(Hopefully some facts are about to be presented that will back up their string of opinions presented. If not our family history is just as likely and in some cases more so. By the way our published family history is in the Library of Congress and has been there since one year after publication.)***

The Story's Genesis

The Honeyman story was first made public in the aftermath of the Civil War. (Honeyman himself had died on 18 August 1822, aged 93.) In 1873, a new, and unfortunately short-lived, monthly magazine named *Our Home* (edited, revealingly, by one A. Van Doren Honeyman, later the author of the Honeyman family history) published a long article by Judge John Van Dyke (1807–78), the heroic Honeyman's grandson, a three-time mayor of New Brunswick, two-time congressman, and one-time Justice of the Supreme Court of New Jersey, lately retired to Wabasha, Minnesota, where he became a state senator.³⁷ "An Unwritten Account of a Spy of Washington" first fleshed out the Honeyman legend in all its colorful and memorable detail. At the time, Van Dyke's revelations made a significant stir and were given additional publicity by their prominence in Stryker's popular *Battles of Trenton and Princeton*. ***(Again we are being asked to believe that because two family members publish a family history that their version is suspect for that very reason even though the men in question were a States Supreme Court Judge, a Congressman in a time when that word was synonymous with Statesman and not have its present taint and an author of 7 other non-fiction works.)***

The timing of Van Dyke's *Our Home* memoir is key. The newly reunited nation was preparing for the centenary celebrations of the Declaration of Independence. Having but recently emerged from the bloodiest of civil wars, Americans were casting their minds back to those worthy days when citizens from north and south rallied together to fight a common enemy.

For Van Dyke and his editor, Honeyman could be upheld as a gleamingly patriotic exemplar to former Unionists and Confederates alike. The author was also an old man, and would die just five years later.

He may well have taken what could have been the last opportunity to seal his family's honorable place in the nation's history. Not long after Van Dyke's death, in fact, organizations such as the Sons of the American Revolution (1889) and the Daughters of the American Revolution (1890) would spring up to celebrate the unity and purpose of the Founding Fathers, and Honeyman was exalted as representing their ideals.

Van Dyke swabbed a thick layer of typically Victorian sentimentality and romanticism over the Honeyman story. In terms of intelligence writing, the post-1865 era is remarkable for its fanciful descriptions of espionage practice, its emphasis on beautiful belles using their feminine wiles to smuggle messages to their beaux in camps opposite, and its depiction (accompanied by imaginative dialogue and entertainingly cod accents) of hardy, lantern-jawed heroes valiantly crossing the Mason-Dixon line and masquerading as the enemy. Needless to say, there is little attempt in the spy memoirs of the time to relate intelligence input to actual operational output, yet somehow every agent succeeded in saving the Union (or Confederacy) in the nick of time.³⁸ As Van Dyke's article appeared soon after the initial flood of Civil War spy memoirs, it would perhaps not be outlandish to suspect him of being influenced by the genre. ⁹³⁸ *(Said as if the author thought this one up by them selves! I too, believe that Van Dyke was influenced by this genre for the new Our Home memoir. In fact he says as much in his memoirs. See page 97. Why not tell the family story of a near and dear relative, when he really did relate intelligence that affected the Revolutionary War. As a proud Honeyman family member I too relate the story when Presidents Day is celebrated or a new grandchild has not yet heard this story. The excitement is fun to experience. It makes one part of history. It makes history real. Honeyman's story is not grandiose, but in all points is plausible. Many things were backed up by out side testimony. A. Van Doren Honeyman did do his research. The fact that A. Van Doren Honeyman and John Van Dyke are related to each other and John Honeyman some how taints their family history is again pure opinion. The fact is that family histories come through families.)*

In the hands of John Van Dyke, then, John Honeyman—hitherto a man of modest accomplishments and abilities—became the quintessential American hero. *(And where do American heroes come from if not from men of modest accomplishments and ability, doing what is right for their country? A hero is not someone who has no fear or from only men with college educations, but a man who experiences fear and does the right thing anyway. Many common men are American heroes.)* Far from being the questionable character and man of uncertain loyalties who emerges from history's dusty documents, Honeyman was in fact a glorious lion heart and Washington's secret warrior—with the achievements and adventures to match. *(Sounds to me that the "grandiosity" is being supplied by the author of the essay not the history.)*

The Secret Revealed

Judge Van Dyke most likely colorized the Honeyman story, as we've seen, but he did not invent it. *(Did we see that he colorized it? Where in this essay was his story written in full? It really isn't that long. We have to go find it our selves. If someone is just reading this they would have nothing to compare.)* In a letter dated 6 January 1874, the judge revealed that he had originally heard the story from the "one person who was an eye and ear witness to all the occurrences described at Griggstown": *(That is the story of his career as a spy not his experiences with Wolfe, which was told to him by John*

Honeyman.) his Aunt Jane, Honeyman's eldest daughter, who had been about 10 or 11 in the winter of 1776/77. **(Please see Chapter 7 pg 108 Note & part II., Chap. VII for Judge Van Dykes accomplishments, then ask your self: is this the type of a man who would lie, fabricate or colorize the memoir?)**

Jane had been present when the Patriot mob surrounded the house after Honeyman's escape and "she had often heard the term 'Tory' applied to her father. She knew he was accused of trading, in some way, with the British; that he was away from home most of the time; and she knew that their neighbors were greatly excited and angry about it; but she knew also that her mother had the protection of Washington," wrote Van Dyke. "She had often seen, and read, and heard read, Washington's order of protection, and knew it by heart, and repeated it over to me, in substance, I think, in nearly the exact words in which it is found in the written article." **(A careful reading of the family history never says that Jane told the spy story. In fact if you read Page 109 it was John Baird, another person who was actually there.)**

Aunt Jane, therefore, is the sole source for Honeyman's exploits. As Jane died in 1836, aged 70, Van Dyke must have elicited the details from her at least some 40 years before he published them in *Our Home*—plenty of time, then, for him to have mixed in lashings of make-believe, spoonfuls of truth, and dollops of myth to Aunt Jane's original tale, itself stitched together from her adolescent memories of events that had occurred six decades previously. **(See Pg 101, and page 108, Honeyman's wife also knew. She had the letter and Major John Baird (See page 104.) is also a stated source. John Baird saw the letter from Gen Washington and read it to assembled neighbors. Also see pg 108 Again, Jane is not the only source cited by Van Dyke. All the sisters are sited, pg 108 See note pg 108 "Jane and others." See Page 109- 110 where Major Baird and John Ten Broek are sited.)**

Importantly, Jane was the only child of Honeyman's never to have married. According to a contemporary description, "she was a tall, stately woman, large in frame and badly club-footed in both feet. She was a dressmaker, but had grace of manners and intelligence beyond her other sisters." Would it be any wonder if clever, imaginative Jane—doomed to long spinsterhood by her appearance, and fated to look after her aged and ailing father for decade after decade—had embroidered a heroic tale to explain what had *really* happened? **(Is the author trying to imply that a child of 10 or 11 or maybe 13, can not memorize the short letter written by Gen. Washington which she heard many times? The pledge of allegiance is longer than this letter and you learn that in 1st grade. If she took care of her aged and ailing father for decade after decade she did in a mansion on a 400 acre estate in upper Summerset County near Lamington, for 30 years till his death. Also she didn't do all the caring alone as her mother died in 1801 and her father married a second wife in his 70's. See page 95. And one of John Honeyman's James Fenimore Cooper grandsons also lived there for a while. Also see pg. 111. Since most of her life she didn't live near the neighbors of Griggstown why would she need to lie about her history. The author's description of Jane doesn't sound like it fits the facts.)**

One question still remains. **(Really, just one question?)** How had Jane Honeyman come to invent a tale of a man involved in valiant deeds of spying for Washington while stoically suffering the abuse of his neighbors, family, and ex-friends?

The answer may lie in the dates. John Honeyman died in the summer of 1822. One year before, the up-and-coming novelist James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851), future author of *The Last of the Mohicans*

and *The Deerslayer*, had published what is today counted as the first US espionage novel, *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground*.

Cooper's historical romance, which included George Washington in a cameo role, rescued the secret agent from his squalid 18th century reputation as a paid trafficker of information and painted him as a noble figure akin to a soldier, albeit one forced to work in shadows, without the benefit of public glory and medals.

The hero of *The Spy* is Harvey Birch, an honest peddler who refuses to accept money for his undercover work for the American side during the Revolution. Owing to a series of melodramatically crossed wires, Birch finds himself accused of treachery and is pursued by British and Americans both. Only Washington knows the truth of the matter but is obliged to remain silent to maintain Birch's cover.

At the end of the war, Washington confides to the faithful Birch during a secret meeting that "there are many motives which might govern me, that to you are unknown. Our situations are different; I am known as the leader of armies—but you must descend into the grave with the reputation of a foe to your native land. Remember that the veil which conceals your true character cannot be raised in years—perhaps never."⁴⁰

Then, Washington, impressed by this son of toil, "stood for a few moments in the attitude of intense thought" before writing "a few lines on a piece of paper" and handing it to Birch. "It must be dreadful to a mind like yours to descend into the grave, branded as a foe to liberty; but you already know the lives that would be sacrificed, should your real character be revealed," the great man cautions as Birch takes the letter. "It is impossible to do you justice now, but I fearlessly entrust you with this certificate; should we never meet again, it may be serviceable to your children."⁴¹

Cooper shifts the action to the War of 1812 in the final chapter, and we find Birch, who has lain low in the ensuing decades owing to his seemingly opprobrious conduct, again struggling for the cause of liberty, again against the British. Two young American officers catch sight of him, wondering who this odd, old, solitary, ragged figure is. They engage him in conversation, and he claims that he knows one of their mothers, but the sound of an approaching fire fight delays further talk and they separate until the next day. Following the battle, they discover that Birch mounted a brave solo assault to capture prisoners but never returned. Fearing the worst, they search for his corpse.

"He was lying on his back...his eyes were closed, as if in slumber; his lips, sunken with years, were slightly moved from their natural position, but it seemed more like a smile than a convulsion which had caused the change." Birch's "hands were pressed upon his breast, and one of them contained a substance that glittered like silver." It was a tin box, "through which the fatal lead had gone; and the dying moments of the old man must have passed in drawing it from his bosom." Opening it, the officers found a message from many years before:

Circumstances of political importance, which involve the lives and fortunes of many, have hitherto kept secret what this paper now reveals. Harvey Birch has for years been a faithful and unrequited servant of his country. Though man may not, may God reward for his conduct!

—GEO. WASHINGTON⁴²

After this bombshell, Cooper resoundingly concludes that the spy "died as he had lived, devoted to his country, and a martyr to her liberties."

The Spy was an enormous hit, and it wouldn't be outlandish to suppose that Aunt Jane read it sometime after her father died. Could she, in order to consecrate her father's silent martyrdom and hush those neighbors still gossiping about his wartime past, have merely plagiarized Cooper's basic plot and final twist? *(Yes, it would be outlandish to suppose that Jane lied. What is outlandish is to believe what the author of this essay is saying:*

1. Poor old Aunt Jane reads Cooper's book and makes up a story to hush neighbors that she no longer lived near for 30 years.

2. She tells her nephew. This nephew immediately publishes said story 40 years later. That worked well to hush said neighbors.

3. That this nephew who has become a lawyer, judge, congressman, bank president.... lies in published memoirs to boost his social standing (a social standing that we have seen earlier really needs boosting) and coincidentally sites the same Cooper book that started Aunt Jane's lies to begin his story. See page 97. Did the author do any research on his own? Everything they have used has come right out of the published family history

4. Then a great grand son, author of 7 other non fiction books adds and edits the story to fit other published works, which would be lying. He too must need a fame boost! See page 156 for account.

We are now saying that an intelligent woman, a supreme court Judge and congressman, and a researcher and author of many Genealogical books as the Honeyman family history all lie? Do we have some other document or story, court records, testimonies that we can point to, to prove that any of them are liars? Or is it more plausible to be exactly a like Family History states? It could be just as likely that Cooper heard about Honeyman and his service to Gen Washington and wrote a fictional account of it.

And for a few minutes let's spend some time talking about Aunt Jane. The author are taking as truth that Jane was the only child of Honeyman's never to have married. According to a contemporary description, "she was a tall, stately woman, large in frame and badly club-footed in both feet. She was a dressmaker, but had grace of manners and intelligence beyond her other sisters." Again this "contemporary description" comes right out of our family history and again with no credit to the published history. So since the author use this information to defame her they must think it true so, so will we. What else does the history says since we now have established that the author take these things as facts. Van Dyke states that Aunt Jane lived with his family. It would seem likely that a woman with two severely clubbed feet could not live on her own. She was taught to be a dressmaker she had grace of manners and was intelligent. This intelligence is used as "evidence" against her by the author. His conjecture is that she read a book and used this to make up a favorable history. Though she was intelligent she probably wasn't sent to school it was not the custom then to educate women and with her club feet it would have been highly unlikely that she was sent to school. She was probably taught to be a seamstress and dressmaker by her father who was a weaver and her mother who could have been a dress maker also. Van Dyke says she read the note, which would indicate she had at least some rudimentary reading skills. Here is an excerpt from "The Spy" taken at random. Footnotes in the following passage are by Cooper.

Sufficient light yet remained to enable the traveler to distinguish the

improvements [Footnote: Improvements is used by the Americans to express every degree of change in converting land from its state of wilderness to that of cultivation. In this meaning of the word, it is an improvement to fell the trees; and it is valued precisely by the supposed amount of the cost.] which had been made in the cultivation, and in the general appearance of the grounds around the building to which he was now approaching. The house was of stone, long, low, and with a small wing at each extremity. A piazza, extending along the front, with neatly turned pillars of wood, together with the good order and preservation of the fences and outbuildings, gave the place an air altogether superior to the common farmhouses of the country. After leading his horse behind an angle of the wall, where it was in some degree protected from the wind and rain, the traveler threw his valise over his arm, and knocked loudly at the entrance of the building for admission. An aged black soon appeared; and without seeming to think it necessary, under the circumstances, to consult his superiors,—first taking one prying look at the applicant, by the light of the candle in his hand,—he acceded to the request for accommodations. The traveler was shown into an extremely neat parlor, where a fire had been lighted to cheer the dullness of an easterly storm and an October evening. After giving the valise into the keeping of his civil attendant, and politely repeating his request to the old gentleman, who arose to receive him, and paying his compliments to the three ladies who were seated at work with their needles, the stranger commenced laying aside some of the outer garments which he had worn in his ride.

The Spy by James Fenimore Cooper From Chapter 1. <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext06/8tspy10.txt>

This is by far, not the hardest paragraph in this book either. People who have a hard time reading the words in books are not likely to be an avid readers. Did Jane read the book, maybe but it more likely that Jane did not read Cooper's book. My opinion is just as valid as the author's opinion, neither are "facts". To brand Aunt Jane a liar on such flimsy evidence is outrageous. Also Aunt Jane told the family story to her nephew while living in the house of her sister. Van Dyke says that all the sisters knew this story from their mother. If Jane was making this up wouldn't her sister say something? If it came from her mother her mother died before Cooper's book was written. If we say that Jane never told Van Dyke anything then we have to say that John Van Dyke lied about all of this. After reading about all the accomplishments of Mr. Van Dyke do we really believe that he would do that? But the story of the spy didn't come from her at all, as see above.)

Yet the Honeyman story's myriad anachronisms and suspiciously detailed narrative (***If it does, it's much like this essay!***) signal Judge Van Dyke's handiwork. For patriotic and social reasons, it was he who not only colorized the tale, but broadened its focus, thrust, and intent far beyond what Aunt Jane had ever envisaged. Between them, Jane and the judge endowed a most ordinary man with an extraordinary—and almost wholly fake—biography. It was John Honeyman himself, strangely enough, who is innocent of telling tall tales. For more than half a century, he remained resolutely silent about his wartime behavior (as well he might, given his not altogether sterling record.) Van Dyke, who “was with him very often during the last fifteen years of his life, and saw his eyes closed in death,” heard nothing of his grandfather's past in all that time. His life was a blank slate upon which anything could be written. And so when Aunt Jane handed her nephew the ball, he ran with it. (***A careful reading of the account never said that John never told anyone about his life but had he never told A. Van Doren Honeyman's father, who lived with his grandfather, about his career as spy. It doesn't say he never spoke to Van***

Dyke. See pg. 96. What it does say is that he did not talk much about being a spy or spoke only to a few, he spoke often of other parts of his life, including much about his life with Wolfe. But he did tell his wife and through her his children about being the spy. Also see the story of the row boat. See pg. 98. Details like this lend weight to it being a memory of John Honeyman not something someone else made up.)

That was more than a century and a quarter ago, and it is high time to bury the John Honeyman myth: a spy he never was. *(Better still it is time to bury this report. I do not know why the author decided to attack my family's history. I do not know what his undeclared motives are. The only stated reason from the beginning of the essay seems to be this:)*

These historical explorations additionally will remind modern intelligence officers and analysts that the undeclared motives of human sources may be as important as their declared ones—particularly when, as readers will see here, a single source is the only witness. *Did they accomplish this goal? How well would the modern intelligence office and analysts do their work, based on this essay? Did he present evidence other than what was already published in the family history? He wrote in many places as if he found this information due to his own research although we have seen time after time, he took and used information from our history when it bolstered his case and never said he got it from our history. All he did was take information he disagreed with and posed a different possibility, he proved nothing. He even said some things that could never have been as proof of lies. And then on this non-evidence he slandered at least four of my relatives. I have no problem with statements that express opinion that there is not enough evidence to say it happened as the published accounts state but there isn't enough evidence to say that it didn't either. That is a true statement. There is NO evidence to say that my relatives are liars.)*

Endnotes

1. J. Van Dyke, "An unwritten account of a spy for Washington," reprinted in *New Jersey History*, LXXXV (1967), Nos. 3 and 4.
2. W.S. Stryker, *The Battles of Trenton and Princeton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1898), 87.
3. G.O. Trevelyan, *The American Revolution* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 4 vols., 1912–1920 new edn.), III, 94.
4. See R. Hughes, *George Washington* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 3 vols., 1926–1930), 568–70.
5. A.H. Bill, *The Campaign of Princeton* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948), 26.
6. The article, which appeared in that year's August issue, is available online at http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1957/5/1957_5_58.shtml.
7. J. Bakeless, *Turncoats, Traitors and Heroes: Espionage in the American Revolution* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998 edn., orig. pub. 1959), 167–70.
8. The sparse details available for this program can be found at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0417034/>.

9. M. Ketchum, *The Winter Soldiers* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1973), 288–89.
10. T. Fleming, “George Washington, Spymaster,” *American Heritage*, February/March 2000.
11. D.H. Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), Appendix X, “Doubtful Documents,” 423.
12. G.J.A. O’Toole, *Honorable Treachery: A History of U.S. Intelligence, Espionage, and Covert Action from the American Revolution to the CIA* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991), 25.
13. P.K. Rose (a pseudonym), *The Founding Fathers of American Intelligence*, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/the-founding-fathers-of-american-intelligence/art-1.html>.
14. A. Van Doren Honeyman, *The Honeyman Family* (Honeyman, Honyman, Hunneman, etc.) in *Scotland and America, 1548–1908* (Plainfield, NJ: Honeyman’s Publishing House, 1909), 94. The story that Honeyman aided the stricken Wolfe to the rear might be true. Francis Parkman, the 19th century American historian and author of *Montcalm and Wolfe*, noted that after the general was hit for the third time “he staggered and sat on the ground. Lieutenant Brown, of the grenadiers, one Henderson, a volunteer in the same company, and a private soldier, aided by an officer of artillery” carried him out of danger. The anonymous “private soldier” might have been Honeyman, though there are several other claimants for the honor. See F. Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe* (London, UK: Macmillan & Co., 2 vols., 1885), II, 296. Regarding Honeyman’s religion, in addition to the other evidence we possess, we know he is buried in Lamington Presbyterian Church Cemetery, Somerset County, New Jersey.
15. On the role of Presbyterianism in the Revolution, see A. Rose, *Washington’s Spies: The Story of America’s First Spy Ring* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2006), 79–81.
16. Some family records are missing, but Van Doren Honeyman, 117–18, pieces together what there is.
17. Van Dyke, 221.
18. This chronology is based on the dated series of letters Washington wrote at the time, all of which are printed in P. Chase et al (eds.), *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 16 vols. so far, 1985–continuing), VII.
19. Washington letter to Charles Scott, 25 September 1778 in the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
20. Van Dyke, 221.
21. *ibid.*, 221–22.
22. *Bakeless, Turncoats, Traitors, and Heroes*, 169 and Van Dyke, 223.
23. See Rose, *Washington’s Spies*, Chap. 2. Later, Washington expressed alarm at the prevalence of these courts-martial, saying that he was “not fully satisfied of the legality of trying an inhabitant of any State by military law, when the Civil Authority of that State has made provision for the punishment of persons taking Arms with the Enemy.” See Washington letter to William Livingston, 15 April 1778, Washington Papers.
24. Washington letter to Lord Stirling, Mercer, Stephen, and de Roche Fermoy, 14 December 1776, Washington papers.

25. Stryker, 88, implies thus.
26. Van Dyke, 223.
27. M.C. Tyler, *The Literary History of the American Revolution, 1763–1783* (New York: G.P Putnam's Sons, 2 vols., 1897), II, 154.
28. An interesting analysis of the Rivington affair is J.L. Lawson, "The 'Remarkable Mystery' of James Rivington, 'spy,'" *Journalism Quarterly* XXXV (1958), No. 3: 317–23, 394.
29. Van Dyke, 223–24.
30. Van Doren Honeyman, 113.
31. Council of Safety Meeting, 5 December 1777, printed in *Minutes of the Council of Safety of the State of New Jersey* (Jersey City, NJ: John H. Lyon, 1872), 169.
32. Council of Safety Meeting, 20 December 1777, printed in *Minutes of the Council of Safety*, 176.
33. A. O'Shea and S.A. Pleasants, "The Case of John Honeyman: Mute Evidence," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* LXXXIV (1966), No. 3: 176; see also Van Doren Honeyman, 112, for the full text of the document.
34. *The New-Jersey Gazett*, 10 March 1779: 4.
35. O'Shea and Pleasants, 177. See also Van Doren Honeyman, 114–15.
36. This subject is authoritatively dealt with in R.C. Haskett, "Prosecuting the Revolution," *American Historical Review* LIX (1954), No. 3: 578–87.
37. The author is indebted for these biographical details to Michael Christian, librarian of the Sons of the American Revolution.
38. E. Fishel's article, "Myths That Never Die," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* II (1988), No. 1: 27–58, is the best source for this aspect of espionage.
39. For example, R.B. Marcy, "Detective Pinkerton," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* XLVII (1873), 281: 720–27; L.C. Baker, *History of the United States Secret Service* (Philadelphia: L.C. Baker, 1867); R. O'Neal Greenhow, *My Imprisonment and the First Year of Abolition Rule at Washington Belle Boyd in Camp and Prison, Written by Herself* (London, UK: R. Bentley, 1863); B. Boyd, (New York: Blelock, 1865).
40. J.F. Cooper, *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company; 1911 edn.), 405.
41. Cooper, 406.
42. Cooper, 409–15. "The Strange Case of John Honeyman and Revolutionary War Espionage"

Historical Document

Posted: Jun 20, 2008 05:03 PM

Last Updated: Jun 25, 2008 07:16 AM

Last Reviewed: Jun 25, 2008 07:16 AM

My Family Connection:

Deborah J. Honeyman married to Benjamin William Honeyman III and mother of Benjamin William Honeyman IV

Benjamin William Honeyman III is the son of Benjamin William Honeyman Jr.

Son of Benjamin William Honeyman Sr.

Son of Benjamin Depue Honeyman

Son of John Van Zandt Honeyman

Son of William E. Honeyman

Son of John Honeyman

Son of John Honeyman the Spy of General Washington