



New Haven: 1779 Invasion

“The destructive evidence of British cruelty are yet visible both in Norwalk and Fairfield, as there are chimney of many burnt houses standing in them yet.”

President Washington recorded in his journal when visiting the Connecticut Coast ten years after the Redcoats' invasion, October 16, 1789

Start/Finish: Savin Rock, Connecticut by the Conference Center

Distance: 33.1 miles

Terrain: Mostly city cycling

Difficulty: Mostly moderate with a few short steep hills

Yale University President Ezra Stiles heard rumors that a fleet of British ships had been spotted near present-day Bridgeport. Of course New Haven had a large exposed port, and the university felt concerned enough about students' safety to begin housing most of them inland in towns like Wethersfield and Farmington. Fort Black Rock, which stood on a stone outcrop in East Haven, had 19 Patriot soldiers. The risk of a British attack on New Haven was clearly there, but the small security steps felt like enough.

Not far from where Yale University President Ezra Stiles spied the British coming into New Haven Harbor through his telescope, a statue of Nathan Hale stands outside of Connecticut Hall. The design of Yale's demolished Chapel is similar to the Old Stone Church in East Haven, where the British raided in 1779.



After all, why would the British devote thousands of men and valuable resources to attack a town of civilians and students?

Well, they did and for three primary reasons:

- ❖ The British wanted to draw George Washington out of his entrenched position in New York and entice him to split his army by sending considerable troops to help the Connecticut coastal towns
- ❖ Small boats run by Patriots constantly harassed British ships in Long Island Sound
- ❖ Connecticut provided most of the provisions for the Continental Army

On July 5, 1779, 2,600 British and Loyalist troops raided New Haven. Looking through a telescope while standing in the steeple of Yale's chapel, President Stiles saw the British boats landing in New Haven Harbor and couldn't believe the scale of the invasion. One division of 1500 men led by General Garth, raced up the beach at Savin Rock and marched nearly unopposed towards the city. The other division, commanded by the infamously brutal Royal Governor of New York General Tryon, overran Black Rock Fort, and crossed at the opening of the Quinnipiac River.

The British landed two divisions, one at Savin Rock in West Haven and another by Morris Cove at Lighthouse Point in East Haven. The Pardee-Morris House nearby survived the raid.



Although some residents supported the British and others actively resisted, many chose to take no action. This blended reception reflected the divisions among the residents of the state at the time, especially along the coastline. But those sympathies shifted considerably by the time the British were done with their plundering and looting from July 5 to July 11 in, first, New Haven, then Fairfield and finally Norwalk. Reports of British soldiers slashing necklaces off of women's necks in New Haven did not exactly win over the locals. Neither did the indiscriminate burning of both Patriot and Loyalists' properties.

George Washington expressed outrage that they would attack civilians and plunder so much personal wealth. Even Britain's own command eventually questioned the prudence of the raid, which just stirred up more resentment among the Connecticut population and convinced many to no longer remain neutral. The British easily "took" New Haven but the "victory" proved a tactical blunder.

Even though the raid on New Haven basically took place in a day, the city itself has a rich legacy of American Revolution sites and relics. On this particular tour, visitors can see the crypt of Benedict Arnold's first wife, Margaret Mansfield, in the basement of the Center Church, which overlooks that town green, and imagine how different his life would have been if she had lived and he had never married Peggy Shippen! (See "The Arnold Women" biography box in *Benedict Arnold: Traitor Torches New London*) Other Arnold stops include his home site and some artifacts at the New Haven Museum, such as his original shopkeeper's sign with the words *B. Arnold Druggist Book Seller* simply painted on wood. This domestic artifact contrasts so sharply with the intense military man he eventually became. What a journey—from pharmacist to brilliant Patriot field commander to traitor! For more on Arnold's story, see *Benedict Arnold: Traitor Torches New London*.

Beer's Tavern, the site of the infamous Powder House Incident between Benedict Arnold and David Wooster, was located where the Taft Apartments now stand. Read the marker outside but also take a peek inside the splendid foyer of this historic building.



No tour of American Revolution-related sites in Connecticut would be complete without a stop to see the tremendous collection of John Trumbull paintings at the Yale University Art Gallery. (See the biography on Trumbull for more information.) Walk just around the corner to see the statue of Nathan Hale, Yale graduate, his youthful expression such a contrast to his bound hands and dark fate by hanging in 1776 by the British. In 1779, President Stiles probably knew about the terrible death of one of Yale's own and feared for the other students under his charge. (For more on Nathan Hale see *Nathan Hale Patriot Spy*).

Route Notes

0.0 Start at the Savin Rock Conference Center. At the traffic light turn RIGHT out of the driveway onto Captain Thomas Boulevard.

The British forces landed at Savin Rock and started their march toward New Haven on July 5, 1779. Two monuments mark the location, one on the other side of the conference center and the other at Bradley Point.

0.2 At the traffic light turn LEFT onto Savin Avenue.

1.1 At the traffic light turn RIGHT onto Main Street by West Haven Green.

On July 5, 1779 British Soldier William Campbell saved the life of Rev. Noah Williston, later in the day Campbell died in battle. A stone memorial rests on West Haven Green and the city named a street in Campbell's honor.

1.2 Turn RIGHT at the traffic light onto Washington Avenue.



2.4 Bear LEFT onto Beach St. (becomes First Ave.) Long Island Sound on the right.

- 4.1 Turn RIGHT onto Main St., becomes Water Street as the road curves left.
- 4.4 At the stop sign turn RIGHT onto Kimberly Ave. then cross over the river.

POWDER HOUSE INCIDENT

April 1775, the British and Americans had clashed at Lexington and Concord and citizens up and down New England had to decide what to do about it. New Haven held a town meeting in which the locals voted **not** to send help to Massachusetts. The men who made up the 2nd Company of the Governor's Foot Guard disagreed. On April 22, 1775, led by their captain, Benedict Arnold--the local pharmacist, merchant and bookseller--about 60 men in full uniform marched down to Beer's Tavern and demanded that Colonel David Wooster turn over the keys to the Powder House so they could secure ammunition and march to Boston. Wooster insisted that they abide by the vote at the town meeting and await additional orders, but Arnold didn't care about votes or politeness.

He wanted the keys and the powder and he got both.

His men then followed their captain on a three-day journey to Cambridge to join forces with the Patriots there. On the face of it, the incident seems modest enough, but in fact the 2nd Company of the Governor's Foot Guard offered the first outside help that Massachusetts received and paved the way for many other Patriots to take up arms against the British.

Every April 22 the Governor's Foot Guard Association celebrates Powder House Day in New Haven by first assembling at the old New Haven Coliseum site at the corner of South Orange and George Streets then marching to the town green and eventually to City Hall, where they participate in a "Demand the Key" ceremony! They even fire off a howitzer.

The location of the Powder House was at Hillhouse Avenue and Trumbull Street, while Beer's Tavern is now the home of the splendid Taft Apartments; look up at the amazing stain glass ceiling if you enter the historic building.

- 5.0 At the traffic light turn RIGHT onto E.T. Grasso Boulevard then cross under the highway, becomes Sea Street.
- 5.5 Turn RIGHT at the red blinking light and stop sign onto Howard Avenue.
- 5.6 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn LEFT onto South Water Street.

5.8 Turn sharp LEFT onto Sea Street.

5.9 Turn RIGHT onto Hallock Avenue, becomes Sixth Street as the road curves to the left.

6.1 At the stop sign turn RIGHT onto Howard Avenue, cross over the highway.

6.2 At the traffic light turn RIGHT onto Fifth Avenue after the highway.

6.5 Turn RIGHT at the traffic light onto Long Warf Drive, cross under the highway.

During colonial times, dozens of sailing vessels crowded New Haven Harbor to the right; Benedict Arnold would have seen a similar view from his home on Water Street.



Grove Street Cemetery houses the markers of many people who were buried on the New Haven town green until 1812, including Roger Sherman and General David Wooster (left). Noah Webster actually lived in Benedict Arnold's former home at one point (right).

7.8 At the traffic light turn RIGHT onto Forbes Avenue.

9.0 Turn RIGHT at the traffic light onto Woodward Avenue.

9.2 Turn LEFT onto John Street (no sign).

9.4 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn RIGHT onto Townsend Avenue.

9.45 Turn LEFT onto Frost Street.

9.5 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn LEFT onto Beacon Avenue (becomes Hillside Avenue at the top of the Hill).

John Trumbull: Painter of a Revolution

Despite being blind in one eye, John Trumbull could sketch, a skill he put to use for the Patriots by drawing British encampments. On the scene at Bunker Hill and, at one point, a personal aide to General George Washington, Trumbull knew first-hand many of the famous figures and events he eventually painted. His father, Jonathan Trumbull, was Governor of Connecticut, which just further placed John in situations of power and influence.

The Yale University Art Gallery has hundreds of Trumbull's finest works, including a full portrait of General George Washington. The university bought the art from the Harvard University (!) graduate in 1831 and paid the then 75-year-old Trumbull a \$1000 annuity for them. Anyone interested in seeing into the world of 18th Century culture during the American Revolution--the men, the dress, the moments that shaped who we are as a country--must visit the Trumbull collection at Yale.

Of course several of his most famous paintings, including *The Resignation of General Washington, December 23, 1783*, hang in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol, but in terms of sheer volume and impact, the New Haven collection really captures the imprint this one artist had on how we see our own revolutionary historical narrative. One of the great ironies: Trumbull went to London to studying under Benjamin West and painted some of his most famous scenes, including *The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker's Hill, June 17, 1775* in England!

9.7 On the night of July 5, 1779, the British camped at Beacon Fort to right after fighting with the local militia.

10.1 Turn RIGHT onto Page Street.

10.15 At the T-intersection turn RIGHT onto Huntington Avenue.

10.5 Continue on Huntington Road (no sign).

10.6 At the stop sign turn RIGHT onto Upson Terrace.

11.0 At the second stop sign turn LEFT onto Woodward Avenue (becomes Fort Hale Park Road).

11.8 Fort Nathan Hale and Black Rock Fort are to the right. On July 5, 1779 the British easily overpowered the Patriots at Black Rock Fort in New Haven Harbor.

12.1 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn RIGHT onto Townsend Avenue.

12.9 Turn RIGHT onto Morris Cove Road.

13.0 Turn LEFT onto Bristol Place.

13.05 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn RIGHT onto Cove Road.

13.1 Turn RIGHT onto Cove Street.

13.5 Turn LEFT onto Cora Street (no sign).

13.6 Turn LEFT onto Lighthouse Road.

John Trumbull's full-length portrait of General George Washington, just one of many wonderful Trumbull paintings at the Yale University Art Gallery.



To the right British landed on the beachhead near the lighthouse on July 5, 1779.

13.9 The Redcoats spared the Pardee-Morris House to the right from burning.

14.2 Continue STRAIGHT at the traffic light onto Morris Causeway.

14.3 Turn LEFT onto Dean Street.

15.0 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn RIGHT onto Barn Street (becomes Dodge Avenue, bear right).

16.2 At the stop sign turn LEFT onto Thompson Avenue.

16.8 Continue STRAIGHT at the traffic light onto High Street by the Stone Church.

The British raided the area near the Stone Church in 1779.

17.2 At the traffic light before the underpass turn LEFT onto Old Broadway Street (no sign) becomes Laurel Street.

Roger Sherman and the Connecticut Compromise

How could small states like Connecticut still have power in the new Congress if the number of representatives was based solely on population? That was the question confounding the men hard at work on building a Constitution for the new United States of America in 1787. Roger Sherman, a successful lawyer from the Nutmeg state and former member of the Committee of Five that wrote the Declaration of Independence, came up with a compromise that helped the fledgling government regain stability: representation in the House would be based on population but in the Senate each state would have two members. This became known as the famous Connecticut Compromise.

Sherman was born in Newton, Massachusetts, but lived his adult life in Connecticut, where he was the first mayor of New Haven and a successful lawyer. When he died in 1793 of typhoid fever, he was buried on the town green, then a cemetery (so the rumors that the green was once a cemetery are true...). But in 1821 they moved the monuments including Sherman's to the Grove Street Cemetery. So even this former Senator, crafter of the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution, had to leave the town green! Visitors on the *New Haven and the 1779 Invasion* tour can visit the site where Sherman's house once stood, not far from Beer's Tavern.

19.2 Turn LEFT onto Clifton Street.

19.8 At the stop sign turn LEFT onto Lexington Avenue.

19.9 At the stop sign turn RIGHT onto East Grand Avenue.

20.0 Continue STRAIGHT over the bridge after the traffic light.

20.2 At the traffic light after the bridge turn RIGHT onto Front Street.

21.1 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn LEFT after the overpass onto Middletown Avenue.

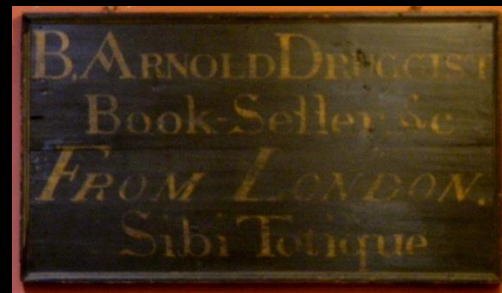
21.5 Turn RIGHT at the traffic light onto Ferry Street.

21.6 At the traffic light turn RIGHT onto State Street (Route 5).

21.7 Turn LEFT onto Rock Street.



Benedict Arnold's wife, Margaret Mansfield, is buried in the Center Church basement crypt (left). The sign from Arnold's apothecary shop at the New Haven Museum (right).



21.8 At the stop sign turn RIGHT onto Grace Street / Rock Street (becomes English Drive).

22.5 Turn LEFT onto Orange Street (no sign).

For a great view of New Haven Continue Straight and follow the axis road to the right and summit of East Rock. A war memorial including a side dedicated to the American Revolution crowns the hill's top.

23.3 Turn RIGHT onto Bishop Street.

23.5 At the T-intersection and stop sign turn LEFT onto Whitney Avenue (becomes Temple Street).

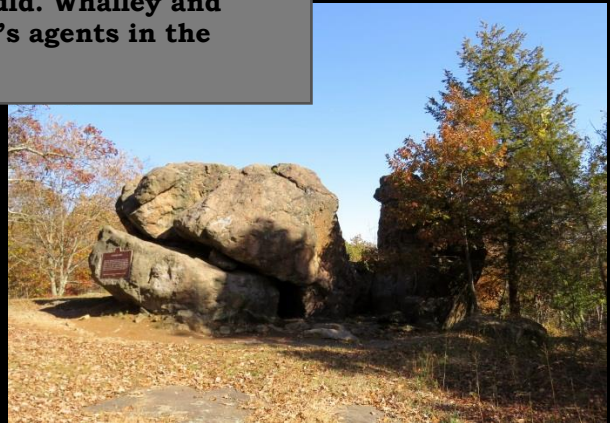
23.9 Benedict Arnold's store sign, colonial era paintings, old maps, and statue of George Washington and Noah Webster are on view at the New Haven Colony Museum to the right.

24.4 Burials in the basement of the Center Church to the right include Benedict Arnold's first wife. The entire upper green is a cemetery; memorials were moved to Grove Street in the 19th century.

24.5 At the traffic light turn RIGHT onto Chapel Street.

As New Haven militiamen prepared to march on Boston after the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the famous "Powder House Incident" occurred at Beer's Tavern where Captain Benedict Arnold demanded keys to the Powder House (where gun powder and arms were stored) from Colonel David Wooster on April 22, 1775. The Taft apartments to the left are now located on the Beer's Tavern site. General Washington also stayed at Beer's Tavern during the Revolution.

Edward Whalley and William Goffe were among the judges who signed the death warrant for King Charles I of England in 1649. After King Charles I's son regained the throne in 1660 as King Charles II, he tried to hunt down as many of the signers of the warrant as he could. Whalley and Goffe hid from the king's agents in the Judge's Cave in 1661.



24.6 Declaration of Independence Signer Roger Sherman lived on the left and Nathan Hale lived at Connecticut Hall while attending Yale to the right a few buildings inward on campus. Nathan Hale stands feet and hands tied in front of the dormitory.

24.7 The Yale University Art Galley houses many of Revolutionary War Artist's John Trumbull's original paintings on the right.

25.0 Turn RIGHT onto Howe Street.

25.2 Turn LEFT onto Elm Street.

26.5 At the circle and yield sign turn RIGHT onto West Park Avenue.

26.7 At the stop sign and T-intersection turn LEFT onto Whatley Avenue.

The British crossed the West River here as they advanced on New Haven.

27.0 Turn LEFT at the traffic light onto West Rock Avenue.

27.2 At the stop sign turn LEFT onto Yale Avenue.

28.2 At the traffic light and T-intersection turn RIGHT onto Route 34 West Derby Avenue (no sign).

28.8 At the traffic light turn LEFT onto Forrest Road / Route 122 South.

30.0 At the traffic light continue STRAIGHT across the intersection then bear quickly LEFT as the road forks becoming Campbell Avenue.

The Patriots fought off the British at West River down the street to the left. The “Defenders” Sculpture marks this location.

32.5 Turn RIGHT at the traffic light onto Captain Thomas Boulevard.

33.1 Turn LEFT at the traffic light onto Rock Street and Savin Rock Conference Center.

SOURCES

Townshend, Charles Harvey, *The British Invasion of New Haven, Connecticut: Together with some account of their landing and burning the towns of Fairfield and Norwalk, July 1779*, Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, Publishers, 1879

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