

Creating a Local Notable:***Brigadier General Anthony Walton White of New Brunswick*****By Chris Rasmussen****DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v10i1.350>**

To the extent he is remembered today, Brigadier General Anthony Walton White is hailed as one of New Brunswick, New Jersey's, most illustrious residents and a reminder of the city's significance during the American Revolution. This account of White's career reveals that he was far from successful in the military or in business. Born to wealth on an estate along the Raritan River, White relied on family ties and political connections to gain appointments in the military and government throughout his life. He forswore allegiance to Great Britain in 1775 and sought a position on Gen. George Washington's staff. Washington interviewed White but was unimpressed and declined to appoint him to his staff. White became a cavalry officer and served throughout the Revolutionary War, but his military record was hardly unblemished, and he faced several inquiries into his conduct and courts-martial proceedings. In the 1790s he served in the suppression of the Whiskey Rebellion and in 1798 was promoted to the rank of brigadier general during the quasi-war against France. George Washington reckoned him one of the least capable and most insufferable officers in the US Army. White fared no better in civilian life or business. After the revolution, he lost his sizeable inheritance in a series of bad investments. He also squandered the wealth inherited by his young bride, a girl he met during his service in South Carolina. White filed for bankruptcy in 1802 and died the following year. White was not a villain, but neither was he a hero. His life, like history generally, offers a complicated and cautionary tale.

Located at the fall line of the Raritan River, New Brunswick, New Jersey, was an important strategic and commercial site and played a small but significant role in the American Revolution.

George Washington passed through New Brunswick in 1775 on his way to Massachusetts to assume command of the US Army. On July 9, 1776, John Neilson climbed atop a table in front of the White Hall Tavern on Albany Street to read aloud the Declaration of Independence only days after it was signed in Philadelphia. Washington's soldiers marched through the town in November 1776 as they retreated southward while Alexander Hamilton slowed the British army's pursuit. British troops occupied New Brunswick through the winter of 1776 before evacuating in June 1777. After the Battle of Monmouth effectively ended the war in New Jersey, Washington's soldiers rested and celebrated the second anniversary of American independence by firing their cannon and muskets and enjoying a double allowance of rum immediately north of New Brunswick on July 4, 1778.¹

These events from the American Revolution were inscribed in New Brunswick's landscape in the early 20th century, as the Daughters of the American Revolution, Sons of the American Revolution, Rutgers College, the City of New Brunswick, and Middlesex County all placed

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Anthony Walton White's papers are held by the Special Collections and University Archives of Rutgers University Libraries in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and by the New Jersey Historical Society, Newark, New Jersey. The A. Walton White Evans family papers also contain papers of Anthony Walton White and his father and are held by the Institute Archives and Special Collections at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. White's papers cited in this essay are identified as RU, NJHS, and RPI.

¹ On the revolution in New Jersey, see Maxine N. Lurie, *Taking Sides in Revolutionary New Jersey: Caught in the Crossfire* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2022); James J. Gigantino II, ed., *The American Revolution in New Jersey: Where Battlefield Meets the Home Front* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015); John Fea, "New Jersey at the Crossroads: Revolution and Confederation Period," in Maxine N. Lurie and Richard Veit, eds., *New Jersey: A History of the Garden State* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 64–89; Mark Edward Lender, "The 'Cockpit' Reconsidered: Revolutionary New Jersey as a Military Theater," in Barbara J. Mitnick, ed., *New Jersey in the American Revolution* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 45–60.

historical markers to commemorate the city's past.² Members of New Brunswick's Jersey Blue chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) were especially active in the effort to perpetuate memories of the revolution. The DAR, founded in Washington, DC, in 1890, and the Jersey Blue chapter, founded four years later, sought to preserve the revolution's legacy, encourage the study of American history, and promote patriotism and Americanization at a moment when an influx of millions of immigrants was remaking American society. In October 1908, DAR members from across New Jersey gathered in the parish house of Christ Episcopal Church in New Brunswick for their annual statewide convention. After the members concluded their meeting they adjourned to the church's graveyard, where some 200 spectators watched as the Jersey Blue chapter unveiled a bronze tablet atop the grave of Anthony Walton White, a cavalry officer in the Revolutionary War. The tablet hailed White's service on George Washington's staff and said that Washington "called him friend" (Image 1).³

² On Revolutionary War sites and historical markers in New Brunswick, see "Revolutionary War Sites in New Brunswick, New Jersey," Revolutionary War New Jersey, https://www.revolutionarywarnewjersey.com/new_jersey_revolutionary_war_sites/towns/new_brunswick_nj_revolutionary_war_sites.htm. In July 2017, the city unveiled a sculpture of John Neilson reading the Declaration of Independence. Cheryl Makin, "Revolutionary Moment Comes to Life, 241 Years Later," *Courier News and Home News Tribune*, July 10, 2017, <https://www.mycentraljersey.com/story/news/local/how-we-live/2017/07/10/revolutionary-moment-comes-life-241-years-later/463116001/>.

³ "Do Honor to Great General's Memory," *New Brunswick Times*, October 1, 1908, 1–2; "D.A.R. Had Fine Program," *New Brunswick Times*, October 2, 1908, 1–2; "D.A.R. Honors Memory of Gen. Anthony White," *Daily Home News*, October 1, 1908, 1–2; "Gen. White a Real Patriot," *Daily Home News*, September 11, 1908, 5. The Jersey Blue chapter of the DAR assumed stewardship of the Buccleuch mansion in 1914 and oversees it today. "Our Chapter," Jersey Blue Chapter: Daughters of the American Revolution, <https://www.jerseybluedar.org/our-chapter.html>. The DAR continued to honor White and other veterans of the Revolutionary War for decades. See "Jersey Blue Chapter Will Hold Memorial Service in Christ Church on May 30," May 28, 1924, 7. On the DAR see Julie Des Jardins, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Memory, 1880–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Historical monuments have generated tremendous scholarship and controversy in recent years. See Erin L. Thompson, *Smashing Statues: The Rise and Fall of America's Public Monuments* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2022); Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, rev. ed., 2018); Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).



Image 1. Tablet placed atop grave of Anthony Walton White by the Jersey Blue chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1908. Photo by the author.

George Washington may have called Anthony Walton White a friend, but he also called him one of the worst officers in the United States Army and an incorrigible liar. White fancied himself a gallant cavalryman but his military record was marred by several scandals, and his reckless management of his and his wife's wealth left the couple nearly penniless. He could most accurately be described as a career officeholder who supported himself by relying on family connections and plying the patronage networks that linked elite men in Britain's North American colonies and in the new United States. Throughout his life, White supported himself by gaining appointment to offices in the British Empire and in the army and government of the United States.⁴

⁴ On patronage networks in the British Empire, see the essays in Robert Olwell and Alan Tully, eds., *Cultures and Identities in Colonial British America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); and in J.G.A. Pocock,

After the US declared and won independence, as historian Joanne Freeman has shown, Americans soon discovered that rooting out the political practices of the British Empire and creating a republican government posed a challenge. White's career attests to the ways in which economic and political power in the new republic remained concentrated in the hands of a comparatively small elite, bound together by shared experience, values, and often by ties of birth and marriage. Wealthy Americans, officeholders, and military officers sometimes struggled to adapt to the new republic with its less rigidly hierarchical society and boisterous politics.⁵

Anthony Walton White (Image 2) was descended from a long line of royal officials and a long line of Anthony Whites. His great-great grandfather, Anthony White I (1614–1673), a supporter of Charles I, fled England after the king was executed and settled in Bermuda, which became a royalist stronghold. His great-grandfather, Anthony White II (1643?–1709), was born in Bermuda and became a lawyer and the colony's chief justice. White's great-grandfather, Leonard (1665–1712) also practiced law in Bermuda.⁶ His grandfather, Anthony White III (c. 1690–c. 1720), moved to New York in 1715, where he married a Dutch colonist, Johanna Staats, who gave birth to a son, Anthony White IV (1717–1787). This latest Anthony White married Elizabeth Morris (1712–c. 1784), daughter of New Jersey Governor Lewis Morris, and traded on his lineage and his influential father-in-law to gain appointment to a string of political offices in the colony of New Jersey.⁷

Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

⁵ Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), xiv–xxiv.

⁶ Virginia Bernhard, *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda, 1616–1782* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999).

⁷ Biographical details on White are drawn from A. S. Graham and Anna M. W. Woodhull, "Anthony Walton White, Brigadier General in the Continental Army," *The Magazine of History, With Notes and Queries* 1, no. 1 (January 1905): 40; William Nelson, "Anthony White I, II, and III," *The Magazine of History, With Notes and Queries*, vol. 4 (July–December 1906): 73–78; Anna M. W. Woodhull, *Memoir of Brig. Gen. Anthony Walton White of the Continental Army* (Newark: New Jersey Historical Society, 1882): 107–115; *Appleton's Cyclopedia of American*



**Image 2. A nineteenth century engraving of Anthony Walton White (1750–1803).
Courtesy of the New York Public Library Digital Collections.**

Anthony Walton White was born on July 7, 1750, in the White House Farm (today the Buccleuch Mansion), a grand home that Anthony White built in 1739 along the Raritan River in New Brunswick (Image 3). His father expected his only son to become a government official and manage the family's estate and arranged for him to be educated by private tutors. As a young man, Anthony Walton White followed in his father's footsteps, becoming a colonial official and serving the British crown. But New Jersey became deeply divided between loyalists and patriots during

Biography, vol. 6, 468; Samuel K. Fore, "Anthony Walton White," George Washington's Mount Vernon, <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/anthony-walton-white/>.

the 1760s and 1770s. The Whites were members of New Brunswick's Christ Church, an Anglican parish, which was so deeply riven by disputes between loyalists and patriots that its rector, Rev. Abraham Beach, was forced to stop conducting worship services during the revolution. As Anthony White IV watched the growing divide in his church, in New Jersey, and throughout the American colonies, he was understandably concerned about preserving his property. So he may have hedged his bets, since no one could know whether the upstart Americans would win or lose the war. During the revolution he lived at Union farm, his estate in Hunterdon County, where he entertained several prominent loyalists as well as patriots.⁸

In 1775, Anthony White IV and Anthony Walton White forswore their allegiance to Britain and declared their support for American independence. Anthony White IV was not an ardent supporter of the revolution but was determined to shield his estate from confiscation, and Anthony Walton White eagerly sought to launch a military career. The elder White wrote to Gen. George Washington in November 1775 to urge the general to appoint his son as an aide-de-camp or some other position "worthy the acceptance of a Gentleman uninfluenc'd by mercenary views." White's friend, George Clinton, who served as one of New York's delegates to the Second Continental Congress, also recommended the young man to Washington.⁹ The Whites' ties to the influential

⁸ Among the guests often staying at Anthony White's estate during the revolution was Cornelia Bell, a patriot whose brother was a loyalist. Cornelia married William Paterson at Union farm in 1779. Lurie, *Taking Sides in Revolutionary New Jersey*, 162; John E. O'Connor, *William Paterson: Lawyer and Statesman, 1745–1806* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1979), 102. J. Lawrence Boggs, ed., "The Cornelia (Bell) Paterson Letters," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* 15 (1930): 508–17; *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* 16 (1931): 56–67 and 186–201; William Paterson, *Glimpses of Colonial Society and the Life at Princeton College*, ed. Weyner Jay Mills (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1903), 150–51, n. 1.

⁹ Anthony White to George Washington, November __ [nd] 1775; George Clinton to George Washington, July 4, 1775, in *Public Papers of George Clinton*, vol. 1, eds. Hugh Hastings and J. A. Holden (New York and Albany: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co., State Printers, 1899), 208–9. Anthony White sold the White House farm to Gen. William Burton, a British officer, in 1774, and British officers under Gen. Charles Cornwallis used the house during the winter of 1776–1777. In 1783, the house was sold to John Bergen, who almost immediately sold it to Col. Charles Stewart. William H. Benedict, "'Historic Buccleuch': Its Successive Owners," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, new series, vol. 6 (1921): 12–13; William H. Benedict, *New Brunswick in History* (New Brunswick, NJ: William H. Benedict, 1925), 259–61; "History," Jersey Blue chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, <https://www.jerseybluedar.org/history.html>.

Morris family, several of whom became prominent supporters of the rebel cause, led Washington to consider appointing White as an aide. Washington interviewed White in autumn 1775 but was unimpressed and declined to appoint him to his staff. White's father continued to press the general to make a place for his son, and Washington complimented the young man in a letter to White's father and wrote a routine letter of introduction stating that White "will do credit to any Military Appointment consistent with his Standing." But Washington was more candid in a letter to Adjutant Gen. Joseph Reed, confiding that it "pains me, when I think of Mr White's expectation of coming into my Family [i.e., his General Staff], if an opening happens. I can derive no earthly assistance from such a man."¹⁰



Image 3. White House Farm (today, the Buccleuch Mansion), birthplace of Anthony Walton White in 1750. Photo by the author.

¹⁰ George Washington to Anthony White, August 25, 1775, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-02-02-0229>; GW, letter of recommendation for AWW, October 17, 1775, A. Walton White Evans papers (RPI), Box 27, Folder 1; GW to Joseph Reed, January 23, 1776. Washington often referred to his staff as his "family." Arthur S. Lefkowitz writes that Washington declined to appoint White as aide-de-camp, *George Washington's Indispensable Men: The 32 Aides-de-Camp Who Helped Win American Independence* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003), 13–14. The *Official Register* of New Jersey men who served in the revolution lists White as Washington's aide-de-camp for a brief period in October 1775. White's service record in the revolution is found in William S. Stryker, *Official Register of the Officers and Men of New Jersey in the Revolutionary War* (Trenton: Wm. T. Nicholson & Co., 1872; Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1967), 64–65.

After White was rejected for a position on Washington's staff, he sought a military appointment from the Committee of Safety organizing the rebel effort in New Jersey. White informed the committee that he had "the offer & Promise of the first vacancy that shall happen in his Excellency General Washington's family," but claimed that he preferred a position as a cavalry officer in a regiment from his home state to serving as an aide-de-camp.¹¹ William Livingston, brigadier general of the New Jersey militia and soon to become the state's first governor, urged the colony's Provincial Congress to commission White an officer. Livingston stated that "general Washington entertain'd a high opinion of his merit" and "many Gentlemen of this Congress have a great Regard" for White, who was "certainly of a respectable Family, & of a military turn."¹² In February 1776, the New Jersey Provincial Congress recommended to the Continental Congress that White be appointed a lieutenant colonel in the Third Battalion of New Jersey troops. The battalion's soldiers lacked muskets, and White immediately contributed to the revolutionary cause by scouring New Brunswick and the surrounding area and paying \$788 to purchase 95 guns.¹³

Membership in America's political and economic elite sometimes aided White's military career but could also be detrimental because any violation of duty, honor, or propriety could tarnish one's reputation, perhaps permanently. White landed himself in trouble in 1776 when he was accused of leading the plundering of Johnson Hall, the elegant home of Sir John Johnson, the prominent New York loyalist who played a central role in organizing British and Indian forces in

¹¹ AWW to Committee of Safety for the Province of New Jersey, January 12, 1776, Evans papers (RPI), Box 27, Folder 3.

¹² William Livingston to Samuel Tucker (President, New Jersey Provincial Congress), January 27, 1776, in *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, vol. 3 (January 1, 1776–May 15, 1776), Library of Congress, American Memory, [https://memory.loc.gov/cgibin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(dg003128\)\)](https://memory.loc.gov/cgibin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field(DOCID+@lit(dg003128))). *Minutes of the Provincial Congress and the Council of Safety of the State of New Jersey* (Trenton: Naar, Day, & Naar, 1979), 354.

¹³ D. [Charles Deshler?], "Revolutionary-ana," *Home News*, June 15, 1887, 3. The writer obtained information about White's purchases from an account book lent to him by White's granddaughter. He states that White was likely repaid for purchasing these guns.

the colony. Johnson's father, Sir William Johnson (c. 1715–1774), served as Britain's Superintendent of Indian Affairs, and John Johnson was appointed superintendent in 1782. White was incensed to hear his "character as an officer & gentleman impeached," and wrote to Gen. Philip Schuyler to demand a court-martial so he could confront his accusers and clear his name.¹⁴ He was tried and acquitted but relieved of his position for conduct unbecoming an officer. Furious about being stripped of his command, White drew his sword and assaulted one of his accusers, Richard Varick. The unarmed Varick fled, and White was later found waiting for him and carrying two loaded pistols and swords, intending to challenge Varick to a duel. As Joanne Freeman points out, dueling entailed much more than some hothead angrily challenging his adversary to pistols at 10 paces. Rather, it was a complicated ritual designed to uphold one's sense of honor. Men with political ambitions such as White brooked little challenge to their honor, which encompassed "much more than a vague sense of self-worth; it represented the ability to prove oneself a deserving political leader."¹⁵ Friends intervened to spare White another court-martial, and Gen. Horatio Gates transferred him to a different army unit.¹⁶ White asked Gen. John Sullivan for a letter of recommendation but the general's aide-de-camp explained that the general was too busy even to compose a letter. White again asked Washington for a position on the general's staff but was

¹⁴ AWW to Gen. Philip Schuyler, September 16, 1776, New York Public Library Digital Collections, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/23c94230-0028-0130-d020-58d385a7bc34#/>.

¹⁵ Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 170.

¹⁶ On White's brief, tumultuous service in the Third Battalion, see Lefkowitz, *George Washington's Indispensable Men*, 220–221; Paul Cushman, *Richard Varick: A Forgotten Founding Father* (Amherst: Modern Memoirs Publishing, 2010), 36, 228–29. Varick later became recording secretary to Gen. George Washington and Mayor of New York City. See also Philip Schuyler to Elias Dayton, May 14, 1776, in "Papers of General Elias Dayton," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, vol. 9 (1860–1864), 180–81; Ebenezer Elmer, "Journal Kept During an Expedition to Canada in 1776," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, vol. 3 (1846–1847), 41–46; Lewis Bush, [n.d.], White papers (RU), Box 3, folder 47; copy of statement by Lewis Bush, Evans papers (RPI), Box 27, Folder 34; original in Lewis Bush, Testimony Involving Anthony Walton White, Von Hemert Autograph Collection, C0472, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Princeton, NJ.

rebuffed. Washington, who demanded strict adherence to military discipline, penned a stern letter to White from his headquarters in Morristown, New Jersey:

. . . I have been told, that your manner of leaving the Northern Army, was inconsistent with the Character of an Officer. This is not all. I am also told, that you have unfortunately indulged yourself in a loose, unguarded way of talking, which has often brought your own veracity in question, and trouble upon others.¹⁷

Ambitious gentlemen relied on their honor and reputation in the revolutionary era, and Washington harshly rebuked White for “such foibles as must forever stain a Character,” informing him that many officers considered White’s behavior disruptive to “the good harmony of a Corps, and dangerous to the peace of Society.”¹⁸

In 1777, White was appointed a lieutenant colonel in the 4th Regiment, Light Dragoons, of the Continental Army. He saw action in the northern theater of fighting, then in 1780 was transferred to South Carolina, where he was promoted to colonel and placed in command of US cavalry forces in the South.¹⁹ His military exploits in the South were not without controversy and resulted in several inquiries into his conduct. In 1780, he was again accused of plundering a Tory’s home. Even more damaging, his performance as a commander was also called into question. In May 1780, Banastre Tarleton, one of Britain’s most able cavalry officers (and, by Americans, most feared and hated) surprised White’s troops at Lenud’s Ferry on the south bank of the Santee River in South Carolina. Tarleton’s men killed and wounded more than three dozen of White’s troops and captured 67, along with 100 horses, while White escaped by swimming across the river. Critics

¹⁷ George Washington to AWW, March 20, 1777, Founders Online, National Archives, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-08-02-0656>. White’s letter to Washington of March 15, 1777, is not extant. On White’s request to General Sullivan, see Alexander Scammell to AWW, November 4, 1776, Evans papers (RPI), Box 27, Folder 3. Scammell was General Sullivan’s aide-de-camp.

¹⁸ George Washington to AWW, March 20, 1777. On the culture of honor and reputation among the American elite, see Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*.

¹⁹ George Washington to AWW, January 28, 1780, “The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition,” (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008), <https://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/GEWN-03-24-02-0240>.

faulted White's decision to rest his horses and men, rather than ferry them across the Santee, where they would have been shielded from Tarleton's attack.²⁰ White's blunder, as historian Scott Miskimon observes, resulted in a devastating blow to the American war effort, effectively leaving the US without a cavalry force in South Carolina.²¹ White was unable to reorganize the cavalry in time to fight in the Battle of Camden in August 1780, in which the British won a significant victory. The army conducted an inquiry into White's conduct at Lenud's Ferry and criticized his leadership but cleared him of wrongdoing.²² In 1781, White was tried and acquitted of the charge of mistreating fellow officers and soldiers. Later that year, he was tried again on charges of improper conduct levied against him by Capt. John Heard in 1779 but Heard ultimately retracted his accusations and White resumed his command.²³ In 1781, White skirmished against Tarleton several times in Virginia and the Carolinas, and the following year fought in Gen. Anthony Wayne's campaign against Savannah.

While he was stationed in the South, White also tended to his financial affairs and amassed considerable landholdings. In June 1782, he successfully bid £4,500 to purchase half of Saint Catherine's Island, Georgia, and spent £5,727 to purchase some 6,600 acres of confiscated Loyalists' estates.²⁴ He also apparently bought an enslaved man, Polidor, whom he sold to Thomas Miller.²⁵ In 1783, White became a business partner with William Pierce, who had been aide-de-camp to Gen. Nathanael Greene, and fellow cavalry officer Richard Call in the mercantile house

²⁰ For an account of the disaster at Lenud's Ferry, see Abraham Buford to George Washington, May 6–8, 1780, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-25-02-0398>.

²¹ Scott A. Miskimon and Anthony Walton White, "A Revolutionary Dragoon," in Jim Picuch, ed., *Cavalry of the American Revolution* (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2012). Tarleton's account of the Battle of Lenud's Ferry may be found in Banastre Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America* (London: T. Cadell, 1787), 20.

²² White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 5.

²³ White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 5.

²⁴ Allen Daniel Candler, ed., *The Revolutionary Records of the State of Georgia* (Atlanta, GA: Franklin-Turner Co., 1908), 424, 547–48.

²⁵ Thomas Miller to AWW, October 23, 1790, White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 1.

of Pierce, White, and Call in Savannah, but lost his sizable investment when the firm dissolved the following year, leaving him responsible for the company's debts.²⁶ To help cover his losses, White and another business partner, Raymond Demere, sold their property on Saint Catherine's to former Georgia governor Nathaniel Brownson and Henry Putnam in 1785.²⁷

In the spring of 1783, White, in his early thirties, married Margaret Ellis, a wealthy 15-year-old orphan from South Carolina, and the newlyweds soon moved to Sans Souci, White's home in New York.²⁸ Anthony White IV died in 1787, bequeathing two-fifths of his large estate to his son and one-fifth to each of his three daughters. White's unmarried sister, Isabella, died in 1789, leaving him a portion of her estate.²⁹ White's other sisters married prominent men: Joanna married John Bayard, a Pennsylvania delegate to the Continental Congress and later mayor of New Brunswick, and Euphemia married William Paterson, who became governor of New Jersey and associate justice of the US Supreme Court.³⁰

White's years at Sans Souci were anything but *sans souci*. The revolution had left the American economy in havoc, disrupting commerce and saddling the states with considerable debt. New Jersey was no exception, and its economy collapsed in 1784.³¹ Besieged by creditors from

²⁶ Pierce averted financial disaster by assigning his share of the company to Richard Call before it went bankrupt. See William Pierce manuscript, MA 0555, Morgan Library and Museum, New York City, <http://corsair.themorgan.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=129493>. Pierce was later elected to the Continental Congress and represented Georgia at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. He later formed another business, which also went bankrupt. "William Pierce," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/william-pierce-1753-1789/>.

²⁷ On White's sale of land on Saint Catherine's Island, see the bond dated July 8, 1785, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, GA, Collection GHS 0097.

²⁸ Margaret Ellis's father, William, died in 1772, and her mother, Sabina, died the following year. Will of William Ellis, Evans papers (RPI), Box 26, Folder 10.

²⁹ Will of Isabella White, 1789, Evans papers (RPI), Box 27, Folder 20. Isabella enslaved several people, as did other members of the White family. In her will she bequeathed five enslaved persons (Ambo, Bet, Rachel, Sabrina, and James) to her sisters and other relatives. The 1790 US Census lists eight slaves in the White household in New York. See Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1908), 137.

³⁰ Paterson's first wife, Cornelia Bell Paterson, died days after giving birth in 1783. He and Euphemia White were married in 1785.

³¹ Richard P. McCormick, *New Jersey from Colony to State, 1609–1789* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981), 161.

his failed investments and from loans he took out during the revolution, he was forced to begin selling and leasing his property to pay his bills. White stated that he had pledged his property as collateral to obtain supplies for his troops while fighting in the South. To support himself, he sought appointment as a government official and wrote to President Washington in 1789 to inquire about being appointed collector of imposts in New York, a federal marshal, “or any other appointment you may please to confer on me under the New Government.” Keenly aware that Washington held him in low regard, White supplied the president names of several references who could vouch that his “character in private life” was now blameless, and vowed that, if appointed, “punctuality, and Integrity shall ever regulate my Conduct in the discharge of the duties of office,” but Washington declined to offer him a position.³² White’s brother-in-law, John Bayard, urged him to write again to the president and expressed his “hope you will yet be thought of to receive some appointment that will yet make you comfortable.”³³

As creditors demanded repayment of loans White had guaranteed during the war, he was forced to sell his real estate and other property, and his fortune quickly vanished. He scrambled to find a way to remain solvent, petitioning Congress to repay him for his financial contributions to the army during the revolution and seeking a salaried position in government. He estimated his personal contribution to the war effort at \$150,000 and petitioned Congress for repayment, but was denied in 1790, 1792, and 1793.³⁴ In the fall of 1793, he complained to John Marshall that his

³² AWW to George Washington, May 1, 1789, and AWW to GW, September 22, 1789, Founders Online, National Archives <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-02-02-0137>. On White’s leasing of land in New Jersey, see John Bayard to AWW, January 30, 1790, White papers (NJHS), Folder 1.

³³ Quotation from John Bayard to AWW, January 18, 1790, Evans papers (RPI), Box 27, Folder 22; see also JB to AWW, August 30, 1789, Evans papers (RPI), Box 27, Folder 22.

³⁴ White sought repayment of this sum of \$150,000 in paper currency in specie of equivalent value. See Henry Knox, Report of the Secretary of War, on the Memorial of Anthony Walton White, February 14, 1791, Greer and Vinsinger Family Collection of American Revolutionary War Documents, University of Tennessee Libraries, Digital Collections, <https://digital.lib.utk.edu/collections/islandora/object/revwar%3A15/transcript>. On White’s efforts to fend off and

service to the nation had seemingly earned him only “a denial of justice from the legislature & base ingratitude from those individuals who experienced my friendship when they were in the greatest distress.”³⁵

In 1793, White found himself in financial distress, and was forced to sell Sans Souci and return with his wife to his hometown, New Brunswick. In that year Governor Richard Howell appointed White adjutant general of New Jersey and White published *The Military System for the New-Jersey Cavalry*. White’s detractors in the US Army had criticized him for reveling in the pageantry of military life but lacking the ability to command men in battle, and White’s “system” for mounted troops confirmed their opinion, omitting any discussion of strategy and tactics but prescribing in exacting detail the formations, drills, and ceremonies for the cavalry.³⁶ The Vicomte de Noailles, who had served with distinction in the American Revolution and returned to the US in 1793 to escape the growing radicalism of the French Revolution, published a lengthy critique of White’s system and urged the US Army to reject it and adopt instead the instructions he had devised for the French cavalry in 1789 and 1791.³⁷

White donned his uniform and returned to military life in 1794 when he was appointed a cavalry officer in the expedition to suppress the Whiskey Rebellion along the Western frontier.

settle with his creditors throughout the 1780s and 1790s, see White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 1. On his failed effort to gain repayment from the US Government, see Board of Treasury to AWW, July 30, 1788, White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 1; Treasury Department to AWW, 9, 1790, White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 1; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States*, March 12, 1790, 174; Commissioner of Army Accounts to AWW, March 16, 1790, White papers (RU), March 16, 1790, White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 1; Elias Boudinot to AWW, April 19, 1792, White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 2; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States*, April 5, 1792, May 5, 1792; John Rutherford to AWW, March 3, 1793, White papers (NJHS), Folder 1; AWW to John Marshall, September 29, 1793, White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 2; Joseph Howell (War Department) to AWW, March 16, 1795, White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 2; *Journal of the Senate of the United States*, March 8, 1796. The Senate rejected White’s request. See *Journal of the Senate of the United States*, March 15, 1796.

³⁵ AWW to John Marshall, September 29, 1793, White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 2.

³⁶ Anthony Walton White, *The Military System for the New-Jersey Cavalry* (New Brunswick, NJ: Shelly Arnett, 1793).

³⁷ Louis-Marie Antoine, Vicomte de Noailles, “A Critique of ‘The Military System for the New-Jersey Cavalry,’” March 2, 1795, White papers (RU), Box 2, Folder 31.

After the US government imposed an excise tax on whiskey, angry farmers and distillers bid defiance to federal authority, and President Washington dispatched—and briefly led—an army of 13,000 state militiamen to quash the rebellion. White quickly earned the hatred of Pennsylvania farmers, who called him “Blackbeard,” a reference to the notorious English pirate, and alleged that his cavalry trampled some rebels, slashed others with their sabers, withheld food and water from prisoners, and left them exposed to unbearably cold weather. Historian William Hogeland’s assessment of White’s behavior during the Pennsylvania campaign is unsparing: the colonel, he wrote, “was well known for mental instability.”³⁸ Some of White’s men, though, rallied to his defense, denying allegations that he had mistreated prisoners and stating that he conducted himself honorably during the rebellion.³⁹

White was hardly alone in suffering financial losses in the 1790s. Speculators, eager to gain a windfall buying and selling land, created what historian Charles Rappleye dubbed the “earliest American real estate bubble.” When the bubble burst it depleted many fortunes, most notably that of financier Robert Morris of Philadelphia, whose efforts as superintendent of finance during the revolution helped stabilize America’s economy and government.⁴⁰ Once among America’s wealthiest citizens, Morris landed in debtors’ prison in 1798. White also found himself tens of thousands of dollars in debt and hounded by creditors, and he was forced to liquidate his

³⁸ William Hogeland, *The Whiskey Rebellion: George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and the Frontier Rebels Who Challenged America’s Newfound Sovereignty* (New York: Scribner, 2006), 221–22; see also 235–36. See also Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). On White’s record in the Whiskey Rebellion, see White papers (RU), Box 1, Folders 11–18, Box 2, Folders 19–23.

³⁹ A Jersey man to *Arnett’s New-Jersey Federalist*, January 15, 1795; William Gibbons, Joseph McClellan, John Sheppan, Jacob McHumphrey, and T. Taylor to AWW, July 4, 1796, White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 2.

⁴⁰ For an evocative description of the land speculation of the 1790s, see Charles Rappleye, *Robert Morris: Financier of the Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 493–507. Robert Morris was not related to Gouverneur Morris and Lewis Morris.

remaining landholdings and other assets in Georgia.⁴¹ He needed a job and sought appointment to a post in government. President Washington appointed him surveyor and inspector of the revenue for the Port of New Brunswick in 1797.⁴² New Brunswick was a bustling port town, and White's position afforded him a modest income that enabled him to support himself, his wife, and their only child, five-year-old Eliza. Their wealth vanishing, the Whites were forced to live with Margaret's sister, Mary Ellis, who moved from South Carolina and purchased a home in New Brunswick to be near her sister. To shield some of his real estate from creditors, White transferred ownership of it to Ellis, who proved a shrewd investor in local real estate.⁴³ Despite White's financial straits, these years were not devoid of solace. He still enjoyed the company of many loyal and influential friends, including Thaddeus Kościusko, the Polish general and Revolutionary War hero, who stayed with the White family for several weeks in the winter of 1797–1798.⁴⁴ The Whites were related by marriage to the influential Morris family, and Gouverneur Morris visited the Whites in 1799 while traveling across New Jersey to Morrisania, his estate in New York. In his diary Morris described Margaret White as “amiable” and “pretty,” but lamented that “She has but a bad Bargain in her Husband.”⁴⁵

Although George Washington appointed White a tax collector, he had nothing but contempt for his ability as an army officer. In 1798, President John Adams appointed White a

⁴¹ John Lawson to AWW, October 15, 1798, White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 2; Seaborn Jones to AWW, White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 2.

⁴² George Washington to the US Senate, March 3, 1797, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-21-02-0365>. Tallies of White's debts are in White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 1; Archibald Mercer to AWW, White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 2.

⁴³ *Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate of the United States of America*, March 3, 1797, 232. Records of White's work as a tax collector may be found in White papers (RU), Box 2. On White's financial problems and his sister-in-law Mary Ellis, see Benedict, “Historic Buccleuch,” 12–13; Benedict, *New Brunswick in History*, 260.

⁴⁴ White's grandson, A. Walton White Evans, recounted Kościusko's career, including his visit to New Brunswick. A. W. W. Evans, *Memoir of Thaddeus Kosciuszko, Poland's Hero and Patriot* (New York: Geo. A. Thitchener, 1883), 23–24.

⁴⁵ Diary, May 6, 1799. *The Diaries of Gouverneur Morris, New York, 1799–1816* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2018), 27.

brigadier general in the provisional army raised during the quasi-war with France, provoked by French privateers' harassment of American vessels in the Caribbean. A staunch Federalist, White had many influential friends, who recommended him to Adams.⁴⁶ Upon learning of White's appointment, Virginian William Heth, who served under Washington during the harsh winter at Valley Forge, wrote to Washington castigating Adams's decision as a mistake that would "keep many an old soldier out of service"—Heth among them—because scores of officers would refuse to serve alongside White, much less under him. White's behavior during the revolution, according to Heth,

only served to prove that he was totally unfit for command, or for any thing else, but to dress, and parade thro' the Country. Great imbecility of mind, & frivoloty of character, were not all that he was charged with: for I have had it from good authority that Colo. [William Augustine] Washington while serving with him in So. Carolina, charged him publickly with being a liar, and actually seperated from the regiment. I knew but little of the man myself; but fame spoke so freely of him as an Officer, as to impress me with a strong contempt for his character. Believe me, Sir, if the President can with propriety give him a hint to resign the sooner it is done, the better.⁴⁷

Washington, in turn, minced no words, writing directly to Secretary of War James McHenry, Secretary of State Timothy Pickering, and President Adams. To McHenry he wrote:

But, in the name of the Army, what could have induced the nomination of Walton White to the rank of Brigadier [?]. . . . Of all the characters in the Revolutionary Army, I believe one more obnoxious to the Officers who composed it could not have been hit upon for a Genl Officer than White—especially among those to the

⁴⁶ For a list of Adams's nominees for officers of the provisional army, including White as a brigadier general, John Adams to the US Senate, July 18, 1798, Founders Online, National Archives, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-2740>. On the politicization of appointments to the provisional army, see William J. Murphy Jr., "John Adams: The Politics of the Additional Army, 1798–1800," *New England Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (June 1979): 234–49. On the quasi-war in New Jersey, see Ryan Radice, "For the Defense of the Liberties and Independence of the United States': Remembering a Forgotten Militia Post and Quasi-War Cantonment in Plainfield, New Jersey," Part 1, *New Jersey Studies* 8, no. 2 (Summer 2022): 74–103, <https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v8i2.286>; Part 2, *New Jersey Studies* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2023): 68–102, <https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v9i1.309>.

⁴⁷ William Heth to George Washington, August 14, 1798, Founders Online, National Archives, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/06-02-02-0421>.

Southward where he was best known, & celebrated for nothing but frivolity—dress—empty shew—& something worse—in short for being a notorious L—r.⁴⁸

McHenry acknowledged Washington's misgivings but explained that "White had been pressed upon the President by strong and influential characters."⁴⁹ The quasi-war did not become a real war, and the provisional army was never called into service and was disbanded in 1800. White attained the rank of brigadier general in a war that was never fought.

In 1801, Governor Joseph Bloomfield appointed White a surrogate for the Middlesex County court, a position that permitted him to earn fees when citizens filed wills and contracts, but he lost his job as tax collector for the Port of New Brunswick in March 1802 when Thomas Jefferson replaced him with Andrew Lyle, a loyal Republican. Jefferson stated bluntly to Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin that White's departure "will be no loss to the public."⁵⁰ Owing more than \$70,000 to out-of-state creditors, White filed for bankruptcy in 1802, initiating one of the largest proceedings under the short-lived Bankruptcy Act of 1800, which was passed to remedy some of the economic havoc of the 1790s by providing greater protection to commercial debtors. In the US District Court for the District of New Jersey, Judge Robert Morris presided over the final dissolution of White's estate. White and Morris were both grandsons of Lewis Morris, as well as longtime residents of New Brunswick. Among his many debts, White owed £12,000 to Judge Morris, who was preparing to sue White in state court to recover this debt. White made overtures

⁴⁸ George Washington to James McHenry, September 14, 1798, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/06-02-02-0474>. Washington levied the same complaints about White to Timothy Pickering. GW to Timothy Pickering, September 9, 1798, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/06-02-02-0464>. GW to John Adams, September 25, 1798, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/06-03-02-0015>.

⁴⁹ James McHenry to George Washington, September 19, 1798, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/06-03-02-0007>.

⁵⁰ Joseph Bloomfield to AWW, November 4, 1801, White papers (RU), Box 3, Folder 41; Thomas Jefferson to the Senate, March 10, 1802, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-37-02-0035>; TJ to Albert Gallatin, August 14, 1801, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-35-02-0060>.

to Judge Morris in December 1801 and prudently settled his debt with the judge before entering federal bankruptcy proceedings.⁵¹ This settlement, which raises evident ethical and legal questions about conflict of interest on Morris's part, left White much less money with which to repay his out-of-state creditors.⁵²

His fortune and reputation depleted, White, age 52, died after a brief illness on February 10, 1803, and was buried in the graveyard at Christ Episcopal Church in New Brunswick. His widow, Margaret, and daughter, Eliza White Evans, petitioned Congress repeatedly for decades to recoup some of the money White had lent to the revolutionary cause, filing claims in 1818, 1824, 1836, and 1838. Margaret Ellis White did not remarry. She and her daughter, Eliza Evans, filed claims in 1854 and 1859 seeking a substantial sum of \$3,750 plus 51 years' interest (from 1787 to 1838) to settle her 1838 claim that White was owed compensation for his service and expenses during the revolution, but Congress declined to pay these claims.⁵³

⁵¹ On December 31, 1801, Judge Morris wrote to White to say he was "sensibly impressed" by White's "polite advance" that morning and accepted "the Gen'l's invitation of commencing the New Year on terms of harmony." Lewis Morris to AWW, December 31, 1801, Evans papers (RPI), Box 27, Folder 28. "First Notice in the Case of Anthony Walton White, Bankrupt," *Mercantile Advertiser* (New York, NY), November 3, 1802, 4. Congress repealed the Bankruptcy Act of 1800 in 1803.

⁵² Mark Lender, "*This Honorable Court: The United States District Court for the District of New Jersey, 1789–1800* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 38–39. On bankruptcy law, see Bruce Mann, *Republic of Debtors: Bankruptcy Law in the Age of American Independence* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009). Details of White's bankruptcy case seem not to be extant. The Historical Society of the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey, "The archives of the court, so far indexed or catalogued, do not indicate that any dockets or papers have survived to reflect the proceedings under the 1800 statute." See "The Bankruptcy Court in New Jersey," The Historical Society of the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey, <https://www.historynjdc.org/history/the-bankruptcy-court-in-new-jersey>.

⁵³ Congress passed several pension acts for Revolutionary War veterans in the nineteenth century. On the long-running effort by White's widow and daughter to gain payment for the debts that White incurred during the revolution, see Margaret White's 1818 application, White papers (RU), Box 3, Folder 42. *Journal of the Senate of the United States of America*, January 30, 1818, 128; Joseph Bloomfield, "Papers of Mrs. White" (a detailed list of Margaret White's documents in support of AWW's claims against the US Government), January 28, 1818, White papers (NJHS), Folder 7; Joseph Bloomfield to Margaret White, March 14, 1818, White papers (RU), Box 1, Folder 2; Henry Clay to Margaret White, January 6, 1824, James F. Hopkins, ed., *The Papers of Henry Clay, vol. 3: Presidential Candidate, 1821–1824* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1963), 63–64; Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application File W. 6477, Anthony Walton White, Continental New Jersey and USA, National Archives Catalog, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/111681818>; H. L. Pinckney to Eliza Evans, May 9, 1836, White papers (NJHS), Folder 3; William Randolph to Margaret White, November 11, 1836, White papers (RU), Box 3, Folder 42; An Act for the relief of the representatives of Col. Anthony Walton White, May 9, 1838. 25th Congress, 2d sess. May 28, 1838; Samuel Burch to Eliza Evans, May 30, 1838, White papers (RU), Box 3, Folder 44; S.R. 317, *Congressional*

When Margaret Ellis White died in 1850, she was not buried next to her late husband, but alongside her beloved sister, Mary, on a plot of land Mary had owned overlooking the Raritan River. Margaret directed her daughter Eliza to inscribe on the tombstone, “Here lie two solitary strangers from South Carolina.”⁵⁴ The heartbreaking tale of Mary Ellis, who died in 1828, became well-known New Jersey lore. The young woman fell in love with a sailor, who went to sea but promised to marry her on his return. Mary ventured daily to the high ground overlooking the Raritan River to search for his ship, but in vain. Today, the sisters’ final resting place above the banks of the Raritan River is surrounded by a sea of asphalt and SUVs, lying smack in the middle of the parking lot behind the AMC movie theater on US Highway 1 (Image 4).⁵⁵



Image 4. Gravesite of Margaret Ellis White and Mary Ellis, in the parking lot behind the AMC movie theater, New Brunswick, New Jersey. Photo by the author.

Globe, April 19, 1854 (33rd Congress, 1st sess.), 929, *Congressional Globe*, May 5, 1854, 1108; H.R. 932, 35th Congress, 2nd sess., March 3, 1859.

⁵⁴ Eliza M. Evans to Walton White Evans, [n.d., 1850], Evans papers (RPI), Box 1, Folder 47.

⁵⁵ On Mary Ellis, see Lorena Cole, “The Legend of Mary Ellis Who Still Awaits Her Betrothed,” *Sunday Times (Home News)*, October 17, 1926, 12. For a detailed history of the gravesite, see Peter Mickulas, “Findings—Historical and Genealogical Research, Loew’s Cemetery Plot,” New Brunswick Free Public Library Archive, http://www.nbfplarchive.org/nbrevitalization/files/nb_images/belvin_photos/people/mary_ellis/mary_ellis_peter_mickulas_crcg_2005.pdf.

Scion of an elite family, Anthony Walton White cobbled together a career by gaining appointment to a series of offices in the US Army and in government. An eager and ambitious volunteer in the American Revolution, he tasted defeat and faced several inquiries into his conduct and leadership. As a member of America's comparatively small political and economic elite, he retained influential allies who assisted him throughout his life, but also tarnished his reputation in the eyes of many influential Americans. His performance during the revolution earned George Washington's contempt, and his conduct during the Whiskey Rebellion earned the rebels' hatred. Born to wealth and privilege, he squandered his sizable fortune and his wife's inheritance through a series of disastrous investments, went bankrupt, and died nearly penniless not far from the beautiful riverfront estate on which he was born. Well born and well connected, White relied on influential patrons to gain positions in the military and in government, but no patron, however powerful, could shield him from the vagaries of fortune and his personal foibles.

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