



## General Putnam

Schooner

New York Navy Schooner

(1) Captain Thomas Cregier

24 March 1776-10 October 1776

(2) First Lieutenant Thomas Quigley

10 October 1776-25 October 1776

Commissioned/First Date:

17 April 1776/March 1776

Out of Service/Cause:

[25] October 1776/sold out of service

Tonnage:

Battery:

Date Reported:

Number/Caliber	Weight	Broadside
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Total:

Broadside:

Swivels: twelve

Crew:

30 [total]

Description:

Low laying schooner

Officers:

(1) First Lieutenant Thomas Quigley, 24 March 1776-25 October 1776, (2) Second Lieutenant David Walker, 1 May 1776-25 October 1776, (3) Master Eliakim Littell, 24 April 1776-25 October 1776, (4) First Mate Cornelius French, 24 April 1776-25 October 1776, Surgeon John James Boyd, 24 April 1776-25 October 1776

Cruises:

Numerous short cruises off the New Jersey coast May-October 1776

Prizes:

Actions:

(1) Action with *Merlin*, 5 July 1776

Comments:

New York Navy Schooner *General Putnam* was purchased in March 1776 by the New York Marine Committee.<sup>1</sup> She was placed under command of Captain Thomas Cregier, who was commissioned on 17 April 1776 by the unusual method of executing a Continental privateer bond and being issued a Continental privateer commission, with a \$5000 bond.<sup>2</sup> In April 1776, Washington asked for the loan of the New York Navy vessels for use in the defense of New York. After some disagreement about terms and conditions, the *General Putnam* (along with the *General Schuyler*) were turned over to him on 10 May 1776. The New York Provincial Congress approved orders on 10 May 1776 instructing Cregier to contact Washington for his orders, and place himself under Washington's command.<sup>3</sup> Washington immediately ordered him to join Tupper's fleet.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile the *General Putnam*'s officers and men were being recruited. Captain Cregier and First Lieutenant Thomas Quigley reported aboard on 24 March 1776, with Master Eliakim Littell, First Mate Cornelius French, and Surgeon John James Boyd arriving on 24 April. Second Lieutenant David Walker entered aboard on 1 May 1776. Petty officers were also being enlisted: the gunner and the cook arrived on 24 April, the boatswain on the 26th, the carpenter on the 29th, and the steward on 1 May. Sailors were being recruited as well, five enlisted on the 24th, two on 1 May, four on 6 May, and eight on 9 May. By 10 May, the day the New York authorities ordered Cregier to follow Washington's orders there was a crew of thirty aboard the schooner. They received one month's pay that day, less the advance money paid on enlistment.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that the captain and lieutenants were paid at the same rate as captains and lieutenants in the Continental Navy.

One bill from *General Putnam*'s fitting out, a carpentry bill for £13.16.10 paid on 13 May 1776, is of interest as showing the schooner carried some cohorn.<sup>6</sup>

By 16 May the *General Putnam* had joined Tupper's flotilla at Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Cregier was gone to New York at that time to procure some articles for the schooner.<sup>7</sup> On 22 May four muskets were obtained for the use of the *General Putnam*.<sup>8</sup> The same day Captain William Rogers of the New York

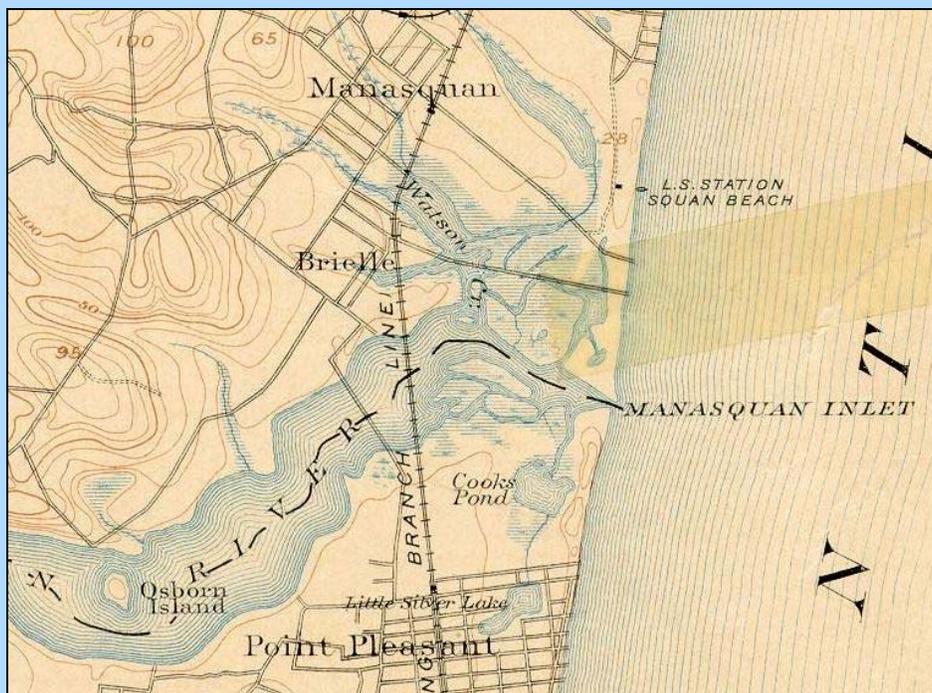
Navy Sloop *Montgomery*, reporting from Little Egg Harbor, New Jersey, noted that he had expected to find the *General Putnam* on “this coast” but had heard nothing of her.<sup>9</sup>

On 24 May Colonel Tupper recommended a deployment of his light craft to Major General Putnam, his immediate commander. After his approval the schooner *General Putnam*, with two whale boats was ordered to cover the northern coast of New Jersey, down to Shrewsbury Inlet, Shark River, and Cranberry Inlet, and even down to Egg-Harbor. This was a range of nearly 140 miles from Sandy Hook. Cregier was to intercept inbound British shipping and protect inbound American vessels with ammunition. In case the schooner was over matched there were several inlets to run into for safety.<sup>10</sup>

Cregier reported to Thomas Randall, a member of the New York Provincial Convention, on 5 June 1776. The *General Putnam* was then at Shrewsbury Inlet. Cregier had sailed the day after his previous report and stood to the south under very little wind for nearly the whole day. At 1600 “it blowing very hard to the south-southwest, making a heavy sea, I was obliged to bear away for this inlet, where I have remained, on account of the wind blowing at east-southeast, which occasioned a very high sea on the bar.” At 0800, perhaps the next day, “we saw a sail to the southeast, standing in for the Hook; at ten A. M. concluded with the Captain of the whale-boats, being twelve in number, to tow me out; the tide being flood, with little wind, we came to the bar, where we found a high surf. The Captain of the whale-boats concluded their boats could not get out over the bar. As the sail we saw was well in with the land, and at the same time the large tender near the ship, which we then judged to be a ship of war, I then thought it proper to come to anchor, and at the same time I went to view the fleet at Sandy-Hook, where we found the ships of war, viz: the Phenix, Mercury, and Lively, with three other small ships, a brig, one schooner, one sloop, and four tenders. By the time I was coming away the above-mentioned ship came to anchor, which I plainly perceived to be a large frigate of thirty-six guns. This intelligence you may depend on. I am resolved to sail from this the first opportunity.”<sup>11</sup>

After this business, Cregier received some information from a man who was aboard a vessel driven ashore by a British frigate on 11 June. According to the informant there were several inbound vessels for the Americans coming to Barnegat Inlet. Cregier then proceeded there and “cruised in and out of Barnegat five days . . .” After that *General Putnam* sailed south for Egg Harbor. On the way “here from Barnegat, I saw three sail of vessels plying to the northeast - they appeared to be three ships. I immediately hauled my wind to speak to them, the wind about-north by west. After standing for them some time, I found one of them to be a very large ship, and was soon convinced she was a ship of war of about fifty guns. I then bore away for this harbour, where I arrived this morning.” *General Putnam* arrived at Little Egg Harbor on 20 June.<sup>12</sup>

*General Putnam* was at sea again on 5 July 1776. Cregier reported that “on the fifth of this instant being about 9 miles distance to the SE. of Egg Harbour, I saw two sail standing to the northward; I then gave them chase; the wind being light, I got out my oars, and rowed until three o’clock in the afternoon, when the wind came to the SW.; after eleven hours’ chase, I drew near them; I then shortened sail and got all clear for action . . .”<sup>13</sup>



Squam Beach (also Squam Beach) from an 1880s topographical map. The beach line will hardly be accurate for the 1770s, as the New Jersey shore is in nearly constant motion.

Cregier was about to get a very nasty surprise. He had been tailing HM Sloop *Merlin*, Commander

William C. Burnaby, a 302-ton ship, armed with eighteen 6-pounders and fourteen swivel guns and a nominal crew of 130 men.<sup>14</sup> *Merlin* was escorting a prize ship from the south to New York. According to *Merlin*'s logbook, she was sailing up the coast about seven miles offshore under a light breeze on the afternoon of 5 July.<sup>15</sup>

Cregier continues his account: "at 4 in the afternoon I got within 170 yards of the sternmost ship in order to board her, but she putting her helm hard a starboard, hauled up her ports, gave me her whole of ten guns: she proved to be a ministerial pirate of 20 guns. I hauled my wind in for the shore, she did the same, and continued firing without intermission. When I was within 400 yards of the shore, I made a small tack, but she being very near me I received her whole broadside, at which I hove about and ran ashore, about 40 yards from Squam Inlet. I then got all my arms and ammunition on the beach, and the ship came to anchor about a quarter of a mile from us, and began a heavy firing upon us; at last, she hoisted out two barges and manned them with about 50 men; but as they approached the shore, we handled them so roughly that they were obliged to make a scandalous retreat. She continued her fire until dark, when she weighed, expending upwards of 400 weight of powder. I had 17 large holes in my mainsail, and some shot in my hull."<sup>16</sup> *Merlin*'s log states that "at 4 P M gave chase to a Privateer drove her ashore & fired a Number of Guns at her at 5 came too off the Southmost Wood Lands"<sup>17</sup>

When the tide came up Cregier got the *General Putnam* afloat and took her into Squan Inlet. He intended to repair "as soon as possible, and hope to pay the pirates for their usage."<sup>18</sup> Cregier went to Shewsbury town on 9 July to post his report and obtain certain items for his schooner. Among these were "spirits for my people, who (some of them) are sick drinking the bad water that is on this coast."<sup>19</sup>

For the next four weeks the *General Putnam* stayed in the immediate area. Surgeon Boyd made a trip to New York and returned with a letter from Thomas Randall about 25 July. Randall advised Cregier to join Captain William Rogers in the *Montgomery*, but Cregier, reporting on 23 August 1776, learned he had gone "up the Sound" to refit. *General Putnam* stayed where she was with Cregier hoping to pick off some of the incoming shipping. Cregier reported that "There appeared six sail one day, and seven sail the other day, but they are all large ships under strong convoys, so there was no doing any thing with them, and every day frigates cruising along this coast. Three days ago fell in with a ship and sloop tender, about ten guns, the frigate being about a mile and a half from the sloop, and was determined to give the sloop battle, but could not bring her to battle."<sup>20</sup>

Cregier also assisted in securing prizes captured by American privateers. He reported that "I have been assisting in bringing in this and Egg Harbour Inlet, 2 prizes taken from the West Indies by 2 different privateers; one of those prizes I had much trouble with, and, in short, was three days at work getting the other into port, which lay aground on the bar of Egg Harbour, a ship of three hundred tons, laden with sugar, rum and molasses, bound to Bristol."<sup>21</sup>

*General Putnam* had now been deployed nearly four months. Cregier concluded his letter to Randall with a state of his schooner: "My provisions grow short, and in a little time shall want a new supply, unless I fall in with some of the enemy's store vessels; but as for that I can not promise myself, but will discharge my duty in the search of them; and as for being supplied by the way of Long island, I believe there is no prospect, as I do imagine the troops intend landing on the said island. My bread is but very indifferent, and does not keep good, although it is aired every fortnight, yet it moulds fast, and believe it never was made of sound flour. You know I laid in only four months' provisions, and you may judge how long what remains will serve me; my people begin to want many articles, and I would be glad if you will send me some cash, as I may furnish them with a little. I have advanced of my own cash to the officers and men, thirty-nine pounds. The custom out of Philadelphia, is to advance half of their wages monthly, and beg you will send me whatever you think proper, and charge the same to me." Cregier sent forward this letter by First Lieutenant Quigley.<sup>22</sup>

By now the *General Putnam* had moved to Cranberry Inlet. After Quigley departed with Cregier's report and before he returned, dissension arose among the crew. When Cregier ordered the crew to prepare to sail the crew informed him "they were determined not to sail under his Command, and requested that they might be permitted to Petition the Congress for a Discharge from the vessel, on acct of his bad- conduct which he did not grant." Instead Cregier left the *General Putnam*. Quigley returned aboard without any knowledge of the trouble. Quigley reported to the New York Marine Committee on 4 September 1776 on what happened next: "On my requesting to way the anchor in order to go out, they one and all acquainted me it was their Determined Resolution never to act in the Schooner while he had the Command of her, upon which I have thought fit to grant them the liberty to Petition and send it by the bearer of this Letter, as I imagine that the Capt will not inform you of these Disturbances, have thought to acquaint you in this manner and as he is not Expected back under Eight or ten Days should be glad you would write me as soon as possible and let me know in what manner you think it most prudent for me to act."<sup>23</sup>

The crew drew up a petition and sent it to the New York Marine Committee. It is a most interesting document, and was signed by twenty-two of the crew. None of the commissioned officers, nor the Master, signed the petition. The crew began by complaining of Cregier's inactivity:

"That we have been four months in the service of the American States, on board the schooner General

Putnam, during which time we have not been to sea but eleven days, all the rest of the time we have spent inactively at the head of inlets, five or six miles from the mouths thereof, from whence, at any emergency, we could not put out without great difficulty, and often not at all. That we have at sundry times lain a week, sometimes longer, in an inlet; and in one we have lain at anchor, four or five miles from the mouth, a full month, without ever attempting to go out, or scarcely offering to send any person to look out. That numbers of vessels have passed and repassed without our endeavouring to speak them, notwithstanding it was the opinion of the officers we had several opportunities very favourable. That with our commander, Thomas Cregier on board, we have not been out of this inlet in seven weeks. . .”<sup>24</sup>

There followed complaints about Cregier’s behavior:

“That our said commander hath several times insulted the officers when they have candidly advised him, and gave them to understand that their business was only to answer a question when asked, and not attempt giving advice. That in correcting the people for slight or no offences, he hath used unlawful weapons; once presenting a pistol to the breast of one Byrns for only requesting to know what his stated allowance was, and swearing by God he would blow a ball through him. At another time, with a large hickory club, striking one Bell on the head and much wounding him, for what, in our opinion, scarcely appeared a crime. That in no one thing has he complied with the resolves of the Congress, his whole conduct being one series of folly, vice, and inconsistencies, selling the most scandalous examples to the people, swearing, lying, and frequenting the company of the most contemptible of women, presenting the private property of others to them. Also at sundry times giving the ship’ s and cabin stores away. We are sorry to have occasion to lay these charges against our commander; but, black as they are, they can be proved by the journals of the officers and the evidence of the most respectable persons in these parts. That, by these means, he hath rendered himself despicable to every man on board; has greatly dissatisfied every friend of the cause, and become the derision of its foes. . .”<sup>25</sup>

Finally, the crew demanded Cregier’s being cashiered from the service:

“That we cannot with honour serve any longer under the command of the said Thomas Cregier. That it is our sincere opinion (with him as our commander) we have not done the least service to our country, and the season of the year being so far advanced, we humbly conceive the vessel unfit to be continued in the service, she being weakened, and consequently would endanger our lives in a gale of wind; besides, she leaks so that not a man in the hold can lay dry in the cabins. And, at the same time, we solemnly declare our ardent desire to exert our utmost abilities in defence of our distressed country in any station where there is a probability of doing it, and profess ourselves fully satisfied with the conduct of our Lieutenant, Mr. Quigley, and the officers in general. And though we confess it would be most agreeable to have a discharge from this vessel, yet, if your honourable House should think proper to continue us therein, (as long as the season will admit,) under the command of Mr. Quigley, or any other person you shall appoint, except the said Thomas Cregier, we shall cheerfully comply; for we beg leave to assure you that we glory in yielding obedience to your commands; but humbly request, for the honour and interest of our country and ourselves, that the said Thomas Gregier may be cashiered. . . .”<sup>26</sup>

Randall had received this letter by 7 September, when he forwarded it to the New York Convention. Randall noted that he feared the complaints were “too true.” Randall suggested that Quigley be promoted to Captain.<sup>27</sup> Cregier was in Fishkill on 24 September, where he was interviewed by the Committee of Safety. He told the Committee that the *General Putnam* was very much out of repair and recommended that she be discharged as winter was approaching. The Committee directed Cregier to await the meeting of the full Convention.<sup>28</sup>

On 26 September, finding the New York Provincial Convention was unable to meet, Cregier went to his home in Kingsbridge to await further orders. He left behind a lengthy letter giving the status of the schooner and the crew, and defending his conduct. Cregier, regarding the schooner and crew said:

“I must, in the first place, acquaint you that my provisions being expended, having not more on board than will support the company about fifteen days; in the next place, my vessel being very small and low in the water, my greatest ordnance being twelve swivel-guns, the shrouds very old and not trustworthy, my best bower cable being very poor, the vessel very weak and leaky, which weakness proceeded from her lying on a bar and heavy surf breaking over her when I was run on shore by a man-of-war, the people much exposed when under sail, or even in hard rains the water pouring into their cabins, which prevents them of lying into their beds, (diligent search has been made in order to stop the leaks, but all to no purpose,) daily complaints being made by my people in regard to the vessel’ s condition, and the season of the year advancing towards cold and stormy weather; this, gentlemen, is certainly the condition of the vessel; the people almost naked, having no shoes nor stockings, and the most part of them not the second shirt to their backs; no money has been advanced to them but from my own private purse; no fresh meat allowed, although I have applied for it; no rum allowed them, which has occasioned much disturbance on board; they have demanded an allowance of half pint of rum per day, which is allowed the men in the Continental fleet, and insist upon it that the Provincial Congress gives that allowance.”<sup>29</sup>

As to his conduct, Cregier wrote: “A riot was made just before I left the vessel in regard to their allowance of rum, in which affair. I was obliged to make use of my authority amongst some of the principal ringleaders, upon which some of them have undertaken to complain of my conduct to your

Honours by letter. I never heard that the conduct of a commander was to be taken notice of by a report made by a common Boatswain, Carpenter, or Gunner, and men who sacrifice every thing that is dear to them for a single can of grog; men whom I have picked up and put in office on purpose to have the vessel manned, and as the vessel is but very small I was glad to pick up any trash. I am very clear you will not find any principal officers' names in that complaint; they are men of good families and characters, hearty in the cause of liberty; if such men were to complain of my conduct, I confess I ought to stand corrected. Perhaps the names of my chief officers you would be glad to know: my chief Lieutenant is Thomas Quigley, David Walker is my Second Lieutenant, Eliakim Little is the Master, and Cornelius French is my Mate, . . .”<sup>30</sup>

Cregier then recommended that “and upon the whole I would recommend it to your honourable House to give directions to lay the vessel up as unfit for any further service this season, as I look upon keeping her any longer in commission will only be a great expense, without the gleam of any profit or service. As for my part, I am determined not to enjoy a commission unless I can be of service to my country; for I should, on that part of the coast, where the vessel is, only be picking the publick's pocket, as nothing is to be met with there but frigates, sloops of war, and large tenders, which we are not able to engage. . . . The accounts of the vessel should be settled and the people paid off, which matter I leave to be determined by your Honours . . .”<sup>31</sup>

Randall wrote to Quigley on 1 October 1776, advising him to keep a lookout for enemy vessels. Quigley reported on 6 October from Cranberry Inlet. The *General Putnam* had chased a large snow to within a short distance of Sandy Hook, but two enemy tenders came out and the schooner broke off the chase. A brig was sighted soon after and chased for several hours off Cranberry Inlet, but a British frigate began chasing the *General Putnam*, which then returned to the inlet. A third vessel could not be chased, as the wind was blowing hard to cross the bar. Quigley took the opportunity to request supplies, for there was only three days' supply of meat left. As for the crew “We have not above four foremast men that is able to stand their watch upon deck for want of shoes and other clothing; therefore they beg you would endeavour to give us some speedy relief, either by sending us some money or otherwise as you shall think most expeditious. I had a letter from the captain of the same date as yours, but he has not mentioned any certain time of his being on board, which makes me conclude that it will not be very soon, as he is no great starter.”<sup>32</sup>

On 7 October 1776 the New York Committee of Safety, after hearing a committee report on this affair, ordered the *General Putnam* sold and the crew paid off from the proceeds.<sup>33</sup> On 10 October 1776 Randall informed the Committee of Safety that he had received a letter from Quigley stating that the crew needed provisions and necessities.<sup>34</sup> On 25 October the crew was discharged and paid off. The entire payroll amounted to £545.4.6.<sup>35</sup> By 5 November 1776 the vessel had been sold and the Committee of Safety was attempting to settle with Quigley the accounts for the vessel, hindered by lack of paperwork.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paullin, *Navy of the American Revolution*, 471, 472 and 472n2 citing Journal of the New York Committee of Safety, 25 April 1776

<sup>2</sup> Paullin, *Navy of the American Revolution*, 472, 473n1 citing the Journal of the New York Committee of Safety, 19 April 1776; Force, *American Archives*, Series 4, 5:1450

<sup>3</sup> Paullin, *Navy of the American Revolution*, 473-474 and 474n1 citing the Journal of the New York Committee of Safety 24 April and 10 May 1776; Force, *American Archives*, Series 4, 5:1500; NDAR, “Journal of the New York Provincial Congress,” 5:33

<sup>4</sup> NDAR, “Lieutenant Colonel Robert Hanson Harrison to Captain Thomas Cregier,” 5:33; Force, *American Archives*, Series 4, 6:410

<sup>5</sup> NDAR, “A List of the Officers, Seamen and Marines, with their Times of Entrance on Board the {new York Armed} Schooner [*General Putnam*],” 5:32

<sup>6</sup> NDAR, “Bill of William Smith against the New York Armed Schooner *General Putnam*,” 5:12-13

<sup>7</sup> NDAR, “Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Tupper to George Washington,” 5:123-126

<sup>8</sup> NDAR, “Journal of the New York Provincial Congress,” 5:202

<sup>9</sup> NDAR, “Captain William Rogers to the New York Provincial Congress,” 5:204-205

<sup>10</sup> Force, *American Archives*, Series 4, 6:563; NDAR, “Major General Israel Putnam to George Washington,” 5:231-232

<sup>11</sup> Force, *American Archives*, Series 4, 6:714-715

<sup>12</sup> NDAR, “Captain Thomas Cregier to Thomas Randall,” 5:645 and notes

<sup>13</sup> NDAR, “Captain Thomas Cregier to Thomas Randall,” V, 991-992

<sup>14</sup> Winfield, *British Warships in the Age of Sail 1714-1792*, 276

<sup>15</sup> NDAR, “Journal of H.M. Sloop *Merlin*, Captain William C. Burnaby,” 5:920

<sup>16</sup> NDAR, “Captain Thomas Cregier to Thomas Randall,” V, 991-992

<sup>17</sup> NDAR, “Journal of H.M. Sloop *Merlin*, Captain William C. Burnaby,” 5:920

<sup>18</sup> NDAR, “Captain Thomas Cregier to Thomas Randall,” V, 991-992

<sup>19</sup> Force, *American Archives*, Series 5, 1:141

<sup>20</sup> NDAR, “Captain Thomas Cregier to Thomas Randall,” 6:284-286

<sup>21</sup> NDAR, “Captain Thomas Cregier to Thomas Randall,” 6:284-286

<sup>22</sup> NDAR, “Captain Thomas Cregier to Thomas Randall,” 6:284-286

<sup>23</sup> NDAR, “Lieutenant Thomas Quigley to Thomas Randall,” 6:680

<sup>24</sup> Force, *American Archives*, Series 5, 1:537; NDAR, “Crew of the Schooner *General Putnam* to the New York Convention,” 6:680-682

<sup>25</sup> Force, *American Archives*, Series 5, 1:537; NDAR, “Crew of the Schooner *General Putnam* to the New York Convention,” 6:680-682

<sup>26</sup> Force, *American Archives*, Series 5, 1:537; NDAR, "Crew of the Schooner *General Putnam* to the New York Convention," 6:680-682

<sup>27</sup> Force, *American Archives*, Series 5, 2:215

<sup>28</sup> NDAR, "Journal of the New York Committee of Safety," 6:973

<sup>29</sup> Force, *American Archives*, Series 5, 2:553; NDAR, "Captain Thomas Cregier to the New York Committee of Safety," 6:1007-1008

<sup>30</sup> Force, *American Archives*, Series 5, 2:553; NDAR, "Captain Thomas Cregier to the New York Committee of Safety," 6:1007-1008

<sup>31</sup> Force, *American Archives*, Series 5, 2:553; NDAR, "Captain Thomas Cregier to the New York Committee of Safety," 6:1007-1008

<sup>32</sup> NDAR, "Lieutenant Thomas Quigley to Thomas Randall," 6:1142-1143

<sup>33</sup> NDAR, "Journal of the New York Committee of Safety," 6:1152

<sup>34</sup> Force, *American Archives*, Series 5, 2:972

<sup>35</sup> NDAR, "Pay Roll of the New York State Schooner *General Putnam*," 6:1413-1414

<sup>36</sup> Force, *American Archives*, Series 5, 3:285

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