



Episode 9, 2003: Revolutionary War Poem Salem, Oregon

Gwen: This episode comes from Oregon and our first investigation begins in Salem.

Elyse: The year is 1780. The Revolutionary War has been underway for five years. In a dark prison cell, an American prisoner of war writes a heartfelt poem. In seven passionate verses, he tells the story of the ongoing war and laments his own sad fate. Oregon became a state 76 years after American independence. It's the last place you'd expect to find a Revolutionary War artifact. But a man here in Salem believes he's found a poem that gives one man's unique account of the war that shaped our nation. Jim Clark is a retired businessman who has one special passion.

Jim: I traveled the United States and went to a lot of historical sites.

Gwen: During one of Jim's travels in 1977, he purchased an antique trunk filled with old American history books. In a compartment underneath the books, Jim made a discovery.

Jim: And I saw this, what appeared to be a handwritten document that was obviously very old. It was really exciting, you know. It was like finding a little treasure, like a little piece of history. That's, I guess, what makes it so special to me and that's why I've hung on to it for 25 years.

Elyse: Jim has always wondered, who wrote the poem and why? I'm Elyse Luray, and this is Gwen Wright. We've come to Salem, Oregon, to investigate Jim's find. Hi. It's a beautiful home.

Jim: Well, thank you. When I first found the poem, you know, I didn't know what to think. I didn't know what it was, but when I started reading it and, you know, that first line, "Come all you bold Americans," I thought, well, maybe it's something from like the civil war even. And then after reading it, it became clear to me that this was a document written by a man who was in prison during the Revolutionary War. And it just kind of sent a shiver up my spine.

Elyse: Can I touch it? Do you mind?

Jim: Absolutely. It has a lot of holes in it.

Elyse: Well, that's good, because it shows wear. When you have a document that's not real, they don't often put wear in the right places so one of the good ways to tell if something is real is where the wear is. That's extraordinary. Let's give a listen to it. The first stanza reads,

"Come all you bold Americans wherever you be. Come pity the downfall of poor Daniel Goodhue, whose pleasures are gone and quite flown away for in prison he is cast and therefore to stay."

He's been in prison, we don't know for how long, but here it is at the end. "fini. Mill prison, march 3, 1780." Jim, what exactly can we tell you?

Jim: Well, hopefully you can tell me if this is an authentic document, that if it was written by the hand of Daniel Goodhue in 1780 as it's dated. And who was this man? What was his part in the Revolutionary War?

Elyse: After 25 years of wanting to know, if you're going to find out, you have to give it up. So we'll take it with us. Okay?

Gwen: Jim's poem is a battle by battle personal account of the first years of the Revolutionary War.

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"For those ruffians of Britain's by thousands did come to slay the boys of Boston in the western land. Now the people of America did assemble and agree to drive them from the land that is called liberty."

The poem makes other references to New England, so we've decided to begin our investigation in Boston, Massachusetts.

Elyse: As Gwen sets off to investigate Goodhue, the man, I'm taking the poem to Stewart Whitehurst at the rare manuscripts department of Skinner auction house. I'm hoping he can help me authenticate the poem as 18th century. It's dated 1780, you know, and it feels old to me. It looks period to me, but I need your expert opinion. It's a great first step. Does it feel old? Does it -- does it give you that little tingle?

Stewart: Let's get the light box on. Now, have you looked to see if there's a watermark -- no. You have not. Well, a watermark actually is an indication of who may have made the paper, which can provide very important clues, as to date, authenticity, that sort of thing. Let's look here. Will be something asymmetrical, something different. There it is. See that little shaped half circle there?

Elyse: Absolutely.

Stewart: It's actually a partial watermark.

Elyse: Little half circle. I never would have noticed that.

Stewart: See if we can identify what it might be. And it is indistinguishable. So I don't know if we're going to be able to get much information off of it.

Elyse: Without a watermark, Stewart isn't able to date the paper precisely, but there are other methods. It's dated 1780. Now what you would expect to find on a piece of paper that's made in 1780 is that it's made of what we call laid paper.

Stewart: Okay, now, we're looking for those strong lines that are going vertically. Those are some main chain lines. And then all the smaller cross lines that are going across, that is your absolutely typical pattern that you would expect to find on laid paper.

Elyse: Now, talk to me about the style of the handwriting.

Stewart: There are a couple of affectations that you find, at least in 18th-century writing, that kind of go by the wayside in the 19th century. What appears to be an "f" to our eyes now which is actually an "s," so it looks like, let's see if we can find any one in here. Ah, perfect. Here we go. If you look right here, it says, "Those ruffians." Look at that. See, there it is. Instead of an "s," it actually looks more like an "f." okay, that's -- absolutely. That would be considered a pretty strong 18th century -- that's incredible. All in all, you put the package together, certainly looks like it could be from 1780.

Elyse: That's just what I wanted to hear. Excellent.

Gwen: I'm starting my investigation into our poet at the Massachusetts historical society. I'm hoping their archives hold some evidence about Daniel Goodhue's life. This is volume 6, names f and g, of "Sailors and Soldiers of the Revolutionary War from the Colony of Massachusetts." If Daniel Goodhue was from Massachusetts and he served in the Revolutionary War, his name will be in here.



Ah, here's the page for Goodhues. Immediately, I notice that there are multiple spellings of the name Goodhue and three Goodhues with the first name Daniel. Obviously, it was a fairly common name and there's nothing here that suggests that any of these men were captured and put in a prison. So I don't know if Daniel Goodhue, our poet, is one of these people. I need a different strategy. I'm running out of sources. There may be a reference to Mill Prison in this book, "Mariners of the American Revolution." Here's a note on the prisons where the American rebels were brought. "Mill Prison at Plymouth, England." So the sailors, the American sailors who were captured were taken to England and imprisoned there. So that's one mystery solved. The Mill Prison that our poet speaks of really did exist, but it was about 3,000 miles away across the Atlantic. Now, let me see if Daniel Goodhue is listed here as a sailor who was captured. Here he is. Daniel Goodhue of Ipswich, captured aboard the "Fancy," August 7, 1777. This must be our man. I think we have some important facts in place now. We know that Daniel Goodhue existed. He came from Ipswich, Massachusetts. He was captured aboard the "Fancy" and taken to Mill Prison in Plymouth, England. If Goodhue was captured aboard a ship, then he must have been a sailor. I need to find out more about his service aboard the "Fancy." I've come to the navy history center in Washington, D.C., to consult with the director of the early history branch. I know that Daniel Goodhue was a sailor, so I'm hoping that Dr. Michael Crawford can tell me more about Goodhue's role in the war and how he landed in Mill Prison. He was captured aboard a ship called the "Fancy." do you know something of the history of that ship? Was it one of these early navy ships?

Michael: The "Fancy" was not a continental navy ship. They all had names like "Tyrannicide" or "Defense" or "Revenge" or something like that. "Fancy" is not a warship's name. It's likely it was a privateer. At the start of the war in 1775, general George Washington knew that, in order to defeat the British, he had to assemble a navy out of nothing. So the general commissioned privateers, mainly merchant ships for hire, to attack and seize incoming British supplies and trade. And here Dr. Crawford discovers a record of the British ships captured by Goodhue's privateer.

Michael: The "Brunswick," the "Cleveland," the "Kanoul," the "Dillon," and an unidentified sloop.

Gwen: So with five British ships that she captured, Daniel Goodhue's ship, the "Fancy," made a real contribution to the war effort?

Michael: She really was a successful cruise until she got caught. "Was captured between silly and ushent." On August 6, 1777, Goodhue's ship was 20 miles off the coast of England, preying on British merchant vessels. Two hours before dawn they were spotted by a heavily armed British warship. Vastly overpowered, they had no choice but to flee. A 28-hour chase ensued. The "Fancy" made several desperate attempts to get away, including dumping 9 of its 12 cannons overboard to gain speed. At 8:30 the next morning, they were fired upon. The entire crew abandoned ship and made for the shoreline. But they were soon overwhelmed by British marines. 56 men, including Daniel Goodhue, were captured and taken to Mill Prison, where they joined about 1200 other prisoners of war.

Gwen: Can you give me an overall sense of what conditions were like in Mill Prison?

Michael: It was a hard life. The food was bad. They usually were given bad meat and moldy cheese. Poor food led to bad nutrition, which, given the crowded conditions, also led to disease. So given the disease and the malnutrition and the general conditions, many of the men must have died in prison.

Gwen: Is that right?



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Michael: Death came frequently.

Gwen: So we still don't know if Goodhue survived prison. But we do know that he's from Ipswich, Massachusetts. With Elyse still in New England, we decide the next step is to visit the Ipswich historical society to see if Daniel Goodhue ever returned home.

Elyse: I pull every town record that I can carry and start my search. Okay, the first book is Ipswich Vital Records. Let's see what I can find in here. Here's a list of Ipswich's birth announcements. Ah! "Daniel, December 16, 1759." that means he was 20 years old when he wrote the poem. Next, I'd like to find out when Daniel enlisted. This chapter is called the Revolutionary War, and on the first page, it lists all the people that enlisted on January 24, 1775. And in the top 10 is Daniel. Wow! That means he was 15 years old when he enlisted. That's so young! But that doesn't tell me if Daniel ever returned home from Mill Prison. Is there anything here about life in Ipswich after the war? Ha! Listen to this! "In may, 1787, the 'Hannah,' fitted for a fishing ship, and captain Newman's crew included Daniel Goodhue." That's seven years after he wrote the poem. But he survived. I now have proof that he definitely survived and he came home. With an image of Daniel Goodhue finally beginning to surface, I'm curious to know what his life was like when he returned to Ipswich. Let's see if our friend Daniel got married. Ah! Here it is! "Daniel and Hannah, November 30, 1788." Eight years after he wrote the poem, he got married. And Daniel lived the rest of his life in Ipswich, becoming the captain of his own ship and fathering four children. November 16, 1803, Captain Daniel died. That's 23 years after he wrote the poem.

Gwen: Anxious to tell Jim the news, Elyse and I returned to Oregon. The first thing you asked us to find out was if the document was real. And I can tell you it's definitely 100% authentic 18th century.

Jim: Wonderful. That's exciting. That in itself is exciting. That's great.

Gwen: We also discovered a great deal about Daniel Goodhue. Not only did he exist, and there were a number of people with the name, but the one who was your poet joined the crew of a privateer called the "Fancy" and went to sea to bring down British trading ships. They captured four major British ships, sent them back to Boston, and then perhaps got a bit too sure of their luck and skill, because they were finally captured in 1777, off the shores of England.

Jim: Wow! That's amazing!

Gwen: And three years later, he wrote this poem. So he was still a teenager when in prison and wrote this poem. Incredible. We know for a fact that he did survive Mill Prison. About half the prisoners survived, so it's pretty amazing that he survived. And what he did was, he went home. He went home to his hometown. He went back to the sea for work and then two years later he got married, and he spent the rest of his life in his hometown. Now that you have so much knowledge, here's your poem again.

Jim: Great! You can have it back after 25 years.

Gwen: Well, we have something else we want to give you. It's called, "A Relic of the Revolution." and it's an account of conditions in Mill Prison during the years that Daniel Goodhue was there. And what's I think especially exciting about this, is here we have the crew of the brigantine "Fancy" who were in the prison with him. And they include, here toward the bottom, Daniel Goodhue.

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Jim: I'll be darned! Isn't that wonderful? That's too cool! That's great!

Gwen: We noticed you were a collector of books.

Jim: Oh, yeah, I love old books.

Gwen: Well, this will go on your shelf now.

Jim: It sure will. Thank you very much. It's even got a ship on it. You know, if it wasn't so corny, I'd say, "God bless America." [laughter]

Gwen: You just said it.

Jim: I did.

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