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The Ordeal of Jolley Allen: A Tory Merchant of Boston

Robert J. Cormier*

Jolley Allen was born in Chancery Lane in the Parish of St. Dunston's in West London on 15 April 1716. He was the second of fourteen children of Nathaniel Allen, the commander of a packet ship that sailed between London and Boston. Captain Allen achieved sufficient prestige to have been honored by a visit from King George II, who dined aboard his vessel. A damask table cloth used on that occasion remained in the family for generations. Other articles regularly used at Allen's table were of solid silver.¹

Although Nathaniel continued to travel to England and the West Indies, he emigrated to Boston in 1734, where he became a dry goods merchant. His account books for the period 1746 to 1754 show him dealing in cloth, gloves, buttons, ribbons, needles, velvet, lace, and silk.²

*Robert Cormier was a teacher and director of social studies at Shrewsbury (Massachusetts) High School, who passed away in 2002. He had a keen passion for historical research and his own research frequently centered on the towns in Central Massachusetts where he lived and taught. Bob Cormier he began his professional career teaching at Assumption Preparatory School. He then taught at Grafton High School for twenty-one years before moving to Shrewsbury High School in 1991. In 1994, he became the first public school teacher to be elected to membership in the American Antiquarian Society.

"The Ordeal of Jolley Allen" was a much longer manuscript that Dr. Robert R. Dykstra, emeritus professor of history and public policy at SUNY Albany, edited and revised to article length for the New England Journal of History. Americans think of the Civil War as the war that pitted brothers and friends against one another, but the travails of Jolley Allen illuminate the divisive nature of the American Revolution as well. In telling Allen's story, Cormier clearly demonstrates how the study of local history offers another view of one of the most important events in history, the American Revolution.

The oldest children, Jolley and Nathaniel the younger, remained behind in England. The next oldest, Thomas and Samuel, emigrated with their parents. A fifth son, William, was the first to be born in Boston. Nathaniel and Dorcas Allen continued to have children every year or two from 1735 to 1749. About half of them lived to maturity; the others were laid to rest in Boston's Old Granary Burial Ground.³

Son Thomas Allen made and lost more than one fortune during his mercantile career. After a profitable effort in the West Indies he established himself at New London, Connecticut. Young William became a sailor. Entire years passed during which there was no word from him at all. By the age of twenty Samuel Allen was in his father's service at Boston.⁴

In 1757 Nathaniel retired from the city and bought a ninety-five-acre farm and opened a shop in the village of Shrewsbury, just a bit more than one day's travel from the familiar bustle and fragrance of Boston. In so doing, he took his place among the well-to-do families of the town. Like his next-door neighbor, Nahum Ward, a town founder, Nathaniel owned slaves. One, named Boston, remained with the family for over twenty years.⁵

Nathaniel resumed his commercial activities, with many of the townspeople his customers. He continued dealing in much the same merchandise, evidently maintaining his old connections in Boston. Samuel continued to act as his father's agent in Boston for both commercial and personal needs until Nathaniel's death.⁶

In Shrewsbury the Allens still had two young children at home. Caleb, apprenticed as a brazier, died in Rhode Island in 1774. Lewis Allen continued to live in Shrewsbury. When Nathaniel died in 1770 he inherited a considerable portion of the Allen farm. He continued Nathaniel's commercial ventures, buying and selling through old family contacts in the port towns.⁷

In 1755 Jolley Allen finally decided to leave London to join the rest of the family in Boston. Setting himself up as a merchant, he advertised a wide variety of goods in the newspapers. Often his name appeared in the largest type used in these publications. Prominent ads advised readers that he sold an assortment of English and Indian goods at both wholesale and retail. His inventory generally included readymade clothing for men and women, bulk cloth, bonnets, indigo, crockery, and spices. He just about always featured tea: bohea, souchong, hyson, and green. Ad copy assured customers that the tea and the indigo were guaranteed to be top quality or the cost would be refunded (cheerfully?) by "the said Jolley Allen." A parade of other items--tobacco pipes, playing cards, necklaces and pendants--depended upon availability.⁸

Jolley lived never much more than a quarter mile from Long Wharf. In 1764 he resided near the drawbridge that crossed the canal on North Street, today almost adjacent to the northern flank of Faneuil Hall/Quincy Market. Here, he guaranteed in a postscript to successive ads, "There is no Danger of the Small-Pox at the above Shop." From 1766 until he left Boston, he leased space on the main thoroughfare, modern Washington Street, in a section called Cornhill, halfway between the governor's mansion and the Town House. Today this would be Washington at Bromfield. It was then, and still is, a prime location. By 1772 he had relocated a block farther down the street, still not an important distance from the Town House.⁹

The nature of Jolley Allen's later commitment to the Loyalist cause remains mysterious. Certainly he was an associate of the Reverend Henry Caner of the King's Chapel congregation, who wrote several pamphlets in support of Parliamentary authority. And the Stamp Act protests of 1765 had no apparent impact on Allen. To judge from the volume of his advertising in the weekly *Boston Post-Boy*, it was business as usual. He ran twenty-six advertisements in 1765, thirteen the following year, and sixteen in 1767. These last included

three display ads that covered two-thirds of a page each, unprecedented in the *Post-Boy*. At the same time, no prejudice against him seems to have surfaced; assembled citizens granted him the minor post of hayward at the Boston town meeting in 1766.¹⁰

There came a moment when Jolley Allen might have developed a political stance that would have put him in the company of those enshrined as leaders of the American Revolution. In 1768 Allen joined his fellow merchants in signing a non-importation agreement in response to the hated Townshend Acts passed by Parliament.¹¹ For almost four years thereafter, until March 1772, Jolley consented to stop advertising and promised to limit imports to items vital to fishing. Then everything changed.

At Long Wharf in the autumn of 1772 vigilant representatives of the protesting merchants spied William Burke, Allen's hired man, carting away two chests of tea that had been purchased from Elisha and Thomas Hutchinson, sons of the unpopular Royal governor.¹² This discovery committed Allen to a course that put his family as well as his fortune squarely on the side of the British Crown in its long-simmering quarrel with the colonies.

Before the Townshend Acts boycott, the sons of Governor Thomas Hutchinson had already been making handsome profits selling tea in partnership with their father. They became infamous in their own right for being among twenty-eight merchants who refused to sign the 1768 protest. They began to stockpile the commodity so that they would be ready, as soon as the boycott ended, to provide a ready supply at prices that would be to their advantage.¹³ Although Jolley had been a part of that protest, by 1772 the Allen shop had been so long without goods that it was not even worth advertising in the newspaper. A clandestine source of tea was tempting after such a long drought. It could be procured on the sly if one knew the right people. The Hutchinsons were definitely the right people.

Allen had taken precautions to disguise the purchase. In the short term he was successful in evading outright discovery. It was William Palphrey, John Hancock's chief clerk, who spotted Burke at the wharf. He took note of the figures on the crates, but erred in copying down the wrong numbers. Allen anticipated a prompt visit of the vigilance committee and stripped the casks of their East India Company markings. Nonetheless, Palphrey knew what he had seen, and the full force of boycott pressure followed. By 1773 Allen had moved to his last location, on Marlborough Street opposite the Three Doves. Here, with fewer customers, he supplemented a reduced inventory with services: "genteel Boarding and Lodging for six or eight Persons, [and] Good Stabling for ten Horses and Carriages." Through the next four years he depended upon the patronage of avowed Tories and officers of the British occupation army for the family livelihood. Allen's notoriety eventually became extensive enough to earn the adjective associated with his name, "Black" Jolley Allen.¹⁴

Numerous questions surround Allen's behavior during this volatile period, such as how to account for his flirtation with the Patriot cause, the motive for his politically dangerous commerce with the Hutchinsons, and his failure, once he became a Patriot target, to join those who publicly proclaimed their British loyalty by addressing a farewell to Governor Hutchinson on his departure and formally welcoming his replacement, General Thomas Gage. There seem to be no answers.¹⁵

In April 1775, following the bloody withdrawal of the British from the confrontations at Lexington and Concord, an American army of over twenty thousand blocked all land access to Boston. Among those huddled in Boston were Jolley, now fifty-seven years old, his wife Eleanor, fifty-one, and their seven children, ranging in age from three to eighteen. The town's civilian population melted away from 16,000 to a mere 3,500. Food and fuel supplies, exposed to the mercy of colonial privateers, sold at grossly inflated prices. If that was

not bad enough, smallpox, that recurrent dread of port towns, once again crept its way through the population.¹⁶

Eventually the British military commander, Sir William Howe, had to come to terms with the besiegers' general, George Washington. Howe bargained for a minimum amount of harassment from the Continentals. In return he offered to quit town without burning it to the ground. Just under one thousand civilians prepared to be evacuated to Halifax, Nova Scotia, along with some nine thousand troops.¹⁷

Many Tories, including the Allens, scrambled to assemble their families and possessions in order to leave with the fleet. Jolley managed to hire a sloop, the *Sally*, and paid her captain, Robert Campbell, the outrageous price that could be demanded for evacuation to Halifax. Carting and loading the possessions from the house and shop cost dearly as well.¹⁸

On 14 March 1776 the Allen family, two servants, and eighteen others boarded the *Sally*. In a classic case of hurry up and wait, a two-week delay ensued while the rest of the 80 ships in the *Sally's* squadron prepared to leave as part of the fleet of 170 sailing vessels in this gathering parade of tall ships. On the seventeenth they were towed down below Castle Island and two days later towed further to Nantasket Road. During that time, Captain Campbell continued to disguise what became evident at the crucial moment of departure: he did not have the faintest notion of how to sail. Under the command of their flimflam captain, two collisions with British naval vessels marred the trip out of the harbor itself. With slapstick seamanship that in different circumstances might have been sheer comedy, Jolley and the makeshift crew had to drop anchor three times before joining the fleet. Darkness fell. The distance between the *Sally* and the rest of the convoy stretched and broke, and they found themselves alone somewhere in the stormy waters of Cape Cod Bay.¹⁹

Daybreak confirmed what they had known as they bailed water during the night: they were hopelessly lost. Captain Campbell announced what he spied as a vessel in the distance.

Wrong again. It turned out to be land. They did not know it yet, but they were just off Race Point at Provincetown, the tip of Cape Cod. The last barrel of drinking water had been lost, ice covered the ropes, the sail hung in shreds. The best they could do to save themselves was to get as close to shore as possible and drop anchor. They drifted and waited. Undaunted, Campbell confidently announced that they had arrived at--of all improbable places--Nantucket.²⁰

By the time the rest of the fleet reached Nova Scotia, Jolley and his fellow passengers had been rescued by the inhabitants of Provincetown. Jolley walked alongside as the family rode a dung cart on a three-mile trek through the woods. The destination seemed designed for Tories: a deserted shack that the town had planned to tear down. Its single window had but four panes of glass, two of them broken. It was not much better than being outside, especially when it rained. The arrival of the Tories gave focus for the seething anger that had accumulated toward the Royal government and its troops. Locals made "the famous Jolley Allen, late of Boston," the primary target of abuse. Bad as that might be, it was only with the greatest of difficulty Allen managed to keep the locals from hanging Campbell for bringing such distress upon the unfortunate souls he had tricked on board the *Sally*.²¹

Word of mouth, letters, and newspapers carried the news of the shipwreck around New England. James Warren wrote about the incident to John Adams. Warren, at Watertown, heard that "one of the Tory sloops is ashore on Cape Cod with a large quantity of English goods, and Black Jolly Allen and some other Tories."²²

These misadventures and the miserable circumstances took their toll on Eleanor Allen. Grieving husband and children watched her strength and will to live slip away. She died late on the afternoon of 19 April, the first anniversary of the shots fired at Lexington. It took three days to arrange burial.²³

In some respects the unexpected appearance of the *Sally* and the Allen cargo had been a boon to the people at Provincetown. Jolley's experience in loading and unloading ships led him to estimate that it should have taken three days to offload the sloop. In the three weeks that it actually took systematic pilfering occurred. Some of it was done on the sly, some of it openly. Sympathizers confided to Allen reports of pitched battles among the looters at the beach.²⁴

The *Sally* had cast up the contents of Allen's shop and two warehouses, mostly china, glass, and other ware, as well as his household furniture that alone had cost him over £1,000. All told, the value of his goods was about £3,000 sterling. The town contained no single facility large enough to store the *Sally's* cargo. The selectmen disbursed what remained after the initial looting to private homes and fish houses for safe-keeping.²⁵

In April the government of Massachusetts asserted its interest in the disposition of Jolley's cargo, sending a legislative committee to Provincetown to investigate. According to local selectmen Solomon Cook and Nehemiah Nickerson, much less "embezzling" had taken place than might have been expected. Certainly, they asserted, there was not as much thievery as stated by the refugees. The town submitted to the Massachusetts General Court a claim for unloading and storage against the value of the cargo that amounted to £150. Attempting to protect the financial interest of the town, Cook and Nickerson argued that it would be advantageous to auction the cargo at Provincetown rather than add the expense of shipping it back to Boston. What was not sold at the Cape to defray these costs could be eventually forwarded to Boston and the control of the Court.²⁶

The care and feeding of thirty survivors proved to be a considerable burden on the tiny shore community. Allen disclosed the most troublesome problem as soon as they were rescued. The wife of Daniel Wizzle, a passenger, had contracted smallpox. Subsequently three inhabitants of the

town caught the pox from her, although they recovered. The authorities requisitioned John Burgis's house for a hospital, and then had it burnt as a precaution against spread of the disease. The unfortunate Mrs. Wizzle died, leaving her infant in the care of the community. On another occasion some of the prisoners escaped in a boat, but they were retaken and sent to Truro under the care of Captain Joseph Smith of the seacoast defense unit stationed there.²⁷

Weeks of captivity went by. It was late May before Allen obtained a pass from the Provincetown selectmen to travel to Watertown and appeal to the General Court for some resolution clarifying his status. The authorities allowed Jolley's oldest son Henry to accompany him. The other six children remained as hostages, insuring Allen's return.²⁸

A week of overland travel brought the weary father and son around the 120-mile arc from Provincetown to Boston. The exhausted pair sought refuge in their house, which had been left padlocked before they boarded the *Sally*. It was not locked any more, being occupied by Jolley's barber. For fourteen years he had shaved Jolley. Now he permitted him and Henry to spend two nights in what had been his own house for a fee of eight shillings.²⁹

It was another nine miles to Watertown where the General Court was sitting. Genuinely fearing for their lives, Jolley and Henry made the last leg of the trip in disguise and under the protection of darkness. They arrived at 2:00 a.m. and found shelter near a hedge in a field and slept well into the sunlight at 7:00 a.m.³⁰

"As soon as we made our appearance in the town," Jolley later recalled of its citizens, "they was ready to tear us to pieces." Placed in confinement, father and son remained there for the next two weeks. The government, busy with pressing issues connected with the war, could spare little concern for the fate of a single Tory. Every day Jolley waited from seven in the morning to eight at night on the chance that the General Court would decide his fate. Under the circumstances, he had

good reason to conclude that he would probably end up in the copper mines of Newgate Prison at Simsbury, Connecticut, "a place of punishment they have, where few persons ever live to come out . . . as no daylight is ever seen." He likewise had good reason to expect his children to be sold off into service, just as those of any destitute family. In this case, because they were Tory children, they would be deliberately placed fifty miles apart.³¹

Meanwhile, the city of Boston was getting itself back into some semblance of orderly business. Commerce brought Lewis Allen, Jolley's brother, on a trip from Shrewsbury to Boston. It was routine for Lewis to stop in Watertown and refresh himself and his horse before the last nine miles. Of course, Lewis knew about the shipwreck. The account printed in the *Boston Gazette* on 8 April had been inserted verbatim four days later in the *Massachusetts Spy*, published in Worcester and certainly read in Shrewsbury: "Last Friday . . . Capt. Jolly Allen, late a shop-keeper in Boston (with some other tories besides women and children) in a sloop, ran ashore on the back of Cape Cod; thinking he had got into the Harbour of Halifax. This is a valuable prize, being laden with prize goods and some cash."³² The Shrewsbury Allens--Lewis, Mary, and Dorcas--had to be relieved knowing that the family had been rescued.

Nonetheless, finding his brother and nephew at Watertown genuinely surprised Lewis. Since it appeared that the government might sentence Jolley to the mines, Lewis petitioned the General Court. In his plea he begged that he be allowed to house Jolley and his children. The Court, seemingly pleased to have some alternative to prison, agreed to release them in Lewis's custody, providing they posted a £100 bond guaranteeing that Allen would not leave Worcester County or correspond with enemies of America. Jolley and Henry immediately set out for Shrewsbury.³³

Normally, Jolley would have rented a horse or a chaise for this final trek; Lewis had given him money for this purpose

before he continued on to Boston. But Jolley and Henry thought the better of it and decided that their safest alternative was to walk. Treatment at the hands of people along the way from Provincetown to Boston had made them mindful of the danger of being tarred-and-feathered. As it turned out, the decision not to hire transportation brought no relief from harassment. As they walked along, Allen's notoriety preceded them. No amount of money could purchase either food or drink across the thirty-one miles to Shrewsbury. Moreover, they attracted shouted threats, the hostility being even worse than on the road from the Cape to Watertown. This was the problem with being, as Allen later put it, "known to all the country round" for "keeping a shop for the sale of English goods." Again they slept in the woods. On 17 June 1776, Jolley and Henry hiked the last miles to Lewis Allen's farm.³⁴

Jolley might have thought that all he now had to worry about was the safe return of the children still confined at the Cape. But a more immediate concern arose. In Massachusetts, Tories remained an impotent minority. They felt the brunt of the Patriot response early and more forcefully than in any other colony. Mob action was not uncommon even in central Massachusetts.

In Hardwick, for instance, a mob attacked the house of Timothy Ruggles and forced him to leave town. John Murray of Rutland suffered a similar fate. Free speech was still a notion for the future. Elisha Smith of Worcester was required to admit publicly that he had "delivered sentiments that was thought unfriendly to America for I said, our powers was as arbitrary as the Devil, and I had rather be under the power of Britain, than America." He pledged "to conduct myself better for the future." In Shrewsbury's North Parish, Reverend Ebenezer Morse had to withdraw from his pulpit because of Loyalist sympathies.³⁵

A favorite allegation against Worcester County's Tories was that they engaged in counterfeiting that undermined the shaky colonial economy. James Jewell of Sterling, convicted

of the crime, received twenty lashes and the cropping of one ear. The Shrewsbury Inn operated by Jotham Bush was allegedly a place where Tories picked up counterfeiting tools supplied by the British. Bush received a three-month term in a prison ship in Boston harbor, where he promptly died of smallpox.³⁶

On 27 June someone warned Jolley that a mob planned to storm the Allen farmhouse. If the reports were true, the attack could be expected some night soon. That evening, problems interfered with the appearance of a portion of the crowd expected from the other towns. The Shrewsbury contingent had been ready and expressed itself as very disappointed. Over the next four days the Allen household remained on continuous alert, with all in fear for their lives. The raiders rescheduled for 8 July. It proved to be a poorly kept secret. Jolley found out about it from informants.³⁷

At this juncture Jonas Stone entered the picture. Contemporaries memorialized Stone as "an ardent friend of his country in her Revolutionary struggle." He had represented Shrewsbury at the General Court since May 1775. Stone and Allen became acquainted at Watertown when the Court had taken action on Jolley's case. Now Jolley sent for two men who had been identified as leaders of the mob, both of them militia officers. Allen withheld his knowledge of the impending attack and convinced them to take him to speak with Jonas Stone. It was a three-mile walk and, Jolley later recalled, "no tongue can express the ill-treatment and abusive language I received."³⁸

What a blessed relief to reach Jonas Stone's house. Stone knew that Allen had not violated the conditions laid down by the government. Now, in the presence of the two men who had delivered him, Jolley revealed the intelligence he had received. A mob was to assemble that very night to surround the Allen house. The plan was to execute him; failing that, the mob at least intended to burn the house. He requested Stone's

protection or, barring that, the privacy of a room for a half-hour so that he could prepare himself for death.³⁹

By now the two officers were uncomfortably aware that Allen had tricked them. This clever and despicable Tory knew of the plan in accurate detail. They finally admitted to Stone that that, indeed, was their plan. Stone took the two into another room, where they spoke for about fifteen minutes. When Stone returned he surprised Jolley by offering him the protection of his own house. For the next eight days Allen remained a guest of the Stone family. No harm came to Allen, although the mob threatened not only Jolley, but also Stone and his property.⁴⁰

By 16 July it appeared that the worst was over. Jolley took leave of Stone and headed back to the Allen homestead. People in town soon got wind of this and it was not long before two men, backed up by a crowd, knocked at the door of Lewis's house, demanding to see Jolley. Lewis refused, but in the fracas that followed he was the predictable loser. The men proceeded through the house smashing everything in sight. Hearing this ruckus, Jolley surrendered himself, "greatly astonished to see the number of people" assembled outside. They forced him to return to Jonas Stone's. Barely four hours after he had bid them farewell, Allen was back with the Stone family, this time as a captive. The men summoned Jonas from the fields where he was working.⁴¹

In the confrontation that now took place the mob demanded to know why Allen had been allowed to leave Stone's house. They would have no Tories the likes of Jolley Allen at large in Shrewsbury; they would deliver him back to the General Court at Watertown. For his part, Stone assured them that Allen had obeyed all the restrictions mandated by the Court and that to take him to Watertown was not only a waste of time but an affront to the Court itself.⁴²

The discussion became even more heated as Stone took his visitors to task for threatening him. The crowd remained unmoved and Stone reached the point of exasperation. He

reminded them that since he had been their representative he had done all in his power to work for legislation to promote their prosperity. "I am now convinced this body that appears now before me . . . seemly are determined to break through the laws I have been striving to hold up to the utmost of my abilities," he said. ". . . And now I see plainly the minds of this body, which is the greatest part of this town, that you have no occasion for a representative: I am determined to serve you no longer, appoint who you will."⁴³

Not sufficiently dissuaded, the mob decided to seek a second opinion. Off it went to Stone's colleague, Representative John Ball in adjacent Northborough. Although it was only a few miles directly down the road, the mobbers force-marched Allen over a circuitous route so that they did not reach their destination until 2:00 a.m. Their resolve rose, as Jolley's fears deepened, with the presence of the Northborough town militia with guns in hand and bayonets fixed. (Somebody later told Allen that his grave had already been prepared.) But Representative Ball echoed the advice they had heard from their own representative in Shrewsbury.⁴⁴

All of this left the mob in a serious dilemma. Moderates in the group at last offered Allen the chance to sign a document by which he would "consent to be shot through the heart" if he attempted to leave Lewis's farm. But he refused, on principle, to sign anything tantamount to his own death warrant. Compromise came when being shot was replaced by up to five hundred stripes on the naked back should he leave Lewis's other than to attend public worship. Thus Allen's instinct for negotiation achieved little real compromise other than selecting an alternative form of execution: a person could hardly expect to survive five hundred lashes.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the bargain was sufficient for the moment to guarantee that he would at least see the approaching dawn. There were moments during these times when there stood a perilous balance between mob rule and traditional concepts

regarding the rule of law. On this night the balance tipped to Jolley Allen's advantage.

It became Henry Allen's chore to attend to the General Court and at its direction hire a vessel to sail to Provincetown and return with the property taken from the *Sally*. The government had heard of mobs from other towns that had gone to Provincetown and broken into Allen's effects there. In spite of the government's written orders to forward the goods, Provincetown refused to relinquish them. Given the circumstances of the rescue and the unloading of the *Sally*, it allegedly remained impossible to distinguish what belonged to Allen from the property of the other internees. Final settlement of that issue had to be put off for the time being.⁴⁶

The authorities allowed Henry to sail back to Boston with the six children and four beds. Before they left, however, the children noticed that some persons sported crimson silk damask shoes. If the color and material looked familiar it was because they were remnants of Jolley's bed. Some Provincetowners even got pieces large enough to make capasheens and bonnets.⁴⁷

On the farm in Shrewsbury, awaiting the children's arrival from the Cape had made the long and otherwise pleasant days of summer longer for Allen. They arrived over several days in August. Nelly got there first. She was almost seventeen and brought the youngest, five-year-old Nathaniel and six-year-old Sarah. Eight more days' waiting brought the first parental hugs in a long time for thirteen-year-old Johanna and eight-and-a-half-year-old Jolley. Henry, whose peach fuzz furnished understated evidence of his recently celebrated sixteenth birthday, brought the ten-year-old Ann on the thirtieth.⁴⁸

The Massachusetts General Court again attempted to bring this footnote of the Revolution to some conclusion. It passed an appropriate resolution on 19 September 1776, and word went to Shrewsbury that Jolley must himself go to Provincetown to settle affairs there. At least this time he did

not have great trepidations about the children. But his evaluation of Patriot fervor brought him to the conclusion that he should take Nelly along. Hostile citizens along the way would hardly harm a young woman. That might have been the extra edge Allen needed in order to survive the round trip, the lessons of his initial reception in Shrewsbury being indelibly imprinted on his mind.⁴⁹

The pair waved good-bye on 23 September and were gone thirty-three days. By the time they returned at least four important tasks had been accomplished. First, the property issue had been settled, although hardly to Allen's advantage. He found the £150 claim against his goods preposterous. In the bargaining that followed he finally agreed to accept a meager £74, which would have to be raised by a public auction of the cargo. The auction raised that sum, delivering to the locals goods that would have yielded 500 guineas in Boston.⁵⁰

The other accomplishments of the trip occurred at Boston. Henry's interest in music would surely serve him well, even in these uncertain times. William Silby, recently relocated from Newport, Rhode Island, agreed to work a year with Henry to teach him "the Art of Playing on the Organ so as to do Church Duty." Allen committed £21 to this goal. He also had brought Eleanor's remains back to Boston and saw her interred in his own tomb under the King's Chapel, "which gave me the greatest Satisfaction to Accomplish." Then, facing the dismal reality that his life was in constant danger, he thought it prudent to make out a will. With that document signed and sealed, he and Nelly headed back to Shrewsbury.⁵¹

In Shrewsbury Allen decided that he must somehow get back to England. The gentle touches he gave the children as he hugged them off to bed each evening made him wonder how long they might be separated this time. They were safe in Shrewsbury, but he never would be and he knew what he must do.

During the next three months Jolley deliberately stayed out of sight. Sometimes he did not show himself for weeks at a

time. Passers-by kept a careful watch for him and shouted threats and insults whenever they saw him. During one stretch he hid in the house for an entire month; at other times he purposefully wearied his watchers by "playing at bo-peep with them."⁵²

On 6 February 1777 the Worcester newspaper carried an important proclamation by General Washington, datelined Morristown, New Jersey. It had at last become necessary, in Washington's view, to physically separate the friends of America and those of Britain. Among other provisions, it granted "full liberty to such as prefer the interest and protection of Great Britain to the freedom and happiness of their Country forthwith to withdraw themselves and families within the enemy's lines." Although Allen never credited Washington's declaration with prompting his next action, the coincidence is hard to ignore.⁵³

At about 1:00 a.m. on Saturday, 8 February 1777, Allen made his escape over Shrewsbury's frost-hardened roads, bound for what he hoped was a rendezvous with the King's navy at New London, Connecticut. Tommy Allen, age twenty-two, son of Jolley's New London brother Thomas, led the escape across territory that had become familiar to him during trips to visit the grandparents in Shrewsbury. Tommy and his most trusted friends, Tom Willson Jr. and Pardon Tabor Jr., made steady progress with Jolley across the New England countryside. Only wind, the shuffle of horses, and hushed conversation of four men moving south broke the night silence. They covered the eighty miles to New London by 2:00 p.m. Sunday for what Allen hoped would be a brief stop. He felt safe for the moment in the home of Pardon Tabor Sr.⁵⁴

The British frigate *Amazon* lay just beyond New London harbor. As published, one of its current missions was to exchange prisoners. There was, of course, no mention of Jolley Allen in these news reports. But aboard the *Amazon* Captain Maximilian Jacobson expected Jolley late that night. Since early winter Jacobson had been maneuvering the *Amazon*

in concert with another frigate at the mouth of the Thames River, effectively blockading New London, capturing and destroying coasters and fishing vessels.⁵⁵

As they approached Tabor's, Tommy split off from the other three and pressed on to his own house not far away. For many years the topic of Uncle Jolley was one of those subjects neatly sidestepped in the Thomas Allen household. The brothers' differences went back at least to 1759, involving Thomas's difficulty in repaying funds borrowed from Jolley. Thomas had refused to set eyes on his older brother for eighteen years.⁵⁶

For the moment Tommy felt immune to his father's anticipated anger. This could be the last opportunity, perhaps for a lifetime, for the brothers to settle differences and lay to rest the bitterness that had tainted their relationship.

Following his initial reluctance, Thomas gave in, and before dusk he and Tommy's mother made their way to the Pardon Tabor house close by the shore of Long Island Sound. The brothers embraced. It was an emotional reunion. Jolley insisted that he could not leave the country without reconciling the old difference between them, and he willingly accepted responsibility for the wrong Thomas had endured. The brothers talked for nearly two hours. The time finally came when they had to say farewell. Each suspected that this could be the last they would ever see of one another.⁵⁷

At 2:00 a.m. on Monday Tommy Allen, young Pardon Tabor, and a man named Bresbe escorted Jolley out to the *Amazon*, where he was personally received in the captain's quarters. Captain Jacobson was on an indefinite schedule and could not be sure exactly when he might sail for British-occupied New York. Tuesday and Wednesday passed. On Thursday Allen asked to be put ashore so that he could make his way by land. Jacobson proved reluctant, fearing for Allen's safety, but he finally consented. He landed Jolley under the *Amazon's* sheltering guns, defying the presence in the area of several American vessels.⁵⁸

It took five days for Allen to complete the overland trek, arriving in New York at about sunset on 17 February. He conferred with Sir William Howe, who remembered him from Boston, and the general's brother, Admiral Lord Richard Howe, commander of British naval forces in America. The timing of his arrival could not have been better. A fleet was ready to set sail the next day and the Howes provided Jolley with a pass. A half-guinea rented the services of a boat to take him out to a waiting ship. The fleet finally set out. It was 19 February 1777. The crossing took only a month and he arrived in London on 21 March.⁵⁹

Several hours after Jolley left his brother's house, Thomas and his family prepared to sit down to lunch when soldiers with fixed bayonets surrounded the house. The officer in charge announced that they had orders to take Thomas to Fort Trumbull. Outwardly Thomas remained composed and finished his meal. He even mustered a bit of bravado, decorated as courtesy, inviting the officers to join him at table.⁶⁰

At Fort Trumbull that evening five more prisoners joined him: his son Tommy, Tom Willson, young Pardon Taber, and two others. Guards placed them in separate rooms. At 6:00 p.m. they were paraded through the streets, under double guard, to face interrogation by General Samuel Parsons. Thomas admitted that he had been at Pardon Taber Sr.'s home Sunday evening, but insisted that he had neither seen Jolley that day nor at any time in the last eighteen years. The guards returned the prisoners to the fort with orders to "split them down, run them through" if they dared talk with one another.⁶¹

The next morning three more prisoners appeared: Pardon Taber Sr. and the two Besbe brothers. For better or worse, Jolley's fate could neither be helped nor hindered by what had happened in New London. So Thomas wrote a confession. In it he forthrightly admitted his evasiveness with regard to seeing Jolley, having not wanted to incriminate his own child. Then he revealed the whole story of the reunion at Taber's. The last

he had heard of Jolley was that one of the Besbes had taken him to a British man-o-war. He categorically denied having any part in the escape.⁶²

It took Thomas another ten days to extricate himself from Fort Trumbull--only to be rearrested two weeks later and confined at Windham, Connecticut. But several testimonials to his status as a good Patriot finally made an impression on the state's Council of Safety, as did Tommy Allen's deposition exonerating his father from the affair. The authorities paroled Thomas in April. New London society warmly welcomed him back, and he resumed business as a tavern-keeper.⁶³

Both Pardon Tabor and his son received fines and prison terms, a month for the father, a year for the son. The authorities released the young man, beset by ill-health, after eight months.⁶⁴ Although the record is silent with regard to the Besbes, Tommy Allen, and Tom Willson, it seems doubtful that they would have escaped completely from the political consequences of their February adventure.

Life in Shrewsbury after Jolley's escape had been less than agreeable for the remaining Allens. Townspeople gave Lewis a prolonged dose of the silent treatment. No doubt the store suffered for want of customers. He fretted about the consequences arson might have on the value of the farm, and within months of Jolley's leaving had already considering an offer of £1,000 for it. "Discord" soured the relationship between him and his wife.⁶⁵

Jolley's children became an increasing burden, as chronic headaches made Henry so ill that Lewis had no choice but to bring him back to Shrewsbury from Boston. After a five-month illness Henry died from what was probably a brain tumor.⁶⁶ Then Boston, the family's slave for over twenty years, left for good. In 1776 Boston had run off to join the Colonial army; in a ride of two hundred miles Lewis had brought him back. The following summer, however, Boston succeeded in enlisting locally, leaving the farm severely short-handed.⁶⁷

Lewis's final attempt to salve old wounds in the Shrewsbury community was an open house in honor of "the Generals," presumably including his next-door neighbor, Artemas Ward. This apparently did nothing to ingratiate himself with either the officers or the town. By the end of 1777 his nerves had been worn to a frazzle. Shrewsbury was now a "hell . . . on Earth."⁶⁸

In 1778 Lewis packed three of Jolley's children off to their uncle Thomas. As Nelly wrote soon after to her father, "We are now as happy as children can be[,] deprived of kind Parents in these unhappy Times. . . . It was very Disagreeable to be parted from the other [siblings], But my Uncle's ingratitude and unhappy Disposition made it Necessary it sho'd be so." Lewis then proceeded to sell the Shrewsbury farm. Many years later, Artemas Ward's grandson, recalling Lewis's departure, remembered only that he had been a "rank tory in the early part of the Revolution, but, the place growing too hot for him, he removed to Leicester."⁶⁹

Lewis bought a handsome property ten miles west of Shrewsbury. He called the house atop a grand hill Mount Pleasant. In 1782 he would die unexpectedly at age thirty-five. Mount Pleasant would be carved up to meet the insolvency of his estate.⁷⁰

Both the distance and the perilous journey conspired to warp the sequence in which news of the family reached Jolley Allen. He did not learn the dreadful news of Henry's death until a year later. In grief, he held the Patriots accountable, writing that his son "Died in the 18th year of his age, quite Broken-Hearted[,] having no Mother, and a Father obliged to fly from him at the reskue [risque] of his Life."⁷¹

Allen had been sending off letters since he left the colonies, but the odds were against many of them getting through. He finally learned that the only word Lewis had had from him had been one letter addressed to Henry. By November 1779, over two and a half years since the escape, Allen had received only two letters from his family in America.

He continued to send duplicate letters each time in the hope that, by boosting the odds, at least one of them would reach New England. In 1780 he penned a memoir of his American ordeal in hopes of its publication after his death.⁷²

Then came word from Thomas announcing Nelly's death from a fifteen-day sickness "of the Consumptive Kind." The anguished Jolley found it hard to believe that Nelly had simply fallen fatally ill. He demanded to know "whether she was Murder'd, drowned, or dyed a natural Death."⁷³

That Jolley's children could finally be brought to New York under a flag of truce was the first real spark of hope the family had experienced in a long time. But the voyage across the ocean and an uncertain fate should he again set foot in America was more than Jolley, "now near Seventy years of Age," wished to undertake.⁷⁴

"I am convinced," he wrote Thomas, "that you and Bro'r Lewis will do everything in your Power for the good of my children in my absence." He approved sending young Jolley to boarding school, "and beg you will not let [the children] want for anything that is in your Power, as I am willing to Satisfy you generously for the same at our first meeting again."⁷⁵

A month later Allen devised a scheme to bring the children to England. He promised a healthy reward for someone trusted by the family to accompany them to London by way of Holland.⁷⁶ But the reunion was not attempted that season. The danger posed by French, Spanish, and American privateers was probably why the spring of 1781 slipped by in favor of the spring or summer of 1782.

Allen apparently remained in good health until near the end. His son and namesake Jolley arrived in London just a little too late in the summer of 1782. Had his father's instructions been followed, this notice would have appeared in the London newspapers: "Died . . . Insolvent, and Strip'd of all my Property by the Barbarous Americans."⁷⁷

Jolley Allen, always well organized, had made his final plans. He wished to be interred in the vault under St. John's

Church in Wapping until such time as “the unhappy Troubles in America are at an End.” Then his remains should be shipped back to New England and “deposited in my own Tomb Number seventeen under the King's Chappel at Boston” beside his wife and children. As requested, he was interred on 7 June 1782, but his body never returned to America.⁷⁸

Endnotes

1. Allen Family Papers (AFP), folio 36, p. 1, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.; Frances M. Stoddard, Genealogical History of the Allen Family (Boston: privately printed, 1891), 13-15; Mary Allen Phinney, Allen-Isham Genealogy (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle Publishing, 1947), 1-2.
2. Stoddard, Genealogical History, 14; AFP, folio 3 (Nathaniel Allen's Day Book).
3. Stoddard, Genealogical History, 15; Phinney, Allen-Isham Genealogy, 3-4.
4. For capsule biographies of Nathaniel Allen, his children, and Jolley Allen's children see Mary Allen Phinney, A Brief History of Lewis Allen . . . and His Descendants (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle Publishing, 1954), 4-14. The bulk of the AFP folios (bound volumes) and manuscript boxes contain materials pertaining to Thomas Allen's life and career. But see also Frances Manwaring Caulkins, “History of New London, Connecticut,” MS, New London County Historical Society, New London, 25-26; idem, History of New London, Connecticut (New London: the author, 1852), 477 note, 622; John R. Totten, Christophers Genealogy (New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 1921), 92-93. For William see Samuel Allen to Nathaniel Allen, 29 August 1758, AFP, box 1, folder 1; Lewis Allen to Thomas Allen, 11 September 1772, AFP, box 2, folder 2; William Allen to Thomas Allen, 27 April 1782, AFP, box 4, folder 1; *ibid.*, 3 June 1783, AFP, box 4, folder 2. For Samuel Allen see his letters to his father and to brother Thomas in AFP, box 1, folder 1, especially Samuel Allen to Thomas Allen, 23 September 1750, 6 December 1755.
5. Worcester County Probate Deeds, Worcester, Mass., vol. 39, p. 350; Job Cushing to Artemas Ward, 15 February 1754, Artemas Ward Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; Phinney, Brief History, 5-6; Andrew H. Ward, “History of Shrewsbury,” Worcester Magazine and Historical Journal 2 (May 1826): 31-32; AFP, Folio 3.
6. AFP, folio 3; Samuel Allen to Nathaniel Allen, 6 October, 28 November 1758, 17 February 1759, AFP, box 1, folder 1.

7. For Caleb's death see J. Graves to M. Graves, 28 September 1774, AFP, box 3, folder 2. Letters written by Lewis Allen to his brother Thomas reveal much about his activities in the early 1770s; see AFP, box 2, folders 1-4.
8. Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser, 24 October 1763, 13 May 1765.
9. *Ibid.*, 5, 12 March 1764, 7 July 1766. See also the Allen ads reprinted in Stoddard, Genealogical History, 24-27.
10. Henry Wilder Foote, Annals of King's Chapel (Boston: Little, Brown, 1882), 594; Record Commissioners of the City of Boston, Boston Town Records, 1758 to 1769 (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1886), 167.
11. Samuel P. Savage to _____, 1 March 1768, S. P. Savage Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.
12. Jolley Allen, "An Account of Part of the Sufferings and Losses of Jolley Allen, a Native of London," ed. C. C. Smith, Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society 16 (1878): 69. This edition, which corrects Allen's original spelling, modernizes capitalization, and provides several useful explanatory notes, is the version cited and quoted here. The original manuscript is located in the AFP, folio 36, pp. 30-62.
13. Bernard Bailyn, The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1974), 154.
14. Allen, "Account," 69-71; Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser, 17 May 1773; James Warren to John Adams, April 3, 1776, Warren-Adams Letters, 2 vols. (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1917), 1: 220.
15. James H. Stark, The Loyalists of Massachusetts and the Other Side of the Revolution (Boston: W. B. Clark, 1910), 124-125, 131-132.
16. "Diary of Ezekiel Price, 1775-6," Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society 7 (November 1863): 206.
17. Justin Winsor, ed., The Memorial History of Boston, including Suffolk County, Massachusetts, 1630-1880, 3 vols. (Boston: Ticknor, 1880), 3: 97.
18. Allen, "Account," 72.
19. *Ibid.*, 72-75.
20. *Ibid.*, 75-76.
21. *Ibid.*, 77-80 and notes.
22. Warren to Adams, April 3, 1776, Warren-Adams Letters, 1: 219-220.
23. Allen, "Account," 80.
24. *Ibid.*, 79.
25. *Ibid.*, 72, 78-79 and note; Jones, Loyalists of Massachusetts, 5; Massachusetts Archives Collection, 1629-1799, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, vol. 210, p. 269.

26. The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1918), 19: 313; Massachusetts Archives Collection, vol. 210, pp. 267, 269a, vol. 221, p. 218; Allen, "Account," 79.
27. Massachusetts Archives Collection, vol. 194, pp. 317-318, vol. 210, pp. 265, 268-269a; Allen, "Account," 77-78.
28. Allen, "Account," 80-81.
29. *Ibid.*, 81.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*, 81-82. For the notorious prison see Richard H. Phelps, A History of Newgate of Connecticut, at Simsbury [and] the Imprisonment of the Tories in the Revolution (Albany: J. Munsell, 1860); Lucius I. Barber, A Record and Documentary History of Simsbury (Simsbury: Daughters of the American Revolution, 1931), 202-212.
32. Boston Gazette, 8 April 1776; Massachusetts Spy (Worcester), 12 April 1776.
33. Allen, "Account," 83-85; Acts and Resolves, 19: 447.
34. Allen, "Account," 86.
35. Jonathan Smith, "Toryism in Worcester County during the War for Independence," Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings 48 (October 1914): 17-18, 24; Massachusetts Spy, 13 February 1777.
36. Smith, "Toryism in Worcester County," 28-29; Massachusetts Archives Collection, vol. 154, p. 238.
37. Allen, "Account," 86-87.
38. *Ibid.*, 87 note; Andrew H. Ward, History of the Town of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts (Boston: Samuel G. Drake, 1847), 424-425.
39. Allen, "Account," 87 and note.
40. *Ibid.*, 87-88.
41. *Ibid.*, 88-89.
42. *Ibid.*, 89-90.
43. *Ibid.*, 90-91.
44. *Ibid.*, 91-92 and note.
45. *Ibid.*, 91-92.
46. *Ibid.*, 92; Massachusetts Archives Collection, vol. 210, p. 264; Acts and Resolves, 19: 587.
47. Allen, "Account," 92.
48. AFP, folio 36, p. 11.
49. Acts and Resolves, 19: 587; Allen, "Account," 93-94.
50. *Ibid.*, 94-95.
51. AFP, folio 36, pp. 1, 10-11, 57.
52. Allen, "Account," 96.
53. Massachusetts Spy, 6 February 1777; Affidavit of Thomas Allen, 17 February 1777, AFP, folio 23. According to Thomas, Jolley said "he

- did not fear [retribution] as he came on the faith of Genl. Washington's Proclamation . . . which [he] said he had in his Pocket."
54. Allen, "Account," 96-97 and note.
 55. *Ibid.*, 97; Connecticut Gazette (New London), 21 February 1777; Caulkins, History of New London, 524-525.
 56. Affidavit of Thomas Allen, 17 February 1777, AFP, folio 23.
 57. *Ibid.*; Affidavit of Thomas Allen Jr., 29 March 1777, AFP, folio 23.
 58. Allen, "Account," 97.
 59. *Ibid.*
 60. For Thomas Allen's narrative of his troubles caused by Jolley's escape, plus copies of relevant letters and documents, see AFP, folio 23.
 61. *Ibid.*
 62. *Ibid.*
 63. Charles J. Hoadly, The Public Records of the State of Connecticut, from October, 1776, to February, 1778 (Hartford: Case, Lockwood and Brainard, 1894), 189, 202; testimonial letters dated 29 and 31 March 1777, AFP, box 3, folder 4; Caulkins, History of New London, 578.
 64. Hoadly, Public Records, 441; AFP, folio 36, p. 13.
 65. Lewis Allen to Thomas Allen, 22 April 1777, AFP, box 3, folder 4; Thomas Allen to Lewis Allen, 15 January 1779, AFP, box 4, folder 1.
 66. Lewis Allen to Thomas Allen, 16 July 1777, AFP, box 3, folder 4; Lewis Allen to Jolley Allen, 12 May 1778, AFP, folio 36, p. 13.
 67. Lewis Allen to Thomas Allen, 16 June 1776, AFP, box 3, folder 4; AFP, folio 36, p. 13; Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War: A Compilation from the Archives (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1896), 2: 292. Of the several African American enlistees in the above record named "Boston," Lewis's man appears to be the Boston later claimed for military credit by both Shrewsbury and Ward (now Auburn).
 68. Lewis Allen to Thomas Allen, 7 December 1777, AFP, box 3, folder 4.
 69. AFP, folio 36, pp. 13-14; Worcester Probate Deeds, vol. 81, p. 497; Ward, History of the Town of Shrewsbury, 216.
 70. Worcester County Probate Records, Worcester, Mass., Series A, Case 1391.
 71. AFP, folio 36, pp. 7, 13.
 72. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
 73. *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 69, 77.
 74. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
 75. *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.
 76. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
 77. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
 78. AFP, folio 36, pp. 17-18, 86; Stoddard, Genealogical History, 19.