



**Scene 1**

**Actors:**

Narrator 1	Citizen 1	Patriot General Silliman
Narrator 2	Citizen 2	Reverend Andrew Elliot

Narrator 1: On December 14, 1775 the Connecticut General Assembly passed an act that allowed for **“restraining and punishing persons who are against the liberties of this and other of the united colonies.”**

Narrator 2: Reverend Andrew Eliot was the enthusiastic preacher of First Church in Fairfield. His sermons and writings were clearly in favor of the Patriot cause. In 1777 he said:

Reverend Andrew Eliot (Pretend you are writing in a journal):

“we are in frequent alarm and constantly uneasy. Those loyalists are constantly attacking our shores, coming across Long Island Sound under the cover of darkness at night .... our situation is very uncertain!!!!”

**AUDIENCE:** BOO!!!! (OR) Huzzah!!!

Citizen 1 (Sounding distressed and worried): “A gang of **Tories** has been discovered in the neighborhood of Fairfield. They were taken and imprisoned! If these enemies proceed in their schemes, **our ruin is certain.**”

Citizen 2 (with a heroic voice): “Rise up then, my countrymen, and bring the **TORIES** to the punishment they merit!”

Narrator 1: On April 25, 1777 the community was under threat when 1,500 British troops, under Major-General William Tryon landed at Compo Point, Fairfield, today Compo Beach, Westport, and began marching north towards Danbury.

Narrator 2: General Silliman wrote a letter to General Wooster:



General Silliman: (pretend to write a letter)

Fairfield April 25<sup>th</sup> 1777

Honored Sir:

We are alarmed by many ships off Compo Point. 40 or 50 boats are manned and plan to land ... We are in great need of help, pray, send us assistance as fast as possible! Immediate help will be of Great Service ... 200 or 300 Redcoats have landed at Compo Hill. Send your assistance without Delay.

I am your most obedient and humble servant,  
Gold Selleck Silliman, Brigadier-General

P.S: As I write, another messenger has come to say that 1,000 Redcoats have landed and that the boats are constantly going and coming. Send help quickly!

Citizen 1: To arms, to arms! The British regulars are marching towards Danbury!

**AUDIENCE**: BOO!!!! (OR) Huzzah!!!

Citizen 2: I have just heard the news! They say Tryon and his men have burned forty buildings in the town of Danbury. Homes, barns, storehouses... everything is ash!

Citizen 1: Our Patriot numbers are too few to stop them. We need more men. Send word to the militia’s in every town, all the way to New Haven!

Narrator 2: It took time before messages reached other Patriot leaders. By April 27<sup>th</sup>, Benedict Arnold and other Patriot commanders were leading American troops, in an attack on the British forces, as they were withdrawing from Danbury.

Citizen 1: Benedict Arnold and his men have attacked the British at Ridgefield!

**AUDIENCE**: BOO!!!! (OR) Huzzah!!!

Citizen 2 (sadly): But they were unable to prevent the destruction at Danbury, nor could they stop the retreat.



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**“Burning of Fairfield Drama”**

**Reader’s Theatre**

Narrator 1: The next morning the British continued their march, although they were continuously fired upon, until they reached their ships anchored off Compo Point. The ship’s cannons kept the Connecticut militia at bay, while the British troops climbed aboard. The fleet then sailed back to New York City.



**Scene 2**

**Actors:**

Narrator	Citizen 1	Reverend Andrew Elliot
British General Tryon	A Fairfield woman	British Soldier
		Messenger

Narrator: By 1778 the townspeople of Fairfield had become weary of the war and fearful of another attack. Reverend Andrew Eliot wrote:

Reverend Andrew Eliot (pretend you are writing)

“we are very much troubled on the Connecticut shore by the enemy, who pay us almost a weekly visit to steal and plunder! Every day we live and sleep in **CONSTANT FEAR!!!!**”

Narrator: On May 2, 1779, General Silliman is kidnapped from his home in Fairfield! The rebel general is taken to the British on Long Island. He is held prisoner for over a year!

On July 7, 1779 Fairfield’s worst nightmares were about to come true.

General Tryon: Men, we have been ordered to raid the coast of Connecticut. I will take 2,600 troops and a fleet of ships and raid the coastal towns of New Haven, Fairfield, and Norwalk.

British Soldier: What is our purpose, sir?

General Tryon: We will attack and destroy those **rebel supplies!** Their rich farm land will provide us with **much needed food**, and we will take their **fine** horses and supplies away from their grasps.

British Soldier: And what of the Continental army?



General Tryon: Let them follow us! If we can lure George Washington’s army away from its defensive position at West Point, then we can weaken them!

**AUDIENCE:** BOO!!!! (OR) Huzzah!!!

Narrator: Tryon’s forces attacked New Haven over July 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, 1779, and then turned towards Fairfield without warning. Local militias had little time to organize.

A Fairfield woman: We have received a message that the British have **attacked** New Haven! We do not know if they will go east towards New London, or west towards us. We must prepare for an attack!

Citizen 1: A British ship has been sighted at anchor off the coast of Fairfield!

**AUDIENCE:** BOO!!!! (OR) Huzzah!!!

Narrator: On the afternoon of July 7, 1779, 800 troops under General Tryon land on the shore, and begin marching up what is today the Fairfield Beach Road to the Town Green.

General Tryon: Men, get to the Town Green and take control, and then we will march to Black Rock Harbor and destroy the fort and ships there.

Narrator: A British soldier addresses the people of the town.

A British Soldier (unrolling a scroll):

Good people of Fairfield, we call upon you now to swear allegiance to the king of Great Britain, whereupon we will offer you refuge!

Reverend Eliot and Citizens, all together: **Never!!!**

Narrator: Colonel [pronounced KER-nel] Whiting of the Patriot Militia sends a messenger with a reply to the British General Tryon saying:

Messenger: Connecticut has dared to take up arms against the cruelty of Britain. We will continue to resist your attacks and protect our land!

**AUDIENCE:** BOO!!!! (OR) Huzzah!!!



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**“Burning of Fairfield Drama”**

**Reader’s Theatre**

Narrator: By the evening of July 7, 1779 British troops have captured all the area between Mill River and Ash Creek and approximately a mile to two miles from the shore. Isaac Jarvis, the Patriot commander of Black Rock Fort, orders his men to keep up constant fire on the British troops.

General Tryon: Fire your muskets and return their rebel fire!



**Scene 3**

**Actors:**

Narrator	Citizen 1	William Wheeler
British General Tryon	Citizen 2	Priscilla Burr
		Mary Silliman

Narrator: Also on July 7<sup>th</sup>, British troops under the command of General Garth have landed at Kensie’s Point near Mill River. They march into the Town from the West, across Sasco Hill and into the Mill Plain area, but the citizens of Fairfield do not give up! They destroy a strategic bridge at Ash Creek so that as the British troops march towards Black Rock, they encounter the damaged bridge and cannot cross Ash Creek. The British plan to attack the Fort are ruined by the Patriot militia!

**AUDIENCE:** BOO!!!! (OR) Huzzah!!!

General Tryon: How can this be? Men, begin burning their homes! One by one, we’ll show them!

Citizen 1: What are we supposed to do? Do we stay and defend our town, do we protect our homes, or do we flee from the enemy?

Citizen 2: How will we fight? Our men are off fighting for our independence. Our town is home to women, children, and the elderly.

Narrator: William Wheeler, 17 years old at the time, made a quick decision and helped his family bring their valuable herd of cows to a pasture on higher ground. From a few miles away, he writes about the destruction in his journal:



William Wheeler (pretending to write in a journal):

The first building that appeared on fire was the guardhouse at Kenzie’s point, the next one at Barlow’s plain. From Black Rock, we see the fire.

The town burned all night. A cloud was fixed in the west and huge flashes of lighting cracked in the sky. There was a scene so shocking that Fairfield will never see again.

We could hear the frequent shots of cannon and muskets from the British throughout the center of town. We knew that the townspeople had to flee.

My distress was nothing compared to my friend, who decided to stay in her home in town. The day after the town was destroyed, we went down to see the ruins. When I finally saw my friend, I could hardly recognize her, she was so shaken up. She was treated very badly.

Priscilla Burr says:

Soldiers came into my house and said it was a fine place, as if they were going to move in! They ended up destroying my home, ripping curtains, breaking furniture and stealing the silver. I gave them **everything** to make them go away!

William Wheeler:

Several women stayed in town to save their houses, but were so frightened, they said they would never stay again.

Jonathan Bulkley, living on the Green, stayed, got a letter of protection from General Tryon and saved his house and three adjoining houses.”

**AUDIENCE (whispering to each other):** Maybe they were British sympathizers!

Narrator: Mary, the wife of General Silliman, heard about the British soldiers coming and quickly left town. She could see the destruction from the safety of her family's land on what is today Jennings Road.





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**“Burning of Fairfield Drama”**

**Reader’s Theatre**

Mary Silliman:

As we retreated from the town, I realized why the British had attacked now. They wanted to burn all of our crops in the hope that General Washington’s army would starve this coming winter. But the brutality they showed against the town, even as they were unopposed, was never to be expected. I wondered what they intended by this carnage and desolation, and I wondered what I should do.



**Scene 4**

**Actors:**

Narrator	British Soldier
Eunice Burr, wife of Thaddeus Burr	General Tryon
A Friend of Eunice	George Washington

Narrator: Eunice Burr reads her testimony regarding the enemy at Fairfield on July 7 and 8, 1779, including Eunice Burr, wife of Thaddeus Burr. They were very important landowners in the town of Fairfield and lived in the Burr Mansion on Old Post Road.

Eunice Burr: On Wednesday morning, some friends visited my home, the Burr Mansion, on Old Post Road. They believed that the enemy’s ships were nearby and they might land.

I have known many British officers, and I **knew** that they were polite. Despite the pleading of my friends, and although I knew I may risk my own life, I decided to remain. I wanted to save my pleasant mansion house with its valuable furniture, food, and supplies in storage.

During the raid, a pack of rude soldiers came rushing into my house. They shouted at me:

British Soldier: “You rebel; where is your husband? He is a **town official!**”

Eunice Burr: The soldiers ripped the buckles off my shoes! They tore the curtains, broke our precious furniture!

Friend of Eunice: “Get out of this house at once! Don’t you know who Eunice Burr is?”  
 (British soldier rushes out of the room)

Narrator: No sooner had they left when more British soldiers came back into the house,

British Soldier (returning back in): Bring me cider! (Pretend to break the china)

Narrator: In the middle of this confusion, General Tryon himself came into the house.



General Tryon (in a loud voice): “I **demand** your husband's papers!”

Eunice Burr: “There are none! Only a few papers from our old estates.”

General Tryon: “**THOSE** are what we want! We intend to have those estates!!!”

Eunice Burr: I pleaded for his mercy. The General changed his mind and promised me that he would protect my property. He wrote a proclamation to post on our front door. (The General pretends to write something on a piece of paper and posts the paper on the wall)

My house was still standing, and I quickly ordered the servants to collect water. Instead of saving anything, I turned my attention to the suffering of my neighbors.

No sooner had the horn blew for the retreat, a band of those savage creatures were left as a **rear guard** to complete the destruction; some of whom, unperceived by me, came into the house.

A friend of Eunice:

I saw my friend Eunice showing the soldiers the protection order from General Tryon, but they ripped the paper from her hands. They started to take our pocket books, so we both turned around and ran as fast as we could from the Burr Mansion.

Eunice: As I turned back to look, the awful soldiers began to set my home aflame. My poor house and things suddenly caught fire and soon the giant mansion was engulfed in a huge, burning fire. Some soldiers offered my comfort, and I sincerely thank them for it.

Narrator:

The greatest damage was inflicted on July 08, 1779, as the British left Fairfield. A rear guard of German auxiliary soldiers were ordered to leave last. The retreating force set fire to all the remaining buildings, including the churches and ministers’ homes, even though the British General Tryon had given them protection!

Connecticut’s defenders, guessing that Norwalk would be Tryon’s next target, appeared in large numbers to fight the enemy on July 12, 1779. However, the fighting there also led to the almost complete destruction of the town.



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Narrator: Fairfield never fully recovered from the destruction. In 1789, ten years after the fire, and six years after the war ended, President George Washington stopped at Samuel Penfield’s “Sun Tavern” in Fairfield. He observed,

George Washington: “The destructive evidences of British cruelty are yet visible both in Norwalk and Fairfield; as there are the chimneys of many burnt houses standing in them yet.”

Narrator: Fairfield’s stature as one of the most influential and prosperous towns in the region diminished in the slow process of rebuilding. In the decades following the war, the economic center of coastal Fairfield County shifted to nearby Bridgeport.