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Robert Sullivan. *My American Revolution: Crossing the Delaware and I-78.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2012. 272 pp. $26.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-374-21745-7.

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Retracing the Past: One Man's Walk in the Shadow of George Washington

In *My American Revolution*, Robert Sullivan figuratively and literally retraces the steps of General George Washington and his troops in an effort to rediscover just what the American Revolutionary War meant to New York and New Jersey, and how the war is remembered today in those areas. Sullivan begins and ends his journey in the place he calls home, New York City. By visiting historic markers and plaques, taking part in reenactments, invading a golf course, crossing the same mountains Washington and his men crossed, and finally signaling New York City with a hand mirror from those same mountains, Sullivan takes a personal journey–one he calls "transformational"–and brings the reader along as well.

Very early on, it is clear that Sullivan not only cares about the subject of the American Revolutionary War but wants the reader to care as well. He tries to convey the sense of wonder that he felt when he realized that the same rivers, mountains, and streets he looked at and walked on daily were the very same environments Washington, the Continental Army, and the British all experienced during the course of the war. Though much has changed since the revolutionary period, Sullivan does his best to explain what happened and where, how it affected the course of the war, and how much the cities and towns have grown to engulf some of the most important sites related to the war.

Sullivan's dedication to his subject plays out in a somewhat extreme way when he decides to attempt a thirty-mile hike from Princeton, New Jersey, to the site of Washington's winter encampment near Morristown, an area used several times as a haven for the Continentals. Like Washington, Sullivan took his extended hike in the winter–a decision unpopular with his wife but one he felt necessary in order to get the true feel of what the American soldiers experienced. After one night in a tent in the freezing cold and a grueling hike during which Sullivan hurt his back, the author reached his destination. Along the way, he stopped at a small deli (where the server expressed her astonishment that Sullivan was *walking* to his destination) and several historical sites tucked away in the forests and hills. As difficult as it was for one man with modern camping gear and the trappings of technology, the reader (and Sullivan) can only get a peek at how difficult it was for the men in the Continental Army, some of whom lacked shoes and began their march after two days of hard fighting in Trenton and Princeton.

Sullivan also took part in a series of reenactments, some official and some not, offering him yet another perspective about Revolutionary War experiences. Sullivan attended the "official" Christmas Day reenactment of the crossing of the Delaware River, the act that propelled the Continentals into New Jersey and a pair of victories at Trenton and Princeton. Immortalized in a painting by the German artist Emanuel Leutze, the crossing of the Delaware has become a potent symbol of American victory and a larger-than-life symbol of the man who led the Continentals to victory, Washington. The annual reenactment, however, started as one man attempting to recapture and promote history–something remarkably like what Sullivan attempts in the book. Over time, it grew and expanded to the point where Sullivan and a crowd of a few thousand people enjoyed the reenactment, very different from the dozens who witnessed the first reenactment. Along with the Delaware River reenactment, Sullivan attempted a few of his own, the most painful being the hike into the Watchung Mountains and Morristown. In New York City, Sullivan went through a series of adventures (or misadventures, if you will) in an attempt to recreate two other important events from the period: the retreat of the Continental Army into New Jersey and Washington's trip to Wall Street for his inauguration as the first president of the United States.

The latter two reenactments appear in the largest sec-

tion of Sullivan's monograph, entitled "The Seasons of the Revolution." Sullivan details an entire year of history in New York City, exploring and discovering more about his home city than he ever knew before. He rediscovers the history of the first American submarine, the "Turtle"; the man who built a working replica; and that man's attempt–in post-9/11 New York–to pilot his submarine to where the Queen Mary 2 was docked. Sullivan also stumbles on what he thinks is a portion of the final resting place of almost four hundred Maryland soldiers who performed a suicidal rear-guard action during the Battle of Brooklyn, allowing the bulk of the Continental Army to escape the city. Yet none of his contacts seems to think the discovery is very important, and Sullivan returns to the site later to discover a new building where the old bones were. He never returns.

Sullivan's final, and ultimately most successful, reenactment takes place when he once again sojourns into New Jersey in an attempt to find a spot where he can signal his family in their apartment. In this, Sullivan tries to pinpoint one of the areas where Washington and his men looked out over New York City over the course of seven long years, the city being lost in 1776 and never recaptured during the course of the war. After a series of missteps, Sullivan achieves his goal by reflecting the sun off a hand mirror to where his daughter could see the light through her classroom window. Pleased and exhausted after another long hike, Sullivan returns home triumphant.

While many Americans can claim a visit to one historical site here and there–Gettysburg maybe, or perhaps Boston or the Alamo–not many can say they literally walked in the footsteps of Washington. Sullivan can claim that and more; his travels within a relatively small area expose the historical relationship between modern New York, New Jersey, and the men who fought and died during the Revolutionary War. While somewhat dry in prose, Sullivan's book nevertheless serves as an excellent introduction to the wartime events that surrounded the author's home city and gives the reader a guided tour to the places where Washington, his soldiers, and many others lived, died, and ultimately triumphed over Great Britain.

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