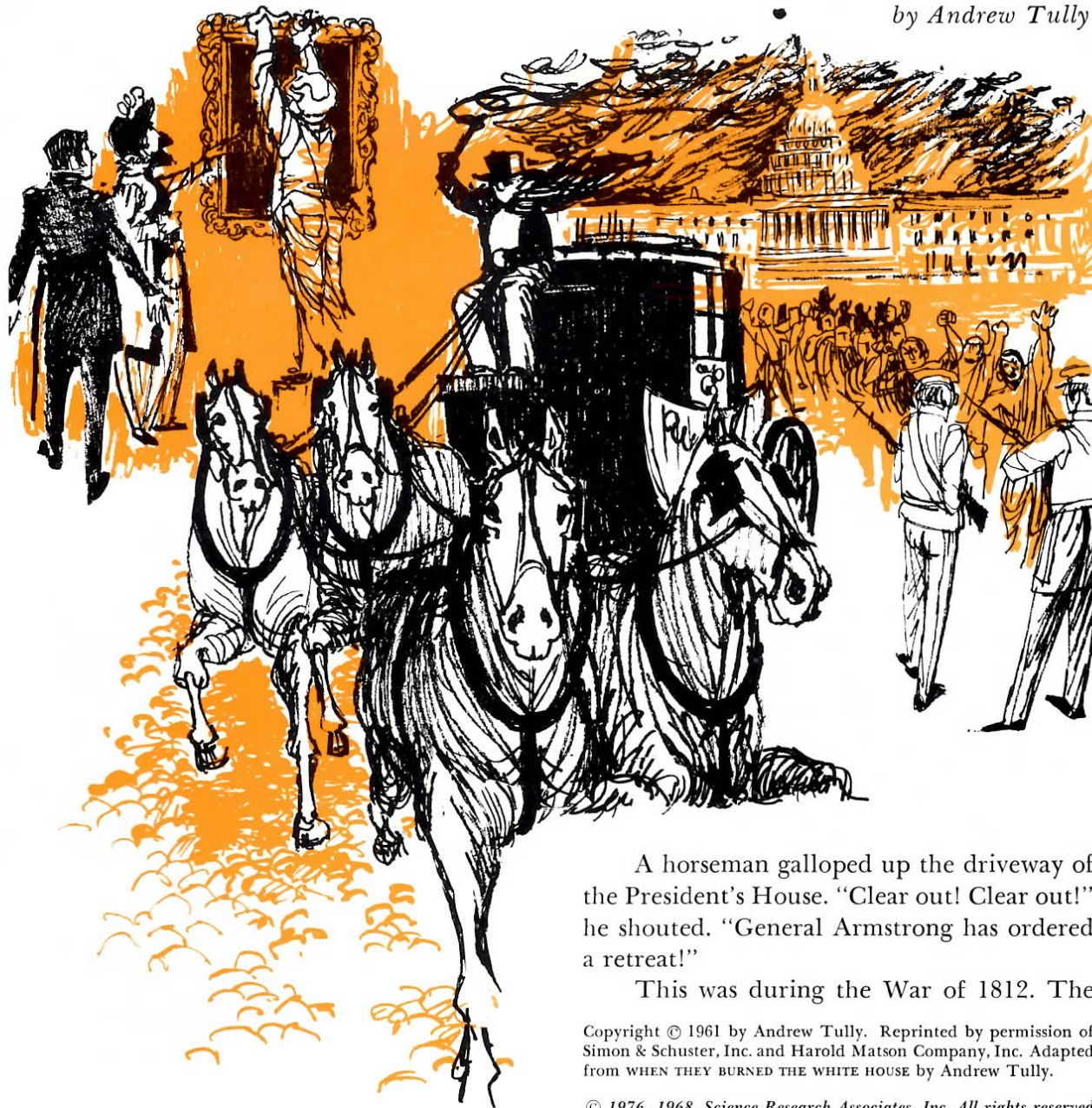


FLIGHT FROM WASHINGTON

by Andrew Tully



A horseman galloped up the driveway of the President's House. "Clear out! Clear out!" he shouted. "General Armstrong has ordered a retreat!"

This was during the War of 1812. The

Copyright © 1961 by Andrew Tully. Reprinted by permission of Simon & Schuster, Inc. and Harold Matson Company, Inc. Adapted from *WHEN THEY BURNED THE WHITE HOUSE* by Andrew Tully.

© 1976, 1968, Science Research Associates, Inc. All rights reserved.

messenger had come straight from the battlefield where the Americans were trying to hold off the British. President James Madison was there, observing. This was the third messenger he had sent to tell the First Lady to take flight.

It was typical of Dolley Madison that she had ignored the first two. Even before the messengers had arrived, she had seen American soldiers fleeing through the city, and had known that the Americans were losing. At once she had sent off to Virginia a carriage containing several trunks of cabinet papers. Then she had filled a wagon with silver and other furnishings of the President's House, and had sent it to the nearby Bank of Maryland. But now, hearing that the British had swept the battlefield, she decided that it was finally time to go. She ordered her carriage brought up from the stables, not realizing what was happening outside.

At the news that the British were advancing on Washington, the capital had become completely confused. Hoodlums were running wild, and a mob of them had collected on the grounds of the President's House. They were swarming about looking for something to steal. As the servant steered Dolley's coach up the driveway, they forced him to pull up the horses. The frightened servant was about to jump down and flee, but at that moment help arrived. Three retreating soldiers charged the mob with fixed bayonets and forced the hoodlums back.

Meanwhile, inside the mansion, Dolley was directing a servant in his efforts to remove a picture from the dining-room wall. It was a portrait of George Washington, painted

by the great Gilbert Stuart, and Dolley regarded it as a national treasure.

"I can't budge it, ma'am," the servant reported. "It's fastened to the wall with screws all around the frame. Besides, you should be on your way. Even the soldiers have all gone off, like chickens flying from the coop."

"We must take the painting," Dolley replied firmly. "Please find the gardener and ask him to bring a screwdriver and an ax. If we cannot unscrew the picture we shall chop it away from the frame."

As the servant left the room, in hurried Colonel Charles Carroll, the man Madison had assigned to guard the First Lady. Colonel Carroll had just ridden out to have a look at the battle. Now he was red-faced and sweating, and very anxious that Dolley be on her way. "The British will be here at any moment," he told her. "Ma'am, you must leave at once!"

"Yes, Colonel, I will," replied Dolley absentmindedly, "as soon as we get this picture down."

"Picture!" exploded Carroll. "Ma'am, I beg of you, there is no time to bother with a picture."

"There is time to bother with *this* picture," Dolley said shortly. "You may go if you wish, but I must save the painting."

So Carroll stood there fuming as the gardener entered and began loosening the frame from the wall. It was slow going, because the screws were firmly embedded in the wood.

"Please, ma'am," Carroll said impatiently. "We'll be here all evening unscrewing that frame. Please let the man chop it away."

Dolley hated to ruin a fine frame, but there seemed to be no other way, so she ordered the gardener to wield his hatchet. Soon the canvas was stowed on top of a wagonload of other valuables and driven to safety.

But Dolley had still one more treasure to save. With a grumbling Colonel Carroll at her heels, she snatched the copy of the Declaration of Independence that hung on the wall.

"The British shan't have this, either," she snapped. "They would be just too pleased to burn this precious document."

Finally Dolley told the exasperated Carroll that she was ready to leave. As they entered the carriage, several hoodlums again surrounded it. "Your husband got us into this!" they shouted at Dolley. "Go find him

so we can hang him!"

Carroll got out of the carriage, a pistol in each hand. The mob fled, and at last Dolley was on her way to safety.

A little later, President Madison rode into the capital with his retreating troops. He went straight to his house, and was relieved to find that Dolley had already fled. Then, with a heavy heart, he started out for Virginia. He hated to leave Washington, but the victorious invaders could not be allowed to take the nation's chief a prisoner.

In the middle of muddy Pennsylvania Avenue lay a copy of that morning's paper. "We feel assured," said one article, "that the number and bravery of our men will afford complete protection to the city."

The newspaper lay unopened and unread; its readers had fled from Washington.

CHECK YOUR READING

- 1. The messengers on horseback were sent by**
 - A** General Armstrong
 - B** Colonel Carroll
 - C** President Madison
- 2. Even before the messengers came, Dolley knew who was winning because she**
 - A** smelled burning gunpowder
 - B** saw retreating soldiers
 - C** heard citizens talking
- 3. Dolley's first thought was to save**
 - A** important government papers
 - B** treasured family pictures
 - C** practical cooking utensils
- 4. A mob had gathered around the President's House to**
 - A** demand that peace be made
 - B** escape the flaming city
 - C** look for something to steal
- 5. Colonel Carroll was red-faced when he arrived because he was**
 - A** flushed from a fast ride
 - B** furious at Dolley's delay
 - C** ashamed of the defeat
- 6. The portrait of Washington was removed by**
 - A** unscrewing the frame from the wall
 - B** chopping the frame from the picture
 - C** cutting the canvas from the frame
- 7. The author portrays Dolley Madison as a woman who**
 - A** was obedient and kind
 - B** did not take life too seriously
 - C** had a high regard for fine things
- 8. The document that Dolley saved was a copy of the**
 - A** Declaration of Independence
 - B** U.S. Constitution
 - C** President's Oath of Office
- 9. The mob that surrounded the departing carriage wanted to hang**
 - A** Dolley
 - B** President Madison
 - C** the British general
- 10. The author implies that the British**
 - A** took President Madison prisoner
 - B** advanced into Virginia and Maryland
 - C** invaded the capital city