"Calu and Hart have brought a vital piece of our national memory back and combined it with a modern, uplifting tale in this exciting novel. Bravo!"—William Mastrosimone

TRENTON

A Novel

John P. Calu & David A. Hart

Part One

1

New York Frontier: 1763

The cabin door flew open, and Captain Alexander Scott stood there wounded, struggling to balance himself. "Hide!" he gasped to his bewildered family before collapsing head first on the cold, hard floor.

"Daddy!" Penny Scott screamed when she saw the arrows sticking out of her father's back. He lay still, sprawled out and helpless. Lilly Scott dropped the tined clamshell she had been using to comb her daughter's long auburn tresses and rushed to her husband's side, but his stare was already lifeless and vacant. Blood oozed from the corner of his mouth.

"Bolt the door, Penny!" Lilly shouted to her dazed five-year-old daughter as she strained to pull her husband's body through the doorway and into the room. Penny stood there in her nightgown, frozen with fear. "Now!" her mother commanded, drawing her husband's saber from its sheath.

The desperation in her mother's voice prodded Penny into action. She closed the heavy wooden door, momentarily dampening the sounds of gunfire and savage war cries that had erupted around the frontier outpost, her father's command. After last month's offensive had driven the local tribes away from the river and back into the mountains, rumors of marauding Iroquois sacking and pillaging the countryside had run rampant through the camp. Thinking the fort was safe from a direct Indian assault, Captain Scott had ordered a detachment of his best men into the field to seek out and destroy the renegade band. With his finest battle-hardened regiment away, only a small garrison of green troops was left to defend the post. The French

fur traders who didn't want this settlement to succeed had no doubt tipped off the Indians.

Lilly ran around the room shuttering the open windows. She could hear the hiss and thud of flying arrows striking the window boards as quickly as she closed them.

The commotion inside the cabin stirred Penny's infant brother James from his peaceful slumber beside the warm, comforting fireplace. Still holding her husband's sword, Lilly lifted the baby from his crib, rocking him gently in one arm. His irritability subsided immediately.

"Penny—quickly," Lilly whispered urgently, "into the crawl space."

This time Penny didn't hesitate. She and her family had rehearsed this scene many times before as an accepted part of their frontier life. Her father had dug a large, rectangular hole under the cabin floor near the center of the main room. Spacious enough to hide both children in the event of an enemy attack, it also concealed Lilly's modest jewelry and the family's few other valuables. A latticed straw mat lay over the hatch, keeping it from plain view.

Penny shoved the mat aside and clawed into the floorboard for the recessed latch ring. Outside the cabin, the bloodcurdling cries of the Indians, driven from their land and beyond the point of all reason, grew louder, closer, and more ominous.

"Hurry!" her mother cried out.

Penny lifted the hatch and jumped down into the pit. She reached up to receive her baby brother. Suddenly, there was an angry pounding on the door, and the baby joined the wailing chorus from outside.

In a split second, Lilly calculated the odds of her family's survival. There were no sounds of gunfire, and she knew the fort was lost. Her gallant husband lay dead by the door. At any moment the rampaging Iroquois would be upon them. Surely they would all die.

"Momma—please!" implored little Penny, her cheeks streaked with tears, her arms outstretched and trembling.

Lilly let go of her husband's sword and dropped to her knees. James was crying loudly and relentlessly. Surely the baby would give both children away, she thought. She had but one choice.

"Penny, listen to me," Lilly intoned over the baby's wails. "You must be brave. No matter what happens don't dare cry or call out. Do you hear me? You must do exactly as I tell you."

On tiptoes, Penny peeked over the floorboards, casting a mournful glance toward her father's uniformed corpse. "But Daddy said—"

Her mother cut her short. "Daddy's dead, Penny! If you want to live, you'll do as I say!"

Before Penny could protest further, Lilly pushed her daughter's head down into the crawl space and slammed the trap door shut. She grabbed her husband's sword, stood erect, and slid the rug back over the floor opening with her foot just as the door burst open and an angry horde of bare-chested savages rushed in.

She slashed at empty air with the sword as she backed toward the rear of the room, the baby clutched in her other arm. She recoiled in horror as a powerfully built Indian warrior, his face ravaged with pockmarks, viciously separated her husband's scalp from the rest of his head. "No!" she screamed, running at him with sword outstretched.

He was too quick for her. She barely scratched his side as he moved to avoid her thrust then grabbed the sword by the blade, pulling it from her hands.

Surrounded by his fellow taunting and jeering warriors, the big man licked his own blood from the saber and bared his teeth ferociously at his intended victim. Lilly wrapped both arms around James protectively.

The war chief's mottled face came within inches of Lilly's own porcelain white one. His coal black eyes burned into her as he grabbed her shoulders roughly, and Lilly was hit by the nauseating odor of smoke, blood, and whiskey. She could see that his face was not only pockmarked from disease but had been partially burned away. Overcome with hatred and revulsion for this savage who had shattered her family, she spat into his face and jerked free of his grasp.

Without a moment's hesitation, Lilly's assailant raised his tomahawk and struck her in the head with the blunt end. A gash opened and blood spurted from her temple. Dazed and nearly senseless from

the blow, she watched helplessly as the monster tore little James from her arms and handed the child to another warrior. The man dangled the screaming infant like a rag doll as he swiftly carried him out the door.

From her dark, cramped hiding place, her tear-soaked blue eyes peering through the dusty cracks between the wooden planks at the edge of the straw mat, Penny watched in horror as the savage ripped the dress from her mother's trembling body and then fell upon her with wanton fury.

"Momma!" Penny screamed inside her head. Her whole body shook with fright, but remembering her mother's last words she closed her eyes and bit her lip so hard it bled. Then, mercifully, she lost consciousness.

2

Footsteps Along the Delaware

A smooth, flat stone skipped lightly across the surface of the water before sinking into the shallow shoals on the peaceful Pennsylvania side of the river. Under the shade of a broad-leaved maple tree, John Hart stood watching the current flow gently downstream and wondered what the future would bring for the son whose only concerns today were the ripples caused by skimming stones.

Knowing this was where she would find her husband, Deborah Scudder Hart had arranged an impromptu picnic following the Sunday church service, attended by everyone in the family except John. It seemed that he had other things on his mind; he had appeared distracted for days, and this, she knew, was his special place. Ever since he was a boy, whenever he felt troubled, John could find comfort walking along the banks of the life-affirming Delaware River. Today, Deborah hoped the laughter of his children and the warmth of the summer sun might also lift his spirits.

Nine years her senior, John Hart married Deborah Scudder when she was just eighteen. In the thirty-five years of wedded bliss that followed, she bore her husband twelve children. Rich in family, a working farmer's most cherished asset, the blest couple had amassed vast landholdings, several mills, and a stable full of racehorses. Current 1774 tax rolls for Hunterdon County, New Jersey, listed the Harts among its wealthiest property owners.

Deborah looked over her brood with a mother's mixture of pride and concern. There had been but one casualty thus far—a daughter, the unlucky thirteenth, who died during birth. It was a death Deborah still lamented, blaming herself repeatedly, though unfairly according

to the midwife who attended her. Their two eldest sons and four older daughters had all married and moved out, but there was still family enough left on the homestead to fill her days overseeing the domestic chores and tending to her young.

Lost in thought, John bent down and picked up a dull gray stone. Rubbing the time-worn edges gently between his thumb and forefinger, it reminded him of the Indian arrowheads he had discovered as a boy walking this same riverbank with his father Captain Edward Hart, for whom John's strong-willed, stone-skimming fourth son had been named. Captain Hart was the ambitious and outgoing founder of the famed "Jersey Blues"—a celebrated militia unit formed to help the British regulars fight the French and their American Indian allies in Canada. The two European countries were in a state of perpetual conflict, to the dismay of many American colonists who objected to the cost in property and blood.

Having arrived at the Perth Amboy encampment in the summer of 1746 several weeks too late to join up with the rest of the New Jersey military contingent, the Hunterdon County volunteers, which were assembled by Captain Hart, were instead detached to Albany, where neighboring New York—at first—welcomed them into their ranks. However, after spending a dismal winter awaiting engagement orders that never came, the Blues ultimately began to suffer from neglect. Basic necessities such as food and warm clothing were scarce and back pay was long overdue. Soon, despite the efforts of their leader, the morale of the Blues broke. Discouraged and disheartened, they returned home without firing a single shot at the enemy. Thankfully, local renown for their fighting spirit remained untarnished.

John sighed now, recalling the look of disappointment on his father's face when he returned from that misguided campaign. Although the full truth of the ordeal was kept from the public, Captain Hart never did recover from the shame and embarrassment of his misadventure, however well-intentioned it may have been. The experience left him in physical and financial ruin and served as an emotional warning for John and his younger brother Daniel to be self-reliant and careful as to where one's sense of duty led. John sometimes worried

that his own son Edward shared more than John's father's name, as the lad harbored an innate hunger for adventure.

During their walks together along this peaceful riverbank, Captain Hart had regaled his son—a much younger John Hart, to be sure—with heroic tales of the hardy Dutch traders and stout Swedish soldiers who first landed at "the falls on the Delaware." Named after the royal governor of Jamestown, Lord De La Warr, the reference stuck to both the river and the indigenous inhabitants living there when a young, enterprising English interpreter recorded the astonishing coincidence that the local Indians called themselves "N-del-a-wowe," meaning "original people" in their native tongue.

The natives that the early English settlers encountered here were actually part of the vast Lenni Lenape nation that, according to legend, had followed a mysterious holy man—a chief called Walomenop—from the Ohio Valley in search of the Great Salt Sea. The remnants of the Unami or Turtle Totem tribe living in scattered lodges south of the falls in Burlington County were all that remained of these "original people."

It was their arrowheads and an assortment of other artifacts that John had found on his solitary jaunts and come to treasure as a child. His father never had much interest in vestiges of the past beyond the tales of the early settlers he told his sons to encourage an interest in their community.

Captain Hart concentrated on the present and moved among an interesting circle of people. Soon after his arrival to the falls area from New York's Long Island, he befriended the Trents. William Trent, the family patriarch, was a Presbyterian who had emigrated from Scotland to Philadelphia. There, he had made a name and a rather sizeable fortune for himself as a merchant and judge. Later in his life, following in the footsteps of his Quaker friends—notably the family of a miller named Mahlon Stacy—William meandered up the Delaware to the eastern shore of the falls. Here, close enough to visit with his former Philadelphia business associates but far from the hubbub of the busy colonial capital, William found the rich, fruitful land promised by his Quaker brethren to be an idyllic place where he

could live as Lord of the Manor with his young and pretty new wife Mary Coddington beside him.

Born on the island of Antigua, the second Lady Trent was said to be the precocious stepdaughter of a wealthy Philadelphia brewer whose connection with the rum and molasses trade accounted for her boastful dowry of African and West Indian slaves. Their exotic presence fueled rumors of her lack of inhibition. While William Trent's time as a member of the landed gentry was short-lived, the town where he chose to close out his days kept his memory alive by adopting his name as its own around 1719.

As had the Lenni Lenape, the Quakers, and even the prideful William Trent before him, Edward came to realize that the enchantment of Trenton was a product of its unique geology. Sitting at the distinctive fracture point where the Piedmont Plateau meets the Atlantic Coastal Plain and created the falls, Trenton and its surrounding area offered a soil rich in mineral deposits, clay, slate, and shale; forests abundant with game and wildlife; and a seemingly endless self-replenishing reservoir of fresh water that included a number of crisscrossing creeks and streams as well as a navigable tidal channel that stretched to the Atlantic Ocean.

It was late summer in 1774, and the captain was gone now. The care of his long-suffering wife and John's mother, Martha Furman Hart, had passed to the son. John wished he could make the memory of his carefree childhood days linger and impress his own children with a fanciful tale or two, but he didn't share his father's gift for storytelling. Quite unlike the captain, he was a plainspoken man. Yet his children took whatever he shared with them more seriously than all the sermons they were subjected to on Sundays at the Baptist Meeting House. John believed in his heart that each child would find his own path, in his own good time, through the history and legacy their father and grandfather passed down to them.

In his mind's eye, standing along the riverbank on this mild summer's day, John could easily trace the movements of the nomadic tribesmen and settlers who preceded him as they discovered the wonders and charms of Trenton and vicinity. Indeed, he had walked in their very footsteps many times. And, lest he forget, it was not far

from where he now stood, deep in thought, that he had met his future bride, the vivacious Deborah Scudder, whose widowed father's farm skirted the river rapids a quarter mile away on the western corner of town.

As if reading his mind, Deborah came up silently from behind and slipped her arm around her husband's, pulling him from his reminiscence. He turned to admire her pale and lovely face, her full lips, and was met by the scent of honeysuckle and mint she'd been gathering. A hint of mischief registered in her bright, hazel-green eyes.

"Husband, I am pleased to see a look of serenity that has been too long absent from your face," she said demurely, offering him a mint leaf.

John accepted the mint gratefully and smiled. "Dearest, would that it were more than a respite."

Deborah smiled back fondly, nearly blushing. With each passing day, she grew more deeply in love with the handsome, well-respected man she had spent her entire adult life with. Now graying at the temples and slightly stooped with age, he was her rock and she his guiding light through the ever-shifting tides of life. "You speak of the troubles brought on by our daughter's disgrace?"

"Nay," he replied chewing the mint leaf slowly. "Our Mary is but an impressionable child, weak in the ways of this world and cursed with a mind too feeble to know she has been wronged. Though I do fear she may be doomed to a life of misery as a result of her unfortunate affair."

Deborah clutched the reed basket to her breast. "Yes, Mary is but a child, John, and now burdened with a child of her own," she declared bitterly. Biting her lip she added, "All the while, this 'healer' into whose care we entrusted her, Doctor Gideon De Camp, lies nightly in his comfortable bed with his priggish wife as if nothing graver than a change in the wind has occurred. Husband, surely you have not forgiven this?"

John clenched the rock in his hand tightly. "No, good woman, I have not, but the man refuses us all recompense for his indiscretion. We have no choice but to allow the law to intercede."

"Husband, no!" she gasped, placing a hand to her forehead. "Mary will become a public mockery."

He tenderly placed the errant strand of his wife's dark hair that had shaken loose back behind her ear and pulled down gently on her bonnet. "Cease this discourse, Mother, for the deed has been done. I have asked Samuel Tucker to petition the court on our behalf."

"Then I hope he has the good sense to keep the matter as discreet as possible," she concluded sadly.

They turned their attention back to the river and watched as their nineteen-year-old son, Edward, ran into the water without removing his clothes. "He favors your father," Deborah observed.

"Let us hope he does not choose to imitate him."

"Your father was a good man, John," Deborah said, "if perhaps a little too anxious for glory on the battlefield."

John cast the stone he'd been holding across the wide still water, but neither paid attention to its flight nor gave a care to where it landed. "A preoccupation I fear is certain to cause us all a great deal of pain in the years to come, if the King has his way with the colonies."

Deborah gave him a sideways glance. Even though John had been, among other occupations in his long and illustrious career, a duly elected government representative, Justice of the Peace, and Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, this was the first he had spoken to her of politics in some time.

"Father, come quickly!" cried a red-faced young lass struggling up the steep, slippery slope from the river. Her long skirt and petticoat were caked with mud around the pleated hem.

"What is it, Mary?" Deborah asked as John gave his daughter a hand up.

"You must come quickly—both of you!" the girl shouted, tugging on her father's sleeve forcefully. "Edward has found something … in the river!"

"A dead fish, I'll wager," quipped Deborah to her husband. "He's probably tormenting the younger children with it."

Mary looked up, wild eyed and pleading. "No mother—it's a girl. And she's dead!"

John and Deborah exchanged a glance before quickly making their way down the embankment. They reached the water in time to see Edward, several yards upstream, lifting a limp body out of a partially submerged canoe.

"Heavens, John, it's a child!" gasped Deborah as she dropped her basket of herbs and ran toward her son and the lifeless form in his arms. The first things she noticed were tangled auburn hair and bruised bare feet. "Edward—is she …" her words hung in the air.

"She's alive, Mother," Edward said as he gained the bank. "But she must have been in the water a long time—she's shivering something terrible."

"Who is she?" asked sixteen-year-old Scudder, setting down his fishing rod.

"Where did she come from?" Daniel and Dee, the youngest Hart children chimed in excitedly as the girl opened her sky blue eyes and struggled instinctively to break free of Edward's grasp.

John quickly removed his waistcoat and draped it over the child. The gesture had the effect he intended. The girl stopped struggling and allowed Edward to continue carrying her up the riverbank.

"Bring her inside by the hearth," Deborah urged, holding the girl's small hand that felt as cold as ice.