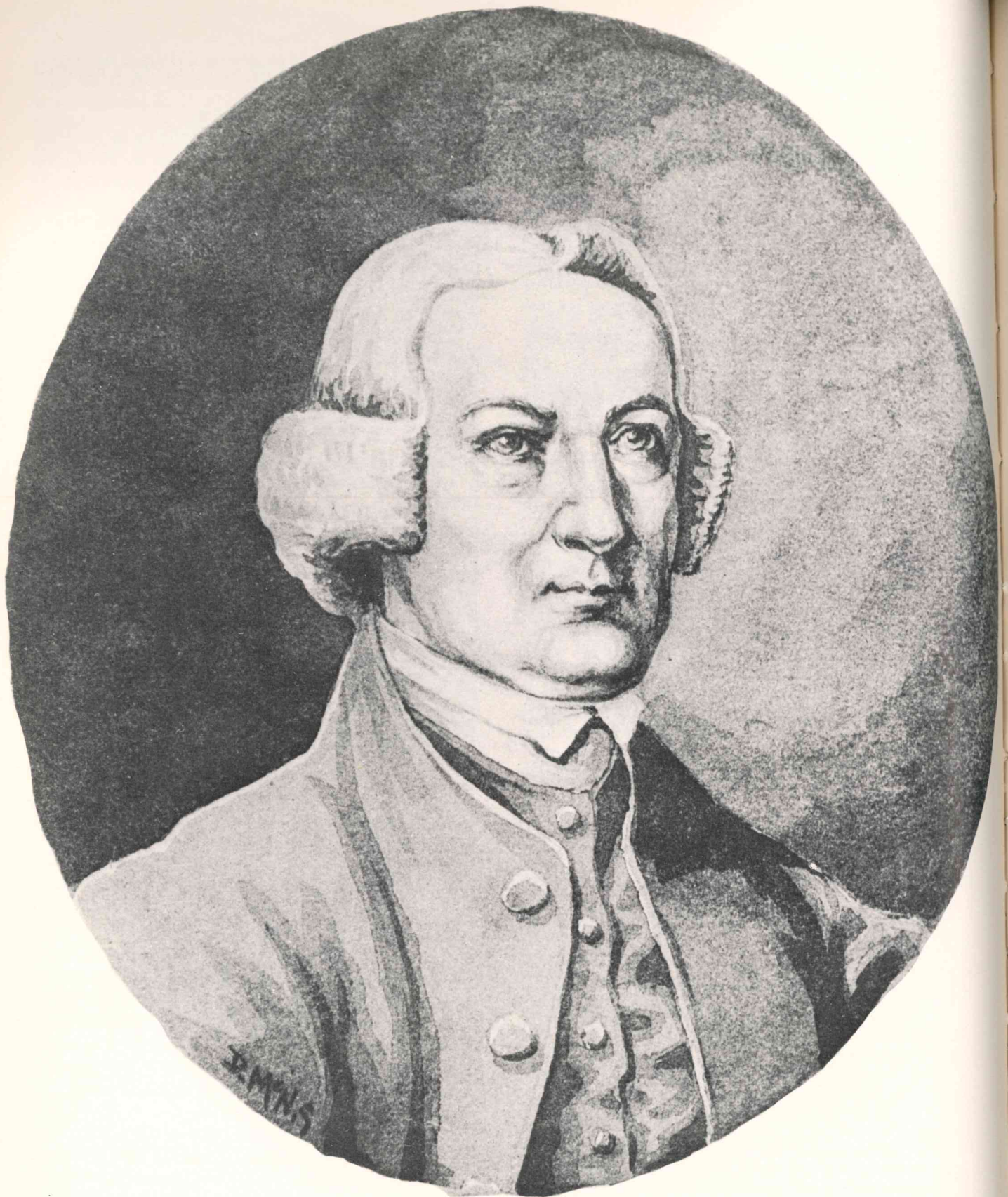


Rhode Island Yearbook 73

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Samuel Ward

Photos Courtesy of The Rhode Island Historical Society

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Samuel Ward

by Virginia Conroy Catton

Virginia Conroy Catton was born in Providence but has lived on Cape Cod, in California and New York, and is now residing in North Attleboro, Massachusetts. She considers herself to be a "Sunday writer" and has had material published in a number of different fields: fiction, articles, plays and humorous verse. Her work has appeared in England and been translated into Danish and Spanish. She is a member of the Rhode Island Short Story Club and on the staff of The Rhode Island Historical Society.

Samuel Ward, born in Newport, Rhode Island on May 27, 1725, was a good husband and affectionate father, successful farmer and merchant, hard working public servant and staunch patriot. If he had given as much thought to his own well-being as he did to that of his sheep he might have lived to sign the Declaration of Independence.

Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, son of a governor and three times governor of Rhode Island himself, he presided in the Second Continental Congress as Chairman of the Committee of the Whole. While serving in Philadelphia, he professed himself too busy to get a smallpox inoculation (trusting his sense of mission, no doubt, to keep him vibrating above the germs) and died of the disease on March 26, 1776. William Ellery was sent to replace him and with Stephen Hopkins, Ward's political enemy for a dozen years, signed the Declaration as representatives of Rhode Island.

Samuel Ward was the only governor to refuse to enforce the Stamp Act imposed by the British. After his final defeat on the local scene by Hopkins, he did not retire to sulk in his tent but threw himself with zeal into the Revolutionary movement, emerging as an important national figure. He shortly came to agree with John Adams and Franklin that the only way the colonies would receive redress

would be to fight and he proposed and helped to secure the appointment of Washington as commander-in-chief of the colonial forces. Ezra Stiles, Newport divine and later President of Yale, considered Ward to be the third most important man at the Congress, ranking only after Samuel and John Adams, placing Hopkins thirteenth.

It was ironic but outwardly fitting that, though Hopkins and Ward had, rather pointedly, traveled to Pennsylvania to serve the Congress by separate routes from Rhode Island, Hopkins, along with Oliver Wolcott and Samuel Adams, was placed in charge of Ward's funeral. Considering the closeness and length of their enmity, Ward's demise must have created a void in the life of Hopkins tantamount to the death of a dear brother.

In that perilous period just before the Revolution Hopkins and Ward were rallying personalities for separate factions vying for control of the state. There were rough geographical and social overtones to this political conflict with Ward of Westerly and Newport personifying inherited wealth, landed aristocracy and the superior cultivation of the South, whereas Hopkins represented the plain, bold, energetic frontier of the new and growing community of Providence in the North.

There is a story about the Hopkins family still repeated in Providence today regarding a visit of Washington. Hopkins' daughter, beset by a helpful acquaintance in a feminine twitter of expectation, was offered the loan of the friend's silver for the occasion. The daughter was reported to have declined the loan with acerbity, stating that what was good enough for her father was good enough for George. This story may be apocryphal but it dramatizes perfectly the image of the independent Rhode Island spirit projected by Hopkins.

Campaigns for election were characterized by high-sounding words and dirty in-fighting. The two contending factions could not be dignified by the name of political parties as we know them today. They were merely shifting coalitions based on narrow local issues and personal gain. But since the perquisites were many and the appointments and commissions lucrative, elections were worth fighting for. Control of the courts went to the winners and they could juggle their tax demands so that the bulk of the burden fell on enemy territory, though the enemy often defaulted in hopes that their friends would soon be in power again.

The political picture was not completely cut and dried, but a rather nebulous situation to assess. There were people in the North whose votes could be bought with rum, fish and cord, and those in the South who would sell their vote for hard cash. Governor Joseph Wanton of Newport was a cohort

of Stephen Hopkins of Providence until Wanton's Tory associations proved to be a liability and he had to be dropped: Nicholas Cooke of Providence was by no means an enemy of Samuel Ward of Newport. Families were split as in the case of the Brown brothers of Providence, dishing out money generously to win elections but playing more or less the string pullers in the smoke-filled room where Hopkins men gathered, whereas their Uncle Elisha was a staunch and active Ward man, who served as Samuel's Deputy Governor. The parties advanced and retreated like the figures in a political minuet and the record of the governorship in Rhode Island tells its own story. Beginning with William Greene in May of 1748 (in for the third time), we go to Stephen Hopkins, William Greene again, Stephen Hopkins, Samuel Ward, Stephen Hopkins, Samuel Ward for two terms and back to Stephen Hopkins again. Then Josias Lyndon, Joseph Wanton and Nicholas Cooke, a hardy old soul, who risked his neck to take the governorship in November of 1775, when Wanton, the King's man, was deposed by the colonists.

It might be conveniently stated that the two factions, headed by Ward and Hopkins, hated each other separately but hated the British together. And on a larger scale the pattern prevailed. Rhode Island fought long and bitter battles with both Connecticut and Massachusetts over boundaries but all were united in a mutual distrust and growing fear of the British Crown's attempt to control them and impinge on their jealously guarded freedoms. Rhode Islanders cheered the culprits of the Boston tea party and Bostonians made fun of the British efforts to try the *GASPEE* defendants for high treason.

Since the natural resources of Rhode Island were limited and its whole economy depended on maritime activity, the stepped-up efforts of the British to control trade and collect revenue, say nothing about the threat to existing civil liberties, forced Rhode Island into the vanguard of the Revolutionary movement.

A first-hand record of this critical era before the Revolution, its mores and intrigues, reflecting Samuel Ward, the public figure, and Ward the man, may be found in the Ward Papers of The Rhode Island Historical Society Library. To make it more accessible to the public the Society published a book, *Correspondence of Governor Samuel Ward May 1775 — March 1776*, edited by Bernhard Knollenberg. Included with this material is a "Genealogy of the Ward Family," compiled by Clifford P. Monahan, which helps keep the ubiquitous Ward family straight in one's mind. Samuel's wife, nee Anna Ray, was the daughter of Simon and Deborah (Greene) Ray. Governor Samuel Ward's mother was a great-

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Eng. by H. Cutler

Nath Greene

Nathanael Greene

grand-daughter of Roger Williams through the Sayles family. And Samuel Ward was the great-grandfather of Julia Ward Howe. The Ward collection per se actually covers material about the family from 1690 to 1909 and contains some priceless corrected lines of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" in the handwriting of Julia Ward Howe.

The personal side of the redoubtable colonial governor, as revealed in the correspondence, is a fascinating one. Governor Samuel was a paterfamilias who loved to play Polonius. His letters to his children are full of sage and rather ponderous admonitions, interspersed with messages of love and practical instructions. He called his wife his better half and once reassured her during one of his frequent absences that a woman who had a man of sense and spirit to assist her and is under the particular care of an all-gracious Being may and forever ought to be cheerful, naming her blessings in that order.

Ward was in office during a particularly difficult time. Outwardly he is characterized in accounts of the time as being penetrating, calm, earnest and firm, noble and enlightened. But poor Anna, his wife, in spite of all assurance continued to worry over him. What with the farm in Westerly, the store in Newport and his political duties the good man had a bit too much on his plate. Somehow he managed to keep an eye on the British in the Bay and the price of beans in Boston at the same time but the nervous tension took its toll. Ward fell ill of a mysterious disease which today might be diagnosed as psychosomatic. It was attributed by his wife to over-work. In July of 1765 she wrote him, "*The Thing I greatly Feard is come upon me; your illness is nothing more than I expected which has bin the Cause of all my uneasiness. You allways impute it to this thing or the orther but your Hurry and Everlasting Studdy will Surely Deprve of the Best if Husbands and Leave me With ten Helplis Orphans that never were Exposed; but the Subject is two Distresing to dwell upon. For Heavens Sake Disingage you Selve from Business and try to recrate.*"

Indeed, Ward, himself, must have worried a bit because he apparently got religion at this time and assured his wife after he had regained his health that he had no intention of backsliding.

The Ward family were outgoing, energetic and creative but there seems to have been a neurotic, rather melancholy strain running counter to this life force in their makeup that would assert itself temporarily. When Samuel Ward's older brother, Thomas, died, he was Secretary of Rhode Island. The death of this brother caused his younger brother, Henry, who attended Thomas devotedly, to fall into a depressive state. Samuel wrote to his wife that he

hoped Henry would soon snap out of it and perhaps this could be hastened by his becoming a candidate for the Secretary's office, although difficulties were anticipated. It is typical of the Wards that Henry did pull himself together, was elected and consistently reelected for over thirty years and died in office. Samuel Ward's sister, Hannah, worked herself up into such distress over the state of her immortal soul that he had to write her that the sins she worried about were imaginary but that even if they were real she might hope for salvation since, "*David was guilty of Adultery and Murder the two highest Crimes in Nature and yet God graciously forgave him.*"

Ward's burdens, both personal and political, were many. His wife died in December of 1770 leaving five of their family of eleven not yet in their teens, the youngest only three. And his eldest daughter, Hannah, on whom the family would naturally have leaned, died four years later in September of 1774. In December of that same year we learn through the correspondence that Ward had occasion to fear for the mental distress of another daughter, Catharine, recently married to Christopher Greene of Warwick. Apart from his praise of her former behavior

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and his usual moral admonitions he warns her, "You have thought too closely for some time past. You ought to relax and endeavor to unbend; the Mind like a Bow may be drawn so hard as to break . . ." It was to his sister Hannah that he had to turn to take his wife's place, however neurotic this good maiden lady may have been at times. On top of all these worries he had the additional one of concern for two sons fighting in the Revolution, though it must be said that Charles, his eldest son, was not one of his favorites.

A kind of an 18th-century beatnik, Charles was inclined to take off for odd destinations with strangers and was cut off with \$50 in Ward's will. Apparently it did not alter his feeling toward this son that

no less a personage than cousin Nathanael Greene, referred to in the family as "Our General" assured Ward that Charles "has conducted himself very prudently since he joined the Army." Ward apparently gave little attention to him and between the lines of family correspondence one gathers that even Sammy, Jr. reprimanded his father for not writing to his delinquent older brother, who, perhaps like so many of his type, only needed a war to prove his mettle.

As for Sammy, Jr., never was father blessed with more of a paragon, according to the record. He was heartily praised by both Greene and Washington for his conduct as an officer in the Revolution. In his school days he studied so hard his father had feared



Stephen Hopkins



Julia Ward Howe from a portrait by John Elliott and William Cotton.

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for his eyesight and his mother for his sanity. She wrote, "I have known of Divers instances of Peoples losing their Reason at Times by over applying their Studies which of all things you ought to Cherish with the greatest Care; your own imagination must Paint such an Idia in Dreadfull Coulers. If you have Reason and a mind to search after knowledge you have Time Enough and it is much harder as you are younger to Study So Close."

It must have been difficult for Samuel Ward to bear what was happening to Sammy, Jr., who, in the words of his mother had never been "Exposed" but had known only love and security. For Sammy, determined to do his patriotic duty but desperately homesick had written from Point aux Trembles in November of 1775 to his sisters, "We have gone up one of the most rapid rivers (Kennebec) in the world, where the water was so shoal that, Moderately speaking, We have waded 100 Miles. We were thirty days in a Wilderness that none but savages ever Attempted to pass We marched 100 Miles upon short three days Provisions, Waded over three rapid Rivers, Marched through snow, and Ice bare foot, passed over the St Lawrence where it was Full of the Enemies Frigates, and are now about twenty four Miles (up stream) from the City to recruit our worn out Natures — I have been hearty through the whole Voyage till within these few days, but soon shall be well again—" And to dramatize the measure of his homesickness he adds "I should now be glad to see the veryest wretch I know off, was he from the Free little honourable Govern.^t of Rhode Island."

Sammy, Jr., having volunteered for service with Colonel Benedict Arnold under Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Greene for this punishing expedition through the Maine wilderness, which culminated in the disastrous siege of Quebec on December 31, 1775, was taken prisoner and held until August.

Attacking this problem with his customary vigor and adroitness, Ward did all in his power to alleviate Sammy's sufferings in captivity, sending money, letters of credit, negotiating with a Canadian prisoner here who had an influential brother there and even enlisting the aid of his good friend, Ben Franklin, who was destined for a political mission in Canada.

One of the last letters Ward dispatched was to Sammy on March 11, 1776. After dealing with the practical arrangements for getting money to his son, he switched to his role of Polonius, the advice giver. "Kind and young as you are," he wrote typically, "You must often have observed the fatal Effects of Vice. Shun therefore my dear Son, as inevitable Ruin Luxury and Vice of every Kind and endeavour to impress deeply upon your Heart the Love of God, of Mankind and of Country, in one Word every

moral, social and relative Virtue . . ."

It was also typical that while writing these high-sounding platitudes, the very human and worldly Sam Ward, according to a gossipy letter of Silas Deane of Connecticut to his wife from Philadelphia, had made himself, like Benjamin Franklin was wont to do when away from home, a kind of star boarder at the home of Mrs. Mary House who, taking turns with his friends, nursed him devotedly in his last illness.

And in a report by Dr. Thomas Young, formerly of Boston and Newport, who attended Ward, written to Henry, his brother, we learn that Samuel had ". . . made a little entertainment and invited some friends with whom he spent the afternoon and evening as convivially as was common for him." Indeed, the next day when feeling unwell, he sent for Dr. Young, he did not really know if he were coming down with the dreaded disease or had a hangover. The good doctor prescribed "first premising a mild emetic in the morning and a pill that cleared the belly the ensuing evening." But soon the unmistakable signs of smallpox appeared. "Never," wrote Dr. Young, "was a sick person more assiduously attended in any part of the World than M.^r Ward was in Philadelphia." But in spite of medical consultation, the care of his friends and of Mrs. House, Ward died on March 26, 1776.

Dr. Young's sincere distress as a friend as well as attending physician is reflected in this letter to Henry. "It is with the most heartfelt grief, with the deepest affliction and pungent regret that I inform you the patriotic Samuel Ward Esq.^r left his anxious, his numerous friends in this City to bewail their loss of one the most able, consistent and determined defenders of American Liberty in his person, who departed life at 20 A.M. this morning of that tremendous disease the small pox, taken the natural way . . . So full, so firm, so capable, so industrious was M.^r Ward, that his loss will be severely felt in the Congress. One, at least, of the mighty advocates for American Independency is fallen in M.^r Ward, to the great grief of the protopatriot (Samuel) Adams."

John Adams wrote his wife, March 29, 1776: "We have this week lost a very valuable friend of the colonies in Governor Ward, of Rhode Island, by the small pox in the natural way. He never would hearken to his friends, who have been constantly advising him to be inoculated, ever since the first Congress began. . . He was an amiable and a sensible man, a stedfast friend to his country upon very pure pinciples."

And here we are forced to face a strange and haunting enigma. Why did the intelligent, conscientious and enlightened Samuel Ward, whose communications home were filled with practical advise



Samuel Ward, Jr.

about the care of livestock, and whose letters to Sammy contain specific, hygienic instructions for the care of the men under his command — why should this man so needed by his family of ten, his state and his country have so perversely neglected himself?

There was reference to the smallpox in family correspondence and he was aware that Dr. Young had inoculated his own family as soon as they came to Philadelphia. It is with a sense of fatalistic horror that we read in his letter to his daughter Deborah of January 2, 1776, *“I am not like to get time to be Inoculated and there is very little of the Small Pox now in this city.”*

Twelve weeks later he was dead of it.

And in June of that year hospitals for inoculation for the smallpox were ordered established in each County in Rhode Island.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sam Ward". The signature is written in dark ink and features a large, sweeping flourish at the end.