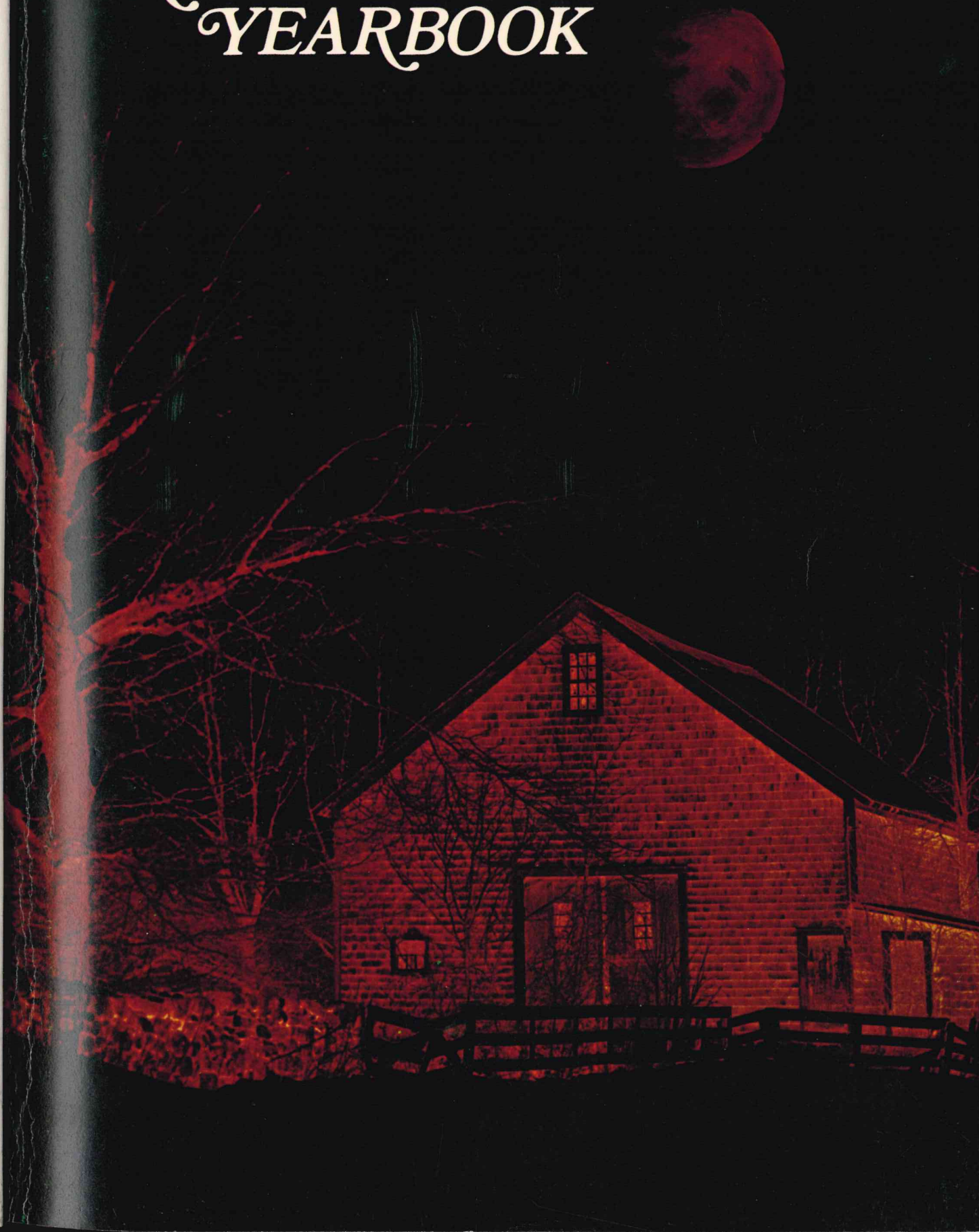


the 1972
**RHODE ISLAND
YEARBOOK**





Florence Parker Simister is a native Rhode Islander, born, raised and educated in Providence and for thirty years has been writing about the history of her state. Her radio show, Streets of the City, went on the air in 1952 and is now in its 20th year. She has written three books for children, all with Rhode Island historical backgrounds. Her articles on various facets of New England and Rhode Island history have appeared in many publications. Her Centennial History of the Rhode Island Hospital Trust National Bank appeared in 1967. Since then two books, compilations of her radio program, have been published. She is currently at work on a book for children and a biography for adults.

Rhode Island Exodus

ST. JOHNSBURY VERMONT 1787

DR. JONATHAN ARNOLD

by Florence Parker Simister

Before the Revolutionary War the most famous physicians in Providence, all practicing at the same time, were Doctors Joseph Hewes, Ephraim Bowen and Jonathan Arnold. This is the story of Dr. Arnold.

He was born in Gloucester, Rhode Island in 1741. At the age of 24 he was practicing and teaching medicine. He had excellent penmanship and so was made clerk of the Court and of the Town Meeting. He is on a list of owners and occupants of buildings in Providence 1749-1771. As early as 1768 he was known not only for his medical skill, but for his civic-mindedness. In that year he was one of the so-called proprietors appointed to build a school in the north part of the town.

In October, 1774, various commands were being chartered because trouble with the mother country seemed imminent. Dr. Arnold applied for the charter for the Independent Company of the Providence Grenadiers.

He was a member of the Committee of Inspection appointed by the town in 1774 following the recommendation of the Continental Congress. The duty of this committee was to see that no one

violated the non-importation agreement and, beginning on March 1, 1775, to see that no one purchased any India tea.

Dr. Arnold played an important part in Rhode Island's Declaration of Independence on May 4, 1776. He was only 35 years old, but he was one of those who drafted it. His name is among those appended to this historic document. He was a Deputy from Providence and the Act, or Declaration, is said to be in his handwriting; he is often referred to as the author of it. This precious document is in the Archives in the State House in Providence.

Three years later, when the Deputies from all the New England states met to agree on the prices to be paid and received for labor and for almost every article sold from a bushel of wheat to a quart of milk, Dr. Arnold attended the convention.

He was so learned in medicine that in December, 1776, he was appointed one of three "examiners of surgeons and surgeons' mates for the army and navy". In the same month he was made "director and proveditor" of the hospitals of the state with power to establish them as he thought necessary,

to supply and provide for them, and appoint stewards and nurses.

During the Revolutionary War Brown University, then Rhode Island College, was contained in one building: University Hall. This was turned into a barracks and hospital and Dr. Arnold took charge of it. He stayed there until peace was declared in 1783. There is still extant at the Rhode Island Historical Society, a scrapbook called **Hospital Papers**. In it are many orders, reports, requests, etc. signed by Dr. Jonathan Arnold, Director-General Hospital, Providence, Rhode Island.

He became an expert in law and he was also interested in mechanical inventions. In the **Journals of the Continental Congress 1774-1789** he is listed as a "member of the committee which considered and reported upon a mechanical device which its inventor claimed would revolutionize navigation on inland waterways." He had a taste for music and poetry. There are references to one or two poems by him: **Elegiac Lines** (on the death of Moses Brown) and **On Hearing a Partridge Drum**.

How did such a man—learned, civic-minded, deeply involved in the politics and life of a town and state that he loved—come to found a new town, far away in the wilderness of Vermont, called St. Johnsbury?

To find the answer one has to go back to the time of the Continental Congress of which Arnold was a member from 1782-1784. Another famous Providence resident, the lawyer David Howell (who, by the way, sold many a cord of wood to the hospital in Providence when Dr. Arnold was Director-General there,) was already serving in Congress when Jonathan Arnold arrived to replace General Ezekiel Cornell. Howell and Arnold agreed on one vital subject whereas Howell and Cornell had not. The subject was the necessity of resisting the import duty of 5 per cent which Congress wished to levy. Many of the states had complied but Howell said over and over that Rhode Island would never grant the right to levy duties within her borders "until the equal right of the thirteen states to the public domain was established by Congress". Howell was persecuted by his fellow-congressmen for his stand but his resistance "laid down distinctly and broadly the doctrines of free trade as a measure of protection, of state sovereignty, and of the equal right of all states in the national domain". John Collins soon replaced Howell in Congress but Arnold and Howell continued to correspond on various aspects of the



Dr. Jonathan Arnold

problem.

Also, Dr. Arnold was involved in another argument in Congress. It seems that the first settlements in what was to be Vermont had been made in the southern section and were involved in boundary disputes between Massachusetts and New Hampshire. There had also been trouble with New York.

After New York and New Hampshire settled their differences some of the pioneers refused to reapply to New York for patents since they had received their original patents from New Hampshire. Under the leadership of Ethan Allen and others they took up arms to defend their right to the land. About 1771 Colonel Allen organized a military force among the inhabitants of the district west of the mountains and the force became known as the Green Mountain Boys. This group of men, already a well-knit unit and well-drilled when the Revolutionary War broke out, were great fighters and of incalculable value to the American cause. They soon adopted a declaration of independence. They wanted to be free of New Hampshire, New York, Massachusetts and Connecticut and, under the name of New Connecticut, submitted their wishes to the Continental Congress.

They w
gress to ca
state const
in its fight
to the Unic

Dr. Jon:
concerning
Mountain
Various t
Vermont.

One th
betrayed
orders of
movement
that story
Johnsbury
border. T
of treason

As a
informati
loans bei
Arnold d
men, he



They were advised by a member of that Congress to call their state Vermont and to adopt a state constitution. Vermont, still having difficulties in its fight for independence, was finally admitted to the Union in 1791.

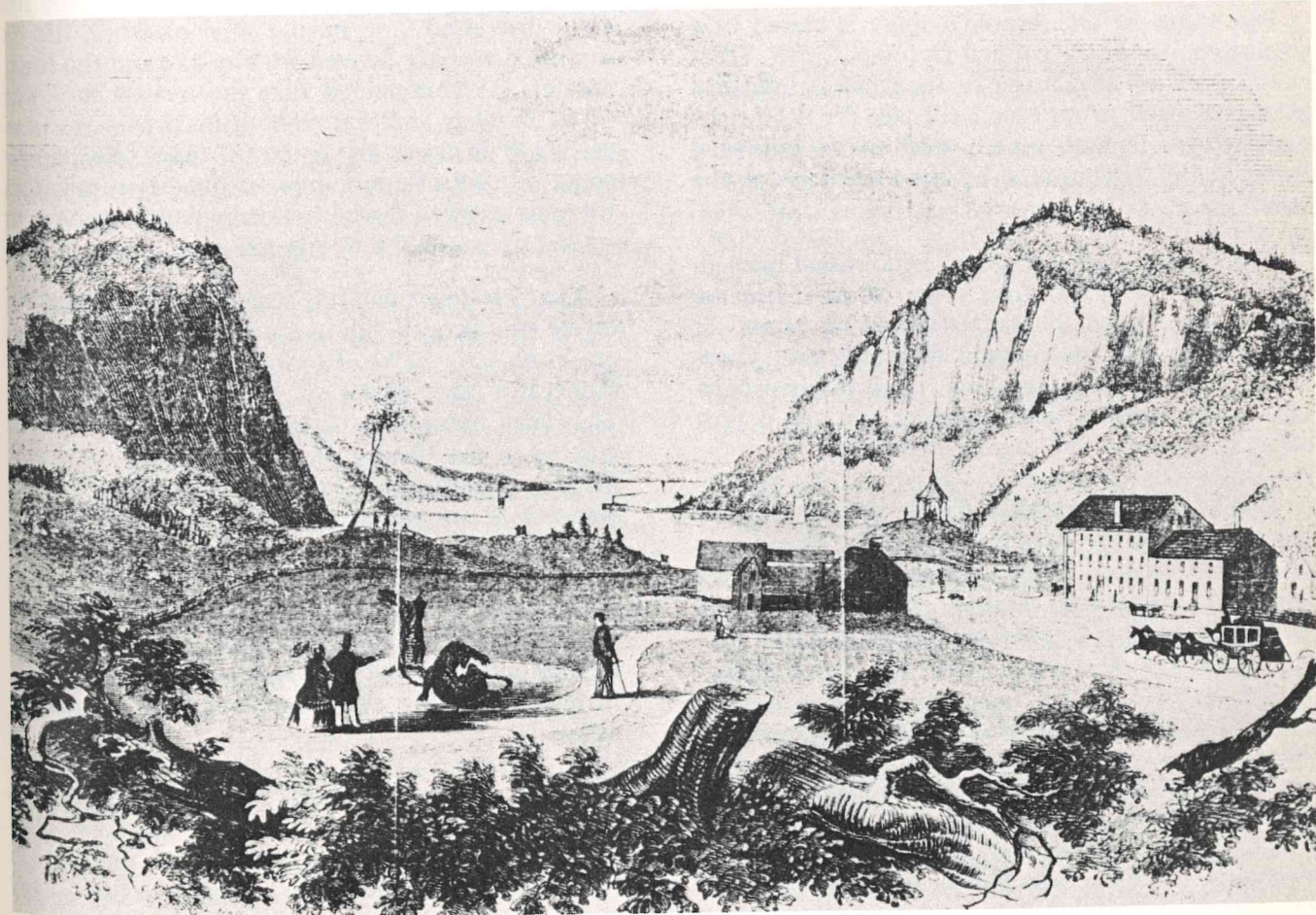
Dr. Jonathan Arnold participated in the debates concerning Vermont and this interest in the Green Mountain State may have led him to settle there. Various theories exist as to why he went to Vermont.

One theory, long since refuted, is that he betrayed his country by communicating secret orders of General Washington which disclosed the movement of troops to the enemy. Because of this, that story goes, he left Rhode Island for St. Johnsbury, the nearest point to the Canadian border. There is no justification for such a charge of treason.

As a matter of fact, David Howell released information to his constituency regarding foreign loans being negotiated by the United States and Arnold did the same. He wanted the equality of men, he believed in states' rights, he denied

Congress to command him to secrecy and wrote to Governor Greene of Rhode Island, "Secrecy was enjoined upon members of Congress...until I was obliged to declare upon the floor that in matters where the necessity therefor (sic) could not be pointed out and which I deemed interesting to the State I had the honor to represent, to be informed of, I should not hold myself bound by a majority from making the necessary communications thereof to my constituents." This was in the true spirit of Rhode Island, the first state to declare its sovereignty and the last to relinquish it.

The truth is that Dr. Arnold admired the fire and spirit of the Green Mountain Boys. He applied for land in their state and the man who had been governor (1778-1789) of what was to become Vermont, Thomas Chittenden, granted him, "a tract of land in old Orange County to be called and known as the Township of St. Johnsbury". Legend has it that Jonathan Arnold procured the charters of St. Johnsbury, Lyndon, Burke and Billymead (now Sutton). The Arnold genealogy has it that the first meeting of the corporation of proprietors of Lyndon, Vermont was held in Providence, Rhode Island on the first of January, 1781. Colonel



Jeremiah Olney was moderator, and Olney Winsor, clerk. Among the proprietors were Governor William Greene of Rhode Island, Thomas Chittenden of Vermont, John Innes Clarke, Joseph Nightingale, Ephraim Bowen Jr., Welcome Arnold, Theodore Foster, William Bowen, Stephen Randall, the Reverend James Manning and many others from this state.

Arnold's land contained 71 equally divided rights, each over 3,000 acres. At the time of the charter Arnold had 13 rights (about 39,000 acres). His contract for supplying the state medical chest at Bennington is supposed to have covered the expense of the charter fees. However, this appointment may not have paid him as much as people thought because there is a letter from Arnold's son, Josias Lyndon Arnold, to the Honorable David Howell Esq. in Providence. Young Arnold complains in the letter that, "The old doctor's (Dr. Hewes') friendship for my father which he harps so much upon—I believe never extended much further than to loan him money at an exorbitant interest." Perhaps this was another source of ready cash for Dr. Arnold, with which he bought rights in St. Johnsbury and Lyndon.

The value of Dr. Arnold's share is stated in a resolution passed in council October, 1786, "that in the grant of land made to Jonathan Arnold and associates each proprietor shall pay for each right nine pounds in hard money before the following June, to be appropriated by the exigencies of the State".

At the time of the charter Vermont had been an independent state for four years. When it became one of the United States it still had no capital or state house, but the General Assembly met somewhere each fall and legislated. It established coinage, fixed weights and measures, set up a post office department and organized a militia.

This governing extended to the towns, too. The old records state: "At a meeting of the Proprietors of the Township of St. Johnsbury held in the house of Jonathan Arnold, Esq. in the said Township in the County of Orange on the 18th day of June, A. D. 1781. . ."

Contrary to the legend, St. Johnsbury was not named for a son of Jonathan Arnold's who died young. It was named for the French Consul in New York appointed to the United States in 1783. He and his three children were adopted as citizens of Vermont. His name was Monsieur Michel Guillaume

St. Jean de Crevecoeur. He shortened this to Hector St. John. He was a friend of Ethan Allen and wrote to him that many towns bore the name St. John and perhaps St. Johnsbury would be better. Some people prefer to think the place was named for St. John who saw a city in heaven, the New Jerusalem. However, Lyndon, close by, is supposed to be named for Dr. Arnold's son, Josias Lyndon Arnold who in turn was named for a governor of Rhode Island, Josias Lyndon.

Dr. Arnold was married three times and was the father of 11 children. Two of them are buried in the North Burial Ground in Providence. One of them, Josias Lyndon, was a graduate of Dartmouth and held a degree from Yale, became a tutor at Brown University and published a book of poetry. He died at the age of 29 in St. Johnsbury. Another son became governor of Rhode Island in 1831. The second Mrs. Arnold had died in 1790 and the doctor married Cynthia Hastings of New Hampshire. He proposed to her on his way to Providence on business and she accepted the proposal when he returned.

In the settlement of St. Johnsbury the going was rough at first. Arnold wrote home that he did his work by hand not having any ox-work. He is supposed to have arrived with an axe and the town charter. He complained that the nearest mill was 10 miles away and that most of his provisions were carried a distance of 26 to 30 miles. He had to make a 30-foot log canoe to put his supplies in when he went to the mill. This he had to portage in several places on the way home.

The first town meeting was held at his dwelling house (the proprietors had met there years before) on June 21, 1790. He was also chosen Town Moderator and Sealer of Weights and Measures. The year before the first town meeting he had written to the General Assembly saying that about 50 men were living in St. Johnsbury and that there was a lack of roads and therefore provisions. A grant was given to him for building a bridge. He cut down three pine trees which gave the men enough wood for a bridge and then for some reason Dr. Arnold made his workmen begin planking at the farther end, carrying the planks across the stringers instead of laying the planks as they proceeded across.

Before he built himself a house, Dr. Arnold's camp was near the north end of St. Johnsbury Plain. When enough land was cleared and enough roads and bridges built, he surveyed the townships.



Once he s
without s
as a surge
and anoth

He wro
real want
and amb
heresy, c
ment. Ar
so from f
one the
Arnold b
phia duri
gress, bu
condition
England.
empty. T
his friend:

His lai
Gazette f
and then
who pref
to luxury

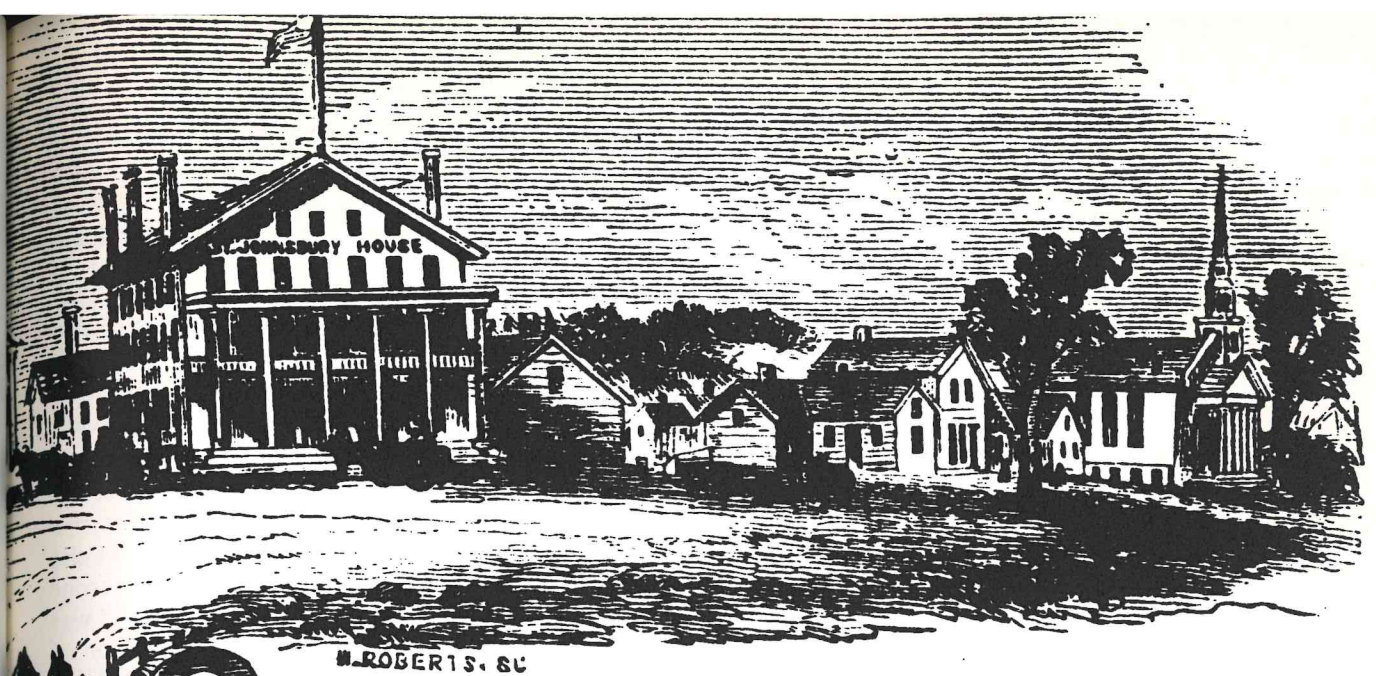
ned this to
Ethan Allen
re the name
r would be
e place was
heaven, the
lose by, is
s son, Josias
amed for a
n.

and was the
re buried in
ice. One of
Dartmouth
e a tutor at
k of poetry.
ry. Another
n 1831. The
90 and the
New Hamp-
Providence
sal when he

ie going was
t he did his
ork. He is
nd the town
st mill was
visions were
He had to
supplies in
o portage in

is dwelling
ears before)
osen Town
l Measures.
ing he had
; that about
d that there
ovisions. A
dge. He cut
nen enough
reason Dr.
king at the
he stringers
proceeded

r. Arnold's
Johnsbury
and enough
townships.



St. JOHNSBURY HOUSE.

All illustrations for this article courtesy of Providence Public Library. Reproductions by Two Dimensions.

Once he stayed for 10 nights in a row in the woods without shelter. This was a man of 45 with a career as a surgeon in the Revolutionary War behind him and another as a politician in Philadelphia.

He wrote, "... a few acres will easily supply all real wants; are we distant from circles of wealth and ambition? We are the same distance from heresy, confusion, chicane (sic) and disappointment. Are we remote from friends? We are equally so from flatterers and defrauders." This letter gives one the feeling that somehow, somewhere Dr. Arnold became disillusioned with life in Philadelphia during the sessions of the Continental Congress, but there is also the fact that in 1786 conditions were not good in southern New England. Crops were bountiful but pockets were empty. This may have prompted him to move with his friends to Vermont.

His lands were advertised in the *Providence Gazette* for June 27, 1787. The location was given and then the advertisement said, "... for those who prefer a competency with health and safety, to luxury with infirmity and danger. Titles to every

lot will be had from the original grantees, payment to be made in cattle, country produce and labour. For further particulars apply to the subscriber in St. Johnsbury who will show, not maps and charts. . . but the soil itself. Jonathan Arnold."

He wrote to Providence to his parents saying he would like to help some Smithfield men with land at \$1.00 an acre. He offered to let them see the land before they bought it.

He did everything for the town he founded. He was adept at medicine, law and government. He was also endowed with the Rhode Island know-how of erecting sawmills, of using mechanical devices, of utilizing everything there was at hand. He used hemlock for medicinal decoctions, for rheumatism and sciatica. He pulverized the bark of hemlock for treatment of scurvy, thistles for quinsy; sweet fern for worms. This last also made good beer. He used the water power for a sawmill and a gristmill in 1787. At Arnold Falls by 1828 there was a blast furnace and iron works. As soon as wool and flax could be raised, spinning wheels and looms were started. When people came to St.

Johnsbury from the country around for a town meeting they brought pies and cheese and cider and their spinning wheels. All the clothing in the settlement was homespun, made in family kitchens. Mills were not established until about 1810.

Today in St. Johnsbury there is still a park called Arnold Park, named for the doctor. It used to be known as the Green at the head of Main Street and was for more than 60 years an open space without trees, used for concerts (the bandstand was here), for a ball ground and for other purposes. In 1855 it was enclosed with a fence and trees were planted. It was then named Arnold Park because it was in front of his original homestead which he deeded to the town. In 1891 the residents of the area put a fountain in the park. There is also a rock there with a plaque on it. The boulder was given by the St. John de Crevecoeur Chapter D. A. R. The tablet was given by descendants of the founder of the town. It says: "This park is named in memory of Jonathan Arnold who founded St. Johnsbury in 1787 and built the first house near this site."

In the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum there are some letters written by Dr. Arnold, one to a Mr. Hazard of Wakefield, one to Daniel Lyman at the Hermitage in North Providence. Mr. Lyman's daughter married Arnold's son, Lemuel Hastings Arnold.

Somewhere in the neighborhood of St. Johnsbury there are supposed to be six armchairs brought from Rhode Island. They have never been located.

There is a miniature of Dr. Arnold painted in Philadelphia in 1782 and given to the Athenaeum by his great-grandson, Albert C. Aborn of New York. Finally, there is a picture of the founder of St. Johnsbury, presented to the town by another great-grandson in 1898. It is the picture of a courtly figure in velvet and ruffles, powdered hair, with refined features.

Dr. Jonathan Arnold was buried in the old graveyard he deeded to the town in 1790 for a burial ground or a public place. When the courthouse was built in 1856 the bodies of the first settlers were moved from this lot. Near the Mt. Pleasant cemetery to which the bodies were removed is a plain marble stone: "Hon. Jonathan Arnold, Died Feb. 1, 1793, Age 58." It is said he died of dropsy.

At the time of his death he was Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas of Orange County, trustee of the University of Vermont, a member of the Governor's council and a probable candidate for governor if he had lived.

His obituary was published in the Providence Gazette on March 9, 1793.

"The Honorable Jonathan Arnold, Esq. who departed this life at his home in St. Johnsbury in the state of Vermont was a native of this town, born December 3, 1741 and descended from one of the first settlers. He was Representative in the General Assembly and Assistant to the Governor and Council. He was educated a physician and was chosen by this State in the late war, Director of Hospitals. He also during the war commanded the Independent Company of Grenadiers of this town. Among the first traits of his character was a peculiar accuracy in penmanship and excellence in composition. This qualification at an early period in his life recommended him to the office of Clerk of the Superior Court, a place which he filled as he did every other office with singular ability, integrity and applause. He had a rare taste for music and poetry and was himself proficient in both. His knowledge was practical and the objects of it were the best interests of society. The improvements made by him in mechanics evince the force of an original genius. His capabilities were general and variegated as the acts of human life, which he seemed calculated to advance and improve. He took an active and zealous part in establishing the independence of this country. He hailed men of all nations as his brothers and gloried in the doctrine of natural equality. His social virtues are not to be forgotten. He was an entertaining companion and a faithful friend. He had the power to strike the attention, engage the affections and attack the heart in the bonds of friendship; to smooth the wrinkled front of care, and calm the mind in friendly relaxation. In fine, let the reader figure the most extraordinary assemblage of virtues and abilities—these were all seen in the real life of Dr. Arnold."

In 1971 we have counted at least 27 names in the St. Johnsbury telephone book, names of descendants of the first settlers who joined Arnold in St. Johnsbury, going there from Providence, from that part of Rehoboth that is now East Providence and from other places in this area.

The memorials to him are not all in St.

Johnsbury
act of
two mo
His son
Rhode
he bec
figure, C

He t
not ma
He led a
of Rho
within
diverse

Take ad
for the I
receiving

INS

The M

Johnsbury. He left behind in his native state the act of independence of Rhode Island which came two months before the United States Declaration. His son, Lemuel Hastings Arnold, was Governor of Rhode Island in 1831. Through his daughter, Sally, he became the ancestor of that famous literary figure, George William Curtis.

He took with him to St. Johnsbury, Vermont not material objects, but his character, his ideals. He led an exodus into the wilderness with the spirit of Rhode Island independence burning fiercely within him. He was a true polymath—"very and diversely learned."

SUBSCRIBE NOW

Take advantage of the new five year subscription plan for the Rhode Island YEARBOOK, assure yourself of receiving the next five issues — 5 for the price of 4.



INSURANCE • Business & Personal

The Man from Starkweather & Shepley

155 South Main St., Providence R. I. 02903

Mini Extra

On September 18, 1898, at the Rockingham Hotel in Narragansett, the lovely and fragile daughter of the Confederacy Varina Anne (Winnie) Davis died.

Winnie was the youngest child of the ex-president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis. In 1887, at the age of 22, Winnie fell in love with Alfred Wilkinson, a Syracuse attorney but the "ghost of sectionalism" prevented their marriage.

Mrs. Jefferson Davis and Winnie had come to Narragansett to visit their good friends the Joseph Pulitzers. Kate Davis Pulitzer was distantly related to Jefferson Davis and the Pulitzers were "sympathetic with the impoverished leader of the lost cause."

By Katherine Tucker

OUR 172nd YEAR

Of neighborly
full-service
banking for
Washington
County



THE WASHINGTON TRUST
Company

ESTABLISHED AS THE WASHINGTON BANK IN 1800
WESTERLY • HOPE VALLEY, RHODE ISLAND