

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTIONS

Vol. XXIII

OCTOBER, 1930

No. 4



SEVENTEENTH CENTURY RHODE ISLAND THIMBLES

The one at the right belonged to Esther Willett, and the other two belonged to the Squaw Sachem Weunquesh.

In the Society's Museum. See page 126.

ROGER WILLIAMS PRESS



PROVIDENCE

E. A. JOHNSON CO.

Issued Quarterly

68 WATERMAN STREET, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

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(Illustrated by Harold Bowditch)

RHODE
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ISLAND
SOCIETY

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Metcalf Bowler as a British Spy

By JANE CLARK

In the years following the American Revolution, Sir Henry Clinton, erstwhile commander-in-chief of His Britannic Majesty's armies in North America (1778-1782), was fighting his battles over again in print. His principal ammunition were the twenty thousand letters, returns, accounts, memorials, intelligence papers, and memoranda, which he had brought back from America. These had been scattered in chests and boxes at his house in the country, and in bureau drawers and pigeon holes at his town house in Portland Place. At least one bundle had been tucked away in the seat of his carriage. Sir Henry Clinton's collection of the British Headquarters Papers was purchased in 1926 by Mr. William L. Clements for his Library at the University of Michigan. Buried among these was the story of a Rhode Island "patriot" who had corresponded with the enemy.

As the papers came to America in their original disorder, it is not surprising that the story was unravelled backwards. In the first month of cataloguing, I found misplaced in the Arnold-André treason correspondence, five letters or "intelligence" written at Providence, R. I., and signed "S. H." Almost a year later, when new boxes were opened for the first time, two letters signed "Rusticus" were found among deserters' depositions, dispatches to Lord George Germain and papers about the Burgoyne campaign. "S. H.", and many a better man, had been crowded from my memory by hundreds of other names, but "Rusticus" remained. He had begged Sir Henry Clinton not to disclose his name to anyone, and I began to think Sir Henry had granted his prayer, when, after the lapse of another year's cataloguing, I found another letter in "Rusticus'" upright hand. This one, however, was signed in bold letters "Metcalf Bowler." The name suddenly reminded me that "S. H." had mentioned "Mrs. Bowler" whom I had taken to be his daughter. The handwritings of the letters were checked, the pieces of the puzzle fitted together and the secret was out. Metcalf Bowler's correspondence with the enemy is published herewith.

JANE CLARK.

Portsmouth Decr 12th 1776

Sir

From some peculiar Circumstances attending my situation in Life, have been unwarily led from my Duty, to the King, and joined the Provincials, in their Opposition to His Majesty's legal Government, and accepted of some offices, inconsistent, with my Allegiance to His Majesty—but since the arrival of the British Forces on Rhode Island, (and having the opportunity of seeing His Majesty's most gracious Proclamation) have desisted from acting in any capacity, contrary to His Majesty's Government—and propose to submit myself to His Majesty's Clemency, as soon as I am able, to wait on your Excellency—

I would beg leave just to observe—I am cloathed, by the Governor & Company of Rhode Island, with a Commission, as Chief Justice of the Superior Court of Judicature Court of Assize &c throughout this Colony, and have sustained the Office of a Judge of that Court, upwards of Six Years—yet should y^r Excellency judge it incompatible, with His Majesty's Governmt to retain that Commission shall when required of by your Excellency, deliver it up—as the Hessian troops are quartered on the island and having committed many outrages, and depredations, on many of the Inhabitants, by entring their Houses, and plundering their Effects, and even putting them in fear of their Lives—as I am situated on the Island, should esteem it a faveur, and indulgence, if your Excellency, would order, as soon as convenient a Guard to my Habitation at Portsmouth that I may be Protected, from the Insults of the Hessians—having put my self, under the Protection of His Majesty's Troops, which Indullgence, shall be gratefully acknowledged, by him

Who has the Honor to Subscribe
With great defference & regard
Yr Excellency's Most obed^t humble Servt

METCALF BOWLER

To the Comm^r in Chief of His Majesty's Forces in Rhode Island

Portsmouth Rhode Island Sep^r 15th 1778

Sir

When I had the Honor of Conversing with your Excellency a short time ago at Newport—you desired I would keep up an epistolary correspondence with your Excellency at New York—throo the hands of Cap^t Savage—having since your departure thought a great deal on that Subject—and at length come to a determination to do my self that Honor—tho' should it ever come to the knowledge of the Provincials—shall run a violent risque of my Life and forfeiture of my Estate both Real and Personal—but as you pledg'd your Honor to me—my Name should never be made mention of—nor called into question—my Letters perused by no Person saving your self—that I might make use of what Signature I pleas'd so now I commit my Life and Fortune into your Hands and Protection—and hereafter shall address you by the

Signature of (Rusticus)—but am afraid from my present-situation my Correspondance will be productive of little service to His Majesty—for the Person from whom I might hope to gain intelligence will be afraid to Correspond frequently with me here—owing to the difficulty of Conveyance and apprehension of being detected—But was I upon the Main my self—think I could easily convey any intelligence necessary to some Person in Newport to be forwarded to your self at New York—I am willing provided y^r Excellency thought my going with my Family on the Main might be productive of any essential Service to His Majesty's Government—and you would be willing to advance me a Sum in Specie to carry with me—which I might make use of (rendring you an account of the expenditure) not only for my own support—but for other necessary and essential purposes—consent to quit my Habitation at Portsmouth and leave my Estate in Town and Country in your Possession—and I think I dare almost assure your Excellency—soon after my arrival at Providence of becoming a Member of their Council of War—a Representative in the General Assembly—and as the choice for a new set of Delegates—for this State commences next Spring—should it be your will and pleasure—with some pecuniary assistance—of being returned one of the Delegates in Congress—however that and the proposal now made of leaving the Island submit to your superior Judgement to determine will only add—that there never could be a more favorable opportunity for my being received in the most cordial manner amongst them than at this juncture—having whilst they were on the Island—made grievous complaints (and give me leave to say not without reason) of my treatment by the Kings Troops—my Property having been destroyed or taken for His Majesty's Service—your Excellency will therefore take the whole into consideration—and return me an Answer—as soon as possible—by the same conveyance that this reaches your hands—should your Excellency think it not expedient for me to leave the Island—but tarry on it this Winter—I must earnestly intreat your Excellency would give Orders—to who ever may be the Comm^r in Chief of the Troops on Rhode Island—that my Person and Property may be protected from Insults—and that I may be allowed some recompence for my Property which has been wantonly destroyed or taken from me into His Majesty's Service—my House and Garden on the Hill in the Town of Newport—has been

taken out of my possession and converted into an Hospital for the use of His Majesty's 43^d Regm^t—nigh eighteen months ago—my Farm where on I dwell—is an entire Waste—having had an Incampment on it for this two years past—not a rail left nor single Fence on the whole Farm—that have not been able to raise the least produce for the support of my Family—saving what Sauce my Garden produced—my only Cow the support of my Children—most wantonly Butcherd since the Provincials quitted the Island—my Library plunderd of Sixty odd Volumes—my Three Horses & Colt on my Farm with my Cart—taken from me into the Kings Service—and altho the Qu^r M^r Gen^l issued an Advertisement that every Inhabittant should come and receive his Property that was taken from him—notwithstanding repeated applications have not been able to procure the return of either Horses or Cart or any satisfaction—in short such has been the severe treatment I have met with of late—that am almost discouraged—and without some alleviations or assistance—I shall not be able to support my self and family on the Island—throo' the approaching—dismal dreary Winter—I have recapitulated my Distrest Circumstances not doubting you will take them into consideration and from your wonted Goodness and Humanity—you will commiserate my very unhappy condition—and order me some Redress—in such manner as shall be most agreeable to your Excellency—should I be permitted to leave the Island doubt not you will order a Flag to be procured to transport my family Furniture & and one Black Servant I have with me which is the only help we have to do family business—I would mention one circumstance which had like to have slipp'd my Memmory—and for which have like to have been brought onto trouble—your Excellency remembers when you took the Papers from me two years ago almost—I inform'd I had some Paper Money my own Property—which you was kind enough to say I might keep—when the Provincials was on the Island—having not a pair Oxen on my Farm to Cart Wood or Plough the Ground—meeting with a Farmer who came on with a Load of Flour for the Provincials and was discharged by them—and going home on the Main—I tempted the Man with a large Price in Paper Money for his Oxen & Cart—and purchasd them with the Money you was so kind as to leave me—for my own and His Majesty's Service took a receipt for the Money—and made report thereof to the first Kings Officer I saw—after the Provincials

retreated S^r Robert Pigot threatens to take them from me as Rebell
Property in expectation of hearing from you I remain y^r most obd^t huble
Servt Rusticus

His Excellency Sir Henry Clinton

October y^e 22^d 1778

Sir

Your favor in answer to mine of y^e 15th Sep^r this receiv'd by the
hands of Cap^t. Savage—I perceive by the contents I have your per-
mission to go to the Main with my Family—only you have mistaken
the Place Connecticut for Providence—as I have no manner of connec-
tion in Connecticut Government—you mention my coming to you
at New York—to settle some affairs—before my departure for Provi-
dence—what ever Commands you may have for me to execute—must
be transmitted me here—throo' the channell of Cap^t Savage for should
I attempt going to New York—or was it only surmised I purposed
such a thing—I should never be admitted to return amongst the Pro-
vincials—you will be pleas'd therefore to reconsider that matter—and
give me your permission if you judge it to be necessary for me to take
my departure with my Family—directly from this Place—and permit
me to have a Flag to take me my Furniture and Family on board from
near my own own shoar—as it will save the expence of carting my Furni-
ture &c to Newport—not hearing from you of some considerable time—
had almost determin'd to try to tarry out the Winter on the Island—
and been making the necessary provision of Fuel &c—however if
you judge it expedient for me to leave the Island this Fall—and
repair to Providence with my Family—on receiving your Commands
shall instantly obey—and if all be making the necessary preparations
for my embarkation in expectation of receiving your further Com-
mands as soon as possible—youll please to be as explicit as you can in
your Instructions and you shall find them fulll'd as far as lies in my
Power—you will not forget to order me the—necessary—without some
of which shall cut but a despicable Figure—I must entreat your Excel-
lency would keep the whole that passes between us in your own breast—
for should it ever come to the Provincials knowledge—of my Cor-
respondance nothing short of my Life—would pay the Forfeit—in

expectation of hearing from you by first oppertunity—I remain
With great esteem and regard
y^r Excellency's most obed^t Serv^t
Rusticus

His Excellency Gen^l Clinton

I receivd yours and shall endeavour to comply with the request if
possible—strict orders having been given out for searching Man Woman
and Child going down or coming from Newport—however have got
Mrs. Moody to take charge of this and hope it will reach your hands
in safety the most material news prevailing is the capture of the Georgia
Fleet which youll perceive by the news papers that have sent my
daughter and its confidently whispered that a Fleet of Twelve Sail of
the Line with Five Frigates French & Spaniards where to sail from
Brest for North America in a short time after the Cutter that arriv'd
from France and its taulked when the Fleet arrives another attack will
be made in Rhode Island—however there is no sign of any—prepara-
tions going forward here as yet on the contrary they are strongly forti-
fying the Town and Huntingtons Regiment is under orders from New
London for this place I believe the proposals said to be made for peace
through the medium of the Court of Spain—would be accepted [torn]
not [for the claim of]* the whole of the newfoundland fishery being
claimed as a teritorial diminution however the people in general are
heartily sick of the War and if not soon over the horrid depreciation of
their currency added to their internal distresses of their avarciousness in
devouring one another must in the end finally—reduce them to sue
for peace—should there be nothing very matieral turn up before the
1st May shall hardly dare to venture writeing again without I see my
way perfectly clear—as your not sensible of the great danger I expose
my self and family to and after the charge I have paid for the Flag
carting my Goods to Newport and the great damage done my Furni-
ture shall even be out of pocket and house hardly any thing left for
the support and maintaineance of my family my-Daughter being left
behind has caused great suspiscion here and I am rather watch'd with
a jealous eye—and as surely as caught in any correspondence no mercy
will be extended—however shall yet remain friendly disposed tho have
been so severly handled at Newport farewell yrs. S. H.

*This phrase has been crossed out.

Providence April 25th 1779

my trunk and Mrs. Bakers when brought up to this town under what the most strictest examination eving to information being receivd she brought of a large parcell of counterfeit paper money—but their search proved abortive nothing being-found in her or my trunks and she having been gone down to Boston some day before in the Stage Coach.

In addition to what was wrote last—an express arriv'd from Congress this week and the Brigade station'd in this Town are now [torn] marching orders—and its said an expedition is on foot against Canada—[torn] Genl Sullivan is to have the Chief Command—that a French Fleet is expect [ed to] join them up the River St. Laurence by the latter end of this month at fart [her pt.] its rumor'd all three of the Brigades in this Vicinity are to hold them-selves in readiness to march at an Hours notice—however they will not stir until they receive their back wages due to them which are deficient above six months they are ordered to be paid up to this date—but no Paper money yet arriv'd all their public offices are destitute of even the Paper trash this causes great murmurings (however the taulk is) the expedition is against Canada.—I am apt to think from the orders issu'd and carpenters procurd and sent off—for to repair all the flatt bottom boats in the different parts of this and also the neighboring States that the expedition on foot most probable will be against Rhode Island and that they are in expectation of a French Fleet to arrive on this Coast the latter end of the Month but its only my own conjecture I know nothing for certain—Congress has certainly empowered their Ambassadors at the Court of France to treat with the Court of Great Britian on Terms of Peace which are to be Negotiated through the Medium of the Spanish Ambassador I am now running the grandest risque possible and pledging my Life at stake, and for what a paltry pittance, that has been more than expended in the transportation of my family and effects, and all promises made me been violated—without something handsome is done soon, to make me compensation, and encourage me to persevere, you must not expect to hear further from me—as I think I have discharged my promise, made punctually, and cannot think of jeopardising my self and family anymore—tho shall never do any thing prejudicial to government, you may rely on, but keep my self a strick neuter, until

affairs are settled. I might have been commissars General, of this department but absolutely-refused intermeddling with any office—the strickest search is made off every person going down or coming up from Newport—then should you send any message or any thing you must be extremely carefull and cautious.

Providence May 11th 1779 S. H.

Providence June 5th 1779

Altho' I said in my last you must not expect to hear from me again—until some thing handsome was further done having as I before observed expended the whole gratuity in removing my family &c. contrary to my expectation and the strongest assurances given yet as you seem desirous of hearing from me, cannot resist my strong inclination, to serve my Friends—especialy as I am assured the conveyance will be safe—nothing very material has turn'd up since I wrote last only the intended 'expedition seems to be entirely dropt at present, and we are as I think only on the defensive—altho' the G. G. is in great expectation of the arrivel of a french fleet on the coast hourly, and is absolutely makeing the necessary preparations, for a desent on the Island, should they arrive—every Boat is in readiness, the Waggon all prepared—and Thirty Men working every day in the Labratory, makeing cartridges, and other necessary warlike stores—the Militia all round, are order'd to be in readiness, with three days Provisions ready cook'd, and boats sent out to discover the Fleet, and give the very-earliest intelligence, should they arrive on the coast—notwithstanding all this military preparation—I am sure, they have no other foundation for the expectation of a Fleet—than barely what one Lt Devilliers who was Capt of Marines on board the Dean Frigate, that arrivd some time ago in the River Delaware from Martinico who says that he dined on board the Languedoc—and that Count De Estaing told him—he might inform the americans he should be in their Seas by the tenth day of June at farthest—I think they seem now rather apprehensive of a visit from you—as the Brigade stationed in this Town which does not exceed 1000 effective men—lay on their arms several nights past they are encamped on the Hill above Mr. Snow's Meeting House I have lately made a tour to Boston, and was there durring their Genll Election—I find the people much divided every one wishing an end

of the contest, and depreciating the first Authors of their Misery—in short their Currency is becoming such vile trash, that they value it not more, than the dirt under their feet—all the trade carried on, is meer chicanery, or a knavery, not an upright honest trader, to be found amongst them—I myself exchanged Dollars as twenty five for one—and indeed, they withheld, their most valuable commodities and would not dispose of them for the paper trash—between the Farmer and the Merchant the poor people are squeezed to Death—every necessary article of life is about fifty p Cent dearer, than here, with us—I heard many that were high Sons of Liberty formerly say—that was a B. fleet to appear and Blockade the Harbor,—and a land force lay Siege to the Town—not an hundred Inhabitants would go out—for they had rather submit to B. Government, than be oppressed in the manner they now are—I saw many Friends, who are yet there, and seem to keep up their spirit, in hopes of deliverance, in due time—there are no Continental Troops in Boston at present nor in its environs save a few Invalids, and G. Heath who commands in that—department has just received orders, to repair to G. Washington's Camp—we have here—Glover's Brigade Consists of about 1000 effective Men Cornell's Brigade which is small, at Tiverton, and its environs—Varnum's Brigade, which is but very small—Sherburne's Regt at Bristol and Warren—a Regiment at Greenwich South Kingston and along that shore—a company or two of y^e Black Corps are—stationed at Warwick Neck, and its environs—I only give this information of their station of the Troops, from what I have collected, having never seen them myself—but am thoroughly convinced, they can't raise on an alarm, for some very considerable time, above 2000 effective men—the Train of Artillery—which are in this Town, and perhaps make amount to about 300 effective Men last week our Govr received a Let^r from G. Washington pressing the sending forward the States quota of Troops, which they had voted to raise, and at the same time informing them, their affairs, wore a gloomy aspect, and that he had received certain intelligence that the B. Army would be reinforced, with 10,000 men from G. Britain, to act offensively, this Campaign—that there did not appear the least prospect of an accommodation, taking place and without his Army was speedily reinforced, he must quit the Field, this Let^r is kept as a great secret, but I got the intelligence, from one of the Govr's family—Con-

gress have been sitting this Three Months, to stop the depreciation of the Currency, but having at length got as far as the rule of Puzzle have given over the attempting any remedy, better than taxation—and have ordered, that Forty Five Million of Dollars, be called in by a Tax, on the States by the first day January 1780,—which in my opinion, instead of helping the great depreciation, will serve to depreciate it still lower—no Persons of any Consequence, seems inclined, to interfere in Government affairs—Government is at present conducted, by a set of low, ignorant, headstrong Men—I have been strongly solicited, to except several posts, but have declined them—thinking I can at present do much more service in a private station, than a public.—I keep Shop for a Livelihood.—tho had but few Goods to sell every European Article being so very scarce here, and extravagantly dear therefore at present, confine my self, to the West India Produce—G. G. has sworn the first person he catches, conveying intelligence, he will directly hang up.—therefore think what violent risque I run, and tremble every moment, at the consequence, of a discovery—however I flatter I shall not fail of a Reward hereafter. adieu Y P &

S. H.

I wrote you some time ago giving you a full account of affairs as they stood then—Since which have not heard any thing from you—tho trust your generosity—since which the Brigade stationed in this Town marched last week and are halted at New London we have here only Jackson's small Regiment and they came from Patuxet—they are under great consternation for fear of an attack as am confident there could not be 1000 effective men raised under some very considerable time—and very few of the inhabitants would turn out—and much more difficulty to bring in the County People—who are now in the height of harvest—if ever strike whilst the Iron is Hot—I can't learn of only two Brigades of continental troops in all Connecticut and one is that marched from this place—but very few of the train of artillery is here at present—and they are in no manner prepared for an attack—there is talk of calling in 1000 Militia from the Massachusetts—how soon they may arrive can't tell—the great news from the Southward of the defeat before Charlestown proves premature there actually having been no attack on the Lines—but if K—s— Troops are in possession

of Fort Johnston and command Ashley River—tho it still reported the G. Moultrie went out and attack'd and kill'd and took 753. tho believe it wants much confirmation—they are extremely jealous of me of late and seem very shy—as I dont solicit any favours nor accept of any—offers they make of Posts in Government under them—and they industriously circulate my D^r. is married to a B. officer—I do assure you I run the most violent risques imaginable and shudder at the consequences of a discovery whilst I write there is a Centry placed on the greet Bridge to stop all transient persons that passes and cant give a good account of themselves and carries them immediately before G. G. I shall be under the greatest terror until I hear the Bearer has reached home—as he is suspected and I believe is now under Bonds—I beg should you send or write it may be done with the utmost caution all the Prisoners here are sent down to Boston for safety—I dont think the Scheem they have undertaken to help the depreciation of their currency will succed as the country-people will not come into the measure proposed—but yet keep up their produce at a most enormous price—their seems to be a gloom on the countenance of the great folks—and they invent lyes to Keep up the spirit of the lower sort tho they begin to see through the deception and say they-will not risque their lives to save opulent mens estates—the inlistments here of troops goes on very slow indeed there is a new Corps raising to consist of 200 men under the command of Col. Barton to acct as a flying Army to range and harrass on your shoare on the Island &—but tho great bounty is given they inlist very slow—I am afraid I shall not venture to let you hear much more from me without some alteration of times—and exceeding anxious wither these reaches your hands if it should not you may expect to hear of my sad fate—farewell

P July 13th 1779

S. H.

Since my last, made a journey to bosten, and had the pleasure of being in company with many well wishers, found that province in a very weak and defenceless state, without any troops, save a few invalids—the castle and other fortifications, much out of repair and neglected—especially that part of the castle, towards the land, in a wecak condition.—no soldjers kept to garrison the castle only a few invalids, to hoist the colours, and do other drudgery—whilst I was at Boston, there was

an alarm fired for four ships, being in the offing, makeing for the harbor, which throw'd the inhabitants, into great consternation, expecting them to prove, the enemys ships, many taulked of leaving the town.—others, of rallying the militia, and collecting what numbers they could to go down, and help defend, the castle &c but at length, they proved to be, two of their own cont^l. frigates, with two english packets their prizes—it was the general oppinion, of thinking people, that the same fleet—that was sent as a reinforcement, to penobscot, might with great ease, have enter'd the harbor of boston, taken possession of the town &c—in such a defenceless condition, were they then in, no ships, no troops, nor men, to defend their fortifications. I left four cont^l. frigates in the harbor just return'd, from successful cruises, and of consequence—man'd, and lying at the wharfs, and dock yards, to refit, for sea, which wont be of some time, as the sailors are a shore, spending their prize money, and some of their Capt^s gone home, to see their familys—there was also—a french frigate, in the harbor, in readiness, to receive mons^r Gerrard, and convey him to France, the new ambasd^r having set out for philads to relieve him—in short, no thing seems attended to, in that province, but accumulating, paper thash good eating—drinking, and fareing sumptuously, every day—and as to their defence, they seem, much to trust, (to Heaven for their safety and protection) they are most amazingly chagrin'd at their late penobscot expeditⁿ—and even say, that Rivington, in his relation of the affair, cannot exaggerate, provided, he dont say, all their troops, were captur'd—as to the late stipulation enterd into, concerning the reducing of the prices of provisions and other articles, and endeavoring to appreciate their currency, am thoroughly convinced, will never have, the desired effect, as the country are very slack, in bringing in any sorts of provision. their markets, very badly supplied, and every art used and method practised, by the country people, to evade the stipulation, and as those that are posses'd, of large sums of paper currency will fare well if to be procured, at any rate—so they send their servants into y^e country, purchase at the stipulated prices, with the addition of a gratuity—the mercantile part, are also practising every method, to evade the stipulation, by withholding such goods, as are most wanted, and such articles, as they cant, under any pretense withhold, they even adulterate, or practise some fraud so as to evade, the stipulated price of those articles.—

the Colony of Connecticut, not as yet having-enterd into any stipulations, are feathering their nest, by purchasing large quantities, of west india Goods, Tea &c from the merchts in Boston and in order to induce them, to sell them large quantities at a time, they give a gratuity, over and above the stipulated prices—was inform'd, there had not been less, than four thousand wagon loads, of west india produce, carried out of Boston, into Connecticut, since the stipulation, took place—the exchange as nigh as I could learn, was from 15 to 20 for one at present, but expected to be much higher, in a few months, as congress keeps the Press continually striking—they emitted one week in July no less than fifteen million of Dollars, therefore, should they be left to themselves, they must sink under their enormous, continental debt, or their paper currency become of no value and die in the possessor's hands and so produce a general bankruptcy, you may easily perceive what small hopes they have of the appreciation of their currency, or of the present stipulation, taking place, long—and should their currency not be made better, before the time of the continental soldjers enlistments expire, which will be in the Months of Nov^r and Decembe^r next—they never will get a thousand men to re-inlist as I am well assur'd, they will place no more implicit faith, in that reverend body, the Congress-wood is extremely scarce and dear at Boston, no less than one hundred Dollars p Cord—on my arrival at Providence—found a prevailing report, of Count D'Estang being bound to North America with a large squadron of line battle ships and frigates, with six thousand land forces, onboard the fleet, and that a Sloop left them, that arriv'd at Bedford in Latd. 25 Longtd 70 steering N. N. W. their destination a profound secreet, only by their takeing on board N. F. Pilots, and others well acquainted, with the Carolina Coast, they were judged, to be first bound, to Georgia, and to secur the whole N. E. Coast—Gen. G. seemd much to credit the report, and in consequence gave orders for all the flatt-bottom boats, to be got in readiness, the wagons, in order, the train of artillery to hold themselves, in readiness to march at an hours warning—Gen. Corn. troops to be employd in cutting fascines and the saw-mills, to go night and day, to saw plank for platforms &c however, its now nigh thirty days, since this Sloop arrivd and no further intelligence receiv'd, of, the fleet being spoke with, or seen, any further to the northward, therefore, imagind they are gone to windward, or were never seen

at all, as reported—however, should any authentick intelligence come to hand, concerning them, before this is calld for, you may depend, on being duly inform'd thereof—I must once more mention, the critical situation, to which I am continually expos'd in keeping up this frequent correspondance for should it once be discover'd, nothing short of my Life, and the utter ruin of my Family must ensue. I have disengaged my self and refused, several lucrutative employments which have been repeatedly offerd me, as I think it best at this juncture, to be in a private statien, by which must have avoided, their test-acct, and am freer, from being suspected of holding any correspondence and am on good terms, with Gen. G. to, I receiv'd by the last Flag sundry articles, for which, you have my thanks, and prov'd very agreeable, as do assure you, I am at great expence to support my family, and hardly any thing to do it with, but what little I get, in the shop keeping way, and my capital is so small, that can purchase, but few articles, to run my Shop, could I now and then, get a supply from Newport it would assist me greatly, and should gratefully-acknowledge the favor—perhaps Mr^s. Bowler may be permitted soon to come down to see her Mother

Providence Sept 15th 1779 S. H.

Providence October 2d 1779

should an open Letter come off from her Sister, M. Gee or my Daughter, in forming of her, being in a bad state of health and desirous, of seeing her Daughter—but since I wrote—have been lucky enough, to obtain leave, from Gen. G. for my Daughter if agreeable to your self, and Gen. Prescott—to pay me a Visit here. with his solemn assurance, of her having liberty of returning—when ever she inclines—should you think it adviseable to let her come, the sooner the better, as the Weather, will grown cold & blustering—you may depend, on receiving on her return, all the intelligence possible, and should she come off, your being so kind, as to make a small addition to the Goods, all ready sent of a few peices of blk and tailored ribbons, a few green shoe bindings a piece or two of black calamances, one or two dozen more blk Handkerchiefs, a piece or two of good Cambrick, a few packs of Pins and some coloared and coarse white Threads some black and coloared

sewing Silks—a small assortment of cultery ware in Buckles Penknife &c—and a good Case Coat cloak that is camblet, linn'd with bare, then I may be fit in the cold during the Winter season, to pick up, intelligence now am to inform you since what I wrote, on the other sheet—we have had various reportes of a french fleet, being seen off being at the Hook—[torn] as where so sanguine is G. G. of their comeing he has sent out a Vessell to look for them, who is returned, without being able to see, or hear aney thing from them—and there is no manner of any certain account of their having been seen, since they were left in Lat 25 Long 70 two of your Anspach Soldjers, arrived here, last evening who report, you have received an account by express from N. York of 22 Sail of the Line being of the Hook, which G. G. puts much confidence in—as he catches at everything that looks like their comeing here, to the northward—but I think they will not be here this Season at least—for am well assur'd G. Wash. nor Cong-s have any advice of their intention of coming to N. America this Fall—yesterday, amid Jacksons Regiment of [torn] Troops from Boston—they were sent to reinforce our People at Penobscot but were too late and are just returned, to their old station, in this Island they amount to, between 3 or 400—and serve them, we have only 500 militia, with a few artillery—all the troops are under marching so infatuated is G. G. about the french fleet arriving on our coast the States are got almost ripe, to quarrell with one another, Massachusetts State, has prohibitted, every sort of merchandize, and provisions from being transported by Land, into any other of the States, & Connecticut is purchasing all the cattle, on the borders of our State, and driving them into theirs, to kill, and give almost any price—the Country People dont bring in any Provisions scarcely, nor any Butter Cheese &c, thus we are almost starving, in a Land of Plenty, and the article of Wood, is also very scarce, the Country People, withholding it, and will not bring in Wood at the stated price—then expect, we shall go to loggerheads—amongst ourselves—I think this Winter must picture a Scene of the utmost Confussion, should things not take a strange alteration as the Continental Troops time of inlistment will expire and am sure they will not re-inlist, as they money now stands—and how they can make it better cant conceive, they have emitted such quantity and the Press, still kept striking of more, to supply their demands Col. Barton's Corps fills very slow, he has not above sixty men,

and has done nothing remarkable, as yet—the Cont. Frigates in Boston is getting ready for Sea, and an embargo laid, to mann them perhaps she may sail in three or four weeks time—but believe not much sooner.

Biographies of Metcalf Bowler, who was Chief Justice of Rhode Island in 1776 and 1777, will be found in the *Record of the Descendants of Charles Bowler* by N. P. Bowler; *The Biographical Cyclopaedia of Rhode Island*, p. 130; *Annals of Trinity Church, Newport*, by George C. Mason, p. 107; and *History of the Narragansett Church* by Wilkins Updike, 1907, v. II, p. 197. The panelling from one of the rooms of Metcalf Bowler's house at Portsmouth is now in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art at New York.

Watermarks on Early Rhode Island Paper

On March 25, 1764, articles of partnership were drawn up and signed for the establishment and operation of a paper mill in Rhode Island. The principal participants in this enterprize were Capt. John Waterman the printer, his father-in-law, Capt. Jonathan Olney, Mr. Jonathan Ballou and Mr. William Goddard, the printer.

A mill was built on the Woonasquatucket River near the present Olneyville and the manufacture of paper began in 1765. A detailed history of this and subsequent Providence paper mills appears in the *Americana Collector* for May, 1926.

PROVIDENCE

WATERMARK USED BY JOHN
WATERMAN ON PAPER MADE IN 1766.

John Waterman, who operated the paper mill at Olneyville used as a watermark the word PROVIDENCE as early as 1766. This watermark appears on the paper of many issues of the *Providence Gazette*. The Waterman paper mill eventually passed into the hands of the Olney