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**Washington's Fourth
Visit to Rhode Island**

R. I. Hist. Soc.



Presented by

"The Old Stone Bank"

Providence, R. I.

February 22, 1932

Washington's Fourth Visit to Rhode Island

GEORGE WASHINGTON visited Rhode Island for the fourth and last time in 1790 when the smallest of the States finally ratified the Constitution. When the General became President of the young Republic which he had brought into being, he decided to make a complete tour of the entire territory comprising the United States. In the autumn of his first presidential year he started this plan by visiting New England between October 15 and November 13, 1789, omitting Rhode Island since she had not fallen in line with all the other states and come into the Union. However, when Washington received word that the last of the thirteen Colonies had joined with the others in May, 1790, he acknowledged the ratification as follows: "Since the Bond of Union is now complete, and we once more consider ourselves as one family, it is much to be hoped that reproaches will cease and prejudices be done away; . . . if we mean to support the liberty and independence, which it has cost us much blood and treasure to establish, we must drive away the demon of party spirit and local reproach."

Upon adjournment of Congress, August 12, 1790, Washington made immediate arrangements to visit Rhode Island and he left New York City for that destination on Sunday, August 15, going first to Newport by



boat. He was accompanied by Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of State, George Clinton, Governor of New York, Theodore Foster, Senator from Rhode Island, Judge Blair of the United States Court, William Smith, Member of Congress from South Carolina, Mr. Gilman, Member of Congress from New Hampshire, and three gentlemen of his official family. This was the only sea voyage ever recorded by Washington except the trip to the Barbados in the fall of 1751, when he accompanied his ill brother Lawrence who sought to regain his health in a warmer climate.

Washington was received with great enthusiasm by the people of Newport where he remained for a day and a night. A huge throng greeted him at the wharf; he received many official salutes, and a long procession marched through the streets in his honor. He took a walk about the town and the day ended with a dinner at the State House which was filled to overflowing with the enthusiastic and admiring populace. On the next day, August 18, the President departed for Providence after he had participated in a program of exercises which included addresses by prominent citizens and by the honored guest himself.

The trip from Newport to Providence must have been a tedious one since the passage required seven hours, but the well-planned reception which awaited him at the head of the Bay very likely banished all irritation caused by the lengthy boat ride

and the late arrival. Two days previous, the Town had made preparations to give Washington an official reception. The leading citizens of the community held a public meeting "to consider of the most proper measures to show the Veneration the Town hath of his Character and the Sentiments of Gratitude the Inhabitants entertain for his rescuing America from the Prospect of Slavery and establishing her Liberty upon the broad basis of Justice and Equity under a Constitution the Admiration and envy of the civilized World."

Among other things at this meeting it was voted to have all the windows in the Market House mended to help improve appearances of the business section, and Henry Ward, Dr. Enos Hitchcock, Welcome Arnold, David Howell and Benjamin Bourne were elected on a special committee to prepare an address to be presented to the President. Another committee was appointed to arrange the details of the official reception and all the inhabitants were requested to clean sidewalks and streets adjoining their dwellings and have everything spic and span before noon of the day when Washington was expected to arrive. At a second meeting on the following day the wording of the address prepared by the special committee was approved, and Daniel Stillwell was ordered "to cause the State House to be handsomely illuminated on Occasion of the Arrival of the President of the United States."

From the contemporary accounts and

private records of these eventful days in the history of Providence it is possible to arrange the various events of the reception program in their proper order. The packet bearing the President and his official party arrived in Providence about four o'clock in the afternoon and as the ship approached the wharf cannon salutes were fired from Federal Hill, and an impressive procession was formed to escort him to his place of lodging. The shouts of the crowds, the ringing of bells and the boom of the guns carried everyone to a high pitch of enthusiasm as Governor Arthur Fenner stepped aboard the packet and welcomed the President to Providence. Then the procession, with various individuals and organizations lined up according to a previous arrangement, moved through the streets to Mr. Daggett's Tavern on Benefit Street (At present the "Mansion House" and formerly the "Golden Ball Inn"). Washington, with Governor Fenner on his right and Senator Foster on his left, followed the troops, music and state and city officials, and behind marched Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, Judge Blair, and other distinguished figures present on the occasion. The program printed for this feature of the celebration is a most interesting document and an original copy is now in the possession of the Rhode Island Historical Society.

When the President arrived at the door of the tavern he reviewed the entire proces-

sion and saluted each unit as it passed. He enjoyed a typical family dinner and prepared for bed quite early. As he was about to depart for his night's rest he was informed that the students on the Hill had prepared a special illumination of the building now known as University Hall, and that they would be highly honored if he would visit the College and view the spectacle. Although it was raining slightly, and contrary to his usual custom of remaining indoors at night, he climbed the hill in company with a few friends and there beheld the college building completely illuminated with candle lights in every window.

The following morning Thursday, was cold and rainy. However, the weather cleared later and Washington took a walk about the town accompanied by several of his official hosts. This walk lasted until early afternoon and included a climb to the top of University Hall and a tour of a local shipyard where a large ship was on the stocks. Stops for refreshments were made at the John Brown residence (still standing on Power Street) at Governor Fenner's home and at Deputy Governor Jabez Bowen's. After a brief rest at the tavern he received the addresses of the Society of the Cincinnati, Rhode Island College (now Brown University) and the Town of Providence. Then he went to the Town Hall where a dinner had been prepared in his honor, and to this affair several hundred persons had been invited. An im-

mense throng surrounded the hall on the outside, and when a toast was proposed to "The President of the United States" the whole company within and without cheered loudly and indulged in a spirited demonstration of enthusiasm. Washington then rose and drank the health of the company present, and later gave the toast, "The Town of Providence."

Other toasts followed, brief speeches were delivered, compliments exchanged and the President quickly departed for the wharf where the same packet awaited him for the return journey to New York City. No doubt a great crowd went to the wharf to bid farewell to the one who had honored the town with his presence. That was the last time Rhode Islanders were to look upon Washington within the boundaries of the State, but the welcome which he received in 1790 was sufficiently warm and vociferous to impress upon him for all times that the smallest state in the Union respected his valor, chivalry, ability to lead, his sound judgment and his inspiring character.

In addition to the four visits which George Washington made to Rhode Island, the correspondence addressed by him to the Governors of the state and to other prominent figures, offers an interesting study of the close relationship between the local citizenry and the first President. Of all letters written by Washington to Rhode Island probably the most eloquent is the one addressed to His Excellency Governor William

Greene and dated June 18, 1783, at his Newburgh headquarters when he relinquished command of the American forces. The opening and closing paragraphs of this precious document clearly indicate a high respect for his loyal compatriots who served him well in the name of state and country:

"Sir:

The great object for which I had the honor to hold an appointment in the service of my country being accomplished, I am now preparing to resign it into the hands of Congress, and to return to that domestic retirement, which it is well known I left with greatest reluctance;—a retirement for which I have never ceased to sigh through a long and painful absence, and in which (remote from the noise and trouble of the world) I meditate to pass the remainder of life in a state of undisturbed repose;—but before I carry this resolution into effect, I think it a duty incumbent on me to make this my last official communication; to congratulate you on the glorious events which Heaven has been pleased to produce in our favor, to offer my sentiments respecting some important subjects, which appear to me, to be intimately connected with the tranquility of the United States, to take my leave of your Excellency as a public character, and to give my final blessing to that country in whose service I have spent the prime of my life, for whose sake I have consumed so many anxious days and watchful nights, and whose happiness being extremely dear to me, will always constitute no inconsiderable part of my own. . . .

I have thus freely disclosed what I wished to make known, before I surrendered up my public trust to those whose committed it to me;—the task is now accomplished:—I now bid adieu to your Excellency as chief magistrate of your state,—at the same time I bid a last farewell to the cares of office and all the employments of public life.

It remains then to be my final and only request, that your Excellency will communicate these sentiments to your Legislature at their next meeting, and that they may be considered as the legacy of one, who has ardently wished on all occasions, to be useful to his country, and who, even in the shade of retirement, will not fail to implore the Divine benediction upon it.

I now make it my earnest prayer, that God would have you, and the state over which you preside, in his holy protection,—that he would incline the hearts of the citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to Government, to entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another, and for their fellow citizens of the United States at large, and particularly for their brethren who have served in the field,—and finally, that he would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all, to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility and pacific temper of mind, which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy nation.

I have the honor to be with much esteem and respect,

Your Excellency's Most Obedient and Most Humble Servant,

GEORGE WASHINGTON"

Additional Copies of this Booklet sent upon request

ADDRESS

"THE OLD STONE BANK"
86 South Main Street
Providence



THE PROVIDENCE INSTITUTION FOR SAVINGS, familiarly known as "The Old Stone Bank," is in its own right a historic institution of Rhode Island. Founded in 1819 as one of the first mutual savings banks in the country, it has since contributed vitally to the development and life of this community.

Proud of its own historical significance, "The Old Stone Bank" has adopted this method of educational advertising to bring to light much that is of value and significance in the colorful annals of Rhode Island and national history.

The sketches and vignettes of old-time Rhode Island and Rhode Islanders that are broadcast weekly and then printed in this form are selected from local historical records which are full of the picturesque, romantic, and adventurous. In the hope that these glimpses into the lives, customs, and environment of our progenitors may be both revealing and inspirational to young and old, this booklet is presented with the compliments of

THE OLD STONE BANK