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

R. I. Hist. Soc.



Presented by  
**"The Old Stone Bank"**  
Providence, R. I.

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## Washington's Third Visit to Rhode Island

**G**EORGE WASHINGTON came to Rhode Island for the third time in 1781. Many stirring events had transpired since his previous visit in 1776 when he stopped over in Providence for two nights and enjoyed the hospitality offered by the citizens who entertained him in a manner befitting his honored position in the hearts and minds of American patriots. The Continental Army had met the British in conflict near New York City; Washington's men had crossed the ice-filled Delaware River on that historic dark and stormy night; Trenton had been seized; a splendid victory had been gained at Princeton and the troops had spent a winter at Morristown. Washington had suffered reverses at Brandywine Creek and at Germantown, and the destitute and barefoot troops had survived the hardships of a freezing winter at Valley Forge; and Burgoyne had surrendered at Saratoga.

The year 1778 brought the departure of Howe and Sir Henry Clinton succeeded him. Then the two years of war found the British again confined to New York City; Washington had returned to White Plains and there was no further effort on the part of the enemy to conquer the Northern States. The British then attempted to subjugate the South while continuing to hold New York against Washington's army, and



all the while the undaunted leader struggled for a decisive victory which finally came on October 19, 1781, when Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown. On November 20, 1782, Great Britain acknowledged the independence of the United States, and on September 3, 1783, a treaty of peace was signed at Versailles in France, and America was free.

On March 6, 1781, three months before the French army departed from Newport, General Washington visited Count de Rochambeau to consult with him concerning the operation of the troops under his command and to hasten the sailing of the expedition under M. Destouches who had resumed direction of the fleet after the death of Admiral de Ternay whose untimely death had occurred in Newport several months before. Washington journeyed to Newport on horseback as far as the Old South Ferry, about a mile to the south of what is now Saunderstown, and reached his destination by way of the Conanicut ferry. A resident of South Kingstown recorded in his diary that the General had passed through that section about ten o'clock on the same date, and that he was accompanied by about twenty soldiers acting as a guard. On his way across the harbor he stopped to exchange greetings with the French generals who were assembled on board the "Duc de Bourgogne," and in the early part of the afternoon he was taken by barge to the landing at the head of Long

Wharf where he stepped ashore amid the plaudits of the admiring throng. The French fleet, lying at anchor in the harbor, fired a salute, and the army, numbering nearly seven thousand men, was lined up in a double rank both sides of the street extending all the way from the landing point to the old State House on Washington Square. Passing through this imposing guard of honor he proceeded first to the State House where he was received officially, and then he continued on to the Vernon House at the corner of Clarke and Mary Streets, Rochambeau's headquarters where Washington was to be the Frenchman's guest.

An eyewitness to this historic procession through the streets of Newport records his impressions of the scene as follows: "I never felt the solid earth tremble under me before. The firing from the French ships that lined the harbor, was tremendous; it was one continued roar, and it looked as though the very Bay was on fire. Washington, as you know, was a Marshal of France; he could not command the French army without being invested with that title. He wore, on this day, the insignia of his office, and was received with all the honors due to one in that capacity. It is known that many of the flower of the French nobility were numbered in the army that acted in our defence. Never," continued this narrator, "will that scene be erased from my memory. The attitudes of the nobles, their deep obeis-



ance, the lifting of hats and caps, the waving of standards, the sea of plumes, the long line of French soldiers and the general disposition of their arms, unique to us, separating to the right and left, the Chief, with Count Rochambeau on his left, unbbonneted, walked through. The French nobles, commanders, and their under officers, followed in the rear. Count Rochambeau was a small keen looking man not handsome as was his son, afterwards Governor of Martinique. Count Noailles looked like what he was—a great man. But the resplendent beauty of the two Viosminels eclipsed all the rest. They were brothers, and one of them a General in the army, who the title of Count too. Newport never saw anything so handsome as these two brothers.”

This same observing citizen continues: “But we, the populace, were the only ones that looked at them, for the eye of every Frenchman was directed to Washington. Calm and unmoving by all the honors that surrounded him, the voice of adulation nor the din of battle had ever disturbed the equanimity of his deportment. Ever dignified, he wore on this day the same saint-like expression that always characterized him. There were other officers of inferior grade too that followed, and I afterwards saw them on horseback, but they did not sit on a horse like Washington. The roofs and windows of every house in sight were filled with the fair part of creation;” (that was

nicely said and so is the following) “and Oh! the fluttering of handkerchiefs, and showing of favors. It was a proud day for Newport.”

On the evening of the same day when Washington arrived in Newport the buildings in the town and the ships in the harbor were brilliantly illuminated. The Town Council asked the citizens to purchase candles for the illumination and requested that every house, large and small, should show a light. An evening parade through the principal streets featured the program of festivities on the day of arrival and it is recorded that the procession was headed by a group of boys bearing candles attached to long sticks. Washington appeared in the line accompanied by Rochambeau and other officers, their aides, and a great company of citizens. The evening was clear, and there was not a breath of air to fan the torches. The marchers passed through the principal streets and finally returned to headquarters in the Vernon House. This treasured structure is still standing today, in excellent state of preservation, and is occupied by the Family Welfare Society, an important social service agency in Newport.

Washington thoroughly enjoyed the company of charming ladies and he had an immediate opportunity to meet and admire the fairest of the fair among the social lights of Newport's fashionable circles at an elaborate ball held in his honor in Mrs.

Cowley's Assembly Room which then stood on Church Street. Both the American and French officers had frequented this popular rendezvous quite often during the preceding winter and Washington found the place, the occasion and the guests most agreeable. The guest of honor opened the ball with Miss Margaret (Peggy) Champlain, noted for her beauty, charm and grace, and who selected the dance "A Successful Campaign," whereupon several of the French officers seized the instruments from the musicians and played for the General and his fascinating partner. The soft light from the silver candelabra was reflected in beautiful mirrors loaned from local mansions and the gay party danced and promenaded beneath festoons of bunting looped with rosettes of swords and pistols.

A continuous round of social functions, and very likely many unavoidable conferences, occupied Washington's days and evenings in Newport until he took leave of his friends and colleagues on March 13 and journeyed overland to Providence. On his departure he was saluted by the French with thirteen guns and again the troops were drawn up in line in his honor. Count de Rochambeau escorted Washington for some distance out of town, and Count Dumas with several other officers of the French army accompanied him to Providence. They passed through Bristol, Warren and Barrington and a stop was made at Warren where the General and his suite

dined in the tavern of Shubael Burr whose bill for entertaining amounted to £12/12 which item was later ordered paid by the General Assembly. Count Dumas described the scene in Providence when the group arrived, as follows: "The whole population had assembled from the suburbs; we were surrounded by a crowd of children carrying torches, reiterating the acclamations of the citizens; all were eager to approach the person of him whom they called their father, and pressed so closely around us that they hindered us from proceeding. General Washington was much affected, stopped a few moments and pressing my hand said. 'We may be beaten by the English; it is the chance of war; but behold an army which they can never conquer.'"

The *Providence Gazette* of March 17, 1781, reports as follows: "On Tuesday Afternoon arrived here from Newport His Excellency General Washington with his Suite, accompanied by Major General Howe, and several other Gentlemen of the Army. He was met at the Lower Ferry by a number of Gentlemen and escorted to the House of the Hon. Jabez Bowen, Esq. (That building stood at the time on the site of the present Providence-Washington Building on Market Square and Washington remained there for two nights, March 13 and 14, 1781). On his Excellency's Arrival he was saluted by a Discharge of Thirteen Cannon from the Continental Park of Artillery,



from the Shipping in the Harbour and welcomed by the Cheerful Countenances of the Inhabitants.

"In the Evening the Town, the Shipping in the Harbour, were beautifully illuminated. On Wednesday an elegant Entertainment was provided at the State House (still standing on North Main Street) at which were present his Excellency, the military Gentlemen who attended him here, a Number of Inhabitants etc. Aften dinner thirteen toasts were drank, under Discharges of Cannon; and the Evening concluded with a splendid ball which was honored by the Presences of his Excellency General Washington, General Howe etc.

"Early on Thursday morning Washington left the town accompanied by Howe, a few officers and a number of private citizens going in a westward direction with New Windsor, New York, as his destination. Private citizens paid for the entertainment provided during the stay in Providence and it does not appear that the town authorities took any official recognition of the visit of the distinguished guest, except for the bill of James Arnold in the town papers for £2/10s/8d. against the town for candles supplied the "Poor to Eluminate the Town for Gen'l Washington."

Additional Copies of this Booklet sent  
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86 South Main Street  
Providence

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**T**HE 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

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