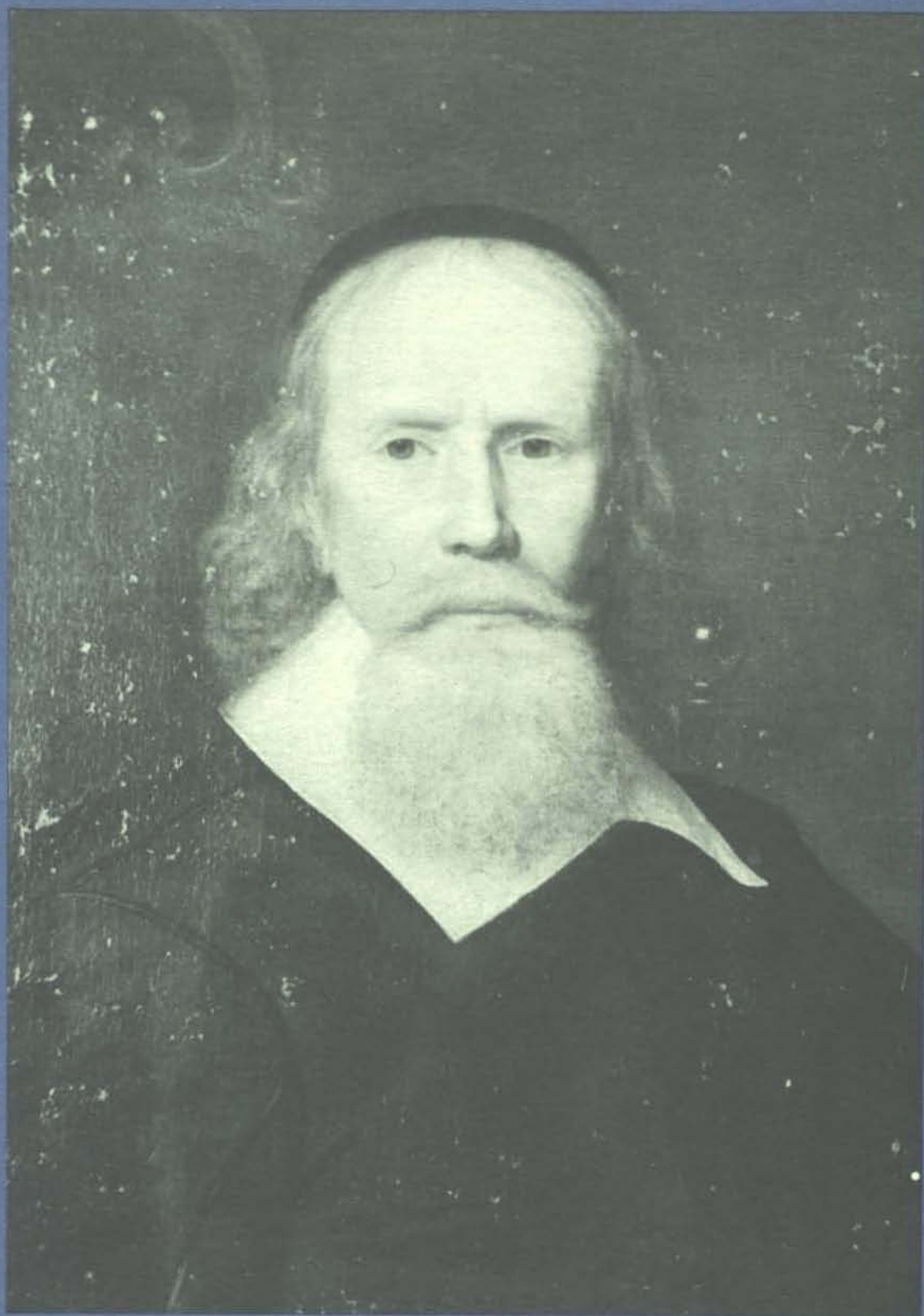




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Volume 40, Number 2 May 1981





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*This portrait, attributed to Guilliam de Ville, a Dutch artist, is said to be a likeness of John Clarke (1609–1676). Clarke founded a Baptist church in Newport around 1644 and spent thirteen years in England (1651–1664) as an agent for the Colony of Rhode Island.
Courtesy of Redwood Library.*



A Colonial Fifth Monarchist?:

John Clarke of Rhode Island

by Richard L. Greaves*

Two letters by John Clarke written in England in the 1650s, while he represented the colony of Rhode Island, throw valuable light on his personal affiliations and religious ideology.¹ The letters were acquired by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary following their sale at Sotheby's on June 26, 1974. Both are addressed to Col. Robert Bennett (or Bennet, 1605–1683), an influential republican MP and a Particular Baptist. In the letters lie clues indicating the likelihood that the colonial John Clarke was the same man as the John Clarke affiliated in the 1650s with the Fifth Monarchists, the radical millenarian group which expected the imminent return of King Jesus, and which espoused such things as government by the saints, legal reform, the cessation of tithes, and the abolition of the state church.²

Clarke's early career provides the ideological and psychological foundation for his pursuit of a radical course in the 1650s. Born at Westhorpe, Suffolk, on October 8, 1609, he was the sixth of the eight children of Thomas Clarke of Bedfordshire and his wife Rose, daughter of William Kerrich of Suffolk. In 1656 Clarke described himself as a physician, suggesting the possibility that he may have attended a university. He married Elizabeth Harris, probably before 1637, and from her father received the manor of Wrestlingworth, Bedfordshire, in 1656.³

Clarke emigrated to Boston, Massachusetts, arriving in November 1637. Manifesting radical theological tenets, he supported the recently-defeated Antinomians and thereby became *persona non grata*. Following a sojourn with other Antinomians to Exeter, New Hampshire, during the winter of 1637–1638, Clarke went to Providence to consult with Roger Williams whose own troubles with the Bay authorities Clarke regarded as a matter of conscience.⁴ Back in the Bay Colony, Clarke and others formed a compact on March 7, 1637/8, to establish a body politic at Aquidneck in Narragansett Bay.⁵ A deed for the land was acquired from the sachems on March 24, thanks to the negotiating efforts of Williams.⁶ In April 1639, Clarke moved from Portsmouth, the Aquidneck Island settlement, where he had been a separatist Congregational minister, to Newport, where he contributed to the new settlement by participating in civic affairs and practicing medicine. There is no record of when he initially adopted Particular Baptist tenets, but it was apparently during his early years at Newport.

*Mr. Greaves is a professor of history at Florida State University.

1. The letters are edited by B. R. White, "Early Baptist Letters (I)," *Baptist Quarterly*, XXVII (1977), 142–149.

2. For the Fifth Monarchists see B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London, 1972).

3. Clarke's life is summarized in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and *A Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Richard L. Greaves and Robert Zaller, 3 vols. (Brighton, Sussex, 1981 ff.), hereafter cited *B.D.B.R.* See also Thomas W. Bicknell, *The Story of John Clarke* (Providence, 1915).

4. John Clarke, *Ill-Newes from New England*, in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 4th Ser., II, 24.

5. *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England*, ed. John Russell Bartlett, 10 vols. (Providence, 1856–1865), I, 52, hereafter cited as *R.I.C.R.*

6. Samuel Hugh Brockunier, *The Irrepressible Democrat: Roger Williams* (New York, 1940), 110.

7. William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630-1833*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), I, 11; *B.D.B.R.*, s.v., Lucar.
8. Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research (1550-1641)* (Cambridge, 1912), I, 366. Williams himself was a millenarian. See W. Clark Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams* (Chicago, 1979).
9. Brockunier, *Irrepressible Democrat*, 196.
10. *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, ed. John Russell Bartlett, repr. ed., 7 vols. (New York, 1963), VI, 213; George Selement, "John Clarke and the Struggle for Separation of Church and State," *Foundations: A Baptist Journal of History and Theology*, XV (1972), 111-125; H. M. King, *A Summer Visit of Three Rhode Islanders to the Massachusetts Bay in 1651* (Providence, 1896).
11. *R.I.C.R.*, I, 234; Henry Chupack, *Roger Williams* (New York 1969), 56. Coddington had received a commission from the Council of State in England earlier in 1651, making him governor of Aquidneck for life.

About 1644 he founded a Baptist church in Newport with the assistance of Mark Lucar, a London Particular Baptist who had been associated with such influential Baptist leaders as Richard Blunt, Samuel Blacklock, and William Kiffin.⁷ Together Clarke and Lucar espoused millenarian principles too extreme even for Williams, who referred disparagingly to their "prophecies concerning the rising of Christ's Kingdom after the desolations by Rome."⁸ Among those who joined the church of Clarke and Lucar were converts from Seekonk (in Plymouth's territory) and dissidents from John Cotton's Boston congregation who had supported Henry Vane, Jr., in the Antinomian controversy. Clarke and Obadiah Holmes were, in fact, indicted by a grand jury at Plymouth for their religious activities at Seekonk, but escaped punishment by taking refuge in Rhode Island.⁹ Meanwhile Clarke's status as a leader was reflected in his service as an assistant and as a treasurer to the Court of Commissioners, which met at Warwick in 1649 and Newport in 1650.

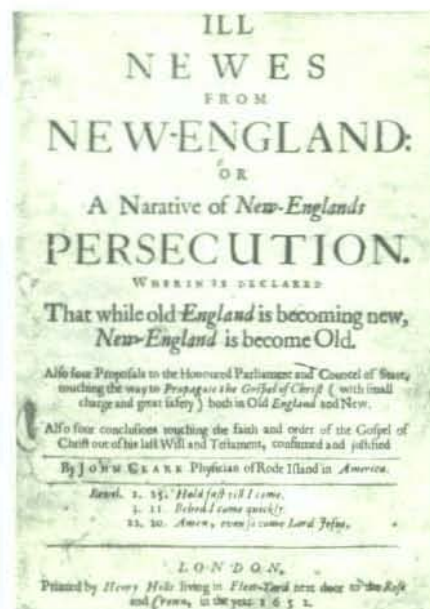
Clarke's religious principles again got him into trouble in 1651. With Obadiah Holmes and John Crandall, he held a conventicle in the home of one of his church members in Lynn, Massachusetts, for which the three men were arrested on July 20, 1651, and taken to Boston for trial the next day. Charged with preaching without authorization, administering the Lord's supper to persons under ecclesiastical discipline, rejecting the baptism of infants, and manifesting disrespect for established forms of worship, Clarke was sentenced to be whipped or pay a fine of £20. His friends paid the fine without his approval. Clarke's offer to debate the Boston ministers in public was not accepted; "there was great hammering about the disputation," Williams wrote to John Winthrop, "but they could not hit."¹⁰ Thus by 1651 Clarke had established a pattern of commitment to radical religious principles and a willingness to defy political authorities who attempted to repress those who held such tenets.

With Williams, Clarke sailed for England in November 1651. Representing Aquidneck, Clarke was to procure the repeal of the commission of Governor William Coddington, while Williams, representing Providence, was to obtain a new charter.¹¹ Still smarting from his recent persecution, Clarke wrote an account of his troubles at Lynn and Boston, which was published in May 1652, under the title *Ill-Newes from New England*. The printer was Henry Hills, a Particular Baptist who had close ties to William Kiffin, Lucar's old friend, and Daniel King, another prominent Baptist minister. The book, intended by Clarke to persuade Parliament to impose religious toleration on New England, included a defense of lay prophesying as the only true ministry. It also included a letter from Holmes to Kiffin and John Spilsbury, a Particular Baptist minister already on record as an opponent of the Seekers and the Ranters. In his letter Holmes linked the Newport congregation to the Particular Baptists in London, calling them "members of the same body" of Christ. For his part, Clarke not only recounted his

recent troubles but firmly enunciated the sectarian case for religious toleration: no Christian "hath any liberty," he wrote, "much less authority, from his Lord to smite his fellow servant, nor yet with outward force or arm of flesh, to constrain or restrain his conscience, no nor yet his outward man for conscience sake, or worship of his God, where injury is not offered to the person, name or estate of others."¹²

Unsettled political conditions in England, especially between 1652 and 1654, temporarily impeded the efforts of Clarke and Williams on behalf of Rhode Island. Williams, angered by Oliver Cromwell's hostility to Vane and by the establishment of the Protectorate, and needed by his supporters in Providence, left England in early 1654. Clarke, however, remained behind to continue his work as an agent. That August a John Clarke was a signatory of the Fifth Monarchist manifesto, *A Declaration of Several of the Churches of Christ*, which deplored the extent to which the first Protectoral Parliament was satiated with materialism.¹³ The identity of this Clarke with the Rhode Island minister has been denied because the signer was a member not of a Particular Baptist church, but rather a spokesman for the open-membership congregation in London of which Henry Jessey was pastor.¹⁴ Yet Jessey maintained close personal relations with Clarke's friend William Kiffin, who had been a member of Jessey's church until 1643 or 1644, as well as with other Particular Baptist leaders. (Richard Blunt, Lucar's former associate, had also once belonged to Jessey's church.) Jessey was concerned with missionary work to the Indians in New England, a subject which would have been of considerable interest to Clarke.¹⁵ There is, then, nothing genuinely incompatible about Clarke's membership in Jessey's church. Clarke also worked in this period on *A Concordance of the Bible*, which Henry Hills, his former publisher, was licensed to print in 1655.¹⁶

The first of Clarke's letters to Robert Bennett was dated August 25, 1655. Bennett had sat in the Rump and Barebones Parliaments and the first Protectoral Parliament, and had served on the Council of State and the Commission for the Approbation of Public Preachers. A Particular Baptist, he had links to Captain Richard Deane, Abraham Cheare, and the Fifth Monarchist John Pendarves.¹⁷ Clarke himself knew Deane, a cousin of Admiral Richard Deane and a Baptist who served the Cromwellian regime as joint Treasurer at War. In this letter, in fact, Clarke acted as an intermediary to end a dispute between Bennett and Deane. Clarke also referred to "our worthy friend Sir Henry Vane," an Antinomian, millenarian, and republican with whom he and Williams had previously worked on colonial business, and with whom Clarke remained in contact. Moreover, Clarke informed Bennett that he had sent two copies of Vane's book, presumably his recently-published *The Retired Man's Meditations* (1655), to friends in the Exeter area, one of whom was John Carew, a regicide and noted Fifth Monarchist who had served with Bennett in the Rump. Clarke specifically noted that "I do earnestly desire to have my unfeigned love and due respects presented



Title page from Clarke's pamphlet, *Ill Newes from New-England (1652), an account of his religious disagreements with the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay*. Courtesy of John Carter Brown Library.

12. Clarke, *Ill-Newes*, in *Mass. Hist. Soc., Colls.*, 4th Ser., II, 10, 39–76. Clarke was attacked by Thomas Cobbett, the minister of Lynn, in *The Civil Magistrate's Power . . . Together with a Brief Answer . . .* (London, 1653).

13. The *Declaration* is reprinted in Baptist Historical Society, *Transactions*, III (1911–1912), 129–153.

14. White, "Early Baptist Letters," *Bapt. Quar.*, XXVII (1977), 147n. The identity of the Fifth Monarchist Clarke with the Clarke of Rhode Island is also rejected by W. H. Allison in the *Dictionary of American Biography*. For a contrary view see W. T. Whitley, "The English Career of John Clarke, Rhode Island," *Bapt. Quar.*, I (1922–1923), 368–372; cf. Capp, *Fifth Monarchy Men*, 246.

15. *B.D.B.R.*, s.v., Jessey.

16. W. Noel Sainsbury, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, 1574–1660*, Colonial Series (London, 1860), 427.

17. *B.D.B.R.*, s.v., Bennet.



Sir Henry Vane the Younger (1613?–1662), former governor of Massachusetts Bay. Vane was instrumental in having William Coddington's commission as proprietary governor of Rhode Island rescinded in 1652. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 4089).

18. Clarke to Bennett, in White, "Early Baptist Letters," *Bapt. Quar.*, XXVII (1977), 142–144.

19. Capp, *Fifth Monarchy Men*, 276–278.

20. *Ibid.*, 116.

21. Whitley, "English Career of John Clarke," *Bapt. Quar.*, I (1922–1923), 370.

22. *B.D.B.R.*, s.v., Carew.

[to Carew], being ashamed that I have not as yet given him a visit by a line or two." The millenarianism common, but not unique, to Fifth Monarchists such as Carew was reflected in Clarke's advice to Bennett: "March courageously after that Captain who, ere long, will gloriously appear to be the Lord of hosts and Prince of kings," yet remembering "that the kingdom to which we belong is as yet but a kingdom of patience." This was not, of course, the activist millenarianism subsequently espoused by Thomas Venner, the Fifth Monarchist rebel. Still, the eschatological imagery was pronounced: "There is a regiment, a royal one, wherein you are listed, which though for the present endure hard service and seem to be worsted yet shall at last have the conquest and everyone crowned." The letter concluded with an interesting reference to the recent capture of Jamaica by the expedition that failed to seize Hispaniola as Cromwell had intended.¹⁸

The dispute which erupted in 1656 in the congregation of John Simpson at Allhallows the Great in London ultimately involved Clarke. In February Simpson retracted his Fifth Monarchist dissidents, seeking outside assistance to buttress their cause, appealed for help to Clarke, John Canne, Henry Danvers, Praisegod Barebone, Arthur Squibb, Clement Ireton, and four others.¹⁹ Although Simpson had refused them admission to the church, the inclusion of Clarke in this group was an indication of his stature in radical circles.

Following the death of Bennett's friend, John Pendarves, in September 1656, the Fifth Monarchists held a huge rally at Abingdon, Berkshire. Out of this came a new manifesto, *The Complaining Testimony of Some . . . of Sions Children*, of which Clarke was a signatory.²⁰ It is very likely that this man was John Clarke of Rhode Island, who was closely associated with Robert Bennett and John Carew, the Fifth Monarchist.

Clarke took a more direct interest in English politics in April 1657, when he signed an address asking Cromwell to refuse the crown. Other signatories included Jessey, Spilsbury (to whom Lucar had written in 1652, and a man undoubtedly known to Clarke), and Hanserd Knollys,²¹ a Particular Baptist minister definitely known to Clarke and mentioned in his 1655 letter to Bennett. Clarke's hostility to the possible assumption of the crown by Cromwell was generally shared by men in Clarke's circle. Carew, a committed republican, had been imprisoned in 1655–1656 in Pendennis Castle for asserting that Cromwell had "taken the crown from the head of Christ, and put it on his own."²² Vane's hostility to the Protectorate was so pronounced that he retired from political life until 1659, when he worked for the overthrow of Richard Cromwell. Roger Williams, of course, had left England partly because of his opposition to the Protectorate. It is, then, consistent with what we know of Rhode Island's John Clarke to find him standing with such men as Spilsbury, Jessey, and Knollys in 1657 to oppose the establishment of a house of Cromwell.

By 1657 Clarke was ministering to a Baptist congregation which met

at Worcester House in London.²³ In the company of John Canne, Wentworth Day, John Belcher, and others, he was arrested on April 1, 1658, at Swan Alley, Coleman Street, an area notorious for its associations with radicalism. The involvement of the Fifth Monarchists Canne, Day, and Belcher clearly underscores the fact that this was a Fifth Monarchist conventicle. Charged with sedition, Clarke appealed to the 1649 act prohibiting rule by a single person and brazenly accused his judges of treason. The jury acquitted him on most counts, but he was still fined and briefly imprisoned.²⁴

The second of Clarke's letters to Bennett, dated December 25, 1658, reflects the unsettled political conditions following Oliver Cromwell's death. To Bennett, who would sit the following month for Launceston in Richard Cromwell's Parliament and would speak out against hereditary monarchy and for a commonwealth, Clarke expressed his hope that the new assembly would be comprised of men devoted to the "good old cause and good old spirit"—men of righteous principles and public spirit. He was especially encouraged by the election of William Packer, a sometime ally of the Fifth Monarchists, and by the efforts made on behalf of Edmund Ludlow and Henry Neville, "who, though he have nothing as to religion, yet he is a public spirited commonwealth's man." Clarke was also pleased because the Presbyterians "have hereby far less advantage [in Parliament] than they had before." His letter specifically referred to a major Fifth Monarchy vision, namely God's intent "to bring in and set up that glorious kingdom of Christ" and "to cast out and throw down the kingdom of Antichrist." To work toward this end, particularly by seeking a godly parliament, he averred, was a duty of the saints. He was convinced that God was "at work to raise up a spirit . . . to recover his cause and to revive the hearts and lift up the heads of his people."²⁵ These statements were fully harmonious with Fifth Monarchist principles.

When the efforts of the saints to achieve their vision of a godly republic failed in 1659, Bennett and Clarke eschewed further radical activity. The Fifth Monarchy petition of September 1659, *An Essay Towards Settlement upon a Sure Foundation*, does not bear Clarke's signature. The authorities, however, were unsure of his loyalties, for in the aftermath of the Fifth Monarchist Thomas Venner's rebellion on January 6, 1661, Clarke was arrested. In the absence of evidence to link him to the plot, he was released. A few days later he issued an eight-page pamphlet entitled *The Plotters Unmasked, Murderers No Saints*, repudiating Venner and his supporters.²⁶ The agent of Rhode Island must have recognized the futility of supporting a lost cause and the impairment this could bring to his colony.

Moving quickly, Clarke petitioned Charles II on January 29, 1661, to replace Rhode Island's parliamentary patent, renewing his request on February 5. He did not, however, relinquish his long-standing belief in the freedom of conscience, but insisted in his petition that "a most flourishing civil state may stand, yea, and best be maintained . . . with

23. Thomas Tillam, *The Lasher Proved Lye* (London, 1657), 2.

24. *A Narrative . . . of the Sufferings of John Canne* (London, 1658); Capp, *Fifth Monarchy Men*, 121. Following the execution of Charles I in Jan. 1649, the Rump Parliament passed an act abolishing the monarchy and making England a republic in which the supreme authority was a parliament which no longer included a House of Lords.

25. Clarke to Bennett, in White, "Early Baptist Letters," *Bapt. Quar.*, XXVII (1977), 145-147.

26. Whitley, "English Career of John Clarke," *ibid.*, I (1922-1923), 371.

Detail of an illuminated copy of the Charter of 1663, granted to the Colony of Rhode Island by Charles II, whose miniature portrait appears in the corner of the document. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 2289).



27. Sainsbury, ed., *Cal. of State Papers, 1661-1668*, Col. Ser. (London, 1880), 4, 5; *R.I.C.R.*, I, 485-491.

28. Sainsbury, ed., *Cal. of State Papers, 1661-1668*, Col. Ser., 20.

29. Rhode Island Historical Society, *Collections*, X (Providence, 1902), 105, 117-118.

30. Sainsbury, ed., *Cal. of State Papers, 1661-1668*, Col. Ser., 127-128, 148-150; *R.I.C.R.*, I, 510-511. For Clarke's sparring with John Winthrop, Jr., in the negotiations see Robert C. Black, III, *The Younger John Winthrop* (New York, 1966), 226-232, 240-243.

31. *R. I. Hist. Soc., Colls.*, X (1902), 78.

a full liberty in religious concernsments."²⁷ On March 28, he expressed his gratitude that progress had been made and he indicated that he was about to return to Rhode Island.²⁸ His commission, however, was renewed on August 27. Plagued by financial problems, he had to borrow £140 from his old associate Richard Deane, for which the latter received the mortgage on a house and land in Newport.²⁹ After the boundary dispute with Connecticut was temporarily settled, Clarke received the new charter from the king on July 8, 1663, and the Assembly's thanks the following November.³⁰ By July 1664, Clarke had left for Newport, and in October the Assembly levied a tax of £600 to reimburse him for his expenses.³¹

In Rhode Island Clarke continued to serve his colony. He ministered to the Newport Baptist church, was deputy governor of the colony three times, went on a mission to welcome the arrival of the Royal Commissioners for New England led by Sir Robert Carr in September 1664, and sat in the General Assembly. In February 1665, he supported

the royal policy of providing coats as gifts to some Rhode Island Indian sachems. His expertise in boundary matters was utilized by the colony in negotiations with Connecticut in 1667. In September 1671, he was appointed to manage the colony's appeal to the English government against Connecticut.³² The following year he retired from political life. His congregation had split in 1671 as the result of a dispute over the sabbath occasioned in part by John Belcher, the Fifth Monarchist arrested with him in 1658. Belcher and his adherents resisted Clarke's efforts to distinguish between the Jewish moral and ceremonial laws, insisting instead on the observance of Saturday as the proper Christian sabbath.³³

After a career rich in political service and religious commitment, Clarke died on April 28, 1676, and was buried in Newport. His millenarian principles, his associations with the Fifth Monarchist John Carew and possibly John Pendarves, the probability of his membership in the London church of Henry Jessey (many of whose members were active in the Fifth Monarchy movement), his favorable opinion of the sometime Fifth Monarchist William Packer, and his general links to influential Baptists and republicans make it very likely indeed that the John Clarke of Rhode Island was the Fifth Monarchist of the same name.

32. Sainsbury, ed., *Cal. of State Papers, 1661-1668*, Col. Ser., 232, 274; R. I. Hist. Soc., *Colls.*, X [1902], 104. The commissioners were sent in 1664 in part to resolve Rhode Island's dispute with Connecticut.

33. Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York, 1975), 43. Belcher was a signatory in 1668 of a letter from the Seventh Day Baptist church at Bell Lane, London, to Clarke's Newport church. Whitley, "English Career of John Clarke," *Bapt. Quar.*, I [1922-1923], 372.



*The George Corliss House at
45 Prospect Street, Providence.
It now houses the Brown
University Admissions office.
This photograph was probably
taken about a decade after its
construction in 1882. Courtesy of
the Rhode Island Historical
Society Library (RHi x3 1453).*

George H. Corliss:

Engineer, Architect, Philanthropist

by Robert W. Kenny*

The Admissions Department of Brown University is one of the few departments, which, having been forced out of University Hall, has ended up with better quarters. The admissions officers are presently impressing sub-freshmen amidst the Victorian grandeur of the Corliss mansion located at the southeast corner of Prospect and Angell Streets.

I first visited the mansion in the early 1930s when Charles Brackett, *the motion picture director* (best known perhaps for the film *Lost Weekend*) was in residence, he having inherited the property on the death of his cousin Maria Corliss, the last surviving child of George Corliss. The Bracketts found the house crowded with late Victorian furniture which they did not like. "We pushed back the decor of the drawing and music rooms to the period of the great Belter furniture which lurked around the house, and did the same thing to the main bedroom. These apartments are therefore nearer to 1850 than they are to 1882, the date when the house was completed." Charles Brackett wrote in a letter to his cousin, Mrs. William Slater Allen. It was one of the most elegant Victorian homes I have ever seen, a fitting residence for a great engineer and philanthropist.

George Henry Corliss was born on June 2, 1817 in North Easton, New York, a tiny village in Washington County about thirty miles north of Troy. The family, originally from Devonshire, had been in the Massachusetts Bay Colony since 1629, settled initially near Newburyport, and later took up farming in or near what is now Haverhill. George Henry Corliss's grandfather, Captain John Corliss, moved to Washington County, New York, shortly after the Revolution and bought considerable acreage which he farmed profitably. Captain Corliss was not an idle man; he fathered seven boys and five girls. Hiram Corliss (1793-1877), the third son of Captain Corliss was the father of George H. Corliss, the famous improver of the steam engine. Hiram Corliss is interesting in his own right. Neither farming nor school teaching, both of which he tried, appealed to him and in 1811, after a brief apprenticeship with a local doctor, he was admitted to the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York. He was graduated in 1816, aged twenty-three, with a certificate in "the Practice of Physic and Surgery." He built up a fine practice and continued to oversee his extensive farm lands. He was an ardent abolitionist, corresponded with William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, and made his home a station on the Un-

* Mr. Kenny is professor emeritus of English at Brown University. He wishes to note that this article is based on sources found in the Corliss Papers at Brown University and on an unpublished biography of Corliss, written by the late Samuel L. Berard.

derground Railroad to Canada. He died in 1877, his greatest sorrow being his inability to attend the opening of the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876 to witness the starting of his son's famous engine, which opened the show.

Dr. Corliss married three times. All the children, however, were from his first marriage to Susan Sheldon Corliss who was the mother of nine children—five girls and four boys. George Henry Corliss was the second child of this marriage. The family life seems to have been a congenial one. Dr. Corliss played the flute and in turn taught his son. Having completed elementary school at fourteen, George hired out at the Factory Store (what we would call a company store), where he inspected, measured, and sold cotton goods. His first engineering venture was the erection of a temporary bridge over the Batten Kill River, a heavy rain having swept the old one away. The village fathers decided to convert a scow into a ferry while the bridge was being rebuilt. George circulated among the businessmen of the village, raised fifty dollars for timbers, and constructed in ten days, with volunteer help, a bridge about one hundred feet long capable of carrying both pedestrians and wagons. He was seventeen at the time.

Apparently bored with store work and seeing no future without further schooling, he, on his own, selected Castleton Seminary in Castleton, Vermont, although his father had recommended the Oneida Institute. A letter dated March 10, 1834, gives his initial reaction to his new school:

Dear Father

It is truly an inestimable privilege to have a Father before whom we can lay our concerns, and ask advice. I feel I need your counsel—I would willingly sit up nights and saw ten cords of wood if I could be home tomorrow noon and get out of this scrape honorably. I should have been on a great deal better footing if I had followed your advice. I can assure you I would sell my right and title to the privilege of Castleton Seminary pretty cheap. —I was obliged to wait seven hours in Salem for the stage the greater part of which time I spent in a bar room disgusted at seeing men and *boys* step up to the bar and take their cigars, Wine and Beer and Cider and once in awhile one called for something a little stronger as they called it. —It is high time that temperance men and their forces arrayed before this formidable ally of Intemperance. They must do it *now* or the enemy will gain ground in this part of the country.

He tells of sleeping the first night at Castleton in a miserably dirty room "that looked more like a shoemaker's shop." The walls were black with smoke, and graffiti were scrawled on the walls. The next day he thought of returning home for "it seemed to me more like a bar room on general training day than like a place to study." He did, however, get a room to himself after making what he called "no small stir."

The room, he said, was decorated "with inscriptions too bad to be mentioned. I think the sooner I am on my way to Oneida Institute the better. There is not enough Piety here among the students." He concluded, however, that "I had better stay this term, & finish the English studies and learn the Greek grammar and spend the rest of the time reading Latin." Slowly he changed his mind; apparently he found the instruction good, if lacking in piety, and in a later letter he asked his father to send along his flute because, as he explained, "there is considerable fluting going on here." (The flute, by the way, is now a cherished possession of Mrs. William Slater Allen.) He remained at Castleton Seminary for three years and was graduated in 1838.

After Castleton Seminary, Corliss went into partnership with his father in a general store. (The doctor was not only physician, surgeon, and farmer, but businessman as well.) Storekeeping apparently bored young Corliss and he sold out his interest in 1844. The year before, on December 27, 1843, he received his first patent, for the invention of a sewing machine—three years before Elias Howe received his sewing machine patent.

Howe is generally credited with being the inventor of the sewing machine, but the patent records clearly accord Corliss the priority. Corliss, however, never did get his machine on the market, while Howe went on to perfect his sewing machine and to become wealthy in its manufacture. A tradition in the Corliss family claimed that George Corliss sold his patent to Howe, who used it to develop his own design. In any event, years later when Howe was traveling in Europe, he was introduced as the American inventor of the sewing machine at a dinner given in his honor by the Associated Scientific Societies of France. In reply to his introduction, Howe said: "It is true I am an American. But I did not invent the sewing machine. That honor belongs to George H. Corliss, of Providence, Rhode Island, the noted engine builder." Corliss always cherished Howe's generous disclaimer.

A few words might be appropriate about Corliss's sewing machine. It was inspired by complaints of the customers of his general store that leather shoes split along the seams. Corliss's machine was designed for work on heavy materials such as leather, heavy ticking, or sail cloth. It could sew twenty stitches a minute. To get financial backing for this invention, Corliss first came to Providence. There were quite a few Rhode Islanders employed in the cotton mills in the vicinity of North Easton and from them Corliss learned of the very considerable machine industry in Rhode Island.

Corliss also hoped to get some machine shop experience in Providence. Edward Bancroft of Fairbanks, Bancroft & Company, suggested that he lay aside for the time being his manufacturing plans and get further experience in machine shop practice. Thus employed he could build up some capital to enable him to start manufacturing his machine. This advice was not altogether pleasing to Corliss and he went

home to New York State but continued his correspondence with Bancroft. A letter from the Providence manufacturer seems to have been decisive. Bancroft wrote to Corliss:

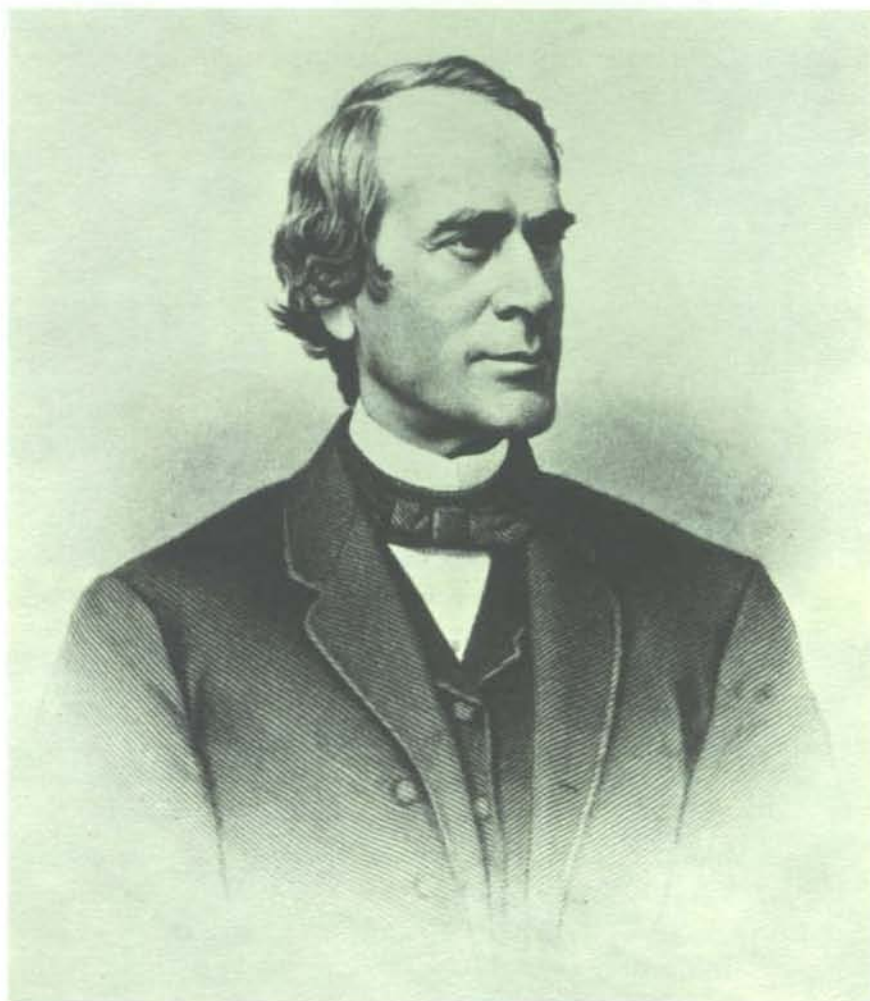
You ask me what kind of business you should best go at—now that is a question I am unable to answer—but I will say that I should have no fear of your succeeding in a business connected with steam engines or other machinery. —to a person who sees the “why” of a thing as readily as you do the trouble would soon turn to pleasure provided, as you say, there was something to be coming in for it—we have been in want for some time of a competent person to execute our various drawings and have concluded to invite you to come to Providence and attach yourself to our firm in the capacity of draftsman.

Shortly thereafter Corliss returned to Providence and was employed at \$1.25 a day as a draftsman for Fairbanks, Bancroft, & Company. As a result, he put aside forever (although I doubt if he was conscious of this at the time) his plans to develop a sewing machine.

His new employment was the start of a career as inventor, designer, and manufacturer of steam engines with improvements that brought him wealth, honors, and a fearful amount of litigation, which enriched the legal profession as it successfully defended his patents against those who used his ideas without a license. Corliss had an Horatio Alger rise with the Providence firm. Fairbanks retired in 1836 and his place was taken by Edwin A. Nightingale. Then Bancroft retired in 1847, and the firm name was changed to Corliss, Nightingale and Company. At age thirty, George Corliss was president of the firm, a post which he held for the rest of his life. A Providence directory of 1855 locates the Corliss, Nightingale & Company at Railroad Crossing, on the north end of Charles Street. George Corliss lived in Providence at 12 Waterman Street, about where the original building of the Rhode Island School of Design now stands.

Corliss soon became acquainted with Professor Alexis Caswell, at that time professor of mathematics and natural philosophy at Brown University. It was apparently from Caswell that Corliss got a clear conception of the principles of confined steam and the force it would exert when properly used to increase the efficiency of a steam engine. As a result of Caswell's influence, Corliss boxed up the sewing machine (not to be unboxed until 1875) and turned his energies to inventions that revolutionized the manufacture of the steam engine. As I understand it (and here I may well be getting in over my head), Corliss's invention was a governor employed with an automatic variable cut-off, which made it possible for the engine to use only that amount of steam necessary to produce the required power with no loss of speed. Obviously the less steam used the less coal was burned, which in turn resulted in savings.

The first Corliss engine employing the cut-off was completed in



*George Corliss (1817–1888),
Providence inventor and
manufacturer. Courtesy of Brown
University.*

1848 and was an instant success. Corliss's patent on the cut-off was dated March 10, 1848. Other inventors had patents on cut-off mechanisms, but none embodied the fundamental design of the Corliss engine. There were suits and countersuits by and against Corliss. He spent over \$100,000 prosecuting those who were illegally using his design, and in turn defending manufacturers of the Corliss engine against infringement suits. William H. Seward, later Lincoln's Secretary of State and an able patent lawyer, handled most of the cases for Corliss. At one time ninety manufacturers of engines using the Corliss cut-off were being sued. Corliss paid all the bills and finally the Supreme Court of the United States decided the suits in his favor. Corliss deplored the time spent in litigation; he personally had to instruct lawyers in the difference between his cut-off mechanism and others.

In his lifetime, Corliss was issued forty-eight patents; twelve pending at his death were issued later, for a total of sixty. Besides the famous cut-off mechanism, he had patents for vertical and horizontal pumps, gear cutters, an elevator, and several machine tools. Corliss, Nightingale & Company was originally in the India Point section of Prov-

idence, later at Promenade and Park Streets, and finally in the northern section of the city near what is now the industrial park, in the vicinity of the new automated post office. (The post office is on a new street named for Corliss.) The factory expanded rapidly in this area, at one time employing more than one thousand men. Corliss was the largest employer in Rhode Island. After 1857, the firm was incorporated as the Corliss Steam Engine Company. Hundreds of Corliss engines were also made by licensed manufacturers all over the country.

Some interesting hints about Corliss's personality survive. In the 1850s, phrenology (the study of skulls based upon the belief that the shape of one's head indicated mental faculties and character) was all the rage. For whatever reason, Corliss consulted a famous Boston quack, one Professor Fowler. Fowler's report, dated April 16, 1856, reads in part:

You have a highly cultivated organization and are indebted to civilization for much of the power you possess. Your physiology evinces predominance of the mental temperament, which has been more exercised than either the motive or vital systems. All things taken into account you are too gentle, amiable, easy, retiring, smooth, kind, respectful, and good-natured. There is not enough of the masculine, executive, forcible. You take life easily. Your head is high, long and narrow, consequently you live more in the intellectual and moral than in the selfish gratification of your mind. Your intellect is favorable to a literary life—more particularly in the study of the mind. You are best adapted to literary pursuits—to teaching and speaking. You are not so well adapted to trade, to originating, discovering and driving business requiring great physical energy.

Despite this report, Corliss seems to have taken the initiative on a number of occasions, plying his trade with originality and skill. During the Civil War, he even helped to change the course of history. Every American schoolboy knows of the famous stand-off battle fought on March 10, 1862, off Hampton Roads, Virginia, between the Confederate iron-clad *Merrimac* and the Union turret *Monitor*, the cheese box on a raft. The *Monitor*, designed by the Swedish inventor John Ericsson, was by its performance that day to revolutionize naval warfare, although admirals on both sides of the Atlantic were traditionally slow to admit it. Not everyone knows that the *Monitor* was towed for three days in foul weather from New York and arrived off the coast of Virginia only in the nick of time. The *Monitor*, totally new in design, with a revolving turret employing two guns capable of being fired in rapid succession, had been hurriedly built in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. There was considerable trouble machining the large bearing on which the whole turret mechanism depended. It was learned that the Corliss works in Providence had the proper equipment to machine the bearing properly. Rail lines were cleared, the huge ring was loaded and shipped



Manufactured goods were a prominent part of the interior decoration of the Corliss House. Charles Brackett, Corliss's nephew, later replaced all of the Victorian furnishings. Courtesy of the Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 32).



Corliss spared no expense in decorating his house. Note the exquisite fireplace and the elaborate light fixtures in this photograph. Courtesy of the Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 29).

to Providence, was worked on, loaded and enroute back to New York the same day. This little known example of the efficiency of the Corliss factory deserves a minor footnote in history.

Corliss's faith in the superiority of his engine was so great, especially in its fuel savings, that he made many contracts that seem extravagant; yet he was always right. One of his gambits was to offer a customer replacing his old engine with a Corliss the choice of paying double the listed price or paying the savings in fuel over the old engine for an agreed period of time. He called this his "sovation" plan and many customers were glad to pay the marked-up price to be freed from the fuel saving formula.

One of Corliss's early employees was a distinguished graduate of the Brown University class of 1853, Alexander Holley, who upon gradua-

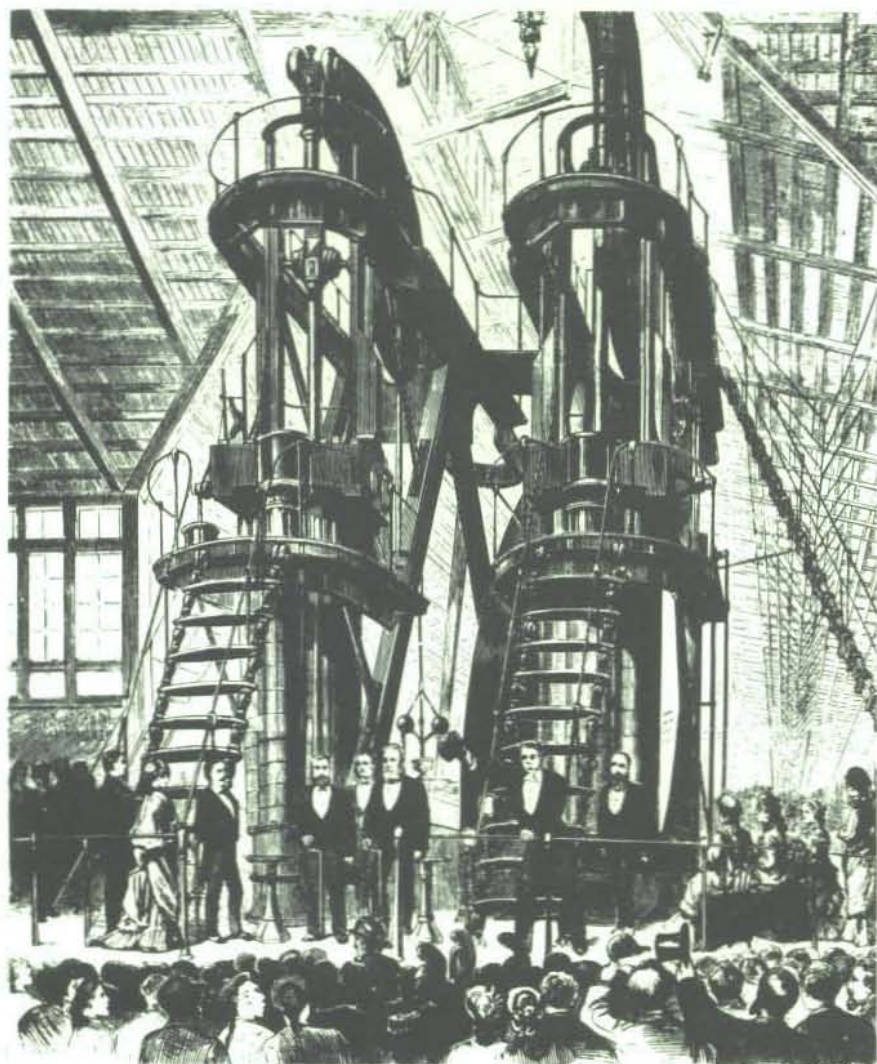
tion was employed as a draftsman. He ran a locomotive engine with cylinders equipped with the Corliss cut-off mechanism on the run between Providence and Stonington. The road bed was so rough, however, that parts of the cut-off mechanism were constantly shaking loose and the project of using it on railroad work was for the time being abandoned.

In 1875 Congress passed an act authorizing a celebration to commemorate the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It was to take the form of a Centennial Exposition to be held in Philadelphia. Corliss was on both the national and state commissions to aid in the planning. His efforts for the Rhode Island exhibit are not so nearly as famous as his role in planning the power plant for Machinery Hall—a fourteen acre tract to house machinery brought from all parts of the world. Corliss's power plan was initially rejected by the national committee, which favored smaller units located at various points in the hall. The committee, however, could not find manufacturers who would guarantee to build on time the number of engines and boilers needed. After several wasted months, the committee turned again to Corliss, who, in agreeing to install his huge engine, indicated that only his desire to have the exhibition open on time induced him to accept their invitation. He enclosed the original plans. There was now only nine months before the scheduled opening of the exhibition, but the Centennial Engine, as it was called, was built here in Providence and transported on seventy-one flat cars to Philadelphia, where its installation was completed thirty days prior to the opening of the exhibition.

A few facts about this wonderful monster. It weighed 776 tons, was 40 feet high and was mounted on a platform 56 feet in diameter. The fly wheel weighed eleven tons and was 30 feet in diameter; this meshed with a 10 foot pinion weighing eight and one-half tons. The pinion shaft was 325 feet long. At intervals, power was taken from this shaft to cross shafts and belted to line shafts which delivered power to the hundreds of machines on display in the hall. One other item of interest. The connecting rods were made from ten thousand horseshoes properly resmelted. Corliss believed that these shoes supplied the best steel where stiffness and durability were concerned.

Corliss had yet another hassle and another victory. This concerned the opening date of the exhibition. He was a man of inflexible religious convictions, and he bitterly opposed a plan to open the exhibition on Sunday. This was no tempest in a teapot; it was a real donneybrook. The clergy, ever conscious of the rightness of its cause, circulated petitions, wrote letters to editors, and backed up Corliss, who ignored a plea from President Grant and wrote to the directors:

Gentlemen, my contract was to provide power and start the Machinery in motion. It is my right and privilege to suspend it at pleasure. Open the gates to desecrate the Sabbath, and I will dismantle my engine and withdraw the power. You can do as you please with the Exhibition but the engine will not run on Sunday.



President Ulysses S. Grant and Emperor Don Pedro II of Brazil were among the dignitaries who witnessed the starting of the Corliss Engine at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

Corliss won. The Exhibition opened on May 10, 1876, a *Wednesday*—a day as far removed from the Sabbath as possible. On the great day, Mr. and Mrs. Corliss were met on the platform by President Grant and Dom Pedro II, the Emperor of Brazil. The emperor grasped the silver levers, turned them slowly, the great wheel began to revolve, and intricate mechanisms throughout the vast hall were set in motion. Thousands cheered, a one-hundred gun salute was fired, chimes and bells tolled. Richard Wagner composed a special Festival March and John Greenleaf Whittier wrote a six-stanza Centennial Hymn, which was sung by a chorus of eight-hundred voices. One stanza will set the tone adequately:

Our father's God! from out whose hand
 The centuries fall like grains of sand,
 We meet today, united, free,
 And loyal to our land and Thee,
 To thank Thee for the era done,
 And trust Thee for the opening one.

The French sculptor Bartholdi reported to his government:

The lines are so grand and beautiful, the play of movement so skillfully arranged, and the whole machine so harmoniously constructed that it had the beauty and almost the grace of the human form.

Corliss spent over one-hundred thousand dollars on the engine, which he donated to the exposition. Machinery Hall was open every day but the engine worked only six days, being covered over on the Sabbath. It performed flawlessly all during the exposition. Six months later, President Grant in Washington pressed an electric button and the huge machine slowly came to a halt. Professor Radinger of the Vienna Polytechnical School, who was present, wrote: "The people wanted to cheer, as they had done on other occasions, but instead of bursting out with joy, they choked with emotion, the hurrah stuck in their throats, and some were so overcome that they shed tears." The engine was bought by George Pullman, the Parlor Car King, for \$62,000. Pullman moved it to Chicago, where it provided power for his plant from 1877 until 1905 when it was dismantled and sold for scrap for \$7,892.50. Thanks to Corliss's proclivity for making models, we can see today what the engine looked like: there is a working model at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, and another model is located in Dayton, Ohio.

Foreign governments and learned societies showered Corliss with honors; American honors were many (including two Rumford medals). In 1882, the Corliss Steam Engine Company won a medal, donor unknown, for "A Fine Display of Draft Horses." (Corliss's medals, along with the famous silver levers which turned on the steam at the Centennial Exhibition, are now on display in cases at the Brown University archives.)

Corliss's accomplishments were many, not the least of which was his unique design for his mansion that still stands on Prospect Street. Years later Charles Brackett wrote to Mrs. William Slater Allen:

When Great Uncle George Corliss was engaged in his master work (the Centennial engine), his beautiful young second wife, Emily, indulged in that relaxation of beautiful young women married to absorbed older men: a bout of galloping hypochondria. She had long consultations with various specialists. At last the most impressive of them waited on her husband. "I am afraid I must insist," he said, "that in future Mrs. Corliss spend her winters in Bermuda." George replied calmly, "I will build a Bermuda for Mrs. Corliss."

This was the genesis of 45 Prospect Street. Corliss was not one to be swayed by the tides of fashion. The Gingerbread Age, or Boss Carpenter Gothic, or in the jargon of the architectural historians, the "extreme eclecticism" of the post-Civil War period, had made him skeptical of



This sparsely furnished hallway was part of the artificial "Bermuda" Corliss created for his wife, Emily. Courtesy of the Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 22).

architects; perhaps the newly completed Brown Library next door, now Robinson Hall, increased his intention not to create anything resembling wedding-cake Gothic. He had once owned and lived for a short time in the Timothy Dexter house in Newburyport and had, it would seem, an appreciation of its Federal virtues. Outwardly, 45 Prospect Street is not unlike the Italianate or Tuscan villa city residences built in Providence and Newport by Richard Upjohn. There were several nearby: the Marshall Woods house not far from the site of Corliss's mansion, and the Seth Adams house just across the street (demolished in 1942), could very well have served as guides to exterior appearance. It is the interior, however, that makes the house distinctive: the bringing of Bermuda to Emily. No expense was spared in furnishing the interior—mahogany and walnut woodwork, some splendid molded and carved wood on stairs and railings, bookcases and mirrors, marble mantels and some ingenious lighting fixtures, probably designed by Corliss himself.

The house is a splendid example of a Victorian mansion, inside and outside, but what gives it peculiar interest and makes it a landmark in domestic housing history is the fact that it was the first radiantly heated house, thermostatically controlled. In the stable complex of the house (now a tool room for the Buildings and Grounds Department of Brown University), Corliss installed a steam boiler and a small version of his famous engine. The engine drove a fan which sent air over hot pipes through steamheated ducts, into a tunnel, then into the main

house. There the heated air was circulated through ducts built into the walls, thus heating all rooms by wall radiation. The wall ducts fused in the attic from which the air was returned to the engine room and recirculated to conserve and reuse any heat that it still contained.

The thermostat, surely one of the earliest, was on the ceiling of the main hall of the house. This consisted of a rod of metal alloy. The alloy was Corliss's secret, which expanded and contracted markedly with changes in house temperature. Through a mechanical linkage, this rod regulated a governor on the engine, driving the fan in the rear basement which in turn regulated the flow of warmed air to the radiant heating duct in the house. Thus Emily got her Bermuda climate in the chill Rhode Island winters. Corliss's daughter Maria understood the system but unfortunately she never disclosed this knowledge to Charlie Brackett. When he took over the house, his contractors could find no heating system at all and promptly installed conspicuous steam radiators. They knew nothing of the radiant system, so they left its elements largely intact (as they are today). Later the heating equipment in the stable area was dismantled.

The house had other noteworthy features: an hydraulic elevator from the basement to the third floor was one of the more interesting devices included in the mansion. Guests, gentlemen only I should judge, could walk to the fourth floor tower room, Corliss's drafting room, where smoking was permitted. The gentlemen were provided with fezzes so that the odor of tobacco would not impregnate their hair, which might, when they descended to join the ladies, prove offensive. It was not exactly Liberty Hall at 45 Prospect Street, I would think. Corliss also devised some concealed sliding insect screens for the windows. At one time there was a silver spigot protruding from the big black walnut sideboard in the dining room. From the spigot came sparkling, pure artesian well water, probably the most potent beverage served at the Corliss table. When the trolley tunnel was built in 1914 it passed over the artesian well and the spigot thereafter was purely ornamental. During the building of the tunnel, Maria Corliss, fearing the house might fall into the excavation, moved to Stimson Avenue. Her fears were groundless. Corliss was also well ahead of his time in the matter of bathrooms. For every room there was a bath, not immediately off it, but set at the end of little corridors.

Corliss enjoyed the Bermuda climate of 45 Prospect Street for about five years; he died suddenly on February 21, 1888. He was twice married, first to Phebe Frost of Canterbury, Connecticut, who died in 1859, and secondly to Emily Shaw of Newburyport. He had two children by his first wife; none by his second. The second Mrs. Corliss lived in the house until her death in 1910. She was succeeded as chatelaine by Maria, the eldest of Corliss's two children. His son George, a bachelor and a cripple who was confined to a wheelchair since his childhood, lived abroad for many years in Nice; he died on a visit to Providence on September 7, 1927, at the age of eighty-five. Miss Maria died two years

later on June 13, 1929, at the age of eighty-nine. This ended the direct line of George Henry Corliss. The records at Swan Point Cemetary indicate that two brothers and a sister of George Corliss are buried in the family plot.

Corliss's last business years were spent in reorganizing the Corliss works. His intention was the mass production of uniform parts. Engineering journals suggest that had he lived a bit longer he might have brought to fruition the manufacturing methods which Henry Ford perfected and which did so much to change the character of American industry. Still, Corliss successfully established his own place in the history of American business and technology. His house on Prospect Street stands as a reminder of his ingenuity and creativity. Surely no one was more wrong than Professor Fowler, the phrenologist. For it certainly cannot be said, as Fowler did in 1856, that Corliss was a man who took life easily.

The first page of an account of an "afterlife" experience found in the Moses Brown Papers. On another page, Moses Brown noted: "Accot [Account] of the Friend who lay in a Trance at Phia [Philadelphia] as gave me by Mr John Murry by his own hand." Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library.

I was very ill with pleurisy and other violent humors in my
breast, but was nothing to the degree of my mind from the despatch
of business of your death. I was in all the agonies of despair, I saw
death approaching and felt all the torments of it. I saw spirits
in the dreadful state I continued for some time, but at last thro-
ugh the violence of my disease the streak of death at once put a
period to the pains of the body, and I found in an instant I was
as soon as I left the body I saw the souls of spirits from dark
spots of blood, I saw instantly in glorious light for the first word
but saw a pale saturnal colour which appeared like the shadow
leaving the case of mortality behind, I fell on my face
and through the opening of the soul I saw fire from pains of
mind, I perceived that all my pains of the body were from the
wounds of that furnace, so all the pains of my mind were from
the wounds of the mind, and that, leaving the despatch state
of mortality, I left everything that pertained to it. I became
conscious all was darkness and imperfection, and that the
conception or sense in this dark imperfect state, of all things
and things is very dull and extravagant. I saw now consisted
that heaven, and hell, were not places, but states - that
the former was better; that the moment we are out of the
body we leave every thing mortal, and leaving the gross
out of it, the pure spirit can see through all respects
all things with interruption in the world of spirits I saw
many that I knew, some, some greatly distressed, as a demon
in despair to be in the midst of sharp pains and fears, and
circumstances some more miserable, and some left, some
suffering happily, seeing the things that made for their pain
others as unhappy, in their ignorance of them, but I saw
so that God was love, and that in the fullness of his love
he would take away all tears from all faces, and sorrow
and sighing should be done away. I had now received more
knowledge of God than it was possible for me to express.
Having lain in his happy state for some considerable
time, I was suddenly brought back to the world (as you see)

In the World of Spirits: An Account of an Early "Afterlife" Experience

transcribed by Harold Kemble*

Editor's Note: The following document, recently found by Mr. Kemble among the Moses Brown Papers in the Rhode Island Historical Society Library, is an unusual and rare account of an "afterlife" experience, a phenomenon that in our own time has aroused a great deal of popular and scientific interest. In recent years, medical experts have focused considerable attention upon trying to document and to explain the similar experiences of some people who have described reaching a spiritual plane of existence during moments when doctors had declared them to be clinically dead.¹ The document printed here, which is undated, relates the afterlife experience of an unidentified man from Philadelphia. Later he told his story to one John Murray, who wrote the story down and forwarded a copy of it to Moses Brown in Providence. The afterlife experience cannot be dated with any degree of accuracy, for the document gives only sketchy details, but it seems likely that it occurred in the 1790s or during the first decade of the 1800s.

This document is fascinating for a number of reasons. In the first place, it helps to provide some evidence of the historical persistence of afterlife experiences.² In the second place, it is remarkably similar to modern versions of such experiences. Raymond A. Moody, Jr., offers a composite picture of a typical afterlife experience:

A man is dying and, as he reaches the point of greatest physical distress, he hears himself pronounced dead by his doctors. He begins to hear an uncomfortable noise—a loud ringing or buzzing—and at the same time feels himself moving very rapidly through a long, dark tunnel. After this, he suddenly finds himself outside of his own physical body, but still in the immediate physical environment, and he sees his own body from a distance, as though he is a spectator. He watches the resuscitation attempt from this unusual vantage point and in a state of emotional upheaval.

After a while, he collects himself and becomes more accustomed to his odd condition. . . . Soon other things begin to happen. Others come to meet and to help him. He glimpses the spirits of relatives and friends who have already died, and a loving warm spirit of a kind he has never encountered before—a being of light—appears before him. . . . At some point he finds himself approaching some sort of barrier or border, apparently representing the limit

*Mr. Kemble is manuscripts curator of the Rhode Island Historical Society.

1. Raymond A. Moody, Jr., *Life After Life: The Investigation of a Phenomenon—Survival of Bodily Death* (Atlanta, Ga., 1975).

2. Moody says that he is unaware of any historical examples of near-death experiences, but adds that he "would not at all be surprised to find that such reports have been recounted in the past." *Ibid.*, 100.

3. *Ibid.*, 23–24.

4. Roland Puccetti, "The Experience of Dying," *Humanist*, XXXIX (July/Aug. 1979), 62–65, quoted at 64.

between earthly life and the next life. Yet, he finds that he must go back to the earth, that the time for his death has not yet come. At this point he resists, for by now he is taken up with his experiences in the afterlife and does not want to return. He is overwhelmed by intense feelings of joy, love, and peace. Despite his attitude, though, he somehow reunites with his physical body and lives.

Later he tries to tell others, but he has trouble doing so. In the first place, he can find no human words adequate to describe these unearthly episodes. He also finds that others scoff, so he stops telling other people. Still, the experience affects his life profoundly, especially his views about death and its relationship to life.³

With some variations, the experience of the unidentified Quaker from Philadelphia resembles Moody's composite account. Significantly, the Quaker told of seeing a "glorious Light," of entering "Paradise," and of meeting others whom he had once known. He also described the spiritual and mystical jubilation he felt upon his return to his bodily state: "I had now reciev'd more knowledg of God then it was possible for me to express."

Medical experts have not been able to explain why these afterlife experiences occur or why they occur for some people and not for others, though there is wide speculation about the meaning and significance of the experiences. Moody postulates that these experiences are actually "death experiences" which suggest the likelihood of a spiritual existence, a hereafter, after bodily death. Other experts, including some philosophers, are more skeptical. Roland Puccetti maintains that afterlife experiences are actually hallucinations: "Under stress of a near-fatal encounter with death, the person imaginatively escapes the life-threatening situation, divorces himself from what he believes to be his dying body, views it secure in a body that cannot be hurt because it is intangible, from above and to one side—the usual camera angle for violent or dramatic group scenes in motion pictures and television films. It is a last-ditch defense mechanism, but that is all it is."⁴ The Quaker from Philadelphia, of course, could not have been influenced by movies or television. And so the debate must continue. . . .

One final word about the document. Readers should note that the final paragraph is not part of the Quaker's first-person account of his afterlife experience; it constitutes some remarks about the episode that were appended to the account by John Murray, who transmitted the document to Moses Brown. Unfortunately, there is no record of Brown's reaction to the story.

—GWL

I was very Ill with pluaratic complaints which brought me very low, but that was nothing to the distress of my mind from the dreadfull apprehensions of Gods wrath—I was in all the agonys of dispair—I saw Death approaching and felt all the Terrors of it seas [seize] my spirits.

In this dreadfull state I continue'd for some time, till at last through the violance of my disorder the stroak of Death at once put a period to the pains of Body and mind. In an instant—I died. As soon as I left the Body I was in the world of spirits—from darkness of mind, I was instantly in glorious Light. For the first vew [view] I had was a wide extensive Lawn which appear'd like Paridice. Leaveing the case of Mortality behind, I felt no more pain of Body; and through the mercy of God, I was free from pain of mind. I now see, that as all my pains of Body arose from the disorders of that frame, so all the pains of my mind arose from the disorders of the mind—and that, leaveing the distemper'd state of Mortality, I left everything that pertained to it. I was now convinc'd [that] all my Doubts ware my infermity; and that the conceptions we have in this dark imperfect state, of Happyness and Misiry, is very wild and extravagant. I was not convinced that Heaven, and Hell, ware not Places, but states—that Happyness was within, that the moment we are out of the Body we leave every thing Mortal—and leaving the grose case of Flesh, the pure spirit can see through all corporial substances without interruption. In this world of spirits I see many that I knew; some seemed greatly distress'd, as a Person in dispair would be in the midst of chearfull company—quite disconsolate; some more misirable, and some less, some exceeding Happy, seeing the things that made for their peace; other[s] as unhappy, in their Ignorance of them; but O! I see that God was Love and that in the fullness of his time he would wipe away all tears from all Faces, and sorrow and sighing should be done away. I had now reciev'd more knowledg of God then it was possible for me to express.

Haveing lain in this Happy state for a very considerable time (I do not Imediately recolect the exact time he ley) I was deliver'd up to Mortality again. When [I] arose up in the Bed I found from the Horable fright that the Company was in [and] that [they] had vew'd me quite dead. Indeed I had known this, being apprised of what was done not only with *my* Body but with others.

My Parant came Trembling to my Beside and says, my dear child how do you do—I answer'd, never better in all my life. I have no pain of Body or mind, I am now in perfect rest; I am satisfied—o' Mother, God is Love. Being asked many questions, I gave such answers as I thought Prudent. I told them I had seen such and such depart this Life who ware no more to return; some of which are in great distress of spirit, and some others in great joy and felicity. I see a poor Negro man belonging to _____ in _____ street depart from his Clay and bound forth into gloryous liberty. He died in a lower Kitching in the jam of the Chimny, and when they ware leying him out his head fell on a Board—I see _____ die in _____ street who was allso happy . . . after talking thus some time, and some present sending to make inquierly if these things ware so, and finding every circumstance literally true, I desired I may be Indulg'd with retirement. I heard still vibrating in my Ears the most Harmonious musick—O! how anxious was I to depart again. All this

time I was perfectly free from pain, but soon after my pain of Body return'd, then I burst forth with joy—and Crys out I'm going again—but I was disapointed. (When I seem'd to wonder they had not laid him out) he added, as soon as the breath was out of my Body my Freinds was about to do that office for me, but my Mother would not permit them, still hoping I was not Dead. The Docter was sent for, and gave it as his opinion that I was quite Dead, yet nevertheless as the wether was cold, to pleas the Mother they may let me ley. I would keep—my Mother would not suffer any of [my] cloaths to be taken of[f] me, but would have a Fire kept in the Room, and People to sit up with me—in which state I found them when I came to my Body.

This is as near the perticulars of the narative as I can possibly recollect. The good mans vews are very different since, from what they ware before; or from what the vews of Religious People in general are now. His vews are now perfectly corespondant with the testimony of the Prophets concerning Jesus and his great salvation. He often says with pleasure, our God is a consuming Fire, and as fire he will consume all Dross, and when that is gone the Mettle will be pure, and there will be nothing els that will be of a perishing nature. Thus in all *His* Character he knows his God to be a God of Love—and Loveing *him* he Loves all men for his sake, and as far as his abillity extends, strives to do good unto all men—he lives a Heaven on Earth as far as it is possible to do in this imperfect state; waiting for the end of his Faith—the fullfillment of Gods Promis. God grant we may go and do likewise—

Book Review

The Papers of Nathanael Greene. Vol I: December 1766–December 1776. Edited by RICHARD K. SHOWMAN, MARGARET COBB, and ROBERT E. MCCARTHY. Assisted by Joyce Boulind, Noel P. Conlon, and Nathaniel N. Shipton. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1976. lvi + 411 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, and index. \$17.95.)

The Papers of Nathanael Greene. Vol. II: January 1777–October 1778. Edited by RICHARD K. SHOWMAN, ROBERT E. MCCARTHY, and MARGARET COBB. Assisted by Nathaniel N. Shipton, Mary MacKechnie Showman, and John Ifkovic. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1980. xxxix + 606 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, and index. \$22.00.)

Nathanael Greene's important role in the War of American Independence is not a new discovery. Collections of his papers in the Rhode Island Historical Society, the Library of Congress, and the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan are established sources of information for scholars. A number of published works have dealt specifically with Greene, including two modern biographies by Theodore Thayer and Elswyth Thane.

From these sources, historians have portrayed Greene as a military leader second only to Washington. They have shown how the self-taught Quaker's natural talents carried him from private to major general and eventually to the command of the armies in the South. Greene emerges as a confidant of Washington, as a skilled quartermaster general during the crucial middle years of the Revolution, and as the strategist who regained control of the Carolinas and Georgia without winning a major battle.

If historians already have access to a large body of material by and about Greene, why have the Rhode Island Historical Society, the Clements Library, and other institutional sponsors embarked upon a project to produce *The Papers of Nathanael Greene*? Editor Richard K. Showman explains in the introduction to Volume I that part of the project's goal is to fill gaps that exist in our understanding of Greene. Showman points out that Greene materials are, in fact, widely scattered. The project has assembled nearly ten thousand documents for a comprehensive microfilm edition of Greene's papers. The letterpress edition, with two volumes in print so far, will publish more than a quarter of the items and calendar the rest. The project has uncovered numerous documents that have been unavailable to scholars. Many of the others have been either hard to find or hard to comprehend without accurate, annotated transcriptions.

Showman and his colleagues have adopted the editorial method pioneered by Julian Boyd and Leonard Labaree. An excellent short description of editorial policies at the start of each volume carefully explains how the documents have been transcribed, annotated, and arranged. The documents themselves are intelligible to the modern reader without losing the flavor of the period. Footnotes are comprehensive without being pendant. The notes are accompanied by a superlative index. Most of the documents in the first two volumes are printed verbatim; calendared items are placed in their proper chronological order. The editors warn us that the expanding nature of Greene's correspondence as the war progressed will cause problems of selectivity in future volumes. Based on the judicious decisions made to date, historians have little to fear on this score.

A useful glossary of eighteenth-century military terminology is printed in each volume to eliminate repetitive footnotes. Even an experienced researcher can profit from spending a few moments familiarizing himself with these terms before he begins reading the text. Two types of explanatory notes in the volumes merit particular attention. In 1776, Greene became involved in a dispute between Colonel James M. Varnum and Colonel Daniel Hitchcock over a prospective promotion. Showman has printed important letters from the two colonels to Washington in a footnote. Both of the letters are difficult to locate, and their publication (I, 284–286) makes Greene's role much clearer. The second type of note is the extended historiographical discussion of a particularly important event. Greene's role in the "Conway Cabal" is placed in context with a useful summary (II, 277–279) and a quick list of basic references.

Only time will tell if the Greene documents contained in these and future volumes will have a major impact on our understanding of the military history of the Revolution. One tends to think that they will, for even a cursory survey of the present two volumes reveals documents of interest to scholars who have begun to ask new questions about a wide range of issues.

Political historians will be interested in the early evidence presented in these volumes of Greene's commitment to a nationalist point of view. His detailed correspondence with various delegates to the Continental Congress, with officials of the Rhode Island state government (including his brother Jacob, who served as a member of the General Assembly and the Committee of Safety), and with other senior army officers sheds new light on the nature of civil-military relations during the war. The documents illustrate clearly that a successful general had to operate within a political context as well as a military one. Did skills honed in this arena enable a brigade or division commander to maintain harmony among his subordinates and meld them into an effective combat force? It is hard to imagine Greene succeeding in the difficult assignments of quartermaster general and commander of the Southern department without a solid background in this area.

Greene's role as brigade and division commander remains the least appreciated aspect of his career. The documents, however, give us a better understanding of the numerous tasks he performed as a commander. Greene's interest in the medical and sanitary care of his men (I, 108, 267-268, 311-312) is highlighted by Showman. Other letters and orders discuss camp routine, discipline, morale, and related matters (I, 180-181, 222-227, 284-286, 305) in detail. I was especially interested in some early evidence (I, 263-264) of the sheer volume of paperwork which the army generated in the summer of 1776.

While much of the material contained in the first two volumes relates to strategy and tactics, Greene's papers also shed light on matters of military organization. Documents from the winters of 1775-1776 and 1776-1777 tell us a great deal about the important place that a state's senior officer had in dealing with the home government during difficult periods of transition. The documents hint strongly that Greene's excellent personal ties with local political leaders may have made it easier for Rhode Island's units to avoid some of the turmoil which hampered other state's reorganizations. In early 1777 Washington used him to smooth over one divisive issue involving the creation of a brigade of state troops distinct from the Continental Army (II, 10-21).

These volumes include letters dealing with several policy issues within the army that had potentially explosive ramifications. The influx of foreign volunteers in 1777 produced a reaction from Greene (II, 69-71, 98-99, 109-113, 123-125) as well as from other native-born officers. A close look at these sources gives us a better understanding of the social fabric of the officer corps and of the later "Conway Cabal." That incident is covered in several key letters (II, 242-245, 252-253, 275-276) and in some excellent editorial notes. Greene's letter to Major General Alexander McDougall, dated 5 February 1778, is especially important to any understanding of the issues at stake, and it remains one of the few documents available anywhere that shows how the inner circle of Washington's advisors perceived events (in this case, Conway's role in the planned "irruption" into Canada).

The Continental Army and Congress undertook a major reevaluation of military policy during the Valley Forge winter. Historians in the past have oversimplified the reevaluation that took place. Greene's report to Governor William Greene of 7 March 1778 (II, 300-304) includes a very telling observation that "we must have a clever little snug Army, well cloathed, well fed, and well deciplind; such an Army will be able to do infinitely more than a great unwieldy mass of people without order or connection." These sentiments, which echoed the opinions of most of the senior members of Washington's staff, foreshadow the 1780-1781 campaign in the South. As subsequent volumes appear, it should be possible to trace the evolution of Greene's preferences and to judge more accurately the ways in which his concepts may have differed from those of Washington. I suspect that we

may discover that the two commanders differed more in matters of emphasis than in matters of substance.

No review would be complete without some criticism. Since both volumes are excellent in all essentials, this reviewer is reduced to minor quibbles. Camp colour men are correctly defined (I, 108n), but the editors then go on to assert incorrectly that they were not used in this technical sense by the Continental Army. More seriously, Greene's reference to Maurice, Comte de Saxe's *Mes Reveries* (I, 90) is highly significant and warrants a more detailed note. References to the Kentish Guards (I, 68–78) are imprecise. This unit was very different from a normal, or standing, militia formation. It voluntarily conducted intensive training and was expected to serve as a nursery for future officers. Greene's involvement in this unit added to his political connections (aided also by the important position held by Jacob Greene) and may help to explain why he was selected to command Rhode Island's Army of Observation in 1775.

Both volumes are very handsome publications. The sponsors, the editors, and the production staff of the University of North Carolina Press have developed a format that is easy to use, easy to read, and visually striking. Judicious use of maps and illustrations, placed where they fit logically in the text, orient the reader in a way that is superior to most documentary collections.

Showman and his associates are to be congratulated for their work to date. They have produced a definitive reference source for scholars of the War of American Independence. In the process, they have accomplished the difficult task of pulling together a large body of documents, organizing them, and publishing them in a readable and accurate manner. The volumes do not offer light recreational reading. But historians by avocation as well as historians by profession will find themselves at home with the editorial style employed in these volumes. We can only hope that proposed reductions in the funding of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission will not force the sponsors to retreat from their high standards in future volumes.

U.S. Army Center of Military History ROBERT K. WRIGHT, JR.

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