



# G. Washington slept here

By BRADFORD F. SWAN



**T**HE FIRST TIME George Washington came to Rhode Island he broke a bowl at Godfrey Malbone's in Newport and it cost him £ 4. On three subsequent visits to the state he had better luck.

That first visit took place in 1756, in either late February or early March. Washington had been sent from Virginia to see General Shirley in Boston and get a decision from the commander-in-chief of His Majesty's forces in America as to the relative rank of royal and colonial officers.

Jared Sparks, the biographer of Washington, says that on that occasion Washington visited both Newport and Providence, but there is no other evidence that he came to Providence — which would not have been on the usual route from Newport to Boston. We know he was in the state from two entries in his cash account of his journey. He gave Mr. Malbone's servants £ 4, and another £ 4 went for "a Bowlc broke."

Colonel Washington, for that was his rank then, may have gone home by the same route, which would have counted as another visit, but if such was the case no record of it can be found.

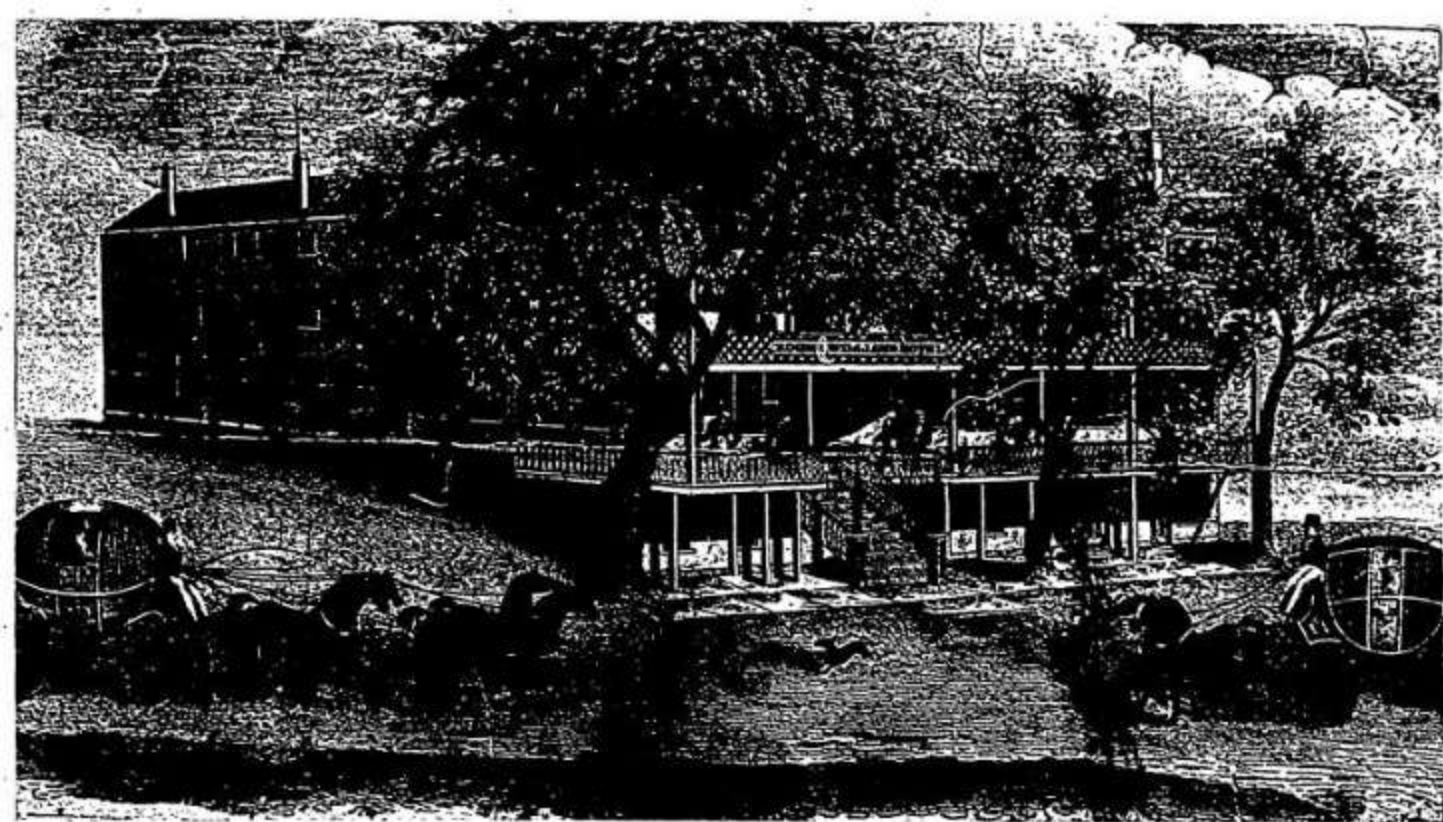
What historians feel was Washington's second visit to the state took place in 1776, after he had been appointed commander-in-chief of the colonial forces. The General Assembly officially invited him to visit and Governor Cooke wrote him to say that he had been informed that Washington was headed for Providence and that arrange-

ments had been made for him and his lady, for Mr. and Mrs. Custis, for General Gates, and "your whole suite."

We have a good eye-witness account of that visit; it was written by Theodore Foster, Providence town clerk, in his interleaved almanac:

"Friday April 5th 1776. . . . Information being received yesterday that his Excellency General Washington Esq., was on the way to this town and that he would be in town today, the Company of Cadets commanded by Col. Nightingale and the Company of Light Infantry commanded by Col. Mathewson appeared in their uniforms and went as far as Mr. Sayles Tavern in North Providence where they waited for his coming up. Col. Hitchcock's and Col. Little's regiments being upon Mathewson Plain as above mentioned under the command of Brigadier Gen. Nathanael Greene were ordered by General Greene to march about one o'clock to meet Gen. Washington. They accordingly marched some ways out of town before they met the General which was at . . . o'clock. Then facing about they marched into town in the following order: first, Col. Little's regiment, which was followed by Col. Hitchcock's regiment. Then followed the Company of Light Infantry. Then the Cadets. Then the Governor of the Colony at whose right hand rode Gen. Washington. Then followed a number of gentlemen on horseback. In this order they proceeded to the House of the Honorable Stephen Hopkins where Gen. Washington puts up and is to dine today. There was a great concourse of people many having come a number of miles to have a sight of His Excellency. The houses through the street were full of women, the eminences covered with men."

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*HOTEL on Benefit Street where Washington slept was known as Daggett's in 1790.*

The Hopkins house where Washington stayed was then on South Main Street near the foot of Hopkins Street. It has since been moved to the corner of Hopkins and Benefit Streets, where it is open to visitors certain days of the week. The building itself is cared for by the Society of Colonial Dames.

Hopkins himself was attending sessions of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, but the town managed some hospitality for Washington's party. The night after their arrival they were all guests at what the *Providence Gazette* de-

scribed as "an elegant entertainment at Hackers Hall, provided by the Gentlemen of the town." There was a dinner in this hall on South Main Street, and according to the *Gazette* "after dinner a number of patriotic toasts were drunk." The next day the General departed for New York, not too hung over, we hope.

**WASHINGTON** came to Rhode Island again in 1781 for a conference with General Rochambeau, commanding the French

forces which had been sent here. Washington spent a week in Newport, conferring with the French leaders.

The general rode up from Connecticut with a guard of 20 cavalymen, passing through South Kingstown and crossing to Newport via the Conanicut ferries on March 6. As near as I can determine Washington stayed at Rochambeau's headquarters, which were in the Vernon-Bowler House at Clarke and Mary Streets, but he must have visited many other houses during his stay.

The first night he was in town, after the usual review of the French troops, the whole place was "illuminated" — as the quaint phrase of the times had it — and Rochambeau and Washington, walking through the streets, were preceded by 30 boys carrying lighted candles.

There were two balls given in Washington's honor, one by the French and one by the townspeople, and Christopher Ellery entertained him at a tea party. It may be noted that at each of the balls Washington had the first dance.

## WASHINGTON

# Once he deliberately bypassed Rhode Island

not with the wife of a ranking dignitary but with some fair young lady, Miss Mary Clarke on one occasion and Miss Margaret Champlin on the other.

Come Tuesday, March 13, and Washington headed for Providence, taking the land route through Bristol and Warren rather than sailing up the bay. In Warren his party consumed 12 guineas worth of entertainment at Shubael Burr's tavern before pressing on to Providence, where he was lodged at the home of Jabez Bowen while cannon boomed. There was more illumination that night and a dinner in what is now the Sixth District Court building. After dinner 13 toasts were drunk and "a splendid ball" followed.

Wednesday Washington paid a courtesy call on old Stephen Hopkins and Thursday morning he and his party headed west, escorted several miles out of town by local dignitaries. The town got off cheaply on that visit, for most of the entertainment was paid for by private citizens. The only expense to the town was £2-10s-8d spent for candles given to the poor so that they could join in on the "illumination."

**T**HE NEXT TIME Washington headed into New England was in 1789. He was President of the United States, and he by-passed Rhode Island as he wasn't inclined to set foot on foreign soil. This state had not yet joined the Union by ratifying the Constitution.

It did so in May, 1790 and that summer Washington made an official visit to Rhode Island, accompanied by Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson and Governor Clinton of New York. This time he came to Newport by packet, sailing from New York on August 15 and arriving in Newport two days later.

Late that Tuesday afternoon, after the President had had a bracing walk around town, there was a dinner at the state house, followed by the usual toasts. Washington then went for another walk, during which he paused at Judge Merchant's long enough to drink a glass of wine. Judge Merchant was so shaky the next day that he was unable to finish reading the official address of the Town of Newport and had to turn the assignment over to one Colonel Sherbet, according to a contemporary chronicler.

Washington and party embarked