RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

FALL 1973

British opinion was divided on such acts as the Gaspee affair. London's Westminster Magazine *April 1774 sympathetically pictured America sprawling under her poor feverish mother Britannia, while beneath them are scattered all Britannia's "boasted rattles and gewgaws" -- the Magna Charta, Coronation Oaths, etc. -- neglected safeguards of English civil rights at home and abroad. Prime Minister Lord North mans the pump encouraged by pleased judges and other cabinet members, as two friends of America -- John Wilkes and Lord Camden -- protest. King George's features top the pump and two politicians look on from a window.*

The Whitehall Pump.

Courtesy John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

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VOLUME 32, NUMBER 4 NOVEMBER 1973

Portrait, detail of engraving, Library of Literary Criticism *ed. Charles Wells Moulton (Buffalo, 1902).*

Sarah Goddard -- for her first venture as book publisher -- chose the work of another highly educated woman. Author Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in her Turkish garb would contrast strangely with Sarah who wrote that only the "endearing ties of Nature . . . between a Parent and an only son" could have induced her to leave Providence.

LETTERS

Nancy Peck

Of the RIGHT HONOURABLE

Lady M—y W—y M——e:

Written, during her TRAVELS in

EUROPE, ASIA AND AFRICA,

TO

Perſons of Diſtinction, Men of Letters. &c.

in different PARTS of EUROPE.

WHICH CONTAIN,

Among other CURIOUS Relations,

ACCOUNTS of the POLICY and MANNERS

of the TURKS;

Drawn from Sources that have been inacceſſible to other Travellers.

THE FOURTH EDITION.

PROVIDENCE, in NEW-ENGLAND:

Printed and ſold by SARAH GODDARD, and COMPANY.

M,DCC,LXVI.

Title page courtesy Brown University Library.

Woman in the News 1762-1770— Sarah Updike Goddard

*by Nancy Fisher Chudacoff**

Participation of American women in the urban economy of the colonial period was an extension of their domestic duties rather than a manifestation of economic and social independence. Although colonial women had more legal rights than women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, colonials excluded most women from politics and higher education and otherwise included them in terms of the men in their lives — as wives, daughters, and mothers — not as individuals. Nurture of the family remained women's basic function even though physical limits of domestic activities reached beyond the household.

As Elizabeth Dexter has suggested, in an economy where most business and crafts were located in the home, many women probably aided husbands or fathers in their work. In this way wives and mothers served as apprentices and became trained in a large number of fields. With but few exceptions most women who worked in businesses did so only to help their husbands, sons or fathers, or because as widows or spinsters, necessity forced them. Every colonial city contained a number of these women who operated taverns, inns, specialty shops, groceries and bookstores. Women also became prominent in several trades such as millinery, laundering and soap and candle making. Printing, especially, had an important female component which included Margaret Draper in Boston, Cornelia Bradford and Ann Zenger in New York, Ann Franklin in Newport, and Sarah Goddard in Providence.[1]

The first woman printer in Rhode Island was Ann Franklin, widow of James, Benjamin's older brother. James moved from Boston to Providence in 1727, setting up the colony's first press. When he died in 1735, his widow continued the business until her son James was able to assume the operation. In 1758 James founded the *Newport Mercury*, first newspaper in the colony. When he died in 1762, Ann ran the press and newspaper until her death the following year.[2]

Although Ann Franklin has been the subject of several articles, Rhode Island's other important female printer is relatively unknown. Cocumscussoc, Rhode Island, about 1700 was the birthplace of Sarah Updike. Her great-grandfather was Richard Smith, friend of Roger Williams and one of Rhode Island's plantation owners. She, her sisters, and brother Daniel—later attorney general of Rhode Island—received a thorough education from a tutor who lived in their father's house.[3] More highly educated than most of her female contemporaries, in 1735 she married Dr. Giles Goddard of New London. During the years between her husband's death in 1757 and her own in 1770 Sarah made her contribution to the development of printing in Providence.[4]

Second largest city in Rhode Island in 1762, Providence had long been overshadowed by Newport but was beginning to move toward hegemony in state affairs. The colony's politics—always a complicated situation—was dominated by two factions. The Newport group,

*Formerly assistant reference librarian, Chicago Historical Society, Mrs. Chudacoff has been the Rhode Island Historical Society's reference librarian since 1971.

1 Elizabeth Anthony Dexter, *Colonial Women of Affairs* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931) 166-179.

2 Howard M. Chapin, "Ann Franklin, Printer," *American Collector* September 1926, 461-65.

3 Carl R. Woodward, *Plantation in Yankeeland* (Chester, Connecticut: Pequot Press, 1971) 120. Wilkins Updike, *History of the Episcopal Church in Narragansett*, 3v. (Boston: Merrymount, 1907) 2:504. Charles Wilson Opdyke, *Op Dyck Genealogy* (New York, 1889) 87-94.

4 Ward L. Miner, *William Goddard, Newspaperman* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1962) 11.

led by Samuel Ward, had as its mouthpiece the *Newport Mercury*. Stephen Hopkins, spokesman for the Providence group handicapped by lack of a journal, convinced young William Goddard to set up a printing press and newspaper.[5]

William Goddard, son of Giles and Sarah, was born in New London, Connecticut, in 1740. He began apprenticeship in 1755 in New Haven and later moved to New York where he completed apprenticeship in 1761. In 1762 he set up shop in Providence with three hundred pounds in capital invested by his mother.[6]

Like other colonial printers, William resembled his contemporaries in the early days of European printing—he was printer, editor, publisher and bookseller. In addition to the *Providence Gazette and Country Journal* which began on October 20, 1762, Goddard published an almanac, sold books, legal forms, paper and writing materials. In all of these activities he was assisted by his mother and sister Mary Katherine, both of whom had accompanied him to Providence.[7]

Most presses at this time relied for financial support on obtaining commissions from colonial governments to print official business. In Rhode Island this plum had been taken by the Newport press.[8] Thus in spite of the popularity of the *Gazette* in Providence, Goddard was unable to earn what he considered to be an adequate living. He suspended publication with the issue of May 11, 1765 and leaving the shop in the hands of his mother, departed for New York shortly thereafter.[9]

Providence was temporarily without a newspaper, but the printing shop run by Sarah and Mary Katherine continued to supply some of the town's vital needs such as blank forms and almanacs. In December 1762 William had begun to publish an almanac written by Benjamin West under the pseudonym of Isaac Bickerstaff.[10] Providence had had almanacs earlier from Boston and Newport, but before Goddard's none calculated to the city's own meridian. Wroth notes their importance—"in these customary issues of the colonial American press, the blank form and the almanac . . . we find the printer performing utilitarian service to his neighbors . . . which at the same time improved the operation of the town machinery to an extent that may only be appreciated by recalling the conditions which existed before that service had been made available."[11] In addition to continuing these services, Sarah acted as postmaster in her son's absence.[12]

Suspension of the *Gazette* coincided with a period of crisis following passage of the Stamp Act, most intensely disliked by printers because of its heavy tax on publications and legal documents. On August 24, 1765 the *Gazette* reappeared in a special issue under the imprint of S. and W. Goddard, significant in that it dealt wholly with the Stamp Act and marked the first appearance of Sarah's name in the business.

William meanwhile had joined the printing shop of John Holt in New York, but he visited Providence frequently. In March 1766 he revived the *Gazette*. The issue of March 12—bearing the name of William Goddard only—contained a message from Sarah asking public support for the paper. But circulation of the *Gazette* again failed to meet Goddard's standards, and he left Providence in June, eventually moving to Philadelphia.

Sarah preferred to remain behind, and in the summer of 1766 she organized Sarah Goddard and Company—"and Company" was Mary Katherine and printer Samuel Inslee. Their first published book was *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M-y W-y M-e* (Lady Mary Wortley Montagu) on September 5, 1766.[13] One wonders if it is of any significance that Sarah's first printing was a work by one of her own sex. More importantly, on August 9, 1766 Sarah once again revived the *Gazette*. She informed readers, "The former printer has left us an elegant and complete assortment of materials and utensils . . . that a moderate family with whom he is connected might be supported by it . . . we hereby modestly request Gentlemen of learning and ingenuity to assist us with their judicious compositions."

Under Sarah's guidance, the *Gazette's* appearance was much the same as during William's

5 David S. Lovejoy, *Rhode Island Politics and the American Revolution* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1958) 228-29. William Carroll, "One Hundred and Fifty Years of Printing in Providence, 1762-1912," paper read before Rhode Island Historical Society March 5, 1912 (typescript) 3.

6 Miner, 16-20.

7 Miner, 37. Isaiah Thomas, *History of Printing in America*, 2v. (Albany, N.Y., 1874) 1:201-204.

8 Miner, 34. Lawrence C. Wroth, *The Colonial Printer* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press, 1964) 226-28.

9 Miner, 47.

10 Miner, 31.

Sarah Goddard's 1767 almanac was first in Rhode Island to display a cover design picturing the signs of the zodiac.

JUST PUBLISHED,
And sold (wholesale and retail) by SARAH GODDARD and COMPANY, at the Post-Office, opposite the Court-House, and at the Printing-Office near the Great-Bridge, in PROVIDENCE.

The *true* and *original*
NEW-ENGLAND
ALMANACK,
OR,
Lady's and Gentleman's DIARY,
For the Year of our LORD CHRIST,

17 67:

Being the third Year after BISSEXTILE, or LEAP-YEAR; and the Seventh of the Reign of his Majesty King GEORGE the Third.

CONTAINING,

A Dedication to my Countrymen; An Ephemeris; Sun and Moon's Rising and Setting; Time of High-Water at *Providence*; Lunations; Eclipses of the Luminaries, the Planets Aspects, and Judgment of the Weather; Spring Tides; Courts in the *New-England* Governments; an accurate Table of Roads; the instructive Story of *Ortogral*; with other Things useful and entertaining.

Calculated for the Meridian of PROVIDENCE, in NEW-ENGLAND, Lat. 41 Deg. 50 Min. North, and 4 H. 42 M. West, from the Royal Observatory at GREENWICH, but, without any sensible Error may serve all the Provinces adjacent.

Advertisement Providence Gazette *December 13, 1766.*

operation. A three-column folio, it probably required one printer's labor four days of each week on composition and press work.[14] A typical issue contained—on page one in large type, one or more stories or anecdotes or letters dealing with pertinent issues of the day; on page two, letters and communications from other British colonies and possessions, the communications often in clippings from other newspapers; on page three, two more columns of correspondence or clippings and one column of advertisements; on page four, advertisements.

How much actual control did Sarah exercise over the operation of the business and the content of the newspaper? The contract that William printed in *The Partnership* indicates the legal view: "And whereas the said Sarah Goddard, held and possesses in *partnership* (italics mine) with William Goddard, a printing office at Providence . . ."[15] Yet William elsewhere gives the impression that he was the controlling force while Sarah's role was merely subordinate.

From August 9 until December 6, 1766, the paper bore the imprint of Sarah Goddard and Company. Beginning December 6 the imprint read, "Printed (in the absence of William Goddard) by Sarah Goddard and Company," and continued in this form until September 19, 1767 when Sarah went into partnership with John Carter. There is no indication that Goddard intended to return to the Providence business, so why did he insert his name in the imprint?

On August 15, 1766—second issue of the revived paper—this message appeared:

But though I cannot reasonably expect to make any adequate advantage of my printing materials . . . yet I could not be persuaded to take them away, rather choosing to leave them for the benefit of my friends where they are in the hands of my mother, Mrs. Sarah Goddard, who has engaged to do all she can for supporting the Printing-business in Providence. . . . And I have lately sent her an assistant (samuel Inslee) to enable her to carry on the Business more extensively. I am convinced if she meets with some encouragement she will be able to give satisfaction to a People who will look with an eye of Candor on her true endeavors to please. My thorough knowledge of her principle to

11 Lawrence C. Wroth, "First Press in Providence," *Proceedings American Antiquarian Society* 51 (1941) 362.

12 Amos Perry, "Providence Gazette: Its Publication, Publishers, Publication Offices, and Editors," *Publications Rhode Island Historical Society* 5:4 (October 1898) 196-201.

13 Miner, 56. John Eliot Alden, *Rhode Island Imprints 1727-1800* (New York: Bowker, 1949) 145.

14 *Printers and Printing in Providence, 1767-1907* ([Providence]: Providence Typographical Union, [1907]) 9.

15 William Goddard, *The Partnership* (Philadelphia, 1770) 26. This book is Goddard's version of his troubles with partners Wharton and Galloway in Philadelphia.

which I am greatly indebted for what is most valuable in my own would enable me to engage that the paper and Press under her Superintendency will be conducted with Freedom and Impartiality.

Goddard writes of the printing materials as his when, in fact, they were owned in partnership with his mother. And again, in *The Partnership*, "At this time I had a very complete office in Providence under the superintendence of Mrs. Sarah Goddard, my mother."[16] Use of the word "superintendence" implies an employee. "Direction" perhaps would have been more applicable.

Goddard had begun on January 26, 1767 to print the *Pennsylvania Chronicle and Universal Advertiser* in partnership with Joseph Galloway and Thomas Wharton of Philadelphia.[17] Beginning in June 1767 articles from the *Chronicle* appeared with regularity in the *Gazette*. It was common for newspapers of the period to clip items from other newspapers, but clips from the *Chronicle* exceeded those of any other colonial paper in the *Gazette*. This, however, was probably a voluntary action of maternal devotion on Sarah's part rather than the result of specific instructions from William.

A well-educated woman, Sarah also possessed a high degree of political acumen, and these qualities indicate that she was capable of directing a newspaper and printing office by herself. Several communications with her son illuminate her mind and character. In the *Chronicle* of December 2, 1767 William was the first to publish John Dickinson's "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies." Sarah wrote her son soon after, "Our friend Judge Chase and I think it would be a good scheme in you to print the Farmer's letters in a pamphlet, and that soon, as they appear to be the completest pieces ever wrote on the subject in America. They are universally admired here."[18] Historians consider Dickinson's "Letters" to be among the most important pieces written during the period.[19] Sarah had the judgment to realize their importance at the time they were written.

William had acknowledged his debt to his mother's principles, but he must not have inherited her temperament. Ward Miner's biography of William notes a large number of quarrels with business associates and friends. In May 1767 Sarah wrote:

It is with aching heart and trembling hand I attempt to write, but hardly able, for the great concern and anxious fears the sight of your late Chronicles gave me, to find you deeper and deeper in an unhappy uncomfortable situation. In your calm hours of reflection you must see the impropriety of publishing such pieces as Lex Talionis [a letter attacking writers of one of the opposition newspapers] . . . for everyone who takes delight in publicly or privately taking away any person's good name, *or striving to render him ridiculous, are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity, whatever their pretense may be for it. The authors of such pieces cannot be your friends, and I conjure you to let all such performances be dropped from your otherwise credible paper. My spirit is moved within me, dreading the direful effects that have too often sprung from such insignificant trifling wrangles in the beginning. Oh my son, my only son, "hearken to wisdom before it is too late—doth she not stand in the streets, and in the high places? to you O men I call, and my voice is to the sons of men—and also at the door of our hearts"—and its effects would be righteousness and peace, if not opposed by our ungovernable wills. I heartily wish it was within the reach of my faint efforts to convey to you what threescore and almost ten years experience has taught me, of the mere nothingness of all you are disputing about, and the infinite importance and value of what you thereby neglect and disregard—a jewel of inestimable value. —I know corrupt nature and our own wicked hearts will prompt us to think—must I then bear such injurious treatment from any person on earth! — Must I give up myself to be vilified and abused by these men! — But remember, we are not under the OLD LAW OF RETALIATION, an eye for an eye, &c. for ever blessed be our gracious*

16 Goddard, 1.

17 Miner, 68.

18 Miner, 82.

19 Phillip Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941) 213.

Quarrelsome son William drew anxious advice from Sarah Goddard when he printed in his Pennsylvania Chronicle *a bitter letter attacking the opposition press.*

RIHS Graphics Collection.

Redeemer, who has abrogated it, and substituted a much more glorious one in its place, no less than the law of universal love; and why should you, or any one else, try to revive what was disannulled above seventeen hundred years past? If such writers were but possest with the spirit of universal love, instead of revenge and resentment for affronts, they would pity and pray for their fellow-sinners, considering we all daily use our greatest benefactor with more ingratitude than one frail creature can another.[20]

The tone of that letter matches John Adams' estimate of women conveyed to Mercy Warren —

The ladies . . . I think are the greatest Politicians that I have the Honour to be acquainted with, not only because they act upon the sublimest of all Principles of Policy, viz., that Honesty is the best Policy, but because they consider questions more coldly than those who are heated with Party zeal and inflamed with the bitter contentions of active Public life.[21]

Such qualities as these seem to fit Sarah well, and they must have been valuable in that period of heated political debate.

The *Gazette* was printed weekly. Although William traveled frequently between Philadelphia and Providence — no doubt advising Sarah on some matters — it would have been impossible for him to exercise direct control. It is fair to conclude that Sarah herself was responsible for activities of the printing shop and contents of the newspaper. There is no reason to suspect that there would have been any conflicts over what to print since Sarah's political loyalties were the same as William's. They were both fervent supporters of the patriots' cause. Knowing what we do of Sarah's temperament and of her son's, we may assume that the *Gazette* was perhaps calmer in tone than it might have been under William.

In September 1767 John Carter entered into partnership under the imprint of Sarah Goddard and John Carter. This must have been a partnership in name only since William did not sell the printing shop and the *Gazette* to Carter until a later date. Shortly after, William began experiencing problems in Philadelphia with his partners Galloway and Wharton. They suggested that he sell the Providence shop and move his mother and sister to Philadelphia where they hoped Sarah would have a moderating influence on William. "My partners," wrote William, "told me they had heard a great character of my mother and as I was a young man they considered it too laborious a task for me to manage every department."[22] They promised to provide a house for Sarah and Mary Katherine and to set Sarah up in a store selling books and stationery. From the challenging occupation of editing the *Gazette* and operating a print shop they wished to remove Sarah to a store selling books.

She did not accept the idea and replied to William, "I observe what you say about Messers

20 Miner, 75-76.

21 Warren-Adams Letters, 1, *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections* 72:221.

22 Goddard, 19.

Galloway and Wharton advising you to endeavor to prevail upon me to leave Providence; but as I have entered here with people for a year's news I choose to continue here until it is concluded and always if I can, for my life is almost at a close." A rather firm and poignant reply. But William later wrote, "Upon showing this to my partners they prevailed upon me to visit her in person. This I did and laid the prospect before her and she from motives of maternal tenderness consented to leave an easy agreeable situation and a multitude of amicable friends and my sister agreed to accompany her."[23] He did at least recognize her sacrifices.

Accordingly William sold the Providence shop and *Gazette* to John Carter. In November 1768 Sarah moved to Philadelphia. Her farewell to Providence appeared in the November 5 *Gazette:*

It would have been extremely agreeable to her to have passed the remainder of her Days in a Town where she has so many Friends and Acquaintances, for whom she entertains the highest Regard, and from whom she has received many favours and Civilities. Impressed with these Sentiments, she can with great Truth say that nothing could have induced her, in her advanced Age, to have removed from the Town of Providence, but the more endearing ties of Nature which exist between a Parent and an only son. . . .

William bought a house for his mother and sister in Philadelphia and installed a press for Sarah to print blank forms and small works. His partner Wharton was incensed since he feared that William intended to moonlight with the home press. Rather than antagonize William's partners, Sarah had the press returned to the printing shop. She wrote to her sisters of her difficulties in adjusting to life in Philadelphia:

This serves to Acquaint you that altho I have been much indisposed this winter, that through the goodness of God I am in a better State of Health than I have been for Sometime when I first came to this City the Air and Climate did not seem to agree with me. If I Stay I hope it will become more Natural.[24]

In December 1768 Sarah signed over to her son her remaining interest in her husband's estate in return for an agreement on William's part to give her support from his Philadelphia business.[25] She continued to assist William at the shop as did Mary Katherine who by this time was an accomplished printer herself.[26] Unlike her daughter, however, there is no indication that Sarah ever learned the mechanical side of the business.

On January 5, 1770 Sarah Goddard died in Philadelphia. The *New York Gazette* printed an obituary of unusual length for the time — a eulogy which Ward Miner attributes to either of printers John Holt or James Parker.[27] Reprinted in the *Providence Gazette* of February 10, 1770, it concludes:

. . . This is so very short and simple an account of the decease of a very amiable person, who was really an ornament and honour to her sex, that in justice to her character I think myself obliged, though no relation to the family, nor very intimately acquainted, to mention the following particulars which have come to my knowledge. . . . educated in her father's house by the best tutors that could be procured, she discovered an extraordinary genius and taste for, and made a surprising progress in most kinds of useful and polite learning, not only in the accomplishments to which female education is usually confined but in languages, and several branches of mathematics. . . . Having taken a liking to the printing business, through her means her son was instructed in it, and settled a Printing-house in the town of Providence, to which place she soon after removed, and became a partner with him in the business which was carried on several years to general acceptance, the two last years under her more immediate joint

23 Goddard, 20.

24 March 14, 1769, Updike Manuscript and Autograph Collection, Providence Public Library.

25 Miner, 89.

26 Wroth, "First Press," 356.

27 Miner, 92.

28 August 24, 1765 *Gazette* bore imprint of S. and W. Goddard as did one book issued in 1766 after Goddard had left Providence.

29 Wroth, "First Press," 364.

30 Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence* (New York: Knopf, 1958) 285.

31 Wroth, "First Press," 382.

management and direction; the credit of the paper was greatly promoted by her virtue, ingenuity and abilities. . . . Her uncommon attainments in literature, were the least valuable parts of her character. Her conduct through all the changing trying scenes of life, was not only unblameable, but exemplary — a sincere piety, an unaffected humility, an easy agreeable cheerfulness and affability, an entertaining, sensible and edifying conversation, and a prudent attention to all the duties of domestic life, endeared her to all her acquaintance, especially in the relations of wife, parent, friend and neighbor. The death of such a person is a public loss, an irreparable one to her children.

The relationship between Sarah and William appears to have been a warm and loving one. Her role in the Providence business and William's view of it were in keeping with the period. As we view her today, Sarah operated within her defined function as a mother rather than as an individual in her own right. It is interesting to note that she is considered as a printer only after William left Providence. Although she provided the money to start the business, worked with William in the shop, and was a legal partner, the business at first was known by his name only.[28] The same was true of most other colonial women printers who may have worked side by side with husbands, but not until the husband's death were they recognized as printers.

Although today the newspaper is only one of several mediums of mass communication, in colonial times it was the primary one. A newspaper was vital to a community for many reasons as Lawrence Wroth has pointed out. As a means of entertainment it provided literary essays and verse that connected colonists with the cultural world at large. It kept them in touch with political events in Europe and other colonies. And particularly it stimulated business through the publication of advertisements. Newspapers were sent by exchange throughout the colonies and West Indies thereby bringing the names and activities of one city to the attention of others.[29]

In 1776 John Holt, the printer, wrote to Samuel Adams, "It was by means of Newspapers that we received and spread the Notice of tyrannical Designs formed against America and kindled a Spirit that has been sufficient to repel them."[30] Sarah Goddard maintained a newspaper at a time when the road to independence was being laid out in papers such as the *Gazette* throughout the colonies.

Sarah fulfilled Providence's need for a newspaper and also supplied other necessary items such as legal forms, almanacs and books. After William Goddard left Providence because he could not obtain the financial return he desired, Sarah was able to operate the business without concern for profit because she had an independent income. It was, however, a going concern by the time she turned it over to John Carter.[31]

Though Sarah's intelligence and business ability were acknowledged by the writer of her obituary, he considered them of far less value than "duties of domestic life." Assistance to her son in the printing business as well as her eventual move to Philadelphia were all part of her domestic duties as a mother, but her decision to remain in Providence, to maintain the business, and to publish the *Gazette* went beyond the range of such duties. More than most women in the colonial period, Sarah Goddard was able to transcend her circumscribed functions.

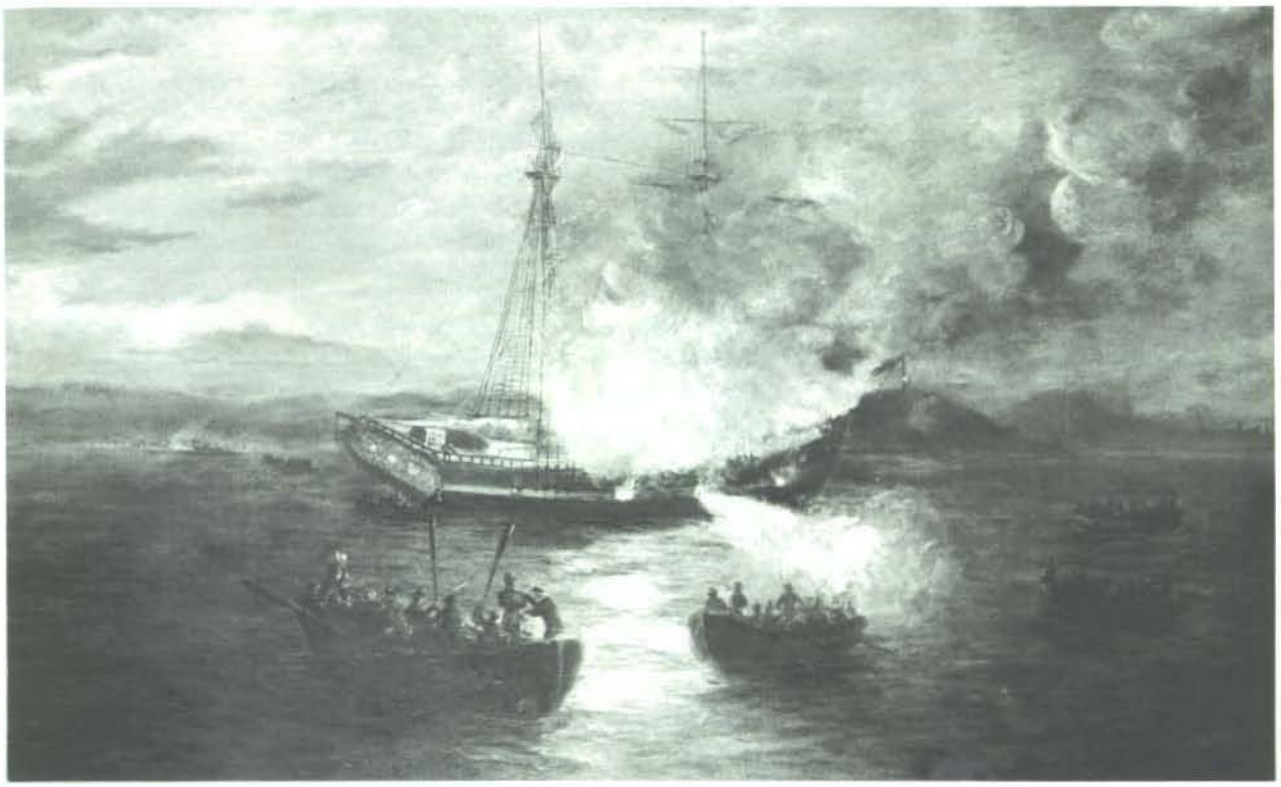
An embossed stamp represented the king's tax on newspapers, pamphlets and all legal and business documents produced in the colonies. Threat of this tax brought forth a Providence Gazette *special issue with first appearance of Sarah's imprint.*

Reproduced from collections of Library of Congress.

". . . more imperious and haughty than the Grand Turk himself . . . " A wooden caricature of that legendary monarch symbolizes angry Rhode Islanders' opinion of William Dudingston, insolent commander of His Majesty's schooner Gaspee.

RIHS Museum Collection.

In the early morning of June 10, 1772, aggrieved Rhode Island colonists had their revenge on him in this famous episode.



Painting by Charles DeWolf Brownell, RIHS.

The Gaspee Affair as Conspiracy

*by Lawrence J. DeVaro, Jr.**

On the afternoon of June 9, 1772, His Majesty's schooner *Gaspee* grounded on a shoal called Namquit Point in Narragansett Bay. From the time of their arrival in Rhode Island's waters in February, the *Gaspee* and her commander, Lieutenant William Dudingston, had been the cause of much commercial frustration of local merchants. Dudingston was insolent, described by one local newspaper as "more imperious and haughty than the Grand Turk himself. . . ." Past accounts of his pettish nature followed him from port to port.[1]

The lieutenant was also shrewd. Aware that owners of seized vessels — rather than navy captains deputized in the customs service — would triumph in any cause brought before Rhode Island's vice-admiralty court, Dudingston had favored the district vice-admiralty court at Boston instead, an option available to customs officials since 1768.[2] Aside from threatening property of Rhode Islanders through possible condemnation of seizures, utilization of the court at Boston invigorated opposition to trials out of the vicinage, a grievance which had irritated merchants within the colony for some time.[3]

Finally the lieutenant was zealous — determined to be a conscientious customs officer even if it meant threatening Rhode Island's flourishing illicit trade in non-British, West-Indian molasses. Governor Joseph Wanton of Rhode Island observed that Dudingston also hounded little packet boats as they plied their way between Newport and Providence. Though peevish, the lieutenant was not foolish. He suspected that these vessels might be transporting commodities other than those of local origin.[4]

In a scene which had occurred repeatedly from February to June 1772, Dudingston, on the afternoon of June 9, had signalled the *Hannah*, a packet boat, to heave to. Defying the order, *Hannah's* master continued sailing up Narragansett Bay with *Gaspee* in close pursuit. He lured the schooner into shallow water where it ran aground. With *Gaspee* perched defenselessly upon a sand spit, aggrieved merchants meant to have their revenge. John Brown, prominent merchant and respected resident of Providence, assisted by Abraham Whipple, sea captain and employee, led a party of approximately three score in eight longboats to Namquit Point. There in the early morning of June 10 they injured the lieutenant gravely, imprisoned the crew temporarily, and put torch to the *Gaspee*, burning it to the water's edge.

The vessel's destruction evoked an angry response from Great Britain. Convinced that an impartial trial could not be secured in the colonies, the ministry appointed a royal commission of inquiry to meet at Newport, gather evidence, and seek indictments with the cooperation of Rhode Island's superior court. Indicted persons would be

*Mr. DeVaro received his Ph.D. from Case Western Reserve University in January 1973.

1 *Newport Mercury* Nov. 9, 1772, July 17, 1769.

2 *An Act for the more easy and effectual recovery of the penalties and forfeitures inflicted by the acts of parliament relating to the trade or revenues of the* British *colonies* and *plantations in* America, 8 Geo. III, c. 22, Danby Pickering, ed. *Statutes at Large*, 28: 70-71.

3 Traditionally the Massachusetts vice-admiralty court had jurisdiction in Rhode Island. The situation changed in 1758 with creation of a local court at Newport, presided over by John Andrews, a Rhode Islander. When a "Supercourt" was created at Halifax in 1764, it renewed controversy over local jurisdiction. The problem would be compounded in 1767 with creation of the Boston court, which encompassed Rhode Island. Charles M. Andrews, "Introduction" to *Records of Vice-Admiralty Court at Rhode Island, 1716-1762*, Dorothy S. Towle, ed. (Washington: American Historical Association, 1936) 82. David S. Lovejoy, *Rhode Island Politics and the American Revolution, 1760-1776* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1958) 92.

4 Account of Events Pertaining to Destruction of Schooner Gaspee, anon. MS. c. 1772, John Hay Library, Brown University.

sent to England for trial.[5] The news of the commission ended a two-year period of calm in the colonies by intensifying discontent toward parliamentary and ministerial measures. The greatest clamor occurred in Virginia's House of Burgesses. Its members voted resolutions establishing a committee of correspondence while urging other colonies to do likewise; by December 1773, eleven had appointed similar bodies.

These are the well-known facts of the *Gaspee* affair, and its significance as a causative factor in the coming of the American Revolution. Most historical interpretations have suggested that, after prompting nearly all of the provincial assemblies to form committees of correspondence, the episode ceased to be an issue capable of fanning the growing flame of revolution.[6] By the end of June 1773 the affair was rendered moribund by two developments — the five commissioners had failed to recommend indictments to the colony's superior court — news of the passage of the Tea Act had arrived in America. However, Thomas Jefferson would allude to the affair in the Declaration of Independence three years later.

If the *Gaspee* affair ceased to be a concern of continental interest by the end of summer 1773, why was it cited as a cause of American discontent in 1776? A clearer understanding of the event's impact upon the movement for independence might be ascertained by resolving this apparent paradox. Interestingly, developments surrounding destruction of the *Gaspee* serve as a model case study of Bernard Bailyn's conspiracy thesis, an interpretation which illuminates the reasons for the prodigious repercussions which the affair created not only in America but also in England; more importantly, the conspiracy thesis casts new light on the significance of the affair after 1773.

According to Bailyn, colonials who opposed parliamentary and ministerial policies which affected Americans believed that corrupt ministers in England were conspiring to subvert republican principles of government in the colonies, thus reducing Americans to a state of slavery. Colonials verified their suspicions with several proofs — the Stamp Act, which treatened the individual's control over his property — the presence in the colonies of officials who misled the ministry with false impressions concerning American affairs — the Townshend program which, in addition to levying taxes upon revenue, further strengthened the growing power of the customs service in North America — and, certainly, deployment of troops to Boston in 1768.[7]

Bailyn also contends that the king's informers in America succeeded in convincing influential people in government that a conspiracy was afoot — that a radical colonial elite was determined to subvert royal authority in America. To what extent did the ministry consider *Gaspee's* burning a conspiracy against royal authority in Rhode Island? It is true that the schooner's destruction had created greater impact in England than in America. Few Americans were moved to condemn this assault upon a royal vessel. Colonial violence, either against British personnel or British vessels, was a frequent occurrence in the colonies. In Rhode Island alone, three royal vessels had been attacked — *St. John* in 1764, *Liberty* in 1769, and *Gaspee* in 1772.[8] Colonial mobs had attacked officers in the service of the crown, among them collector Charles Dudley, and numerous tidewaiters, pilots and navy captains, including William Reid of *Liberty* and William Dudingston of *Gaspee*.

British-American subjects who placed a high premium on royal authority protested these outrages vociferously. Collector Dudley — who referred to the incident as "this dark Affair" — confided his suspicions to Admiral John Montagu, commander-in-chief of British naval forces in North America:

I shall first of all premise that the Attack upon the Gaspee was not the Effect of Sudden Passion and Resentment, but of cool deliberation and forethought: her local Circumstances at the Time she

5 For a detailed account of events prior to the burning and its aftermath, see Gaspee Commission Papers, R. I. State Archives. The bulk of these are printed in either John R. Bartlett, ed. *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England*, 10v. (Providence, 1856-1865) 7, or William R. Staples, *Documentary History of the Destruction of the Gaspee* (Providence, 1845).

6 Eugene Wulsin, "Political Consequences of the Burning of the Gaspee," *Rhode Island History* 3:1 & 2 (Jan. and April 1944).

7 Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1967) 98-116.

8 Documents relating to attacks upon *St. John* and *Liberty* are in Bartlett, 6: 428-430, 596.

9 July 23, 1772, Public Record Office 1:484, Admirals' Dispatches, Papers Relating to the Gaspee, comp. by Walter A. Edwards, MSS., RIHS Library.

10 Account of Events . . .

One British loyalist blamed the Gaspee's *fate on "cool deliberation and forethought." This belief could have been based on rumors of the Sabin Tavern meeting where the vessel's attackers gathered for their expedition.*

Sketch of Sabin House, Providence, from Rhode Island Historical Calendar *1898.*

was burnt did not raise the first Emotion to that enormous Act; it had been long determin'd she shou'd be destroy'd.[9]

One anonymous observer — his account bears strong resemblance to Dudley's — carried the argument further:

Some measures necessary to raise a sufficient Number of People to engage in this wicked attempt — a Drum was beat Thro' the Town with an avowed intention of making all Persons acquainted with it, that all Persons might join in the Common Cause; and many Persons were called upon and invited in a more particular Manner to engage in the design.[10]

Anonymous viewed the attack as a concerted rebellion in which all Rhode Islanders, with drums beating and banners flying, had risen up in violent challenge to royal authority.[11] Taking exception to this idea, the Reverend Mr. Ezra Stiles of Newport wrote: "I am well assured, notwithstanding the exaggerated Accounts about beating up for volunteers in the Streets of Providence, the Thing was conducted with . . . Secrecy and Caution. . . ."[12]

He did not believe that the people of Rhode Island had in effect levied war against their King.

Dudley's premise became Admiral Montagu's food for thought. Montagu would soon write to Lord Hillsborough, secretary of state for the colonies,[13] that the attack had been an open, armed conflict by the people of Rhode Island against one of the king's vessels. Many Rhode Islanders resented the construction which their act of protest had been given by the king's American informers. The *Providence Gazette* — September 26, 1772 — captured the mood:

We further learn, that the Affair of burning the Gaspee Schooner, having been greatly exaggerated and misrepresented, the Ministry were highly incensed on the Occasion; but that on the Arrival of Capt. Sheldon, from this Port, with Dispatches from his Honor the Governor, containing a true Representation of Facts, the Clamour against the Colony has abated, and was almost entirely subsided when the last Accounts came away.

Many Rhode Islanders were also resentful of the casual way in which facts were "colored." The ministry was told that some "two hundred men in eight boats" had participated in the attack and that they had murdered the officer. Thomas Hutchinson, another correspondent of the king, wrote, "it was supposed [that Dudingston was] mortally wounded. . . ."[14] Dudingston had not died; the participants numbered close to sixty or seventy, rather than two hundred.

Other stories circulating in the press illustrated the extent of misrepresentation of facts. A reprint from a London paper asserted, "It is rumoured about town [London], that Admiral Montagu, and the other Commissioners, who went with him on the expedition to Rhode Island, had been tarred and feathered, and were returned over land to Boston in a very woeful condition."[15] Actually, none of the commissioners had experienced any physical abuse while at Newport. When a store ship caught fire in Boston harbor, the printer of one Boston newspaper sighed relief that the

11 James Willard Hurst, "Treason down to the Constitution," in *Law of Treason in the United States: Collected Essays* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1971) 77.

12 Feb. 16, 1773, to Rev. Elihu Spencer at Trenton, N. J. Franklin B. Dexter, ed. *Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles* (New York: Scribners, 1901) 1:350.

13 In the midst of the ministry's deliberation upon the *Gaspee* affair, the Earl of Dartmouth replaced Hillsborough as secretary on Aug. 14, 1772.

14 *Newport Mercury*, Sept. 28, 1772. Hutchinson, *History of Colony and Province of Massachusetts-Bay*, Lawrence S. Mayo, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1936) 3:262, n.

15 *Providence Gazette*, May 8, 1773. Not one of the commissioners, Montagu attended the inquiry in his capacity as commander-in-chief of the British navy in North America.

accident had occurred during the day and was witnessed by the ship's crew: ". . . otherwise it might have been Matter of Representation to the Board of Admiralty at Home to have immediately fitted out a Fleet in order to apprehend certain Persons, to be sent beyond the Seas to be tried, as in the Case of the Gaspee schooner at Rhode-Island." Nevertheless, the incident was erroneously reported. Londoners were told that the vessel had been "set on fire by some of the inhabitants of this metropolis [Boston], a great number of whom were taken up and committed to gaol. — *It is probable, there has been more Letter-Writing.*"[16]

Lord Hillsborough's references to the *Gaspee's* destruction betrayed the same attitudes which Dudley had voiced earlier: "The King's Servants are clearly of opinion that a Transaction of such a nature, in which so great a number of Persons was concerned, could not have happened without previous meetings concert, nor without such preparation as could not, in the nature of it, be concealed from Observation." If the plan were so public, thought Hillsborough, why had the colony's officials failed to forestall it? Hillsborough's successor, Lord Dartmouth, though less suspicious, was hopeful that Governor Wanton would vigorously endeavor to discover "the Authors & abettors of so henious an Offence. . . ."[17]

Governor Wanton made an attempt to discount the idea that a conspiratorial design by the people of Rhode Island had surfaced on the evening of June 9, 1772. He considered the attack an effort by a few lawless men to rid the colony of a nuisance. The ministry was not convinced. It sought the opinion of the Attorney and Solicitor General who designated the burning an act of treason, a concerted effort to levy war against the king.[18]

In addition to the opinion of the crown lawyers, the king's ministers also acted upon their own suspicions — attitudes and impressions fostered by accurate and inaccurate information provided by informers in America. Mistrust was largely responsible for the appointment of a royal commission. Members of the ministry hoped that such an investigative body would subrogate any inquiry by a grand jury in Rhode Island. They believed that Rhode Islanders and their civil officials could not be depended upon to bring the guilty persons to justice. One of the king's friends in Rhode Island was certain that the colony's chief magistrates were knowledgeable of a conspiracy to destroy the schooner. He wrote: "Reason and Common Sense forbid any conjecture." He also doubted that "Sophistry or Cunning . . . [could] exculpate, or even extenuate the fault of those men whose Duty it was to preserve the Peace."[19] Inaccurate reports which verified ministerial distrust were proffered as unimpeachable. Although the attack had been planned in Providence and carried out seven miles from that city, the crown maintained that Newport was the scene of the lawlessness and wished "to be perfectly informed how so daring an attempt could be concerted, prepared and carried into execution in the chief town of our said colony [Newport], the residence of the Governor and principal magistrates thereof. . . ."[20]

At the completion of their investigation, the king's five commissioners — Governor Joseph Wanton, Chief Justices Peter Oliver of Massachusetts, Daniel Horsmanden of New York, and Frederick Smyth of New Jersey, and Robert Auchmuty, Jr., vice-admiralty judge for the Boston district — would find no evidence to support the idea of a conspiracy or of a general uprising by Rhode Islanders; they would conclude "that the whole was conducted suddenly and

16 *Newport Mercury*, June 7, Sept. 27, 1773.

17 Hillsborough to the Gov. of R. I., Aug. 7, 1772, Colonial Office 5:1301, fol. 452, Papers Relating to Gaspee. Dartmouth to Joseph Wanton, Sept. 4, 1772, Gaspee Commission Records, John Carter Brown Library.

18 Any challenge to royal authority by the people to redress their grievances was considered constructive levying of war and defined as treason. On the other hand, conspiracy to levy war included compassing, plotting or planning to commit treason, even though the plan might not come to fruition. Charles Dudley argued that a conspiracy existed to overthrow royal authority by destroying the *Gaspee*. He drew a connection between the alleged conspiracy in March and the vessel's destruction in June 1772. Two ideas of treason — conspiracy to levy war and constructive levying of war — were put forth by Dudley and the anonymous writer. Hurst, 77-79.

19 Account of Events . . .

20 "Royal Commission to the Commissioners of Inquiry," Bartlett, 7: 109. Although the governor resided in Newport, Providence was the residence of Deputy Governor Darius Sessions and Chief Justice Stephen Hopkins.

21 "Report of the Commissioners to the King," June 22, 1773, Gaspee Commission Papers. Bartlett, 7: 179.

Under this heading King George's letters patent appointed five commissioners to investigate the Gaspee *incident.*

Rhode Island State House; photograph by Leo P. Reardon.

secretly" on the evening of June 9 and early morning of the following day.[21] Nevertheless, the ministry believed that a conspiracy had been hatched in Rhode Island, an idea which reached Whitehall via two of the king's principal informers in America — Collector Charles Dudley and Admiral John Montagu. Many Rhode Islanders concluded that the admiral had deliberately misrepresented the facts to the State Department.[22]

The suspicions and mistrust which had characterized British officialdom's attitudes toward the affair were also evident in the reaction of Rhode Islanders, upon gleaning their first reports of the ministry's actions. By late October incomplete and erroneous reports in the colony made reference to a court of oyer and terminer, one to hear and determine, or to try any persons who might be apprehended as a result of the king's generous reward of £1,000, offered in his proclamation.[23] By the end of November more accurate, although unofficial, reports referred to the appointment of a commission of inquiry. By December 14 official correspondence from the Earl of Dartmouth had arrived at Newport and confirmed the worst fears of Governor Wanton and the General Assembly. A commission of inquiry had indeed been appointed by the king, with powers to send indicted persons to England to stand trial. General Gage was ordered to place a regiment in readiness should the commissioners request the assistance of the army.

First impressions die hard, and many half-truths regarding the real nature of the commission continued to circulate.[24] As late as December 21, the *Newport Mercury* reflected the public's misinterpretation of the commissioners' powers. The paper mentioned that troops would be used at Rhode Island "to support the *trial* [italics mine] of persons there suspected, or rather informed against. . . . Others say, that these devoted persons are to be taken agreeable to a late act of parliament, and sent for trial to London!"[25] Whether commissioners were empowered to try persons in Rhode Island, or to inquire into causes of the crime and recommend or hand down indictments — with subsequent trial in England by a jury of Londoners — the commission threatened to undermine legal processes which provided for possible indict-

22 Henry Marchant to David Jennings, Newport, Jan. 25, 1773, Henry Marchant Letter Book, Newport Historical Society. *Newport Mercury* Jan. 18, 1773.

23 *Newport Mercury* Oct. 26, 1772. *Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News Letter* Oct. 29, 1772.

24 For a discussion of the confusion created by an earlier decision to use the Dockyards Act for prosecution of *Gaspee* suspects, see William R. Leslie, "Gaspee Affair: A Study of Its Constitutional Significance," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39: 2 (Sept. 1952) 242. Thomas Hutchinson, for one, realized that the act had nothing to do with the schooner's destruction. *Newport Mercury* Dec. 21, 28, 1772. *Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News Letter* Dec. 31, 1772.

25 *Newport Mercury* Dec. 21, 1772. The membership of the commission was also a topic for speculation. Among possible commissioners mentioned were governors William Tryon of New York, Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut, Thomas Hutchinson of Massachusetts; three chief justices, Daniel Horsmanden of New York, Frederick Smyth of New Jersey, Peter Oliver of Massachusetts; and Admiral Montagu. While all received correspondence from the State Department, not all were appointed to the commission.

ment by a Rhode Island grand jury, and conviction or acquittal by the colony's superior court. If commissioners were invested with powers to send persons to England to stand trial, then they posed a threat to the sacrosanct British right of trials in the vicinage by a jury of one's peers. Rhode Island's General Assembly, sufficiently alarmed by news of the commission, appointed an ad hoc committee composed of Deputy Governor Darius Sessions, House Speaker Stephen Hopkins, and others, who communicated with Samuel Adams in December 1772.

The committee believed that the dangers, which the commission of inquiry had set loose, would "affect in the tenderest point the liberties, lives, and properties of all America. . . ." Implying that their rights were threatened by a plotting group bent upon their enslavement, Rhode Island's legislators appealed earnestly to Adams for assistance: "You will consider how natural it is for those who are oppressed, and in the greatest danger of being totally crushed, to look around every way for assistance and advice."[26] In their attempt to alert prominent citizens of other colonies who could best assist them, they had also sent a copy of the Dartmouth letter to John Dickinson of Pennsylvania, asking his advice on the matter.[27]

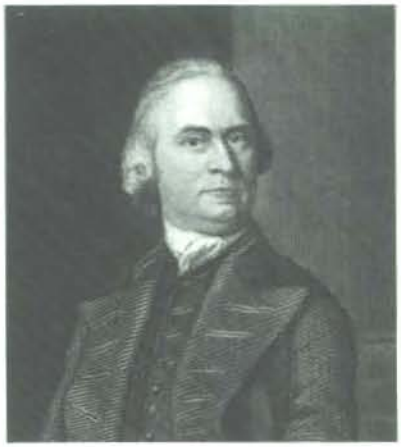
Samuel Adams thought he had perceived a diabolical design in the commission of inquiry. If so the commission had the capacity for arousing universal colonial interest. Adams observed:

The Colonies are all embarkd in the same bottom. The Liberties of all are alike invaded by the same haughty Power: The Conspirators against their common Rights have indeed exerted their brutal Force, or applied their insidious Arts, differently in the several Colonies, as they thought would best serve their Purpose of Oppression and Tyranny.[28]

Adams' thoughts naturally turned once again to an inter-colonial network of corresponding committees. For several years he had given enthusiastic support to colonial cooperation through ad hoc committees of correspondence within colonial legislatures. Because other colonies had not responded to Adams' appeal, Massachusetts had proceeded unilaterally, establishing town committees throughout the province. But now Virginia, not Massachusetts, was the first to respond to this apparent threat to American liberties. When the policy of overseas trials was first broached in 1768, many members of its House of Burgesses were compelled to voice their concern. Now, reports of the commission — received from Adams and various New England newspapers — triggered debate in March 1773. It culminated in a resolution calling for the formation of committees of correspondence. The preamble drew attention to the prevalence of "various Rumours and Reports" regarding the commission at Newport and the fears which it had generated in Virginia. In an attempt to "remove the Uneasiness, and to quiet the minds of the People" and to protect the rights of Englishmen, eleven Burgesses were appointed to a committee of correspondence and inquiry.

Resolutions urged speedy execution of three proposals. First, the committee would initiate a general correspondence with all the colonies to

Samuel Adams saw threat of British conspiracy in the commission of inquiry.



Detail of engraving, RIHS Graphics Collection.

26 Darius Sessions to Samuel Adams Dec. 25, 1772. William V. Wells, *Life and Public Services of Samuel Adams* (Boston, 1865) 2: 14.

27 Darius Sessions, Stephen Hopkins, Moses Brown and John Cole to John Dickinson, Providence, Jan. 1773, Dickinson Family Papers, Library Company of Philadelphia.

28 Samuel Adams to Richard Henry Lee, Boston, April 10, 1773. Harry A. Cushing, ed. *Writings of Samuel Adams* (New York: Putnam's, 1906) 3: 28.

29 John P. Kennedy, ed. *Journal of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1773-1776, Including Records of the Committee of Correspondence* (Richmond, Va., 1905) 28.

secure information concerning acts of the *"British Parliament*, or proceedings *of* Administration, as may relate to or affect the British Colonies in America. . . ." Secondly, a particular inquiry into the commission at Rhode Island was ordered. Thirdly, the resolutions would be transmitted to the other legislatures, admonishing them to form their own committees.[29] Yet the tone of the resolutions was decidedly low-pitched. Richard Henry Lee explained why:

. . . our language is so contrived as to prevent the Enemies of America from hurrying this transaction into that vortex of treason, whither they have carried every honest attempt to defend ourselves from their tyrannous designs for destroying our constitutional liberty.[30]

Although Governor Dunmore had dissolved the House of Burgesses after passage of the resolutions, the committee met privately, drafted a circular letter with the resolutions enclosed, and forwarded them to several other provincial legislatures.[31] The Virginia committee also established a communication link with London through a correspondent, John Norton, a Virginian residing in England.[32]

Outflanked by Virginia, the Rhode Island General Assembly was determined to win the second place of honor. It voted resolutions establishing a committee of correspondence on May 7.[33] Other New England colonies soon responded to Rhode Island's initiative. Connecticut acted on May 21. Six days later New Hampshire's assembly unanimously appointed a committee of seven. On the same day Massachusetts Bay, so enthusiastic in the past, followed. Representing views of the General Court, Speaker Thomas Cushing spoke openly of "the Conspirators against our Rights. . . ." He observed that "there has been long a settled Plan to subvert the Political Constitutions of these Colonies and to introduce arbitrary Power. . . ."

In July South Carolina augmented the movement for committees. By the autumn of 1773, Georgia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Delaware had acted. As 1773 neared its end, only three colonies had not yet joined the growing network of provincial committees. Josiah Martin, North Carolina's governor, prorogued the assembly on December 28, but not before the legislature had voted resolutions establishing a committee.[34] New York and New Jersey would not act until 1774, although their reasons for so doing would be motivated by issues unrelated to the *Gaspee* affair. The royal commission of inquiry had precipitated a chain reaction among provincial legislatures, and it galvanized public indignation toward the apparently deliberate infringement of American liberties by crown officials.

Which provisions in the commission did colonials find most objectionable? In a letter to the editor of the *Providence Gazette*, one "W.B." cited the "strange, new-fangled, and unconstitutional Court" on several counts. One worry involved the establishment of a precedent for commissions appointed by the crown. He queried "whether any Attention or Respect ought to be paid to it, which may in the least tend to shew, that this Colony, or any Members of it, submit to, or acquiesce in, the Authority of that Court."[35]

"W.B." must have been scandalized when John Cole, a member of the Rhode Island committee, appeared as a deponent before the commission of inquiry. Cole had strongly resisted making an appearance until Chief Justice Hopkins urged him to compose a courteous reply to a summons. When called again during the spring meeting, Cole did testify in June 1773. His recent appointment to the committee left him open to a minimal charge of conflict of interest, and a more serious accusation of renouncing the very principles upon which the committee stood. By appearing before the commissioners was he not granting some measure of legality to their hearings? Was he not abetting the ministry in its attempt to establish precedence for future commissions of inquiry?[36]

No one was more definitive upon the subject of precedence than Samuel Adams. "You will allow me to observe that this is a Matter in which the whole American Continent is deeply concerned and a Submission of the Colony of Rhode Island to

30 To John Dickinson, Chantilly, April 4, 1773. James C. Ballough, ed. *Letters of Richard Henry Lee* (New York: Macmillan, 1911) 1: 83.

31 Jefferson, "Autobiography," *Works of Thomas Jefferson* ed. Paul Leicester Ford (New York: Putnam's, 1904) 1: 10.

32 Committee of Correspondence to John Norton, Va., April 6, 1773. Kennedy, 42. Benjamin W. Labaree, *Boston Tea Party* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964) 170.

33 *Newport Mercury* May 10, 1773.

34 Kennedy, 49-62.

35 *Providence Gazette* April 24, 1773.

36 Deposition of John Cole, June 3, 1773, Gaspee Commission Papers.

this enormous Claim of power would be made a Precedent for all the rest. . . ."[37] Connecticut's committee agreed. It remarked that a moral victory had been achieved by the crown in June 1773, when the commission adjourned. For although it had "closed without effecting anything" the commission had originally "been Projected with [no] other serious view than to establish by Precedent the unconstitutional Measure."[38]

On another occasion Adams had cautioned General Assembly members to offer "no Concessions . . . which shall have the remotest tendency to fix a precedent; for if it is once established, a thousand Commissioners of the like arbitrary kind may be introduced to the utter ruin of your free Constitution."[39] In February 1774, "A Countryman" condemned the ministry's effort to establish new and arbitrary legal procedures in the colonies: "And, forever to deter us from attempting to resist, these cruel violations of all the laws of God — of nature, and of the English constitution, a court of INQUISITION hath been arbitrarily created in a free government, *for a precedent to all the rest of the colonies* [italics mine], in violation of its charter rights, and laws. . . ."[40]

Precedent was but one of several grievances. That the commission was composed of royal appointees in lieu of a jury was another objection. "W.B." considered jury trial "the grand Bulwark" of English liberties. Because the accused was entitled by law to two hearings by his peers — one to determine whether sufficient evidence existed for indictment, the other to determine his innocence or guilt — any interference with this traditional and established legal procedure would remove the "twofold Barrier . . . between the *Liberties of the People* and the *Prerogatives of the Crown.*" "W.B." stated that the commission not only threatened the tradition of jury trial, it also enhanced the royal prerogative at the expense of "the admirable *Balance* of our Constitution. . . ." Therefore, he considered increased royal prerogative as a third threat: ". . . this Power might be dangerous and destructive to our Constitution, if exerted without Check or Controul, by Justices of Oyer and Terminer, occasionally named by the Crown, who might then, as in France or Turky imprison, dispatch or exile any Man, that was obnoxious to the Government, by an instant Declaration, *that such is their Will and Pleasure.*"

"W.B." spoke of a fourth and final objection in his declamation to Mr. Carter of the *Gazette*. It was not sufficient that the accused merely be given a trial by jury. He was also entitled to a trial in the vicinage "by a unamimous Sufferage of twelve of his *Equals* and *Neighbours*, indifferently chosen, and superior to all Suspicion."[41]

This colonial fear of trials out of the vicinage became manifest after 1763, when colonial vice-admiralty courts were reorganized. A "super-court" had been erected in Halifax, enjoying concurrent jurisdiction with the provincial vice-admiralty courts. Such an arrangement would permit customs officials to take causes to Halifax where they would be heard before a vice-admiralty judge who might be impartial, rather than before provincial vice-admiralty judges predisposed toward favoring local merchants.

Distance was one of the disadvantages which colonial merchants mentioned. Unfamiliarity with the region meant that merchants who were not acquainted with local lawyers there, could not avail themselves of suitable legal counsel. Expensive court costs was another inconvenience created by the remote location of the Halifax tribunal. Petitioning the House of Commons, the Massachusetts General Court stated that "many persons, however legally their goods may have been imported . . .[would] lose their property, merely from an inability of following after it, and making that defence which they might do if the trial had been in the Colony where the goods were

37 Samuel Adams to Darius Sessions, Boston, Jan. 2, 1773. Cushing, 2: 397.

38 Silliman to Va. Committee, Nov. 4, 1773. Kennedy, 59.

39 Samuel Adams to Sessions, Feb. 1773. Cushing, 2: 427.

40 *Newport Mercury* Feb. 7, 1774.

41 *Providence Gazette* April 24, 1773.

42 Carl Ubbelohde, *Vice-Admiralty Courts and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1960) 49, 55, 61, 130, 145.

43 Ezra Stiles to Rev. Elihu Spencer, at Trenton, N. J., Newport, Feb. 16, 1773. Dexter, 1: 350.

seized." Implicit in this grievance was the idea that such trials, removed from the locale where the violation had occurred, ran counter to the revered tradition of trials in the vicinage.

In 1767, as a result of these complaints, four district courts were established to replace the "supercourt." Their creation did correct the problem, for colonials no longer cited distance as a significant grievance. Yet, in a limited sense, trials in one of the district courts still posed the same problems which trials in Halifax had. The possibility remained that a cause might not be tried in the region where the offense had occurred.[42]

When in March 1772 William Dudingston carried the seized *Fortune* to the district vice-admiralty court at Boston for condemnation — thereby circumventing Rhode Island vice-admiralty judge John Andrews — Rhode Islanders were in effect protesting a violation of trials in the vicinage. Thus at a time when colonials were giving great attention to the powers of the commission of inquiry at Rhode Island, allusions to vice-admiralty courts were an understandable occurrence, for these courts were doubly offensive to Americans. They dispensed with trial by jury and they ignored the tradition of trials in the vicinage.

Opposition to trials out of the vicinage remained a vital colonial grievance, sustained by the ministry on two other occasions. In 1768 overseas trials were broached as a possible solution to insure the prosecution of Massachusetts malcontents. The crown feared they might otherwise escape a just trial. But nothing had come of the plan. Appointment of a commission of inquiry in 1772 — with the same provision for overseas trials — had indeed given new vitality to the argument opposing such trials. Undoubtedly, it was the primary objection to the commission of inquiry.

Colonials expressed themselves freely upon this subject. The Reverend Mr. Stiles maintained that Rhode Islanders "will bear Any Thing but an actual Seizure of Persons."[43] Henry Marchant, Rhode Island's attorney general, summarized the attendant evils: ". . . it is resolved that an American is liable upon any Accusation & carried from the Country where the Fact was committed, from a Tryal by his Peers, to a Country where he is an utter Stranger. . . ."[44] Hannah Winthrop, wife of Harvard's president John Winthrop, viewed overseas trials as "one of the most extraordinary Political Maneuvers this Century has produced. . . ."[45] Richard Henry Lee spoke for a number of fellow Virginians when he remarked: "This is so unreasonable and so unconstitutional a stretch of power, that I hope it will never be permitted to take place while a spark of virtue or one manly sentiment remains in America."[46]

Richard Henry Lee stigmatized overseas trial of colonists as an unreasonable, unconstitutional stretch of power.

Detail of engraving, National Portrait Gallery of Eminent Americans, *E. A. Duyckinck (New York, 1862).*

Long after the burning of the *Gaspee* and the commission of inquiry had ceased to be topics of current discussion, the issue of trials out of the vicinage — beyond the seas — remained a vital force in the constitutional argument which was creating deeper divisions between many

44 Marchant to Jennings, Jan. 25, 1773. Marchant Letter Book. Marchant was mistaken on one point. According to Lord Dartmouth prisoners would be sent to England along with witnesses for defense and prosecution. Dartmouth to Wanton, Sept. 4, 1772, Gaspee Commission Records.

45 Hannah Winthrop to Mercy Warren, Jan. 4, 1773. *Warren-Adams Letters* 1: 16 (*Massachusetts Historical Society Collections* 72).

46 Lee to Samuel Adams, Feb. 4, 1773. Wells, 2: 65.

Americans and the British government. In February 1774, "A Countryman" enumerated many grievances which Americans could lay at the feet of the British government — injustices of inept customs officials — the British navy's harassment of coasting vessels engaged in transporting firewood from one local port to another — firing upon passenger boats thus endangering lives — standing armies in time of peace in certain provinces. But he found most objectionable "a Court of INQUISITION" empowered to inquire into charges, and to transport indicted suspects to England for trial.

In May of that year "Hampden" reminded his readers that a precedent for royal commissions of inquiry had already been established, and that the threat of overseas trials was therefore more real than ever before. "A court of inquisition," he wrote, "may be again appointed:"

The judges may be severe, and determined to take up, and send to Europe, a number of persons, upon the slightest suspicions; and if the justices of our courts should be disposed to sacrifice the rights and privileges of their countrymen to their own private interest, or ambition; they would undoubtedly, grant warrants to apprehend any persons, pointed out by the Inquisitors; and a sheriff, from the same vile motives, might execute the detestable precepts, and the inhabitants of this colony be thus torn from their families, their friends, and their country, and hurried to a foreign realm, to certain destruction.

In addition to those individuals who spoke out in public presses, town governments of Westerly and South Kingstown recorded their opposition to increased jurisdiction of vice-admiralty courts and to the principle of trials beyond the seas. On June 10 a Connecticut newspaper printed the recently passed resolutions of the Connecticut House of Representatives, declaring unconstitutional "the apprehending and carrying persons beyond the sea, to be tried for any crime alledged to be committed within the colony. . . ." South Carolina's legislature registered a similar protest.

The First Continental Congress drafted a petition to the King. Among other objections it deplored an old treason statute from the reign of Henry VIII providing for trials out of the vicinage and its application to the colonies. But mostly the petition condemned "attempts [which] have been made to enforce that statute."[47] The following spring, 1775, the New York General Assembly drafted a petition to the King, a memorial to the House of Lords, and a representation and remonstrance to the House of Commons. Much of the assembly's denunciation was leveled at vice-admiralty courts and the commission of inquiry. The protestations set forth a defense of the central and sacred component of English common law: "That a Trial by a Jury of the Vicinage in all Capital Cases, is the Grand Security of Freedom and the Birthright of Englishmen, and therefore that the seizing any Person or Persons residing in this Colony suspected of Treasons, misprisons of Treason, or any other Offences and sending such Persons out of the same to be tried, is Dangerous to the Lives and Liberties of his Majesty's American Subjects."[48]

The issues were numerous: precedent, extension of royal prerogative at the expense of American liberties, replacement of a jury by royal commissioners, and overseas trials. The commission was condemned for still other reasons. Treason charges, leveled at opponents of parliamentary policies, were first given serious consideration in the summer of 1768, when the Massachusetts legislature issued a circular letter urging other colonies to resist bills recently enacted by Parliament.

At that time the treason statute of Henry VIII was resurrected as legal justification for carrying Americans to England to stand trial. While the attempt to transport Massachusetts dissidents to England for trial never went beyond the stage of parliamentary discussion, it culminated in the appointment of a commission of inquiry in 1772. If anyone had possessed the slightest doubt in 1768 that the crown was resolute when it spoke of charges of treason for dissenting Americans, such

47 *Newport Mercury* Feb. 7, May 2, Feb. 21, June 27, July 25, 1774. Jan. 30, 1775.

48 Collected Letters 3, 1763-1775, R. I. State Archives.

49 Stiles to Spencer, Feb. 16, 1773. Dexter, 1: 349.

50 Marchant to Jennings, Jan. 25, 1773. Marchant Letter Book.

51 Stephen Hopkins to Col. Wanton, Providence, Jan. 20, 1773. American MSS., John Carter Brown Library.

52 Stiles to Spencer, Feb. 16, 1773, Dexter, 1: 349. Marchant to Jennings, Jan. 25, 1773. Marchant Letter Book.

". . . such Evidence as would not hang a Cat. . . ." scoffed Henry Marchant of British attempts to implicate eminent Rhode Islanders in treason.

Detail of design. Reynard the Fox *by Thomas James Arnold (New York, 1860).*

misunderstandings were surely removed when the King's five commissioners arrived at Newport in January 1773 to begin their hearings. A charge of treason indicated to many that the crown was acting vindictively. Exceedingly dismayed by the opinion of the crown lawyers, the Reverend Mr. Stiles had commented: "No one justifies the burning of the Gaspee. But no one ever thought of such a Thing as being Treason."[49]

Henry Marchant shared the cleric's consternation. He questioned the justification for the charge, and laid the blame at the feet of those informers in America who supplied the ministry with its information regarding colonial affairs:

That the Gaspee is burnt is a Truth & that the Fault was committed by a set of foolhardy desperate Fellows is also a Fact — all good peaceable & quiet men wish they were not Facts. But also good men look with Abhorrence upon the Vile Manner in which some of the first Characters in the Colony, certainly Men of the first Fortunes, have been trifled with, & Their Necks openly threatened with Halters, charging Them with being the Ring Leaders in perpetrating the Crime of Treason & Rebellion; and yt too upon such Evidence as would not hang a Cat.[50]

Stephen Hopkins had proposed a long adjournment for the commissioners in January 1773, so that "this Injurd Colony [will have] an Opportunity of Shewing the Error & Falsehood of many Malitious Charges made against it by Admiral Montague & many other Crown Officers. . . ."[51]

The use of troops was a final grievance pointed to continually as the commission prepared to convene. There was precedence for the use of the military in America. The decision had been made to introduce troops into Boston in 1767. The massacre of March 1770 was the capstone of that policy. Despite fear among residents that regiments might be called into Rhode Island, the commissioners never requested military support. Ezra Stiles noted: "The Commissioners soon found there was no Necessity for assembling Troops upon us, to protect their inquiry and therefore sent for none." Henry Marchant concurred that the denizens of Newport had not frustrated the commission's proceedings in any disruptive manner, much to the amazement of the commissioners themselves.[52]

References to use of troops appear conspicuously absent after January 1773. Belief that the military would be used had been greatest prior to convening of the commission.[53] Samuel Adams had remarked that deployment of a regiment or two for Newport would cast the commissioners in a bad light. He did not believe that they would be quick to risk their reputations by calling upon General Gage and his soldiers to protect them.[54] As events unfolded, military assistance was not necessary to maintain civil order in the colony. Nevertheless, provision for the use of troops at Newport was proof to many colonials that the ministry's motivation was malevolent.

Of all the grievances which colonials enumerated, what appeared to be the central source of their protest? What appeared to be

53 John Shy — *Toward Lexington: Role of British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965) 401-402 — argues that the ministry's reaction to the *Gaspee's* destruction "was curiously weak," that "no effective measures were taken" to assist the commissioners, cites Admiral Montagu's reluctance to send armed vessels to Newport during the inquiry. Actually Montagu had already dispatched warships to Rhode Island, consistent with his orders from the Lords of the Admiralty in September 1772. When the admiral expressed reluctance to send vessels in March 1773, his hesitancy was not indicative of weakness of will; rather it indicated that the government thought troops would not be needed, because Rhode Islanders had not attempted to frustrate by force the activities of the commissioners.

54 Adams to Sessions, Jan. 2, 1773. Cushing, 2: 390.

endangered by these proposed or implemented policies from Whitehall? Many Americans perceived a common theme — ministerial tyranny upon American liberties and the British constitution. Three Providence attorneys — penning their objections to the commissioners in January 1773 — had resisted the opportunity to participate in the establishment of precedence, which they believed "would entail an eternal Infamy on those, who, ought to be acquainted with the Principles of the Constitution." "A Countryman" perceived an assault upon Rhode Island's charter rights; and too, Samuel Adams had warned that a precedent, once established, would be used to the detriment of other colonies, and that it would terminate in the corruption of Rhode Island's "Free Constitution."[55]

"W.B." considered extension of the royal prerogative an attack upon the *"Liberties of the People"* and "destructive to our Constitution." Likewise a commission of inquiry, supplanting the grand jury, was injurious to "our once happy Constitution." To others it was a violation of "British laws." And the primary target of colonial attacks, the continuing threat to trials in the vicinage — fear of transportation to England for trial — was viewed as the undermining of ancient British legal traditions. "Americanus" considered overseas trials as a danger to "our free Constitution." The Connecticut legislature also detected an attack upon liberties: ". . . subjecting [persons] to be tried by commissioners, or any court constituted by act of parliament, or other ways within this colony in a summary way, without a jury, is unconstitutional and subversive of the liberties and rights of the free subjects of this colony."[56]

An attack upon American liberties, an abridgement of the British constitution, why? This question was mulled over by Richard Henry Lee of Virginia in February 1773, soon after the commission had adjourned. "The primary end of government seems to be the security of life and property; but this ministerial law [commission of inquiry] would, if acquiesced in, totally defeat every idea of social security and happiness."[57]

Why should men of Whitehall want to disturb the constitutional well-being of Americans? Henry Marchant, writing to his London friend David Jennings, expressed his fears of the ministry's motive. He was especially suspicious of the King's proclamation and reward of L1,000 for anyone offering information leading to arrest and conviction of the *Gaspee's* attackers. Marchant believed that such a great reward might encourage persons "to give their evidence from the motive of making a Fortune by it." Envisioning insidious effects of the royal commission, he pondered: "Is it not as well that some Crimes should go unpunished, as that by attempting to punish one we bring on the Persecution of many men!"[58]

As disgruntled Americans cogitated the ramifications of the commission of inquiry, they arrived at the conclusion that something foul was afoot — a master plan whose roots antedated the commission by several years, and whose ultimate goal was still in the process of unfolding. One writer from Massachusetts observed: "We ought to consider the measure as levelled not at Rhode Island meerly but as a flagrant attack upon American liberty in general." Samuel Adams perceived evidences of a deliberate design to whittle away American liberties under the slightest pretext. In arguing his point, he referred to the courteous reception which the commissioners had received during their winter stay in Newport. He wrote: "The promoters of ministerial measures in this Town [Boston] are pleased to hear from one of the Commissioners that they are treated with great respect: Even common Civility will be thus colourd to serve the great purpose."[59]

"W.B." urged Americans to safeguard their liberties by protecting them from a vengeful ministry, for "the *Liberties* of English Subjects cannot but subsist, so long as this Palladium [trial

55 John Cole, George Brown and Daniel Hitchcock to Stephen Hopkins, East Greenwich, Jan. 19, 1773. Copy enclosed in Hopkins to Wanton, Jan. 20, 1773. American MSS. *Newport Mercury* Feb. 7, 1774. Adams to Sessions, Feb. 1773. Cushing, 2: 427.

56 *Providence Gazette* April 24, 1773. *Newport Mercury* Feb. 1, 1773; Dec. 21, 1772; June 24, 1774.

57 Lee to Samuel Adams, Feb. 4, 1773. Wells, 2: 65.

58 Jan. 25, 1773, Marchant Letter Book.

59 *Newport Mercury* Feb. 1, 1773. Adams to Sessions, Feb. 1773. Cushing, 2: 427.

King George's £1,000 reward for information concerning the Gaspee's attackers led Henry Marchant to fear it might tempt possible witnesses to make "a Fortune" by testifying.

L. S.

GEORGE R.

By the KING.

A PROCLAMATION:

FOR the discovering and apprehending the Persons who plundered and burnt the *Gaspee* Schooner; and barbarously wounded and ill treated Lieutenant *William Dudingston*, Commander of the said Schooner.

WHEREAS We have received Information, that upon the 10th Day of June last, between the Hours of Twelve and One in the Morning, in the Providence or Narragansett River, in Our Colony of Rhode-Island *and* Providence Plantations, *a great Number of Persons, armed with Guns and other offensive Weapons, and led by Two Persons, who were called the Captain and Head-Sheriff, in several armed Boats, attacked and Boarded Our Vessel called the* Gaspee *Schooner, then lying at single Anchor in the said River, commanded by Our Lieutenant* William Dudingston, *under the Orders of Our Rear-Admiral* John Montagu, *and having dangerously wounded and barbarously treated the said* William Dudingston, *took, plundered and burnt the said Schooner:*

WE, to the Intent that such outrageous and heinous Offenders may be discovered, and brought to condign Punishment, [illegible] Privy Council, to issue this Our Royal PROCLAMATION:

And We are hereby graciously pleased to promise, that if any Person or Persons shall discover any other Person or Persons concerned in the said daring and heinous Offences, above mentioned, so that he or they may be apprehended and brought to Justice, such Discoverer shall have and receive, as a Reward for such Discovery, upon Conviction of each of the said Offenders, the Sum of *Five Hundred Pounds*. And if any Person or Persons shall discover either of the said Persons who acted as, or called themselves, or were called by their said Accomplices, the Head-Sheriff or the Captain, so that they, or either of them, may be apprehended and brought to Punishment, such Discoverer shall have and receive, as a Reward for such Discovery, upon Conviction of either of the said Persons, the further Sum of *Five Hundred Pounds*, over and above the Sum of *Five Hundred Pounds* herein before promised, for the discovery & apprehending any of the other common Offenders, abovementioned; and if any Person or Persons concerned therein, except the Two Persons who were called the Head-Sheriff, and Captain, and the Person or Persons who wounded Our said Lieutenant *William Dudingston*, shall discover any one or more of the said Accomplices, so that he or they may be apprehended and brought to Punishment, such Discoverer shall have and receive the said Reward or Rewards of *Five Hundred Pounds*, or *One Thousand Pounds*, as the Case may be; and also Our gracious Pardon for his said Offence. And the Commissioners for executing the Office of Treasurer of Our Exchequer, are hereby required to make Payment accordingly of the said Rewards. And We do hereby strictly charge and command all Our Governors, Deputy-Governors, Magistrates, Officers, and all other Our Loving Subjects, that they do use their utmost Diligence in their several Places and Capacities, to find out, discover and apprehend the said Offenders, in Order to their being brought to Justice. And We do hereby command that this Our Proclamation be printed and published, in the usual Form, and affixed to the principal Places of the Town of Newport and other Towns in Our said Colony, that none may pretend Ignorance.

GIVEN at Our Court at St. James's, *the Twenty-Sixth Day of* August, 1772, *in the Twelfth Year of Our Reign.*

GOD save the KING.

Printed by SOLOMON SOUTHWICK, Printer to the Honorable the Governor and Company of the Colony of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, in New-England.

RIHS Collection of Broadsides.

by jury in the vicinage] remains sacred and inviolate, not only from All open Attacks, but also from all *secret Machinations*, which may sap and undermine it." Harkening back to fears raised by revisions in the structure of colonial vice-admiralty courts, and by new threats offered in the commission of inquiry, "Hampden" identified what "appears to be a plan concerted and established for enslaving us, and all our posterity. . . ." The conspiracy to which he alluded was the crown's "attempt to deprive us of that great bulwark of English liberty, *trials by juries in the vicinage*" and at the "discretion of an arbitrary minister . . . to undergo a mock trial, and inevitable execution."[60]

"Constitution" was reminded of conspiratorial designs of royal officials when he witnessed a happening in New York not unlike the *Gaspee* incident. Some of the officers and crew of *Lively Frigate*, a man-of-war stationed in the area, approached *Mary*, a brig, to search for undeclared goods. *Mary* tried to answer a command to heave to promptly, but before she could adjust her sails her crew was fired upon. "Constitution" warned: "It must be feared by every loyal Subject, that such daring cruel and unprovoked Insults, are in Consequence of some dreadful Schemes hatched by the enemies of our King and Constitution, to throw this Country into Confusion, in order to reap Advantages, by accusing us of high Treason, when we are forced highly to resent such flagrant Breaches, not only of our invaluable Constitution, but even of the Laws of Nature."[61]

"Constitution" did not ponder the ultimate objective of the conspirators. But "W.B." did proffer an answer. He saw the appointment of a commission of inquiry as part of a larger albeit uncompleted mosaic of British tyranny with a decidedly malicious design. He wrote: "Every new Tribunal, erected for the Decision of Facts, without the Intervention of a Jury (whether composed of Commissioners of the Revenue, or any other standing Magistrate) is a step towards establishing *Aristocracy* . . . the most oppressive of absolute Governments."

This seeming misrepresentation of facts by enemies of America climaxed in the ministry's assertion that Rhode Islanders had engaged in open and treasonous rebellion against their king, an action which necessitated stern measures — appointment of a commission of inquiry. To those people who had consistently opposed acts of Parliament and policies of the king's ministers since 1763, the commission was simply one more attempt to deprive Americans of their constitutional birthright, under the guise of some other objective. "W.B." had warned that *"new and arbitrary Methods of Trial . . .* under a Variety of plausible Pretences, may in Time imperceptibly *undermine* [trial by jury] this best Preservative of English liberty." Undoubtedly, many colonials shared his view that the charge of treason in the destruction of the *Gaspee* was one of those pretexts which the ministry had invented from time to time to further its sinister ends.[62]

Viewed as one event in a continuum of conspiratorial policies, the impact of the *Gaspee* affair upon imperial politics was soon engulfed by another controversy. Belief that Parliament intended to pass a bill which would extend preferential economic advantages to the East India Company — at the expense of other tea merchants — precipitated a new crisis. It appeared as though Americans were being coerced into acknowledging the principle of parliamentary taxation through a duty on tea. To opponents of Parliament "the plan was a conspiracy between the Ministry and the Company to force American recognition of Parliamentary taxation." Confrontation came on the evening of December 16, 1773 when a group of

60 *Providence Gazette* April 24, 1773. *Newport Mercury* May 2, 1774.

61 *Newport Mercury* July 26, 1773.

62 *Providence Gazette* April 24, 1773.

63 Labaree, 258.

64 Merrill Jensen, *Founding of a Nation: History of the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968) 456-457.

65 Thomas Jefferson, *Summary View of the Rights of British America*, ed. Thomas P. Abernethy (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1943) 15-16, 11.

men, disguised as Indians, boarded three ships, opened the chests on board, and pitched the tea into the harbor.[63]

As in the case of the burning of the *Gaspee*, the ministry reacted to the Boston Tea Party by proposing seizure of the ringleaders for transportation to England for trial. The Attorney and Solicitor General at first opined that such trials in England would be legal. However, after further consideration, they reversed themselves on the basis of insufficient evidence for a charge of treason. The ministry did not choose to risk the blame for reprisal. Nor were crown lawyers eager for that stigma. The dilemma was passed on to Parliament. It responded with several bills which came to be known collectively as Coercive or Intolerable Acts. One of these, the Administration of Justice Act, stipulated that any British officer charged with a capital crime — allegedly committed in the colonies — might take his trial in another colony or in England. The law accented the ministry's dogged persistence to make use of the unpopular principle of trials beyond the seas.[64]

During summer 1774, Thomas Jefferson — addressing himself to the many laws which Parliament had passed, the many policies which the ministry had implemented — devoted space to this continuing American fear of trials out of the vicinage. He quoted from the Administration of Justice Act, knowing full well that it had been intended for protection of British officials and loyal subjects of the crown, rather than as punishment for American opponents of British policies. In his discourse he was reminded of Rhode Island's earlier experience: "A clause for a similar purpose had been introduced into an act, passed in the 12th year of his Majesty's reign, intitled 'An act for the better securing and preserving his majesty's dockyards, magazines, ships, ammunition, and stores;' against which, as meriting the same censures, the several colonies have already protested." Again, during summer 1776, Jefferson made implicit reference in the Declaration of Independence to the commission of inquiry and the Administration of Justice Act when he chastised George III "For transporting us beyond the Seas to be tried for pretended offences. . . ."

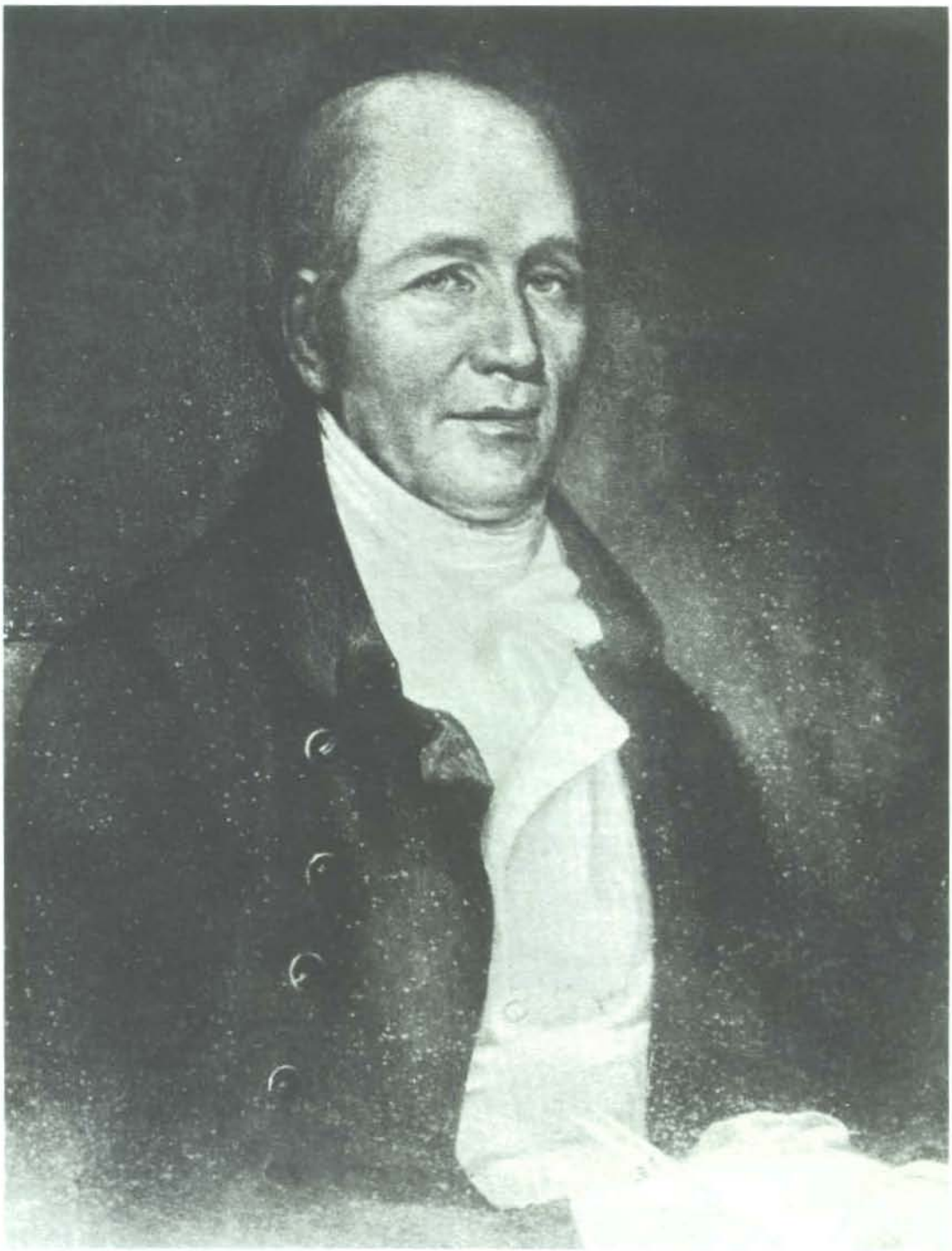
This issue of trials beyond the seas had first found expression in opposition to the vice-admiralty courts' jurisdiction and later in provisions of the commission of inquiry. It remained a perennial grievance to American revolutionaries, long after the commission of inquiry and the event which had led to it — the burning of the *Gaspee* — were vivid memories only in the minds of Rhode Islanders. Tea had preempted the commission of inquiry; the Intolerable Acts had preempted tea. Jefferson explained it well: "Single acts of tyranny may be ascribed to the accidental opinion of a day; but a series of oppressions, begun at a distinguished period, and pursued unalterably through every change of ministers, too plainly prove a deliberate and systematical plan of reducing us to slavery."[65] With such a wide range of injustices to choose from, why dwell upon the *Gaspee* affair or the commission of inquiry?

For the most part American revolutionaries did not dwell upon either. They found new justification after 1773 to substantiate their conviction that a vindictive ministry and parliament, handily assisted by American informers who misrepresented the true state of affairs to the crown, had together joined forces toward a common cause — deliberate subversion of the British constitution in the colonies. They sincerely believed that the commission of inquiry — Great Britain's answer to the burning of the *Gaspee* — provided a vital link in a chain of tyranny which led them to declare their independence.

Photograph, Leo P. Reardon

Namquit Point, Warwick -- site of the Gaspee *incident -- now known as Gaspee Point.*

Providence merchant John Innes Clark emerges as thoughtful husband and father -- as well as canny business man -- in his letters and the correspondence of his family.



Portrait by John Trumbull, History of the Episcopal Church in Narragansett, R. I. *by Wilkins Updike* (Boston, 1907).

John Innes Clark and His Family — Beautiful People in Providence

*by Joseph K. Ott**

The Rhode Island Historical Society Library acquired in 1970 a collection of manuscripts relating to John Innes Clark and his family. Some of the letters were written by Clark but the majority are between sisters, mothers and daughters, and other distaff friends and relations. Their business and political content is perhaps not excessive but their insight into customs and furnishings of the 1790-1812 period is fascinating. Warm, chatty, affectionate, the letters comment on fashions, family affairs, school life, and so on. From the use of wall-to-wall carpeting with hearth-side rugs to problems of moths and errant nurses, the ladies have cheerfully recorded the gamut of life's little decisions.

Wealthy Providence merchant, Clark established with Colonel Joseph Nightingale the firm of Clark and Nightingale. Its success enabled Clark to build a large three-storey hipped-roof wooden house on the northeast corner of John and Benefit Streets in 1789. His partner built one almost exactly similar on abutting land at the northeast corner of Williams and Benefit in 1791. After Nightingale died a few years later, John Carter Brown bought his house — still standing at 357 Benefit, still in the Brown family — one of the great houses of Providence and of the nation. Clark's, of course, was as grand but fate — perhaps in the guise of the mason who built the chimneys — has been less kind to it.

The house burned on November 20, 1849, taking with it Anna Almy Jenkins — widow of William Jenkins and owner at the time — and one of her daughters. The mother had escaped but, hearing that another child was still within, rushed back into the flames where both were lost. Sources below give a much more graphic and detailed account of the event and of the houses.[1]

Out of this tragedy later came a surprising amount of happiness in a very unexpected manner. The fire had begun in early morning hours and the household was aroused by the family dog who — in his efforts to break loose and give the alarm — broke the iron chain fastened to his collar.

The surviving daughter, Anna Almy Jenkins, married Thomas Frederick Hoppin. They built an Italian-villa-type mansion, still standing at 383 Benefit, on the site of the old Clark-Jenkins house. An artist, Hoppin designed a bronze likeness — complete with broken chain — of the heroic dog that had saved several lives from the fire. This figure stood on the Hoppin lawn; in 1896 it was moved by the family's generosity to Roger Williams Park. It stands today near the children's animal-contact area, and generations of children (the writer's included) have climbed with delight on its broad back — just as the Hoppin children did more than a hundred years ago — oblivious of its poignant history.

Cast by the Gorham Company, the statue has been credited as the first bronze sculpture molded in the United States. This is not strictly accurate since Robert Ball Hughes (1806-1868) cast in 1847 a monument to Nathaniel Bowditch for placement in Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts.[2] The latter, an ambitious undertaking,

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1 Abby Isabel Bulkley, *Chad Browne Memorial* (Brooklyn, N. Y., 1888) 85-86. John Hutchins Cady, *Civic and Architectural Development of Providence 1636-1950* (Providence: Book Shop, 1957) 63-64. Margaret Bingham Stillwell, *Pageant of Benefit Street* (Providence: Akerman-Standard Press, 1945) 58-60. Wilkins Updike, *History of the Episcopal Church in Narragansett . . .* Including a History of Other Episcopal Churches in the State, 2nd ed., 3v., ed. Daniel Goodwin (Boston: Merrymount, 1907).

2 Albert TenEyck Gardner, *American Sculpture* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1965) 6.

certainly predates "The Sentinel," as the dog is known. Gorham's work has proved the more lasting, as the Bowditch was recast either by design or by necessity in Paris in the 1880s. Gorham, it could be noted, was perhaps the leading art and statuary foundry in the country — in addition to its better known activities — until a few years ago.

The builder of the John Innes Clark house is unknown. The mason who built the chimneys is also unknown and perhaps that is just as well. Reference after reference in the Clark papers comments on the frequency of downdrafts in fireplaces. Particularly during wind storms smoke would pour into rooms. Writers of letters would say they were in tears and had to stop, that they dreaded the inevitable re-whitewashing or re-papering of blackened rooms, and so on. Surrounding trees were topped, masons worked on the chimneys, but nothing seemed to help. Significantly, a gale was blowing that night of November 20, 1849, perhaps a spark caught some fabric or fireplace brush, and conflagration followed.

In any event the elegant house in which George Washington drank wine and punch during his official visit here in August 1790 was no more.[3] In its day the interiors under the Clark ownership must have been impressive. Clark died in 1808; the inventory of his estate lists quantities of mahogany furniture, looking glasses, plate, and all the furnishings of a wealthy ship owner. A "sopha" and two "sophetts" had silk coverings, window curtains and their cornices were also silk. This use of fabric and furniture did not occur by mere chance.

The intelligence system that supplied ideas for interior decorating was probably the best in Providence. The Clark manuscripts were written by sophisticated, well traveled ladies and gentlemen of good families who had access to the best houses in Providence, Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Charleston. The men traveled throughout Europe and — though basically interested in business affairs — kept one eye on styles in vogue, often at the request of wives and also from their own desires to be in the vanguard of the latest thing. A certain native thriftiness was also in evidence.

I send to care Loomis and Tillinghast of New York the decanters and 2 doz coolers — the looking glasses I ordered from France, and the table cloths from Germany [having discovered English ones were more expensive] . . . when in Paris I ordered the border for a room, and in addition a better and as I thot handsome paper, to give you a choice. (John Ward, London, April 17, 1795, to probably Mrs. John Innes Clark.)

From tragedy came this durable park playmate for generations of children. The bronze mastiff is admired too by fellow canines.

Photograph from Picture Book of Roger Williams Park *by Charlotte Estey (Providence, 1950) courtesy E. A. Johnson Co.*

3 Cady, 63.

There is to be a sale of elegant glasses my dear sister the 14th of this month where Mr. Ward thinks will be great bargains to be had — I do not know what country men they are — but never was such a sale of glasses in this country — upwards of two hundred from sixteen to sixty inches long — not to be seen till the day before the sale . . . write me your determination — if you wish Mr Ward to get you a pair here (if he can get a bargain) you will please to tell us the size you want — or if you prefer having your commission fulfilled for England. (Eliza Bowen Ward, probably New York, late 1790s, to her sister Mrs. Clark.) Auctions such as this were not uncommon and New York was a great looking-glass market.

"I wish you could see the furniture chintz I have purchased and now send home for Anna — at five shillings york [?] per yd." This fabric and another Mrs. Ward had previously sent to Mrs. Ives ". . . are the two handsomest patterns in this city or Philadelphia of the kind — that is in stripes — and stripes are all 'the go.'" The writer suggests Mrs. Clark could see Mrs. Ives', but this had been more expensive, ". . . and you had better see them both by candlelight." The writer also says Mrs. Clark could see Mrs. Nightingale's "but Mrs W. [Ward] says it is not fashionable." (Eliza Bowen, New York, October 21, 1792, to Mrs. Clark.) One should remember that "furniture" in this period probably referred to bed or window hangings in this context.

There seemed to be very little time-lag in all these arrangements, unless one had to wait for ships to cross the Atlantic and — in case of China trade goods — the Pacific as well. For fashions to filter down to the less affluent or less well connected took months and even years. Commissioning articles to be manufactured — weaving of damasks or making of fine cabinetwork to order — would also occasion delays.

A great deal of visiting back and forth occurred. One's friends and relations stopped by to renew old ties, to spend a night or so on the way to some more distant destination — it was more socially acceptable, pleasant, educational, and cheaper than a public inn — or for any one of many reasons. Visits lasted from a few hours to days, or in the case of specific invitations, months — through births and deaths and the desperation of hosts.

After a succession of house guests, Anne Elizabeth Clark Kane wrote from Providence to her mother on November 22, 1811: *I am very anxious to get somewhere in the country — this kind of life I do not love and cannot any longer put up with — I neither do my duty to myself or my children but when one lives in a small town there is no avoiding it — without like Uncle Ben they open a tavern at once.*

There were obligations of other sorts — balls, assemblies, returning visits, "taking tea," and so on. All these were basically pleasurable, naturally, and also helped disseminate news in the fashionable world, where Beautiful People gossiped and gave events of the day in their letters.

Eliza writes me that Tommy Lippitt is to be married to Betsy Chace, I can hardly credit her — was ever any thing so astonishing ? — refuse Mr. Robbins — (as I suppose she did) — and have the other! when will wonders cease! . . . what if T Lippitt or B Chace should hear all this — why they would never forgive me — so I beseech you my dearly beloved sister not to play tell all this time (Eliza Bowen, Mooreland, April 22, 1790, to Mrs. Clark.)

We last evening dear Mama spent a very agreeable evening at Mrs John Brown's it was new years and Alices birthday a very large party of thirteen ladies and almost equal number of gentlemen. (Anne Elizabeth Clark, Providence, January 2, 1798, to Mrs. Clark.) For her health, Mrs. Clark spent a considerable amount of time away, usually in Charleston, South Carolina and, following her husband's death, in Philadelphia. The pattern of

northerners going south for the winter and southerners coming north for the summer — particularly to Newport — had been well established early in the eighteenth century.[4]

Armand our french master ran away last week in every bodys debt he was a worthless good for nothing fellow and was so negligent he did not attend above twice a week once he was put in jail a sheriff has now gone after him. (Anne Elizabeth Clark, probably Salem or Providence, April 29, 1797, to Mrs. Clark.)

Speaking of some impoverished friends — the year was not a kind one to many — Anne Elizabeth Clark Kane wrote from Providence, November 22, 1811 to her mother that "they beg like Indians."

I passed last evening at Mr Tom Russells — every thing very elegant . . . this evening at Mr Dickinsons which I hope will put an end to large partys for the present — they ask you a full week beforehand — and the ladies appear at them in full dress. (Eliza Bowen Ward, probably New York, late 1790s or early 1800s, to Mrs. Clark.)

Mr. Brown I believe is indeed a queer stick, he has not a word to say before modest ladies I am told, but a great gallant among ladies of another description. (F. Moore, Charleston, December 21, 1799, to Mrs. Clark.) This probably referred to James Brown.

The girls have gone a sleighing this evening to Pawtuxet — I was desirous of gratifying them as the sleighing never was finer and the moon is uncommonly high and clear and not a single cloud to be seen. (Clark, Providence, January 12, 1798, to his wife.)

Mr Malbone has taken Eliza's and my miniature — they are said to be excellent likenesses much better than the one that you have . . . We have not come on very fast since our return in reading — it took up almost a fortnight in sitting for our pictures. (Harriet Clark, Providence, January 31, 1798, to her mother.) Harriet and Anne Elizabeth were sisters, sixteen and nineteen years old at the time.

We have now a great many instruments such as I am sure you will be pleased with — an Electrical machine, an excellent telescope, microscope, air pump, barometer, and thermometer, and every day expect a pair of 18 inch globes which the maker has written Mr Prince are the best he has ever made and upon a new construction. Harriet and her sister were studying under Mr. Prince, and she goes on to say they have studied air, optics, astronomy, etc. and "We are now studying electricity which I am not so well pleased with as the shocks are as disagreeable to me much more so than even the shower bath." On the brighter side — "We have so many invitations we cannot comply with them." (Harriet Clark, Salem, November 26, 1797, to her mother.) The shower bath in that era was a wooden box in which one stood while cold water sluiced down on head and shoulders through holes in the top.

Much more is detailed, particularly daily life at school in Medford when the girls were younger, the need for "babies" (evidently dolls) for companionship during that time, later advice during impending motherhood, and so on. A description of a ball which President Washington attended in Charleston is a fascinating study in itself of hair styles, fashions, logistics of the presidential entrance, and the subsequent swirl of the dance. The fire department had been called to stand by outside just in case its members would be needed.

Not all the letters were frivolous. Clark wrote in August 1797 of the yellow fever in Providence and the rumors that it had started from a ship recently returned from Cape François, killing two men in John Brown's long house. Tragedy continued — Nightingale died, and Clark decided to close the firm of Clark and Nightingale. The spirit of this eighteenth-century merchant at such a time becomes remorseless —

. . . it is an arduous task, yet I hope and doubt not if tolerably successful I shall be able to accomplish it in the course of a twelve month as I am determined to throw all the refractory delinquents into the hands of an attorney — this perhaps may

4 Carl Bridenbaugh, "Colonial Newport as a Summer Resort," *Rhode Island Historical Society Collections* 26:1 (January 1933).

Edward Dexter's business failure and indebtedness were noted by Anne Elizabeth Clark Kane in a letter of November 6, 1811.

RIHS Museum Collection.

make me many enemies, but I will not sacrifice my time nor reputation to gratify the indolent whim of any capricious mortal whatever. (Clark, Providence, January 12, 1798, to his wife.)

I wrote you of Blodget and Powers failure since then Edward Dexter has gone — and Corlis to a very large amount injuring a great many . . . Halsey has a mortgage on his house in town and it is now for sale — Dexter has moved out of the Snow house in consequence of the warning we gave him in the summer he had not paid the last six months rent but it would have been better he should have stayed for nothing than that it should be vacant which it now will be until the summer . . . Will you let me know in your next if you find among your things my best pr of bellows they are light mahogany with small brass nails all around them you had one pr of very dark and highly carved ones — I do not want them my dear mother I only inquire that I may not suspect any body here. (Anne Elizabeth Clark Kane, Providence, November 6, 1811, to her mother.)

Ann Elizabeth's husband Oliver Kane was in charge of Mrs. Clark's affairs after her husband died. From her house at 220 Arch Street, Philadelphia, Mrs. Clark would inquire how her financial status was coming along. News was not always pleasant, as the settling of any large estate took time and diligence. Kane wrote that

Samuel Snow, at Canton, took up money under a letter of credit from Mr Clark which he very improperly appropriated to his own use. A suit was afterwards commenced by Howqua against the Perkins who were partners in the adventure, and judgment for about 15,000 dollars was received against them, two thirds of that this estate must pay . . . We had always indulged hopes of being able to prove a conspiracy between Snow and Howqua to defraud the Patterson's concern, but Howqua proved himself too well versed in matters of that kind to allow us to succeed . . . I have been advised to put Sam. Snow and Ben. Munro into jail as a fit reward for their conduct but I shall do nothing further than to take their joint and several bond for the money and hold it over them. (Oliver Kane, Providence, November 30, 1812, to Mrs. Clark.)

The rich were also not isolated from life's little problems — "Dear Mother I wish I would write you something more amusing but I do not feel very smart and I am harried to death — nurse is in daily expectation of her lover — and if I lose her I shall give up — it seems he has never used her ill but wrote her from the country." (Anne Alizabeth Clark Kane, Providence, November 22, 1811.) Two months after, having promised to stay through the summer, nurse abruptly left, to everyone's chagrin.

"It is almost time to white wash and clean house — I dread it." (Anne Elizabeth Clark Kane, Providence, June 1, 1812, to her mother.)

"I hardly know when I wrote you dearest mother we have been so engaged in white washing and cleaning house and such a large smoky house

as ours is with so much woodwork that I have been fatigued to death both in mind and body." (Anne Elizabeth Clark Kane, Providence, June 17, 1812.)

"This month has been more pleasant. It is however exceeding cold, the thermometer in our dining room with a good fire being about 48°." (Clark, Providence, December 21, 1797, to an unknown recipient).

"The pump of the cistern leaked so bad that the water rotted away everything that supported the hearth and it was all caving in — we had the hearth taken up — a new one put down — the cistern cleaned out and new pipes laid from the house to it as the others were all rotted." (Anne Elizabeth Clark Kane, Providence, May 20, 1811, to her mother.)

After opening the house previously closed for some time — "Tomorrow I shall have all my blankets shaken — I find they are eat into holes through and through, by the moths and I shall have my own carpets beat out and put down . . . Kitty and myself up to the elbows in soap suds." (Anne Elizabeth Clark Kane, Providence, October 11, 1811 or 1813, to her mother, with John Ward on Wall Street, New York.)

As one might expect, they also had mildew problems in wet weather. "I had to take up the dining room carpet soon after you went away and put down one of my chamber ones for I found it going all over — some places had cracked away the length of [?] finger." (Anne Elizabeth Clark Kane, Providence, May 1, 1812, to her mother.)

"I have attended to your desires and had every thing aired in the SW upper chamber, also those on the shelves in the trunk room closet." (Clark, Providence, August 15, 1797, to his wife.)

In a letter in which much was made of switching carpets from one room to another: "Do as every body else does here where they move so often — put down thick double width green baize by the door — I will send you some for the purpose if you will say how much." (Anne Elizabeth Clark Kane to her sister in Providence, undated, probably early 1800s.)

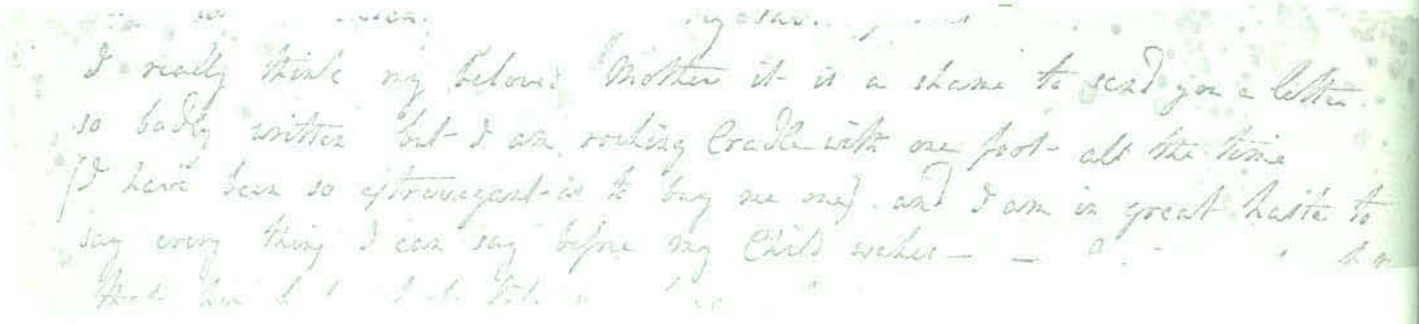
"I would not by any means advise her going to Newport — there are no conveniences there for see bathing — the beach is always full of people — without any shelter." (Anne Elizabeth Clark Kane, Providence, April 23, 1813, to her mother, regarding the proposed therapeutic value to sister Harriet and her new baby in "see" bathing.)

"It is a shame to send you a letter so badly written but I am rocking cradle with one foot all the time (I have been so extravagant as to buy me one) and I am in real haste to say every thing I can before my child wakes." (Anne Elizabeth Clark Kane, probably Providence, January 1, 1813, to her mother.)

"I hope we shall finish all our kitchen apparatus by Thursday evening . . . the masons make a dirty house." (Clark, Providence, August 20, 1802, to his wife.)

Perhaps one of the most interesting areas in the study of the Clark manuscripts concerns the nature and use of carpets, window and bed hangings, wall paper, color, etc. It is unfortunate that there is no precisely detailed accounting of the appearance of the various rooms, but aspects of their decoration can be inferred from letters that follow.

Although the Clark house was built in 1789, the Nightingale house in 1791, the John Brown house begun in 1786 — all three in the same locality, owned by leading merchants of the day — it would be a mistake to say that what was used in one would have been necessarily used in another. Some owners followed the latest trends, some probably did not, and in any event personal tastes were involved. It seems safe to assume however that the Clark family were fashion-conscious and further that what was considered stylish in one city would be so considered and used in another. There is a handicap also in that too few of these letters are dated exactly.



"I have been pricing carpets but cannot find any exactly the size you want, the nearest to the size I can get is 6 yd by 5 yd or 5 by 4 the very lowest price will be 19 shill a square yard — Wilton carpeting can be had 3 quarters wide at 12 shillings per [?] yard." (Patty Murray, New York, November 1792, to Mrs. Clark.)

The paper for the room I hope you will be pleased with, I think it extremely handsome also does Mrs. Timmins. The looking glasses you will like I am confident and the carpet also. I caused the carpet to be made the full size of the room and for you to have the place for the hearth cut out at the proper place, it was impossible for me to calculate exactly the place of the hearth, tho I know it is not near the middle of the room. I have had 4 rugs put up for you of [?] Mr. Rogers, they are used here by every lady to preserve the carpet about the fire place . . . I have continuedly these 6 months visiting the sellers of carriages, but have not been able to find one that I thought would suit you at less than eighty pounds — and as that was so much more than you mentioned as to price, I have hitherto declined taking it . . . With the paper I have sent some suitable lining — that is such as should be first well pasted all over the wall of the room and the paper put over it — this is to prevent any stains from the wall soaking thro to discolour the paper or injure its appearance and is always done in this country where a room is intended to be well papered. Great care should be taken to lay the first paper fair and smooth . . . I have also learnt that it will take three months to compleat the orange damask — as there are only three men in the kingdom who can weave it — this being the case I think I shall procure some fashionable chintz for the drawing room and bed chamber. (Ephm Bowen Jr., London, March 23, 1799, to his sister Mrs. Clark.)

Will you send immediately to Boston for the carpet for a room 20 feet by 15 I cannot get carpets here under two and three quarters and the very lowest if I take enough for my whole house is two and a half dollars — you want a new carpet for the parlor — I had as lives have that you have down and as the money must be laid out for one it will be better for you to get you one that will suit you — that will entirely cover the room — when you want one for that room you can put down the one in the dining room chamber and put the one down that was in my room in the dining room . . . and I had rather have it on your parlor than in my chamber I repeat that — carpet will very well answer my purpose — therefore dear Harriet send it on immediately by the first packet with any pieces of border you may have left — will you likewise send to Boston for 16 yds of rich stair Brussells carpet with borders as wide as can be procured — Let it be written for dark *and rich — wide and with a border to it — there is none to be had here with borders and what there is comes very high — it had better be sent to Providence by the waggon and then shipped here it will be more speedy and I am in want of all there articles dont forget to send the parlor carpet by the first packet for since I find how very much handsome is a room looks entirely covered I am anxious you should get a new one even if you shift a little at present — for the two lower room carpets that my husband has had put down he has given 1/6-pr [?] yd the sowing — think what a price — my Salem furniture is arrived and is much admired . . . She [Julia] shall take my window curtains if she will for this winter and I will take hers — I do not mind mine not being trimmed now my bed is complete . . . My curtains look very handsome — it is the fashion to put the cornices quite to the top of the wall even if the room is fourteen feet high — my curtains are just the length of my windows so I hoisted up my draperies and let my rods rest upon staples below but it does not show . . . Send me some artificial flowers in a band box . . . I hope to day the storm will bring in my trunk* [which she had requested earlier to be sent on] *and my silver*

— my sideboard looks naked without it. (Anne Elizabeth Clark Kane, possibly New York or New London, Friday the 24th, late 1790s or early 1800s, to Harriet Clark.)

Pray tell Aunt Ward that there are no new fashions — we have had our muslins made as we have had gowns for these two years past . . . I have said nothing Aunt Ward will say about the furniture which is very handsomely arranged — A large glass of about 8 feet by 5 feet fronts the chimney — the side board with plate — Vases etc stand on one side the room opposite the windows with as elegant glass with branches over it — the Salem table is under the first glass — Pembroke tables [?] in the [?] and the ends each side the chimney — wrote you yesterday by packet dear Mama to request you to send the great Leopard skin and the fur carpet . . . as there is no sleighing here without furs. (Probably Anne Elizabeth or Harriet, New York, January 26, probably early 1800s, to Mrs. Clark.)

Crimson is very rich but blue is handsomer — Mr. Ward says blue too for Eliza he says and what did you ever see look so handsome as Mrs Coolidges room? I should advise you to send for silk for the fringe two [?] the dark colored satin and the blue forms a fashionable fringe here but if you have a gold cornice this and yellow would be handsome — Mrs Hazard Gibbes was blue and yellow — I will however send to Mrs Coolidge and procure some patterns if possible. [Continuing the letter a day or two later] *— I have procured a pattern of Mrs Coolidges furniture I thought the wrong side showed the worsted but I find it is covered.* (Eliza B. Ward, Boston, probably late 1790s, to her sister Mrs. Clark.)

I have looked for stair carpeting for you my dear sister and can get you some Wilton for six shillings yd — not very elegant but pretty — somewhat in stripes and very elegant for two dollars — Do send word to Mrs Nightingale that I can get most elegant floor carpets for two dollars — I have seen but one chintz I like and that is engaged — however there is another cargo just arrived and to be opened next week — when I will look again for her and for you if you wish. (Eliza B. Ward, Boston, May 1, probably late 1790s, to Mrs. Clark.)

I should advise you to get a satin in preference to a damask by all means as nobody I am told that [can] *get damask now — satin or a tabby — a modern manufacture of silk and worsted the outside exactly a silk tabby — the inside worsted — is very fashionable — The British Consul at Charleston had a room furnished with a lemon or orange color that I thought very elegant — it has a small stripe and a lemon or star I forget which but looked handsomer than anything.* (Eliza B. Ward, Boston, May 1, before 1808, to Mrs. Clark.)

"Will you likewise send me on the cords and tassells I did not take of the drawing room curtains there are two that belong to the window curtains I did not take I want them to hitch the drapery in the middle as is the fashion here." (Anne Elizabeth Clark Kane, New York, probably early 1800s, to Mrs. Clark).

"Miss Halsey and Mrs Chace have got some little orange trees they now look all of them green I had some but they died." (Anne Elizabeth Clark from school, Warwick, November 14, 1788, to Mrs. Clark.)

"Yesterday . . . chose two pieces of furniture chintz for you that I think will suit your palampores and cheap." (Patty Murray, New York, November 4, 1792, to Mrs. Clark.)

"I hope some of the enclosed patterns will please you my sister pray inform me as soon as possible — the small stripes of black and purple make up very pretty but they do not look quite so dressy." (Frances Moore, Charleston, September 15, 1792, to Mrs. Clark.) Sample swatches are attached to the letter.

"Altho I have not been quilting this winter I have just had a carpet wove in true Scotch taste in imitation of the Highland plaid." (Elizabeth Watters, Wilmington, N. C., February 21, 1803, to her aunt Mrs. Clark.)

In a letter in which she mentions seeing the Derby gardens, hearing of Mrs. Derby's health — "in a decline" — and so on —

5 Noted clergyman and scientific instrument maker, very probably the same "Mr. Prince" with whom the girls studied science in Salem. Dr. Prince's inventiveness may have been the reason why he was the man to have the first recorded tambour desk in the colonies. See also Martha G. Fales, "Dr. Prince's air pump," *Antiques* March 1973, 499-500.

6 Carter-Danforth Papers (RIHS Library).

Dr. Prince[5] *has a new kind of desk made and I wish Papa would permit me to have one like it — the lower part of it is like a bureau then there is a desk that doubles together like a card table and back of that is a parcel of drawers hid with doors made in reeds to slip back and in the middle a plain door — 'tis the handsomest thing of the kind I ever saw and the most beautifully varnished — varnishing and all would come to almost twelve pounds — tis admired by all — if I have it my old desk might be sold as that would be of no use and I should think 'twould sell for six or eight pounds.* (Harriet Clark, Salem, August 31, probably 1797 or 1798 as it includes the remark "he says he shall see you before ninety eight is out," to Mrs. Clark.)

This is the earliest mention known to the author of a tambour writing table and in Clark's estate inventory such a form is listed. It would seem that he gratified Harriet's wishes and the family then owned the very newest of furniture styles from Massachusetts.

"I have as you requested procured a fountain for your bird cage and shall send it by Captn Currie." (Thomas M. Clark, New York, January 6, 1794, to his sister Harriet.)

It would appear that the interior of the Clark house presented a rather cosmopolitan appearance. Further, one could assume from the pattern of living that rooms other than host's and hostess' would have been rather complete apartments — a house guest staying a few nights would expect to have a bed, probably a table or two on which to take tea and meals, and sufficient chairs to entertain on a small scale. Probably chests and other amenities would also be provided. Again however it is unwise to generalize, as living patterns did differ.

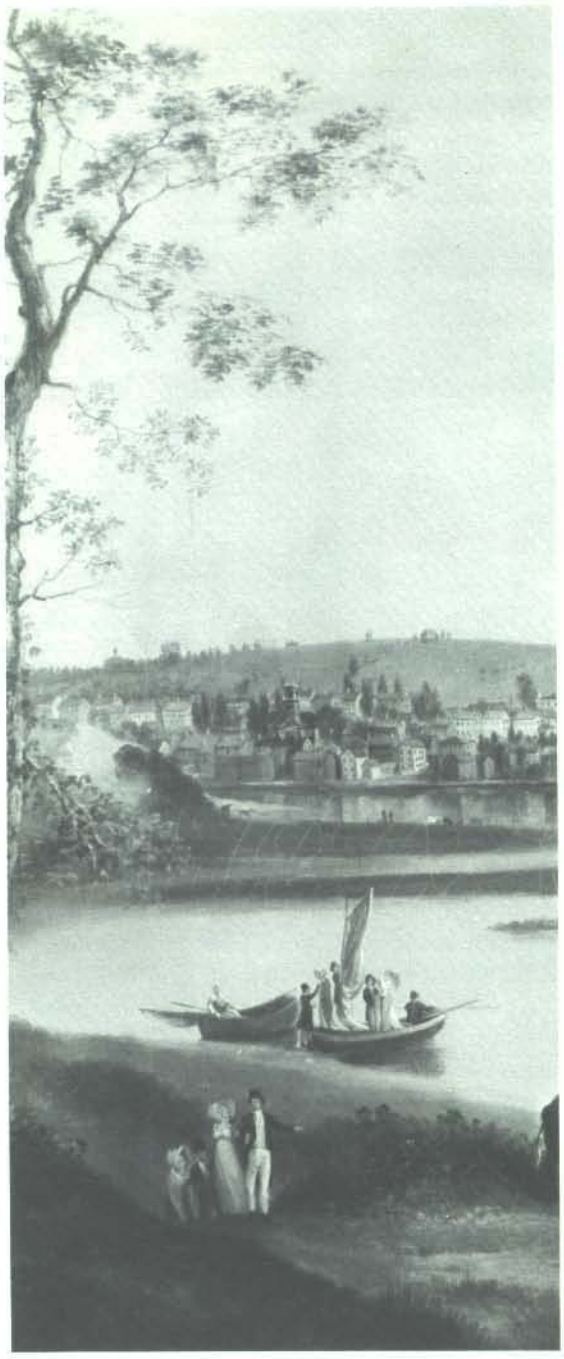
Unlike the comment made to Benjamin Carter at Providence College [Brown University] in a letter largely concerned with attitudes on the moral turpitude of the times — *As to Mr John Brown's clayey tabernacle it is a matter of indifference to . . . H. Dagget* (Wrentham, May 25, 1786)[6] — we *are* interested in the character of the rooms in these great houses.

". . . 'tis the handsomest thing of the kind I ever saw . . ."

Tambour desk from Salem, Massachusetts. Courtesy Israel Sack, Inc., N.Y.C.

Inventories such as Clark's sometimes do not tell us what was in what room; even if they do specify, we do not know whether this was an arrangement made for the convenience of the estate appraiser or whether contents had been shifted for some other reason, perhaps the serious sickness of the deceased. As inventories were often taken several months after the owner had died, perhaps rooms had been shifted around substantially as occupants of the house changed.

A further problem is the matter of storage — both small and large houses sometimes are mentioned as having closets; shelves were put up by carpenters and others, but where and for what purposes is usually uncertain. Structural details can help in the former but seldom in the latter case.



For all the details of design and decoration the Clark papers may or may not give, a lasting impression of the affectionate and delightful natures of the ladies is explicit —

I have never met with a more agreeable society than those ladies with whom I had the pleasure of becoming acquainted with during my stay in Providence, and much regret the distance which separates us. (Elizabeth Watters, Wilmington, N. C., February 21, 1803, to her aunt, Mrs. Clark.)

Mr. Mitchell is obliged to cross the river every day to attend to his plantation and machine and frequently is not at home till after dark — it is in these moments I sometimes feel that I am alone — when the shades of evening begin to fall — and the landscape swims in the dim uncertainty of twilight — I throw away my work and yield to my own reflections — my spirit goes forth beyond these little limits — it stretches over the troubled waste of waters — and finds no resting place till it sinks into my dear mothers bosom — tear after tear swims in my eyes — I wipe them away — but they will come again. I cannot help thinking how happy I have been at home — and how many dear friends I have left — but I must quit this subject — my eyes will betray me — and I would not have my husband know I trust myself with vain regrets — indeed my dear mother they are only occasional — for when I hear his footsteps unclouded gladness fills my breast — and I can only feel how happy I am to possess a heart like his. (Anna Mitchell, Hampstead, N. C., March 24, 1793, to Mrs. Lydia Bowen.)

An idyllic scene on the Providence Cove shows fashions of the letter-writers' time. Across the water -- centering the picture -- is the square belfry of St. John's Episcopal Church, an edifice that benefited from Clark's generosity.

Detail, painting of Providence Cove 1818 by Alvan Fisher, RIHS.

These two little girls played upon the Benefit Street lawn the Clark ladies had enjoyed some fifty years before. In 1859 G. P. A. Healy painted this portrait of Alice and Anna, daughters of Thomas Frederick Hoppin, sculptor of the Roger Williams Park "Sentinel." (Page 123)

Painting privately owned.