

WINTER/SPRING 2006



the Rhode Island
Historical Society

Rhode Island History

A RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY PUBLICATION

Volume 64, Number 1

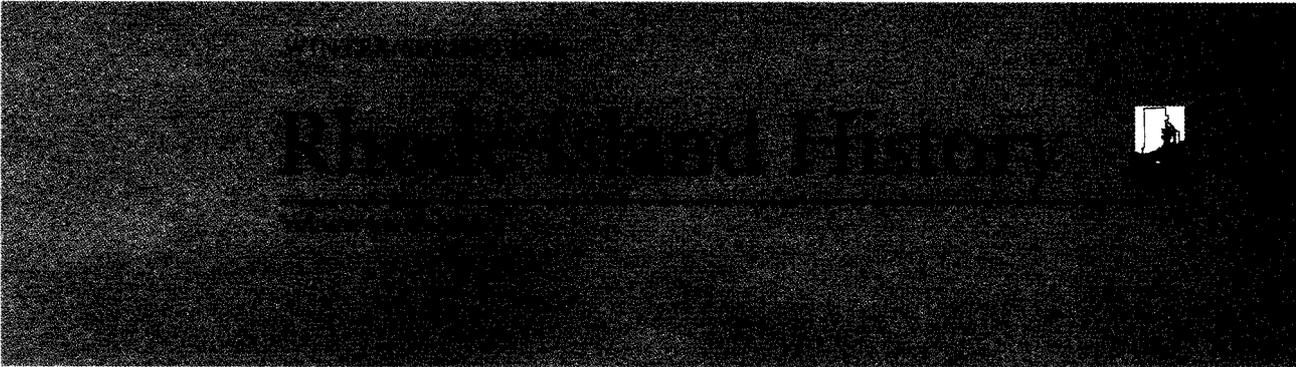


Rhode Island Historical Society
110 Benevolent Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02906-3152

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Cover

Detail: *Nathanael Greene (1742-1786), Rhode Island's Revolutionary War hero. Oil painting by Charles Willson Peale. Independence National Historical Park Collection, Philadelphia.*



Published by
The Rhode Island Historical Society
110 Benevolent Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02906-3152
and printed by a grant from the State of
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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>The Nathanael Greene Papers</i> | |
| Introduction | 3 |
| Nathanael Greene: An Appreciation | 5 |
| DENNIS M. CONRAD | |
| The History of the Nathanael Greene Papers | 17 |
| RICHARD K. SHOWMAN | |
| The Nathanael Greene Papers Project, 1972-2005 | 23 |
| ELIZABETH C. STEVENS | |



Introduction

In this issue of Rhode Island History we celebrate General Nathanael Greene, a native son, who made a key contribution to the eighteenth-century American struggle for independence. At the same time, we celebrate a related accomplishment by the Rhode Island Historical Society—the publication of a comprehensive modern edition of Greene’s papers.

As Dennis Conrad, an overall editor of the thirteen-volume edition, observes here in his appreciation of Greene, the Rhode Island Quaker who went on to act as George Washington’s associate in the Revolutionary War was little known or understood in the centuries following the conflict that established our nationhood. That lack of recognition was due in large part to the fact that Greene’s papers were not available in a coherent collection that would allow scholars to assess his talents and his contribution to the birth of our country. An account of the papers’ history, traced by Richard K. Showman, the founding editor of the Greene Papers project, is reprinted here from the first volume of the now completed *Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, an edition that includes, in full or in part, the entire extant corpus of documents written to or by Greene during his lifetime. As a part-time editor for some twenty-five years with the project, I was asked by the Rhode Island Historical Society’s Publications Committee to write a brief history of this modern edition.

There is something immensely satisfying about the completion of a long-term undertaking such as the Greene Papers project, which had been pending for more than two centuries and which will make a lasting contribution to the written history of our state and to the narrative of the birth of our nation. The Rhode Island Historical Society, including its members and its boards of trustees, as well as the people of Rhode Island, who supported the project through the state’s large financial contributions, should feel justly proud of this monumental achievement.

—Elizabeth C. Stevens



Nathanael Greene: An Appreciation

DENNIS M. CONRAD

When I first began work on Nathanael Greene in graduate school in the mid-1970s, I was convinced that there existed a cache of papers that would demonstrate that he helped to reestablish the collaborationist tidewater planters at the top of the political pecking order in South Carolina in the waning days of the American Revolution. The discovery of these papers, I was convinced, would dramatically alter the perception of Greene and the American Revolution in the South. When I joined the Greene Papers project some ten years later, I still hoped that such a cache existed and would be found, even though my era-specific views about the American military's readiness to intervene in American political life on the side of the "establishment" had given way to a less paranoid approach, thanks to the research I had done on Greene's life.

Now, at the conclusion of the Greene Papers project, I am convinced that such a cache does not exist—if it ever did. Neither have any other documents of such a startling nature emerged. The published volumes of his papers contain nothing that will dramatically alter the image of Greene that has come down to us from his contemporaries and from his first biographers. What publication of his papers has done, rather, is to provide historians, students, and lay readers with a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the man and his times and a greater appreciation of what he accomplished, particularly as commander of American forces in the South in the latter part of the Revolution.

One of the areas of interpretation that has undergone change thanks to the publication of the papers is the understanding of Greene, his family, and his situation before he entered the army. The popular image of Greene was that he was a rustic whose upbringing and education was limiting and limited—that he was, in the words of biographer Theodore Thayer, raised in a "drab and provincial middle-class Quaker home" where he was taught the "simple lessons of toil and plain living," and that the education afforded Nathanael and his brothers was nothing more than "the three R's."¹

While there is some truth to this characterization, it fails to give the complete picture. The Greene family were hard-working and middle class. Claude Blanchard, who served as commissary for the French Expeditionary Force to America, marveled that one of Greene's brothers, probably Christopher, whom Blanchard contracted with to provide wagons to transport wood for the French force, actually drove one of the wagons himself.² On the other hand, the family was wealthy and influential enough that it operated two iron-making forges, one at Potowomut on Hunts—now Greene—River and one on the Pawtuxet River in Coventry, R.I.³ The Greenes also conducted a vigorous intercolony mercantile operation and sent ships and trading goods as far away as Grenada in the West Indies.⁴ The family was wealthy enough to own "house" slaves, whose primary duty was to wait on family members.⁵ It also possessed enough status among its neighbors that Nathanael was elected to represent Coventry in the Rhode Island General Assembly.⁶

Dennis Conrad was an editor on the Greene Papers project for eighteen years, serving as lead editor for volumes 7 through 12. He is currently a historian with the Early History Branch of the Naval Historical Center in Washington, D.C., where he continues his work in documentary editing as one of the editors of the Naval Documents of the American Revolution series.

Major General Nathanael Greene. Lithograph from a mezzotint by Valentine Green, based on drawings by Thomas Stothard from Charles Willson Peale's painting of Greene. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 7889). Several letters concerning this mezzotint, written in the months before Greene's death, are published in The Papers of General Nathanael Greene, vol.13, pp. 587 and n, 626, 684 and n).

The claim that Greene and his brothers received nothing more than a rudimentary education is also not nuanced enough. Letters written by Jacob Greene, Nathanael's brother, seem to confirm Thayer's assertion. Jacob was a phonetic speller, and his use of punctuation was certainly not according to the established rules.⁷ Richard K. Showman, the beloved first editor of the Greene Papers, once observed, as we all sat around the microfilm reader trying to decipher one of Jacob's letters, that Jacob Greene seemed to use punctuation only when and where he should not.

Nathanael Greene, however, represents a challenge to Thayer's portrayal of how educated the Greene family was. As can be seen from sampling any of the volumes in his private correspondence, he was a beautifully expressive writer who could certainly turn a phrase. Stanley Idzerda, the former editor of the Papers of the Marquis de Lafayette, once told Showman that Greene was by far the best stylist among the senior officers in the Continental army—a talent that would seem to belie his not having read anything but the Bible. There is also the fact that the family's homestead at Potowomut boasts a fine library dating from the days when Greene lived there, a library that contains an assortment of works of fiction and nonfiction. Then too, there is the testimony of Pierre Du Ponceau, an aide to the Baron Steuben, who accompanied Greene part of the way on his journey to take command of the Southern Continental army in 1780. Du Ponceau remembered discussing various topics of classical learning with Greene and being impressed by the breadth and depth of the latter's knowledge.⁸ Evidence of this knowledge appears in Greene's papers where, to cite two examples, in a 1782 letter to George Weedon, Greene demonstrated a real familiarity with Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and in a 1780 letter he asked his friend Charles Pettit to order him a set of the essays of David Hume for his personal use.⁹ A neophyte would not use the Scottish philosopher Hume to introduce himself to the discipline of philosophy. It is clear that the understanding of Greene's upbringing and economic position in Rhode Island society will be altered thanks to the publication of his papers.

The great mystery of Greene's early life that neither his biographers nor the papers can adequately explain is his appointment as a brigadier general in the Rhode Island Continental line. As Richard Showman pointed out in the introduction to volume 1 of *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, "When he was commissioned brigadier general . . . on 22 June 1775, he was, at thirty-two, not only the youngest general in the army, but . . . also the only one who had never held a military commission."¹⁰ Compounding this mystery is the fact that Greene, because he limped, had been passed over when the minuteman unit that he helped to organize, the Kentish Guards, had elected officers some six months earlier.¹¹ While Greene's presence in the Assembly might explain why some representatives were willing to vote for him, it does not explain why his name was put forward in preference to numerous well-connected veterans of the French and Indian War, nor have any documents emerged that help explain what led the Rhode Island legislators to make the appointment. For now, the best explanation is that put forward by Showman in the introduction to Volume I: "Perhaps by some miracle the leaders of the Rhode Island Assembly recognized his hidden genius; it is more likely that like the winner of a lottery they simply picked the right number."¹²

One misunderstood aspect of Greene's life has been clarified by the Greene Papers project. Several of Greene's early biographers made much of a supposed conflict between his Quakerism and his military career.¹³ According to these biographers, Greene was suspended from his local Friends meeting for attending a military parade. Actually, his suspension in July 1773 was because he had visited a "Publick Resort," or alehouse, and his resignation from the Society of Friends in 1777 was not because he pursued a military career (he continued as a member of the Greenwich meeting for two years after being named brigadier general!) but because his views on religion had changed.¹⁴

Greene's papers do show, however, why he quickly became one of George Washington's favorite generals and one of those Washington relied heavily upon. Greene's orders, starting on 30 July 1775 and continuing to 20 January 1778, just prior to his becoming quartermaster general of the army, give evidence that Greene was an officer who was conscientious, well-organized, engaged, and concerned about the health and well-being of those under his command.¹⁵ In particular, it was his concern over the health of his men and the organization of the brigade hospital that is most impressive. Thanks to Greene's energy and organizational abilities, the Rhode Island Continental line regiments quickly emerged as the cream of Washington's army.

Despite his abilities, Greene did make mistakes that a more experienced military leader might not have made. Most notably, his role in the decision to hold Fort Washington on Mount Washington in New York's Hudson Highlands in November 1776 in the face of a British siege was a grievous mistake that saw the capture of twenty-eight hundred American troops, the greatest American military disaster until the fall of Charleston in 1780. In a comprehensive note discussing this debacle, Showman was unflinching in his appraisal of Greene's mistakes. "The truth is that, as it stood, Ft. Washington was incapable of withstanding a determined siege," wrote Showman. "In his ignorance of warfare, [Greene] had trusted the judgment of others who were little more knowledgeable than he. So, apparently, had Washington."¹⁶

It is indicative of Greene's character that he did not try to deflect responsibility for the disaster by blaming others, as some of his contemporaries did. Another aspect of Greene's greatness is that he did not allow this mistake to paralyze him; instead, he went on to serve as an effective battle commander, performing commendably, if not notably, in several subsequent battles. A letter that he wrote to "Light Horse Harry" Lee on 18 February 1782, in response to Lee's complaint that his reputation had been "injured" by Greene in public dispatches after the battle of Eutaw Springs, says much about Greene:

[T]o my remembrance [the Southern army] has never made a single move but that you have figured capitably in: not only in the service, but in the report . . . How different was my situation in the Northern Army. I fought hard at Harlem, I was in the action at Trenton and Princetown, I covered the retreat at Brandawine, and was upward of an hour and a quarter in a hot action, and confessedly saved the park of Artillery and indeed the Army from the fatal effects of a disagreeable route; and yet in all these actions I never had the honor to have my name mentioned to the public either as being with the Army or having done the least thing notwithstanding I was a General Officer. At Germaintown, I was evidently degraded, altho I think if ever I merited any thing it was for my exertions on that day. I have been concerned in many other lesser services which have been all passed over in silence. But I never murmured or complained, notwithstanding I was held in indignation for faults and misfortunes I had no direction of. I would not mention these things but to shew you how groundless your complaints are.¹⁷

In my estimation, these remarks clearly demonstrate that Greene was an excellent field commander who was also steady, uncomplaining, and—unlike other senior officers in the Continental army—capable of humility.



The incident that best illustrates his willingness to sacrifice his own interests to the greater good is his acceptance of the job of quartermaster general. By 1778 Greene enjoyed a reputation as an officer who could gather and conserve supplies, so it is no surprise that when the supply situation of the Continental army deteriorated badly, Washington pressed him to become the army's quartermaster general. Greene was reluctant to do so. Although he argued that he felt himself unprepared "to enter into this

large Field of Business,” his principal objection was that serving as quartermaster general would prevent him from “doing the active Duty of a General Officer” and take him “out of the line of splendor.”¹⁸ Greene succinctly summarized his reluctance: “There is a great difference between being raised to an Office and descending to one; which is my case. There is also a great difference betwext serving where you have a fair prospect of honor, and laurels, and where you have no prospect of either, let you discharge your duty ever so well. No body ever heard of a quarter Master in History as such or in relateing any brilliant Action.”¹⁹

Why, then, did he take the post? Despite the assertions of some historians, it was not for the money.²⁰ In the end it was Greene’s patriotism and, more importantly, his affection for Washington, a father figure for him, that moved him to accept the appointment.²¹ Washington made the decision easier by assuring Greene that he would not lose his seniority as a combat officer. As a result, during his years as quartermaster general Greene still served on occasion as a line officer commanding troops in battle.

Greene’s tenure as quartermaster general, which extended from 2 March 1778 until 5 August 1780 and is covered in volumes 2 through 6 of the published Greene Papers, is interesting and vital, though in a different sort of way from traditional military history. The “new” military historians, who are less interested in battles and campaigns and who focus instead upon the impact of warfare on society, will find these volumes fascinating. The supply departments were the single biggest purchaser of goods in America during this time. As such, the documents from this period, as Don Higginbotham wrote in a review of the Greene Papers’ volume 4, “brim with information about crops, manufactures, transports, and trade routes. A fascinating appendix, ‘Items Furnished by the Quartermaster Department,’ contains a list of over 500 items (and is far from complete, say the editors) that is highly suggestive about technological developments in America.”²² In other words, Greene and his generally young deputy quartermasters (such as Moore Furman, Udney Hay, Nehemiah Hubbard, Owen and Clement Biddle, and Morgan Lewis, to name a few) ran the largest business enterprise in the United States, and despite having to cope with rampant inflation, lack of money, parochialism, procedural obstacles created by the states, war weariness, and greed and inferior workmanship on the part of producers and laborers, they ran the operation well.²³

While Greene may have been a reluctant quartermaster general, he was a good one, though this aspect of his career has been underappreciated. He reenergized the department with his appointments and broadened the scope of the department’s buying activities by sending agents farther afield to buy supplies. For example, in early 1779 he and Charles Pettit spent much time and energy arranging the shipment of rice from South Carolina to compensate for a drought-induced shortfall of grain supplies in New England.²⁴ Perhaps Greene’s most notable innovation was to establish grain depots to supply forage to Washington’s forces wherever they might be. Since Washington was fighting a reactive war, governing his movements by those of the British and often shifting his forces to counter an enemy threat, Greene’s positioning of a number of small magazines along a “line of communications” running from the Hudson River to Head of Elk, Maryland, afforded the Continental army maximum flexibility. By limiting the size of these depots so they would not become targets for British operations and placing them high upstream on rivers to protect them from British waterborne raiders, Greene maximized their benefit and minimized the risk. Coupled with his energetic acquisition of teams, wagons, and boats, he transformed Washington’s army into a mobile fighting force.²⁵

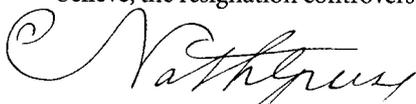
Greene successfully revived the previously dysfunctional department and kept it running smoothly until the autumn of 1779, when the Continental currency began a precipitous decline in value. The hyperinflation that saw the Continental dollar go from a ratio of 4 to 1 specie dollars to a ratio of 60 to 1 had a disastrous effect on quartermaster operations. Farmers and merchants were loath to sell their goods to government agents when the

currency they were paid in might halve in value literally overnight. Moreover, hyperinflation meant that department personnel, who received a percentage of every transaction as wages, garnered large, albeit increasingly worthless, amounts of money, which in turn reinforced a perception that supply officers were enriching themselves at public expense. Though Greene consistently advocated eliminating or modifying this percentage system, Congress could not resist making supply officers a scapegoat for the financial problems of the country, even though the cost of supporting a soldier in the field, as measured in specie, actually declined during this period.

Seemingly powerless to stop erosion of the money supply, in late 1779 Congress initiated a new way of obtaining needed goods for the army. Under its state supply system, Congress set a quota of provisions and forage for each state. If a state met that quota, two-thirds of the money it owed to the national government would be forgiven. The plan was much more detailed than can be explained here, and its problems were legion (Greene provided an insightful and trenchant critique of the new system in a letter to Washington of 8-12 March 1780).²⁶ The quartermaster department increasingly had to rely on impressment—which is a polite way of saying legalized stealing—to supply the army. With the state supply system in operation, Congress decided that the quartermaster department could be radically reduced in size and that its officers, including Greene himself, should be held more strictly accountable for its operations.

Greene was irate. In several letters he expressed his belief that the reorganization plan was the product of a cabal of congressional delegates who were plotting his downfall, despite assurances from his friends that no such cabal existed.²⁷ Unwilling to hazard his reputation on such a system, Greene resigned as quartermaster general in the summer of 1780. His letter of resignation of 26 July contained offensive language, to which a few congressional delegates took exception.²⁸ For a brief period it appeared that Congress might force him to retire from the army, and Washington—unnecessarily, as it turned out—wrote a strongly worded letter of support to Congress on Greene's behalf.²⁹ But the furor quickly subsided, and Greene took his place once more as Washington's trusted subordinate.

Greene's resignation, I believe, shows him at his worst. Prickly, suspicious, and selfish, he put his own concerns above those of the army and the country, acting in a fit of pique just as the 1780 campaign was about to begin. The resignation also shows a very human Nathanael Greene, a man who was insecure enough about his status and reputation that he reacted badly when he believed they might be threatened. More than any other episode, I believe, the resignation controversy humanizes Greene and allows us to identify with him.



Even before he left the job of quartermaster, Greene commanded American troops in two little-known but important engagements.³⁰ At Connecticut Farms, N.J., on 7 June 1780, and again at Springfield, N.J., on 23 June 1780, his command of Continentals and militia turned back the more numerous British invaders. The action at Springfield can be seen as a harbinger of Greene's successful Southern campaign: his men were pushed back at Springfield by a British advance, but in the end it was the British who abandoned the contested area, never to return. Greene's effective use of the New Jersey militia at Connecticut Farms probably impressed the southern delegates to Congress. Those delegations enthusiastically endorsed his appointment as commander of the Southern Department, where the militia was a key component of the military force.³¹

Greene received command of the Continental army in the South on 14 October 1780, but he did not join that ill-equipped, under-strength, and disheartened force at Charlotte, N.C., until 3 December. The Greene Papers' volumes covering the Southern campaign

show vividly how desperate the supply situation of this army was, and how effective the British were—at least until Yorktown in late 1781—in cutting the American supply lines from the North to Greene’s army.

It was as commander of this ragtag force that Greene deservedly won his greatest fame. He modeled himself after Washington in his treatment of subordinates and politicians, but he showed a greater genius in both strategic and tactical matters than his mentor. Upon taking command, he decided to play the role of a guerrilla leader until he could reinforce his army. Greene understood the need to bolster the spirit of the southern patriots by appearing to be on the offensive, even though he was not strong enough to challenge the British army in South Carolina. Dividing his army to threaten the flanks of the main British force, which was encamped at Winnsboro, S.C., he led the major part of his army to a “camp of repose” on the Pee Dee River; the other division of the army, commanded by Gen. Daniel Morgan, moved into the western part of South Carolina, where it rallied local partisans and suppressed Loyalist forces in the area.³²

To counter the threat posed by Morgan, the British commander, Lord Cornwallis, dispatched a force led by Banastre Tarleton to destroy Morgan’s detachment. In a stunning reversal, Morgan won an overwhelming victory at the battle of Cowpens on 17 January 1781. Greene’s orders and letters to Morgan make it clear that Greene did not intend that his subordinate fight a pitched battle with a superior British force, but he was also

The General Nathanael Greene Memorial was unveiled in Greensboro, North Carolina, on 3 July 1915 to commemorate the Revolutionary War battle of Guilford Court House. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 6019).



intelligent enough to know how to take advantage of the victory.³³ Cornwallis, desperate to retrieve the nine hundred British prisoners that Morgan had taken, immediately pursued Morgan, while Greene ordered the remainder of the army to begin a march northward, planning to link the two wings of the army before the advancing British force overtook Morgan's detachment.

Through luck and skillful leadership, Greene successfully brought his forces together near Guilford Court House in central North Carolina, but the numbers of this combined force were still inadequate to challenge their British pursuers, so the American army continued its retreat toward Virginia. This retreat across the breadth of North Carolina with the enemy in close pursuit is known as the Race to the Dan, a river that forms a natural barrier on the border between North Carolina and Virginia. The Americans won this race by mere hours. It was a stunning achievement, made more impressive by the fact that Greene lost virtually no men to desertion and was able to save the army's meager cache of supplies. The race is made almost palpable for the readers of the published Greene Papers by the notes—there was literally no time for letters—sent to Greene by Otho Williams and Henry Lee, commanders of the American rear guard.³⁴

In the relative safety of Virginia, Greene's army recovered from its long march and began to receive militia reinforcements. These made it strong enough to challenge Cornwallis to battle at Guilford Court House, in present-day Greensboro, N.C., on 15 March 1781. Although the veteran army of Cornwallis won the battle, it suffered so many casualties and had such severe supply problems that it was no longer an effective fighting force, and it had to retire to Wilmington on the North Carolina coast for reinforcements and resupply. The outcome of the battle—a tactical defeat for the Americans, but a strategic victory—would become a recurring theme during Greene's Southern campaign.³⁵ Greene and his army recognized that their victory at Guilford Court House contributed directly to the final American victory at Yorktown; as Greene wrote to his friend Henry Knox during the siege, "We have been beating the bush and the General [Washington] has come to catch the bird."³⁶

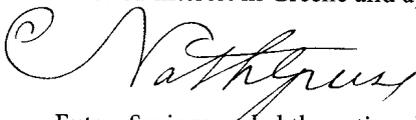
Greene pursued Cornwallis for a time, but on 29 March, in another daring strategic move that would define his legacy, he broke off pursuit (allowing the still dangerous Cornwallis to remain unmolested in his rear) and moved his army into South Carolina.³⁷ This movement put Greene's army in a position to confront the main British force in the state, an army under Lord Rawdon occupying Camden, S.C. Deciding that he must challenge Greene before the Americans could be reinforced, on 25 April 1781 Rawdon engaged him at the battle of Hobkirk's Hill, near Camden. Greene again lost the battle, but he inflicted sufficient casualties on Rawdon's force that the British commander was forced to abandon the post at Camden and retreat southward. Interestingly, immediately after the battle and before learning of Rawdon's withdrawal, a despondent Greene, in a very human moment, despaired of being able to achieve anything more in South Carolina, and he considered giving up command of American forces there and going to take command of American troops in Virginia.³⁸

With Greene's army now dominant in the area, from 23 April through 5 June 1781 American partisans, aided by Col. Henry Lee's legion, were able to capture a number of British support posts in the South Carolina and Georgia interior. This so-called War of the Posts soon reduced the power of the British army and crippled its ability to hold the South Carolina backcountry. While this was occurring, Greene's army moved against the British fort at Ninety-Six, the western anchor of the British interior posts. Rawdon had ordered the post evacuated, but his orders never arrived because his messengers were all captured. Greene's army besieged Ninety-Six for nearly a month but was forced to give up the siege when Lord Rawdon marched his newly reinforced army to the fort's rescue.³⁹

Again eschewing a battle that might threaten his army's ability to remain in the field, Greene retreated to a position of safety; but as before, the British decided that their victory was hollow, that the American threat was too great, and that they must once again withdraw. By leaving Ninety-Six, the British abandoned their last stronghold in the western part of South Carolina and ceded control of the interior of that state and Georgia to the Americans. With no expression of triumph at this turn of events, Greene tried to cut off the retiring British columns as they moved toward a successful joining of forces near Orangeburg, S.C. Yet again he had suffered a tactical defeat but secured a strategic victory. As he wrote in one of his letters about this time, "We rise, get beat, rise, and fight again."⁴⁰

Having marched and engaged the enemy almost continuously since January 1781, Greene decided to rest his army at the High Hills of the Santee, S.C., during July and early August and await reinforcements. These never came; but despite being outnumbered by British forces in South Carolina, on 23 August Greene chose to retake the offensive. He did so because he was concerned that a diplomatic mediation of the war, then being discussed—but not actually pursued—in Europe, might take place at campaign's end and lead to a peace on the basis of *uti posseditis*, the diplomatic principle that belligerents retain the territory they held at the cessation of hostilities. His concern about a settlement on that basis was something that became clear only with the publication of his papers, which show that he wanted to limit British territorial control in South Carolina as much as possible in anticipation of a possible peace. This decision to go on the offensive was an aggressive move that belies the reputation for Fabianism that is sometimes associated with Greene. The resulting battle of Eutaw Springs on 8 September 1781 was a tactical draw, but again the British army was severely weakened and forced to withdraw to the environs of Charleston.

In just nine months and without winning a major victory, Greene had wrested most of the Carolinas and Georgia from British control. It is this campaign, fought under difficult conditions, that has earned him a reputation for greatness. By providing stark and striking evidence of what was accomplished, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene* has generated renewed interest in Greene and appreciation of his accomplishments.⁴¹



Eutaw Springs ended the active phase of the Southern campaign. The war in the South now devolved to occasional raids and skirmishes. Greene's army took a position near Charleston but was too weak to attack the British fortifications; the British, for their part, were too weak and demoralized to move out of their breastworks and try to reconquer the ground they had lost. Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown in October 1781 reinforced British passivity, and the war settled into an uneasy stalemate until the British abandoned Charleston on 14 December 1782.

Greene's last months as Southern army commander—from December 1782 through August 1783—were a very difficult time for him. His army, composed mostly of soldiers from the Middle Atlantic states, was anxious to return home before the onset of another malaria season. As the months dragged on, his troops became increasingly restive, and one unit actually mutinied and went home. At the same time the war-weary southern states found it increasingly difficult to feed and supply his army, yet were unwilling to see it depart before peace was actually concluded. Hoping to increase support for his army, Greene became an active proponent for the nationalist political agenda being sponsored by some in Congress and by officials in the national government. This advocacy brought him into conflict with some of the more "localist" politicians in the South who had risen to power in the waning days of the war. These conflicts were both very

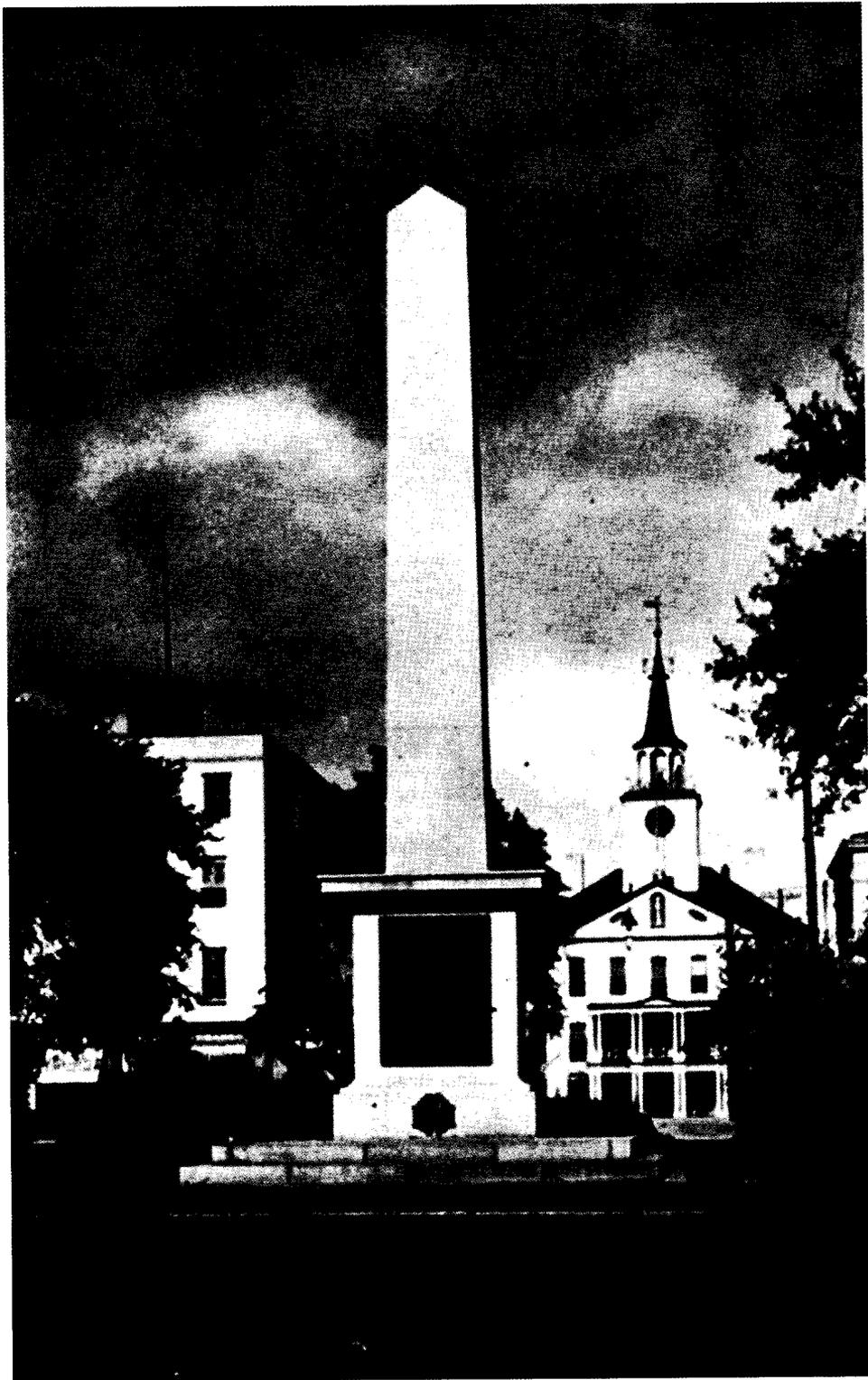


Nathanael Greene's family leased this house on Mill Street, Newport, in 1785. Photograph from The Remains of Major-General Nathanael Greene (Providence: E. L. Freeman & Sons, 1903).

significant and incredibly petty, and neither Greene nor the local officials come off well in the accounts that have come down to us.⁴²

Concern for the well-being of his troops also caused Greene to sign promissory notes to support John Banks, a young merchant who had a contract to feed and clothe the Southern army. When Banks went bankrupt and then died shortly after the war's end, Greene became responsible for his debts. Unable to pay those debts, and burdened also by the expenses he incurred in setting up and operating two plantations, Greene found himself critically short of funds as he scrambled to forestall creditors. Worn down by his continuing money concerns, he died suddenly of heat stroke at his Mulberry Grove plantation in Georgia on 19 June 1786 at the age of forty-three, leaving a wife and family of five young children. It was a tragic end for a man who probably would have become one of the foremost political leaders of the early Republic.

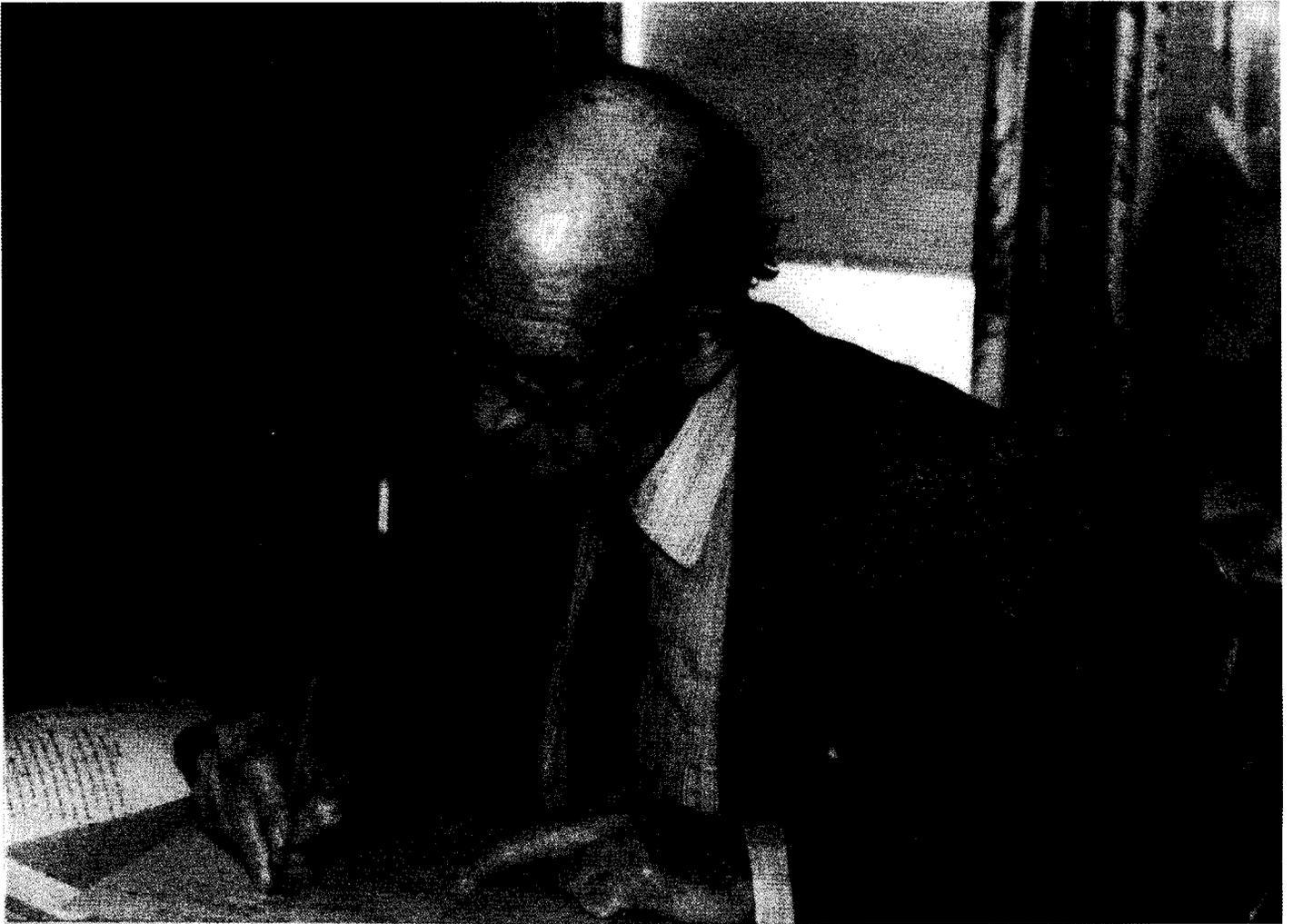
Nathanael Greene does not share the name recognition that others of the Revolutionary generation enjoy, and this is unfortunate. As Alexander Hamilton said in a eulogy a few short years after Greene's death, "As a man the virtues of Greene are admitted; as a patriot he holds a place in the foremost rank; as a statesman he is praised; as a soldier he is admired. But in the two last characters especially in the last but one his reputation falls far below his desert. . . . For as high as this great man stood in the estimation of his Country, the whole extent of his worth was little known."⁴³ I share Hamilton's sentiments and only hope that the publication of Greene's papers will help to repair that lack.



Nathanael Greene Monument, Johnson Square, Savannah, Georgia. Photograph from The Remains of Major-General Nathanael Greene (Providence: E. L. Freeman & Sons, 1903).

Notes

1. Theodore Thayer, *Nathanael Greene: Strategist of the American Revolution* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1960), 15.
2. *The Journal of Claude Blanchard, Commissary of the French Auxiliary Army Sent to the United States during the American Revolution, 1780-1783*, ed. Thomas Balch, trans. William Duane (Albany, N.Y.: J. Munsell, 1876), 80.
3. For more on these forges, see *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, ed. Richard K. Showman et. al., 13 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, for the Rhode Island Historical Society, 1976-2005), 1:4 n (hereafter cited as *NG Papers*).
4. *NG Papers*, 1:4 n, 158-59 and n.
5. See Nathanael Greene (NG) to Catherine Littlefield Greene, 1 Feb. 1777, *NG Papers*, 13:712, 713 n.
6. See NG to Moses Brown, 9 Apr. 1771, *NG Papers*, 13:707-8 and n.
7. See, for example, Jacob Greene to NG, 9 Dec. 1779 and 12 Feb. 1780, *NG Papers*, 5:158-59, 375-77.
8. "The Autobiography of Peter Stephen Du Ponceau," pt. 2, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 63 (July 1939): 312.
9. NG to Weedon, 22 Apr. 1782, *NG Papers*, 11:99-100 (see also Weedon's reply of 12 June, *ibid.*, 322-23); Pettit to NG, 20 Aug. 1780, *ibid.*, 6:225, 226 n.
10. *NG Papers*, 1:xviii.
11. See NG to Col. James M. Varnum, 31 Oct. 1774, *NG Papers*, 1:75-76.
12. *NG Papers*, 1:xix.
13. See, for example, William Johnson, *Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, Major General of the Armies of the United States*, 2 vols. (Charleston, S.C., 1822), 1:18-19.
14. *NG Papers*, 1:69-70 n; NG to Jacob Greene, 4 June 1777, *ibid.*, 2:104 and n.
15. *NG Papers*, 1:102 through 2:258 passim.
16. *NG Papers*, 1:353-59 n; the portion quoted is at 355 n.
17. *NG Papers*, 10:378.
18. Committee at Camp to the President of Congress, 26 Feb. 1778, *NG Papers*, 2:309 n; NG to Joseph Reed, *ibid.*, 307.
19. NG to George Washington, 24 Apr. 1779, *NG Papers*, 3:427.
20. The charge that Greene accepted the post for money was first leveled by early historian George Bancroft; it is discussed in a note in *NG Papers*, 2:309. In fact, Greene offered to serve as quartermaster for a year without pay; see George Washington to NG, 3 Sept. 1779, *ibid.*, 4:360.
21. For a discussion of Greene's decision to accept the position of quartermaster general, see *NG Papers*, 2:307-10 n.
22. *Journal of American History* 74 (December 1987): 1054.
23. For a modern study that argues, despite the charges of its critics, that the supply departments were run as well as possible given the exigencies of war, see E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 171-87. Carp once served as an editor with the Greene Papers project.
24. This effort is recorded in vols. 3 and 4 of *NG Papers*.
25. Edward Payson, "Nathanael Greene and the Supply of the Continental Army," *The Quartermaster Review*, May-June 1950, [HTTP://WWW.QMFOUND.COM/GREENE.HTM](http://www.QMFOUND.COM/GREENE.HTM) (accessed March 2006).
26. *NG Papers*, 5:540-54.
27. See, for example, NG to Samuel B. Webb, 14 July 1780, NG to Jeremiah Wadsworth, 15 July 1780, Charles Pettit to NG, 28 July 1780, Ezekiel Cornell to NG, 15 Aug. 1780, *NG Papers*, 6:59-60, 109-10, 163-66, 214-16.
28. NG to Samuel Huntington, President of Congress, 26 July 1780, *NG Papers*, 6:155-57. See also Headnote on NG's Resignation, *ibid.*, 150-55.
29. Washington to Joseph Jones, 13 Aug. 1780, *The Writings of George Washington, from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, 39 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931-44), 19:366-69.
30. On the significance of these engagements, see Thomas Fleming, *The Forgotten Victory: The Battle for New Jersey, 1780* (n.p.: Reader's Digest Press, 1973), 290-302.
31. See John Mathews to Washington, 6 Oct. 1780, *Letters of the Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, ed. Paul Smith et al., 26 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1976-2000), 16:159.
32. See Headnote on Greene's Decision to Split the Southern Army and NG to Daniel Morgan, 16 Dec. 1780, *NG Papers*, 6:587-90.
33. See *ibid.* and NG to Morgan, 3, 8, and 19 Jan. 1780, *ibid.*, 41-42, 72-73, 146-47.
34. See *NG Papers*, 6:262-90. It is also published electronically as part of the Nathanael Greene Mini-Edition, Model Editions Partnership, [HTTP://ADH.SC.EDU/NG/NG-TABLE.HTML](http://ADH.SC.EDU/NG/NG-TABLE.HTML).
35. For a cogent discussion of Greene's tactical dispositions at that battle and how they differed from what Washington would have done, see John Buchanan, *The Road to Valley Forge: How Washington Built the Army That Won the Revolution* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 315-16.
36. NG to Knox, 29 Sept. 1781, *NG Papers*, 9:411. Interestingly, in the same letter Greene showed his very human side by defensively lamenting the fact that his army had "fought frequently and bled freely, and little glory comes to our share. Our force has been so small that nothing capital could be effected, and our operations have been conducted under every disadvantage that could embarrass either a General or an Army. We have done all we could, and if the public and our friends are not satisfied we cannot help it."
37. See NG to George Washington, 29 Mar. 1781, *NG Papers*, 7:481-82. As discussed in a note at that letter, Henry Lee later tried to claim credit for the idea to move into South Carolina, but the timing of when the decision was made clearly shows NG to be the author of the strategy. *Ibid.*, 482 n.
38. See Recollection of a Conversation between General Nathanael Greene and Colonel William R. Davie, 9 May 1781, *NG Papers*, 8:225-26, 226-27 n.
39. On the War of the Posts and the siege of Ninety-Six, see *NG Papers*, 8:139-439 passim. The post was called Ninety-Six because of its distance in miles from Charleston.
40. NG to the Chevalier La Luzerne, 28 Apr. 1781, *NG Papers*, 8:168.
41. See, for example, Terry Golway, *Washington's General: Nathanael Greene and the Triumph of the American Revolution* (New York: Henry Holt Co., 2005), 343.
42. For example, see the controversy over flags of truce that resulted in a standoff between Greene and Gov. Benjamin Guerard of South Carolina, *NG Papers*, 12:574-620 passim.
43. Eulogy on Nathanael Greene, 4 July 1789, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett et al., 27 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961-87), 5:347.



#11063444

Joseph Valley Forge March 7 - 1778

The History of the Nathanael Greene Papers

[Reprinted from volume 1 of *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, published in 1976]

RICHARD K. SHOWMAN

The search for the papers of Nathanael Greene began in the summer of 1972 and has not yet ended.* By May 1976 the editors had assembled photocopies of some nine thousand letters to and from Greene and more than seven hundred documents originated by him, including military orders. More than 90 percent of the total were written during the War for Independence, constituting—aside from Washington's—the largest body of papers of a Continental army general.

The Clements Library [at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor], with over four thousand documents (plus many concerning Greene), has by far the largest collection. The National Archives, the Library of Congress, and the American Philosophical Society Library account for another twenty-five hundred, while the remainder (except for sixty some items in private hands) are scattered among a hundred respondents. At least five hundred are copied from nineteenth-century transcripts or printed versions of originals that have since disappeared.

A large proportion of the documents have variant copies. It is not uncommon to have a draft, an autograph copy, and a contemporary copy of the same letter. Nineteenth-century transcripts of Greene letters are numerous. Copies of more than four thousand have been received, twenty-six hundred of them collected by Greene's grandson and biographer, George Washington Greene, and now in Huntington Library; the rest are found principally among the papers of Jared Sparks, Harvard College Library; Peter Force, Library of Congress; George Bancroft, New York Public Library; and Lyman Draper, State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Copies of three dozen transcripts of Greene's letters to his wife have been made available by Bernard Nightingale of Brunswick, Georgia. Transcripts have often proved invaluable in the transcribing of damaged originals.

Of the almost ten thousand documents that have been photocopied, the vast majority—perhaps four-fifths—have been fairly accessible to the diligent researcher. The remainder have been difficult or even impossible to locate through conventional finding aids. These have offered the greatest challenge—and the greatest reward. As Leonard W. Labaree once wrote: "Editors are psychologically much like the biblical shepherd who rejoices far more over the one lost sheep that is found than over the ninety and nine that never strayed from the fold."¹ Many such strays have turned up in institutions where one would not ordinarily expect to find Revolutionary War manuscripts, such as the Polish Museum of Chicago, the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, the Detroit Public Library, or the Savitz Library of Glassboro (N.J.) State College. Some have rested, unknown to scholars, in such unsuspected places as the New Jersey Department of Defense.

Most, however, have hidden uncataloged—and sometimes unseen—in the major repositories. One of the first things an editor learns is that few institutions have had the staff or funds to keep abreast of cataloging manuscripts. The countless hours the editors have spent in leafing through catalog cards or manuscript pages of Greene's principal correspondents have been rewarded by the addition of several hundred documents. Equally rewarding, though even more laborious, has been the task of looking at reels of microfilm, frame by

Richard K. Showman, the first editor of The Papers of General Nathanael Greene, at work at his desk at the Rhode Island Historical Society's Aldrich House.

The late Richard K. Showman was the first editor of the Greene Papers. This essay is reprinted by permission of the University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, N.C.

frame. At the Library of Congress and the National Archives, the editors have been aided in such searching by staff members of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

Occasionally an entire parcel of uncataloged Greene letters has been turned up. One of the most valuable of such discoveries was made by William Joyce of the American Antiquarian Society, who came across thirty some letters from Greene to his brothers that had lain uncataloged since they were donated in 1917. Transcripts of a dozen letters from Greene to his brother Jacob were similarly found among the papers of Theodore Foster in our own Rhode Island Historical Society Library.

Hundreds of documents continue to be held by individuals. Where they are known, a direct appeal has almost always elicited a favorable response, but general appeals have failed to reach most of the unidentified owners of manuscripts. Some of those who have been reached have failed to respond—perhaps from inertia or from the mistaken notion that printing a document diminishes its value. The editors can only hope that this volume will bring out more copies of letters still in private hands.

The sheer number of Greene's correspondents is impressive (three hundred persons with four or more documents from each), but even more impressive are the number of revolutionary leaders who are represented. Included are all of the presidents of the Continental Congress, the War Board, almost all of the state governors, and most of the major generals of the Continental army, as well as men of lesser rank who served under him. His correspondence with Washington is by all odds the most voluminous, with over six hundred letters between them, including those written to Washington over an aide's name.

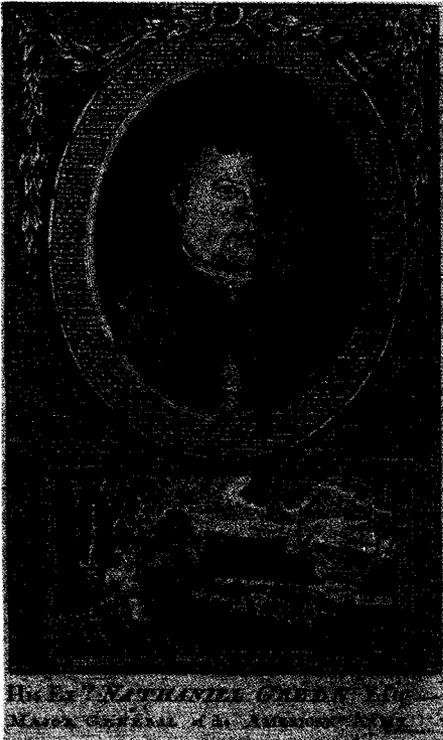
The southern campaign accounts for well over half of the total. Much of the correspondence was with partisan leaders and the Continental officers who served with him. A hundred letters to and from Francis Marion have survived; over a hundred and thirty of Thomas Sumter, and two hundred of "Lighthorse Harry" Lee. From the year 1781 alone more than twenty-four hundred documents have come down to us. And finally there are personal letters—five hundred of them between 1770 and 1786, including eighty to his wife.

That so many documents should have survived the rigors of war, not to mention the vicissitudes of two intervening centuries, is little short of miraculous.

The chief hazard confronting wartime documents was the mobility of the army. During the eight and a half years that Greene served, he had a total of twenty-four separate headquarters from Massachusetts to South Carolina. From each one, moreover, he made innumerable excursions, operating out of a saddlebag and field desk. Most of his correspondents were equally mobile. Some—especially the partisan leaders in the Carolinas—were constantly on the move. Even the Continental Congress moved six times during his tenure.

Greene's own collection of his papers must have had many narrow escapes as they were periodically boxed and shipped either by water or by wagon along backcountry roads. Some of the near disasters are documented. When, for example, his brigade was en route from Boston to New York in April 1776, the transports out of New London encountered a storm that swept baggage from the deck of one vessel and turned several back to port.² When Cornwallis made a surprise landing near Ft. Lee in November that same year, Greene had only minutes to gather up his possessions and to evacuate the fort.³ Near the war's end, he came close to losing all his records; on returning to his quarters in Charleston he found his room ablaze, some thirty books already burned.⁴ Fortunately the fire was extinguished before any papers were destroyed.

Many papers escaped destruction through sheer good fortune; others—especially official letters—often survived through some form of duplication, which amounted in effect to survival insurance: these included drafts, file copies, copies made of incoming mail, circular letters, and letters printed in newspapers. When Greene was in enemy terri-



An admiring Athena, as the goddess of war, appears below the portrait of Greene in this engraving by John Norman, Boston, circa 1780. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 7329).

tory, he often sent two copies of a letter via two different riders to ensure that one got through. At least one such letter has come down to us from the British Public Records Office. It did not get through.

Good fortune, however, did not always ride with his papers. Those that he had accumulated between May 1775 and April 1778 have disappeared. No positive evidence of the disappearance has ever turned up, but the negative evidence is persuasive. For the three-year period, for example, there are no drafts or file copies of his letters; after April 1778 there are almost two thousand. Of the hundreds of letters that he received in the three-year period, only twenty-five recipients' copies have reappeared, and they seem in each case to have survived only because he sent them on to other persons—nine of them now being in the Washington papers. There are, of course, many retained copies of letters to him kept by the senders.

Not all of the missing letters were victims of accident. He once wrote brother Christopher: "I make it a constant rule to burn all [letters from the brothers] that contain family secrets, as soon as I have read them."⁵ He did save business letters from Jacob (which contained some family secrets), but only three letters from his other four brothers have survived. Fortunately his brothers did not follow his rule, since his letters to them are the most revealing we have.

He did not destroy his wife's letters to him, but someone apparently did. Mrs. Greene is the most likely suspect since she had both motive and opportunity. Her motive could well have been embarrassment over her poor grammar and spelling (which he once criticized), and she had ample opportunity to destroy the letters during the twenty-eight years his personal papers were in her possession. Fortunately, unlike Martha Washington, she did not destroy her husband's letters to her.

During the last months of the war, Greene put his papers in some order, filling two trunks with six thousand documents—divided into personal and official papers. Since much of the quartermaster correspondence had been left with his deputy, Charles Pettit, the bulk of the official papers in his possession concerned the southern campaign. He had given some thought to writing an account of the campaign based on the papers, for he had told John Adams that the "measures which led to important events and the reasons for these measures must lay in the dark, untill a more leisure hour."⁶

He was also concerned that Congress have copies of the papers. On his return north in the autumn of 1783, he stopped at Princeton, where Congress was then meeting, and there, at the suggestion of President Elias Boudinot, he wrote the following letter:

The letters and miscellaneous papers containing a history of the most material parts of the Southern operations may contain some things which Congress or their officers may hereafter have occasion to refer to. Loose files are easily disordered and where recourse is often had to them papers often get lost.

If Congress should think it an object worthy the expence and would indulge my wishes, I should be glad to get the whole papers transcribed into bound books. Having taken the liberty of suggesting my wishes I shall be happy to take the trouble of directing the business if Congress will be at the expence of a Clerk to do the writing.⁷

On the same day, Congress ordered Secretary Thomson to furnish him with a clerk, but it is not recorded that it appropriated money to pay his salary.⁸ In 1785, as Greene prepared to move his family to Georgia, he hired Phineas Miller, a young Yale graduate, to tutor his children and transcribe the papers. Beset as he was by financial troubles, he had undoubtedly been assured by Thomson that Congress would pay part of Miller's salary. On Greene's death in June 1786, Miller had barely started the copying.

Before Catharine Greene returned to New England in 1786, she left the two trunks of papers with Greene's friend and executor, Edward Rutledge of Charleston, S.C., a distin-

guished lawyer and signer of the Declaration of Independence.⁹ It was Miller's plan to spend a year with Catharine and her family in Connecticut, copying the documents, but he did not receive the two trunks from Rutledge until shortly before he was ready to return to Georgia.¹⁰ Catharine Greene kept the personal papers, taking them with her to Cumberland Island, but she returned the official papers to Rutledge's office, where they sat for twelve years. It is doubtful if Miller ever touched them again; it is possible that Rutledge oversaw the copying of the three bound volumes that are now in the Library of Congress. Several of the transcriptions appear to be in Rutledge's hand. When he died in 1800 (while governor), his son Henry took the papers. They probably were in Henry's possession for some years, since he later wrote that he had had "full leisure to examine" them. Before moving to Tennessee he placed the bulk of the official papers with his uncle, General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, who had been his father's law partner.¹¹ Young Rutledge kept some letters (perhaps inadvertently); they showed up a century later in the hands of a descendant who was unaware "how they came into the possession of the family."¹²

In 1796 Catharine Greene married Phineas Miller. She died in 1814, leaving the estate on Cumberland Island and Nathanael Greene's personal papers to her youngest daughter, Louisa Shaw. In 1817 Louisa turned over the papers to Justice William Johnson of South Carolina to use in writing a biography of her father. At the same time, she asked General Pinckney to let Johnson use all of the official papers.¹³ The status of those papers was undetermined. General Pinckney may have planned to send them to the War Department, but when he died eight years later, they were still in Johnson's possession. When Louisa pressed Johnson two years later to return the personal papers to her, he apparently responded by also sending her the official papers he had received from Pinckney.¹⁴ Considering Johnson's careless handling of the documents, it is remarkable that after ten years they were relatively intact.

At some point Louisa turned over several hundred letters to her sister Cornelia. The remainder—almost six thousand—were left on her death to her nephew, Phineas Miller Nightingale, along with her estate on Cumberland Island. In 1847 his cousin, George Washington Greene, then living in New York, asked to borrow the papers with a view to publishing selections in a proposed six-volume collection of his grandfather's papers. Nightingale agreed and sent them to a lawyer in New York for inventorying. When Greene received the two trunks there were 5,597 documents, two-thirds of them original letters addressed to the general and the other third, drafts or file copies—many in his grandfather's hand.¹⁵

George Washington Greene kept the papers for many years, returning, in the meantime, to Rhode Island to live. Before he sent them back to Georgia, he showed them to the trustees of the Rhode Island Historical Society, who indicated they would be glad to have the collection—as a gift. But times were hard in postwar Georgia, and the letters constituted an asset the heirs could not afford to give away (there were forty-seven letters signed by Washington, fourteen of them written in his hand). After twenty years Phineas M. Nightingale's widow offered to sell them to the Rhode Island Historical Society. Professor J. Franklin Jameson of Brown University, an officer of the society, tried unsuccessfully to raise funds to purchase them.¹⁶ Two years later the family sold them to Joseph Sabin, the New York autograph dealer. There were still more than 5,500 documents in the collection. The price: \$5,000. Between 1894 and 1920, Sabin or his son sold approximately a third of the collection at one time or another, hundreds of which have never reappeared. The remaining two-thirds were kept together until they were purchased in the 1920s by William L. Clements. Today they constitute the core collection of the Greene papers at Clements Library.¹⁷

The rest of the papers in Greene's possession at the time of his death—those given by Louisa Shaw to her sister Cornelia and consisting of several hundred items—have had

a more charmed existence. Cornelia bequeathed them to her son Peyton Skipwith of Oxford, Miss., who some time before the Civil War lent them to his cousin, George Washington Greene, in Rhode Island. Some years later they were en route back to Skipwith when the vessel carrying them was wrecked off the Carolina coast. They were retrieved by a gunboat and eventually found their way back to Mississippi. All were water-damaged, some severely. In 1920 they made a final passage to a safe resting place in the Library of Congress.¹⁸ Fortunately some of the most severely damaged letters had been copied by Greene before shipping them back.

We have mentioned one other set of papers that were once part of General Greene's files—the so-called quartermaster papers that he left in 1780 with his deputy, Charles Pettit. When Pettit left the department a year later, he apparently took the papers with him. After his death in 1806, according to William Johnson, they were sold as wastepaper and retrieved by Robert DeSilver, a Philadelphia publisher, who made them available to Dr. Charles Caldwell for a biography of Greene that was subsequently (1819) published by DeSilver.¹⁹ The following year, some thirteen hundred items of DeSilver's collection were given to the American Philosophical Society, where they have been cared for ever since.

In 1835 the State Department acquired the rest of Greene's quartermaster papers that had been found, according to DeSilver, "in an old Barrel of rubbish and arranged and bound by him (DeSilver)."²⁰ Whether they were the letters Johnson speaks of as being sold for wastepaper cannot be ascertained.

It is not impossible that Greene's missing collection of letters from the 1775-78 period might also show up in a "barrel of rubbish" sometime, but lacking such a near-miracle, it is fortunate that copies of many of them have reappeared from other collections—as can be seen by the number that are printed in the latter half of this volume [volume 1 of *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*].

Notes

* [The more than thirty-year search for Nathanael Greene documents concluded with the completion of the manuscript of volume 13 of *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene* in September 2004. Ultimately over ten thousand Greene letters were located, many with multiple versions. *Ed.*]

1. Leonard W. Labaree, "In Search of 'B. Franklin,'" *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3 Ser., 16 (1959): 189.

2. See . . . note 1, NG [Nathanael Greene] to Commanding Officer of the sloop *Gale*, 10 April 1776, [*The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, ed. Richard K. Showman et al., 13 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, for the Rhode Island Historical Society, 1976-2005), 1:210 n. 1 (hereafter cited as *NG Papers*)].

3. See . . . note 2, NG to Nicholas Cooke, 4 Dec. 1776 [*NG Papers*, 1:363 n. 2].

4. NG to Benjamin Lincoln, 28 Dec. 1782, Duke University Library [*NG Papers*, 12:350].

5. NG to Christopher Greene, 22 April 1778, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass. [*NG Papers*, 2:349-51].

6. NG to John Adams, 28 Jan. 1782, William L.

Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich. [*NG Papers*, 10:272-73].

7. NG to Boudinot, 1 Nov. 1783, Papers of the Continental Congress (U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C.) [*NG Papers*, 13:167-68].

8. Worthington C. Ford and others, eds., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 34 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904-37), 25:788-89.

9. Jeremiah Wadsworth to Charles Thomson, 1 Oct. 1786, and Wadsworth to Edward Rutledge, 29 July 1787, Connecticut Historical Society.

10. Phineas Miller to Henry Knox, 24 July 1790, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

11. Henry M. Rutledge to William Johnson, 26 June 1822, Clements Library.

12. "Letters to General Greene and Others," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 16 (1915): 97.

13. William Johnson, *Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, Major General of the Armies of the United States*, 2 vols. (Charleston, S.C., 1822), 1: v, and Alexander Garden to Charles C. Pinckney,

11 Feb. 1817, Georgia Historical Society.

14. Jared Sparks recorded in his diary, after seeing Louisa Shaw in Providence, that she said she would reclaim the papers from Johnson. Sparks Diary, 12 Oct. 1827, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Mass.

15. A. H. Richards to P. M. Nightingale, 8 May 1848. Letter in possession of Bernard Nightingale, Brunswick, Ga. A receipt for the documents, signed by Greene, is on the back of the inventory.

16. J. Franklin Jameson, "The Papers of Major-Gen. Nathanael Greene," *RIHS*, Pub. 3 (Oct. 1895): 159-67.

17. Joseph Sabin's correspondence with the Nightingales and William L. Clements is found in the New York Public Library.

18. See the Introduction to the Skipwith Collection in the Greene Papers, U.S. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

19. Johnson, *Greene*, 1: viii.

20. L. B. Clarke to George Templeman, 4 Dec. 1833, Papers of the Continental Congress (U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C.).

The Nathanael Greene Papers Project, 1972-2005

ELIZABETH C. STEVENS

In 1971 Albert T. Klyberg, director of the Rhode Island Historical Society, proposed the publication of a letterpress edition of Nathanael Greene's papers, the "bound books" of correspondence whose creation Greene had wanted and Congress had endorsed in 1783. The William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan—which held the largest collection of Greene's papers, and where Klyberg had worked on those papers as a graduate student—cosponsored the proposed project. Klyberg applied for and received funds from the National Historical Publications Commission (later the NHPRC); he then proceeded to raise monies in Rhode Island to match the national grant. Early local sponsors included the Rhode Island Bicentennial Commission, the General Nathanael Greene Memorial Association, and the Rhode Island Society of the Cincinnati. The Publications Committee of the Rhode Island Historical Society served as the editorial board for the duration of the project; as institutional sponsor, the Society provided office space and most of the necessary administrative functions.

In consultation with others, Klyberg selected Richard K. Showman, who had been an editor of the revised *Harvard Guide to American History*, to be the editor of the Nathanael Greene Papers project. Although not an expert in military history, Showman proved to be an ideal choice for the position. Throughout the period of the project's inception, Showman immersed himself in the details of the life of Nathanael Greene and became deeply versed in his subject. Showman's ability to pay attention to the smallest editorial detail while always keeping the big picture in mind was one of his greatest assets for the project. Showman grasped the importance of making Nathanael Greene and his legacy available to the lay person as well as to the military historian. With his far-ranging intelligence and curiosity, his intuitive grasp of the tasks before him, a fluid writing style, an enormous sense of humor, and great personal warmth, Showman proved a consummate editor on the project and a beloved member of the Rhode Island Historical Society's staff.

To master the intricacies of a documentary editing project like the Nathanael Greene Papers, Showman contacted and mined the experience of editors of long-standing documentary editions, including Howard Syrett at the Alexander Hamilton Papers, James Ferguson of the Papers of Robert Morris, and William Willcox of the Benjamin Franklin Papers. In time Showman himself would become a founding member of the Association for Documentary Editing and a contributor to a manual for historical editors, published in the 1980s. With his wife and able assistant, Mary "Mac" Showman, he traveled to archives in Washington, D.C., and farther south, searching for Nathanael Greene documents. He established contacts with collectors, manuscript and autograph dealers, archivists, and librarians whose holdings or institutions contained manuscripts or documents written to or by Greene. He also searched period newspapers, legislative and judicial records, and any repositories that might possibly have had Nathanael Greene letters. Greene papers were eventually obtained from more than 125 different repositories and private collectors, including a handful from sources outside the United States.

In this March 1778 letter from Valley Forge to relative William Greene, soon to be elected governor of Rhode Island, Nathanael Greene lamented the time he was spending away from his wife and children and discussed national politics and the situation of the army. RIHS Collection (RH1 X3 7890)

Elizabeth C. Stevens, the editor of Rhode Island History, was associated with the Papers of General Nathanael Greene project from 1978 until 2005.

The Nathanael Greene project was first based in a small office at the Rhode Island Historical Society's John Brown House. To organize the project, Showman designed a legal-sized manila envelope, open at the top and filed vertically, for photocopies of each Greene letter uncovered; subsequent variants of letters (e.g., contemporary copies, transcripts, or drafts) obtained from other repositories were also placed in the envelope. Each document's envelope was carefully labeled with information as to provenance. Envelopes containing these xeroxes of Greene documents were filed chronologically. Cross-filing systems were devised to serve a number of purposes: for instance, all of Nathanael Greene's correspondence with a particular person, no matter what the date, could be located easily. Showman also created a system for saving xeroxes of primary documents

that concerned Greene but were not to or from him; these documents would later prove invaluable in the annotation of Greene's papers. In addition, Showman began to build a collection of primary and secondary research materials for the Nathanael Greene Papers office, including a complete set of the printed *Proceedings of the Continental Congress*, biographies of Revolutionary War generals, George Washington Greene's three-volume biography of his grandfather, the Fitzpatrick edition of the *Papers of George Washington*, a reprint of Samuel Johnson's eighteenth-century dictionary, several Revolutionary War atlases, and other pertinent materials. Through loan from the Library of Congress, he also acquired, for office use, microfilm of the Papers of the Continental Congress, the Washington Papers, the Steuben Papers, the Jeremiah Wadsworth Papers, and other collections related to Greene's activities in the war.



Nathanael

In consultation with other editors, Showman set up a system of transcribing and editing the photocopies of Nathanael Greene documents that were flowing into the Greene Papers office. With multiple versions of letters often surfacing, the project's staff used generally accepted standards to determine which version of a letter should be printed. For instance, an autograph version in Nathanael Greene's own hand and signed by him would be most preferable; a letter signed by Greene but written in an aide's hand would have preference over a copy; and a copy would take

precedence over a transcript. In many cases, however, a transcript or copy was the only surviving iteration. Once a version was selected for printing, it was carefully transcribed on an IBM Selectric typewriter. This process was rendered difficult by the condition of many of the letters and by the handwriting of Greene and his correspondents. In the midst of war, Greene was often hurried; he even wrote letters while on horseback, and the quality of his handwriting deteriorated at those times. The project was determined to render transcriptions as faithful to the original as possible; therefore, once the transcriber had produced a typewritten modern transcript of a letter, it was carefully read against the xeroxed handwritten original by at least three people on the staff to eliminate any typographical errors or errors due to difficulty in deciphering handwriting. Typed transcripts were then meticulously corrected.

Once a viable transcript was produced, a decision was made as to how it should appear in print. Because of the sheer number of documents—Nathanael Greene's known correspondence eventually numbered some ten thousand letters of varying lengths, some as

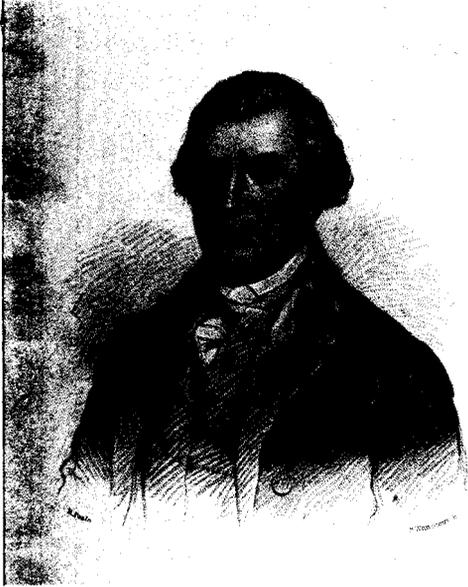
Images such as this one celebrated Nathanael Greene as a national hero at the close of the Revolutionary War. Steel engraving, based on a painting by Alonzo Chappel. Published by Johnson, Fry & Co., New York, 1862. RIHS Collection (RH X3 1186).

short as a line, others as long as ten or fifteen manuscript pages—it soon became clear that printing all documents in full in a letterpress edition would be prohibitively expensive. A decision was consequently made to print in full only those documents deemed essential to illuminate Greene's life and work or that illustrated important aspects of the economic, social, and political history of his era, and to abstract letters that were deemed more routine or repetitive of information already contained in other letters. This policy was somewhat controversial; many documentary editing projects that printed documents selectively simply listed unselected documents, with source notes, at the back of their volumes. Klyberg and Showman devised a middle ground to allow the reader as much access to Nathanael Greene's papers as possible. Although the percentage varied from volume to volume, the ratio of abstracted letters to those printed in full in the published Nathanael Greene Papers was usually about 60 to 40 (90 percent of Greene's routine orders were abstracted). As a safeguard against error in selection, as well as a comprehensive backup to the printed volumes, a separate microfilm edition of every transcript, and, in later years, an "electronic edition," were envisioned, although this plan has not yet been realized.

With the abstract-or-print-in-full decision made, the project's staff began the process of composing the abstract, if necessary, and annotating the document. The goal of annotation was to make the contents of the letters clear and understandable to the modern reader. Sometimes brief identifications or explanations of people, places, or unfamiliar terms were sufficient; sometimes longer annotations were necessary—to identify Nathanael Greene's relatives, military aides, or close associates, for example, or to explain family or business relationships, political scenarios (international, national, or local), the inner workings of the quartermaster department of the army (which Greene headed from 1778 until he assumed command of the Southern Department in 1780), or battles or military engagements in which Greene was involved. Some annotations were barely a few words; others ran to a number of paragraphs, and a few covered several pages. Annotations also provided cross-references to information in other documents in the volume or the series.

In doing their research, Showman and his associates mined not only the sources that had been collected in the project office but also the resources of the various Brown University libraries and the library of the Rhode Island Historical Society, with the latter providing the project with interlibrary loan services. Editorial staff also searched the State Archives of Rhode Island and other archives for primary materials that would enhance their annotations. In addition to writing these explanatory footnotes for every document, whether printed in full or abstracted, the editors devised and expanded on a glossary that explained eighteenth-century military terms, and they compiled a complete (though not exhaustive) list of "Items Furnished by the Quartermaster Department" during Greene's tenure as quartermaster general.

The editors also felt that it was necessary to provide maps that would allow readers to follow Greene's movements (which were sometimes intricate) during the war. Suitable maps for this purpose did not exist. Therefore, using outline maps from Lester Cappon's *Atlas of Early American History*, and with permission from the Newberry Library of Chicago, Showman and others on the staff selected significant, though sometimes obscure, locations mentioned or otherwise indicated in Greene's text and commissioned new maps that could be reprinted in the various volumes. The research for this work involved hours of examining primary and secondary sources to pinpoint these locations. Among those who assisted in creating the highly original maps were Lawrence E. Babits of East Carolina State University and Anne E. Gibson, the manager of cartography services at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts.

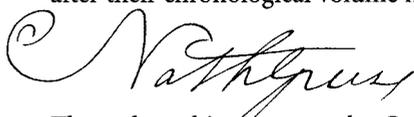


This engraved portrait of Nathanael Greene was derived from the painting of Greene by Charles Willson Peale. RHHS Collection (RHHS X3 6169).

Preparing annotations and maps was laborious and time-consuming work. Once it was completed, the manuscript prepared in the Nathanael Greene Papers office was sent off for copyediting at the University of North Carolina Press, a highly respected publisher in the field of eighteenth-century American history, which had contracted to publish the series. Meanwhile, the project's editorial staff continued to work on the volume. Illustrations were chosen and reproduced, permissions to print documents were obtained from libraries and archives, and "front matter"—an introduction commenting on the contents of the particular volume, an explanation of the editorial method, credits for illustrations, and acknowledgements—was composed. Then, even as work began on the subsequent volume, the Greene project staff read the galley and page proofs of the current volume, sent from the University of North Carolina Press. Once the page proofs were in hand, the volume's index was prepared, an arduous and time-consuming task. The highly analytical indexes at the end of the various volumes are a major and valuable component of the series, making it possible for researchers to locate particular material without having to wade through entire volumes of densely packed letters, abstracts, and annotations.

The advent of personal computers in the 1980s brought about changes at the Greene Papers project. Once transcripts were typed on an IBM Selectric typewriter and corrected with Wite-Out; now they could be prepared and corrected in a fraction of the time using a keyboard and computer screen. As computer technology advanced in the 1980s and 1990s, the staff was able to keep files of documents and search for information with a keystroke; primary and secondary materials could be located via the Internet, and e-mail made research queries and contact with libraries and other projects far more efficient. Further, the creation of analytical indexes was facilitated by the use of computer software specifically designed for the task. By the time volume 13 was prepared, holograph documents could be accessed from collections of the Library of Congress, and libraries could be searched on line for relevant annotation material. In 1995 the Nathanael Greene Papers became one of seven documentary editions to be included in the Model Editions Partnership, a consortium sponsored by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission to explore the scholarly and technological issues in the preparation of electronic versions of documentary editions for distribution on the Internet and CD-ROMs.

Volume 1 of *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene* appeared in 1976 to critical acclaim. Reviewing the volume, noted Revolutionary War historian Don Higginbotham called it "one of the major scholarly rewards of the bicentennial," asserting that the "editorial labors of Richard K. Showman and his fine staff are of the highest quality" (*Journal of American History* 64 [1977]: 394). Higginbotham had similar high praise in his review of subsequent volumes: "A great commander [Nathanael Greene] and superb editors: that in itself is an unbeatable combination" (*ibid.* 79 [1992]: 640). By the time the second volume was published in 1980, the project had moved to more spacious offices on the third floor of the Rhode Island Historical Society's Aldrich House. The third volume came out in 1984. The succeeding volumes, increasingly larger in size, were published at intervals of eighteen month to two years, with the final volume, volume 13, appearing in October 2005. In addition to covering the period from May 1783 to June 1786, the last volume contains a final "sweep-up" of earlier Greene letters that had come to light after their chronological volume had been published.



Throughout his tenure at the Greene Papers project, Richard Showman was adept at assembling a talented and dedicated staff of editors, transcribers, and collators to assist him. He selected Robert McCarthy, a Rhode Island native and newly minted Ph.D. from Harvard, as his associate when the project was first organized. McCarthy was involved in every

aspect of the editorial process and pioneered the analytical index for the project before he left in 1988 to join the faculty of the history department at Providence College. In 1982 Showman hired Dennis M. Conrad, who had written his Ph.D. thesis at Duke University on Nathanael Greene's southern campaign, as associate editor. Showman retired from the project in 1993, and Conrad succeeded him as senior editor and project director. Roger N. Parks, the editor of the *Bibliographies of New England History* series, replaced Robert McCarthy on the staff in 1988, and when Conrad left in 2001 to become an editor at the Naval Historical Center of the U.S. government in Washington, Parks became the Greene Papers' senior editor, serving in that capacity until the conclusion of the project. Conrad continued his association with the Greene Papers on a part-time basis until the last volume was completed. Martha King, formerly of the Thomas Edison and Henry Laurens Papers, joined the project for several years in the 1990s.

Among other staff members who made significant contributions to the Nathanael Greene project were Margaret Cobb, who had previously worked at the Susquehanna Company Papers in Boston, and Joyce Boulind, who had been with the Alexander Hamilton Papers at Columbia University in New York; both provided transcription expertise. Nathaniel Shipton, for some years the Rhode Island Historical Society's manuscripts curator and now the curator of manuscripts at the American Antiquarian Society, was especially skilled at reading eighteenth-century handwriting, and he spent many hours checking the accuracy of the project's transcripts. Several young scholars, including John Ifkovic, Wayne Karp, and Susan Bowler, held one-year National Historical Publications and Records Commission fellowships at the project in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Nathanael Greene Papers repeatedly faced issues of funding. The National Historical Publications and Records Commission's support continued throughout the life of the project, although it was necessary to prepare and submit grant proposals to the commission every other year. Sometimes the commission's own funding was threatened and its grants to the Greene Papers project were pared back, and at these times the project's staff had to be reduced. In order to preserve the limited available funds for other staff members, Showman himself took no salary for a year during the Reagan budget cutback of 1981. Recognizing the value of the project, Claiborne Pell and other Rhode Island senators often worked to keep the NHPRC properly funded. Beginning with volume 4, the National Endowment for the Humanities also provided grants for the Greene Papers, but it too faced constraints on its own funding, and consequently NEH support was also sometimes decreased.

Even with these two very necessary large federal grants, the project would never have continued without support from local sources. The State of Rhode Island was a major benefactor of the Nathanael Greene Papers, annually providing funds to match the grants from the federal agencies. Although the project sometimes seemed to be an endless one, the state legislature voted monies to support it year after year. Other sources of funding included the Society of the Cincinnati in the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, the General Nathanael Greene Memorial Association, the Sons of the Revolution in the State of Rhode Island, the Sons of the American Revolution (John Peck Rathbun Chapter), and the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities.

In addition to federal and local financial support, the project received funding from organizations in southern states where Nathanael Greene's military leadership had made a decisive difference in the Revolutionary War. Among these were the North Carolina and Virginia Societies of the Cincinnati, the South Carolina Humanities Council, the Kellenberger Historical Foundation, and the R. J. Taylor, Jr., Foundation. Other sponsors of the project included the William Clements Library of the University of Michigan, the Kosciuszko Foundation, and the David Library of the American Revolution.

It can safely be said that the Papers of Nathanael Greene project has been one of the most significant achievements of the Rhode Island Historical Society in recent years. The handsome series of thirteen volumes collects every extant document written by or to Nathanael Greene, in modern transcription with annotation. Prior to the project's inception, a scholar pursuing research on Nathanael Greene would have had to spend many months or years traveling to archives and repositories across the country to examine original manuscripts. Moreover, some of the documents printed in the volumes might not have been available to the scholar because they are in private hands. The editorial quality of the series, with its meticulous transcripts and rigorous annotation, has in fact made it a valuable resource for those writing about, or interested in, the Revolutionary War era. Virtually all credible works of scholarship or popular history that deal with the period now make reference to the *Papers of General Nathanael Greene*. For Rhode Island, the value of a modern edition of Nathanael Greene's papers is immense, for with it historians are at last restoring a Rhode Islander to his rightful place at George Washington's side in the nation's struggle for independence.



With these Kentish Guards participating, the two hundredth anniversary of Nathanael Greene's birth was commemorated at the John Brown House in Providence on 7 August 1942. Photograph by Charlotte Estey. RIHS Collection (RHi E791 265).