

Darius Sessions – History's Hidden Hero

The History of Darius Sessions, the People and Events, of foiling the British after the burning of the *MMS Gaspee* and his strategic connection to George Washington

The Accounts of Rhode Island's Deputy Governor and his Role in the Revolutionary War

by Robert Porter Lynch updated Feb 2022 Version 4.1



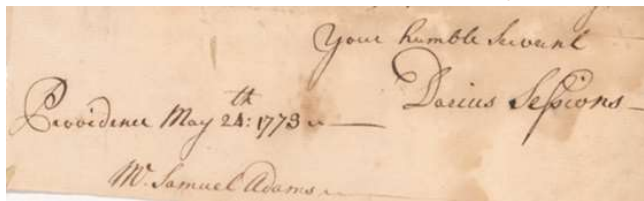
To date, I have not discovered any portraits of Darius Session. If anyone knows of one, please contact me. For the time being I'll use this colonial era silhouette to symbolize Sessions



Thus, this history is still unfolding as more discoveries and puzzle-pieces are connected. Sessions' personal papers are still buried away in some unknown place waiting their revelations.

Darius Sessions is one of the great but unheralded orchestrators of the events that led up to the Revolution. He consistently outfoxed the British in their attempts to capture Rhode Island's Patriots.

Sam Adams said that the "Fate of America" lay in Sessions' decisions.



Letter from Darius Sessions to Samuel Adams

Sessions changed the course of American history by plucking Nathanael Greene out of the enlisted ranks of the militia, propelling him to the rank of Major General, where Washington selected him to serve as second in command. He was a master strategist and architect of a network clandestine activities that have heretofore gone unrecognized. Because many of Sessions' papers are missing, he has inadvertently been relegated to a footnote in history. This document should help correct this omission.

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A Symbol of Historic Significance to Rhode Island

In today's throw-away world, perhaps a chair doesn't mean much.

But for people who recognize hard-won American values, the George Washington Chair is much more:

It is one of the very few artifacts known to be owned by a great American Revolutionary hero – Darius Sessions: a strategist and institution builder. It's a symbol of the heroics of what made this country great, of what happens when people have qualities beheld by our forefathers of the Age of Enlightenment that are quite rare today – but need to be preserved as our roots:

- Power of Purpose and Vision
- Strength and Toughness of Character
- Ideals and Values Balancing Self Interest with Community Benefit
- Unity of Trust and Fidelity to Others
- Holding Civic Responsibilities as dearly as Civil Rights
- Leadership with Courage and Conviction to build a better world
- Striving for Knowledge and Deeper Wisdom through education

When people were charged with a force to create a better world and build a bold new future.



2016 Photo

Darius Sessions was likely sitting in this chair by the fireplace on the bitterly cold night of New Year's Eve, 1772, when he read the hallowed words written to him personally by Sam Adams telling him the actions he and Stephen Hopkins were about to take:
".... may involve the Fate of America"

Gen. George Washington sat in this chair to plan Revolutionary War strategies with the Sons of Liberty

In the pages that follow, we will explore the remarkable people and events and provenance of this unique artifact of American Revolutionary War History.



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Author’s Notes:

- 1) This is not a final document – it is a “Working Paper” in progress. More information is being collected. Specifically, because the Darius Sessions Personal Papers are still missing, there remain many questions regarding his relationship with George Washington that need to be answered.
- 2) If anyone unearths new evidence or errors in this manuscript, please contact RobertLynch@warrenco.com



Part 1: Introduction

The uncovering of one of “history’s hidden heroes” has been a very personal journey; it certainly did not start as an academic analysis. My father, a wonderful embracer of American history, encouraged me to choose heroes of history as my guideposts for my development of character. As a young child, my father would read histories to me at night as I fell off to sleep. I loved heroes who were adventuresome. This was the early era of television in the 1950s. Watching Disney’s program on Davey Crockett or Zorro was thrilling for a young boy. By the time I was ten, George Washington had risen to the top of my list of people I admired. By the time I was a senior in high school, a dramatic symbol of this great man came into our old farmhouse in Western Cranston.



The Old Farmhouse in Western Cranston built by John Burton

ACQUIRING THE WASHINGTON CHAIR

In 1964 my father, an avid antique collector, raised near *Gaspée* Point, and founder of the Pawtuxet Rangers in 1974, bought the George Washington chair from an antique dealer in Bristol, R.I.. Along with the chair came its clue to its provenance – an old newspaper article and picture from 1907. According to the article, the chair was once owned by Deputy Governor Darius Sessions, a Rhode Island patriot during the Revolution; then it was passed down through his family.



The Washington Chair in 1970 in the Old Farmhouse

The oral legend attached to the chair was that Governor Sessions conferred with General Washington on war strategy on his way to take command of the Continental Army in Boston in June, 1775.

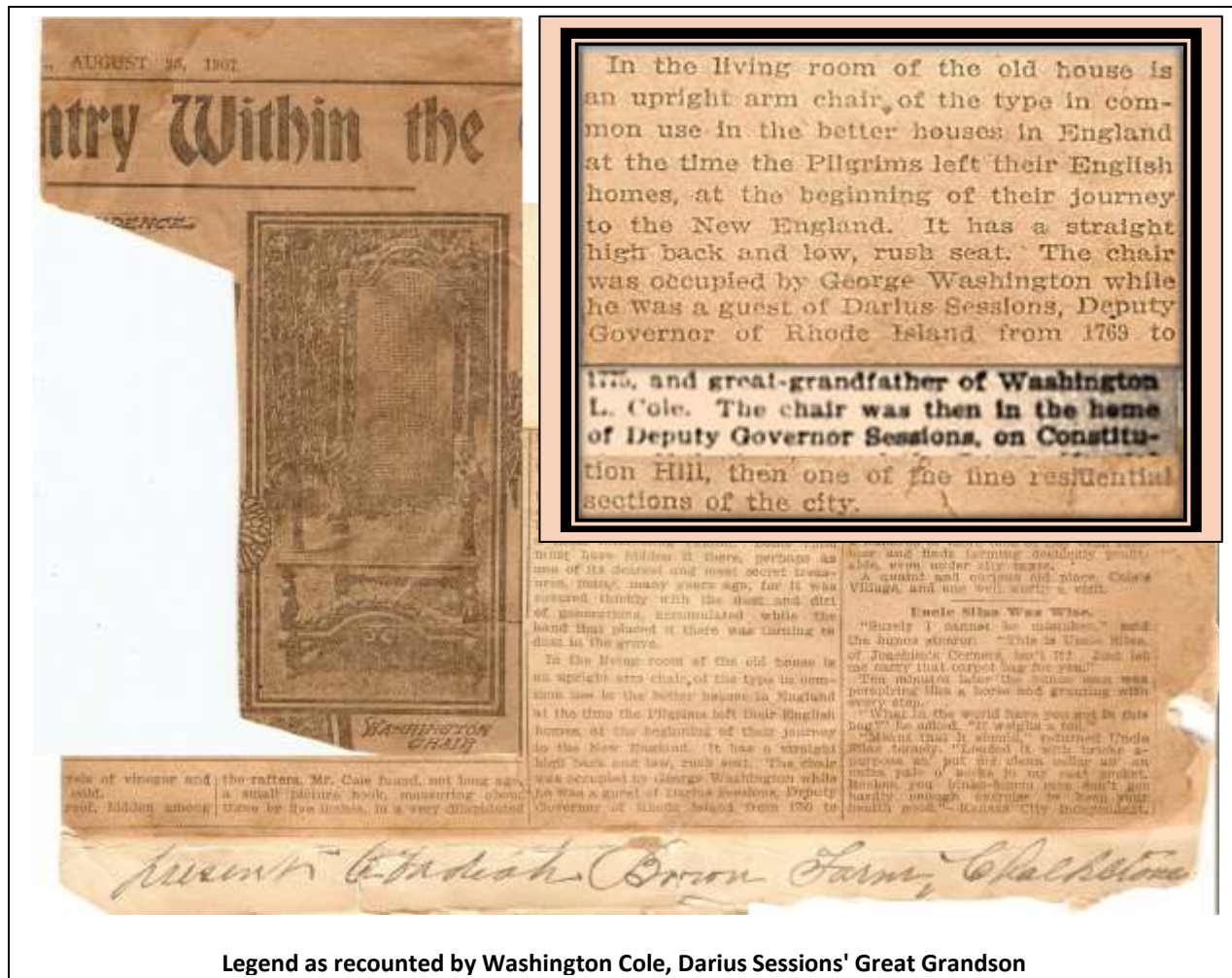
After my father passed away, the chair became my most revered heirloom. But, other than the notation in the newspaper clipping and the oral legend, there was little other evidence. Was the story true? What were the facts? Would historical research validate the legend? I aimed to find out.

Digging into archives, finding the full news article in microfiche storage, and with extensive help of the internet and digitized copies of archival books, the real truth has become evident – separating and lifting the facts from the legend. Now the true story of Darius Sessions and the George Washington chair, hidden



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for over two centuries is emerging -- the facts have proven to be more compelling than the legend.



Legend as recounted by Washington Cole, Darius Sessions' Great Grandson

BACKGROUND ON SESSIONS

Darius Sessions, the chair's owner, was a remarkable patriot who played a significant leadership role in the initiation of the Revolution.

Darius was born August 17, 1717, in Pomfret, Connecticut (apparently the farm was located between Pomfret and Killingly, west of Providence)¹ to Nathaniel Sessions (b. 1681 d.1771) and Joanna Corbin (b. 1686 d.1771 in Pomfret, CT). His family was apparently prosperous, owning large tracts of land in Eastern Connecticut. Later accounts attribute the chair being brought from England by Nathaniel Sessions.

After graduating from Yale College in the class of 1737, Darius set up a series of successful mercantile businesses in Rhode Island and practiced law. The records show he was part owner of the Providence-

¹ Sessions, Francis Charles; *History of the Sessions Family in America*, 1890, Letter from Thomas Sessions, p34 & 35 alternatively refer to Pomfret and Killingly, implying that the farm was located between the two, on Hartford Pike. Parents married 1707 in Woodstock, CT. A note in *Ibid* p 125 states that Nathaniel Sessions built the 16-mile cart road from Pomfret to North Scituate, known as the "Hartford Pike," what is now Route 101. Darius, as a young boy, drove oxen over the road into town. See Virtual Archives at www.gaspee.org



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based privateer sloop *Reprisal* in 1746 during King George's War and then served as master of the schooner *Smithfield* in 1750, trading in the West Indies.

In 1750, Sessions married Sarah Antram of Providence. During his early years in Providence, he ran a retail store, and it's likely he was part of the West Indies molasses and rum trade with his father-in-law, William Antram, whose distillery house was located just north of Sessions' home on South Main Street at the corner of Smith Street in Providence, diagonally across from King's Chapel. Providence, as a major seaport, would transport lumber, grain, and fish to the West Indies. To make the voyage profitable, each ship would "back haul" a cargo on the return voyage. Molasses was a secondary (thus cheap) by-product of the sugar plantations in the Caribbean; its primary value was in the production of rum. In his advertisement, he also offers "a general assortment of West India goods, grocery, and many other articles..."

During the French & Indian War (1754-63) Darius bankrolled the efforts of his brother, Capt. Amasa Sessions, returning from Providence to recruit a company of soldiers from Pomfret and Abington to fight for Rhode Island in that effort.

According to a local account from the early 20th century,

"As early as 1760, Deputy Governor Darius Sessions, after whom Sessions Street is named, maintained his country home on the site of the new Brown [University] Stadium (Elmgrove Avenue). It is said to have been a beautiful country estate, and travellers on Neck Road stopped to marvel at the gorgeous flower beds which surrounded the place."²

Sessions must have been quite prosperous with a large farm on the east side of Providence, a city home on Main Street and an expanse of acreage in Pomfret, Connecticut, which he had purchased in 1761. Sessions had the Pomfret farm house totally reconstructed into a stately colonial mansion.

During the American War of Independence, it is known that Darius frequently returned to his farm in Connecticut, which became a command center during the war. Operating behind the scenes, he provided continued assistance to Washington and other Revolutionary leaders.

Sessions signed his name with the title of Esquire, which indicated he was also a lawyer, hence his interest in legislation. He ran for the state assembly in 1763 representing the Town of Providence. Six years later he had gained so much respect that he elected Deputy Governor of Rhode Island in May of 1769,³ succeeding Joseph Wanton, a Tory, who became the new Governor.⁴ Wanton succeeding Stephen

To be SOLD by
Darius Sessions,
 At his Shop, on the Main Street, between the Court-House and Church, and directly opposite the large Button-Wood Tree,
THE best New Milk CHEESE, by the Quantity or single.
 Choice FRENCH BRANDY, by the Keg, or less Quantity.
 HOLLAND GENEVA.
 Distilled CORDIAL WATERS.
 Sundry Sorts of WINES, strong, genuine, and well tasted.
 Also a general Assortment of WEST-INDIA GOODS, GROCERY, and many other Articles, as good and cheap as can be bought in this Town.
 Providence, December 16, 1767. (6)

Ad in the *Providence Gazette* 16 December 1767

² Providence Sunday Journal, November 24th, 1929

³ Elections were held in mid April in those times.

⁴ Because Rhode Island had two major population centers, Newport and Providence, it has two capitols, one in each town. Further, Rhode Island voters had a tendency having the Governor and Deputy Governor "rotate" in representing one or the other of these cities. Up until 1768, Hopkins and Ward were bitter rivals. They joined forces to create unity to ensure the Spirit of the Revolution was successful. (• Governor, – Deputy Governor)

- [Stephen Hopkins](#) of Providence; 7 May 1755 - 4 May 1757
- [John Gardner](#), of Newport; May 1, 1754 – May 7, 1755



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Hopkins (Sessions’ friend and neighbor), who was elevated to the colony’s Superior Court. Later Hopkins became one of the colony’s two delegates to the Continental Congress.

Sessions had ten children with Sarah. His last, Thomas, wrote in 1845

"Darius, my honored father, was a scholar, a merchant, a statesman, a Christian, a man. His sound judgment and legal information were generally considered conclusive, and the numerous applications to him gave a very extensive acquaintance."

Thomas Sessions, who later became a Colonel and business partner with his father, was born in 1769.⁵ It was the same year Darius became Deputy-Governor.⁶ Thomas Sessions later inherited the Washington Chair, and was a founding member of the Mt. Vernon Masonic Lodge.⁷

Darius Sessions is best identified for his contributions in the furtherance of education, and as a Revolutionary War strategist.

CHAMPION OF EDUCATION

In 1764, Sessions was instrumental in helping Rev. James Manning found Rhode Island College in Warren, Rhode Island. It was New England’s third college. Sessions was appointed one of the trustees. In the spirit of Rhode Island’s founder, Roger Williams, the Charter declared⁸

"Whereas Institutions for liberal Education are highly beneficial to Society, by forming the rising Generation to Virtue Knowledge & useful Literature & thus preserving in the Community a Succession of Men duly qualified for discharging the Offices of Life with usefulness and reputation... That into this liberal

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- [Jonathan Nichols, Jr.](#), of Newport; May 7, 1755 – September 1756 (died in office)
 - [William Greene](#) of Warwick; 4 May 1757 - 23 January 1758 (died in office)
 - [John Gardner](#), of Newport; September 6, 1756 – January 1764
 - [Stephen Hopkins](#) of Providence; 13 March 1758 - 5 May 1762
 - [John Gardner](#), of Newport; September 6, 1756 – January 1764
 - [Samuel Ward](#) of Newport; 5 May 1762 - 4 May 1763
 - [John Gardner](#), of Newport; September 6, 1756 – January 1764
 - [Stephen Hopkins](#) of Providence; May 1763 - 3 May 1765
 - [John Gardner](#), of Newport; September 6, 1756 – January 1764 (died in office)
 - [Joseph Wanton, Jr.](#), of Newport; February 27, 1764 – May 1, 1765
 - [Samuel Ward](#) of Newport; 3 May 1765 - 1 May 1767
 - [Elisha Brown](#), of N. Providence; May 1, 1765 – May 6, 1767
 - [Stephen Hopkins](#) of Providence; 1 May 1767 - 4 May 1768
 - [Joseph Wanton, Jr.](#), of Newport; May 6, 1767 – May 4, 1768
 - [Josias Lyndon](#) of Newport; 4 May 1768 - 3 May 1769
 - [Nicholas Cooke](#), of Providence; May 4, 1768 – May 3, 1769
 - [Joseph Wanton](#) of Newport; 3 May 1769 - 7 November 1775 (removed from office)
 - [Darius Sessions](#), of Providence; May 3, 1769 – May 3, 1775

⁵ from Carroll, Charles. *Rhode Island: Three Centuries of Democracy*. Vol. I, p235 "One man of great influence in his life was his neighbor, Chief Justice Stephen Hopkins, who went on to sign the Declaration of Independence in 1776."

⁶ The title "Deputy-Governor" was changed to "Lieutenant Governor" in 1800.

⁷ According to records of the RI Masons curator/librarian, Richard Lynch provided June 2016, indicating Thomas Sessions was a member of St. Johns Masonic Lodge 1 in Providence and a founder of the Mt. Vernon Lodge.

⁸ Brown University Charter, Henry Merritt Wriston, Akerman-Standard Press Providence, R.I, 1945



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and catholic institution shall never be admitted any religious tests; but, on the contrary, all the members hereof shall forever enjoy full, free, absolute, and uninterrupted liberty of conscience.”

And that youth of all religious denominations shall and may be freely admitted to the equal advantages, emoluments, and honors of the College or University; and shall receive a like, fair, generous, and equal treatment during their residence therein, they conducting themselves peaceably, and conforming to the laws and statutes thereof. And that the public teaching shall, in general, respect the sciences; and that the sectarian differences of opinions shall not make any part of the public and classical instruction; although all religious controversies may be studied freely, examined, and explained by the President, Professors, and Tutors in a personal, separate, and distinct manner to the youth of any or each denomination: And above all, a constant regard be paid to, and effectual care taken of, the morals of the College.

Several years later, Sessions played an important role in helping the College move to Providence between the homes of John Brown and Sessions. Later, in 1804, the name was changed to Brown University.⁹

Darius was clearly interested in building the institutions and values that would provide his children with a better future; he was more than just a merchant and legislator; he was deeply involved in furthering the education of the colony, as one of the state’s historians commented:

A new order and ideal began at Providence, where the merchant class had begun to accumulate wealth and the free school plan came under discussion by leading citizens. Among those who took the lead in advocacy of public schools [were] Nicholas Cooke, Esek and Stephen Hopkins, Moses and Nicholas Brown, Darius Sessions, Nathanael Greene,[and others], leading citizens of wealth and intelligence. On December 8, 1767, the town of Providence in town meeting voted to build three school houses for small children and one for youth, to provide instructors and pay the bills from the town treasury, the schools to be under the supervision of the school committee. This was the first act of the town of Providence to establish free schools, supported by a tax on all the property of the people.¹⁰

It's worthwhile to understand the underlying vision and values of the community leaders of the time, and their building of a civilized culture far into the future, as the state historian described:

In the preamble of a report written by Deputy-Governor Jabez Brown [who would be succeeded in the next election by Darius Sessions]....expresses the rising sentiment of the progressive class:

"The education of youth, being a thing of the first importance to every society, as thereby the minds of the rising generation are formed to virtue, knowledge and useful literature, and a

⁹ According to Henry Merritt Wriston’s 1945 account of the Brown University Charter: “At the meeting on September 8, 1803, the Corporation voted that “the donation of \$5,000 Dollars, if made to this College, within one Year from the late Commencement, shall entitle the donor to name the College.” On September 6 of the following year, a letter from *Nicholas Brown* making a gift of that amount was read to the Corporation. They thereupon voted that “this College be called and known in all future time by the Name of Brown University in Providence in the State of Rhode Island, and Providence Plantations.” (Corporation Records, I, 311, 319.)” Nicholas Brown was probably making the donation on behalf of the Brown family of four Brown brother – Nicholas, Moses, Joseph, and John. It appears that it took a full year to get the brothers in agreement and assemble the cash.

¹⁰ Thomas Williams Bicknell, *The History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, Volume 2, American Historical Society, 1920 p 655. This position was also expressed by Thomas Jefferson.



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succession of able and useful men are produced, with suitable qualifications for serving their country with ability and faithfulness; and institutions of this nature are the more useful by how much the more liberal and free the enjoyment of them is."¹¹

ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT GATHERS MOMENTUM

Rhode Island was becoming strongly opposed to slavery by the early 1770s.¹² By 1774, Darius Sessions, an active member of the Sons of Liberty, operating from in his capacity as Deputy Governor in Providence, had effectively neutralized loyalist Governor Wanton in Newport (see **Part II. The Seeds of the Revolution**). As a frequent moderator of Providence Town meetings, Sessions, with his friend Stephen Hopkins (five- time former governor, Supreme Court Justice, & Continental Congress delegate) and the many members of the Sons of Liberty, effectively enabled of **Rhode Island Embraces the Age of Enlightenment** to bear on the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the colony's governance. Historian J. Stanley Lemon¹³ wrote:

"By the early 1770s the impact of moral concerns became evident as various prominent people began to purge themselves of any involvement in the institution of slavery.

James Manning, Brown University's first president and pastor of Providence's First Baptist Church, freed his only slave in December 1770. Former slaveholder Samuel Hopkins, pastor of the First Congregational Church in Newport, began preaching against slavery in 1771, and he was soon joined by Ezra Stiles, pastor of Newport's Second Congregational Church and a future president of Yale. Moses Brown converted to Quakerism and freed his ten slaves in 1773, the same year in which the Quaker Yearly Meeting voted a complete break with slavery and ordered Friends to free all of their slaves.

In June 1774 the growing movement against slavery led the Rhode Island General Assembly to pass a law prohibiting the further importation of slaves into Rhode Island.

Today there is much controversy about the issue of John Brown running slave ships.

While John Brown's slavery escapade is not to be dismissed lightly, it should be noted that the historical record is clear that slavery was not considered an honorable deed.

In fact, it became a divisive force within the prominent Brown Family. This came to a head in 1790 when Moses Brown (and others in Providence) sued his own brother John Brown for violating the anti-slavery laws in Rhode Island. (see below)

Sessions was Deputy Governor charged with ensuring the bill was signed into law. This was a monumental act, making Rhode Island one of the first of the colonies to take an active stand against

¹¹ Bicknell, Ibid, p 655.

¹² The town of Warwick abolished slavery in the 1650s. In the 1760s, however, Rhode Island leaders were betwixt and between two minds: "Hopkins published this pamphlet, *The Rights of Colonies Examined*, which established the basic terms of colonial opposition to Parliamentary taxation. Those who paid taxes levied without their consent, Hopkins asserted, were "in the miserable condition of slaves" - "the heaviest curse human nature is capable of." Hopkins was himself a slaveowner at the time. The Brown brothers forwarded a copy of the pamphlet to Hopkins's younger brother Esek, who was then on the coast of Africa aboard the slave ship *Sally*." (source: <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:303432/>) However, over the next twenty years, the issue of slavery was being resolved as a moral issued, primarily by Quaker influence on thought. In the August 21, 1790 edition of the *Providence Gazette* (which featured George Washington's visit), there is a notice of the Quarterly Meeting of the Providence Abolitionist Society, indicating an organized movement.

¹³ J. Stanley Lemon, *Rhode Island and the Slave Trade*; RI History, Vol 60 #4, Fall 2001, pp 96-7



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slavery. Unlike other New England Colonies, Rhode Island had been established in 1636 with complete religious freedom. Quakers migrated to the colony. By the early 1770s, they became vocal and persuasive advocates of freedom for all humans. Hopkins' second wife was a Quaker, influencing his ideals. Congregationalists, led by Rev. Samuel Hopkins, joined the Quakers in the Abolitionist movement. About 17 percent of the 655 families owned slaves in 1774, with 52 of these 114 families owning one slave each.¹⁴

Freeing slaves was not just a legal process. It involved matters of conscience and responsibility for the well-being of those who had been enslaved but were also dependent for support. For example, in October 1772, Hopkins released (manumitted) his slave Saint Jago, with this statement:

But, principally, and most of all finding that the merciful and beneficent goodness of Almighty God; by the blessed Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord: hath by the blessed Spirit taught all, who honestly obey its Divine Dictates, that, the keeping any of his rational Creatures in Bondage, who are capable of taking care of, and providing for themselves in a State of Freedom: is, altogether inconsistent with his Holy and Righteous Will.¹⁵

However, Hopkins also believed that he had a responsibility to ensure that those he freed could thrive as self-sufficient "rational creatures." His treatment of "slaves" was not of the brutal form of many Southern farm workers, but much more as members of the family. An unconditional release of those not ready for full freed would be just as immoral and irresponsible and holding a person who was ready for the "outside world." Thus, Hopkins, much to the chagrin of his Quaker friends, declined to manumit his enslaved woman, Fibbo. He reasoned that "she had Children that needed the Immediate Care of a Mother."

Early in the Revolution, Washington's Continental faced severe troop shortages. Disease and famine caused the death of nearly 2,000 soldiers during the army's winter encampment at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Washington made a plea to Congress:

"No less than 2,898 men now in camp [are] unfit because they are barefoot and otherwise naked"

Not enough men could be convinced to enlist in the depleting army with bounties of land and money, Congress mandated: Each state must fill a quota of militias, based on its population.

However, Rhode Island, the smallest colony with a population less than 60,000 needed to fill two battalions – about 400 men. When sufficient men couldn't fill the ranks, its leaders appealed to Washington to allow both free and enslaved Black men to enlist.

¹⁴ Donald R. Hopkins, *A Slave Called Saint Jago*, RI History, Vol 69 #1, Winter/Spring 2011, p 32

¹⁵ Ibid. Saint Jago was a skilled craftsman in the maritime trades, which enabled him to support himself.



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General James Varnum urged General George Washington to enlist slaves in the Continental Army. Varnum reasoned that a regiment of African Americans would be willing to serve if they were given their freedom in return for service to their country. Washington feared that arming former slaves might incite a rebellion among slaves, angering Southern slaveholders. However, Washington's pragmatism prevailed in the face of unrelenting realities of winning the war, passing Varnum's recommendation to R.I. Governor Nicholas Cooke.

In February 1778, the Rhode Island Assembly passed the Slave Enlistment Act enabling

"every able-bodied negro, mulatto, or Indian man slave in this state to enlist into either of the Continental Battalions being raised ... every slave so enlisting shall, upon his passing muster before Colonel Christopher Greene, be immediately discharged from the service of his master or mistress, and be absolutely free."

Compensation was provided to owners losing slaves. With the coming of spring planting, slave owners on the farms were concerned about the unintended consequences of armed ex-slaves potentially trying to free those still in bondage, and preventing the harvesting of crops needed for the Revolution. In June the Assembly repealed the law; while over 100 formerly enslaved African Americans had enlisted and won their freedom. After the bill was repealed, another 44 enlisted. All were eventually fully integrated into the R.I. 1st Regiment – something that would not happen in the U.S. Army until 1947. The 1st Rhode Island Regiment is widely recognized as the first integrated black battalion in U.S. military history.

The "Black Regiment," composed of about 60% blacks and 40% whites, led by all white officers, engaged in its first combat at the Battle of Bloody Run Brook in Rhode Island in August 1778, fighting with distinction. Three charges by Hessian soldiers and British regulars failed to break the line.

Historian Sidney Rider states the Hessian Colonel

"applied to exchange his command and go to New York, because he dared not lead his regiment" into battle again, "lest his men should shoot him for having caused them so much loss."¹⁶ The First Rhode Island suffered only three killed, nine wounded, and eleven missing. General Lafayette proclaimed the battle as "the best fought action of the war."¹⁷

The unit stayed together, closing out their battle action in Yorktown in 1781 with the final British defeat.



1781 watercolor of a black infantryman of the 1st Rhode Island Regiment of the Continental Army at the Yorktown Campaign. The 1st Rhode Island was one of the few regiments in the Continental Army that had a large number of black soldiers in its ranks.



Depiction of member of the RI First Regiment, History.com

¹⁶ Rider, Sidney (1880). "Rhode Island Historical Tracts". *Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center*. 10: 59.

¹⁷ Abdul-Jabbar, Kareem; Steinberg, Alan (2000). *Black Profiles in Courage: A Legacy of African American Achievement*. New York, NY: Perennial. p. 31.



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Historian J. Stanley Lemon continues about the abolitionist movement:

This was followed by the state's gradual emancipation act of 1784, which provided that from then on, children born to slave mothers were to be considered freeborn citizens. However, to compensate owners for their losses, such children were to be bound out as apprentices until age twenty-one, and their wages paid to their mothers' owners.¹⁸

Then, in 1787, the General Assembly made it illegal for any Rhode Islander to be involved in the African slave trade anywhere. This last law is noteworthy in that it was the first law in America prohibiting American citizens from involvement in the African slave trade.

In 1788 Moses Brown and Samuel Hopkins convinced both Massachusetts and Connecticut to enact laws almost identical to Rhode Island's, thereby outlawing the African slave trade for nearly all New Englanders. But when these laws went unenforced, in February 1789 Moses Brown, Samuel Hopkins, James Manning ... and about 180 other men, mostly Quakers, organized the Abolition Society ... for the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Held in Bondage, and for Improving the condition of the African Race). The Abolition Society became the self-appointed agency to enforce the laws against the slave trade, and it was this group that prosecuted John Brown, Moses's brother, in 1790 and 1797. Congress passed its first law against the African slave trade in 1794 and outlawed it completely in 1808.



The Washington Chair dates to about 1690. Historical research shows that Washington visited Providence in 1776, 1781, 1783, and 1790. Washington also passed by former Deputy Governor Darius Sessions' command center near Pomfret, Connecticut several times.

Its style is known as "Flemish," and was probably owned by Nathaniel Sessions before being handed down to his son Darius. It is made of maple and beech wood, retains its original finish, and was originally 56 inches tall. It was a favorite on an open hearth in the winter as the legs were worn down four inches over the centuries on a brick or stone hearth. The original cane seat, somewhat worn and slightly damaged, lies protected under a firm seat cover.

The chair may have migrated between Providence and Pomfret at various times.

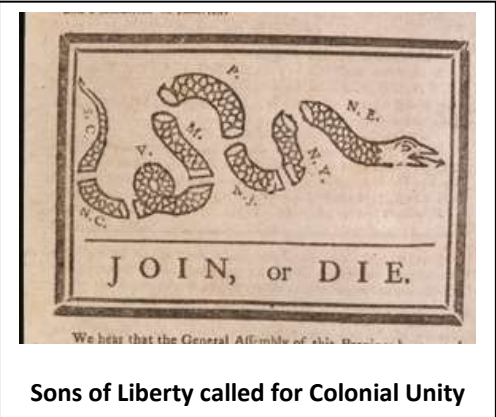
¹⁸ It should be noted, as later described in this paper, that RI was experiencing great internal dissension and economic depression this year (see [A Polarized Citizenry](#)). The fact that any freedoms were granted during this period of strife and economic collapse is meritorious.



Part II. The Seeds of the Revolution

THE STAMP ACT AND THE SONS OF LIBERTY

King George was suffering financial hardships fighting wars and keeping such a large standing army and navy deployed throughout his empire. To pay for the conflicts and a large military, the Crown ordered the Revenue Act of 1764 and the Stamp Act of 1765, taxing the colonists for the cost of their defense. In addition, Lord Grenville, the first lord of the admiralty, soon to become the first lord of treasury, authorized naval commanders to act as customs revenue collectors.¹⁹



The uprising of moral objections was swift, with the colonists screaming “Taxation without Representation is Tyranny!” Quickly across the colonies, the Sons and Daughters of Liberty were formed to stop the purchase of English goods.

Most historians have followed their predecessors with propositions such as:

Boston’s first public demonstration (August 14th, 1765) against the Stamp Act set off a wave of similar protests in the other parts of British North America. – J.L. Bell²⁰ 2015

This is a less than authentic narrative of history.

Providence and Newport were seaports that relied on trade and commerce for their livelihood. Using the power of the Admiralty to enforce customs laws was considered tyrannical. Rhode Island merchants, who were frequently partners in ship ownership were outraged. In 1764, Providence merchants (most likely including Sessions) wrote the resolution: “**Rhode Island Remonstrance**,” which Stephen Hopkins, the colony's governor and chancellor of the newly created College of Rhode Island, (today’s Brown University) took across the Atlantic in the middle of winter to hand personally to authorities, protesting the new taxes and stepped-up enforcement. Upon returning from England in the early spring of 1765, Hopkins published this pamphlet, **The Rights of Colonies Examined**, which established the legal and moral basis colonial opposition to Parliamentary taxation. Those who paid taxes levied without their consent, Hopkins declared, were “**in the miserable condition of slaves**” - “**the heaviest curse human nature is capable of.**”

When word of the Stamp Act reached America in May of 1765, the Virginia House of Burgesses met on the last day of that month to pass a Resolution which stated in part, that only duly elected representatives could impose taxes, which is “**the only security against a burdensome taxation.**”

On June 8, 1765, the Massachusetts Assembly initiated a call to action, requesting the legislatures of the other colonies send delegates to a congress in New York to discuss a unified response to the Stamp Act.



Effigy of Tax Collector hanging in Boston with inscription:

What greater Joy did ever New England see Than a Stampman hanging on a Tree

¹⁹ Smugglers and Patriots, p 68

²⁰ <https://boston1775.blogspot.com/2015/08/a-stampman-hanging-on-tree.html>



Darius Sessions – History's Hidden Hero

Nine of the 13 colonies, including Rhode Island, chose to send delegates to the meeting, which was held in New York City. Several southern colony's delegates were blocked by loyalist Governors.²¹

What is significant, and largely overlooked by historians, was the pivotal and significant role played by Rhode Island's colonial leadership in orchestrating not just resistance, not symbolic hanging of effigies of tax collectors or protests in the streets, but generated a substantive contribution to the orchestration of the Stamp Act Congress, which was the predecessor of the Continental Congress that led the Revolution.



Stephen Hopkins

In early August, 1765, (before the hanging of the effigy in Boston) patriots in Providence gathered to begin drafting a powerful and poignant Resolution of resistance to the usurpation of power by the King. (see next page for the text, and a comparison to the final Resolution of the Stamp Act Congress in October, 1765). The historic record indicates that on August 13th it was the Town of Providence that a far more substantive response than the symbolic one in Boston the following day. The Town Council instructed their Deputies in General assembly to insist on the exclusive right of the colony to tax itself, and proposed a set of resolutions, modeled after that of the Virginia House of Burgesses in late May, which were afterwards adopted, in substance & nearly in words, by the General Assembly and later

incorporated into the Resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress (the predecessor to the Continental Congress) that convened in New York City two months later.

Those likely engaged in leading the passage of the Resolution would be Henry Ward,²² who was serving as Governor of the colony at the time. Ward was noteworthy because he was the *only* Governor of the Colonies who actively defied the Royal Order. Another would have been Metcalf Bowler,²³ who attended represented Rhode Island with Ward at the Stamp Act Congress. Stephen Hopkins, an ardent patriot would likely be a primary initiator, as both a Providence resident and past Governor. His pamphlet that year, "*The Rights of Colonies Examined*"²⁴ established Hopkins as a thought-leader in the wave of patriotic thinking.²⁵

²¹ <https://www.americanhistorycentral.com/entries/henry-ward-rhode-island/>

²² Henry Ward: (from 1740 to 1743, his father served as Governor of the Colony). His brother, Samuel Ward, was Governor and represented Rhode Island at the First Continental Congress and [Second Continental Congress](#). From 1761 to 1797, Ward served as the Secretary of State of the Rhode Island government and represented Rhode Island at the [Stamp Act Congress](#). He was a rivalry with Stephen Hopkins, ended in 1768, when they buried the hatchet, understanding the cause of Liberty was more important. Sources: Wikipedia and www.americanhistorycentral.com

²³ He served for many years in the colonial assembly, and was its speaker from 1767 to 1776. He served as an Associate Justice of the [Rhode Island Supreme Court](#) from May 1768 to June 1769, and from June 1770 to August 1776, and as Chief Justice from August 1776 to February 1777.^[1] When Rhode Island declared its independence from Great Britain, Bowler was among the signatories. He remained active in state government, serving on its Committee of Secret Correspondence. In 1772, Bowler was involved in the investigation into the [Gaspée Affair](#).

²⁴ Hopkins finished writing the pamphlet on November 30, 1764, and it was published by Goddard in early 1765, thus the discrepancy in dates. " (source: <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:303432/>)

²⁵ From Wikipedia: *The Rights of Colonies Examined* received widespread circulation and brought hearty approval throughout the colonies. Historian [Thomas Bicknell](#) called it "the most remarkable document that was issued during the period preceding the War of the Revolution." Massachusetts Governor [Thomas Hutchinson](#) wrote that "it was conceived in a higher strain than any that were sent out by other colonies." With this paper, Hopkins became to Rhode Island what [Samuel Adams](#) was to Massachusetts and what [Thomas Jefferson](#) was to Virginia.



Comparing the Town of Providence Version (August 13, 1765) with the first five paragraphs of the Stamp Act Congress Version (October 19, 1765) [blue text]

1. That the first adventurers, settlers of this his Majesty's Colony and Dominion of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, brought with them and transmitted to their Posterity, and all other his Majesty's Subjects, since inhabiting in this his Majesty's Colony, all the Privileges and Immunities that have at any time been held, enjoyed and possessed by the People of Great Britain (Note: this phraseology parallels the earlier resolution of the VIRGINIA, House of Burgesses, 29 May 1765 1) Resolved, that the first adventurers and settlers of His Majesty's colony and dominion of Virginia brought with them and transmitted to their posterity . . . all the liberties, privileges, franchises, and immunities that have at any time been held, enjoyed, and possessed by the people of Great Britain. (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Resolves#Text_of_the_Virginia_Resolves)

1) That his majesty's subjects in these colonies owe the same allegiance to the crown of Great Britain that is owing from his subjects born within the realm, and all due subordination to that august body the Parliament of Great Britain.
2. That by a charter, granted by King Charles the Second, in the 15th year of his Reign the Colony aforesaid is declared intituled to all Privileges and Immunities of natural born Subjects, to all Intents and Purposes, as if they had been abiding and born within the Realm of England.

2) That his majesty's liege subjects in these colonies are entitled to all the inherent rights and liberties of his natural born subjects within the kingdom of Great Britain
3. That his majesty's liege people of this Colony have enjoyed the Right of being governed by their own Assembly in the Article of Taxes and internal Police; and that the same have never been forfeited or any other Way yielded up, but have been constantly recognized by the King & People of Great Britain.

3) That it is inseparably essential to the freedom of a people, and the undoubted right of Englishmen, that no taxes be imposed on them but with their own consent, given personally or by their representatives.
4. That therefore the General Assembly of this Colony have in their Representative Capacity, the only exclusive Right to lay Taxes and Imposts upon the Inhabitants of this Colony: and that Every Attempt to vest such Power in any Person or Persons whatever other than the General Assembly aforesaid is unconstitutional, and hath a manifest Tendency to destroy the Liberties of the People of this Colony.

4) That the people of these colonies are not, and, from their local circumstances, cannot be, represented in the House of Commons in Great Britain.
5. That his Majesty's liege People the Inhabitants of this Colony are not bound to yield Obedience to any Law or Ordinance designed to impose any internal Taxation whatsoever upon them other than the Laws or Ordinances of the General Assembly, aforesaid.

5) That the only representatives of the people of these colonies are persons chosen therein by themselves; and that no taxes ever have been, or can be constitutionally imposed on them, but by their respective legislatures.
6. That all the officers in this colony appointed by the authority thereof be and they are hereby directed to proceed in the execution of their respective offices in the same manner as usual: and that this assembly will indemnify and save harmless all the said officers on account of their conduct agreeable to this Resolution.

No Comparable Language in the Stamp Act Congress

Delegates from Rhode Island to the Stamp Act Congress were: Henry Ward and Metcalf Bowler



Darius Sessions – History's Hidden Hero

So too would be Darius Sessions, who frequently served as moderator of the Town Meetings, and was the town's duly elected representative to the colony's legislature, which would act on the Resolution several weeks later with virtually the same language.

A week and a half after the Providence Resolution, the steaming pot of patriotism blew over in Newport, which had good reason to be angry, because their tax burden was four times the amount to be born by Providence. As reported in the *Newport Mercury*:

... a Gallows was erected in Queen-Street, just below the Court-House, whereon the Effigies of three Gentlemen were exhibited, one of whom was a Distributor of Stamps, which was placed in the Center. The other two were suspected of countenancing and abetting the Stamp Act.

Various Labels were affixed to their Breasts, Arms, &c. denoting the Cause of these indignant Representations, and the Persons who were the Subjects of Derision.—They hung from Eleven o'Clock till about Four, when some Combustibles being placed under the Gallows, a Fire was made, and the Effigies consumed, amidst the Acclamations of the People.—The whole was conducted with Moderation, and no Violence was offered to the Persons or Property of any Man.²⁶

The three "Persons who were the Subjects of Derision," were:

- Rhode Island's stamp-tax collector, Augustus Johnston (c. 1729-1790).
- Martin Howard, Jr. (1725–1781), a lawyer who had written a pamphlet titled *A Letter from a Gentleman at Halifax to His Friend in Rhode Island*, supporting the Stamp Act
- Dr. Thomas Moffatt (c. 1702–1787), another supporter of stronger royal government.

The effigies were guarded by Samuel Vernon, William Ellery (who would sign the Declaration of Independence in 1776). By day's end the protesters had plundered the homes of the three, but no homes were destroyed. Governor Stephen Ward and other authorities went into the Colony House for the quarterly meeting of Newport's freeholders shortly thereafter. Stamp masters resigned across the colonies.

The rapid alignment of the colonies to orchestrate the Congress indicates the network of Committees of Correspondence were already well formed and highly functional by 1765.

The flames of freedom were fueled by increasing animosity toward the Stamp Act. The State Legislature, where Sessions represented the Town of Providence, was unequivocal in its enforcements of principles of justice:

RHODE ISLAND RESOLVES ON THE STAMP ACT, SEPTEMBER 16, 1765.
 "This Assembly, taking into the most serious consideration, an act passed by the Parliament of Great Britain, at their last session, for levying stamp duties, and other internal duties, in North America, do resolve,
 " I. That the first adventurers, settlers of this, His Majesty's colony and dominion of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, brought with them and transmitted to their posterity, and all other His Majesty's subjects since inhabiting this, His Majesty's colony, all the privileges and immunities that have at any time been held, enjoyed, and possessed by the people of Great Britain.

²⁶ <https://boston1775.blogspot.com/2015/08/anti-stamp-act-protests-in-rhode-island.html?m=1>



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"2. That by a charter granted by King Charles the Second, in the fifteenth year of his reign, the colony, aforesaid, is declared and entitled to all the privileges and immunities of natural born subjects, to all intents and purposes, as if they had been abiding and born within the realm of England.

"3. That His Majesty's liege people of this colony have enjoyed the right of being governed by their own Assembly, in the article of taxes and internal police; and that the same hath never been forfeited, or any other way yielded up; but hath been constantly recognized by the King and people of Britain.

"4. That, therefore, the General Assembly of this colony have, in their representative capacity, the only exclusive right to levy taxes and imposts upon the inhabitants of this colony; and that every attempt to vest such power in any person or persons, whatever, other than the General Assembly, aforesaid, is unconstitutional, and hath a manifest tendency to destroy the liberties of the people of this colony.

"5. That His Majesty's liege people, the inhabitants of this colony, are not bound to yield obedience to any law or ordinance designed to impose any internal taxation whatsoever upon them, other than the laws or ordinances of the General Assembly, aforesaid.

"6. That all the officers in this colony, appointed by the authority thereof, be, and they are hereby, directed to proceed in the execution of their respective offices in the same manner as usual; and that this Assembly will indemnify and save harmless all the said officers on account of their conduct, agreeably to this resolution." (Rhode Island Colonial Records, 1757-1769, v. 6, pp. 451-452.)

These resolutions, viewed as a complete message to the King, are tantamount to a Declaration of Independence. When the Crown read this document, its hackles must have been standing on end.

Historian Charles Warren Lippett, a former R.I. Governor, wrote:²⁷

Rhode Island enacted a law not dependent upon the action of any future body, not postponing the time in which its action should become effective to a distant period, or permitting it to rest upon the contingency of the action of another legislative body; but then and there, in plain, unmistakable language, the colony refused to abide by the act of the English Parliament, denied the right of that body to impose such taxes, and authorized its official representatives to ignore all laws in relation to the vexed question of the Stamp Act except those enacted by the Rhode Island legislature. It also assumed, without equivocation, the antagonistic and, so to speak, rebellious position of protecting its own officers against the power of England in consequence of any action they might take in executing the mandates of the colony of Rhode Island... Governor Ward, years before the question of independence was generally discussed, had foreseen the probabilities, and as early as 1766, in writing to his son, said:

²⁷ Charles Warren Lippett; The Rhode Island Declaration of Independence, 1906 p20, 25



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"These colonies are destined to an early independence, and you will live to see my words verified."

By late summer in 1765 the first Stamp Act riots had taken place in Boston followed quickly by a riot in Newport; both spurred on by the Sons of Liberty. The Daughters of Liberty²⁸ were soon created to replace imported cloth with homespun clothes that could not be taxed. Committees of Inspection were formed to ensure the boycott was successful.

This initiative expanded to include a boycott of all British goods, instead favoring home-grown industries, trades, and crafts. The Providence Liberty Tree was dedicated in 1768 by the Sons of Liberty, with great fanfare. Silas Downer delivered a strong oratory:²⁹

"We do therefore, in the name and behalf of all the true Sons of Liberty in America...dedicate and solemnly devote this tree, to be a Tree of Liberty. May all our councils and deliberations under its venerable branches be guided by wisdom, and directed to the support and maintenance of the liberty, which our renowned forefathers sought out and found under trees in the wilderness. May it long flourish, and may the Sons of Liberty often repair hither, to confirm and strengthen each other. When they look towards this sacred Elm, may they be penetrated with a sense of their duty to themselves, their country and their posterity.... Government is necessary. It was instituted to secure to individuals that natural liberty, which no human creature had a right to deprive them of. For which end the people have given power unto the rulers to use as there may be occasion for the good of the whole community, and not that the civil magistrate, who is only the people trustee, should make use of it for the hurt of the governed.

In July, 1769, while Sessions was Deputy Governor, "the merchants, traders, farmers, and mechanics, and in general, all the 'Sons of Liberty' in Providence and the neighboring towns" met at the "Liberty Tree" on South Main Street to "consult and agree on effectual measures to discourage the importation and consumption of European goods."

The following year, a committee made up of Stephen Hopkins, Darius Sessions, Nicholas Brown, Nicholas Cooke, and two others were chosen to ensure that Providence merchants did not violate the non-importation agreement.³⁰ The General Assembly then voted to deny the right of any power except itself to levy taxes upon the colony. Tensions continued to build as Britain just got tougher.

²⁸The Daughters of Liberty were organized by eighteen young ladies at Dr. Ephraim Bowen's House in Providence, March 4, 1766. *Harper's Encyclopædia of United States History: From 458 A.D. to 1902*, Volume 9, p 509

²⁹ [Pamphlet War: Silas Downer and His Dedication of the Tree of Liberty in Providence - Restoring Our Foundations](#)

³⁰ Bicknell, *Ibid*, p 731. See Staples Annals. Sessions is also listed as one of the Founders of Meeting Street School in 1770, according to Thomas Stockwell, *A History of Public Education in Rhode Island: From 1636 to 1876*, p 139. In 1771, Sessions, along with Justice Hopkins, and Moses Brown, served on a committee to determine the actual gravesight of RI's Founder, Roger Williams (Chapin, Howard; *Report on the Birthplace of Roger Williams*, RIHS, 1918)



BURNING OF THE *HMS LIBERTY*

In March 1766, Lord Rockingham, Britain's the new prime minister, repealed the Stamp Act. Colonists saw this as a victory. Boston's most prominent trading merchant, John Hancock, celebrated by inviting the entire town to a round of drinks.

However, the abrasion between the Crown and the Colonies only got worse as other existing tax laws were more strictly enforced. The Seven Years war with France had depressed trade. Moreover, young men in the colonies were pressed into duty to serve on ships. In Massachusetts, one male in four were put on British warships, and nearly 10% of them died.³¹

The dislocations and economic imbalances during the war continued after the war ended in 1763. New England's shipping industry, which transported lumber, grain, and fish to the West Indies, was facing depressed prices because of an over-supply of goods. Extra tariffs from the Molasses Tax, which amounted to about a 50% tax, made its importation unprofitable (unless the Customs Inspector was bribed). Returning from the West Indies with an empty ship was a foolish move sure to end in bankruptcy.

On 10 June 1768, (ironically exactly 4 years before the burning of *HMS Gaspée*) the merchant sloop *Liberty*, owned by Hancock, entered Boston Harbour with a cargo of Madeira wine awaiting the customs inspector for clearance to unload.

For years, a game was played -- inspectors queried the captain regarding the extent of the cargo liable for a customs tax; the captain only reported a part of the cargo and unloaded the rest free from any duty; the customs inspectors avoided a struggle and received a "facilitation" reward -- usually a free sample of the cargo for "future inspection." That was the "deal."

Not this time. The customs collector broke the "code," demanding a 100% duty on the full cargo. Enraged by such a betrayal, *Liberty's* captain locked the inspector in the ship's brig, then proceeded to unload every barrel of wine.

British officials retaliated, seizing the *Liberty*. Enraged colonists, beat two custom officials, then proceeded to smash windows in the homes of other customs collectors, who sought refuge on British ships moored in the harbour.³²

Now commissioned as the *HMS Liberty*, she was then taken to Rhode Island to be refitted with several guns. In May, 1769 she began patrolling Rhode Island waters and Long Island Sound to aid Charles Dudley, British Collector of Customs, who arrived in Newport in the spring of 1768. Forthwith, he captured a Providence-bound vessel arriving from the West Indies with an undeclared cargo of molasses.



John Hancock



HMS Liberty Topsail Sloop

³¹ Tyler, John, *Smugglers and Patriots*, Op Cit, p 72

³² <https://alphahistory.com/americanrevolution/seizure-of-liberty/> The **Liberty** Incident only strengthened Britain's resolve to suppress an impending rebellion. Army troops arrived in October, 1768, to enforce customs laws, protect officials and stifle any insurrectionists. This would eventually culminate in the Boston Massacre in March, 1770.



Darius Sessions – History's Hidden Hero

A M E R I C A.
 Boston, (New-England) July 27. We hear from Newport, that last Monday the Sloop Liberty, Capt. Reid, brought in there a Brig and a Sloop belonging to Connecticut, that they had seized in the Sound, which, together with the imprudent Behaviour of the Captain and some of his People, so exasperated a Number of Persons there, that on Wednesday they went on board the Liberty as she lay at Anchor in the Harbour, and cut her Cables, and left her Drift ashore; they then set her on Fire, but being informed a considerable Quantity of Powder was on board, for Fear of endangering the Town, they extinguished it again; they then cut away her Mast, threw her Guns and Stores overboard, entered the Cabin and destroyed the Captain's and his Wife's Clothes, Bedding, &c. broke the Tables, Chairs, China, and other Things therein, and did not quit her till Three o'Clock the next Morning, when after scuttling the Vessel, they left her a meer Wreck, and she now remains sunk near one of the Wharfs here. The Brig, that was seized, we hear, was legally discharged on Thursday, but that the Sloop made her Escape in the Confusion the Evening before.

ARIS'S BIRMINGHAM GAZETTE, England,
 Sept. 18, 1769 report on Burning of *HMS Liberty*

commandeered the brig and a sloop back to Newport. Newspapers of the time referred to Captain Reid as “impudent,” exasperating a number of people in the town. There was no evidence the captured captains were smuggling.

The reaction ashore in Newport was swift. A group of Newport citizens rowed out to the *Liberty*, which was anchored in the Harbour. They overcame the skeleton crew on board, smashed her lifeboats, cut down her masts and cables, threw her guns and stores overboard, wrecked the captain’s cabin, and then set the wreck afire.

But, learning of the considerable amount of gunpowder on board, they extinguished the fire, and set her adrift. She ran aground on a Goat Island outside the Harbour, and then was burned and scuttled.

Colonists were incensed that a naval warship would be used by the Admiralty as a revenue cutter. The normally peaceful cat and mouse game escalated to a quasi-war.

HMS Liberty’s captain, William Reid, was ruthless. His orders gave him the authority to capture any smugglers dodging customs tax, then collect a bounty for he and his crew.³³ Reid quickly irritated local merchants and seamen for his “extraordinary zeal in executing the orders he had received,” as he bulldogged his way in boarding and inspecting vessels.

On 19 July 1769, *Liberty* captured two Connecticut based merchant vessels. The *Liberty*’s crew manhandled Captain Joseph Packwood, then



Artist's depiction of Burning of the *HMS Liberty* -- Nighttime on Narragansett Bay is illuminated by the licking flames of a British warship set ablaze— nearly three years before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. The burning of *HMS Gaspée* by Rhode Island colonists was the audacious prelude to a history-altering conflict. HEROIC DEEDS OF AMERICAN SAILORS (1918)

³³ Armstrong, Benjamin F., U.S. Navy Commander; Naval History Magazine, U.S. Naval Institute, Volume 30, Number 1, February 2016



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The captured sloop and brig escaped in the confusion, bound for Connecticut.

The Burning of the *Liberty* is clearly the first overt American act of defiance against the British government.³⁴ But most historians overlook its significance as they have the Burning of the *Gaspée* in Rhode Island waters three years later.

Perhaps one of the reasons is that, just as with the *Gaspée* Affair, the perpetrators were never revealed or captured, thus they were not tried, convicted, and hung for treason. The Burning of the *Liberty* was hushed up; it became a clandestine scheme leaving no traces of the schemers.

Two months before the burning, Joseph Wanton, a loyalist from Newport, was elected Governor of the colony. He issued a proclamation and reward to prosecute the insurrectionists. No one ever came forward to collect the reward. How could this happen? Rhode Island had suffered bad weather and a poor economy following the end of the Seven Years War.

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Darius Sessions, an ardent patriot, was chosen by his peers to be elevated to the position of Deputy Governor at the same time Wanton assumed the governorship. We know from their relationship during the *Gaspée* Affair that Sessions, along with Stephen Hopkins, consistently subverted, undermined, and outmaneuvered Wanton. The Sons of Liberty had already fused their bond of trust and fidelity before the *Liberty* Affair.

The question, which will probably never be answered, is: “Did Sessions and Hopkins play a role in the Liberty Affair coverup? Was this just a dress rehearsal for the *Gaspée* Affair three years later?”

Because there are no known records of their involvement, this will probably remain one of history’s mysteries.

PIVOTAL ROLE OF COMMITTEES OF CORRESPONDENCE

A primary reason why the response to the Stamp Act was so quick and firm was the coalescence of a powerful network of like-minded, enlightened leaders in every colony, known as *Committees of Correspondence*. (Darius Sessions referred to them as *Committees of Intelligence*³⁵ and *Correspondence*.) In Providence, Hopkins and Sessions were among the prominent members.

Of course, the name was a bland term that really meant the members were both a spy ring (the earliest version of the CIA) – as well as a coordinating council and a cult of intellectual thinking that became a vehicle for writers like Sam Adams, Patrick Henry, and Thomas Paine to spread their ideas across the eastern seaboard, uniting a common vision and core values. Between 1772 and 1774, hundreds of committees emerged, unifying the values and vision from north to south.



In the fall of 1772, the passions of freedom would quickly link Rhode Island’s and Massachusetts’ patriots in alignment. In the Bay Colony,

“Governor Thomas Hutchinson announced that high officials in Massachusetts would be paid by the Crown, rather than by appropriations from the colonial House of Representatives. Samuel Adams

³⁴ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Liberty_\(1768\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Liberty_(1768))

³⁵ This may be the clue that tips us off that Sessions went “underground” as part of Washington’s network of spies.



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published an article in the Boston Gazette condemning this action, which made the most powerful government positions independent of the electorate and raised questions about whether colonists would receive fair trials... the town passed a resolution affirming the right to petition and established a 21member Committee of Correspondence to exchange ideas about recourse. On November 2, 1772, the Boston Committee of Correspondence was convened and tasked with writing the *Votes and Proceedings of the Freeholders and Other Inhabitants of the Town of Boston*...

They made this historic plea to their colonial brethren. They addressed the pamphlet to the other towns of Massachusetts and called upon each for “a free communication of your sentiments” on the current political emergency... It proclaimed that Britain’s actions “if accomplish’d, would complete our slavery” and asserted that colonists had a moral obligation to repudiate tyranny.

At this very early stage in the resistance, Boston had thrown down a metaphorical gauntlet by holding an extraconstitutional meeting and calling for an exchange with the municipalities of the colony .. creating an unprecedented vehicle of mobilization that garnered the full energy of communities. Colonists assembled in halls and thoughtfully considered the state of the relationship with their imperial sovereign .. The process opened “the eyes of many who [had] not the opportunity of informing themselves concerning these important matters” and gave them an occasion to voice distress in an open forum.... The Boston Pamphlet initiated exchange throughout Massachusetts that explored unifying principles and served as a model for systemic organization.

After the Gaspée Affair, this foundation would be extended throughout the colonies.³⁶

It would be upon this foundation that Darius Sessions formed his destiny-changing relationship with Sam Adams. Historian Gordon Woods viewed the strengthening of the Committees of Correspondence in the 1770s marked "a new kind of popular politics in America."³⁷

The rhetoric of liberty now brought to the surface long-latent political tendencies. Ordinary people were no longer willing to trust only wealthy and learned gentlemen to represent them ... various artisan, religious, and ethnic groups now felt that their particular interests were so distinct that only people of their kind could speak for them.

Coupled with *Committees of Safety*, which linked to the networks of militia units in nearly every city and town, a highly synchronized, coordinated, and unified effort was architected – one amongst many: *E Pluribus Unum*.

The complete accomplishment of it in so short a time and by such simple means was perhaps a singular example in the history of mankind. Thirteen clocks were made to strike together: a perfection of mechanism, which no artist had ever before effected. John Adams³⁸

³⁶ Ben Warford-Johnston, *American Colonial Committees of Correspondence: Encountering Oppression, Exploring Unity, and Exchanging Visions of the Future*, *The History Teacher*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (November 2016), pp. 83-128 (46 pages), Published By: Society for History Education <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44504455>

³⁷ Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution: A History* (Random House, 2002).

³⁸ John Adams, Letter to Hezekiah Niles, 13 February 1818, *The Works of John Adams*, vol. 10 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1856) 283.



BURNING OF THE *HMS GASPÉE* ³⁹

As the 1770s emerged, the colonies began to polarize; loyalist Tories remained faithful to the King in England and the patriotic Sons of Liberty barked for more freedom. Animoshities mounted as King George demanded more tax money from colonists. Rhode Island held great promise for shaking out more tax revenue. Narragansett Bay embraced the prosperous ports of Newport, Fall River, and Providence, which were suspected as being centerpieces for smuggling and tax evasion.

The outraged colonists roared back with their claim “Taxation Representation is Tyranny!”

In 1772 the British revenue schooner *Gaspée*, commanded by Lt. Dudingston, began patrolling Rhode Island waters, harassing trade in a very disturbing, discourteous, adversarial, combative, and irritating manner,⁴⁰ just like his predecessor, Captain Reid on the *Liberty* three years earlier.

Lt. William Dudingston, who was known for his brutal treatment of anyone who crossed him, stopped the sloop *Fortune* on a cold day in February. Owned by Nathanael Greene, the ship was laden with rum and spirits, which were not declared at the Newport Customs House, thus considered contraband. Dudingston had been ordered by Admiral Montagu, in Boston to confiscate any ships evading customs taxes. Dudingston seized the ship under Royal authority and sent it to Boston. Any trial would be conducted there, contrary to the Royal Charter of Rhode Island which gave local courts jurisdiction. This not only raised the ire of Nathanael Greene, but also Deputy Governor Sessions and R.I. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Hopkins. Undoubtedly John Brown, who owned a fleet of merchant traders, was also on high alert. The usurpation of judicial control irked Rhode Islanders, who kicked up a storm.

Montagu, recognizing the backlash and antagonistic reactions of the colonists, decided to send the *Beaver*, under Capt. Linzee Narragansett Bay to redouble efforts to enforce the laws and help *Gaspée* against attack.

Fearing military intervention would be the beginning of martial law and the eventual dissolution of civil rights, Sessions, from his office in Providence wrote a stringent letter to Governor Wanton in Newport:

To Governor Wanton

PROVIDENCE,

March 21, 1772

SIR:—The inhabitants of this town have, of late, been much disquieted in their minds, by repeated advances being brought of a schooner which for some time past hath cruised in the Narragansett Bay and much disturbed our Navigation. She suffers no vessel to pass, not even packet boats, or others of an inferior kind, without a strict examination, and where any sort of unwillingness is discovered, they are compelled to submit, by an armed force.

Who he is and by what authority he assumes such a conduct, it is thought needs some inquiry, and I am requested, by a number of gentlemen of this town, on their behalf, to acquaint your Honor therewith, and that you would take the matter into consideration and, if the commander of that schooner, has not as yet made proper application and been duly authorized in his proceedings, that some proper measures be taken to bring him to account.

It is suspected he has no legal authority to justify his conduct, and his commission, if he has any, is some antiquated paper, more of a fiction than anything else, and this seems to be confirmed by Mr. Thomas Greene, who says he saw it, and believes it to be no other than the commission the famous Reid had, who lost his sloop at Newport, or something else of no validity. In consequence

³⁹ Note: The Gaspée Committee celebrates and documents the significance of this event. For more historical information, see the “Virtual Archives” @ <http://www.gaspee.org/> It is an excellent source updated regularly.

⁴⁰ There had been a string of events in Newport Harbor that preceded the *Gaspée* that put a chip on the shoulder of the Admiralty at the outset, including the 1769 burning and scuttling of the British armed sloop *Liberty*.



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of the above-mentioned application, I have consulted with the Chief Justice thereon, who is of opinion, that no commander of any vessel has any right to use any authority in the Body of the Colony without previously applying to the Governor and showing his warrant for so doing and also being sworn to a due exercise of his office—and this he informs me has been the common custom in this Colony.

I am, sir, with the greatest respect, your Honor's most obedient and humble servant,

DARIUS SESSIONS⁴¹

It's likely, given their relationship, that Stephen Hopkins had a hand in this letter. They were setting a trap – whipsaw the civilian authority against the military authority using powerful legal precedents to pit the British against themselves.

The events leading up to the burning of the *HMS Gaspée* were a clear indication that Hopkins and Sessions were joined at the hip in orchestrating a resistance to military rule in Rhode Island just 10 weeks before the burning of the *HMS Gaspée*. This would cause one to give credence to the idea that the Gaspée Affair was no event of spontaneous combustion, but likely well planned in advance. A chain of strained correspondence then ensued between Wanton and the commander of the schooner *Gaspée*, Lieutenant William Dudingston, and Dudingston's superior, Admiral John Montagu, based in Boston.

Governor Wanton fell in line with Sessions' line of thinking, responding with a terse letter to Dudingston:

NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

March 22, 1772

SIR:—A considerable number of the inhabitants of this Colony have complained to me of your having, in a most illegal and unwarrantable manner, interrupted their trade, by searching and detaining every little packet boat plying between the several towns.

As I know not by what authority you assume this power, I have sent off the high sheriff, to inform you of the complaint exhibited against you, and expect that you do, without delay, produce me your commission and instructions, if any you have, which was your duty to have done when you first came within the jurisdiction of this Colony.

I am your humble servant,

J. WANTON.

To the commanding officer of a schooner near Brenton's Point⁴²

Unbending, Dudingston and Montagu were determined to control shipping firmly. Dudingston was obviously insulted by Governor Wanton's letter. The Lieutenant quickly responded curtly he reported to his military commander, Admiral Montagu, not Rhode Island's Governor.

HMS GASPEE, Rhode Island,

March 23, 1772.

SIR:—Last night, I received your letter informing me that a "number of the inhabitants of this Colony had complained" to you of my having "in a most illegal and unwarrantable manner interrupted their packet boats, plying between the several towns."

In answer to which, I have done nothing but what was my duty, and their complaint can only be founded on their ignorance of that. When I waited on you, on my arrival, I acquainted you of my

⁴¹ Source: William R. Staples, *The Documentary History of the Destruction of the Gaspée*, Knowles, Vose, and Anthony, Providence, 1845 p 3 as republished by the RI Publications Society in 1990 via <http://gaspee.org/StaplesGaspee.htm>

⁴² Ibid, p 4-5 It is not clear who the High Sheriff was that Wanton referred to, but it could have been Abraham Whipple



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being sent to this government to assist the revenue. I had my commission to show you if required, as it was ever understood by all his Majesty's governors I have had the honor to wait on, that every officer commanding one of his Majesty's vessels was properly authorized and never did produce it, unasked for. The officer I send is equally qualified, and has been in the boats in boarding most of the vessels, and can give any information relative to my proceeding.

Sir, your humble servant,

W. DUDINGSTON⁴³

Clearly irked by Dudingston's remarks, it was now a battle over who had power, authority, and control over Rhode Island.. Wanton whipped off a hasty response:

To Mr. W. Dudingston, of the Schooner Gaspee.

NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND MARCH 23, 1772

SIR:—Yours of this day I have received, which does not give me that satisfaction I had a right to expect; neither was the bearer of the letter qualified to give me any authentic information respecting the legality of that authority you have presumed to exercise within this Colony. I expect that you do without delay, comply with my request of yesterday, and you may be assured that my utmost exertions shall not be wanting to protect your person from any insult or outrage on coming ashore.

I am your humble servant,

J. WANTON.⁴⁴

Dudingston forwarded copies of the correspondence to Admiral Montagu, commander-in-chief of his Majesty's naval fleet for the region. Wanton must have also sent copies of the interplay to Sessions, which were then, in turn, read by Hopkins. Montagu shot back at Wanton:

To Governor Wanton

BOSTON, 6th April, 1772

SIR: Lieutenant Dudingston, commander of his Majesty's armed schooner and a part of the squadron under my command, has sent me two letters he received from you of such a nature I am at a loss what answer to give them, and ashamed to find they come from one of his Majesty's Governors. He informs me that he waited upon you and showed you the admiralty and my orders for his proceedings, which, agreeable to his instructions, he is to do, that you may be acquainted that he is on that station to protect your province from pirates and to give the trade all the assistance he can, and to endeavor, as much as lays in his power, to protect the revenue officer, and to prevent (if possible) the illicit trade that is carrying on at Rhode Island.

He, sir, has done his duty and behaved like an officer, and it is your duty as a governor, to give him your assistance, and not endeavor to distress the King's officers for strictly complying with

⁴³ Ibid, p 5

⁴⁴ Ibid, p5



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my orders. I shall give them directions, that, in case they receive any molestation in the execution of their duty, they shall send every man so taken in molesting them, to me.

I am also informed, the people of Newport talk of fitting out an armed vessel to rescue any vessel the King's schooner may take carrying on an illicit trade. Let them be cautious what they do; for as sure as they attempt it, and any of them are taken, I will hang them as pirates. I shall report your two insolent letters to my officer, to his Majesty's Secretaries of State, and leave them to determine what right you have to demand a sight of all orders I shall give to all officers of my squadron, and I would advise you not to send your Sheriff on board the King's ship again, on such ridiculous errands. The Captain and Lieutenants have all my orders to give you assistance whenever you demand it, but further you have no business with them, and, be assured, it is not their duty to show you any part of my orders or instructions to them.

I am, sir, your most humble servant.

J. MONTAGU.⁴⁵

Montagu's retort just enflamed the situation with Wanton, who, as an official duly elected by the citizens of Rhode Island, was being treated callously referred to as His Majesty's servient Royal Governor, wrongly assuming he was appointed by the Crown. Wanton flexed his loyalist muscles with his fiery reply:

To Admiral Montagu

RHODE ISLAND, May 8, 1772

SIR:—Your letter dated April the 8th at Boston, I have received. Lieutenant Dudingston has done well in transmitting my letters to you, which I sent him; but I am sorry to be informed there is any thing contained in them that should be construed as a design of giving offence, when no such thing was intended. But Mr. Dudingston has not behaved so well in asserting to you "he waited on me and showed me the admiralty and your orders for his proceedings which agreeable to his instruction he is to do," but in that he has altogether misinformed you, for he, at no time, ever showed me any orders from the admiralty or from you, and positively denied that he derived any authority either from you or the commissioners; therefore, it was altogether out of my power to know, whether he came hither to protect us from pirates, or was a pirate himself. —You say "he has done his duty and behaved like an officer." In this I apprehend you must be mistaken, for I can never believe it is the duty of any officer, to give false information to his superiors. As to your attempt to point out what was my duty as Governor, please to be informed, that I do not receive instructions for the administration of my government, from the King's admiral stationed in America. You seem to assert that I have endeavored to distress the King's officer, for strictly complying with your orders. In this you are altogether mistaken, for I have at all times heretofore, and shall constantly for time to come, afford them all the aid and assistance in my power in the execution of their office. The information you have received "that the people of Newport talked of fitting out an armed vessel to rescue any vessel the King's schooner might take carrying on an

⁴⁵ Ibid, p6



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illicit trade," you may be assured is without foundation, and a scandalous imposition, for upon inquiring into this matter, I cannot find that any such design was ever made, or so much as talked of, and, therefore, I hope you will not hang any of his Majesty's subjects belonging to his colony upon such false information. I am greatly obliged for the promise of transmitting my letters to the Secretary of State. I am, however, a little shocked at your impolite expression made use of upon that occasion; in return for this good office, I shall also transmit your letter to the Secretary of State, and leave to the King and his ministers to determine on which side the charge of insolence lies. As to your advice not to send the Sheriff on board any of your squadron, please to know, that I will send the Sheriff of this Colony at any time, and to any place, within the body of it, as I shall think fit. In the last paragraph of your letter you are pleased flatly to contradict what you wrote in the beginning; for there you assert that Dudingston, by his instructions, was directed to show me the admiralty and your orders to him, and here you assert, that I have no business with them, and assure me that it is not his duty to show me them or any part thereof.

I am, sir, your humble servant,

J. WANTON⁴⁶

In response to Dudingston's escalation to his higher command, Wanton realized he needed to bring the power of his office to bear against Montagu. His only resort was to turn to Sessions as Deputy Governor and the colony's General Assembly as allies. Wanton, who by Sessions' March 21st letter had sided with the strength of the colonial government versus the authority of the Crown, no longer trusted Montagu. Wanton appealed to the legislature in early May by turning over Montagu's provocative documents, to which the Assembly responded favorably:

"Resolved, That his Honor the Governor be requested to transmit a copy of the written letter to Admiral Montagu, and likewise , that his Honor, the Governor, be requested to transmit to the Secretary of State, a narration, containing the proceedings referred to in said letter, together with a copy of the Admiral's letter, as soon as may be, and that he present a copy thereof to this Assembly at the next session [June] of the same."⁴⁷

In private correspondence to Lt. Dudingston, Admiral Montagu expressed concern regarding

... officers in the Navy being arrested here by the Attorney General. I shall be on my guard not to put it in their power to arrest me or any officer under my command in this government.⁴⁸

On May 22nd Lt. Dudingston in a letter to Adm. Montagu, complained about the disrespect laid upon him by Governor Wanton:

Had such an assertion come from a private character, I should hope for reparation for an attempt to wound my reputation as an officer. In my present situation I have only to hope my person will be respected as an officer as much as any Governor, who can make it appear by no better evidence than an old woman and clerk in the naval office, and not in the station of a gentleman, and I do not think either would be base enough to witness so great a falsehood. As to his letter, it cannot be looked upon as his, but the Assembly's, where it was put to the vote to answer your

⁴⁶ Ibid, p 7

⁴⁷ Ibid, p8

⁴⁸ Ibid, p8



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letter or not. They were all for the answer, the Governor alone, for sending it to Lord Hillsborough⁴⁹

The rift between loyalist Governor Wanton and the Royal Navy was now a bleeding wound that would play directly into the hands of Sessions' and Hopkins' strategy.

Dudingston continued harassing shipping in Narragansett Bay, seizing the sloop *Fortune* owned by Nathanael Greene in February, 1773. (Two years later Greene would become Brigadier General of the Rhode Island forces.) Lt. Dudingston continued in his letter to Adm. Montagu:

Mr. Greene is one of the house, the owner of the rum. I could expect no quarter from people of that stamp. On the 20th [of May] the sloop was condemned. I have taken the liberty to enclose my letter to the Commissioners for your perusal, open, as it was the intention of the people here to have the sloop sold in the manner they have been used to, which always falls into the old owners' hands without opposition. I hope soon to have the board's answer to determine her destination.⁵⁰

Nathanael Greene, who also owned a small iron forge on the Pawtuxet River, was highly provoked, and began initiating legal action with his lawyer, James Varnum, who was active in the East Greenwich militia.

In the three-way chess game between the Sons of Liberty, the Loyalist Governor, and the Royalist Admiralty, the stakes were getting higher and the relationships stormier. Wanton leveled his growing frustrations with Montagu upon the Royal Secretary of State in Whitehall to bolster his sagging esteem:

To the Secretary of State, Right Honorable Earl of Hillsborough NEWPORT, Rhode Island,
May 20, 1772.

MY LORD: In conformity to a vote of the General Assembly of this colony, I herewith transmit your Lordship a copy of a letter I received from Admiral Montagu and the answer: They have also requested me to transmit to your Lordship a narrative of all the proceedings referred to in said letter.

As Admiral Montagu has endeavored to fix a stigma on my character and administration as Governor of this Colony, by charging me with attempting to distress the King's officers from strictly complying with his orders, your Lordship will indulge me with giving a short account of my proceedings, by which the ungenerous accusation of Admiral Montagu will, I flatter myself, appear not to have the least foundation in truth.⁵¹

Wanton then presented an extensive documentation of his actions in an effort to exonerate himself and put the blame squarely on the shoulders of Montagu and Dudingston. He first referred to the Sessions letter of March 21st pointing out that the Gaspée had questionable legal authority to board and seize vessels. As Rhode Island's 1663 Royal Charter granted the right of self-determination to the citizens, Wanton questioned the power of "an order from the Lords of the Admiralty" to override the legitimacy of the colony's governance. Incredibly, Wanton continued his attack on Montagu in full view of the public:

"I have done nothing but what was my duty, and that Admiral Montagu's accusation is as groundless as it is illiberal."

⁴⁹ Ibid, p10

⁵⁰ Ibid, p10

⁵¹ Ibid, p 10-11



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"Admiral Montagu says ... that the people of Newport talk of fitting out an armed vessel to rescue any seizures which may be made by the King's vessels, is, your Lordship may be assured, a malicious representation, calculated, by the enemies of our happy constitution, to injure the colony, and bring upon the inhabitants his Majesty's displeasure. I acknowledge it a singular happiness, that this affair is brought before your Lordship, and that your candor and inflexible integrity will fix the charge of insolence where it really belongs. I submit the dispute, with pleasure, from a thorough conviction that your Lordship's opinion thereupon will be consonant to the strictest equity."⁵²

He then leveled his fire on Lt. Dudingston:

"It is now my turn to complain of Wm. Dudingston's illegal proceedings, in carrying a quantity of rum he had seized on board a small boat, lying within the county of Kent, in this colony, to Boston, for trial, notwithstanding by the 8th of his present Majesty, it is expressly declared, that all forfeitures of this kind shall be tried in that colony where the offence is committed."

"I do not believe [Lt. Dudingston] had any right to officiate as a custom house officer within the body of this colony."

To recite every particular of his unwarrantable proceedings, would, my Lord, be tedious. Let it then suffice, that since the *Gaspée* and *Beaver* have been stationed in this colony, the inhabitants have been insulted without any just cause, with the most abusive and contumelious language, and I am sorry that I have reason to say, that the principal officers belonging to said vessels have exercised that power with which they are vested, in a wanton and arbitrary manner, to the very great injury and disturbance of the colony.

Wanton concluded his long letter with the comment that he had tried to uphold the trust of the King's officers in the legal discharge of his duties as Governor, however:

"...if any of them through prejudice, ignorance of their duty or youthful indiscretion, insult the colony, it is my duty, as his Majesty's governor, to remonstrate against it."⁵³

When Sessions and Hopkins learned of this letter, their reaction must have been two-fold:

The facts stated and alluded to in the foregoing letters must have done much toward rendering the situation of Lieut. Dudingston more uncomfortable, and the discharge of his duties less acceptable to the colony.

In one instance, at least, he had violated the express provision of an act of Parliament relating to seizures made for illicit trade. The act required that goods so seized should be adjudicated upon by the court of Vice-Admiralty in the colony where seized. He seized a sloop with twelve hogsheads of rum on board, within the county of Kent, and sent them to Boston for trial. He states that the owner of the rum was a Mr. Greene, a member of the General Assembly from Coventry. If so, it must have been Nathanael Greene, Jr. For this act he had been threatened with a suit, and dared not go on shore for fear of being arrested. Things continued in this state, growing even worse rather than better, until the destruction of the *Gaspée*.

-- Staples, Op Cit, 1845 p12

⁵² Ibid, p11

⁵³ Ibid, p12



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First, that loyalist Governor Wanton was certainly not an “arch-enemy” of Rhode Islanders. The real enemy was Montagu and the Royal Navy. Given that Wanton was attempting to curry favor with the General Assembly, it would behoove the patriots’ cause not to antagonize Wanton, just keep driving the wedge between Wanton and Montagu, using Dudingston as the pawn in the game.

Second, *carpe diem* – *seize the moment*. Wanton’s letter would not be delivered in London for several more weeks. It would not be until July at the earliest before the news of Whitehall’s response would come back across the Atlantic. Given the animosity already shown toward Massachusetts and Rhode Island, they could only expect the worst. Therefore, now is the time to strike.

Author’s Note: In examining “history,” there are two paths one can take in exploring the past:

1. Using the Latin approach – the word *historia* means “narrative of past events, account, tale, story,” or
2. Using the Greek approach – the word *historia* means “a learning or knowing by inquiry; an account of one’s inquiries; knowledge, account, historical account, record, narrative, be witness or expert; give testimony, recount; find out, search deeply, inquire.” For example, Greek historian Plutarch, writing in the Roman era, famously dug deeply into the inner motivations of different leaders to understand what drove them to act in their unique ways.

The first path is actually easier – collect the data and present it in a logical and understandable way.

However, this approach becomes superficial and shallow when presented with information such as that posed by the Gaspée Affair. Essentially the Colonists, particularly Sessions and Hopkins, were also propagandists, leaving a breadcrumb trail of information that was, by its intent, not false, but filled with holes, misleading information, and carefully orchestrated deception.

While the simple acceptance of the written accounts of the Gaspée Affair is the safe route for any historian, it deprives the reader of the Greek approach to history – to understand the deeper meaning and underlying motives of the key players in the action. To accomplish this, the historian viewing events centuries past is placed in a somewhat awkward (and thus vulnerable) position of having to be creative (which more prosaic critics would call “speculative”) to fill in the missing events and underlying motives based on the facts available, along with an interpretation of what the missing pieces must have looked like in order for the denouement of the story to have evolved.

As a “pracademic” (a person with deep experience along with an intense interest in academic excellence), I have the liberty to seek the truth without the shackles and constraints of a “professional” historian who is open to withering criticism if they stray off the narrow path of conservative assessment. Hopefully the reader will find my more liberal interpretation of the missing pieces of history to be revealing.

In June, 1772 the pot had boiled over. Leaders in Providence must have met secretly in advance to concoct a rouse that was carefully orchestrated and executed with exact precision.

What tells us this was the case?

Timing and coordination had to be perfectly synchronized with the tides, the time of night, and all the players had to be bound by an honor code not to reveal who was involved. Cover stories had to be



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schemed in advance to lead the authorities astray. The events afterwards must be construed to be logical and coincidental, even if somewhat strange. There must be a good explanation for everything that would transpire. The architecture for such a deception could only be done by master strategists who had worked together in the past, trusted each other, understood human behavior, could execute a detailed plan, and had prior experience in pulling off events such as this.

The arrow aiming at the main schemers with these qualities points directly to Sessions, Hopkins, and at least two of the Brown brothers – John and Joseph. Others were engaged in the subplots – each had to have a cover story, and understand the big picture so they could ensure a complete picture of the deceptions.

A team of lawyers were engaged to jockey evidence, create false leads, and ensure that the facts were obscured by legal processes and precedents that would entangle the civilian government with the Crown and the Admiralty.

Setting the trap began with using a smaller shallow draft vessel, the *Hannah*, to lure the *Gaspée* onto a sandbar off Warwick near Pawtuxet village. It was a moon tide, meaning the ebbing tide would severely strand the *Gaspée* onto the shoals for an extended period of time, giving the perpetrators ample time to attack the *Gaspée* and do severe damage. The *Hannah* then sailed onward into Providence Harbor to notify the Sons of Liberty.

The historic record indicates drummers paraded through the town alerting everyone of the *Gaspée's* plight. Evidently this was the signal that the trap had been sprung.

A large group of merchants and sea captains, headed by wealthy merchant and entrepreneur John Brown,⁵⁴ along with his brother Joseph Brown and Abraham Whipple, gathered in Providence at Sabin's Tavern or across the street at Fenner's Wharf on South Main Street. Records do not show that Sessions or Hopkins were in the Tavern or on the Wharf, but they lived only a 10-minute walk away.

Whether the patriots were elevated after a flagon of ale and rum is speculative, but we know they were fighting mad. Several prominent lawyers remained at the Tavern to provide a cover story for the raiders.

Getting to the *Gaspée* was the next carefully designed arrangement. Long-boats had to be in position for the six-mile row to the grounded ship. Rowing the boats would have taken about an hour at full speed, however aided by an ebbing tide.

Then, under muffled oar, a number of incensed patriots, led by prominent citizens, rowed out in eight boats to the grounded *Gaspée*, attacked and boarded the ship, shot Dudingston, and then set fire to His Majesty's Schooner. At the time it was the first violent act that preceded the Revolution.⁵⁵

The synchronization of the events the following morning tells a lot about how well the colonists had coordinated their efforts in advance.

Like all the conspirators, Deputy Governor Sessions had an alibi, claiming he:

⁵⁴ John Brown, who Sessions engaged to be Brown University's chief benefactor was not just a merchant, he was an entrepreneur and industrialist. Soon after the discovery of iron ore in Cranston in 1767, Brown partnered with Stephen Hopkins to create an iron-ore smelting furnace in Hope Village in Scituate on the north branch of the Pawtuxet River. The Hope Furnace also had a Forge (foundry) that produced over 1,000 cannon for the Revolution. Excess iron not used by Brown's Forge went into iron billets used for making tools & implements, and iron nails. A network of forges extended down the Pawtuxet River to Narragansett Bay. Nathanael Greene had a Forge on the Southern Branch of the Pawtuxet River where Greene converted Brown's iron billets into anchors and chain for Brown's fleet of ships. Other forges made shovels, axes, iron fittings, and probably musket barrels.

⁵⁵ Some scholars claim the 1769 burning of the revenue sloop *Liberty* in Newport was the first.



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"had only heard a drum beating about the streets, soon after which, the noise of the drum ceased; the remaining part of that night he heard not the least noise or disturbance ... nor receive any the least hint...of any riot, outrage, or tumultuous assembling of people."⁵⁶



Depiction of the Burning of the *Gaspee*, night of June 9-10, 1772

Sessions reported he learned about the *Gaspée* burning the following morning.

Conveniently, Vice Admiralty Court Justice John Andrews, a patriot, was not in his home in Cranston just north of Pawtuxet Village; he was staying with friends in Providence that night. Ironically, as if by clockwork, or more probably by design, Sessions connected with Andrews in the morning and “galloped”⁵⁷ to Pawtuxet Village to investigate and to ensure Dudingston’s wounds, which were extensive, received a doctor’s attention. Dudingston resisted Sessions’ inquiry.

Andrews was along with Sessions, not in his capacity of justice, but instead to arrange salvage rights of the *Gaspée*’s cannon’s, anchors, fittings and any stores that could be recovered. Conveniently the records of the salvage operation disappeared.⁵⁸ Where did the *Gaspée*’s eight cannons go? Probably to a local militia unit or privateer owned by one of the merchants.

The morning after the *Gaspée* burning, Stephen Hopkins, Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, sent a message to Deputy Governor Sessions to attend to the matter immediately. The message, written

⁵⁶ Note how carefully Sessions words this statement, saying as little as possible (the result of his legal training)

⁵⁷ The horses must have trotted, horses can only gallop for a mile or two.

⁵⁸ Steven Park, *The Burning of His Majesty’s Schooner Gaspée*, Journal of the American Revolution, 2016, p20



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after Sessions had already left for Pawtuxet, created the illusion that King George should regard Rhode Island's civil officials as responsible authorities who would never approve such aggression.

Jumping on the opportunity to set the tenor of any subsequent investigation, the next day Sessions wrote to Governor Wanton:

To Governor Wanton

PROVIDENCE, June 11, 1772.

SIR:—A very disagreeable affair has lately happened within this part of the colony. Last Tuesday night, as his Majesty's schooner the *Gaspée* lay aground on the point of land called Namquit, a little below Pawtuxet, she was boarded in a hostile manner, by a number of persons unknown, who, in the attack, dangerously wounded the commander, William Dudingston, by firing a pistol or musket ball through his arm, from whence it passed and entered near his groin, and is now lodged in some part of his body. As soon as they had secured the possession of the vessel, they took out the captain with all the people, the greater part being first pinioned, put them into boats, and put them ashore on the main land near Pawtuxet; after which they put fire to the schooner, which soon reduced her to ashes, down to the water's edge. Upon my receiving the news, I immediately set out for Pawtuxet, attended by some gentlemen from this town, went directly to Capt. Dudingston, told him if he needed any money, surgeons, or a removal of his person to a place more convenient, I would give him all the assistance in my power.

He replied, he wanted no favors with respect to himself, but only desired some care might be taken of his people, that they might be collected together, and sent either to Boston to the Admiral, or else to the Beaver at Newport, which I promised I would take care to do. I then informed him, that the design of my visit, at that time, was not only to afford him any relief his circumstances might require, but also to gain a declaration from his own mouth respecting the attack that had been made on his person and the vessel he commanded, that the perpetrators might be brought to justice. He answered, he would give me no account of the matter; first, because of his indisposition of body, and secondly, because it was his duty to forbear any thing of the nature till he had done it to his commanding officer, at a court martial, to which, if he lived, he must be called, but if he died, he desired it might all die with him. I then asked him if he was willing I should examine any of his officers and people. He said he was willing. I then proceeded to examine a number of them, they all agreeing nearly to the same thing, and herewith convey to your honor, copies of the most material of their declarations.

The dangerous tendency of this transaction is too obvious to pass it over with the least appearance of neglect, and, therefore, doubt not your honor will give it due attention, and prosecute such measures as wisdom and prudence shall dictate.

It is the prevailing opinion of the gentlemen in this quarter, that a proclamation, with a large reward, be issued for the apprehending the persons who have thus offended. You will please consult the gentlemen your way, and in the meantime, I will endeavor to collect the sentiments of the members of the Assembly, and other principal gentlemen by name and send the same to your honor as soon as may be.

I am, with respect, your honor's most humble servant,

DARIUS SESSIONS⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Letter of Darius Sessions to Gov. Joseph Wanton, June 11, 1772, Rhode Island Secretary of State, Archives



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Appended to the Letter were various affidavits from the *Gaspée's* crew stating that none of the men could be identified.

As Dudingston lay convalescing, Nathanael Greene now had the irascible Lieutenant boxed in. Greene ordered the Kent County sheriff, Abraham Whipple to exact his revenge. Dudingston was in too serious condition to drag to jail, so the sheriff issued the warrant with the charge of illegal seizure. Whipple must have experienced a sublime irony, as he was one of the ringleaders of the raiders the night before.

This confrontation put Nathanael Greene in position of prime suspect in the *Gaspée's* demise, but Greene did have a verifiable alibi.

Any inference that the architects of the *Gaspée* Affair were a bunch of drunken louts who, at the spur of the moment under the influence of alcohol, took reckless action would be erroneous. This was just a deceptive fabrication to make the British think it just uncivilized behavior and nothing more.

Given the level of prominent people engaged in the *Gaspée* Affair, this certainly does not look like a spontaneous act of vengeance. The sophistication of the Affair certainly appears, in retrospect, to have been well planned in advance, and the reaction of Sessions and Hopkins certainly seems to have emanated from the minds astute strategists who knew they were going to be chess players in a high-stakes game.

Clearly, given the synchronization of the event, and the cover-up that followed, the burning of the *Gaspée* was the result of a well- designed strategy and perfectly executed tactics. Certainly, many of the elements resemble the 1769 burning of the *Liberty*, including Governor Wanton's offer of a large reward with no "squealers;" with Sessions being Deputy Governor, there was no credible follow-up investigation.

Frictions were so heated between the patriotic colonists and the Crown that colonial leaders realized more conflagrations were almost certain and strong retribution by the King was becoming inevitable.

To demonstrate their presumed allegiance and assuage the Crown, Sessions penned another letter to the outraged Governor Wanton, pleading for him to take immediate action. Clearly, given the events that transpired over the next year, this was all part of creating the illusion Sessions and Hopkins were standing firmly on the grounds of loyalty to the King.

To: The Hon. JOSEPH WANTON, Esq., at Newport. PROVIDENCE, June 12, 1772.

SIR:—Since I wrote you yesterday ... I have received the advice of all the civil authority in this town, as well as an application in writing, signed by a great number of the most reputable inhabitants, who are unanimously of opinion, and earnestly desire that your Honor forthwith issue a proclamation with a proper reward, for the apprehending and bringing to justice any and every person that was concerned in destroying the schooner *Gaspée*, or in assaulting and wounding William Dudingston, the commander of said schooner; and, if your Honor find it expedient to put forth such proclamation, it is requested that a copy thereof may be sent by the bearer, who goes express, and has orders to wait until it is determined whether a proclamation be issued or not; and if it be, to bring it back with him timely, that it may be inserted in our newspaper tomorrow.

Some exceptions are taken at the *Gaspée's* being called his Majesty's schooner, as it is thought by some she, in fact, really was not, and consequently did not deserve that appellation. If the evidence we have in that respect be sufficient to denominate her a King's vessel, she ought to be called so, if



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not, then only without any compliment, the schooner Gaspée, which is submitted to your honor's better knowledge and discretion by Your Honor's most humble servant, DARIUS SESSIONS⁶⁰

P.S.—Dr. Sterling, who attends Capt. Dudingston, informed us yesterday that he was in a fair way to recover of his wounds.

The Governor responded that same day with the issuance of proclamation demanding justice along with a reward to find the culprits:

...to discover and apprehend the persons guilty of the atrocious crime, that they may be brought to punishment.... I do hereby offer the reward of one hundred pounds, sterling money of Great Britain, to any person or persons, who shall discover the perpetrators of the said villainy, to be paid immediately upon the conviction of any one or more of them.

Upon Admiral Montagu's learning of the incident, he posted a curt letter to Governor Wanton reflective of their adversarial and antagonistic relationship:

To: His Excellency GOV. WANTON.

BOSTON, 11th June, 1772.

SIR: Enclosed I transmit your Excellency a deposition taken before me of the piratical proceedings of the people of Providence in Rhode Island government, by attacking his Majesty's schooner with an armed force, wounding her commander in a dangerous manner, and then setting her on fire. I am to request your Excellency will use such methods as you shall think proper for apprehending and bringing the offenders to justice. I am now dispatching a sloop to England with the account I enclose to you, and am your Excellency's most obedient humble servant,

J. MONTAGU.

Wanton responded quickly, the next day informing Montagu:

Upon the first information of this unhappy affair, which gives me, and every friend to government, the highest concern, I called together all the members of the General Assembly that I could conveniently, who unanimously advised me to publish the proclamation of which I enclose you a copy.

I have not, as yet, been able to collect all the circumstances of this daring insult upon authority, so as to give you a perfect idea of it ... You may rely upon the utmost and continued exertions of the officers of this Colony to detect and bring to justice the perpetrators of this violent outrage ...

To protect his position, Wanton knew he had better inform the Lord Secretary Hillsborough in London.

NEWPORT, Rhode Island, June 16, 1772.

MY LORD: I had the honor to write your Lordship on the 20th inst. I am now reduced to the necessity of addressing your Lordship upon a most disagreeable subject; the destruction of the schooner Gaspée, under the command of Lieutenant W. Dudingston, by persons unknown.

Wanton went on, at length to describe the events, and continued:

I immediately convened such of his Majesty's council and the house of deputies as could be seasonably notified, and laid before them the proceedings of the deputy governor [Sessions], which

⁶⁰ State Archives, Op Cit (Note: in his reference to the schooner Gaspée, Sessions is questioning if the appellation "HMS" (meaning His Majesty's Ship) has been properly conferred on the ship by a Royal Commissioning.



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they highly approved of, and unanimously recommended my issuing a proclamation, with a reward of £100 sterling for the discovery of any of the persons concerned in this violent insult upon government, which I cheerfully complied with, and sent them into the several towns in this Colony.

This transaction gives me the utmost uneasiness, and your Lordship may be assured, that the utmost vigilance of the civil authority will not be wanting to bring the perpetrators to exemplary and condign punishment; and injustice to the inhabitants of the Colony, I must not omit mentioning, that the conduct of those who committed this outrage is, by them, universally condemned.

In concluding his letter to the Crown, Wanton took one more sideswipe at Montagu and Dudingston's appalling behavior, and, in such manner, basically blamed them for the burning of the *Gaspée* – in essence: “they got what they deserved.” Sessions and Hopkins must have relished the fear, uncertainty, doubt, distrust, and discord between Wanton and Montagu.

In my last, I informed your Lordship, that the inhabitants had been insulted without any just cause, and I am extremely sorry that I have still reason to say, that the trade of this Colony is interrupted in a most unprecedented and oppressive manner, without contributing, in the least, to the service of the revenue. Inward bound vessels have been detained several days without the least colorable pretext, and then delivered up. One from South Kingstown, for having on board a small quantity of tobacco of the growth of this Colony, which the owner was transporting to Newport for a market; another for having only three or four dozen wine laid in by the Captain for sea stores. The small freight boats plying between the several towns with the produce of the Colony, are, by the severity of these officers, subjected to great inconvenience, which very sensibly affects the whole Colony, particularly the town of Newport, its metropolis, whose inhabitants are principally supplied with the necessities of life by water, and the obstructions they now experience have contributed not a little to enhance the price of fuel and provisions, to the great disadvantage of the town; and in my humble opinion, if such measures are permitted to be pursued, the Colony will ere long be involved in the deepest calamity.

These, my Lord, are serious and important truths; and as your Lordship, from your thorough knowledge of the Colony, must be perfectly acquainted with the nature and extent of our trade, the profits of which ultimately centering in Great Britain, for the purchase of her manufactures, I have no room to doubt of your Lordship's interposition in behalf of this Colony, that all cause of complaint against any of the King's officers stationed here may be removed, and the inhabitants treated with that respect which is due to the subjects of his Britannic Majesty.

As a proof, my Lord, that the trade of this Colony stands upon as fair and legal a footing as the trade of any part of his Majesty's dominions, out of two hundred sail of vessels which have entered this port since the first day of March last, only two in that number have been prosecuted and condemned for breach of acts of trade, one of which belongs to the Massachusetts Bay, notwithstanding they have been searched and rummaged with the greatest severity. These two vessels, although seized and condemned here, were sent by Capt. Linzee, of the *Beaver*, and Lieutenant Dudingston, to Boston, for sale, in direct opposition to the orders of the court of Vice



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Admiralty within this Colony, and the marshal of said court prevented by force from libelling one of these vessels for payment of the mariners' wages.

These, my Lord, are but a few of the many grievances which the people of this Colony have been for months past harassed and perplexed with; but as the General Assembly will be convened, I make no doubt they will order a more particular remonstrance to be made.⁶¹

The last sentence is intriguing. Wanton was expecting the General Assembly to reinforce his complaints with a poignant list of complaints, thus empowering Sessions and Hopkins to move expediently. Seemingly Wanton would much rather be rid of Montagu and let mischievous perpetrators slip by.

Montagu, on the other hand, was out for blood. His promotion in the Naval ranks was far more dependent upon on capture and conviction, and the salacious headlines crediting him as victor.

His Excellency GOV. WANTON.

BOSTON, 8th July, 1772.

SIR:... I am to beg your Excellency will get the people mentioned in the enclosed account apprehended, that they may be examined before you, in the presence of Lieutenant Dudingston, who, I dare say, will remember the person of the surgeon that dressed his wounds, and may possibly recollect the persons of Potter and Brown, who appear to me to have been the ringleaders in destroying his Majesty's schooner. As this affair was transacted in your Excellency's government, I must totally rely on you to have these people secured and (if there is sufficient proof against them) brought to justice. I doubt not but that you will exert yourself as much as in your power, and I flatter myself, that, with your assistance, the King will have justice done him, and the offenders brought to punishment, which I hope will in future prevent the King's officers from being upon all occasions insulted, and check the lawless and piratical behavior of the people of Rhode Island ... I shall be glad your Excellency ... will use every proper method to get them apprehended, that they may be tried ...

J. MONTAGU.

King George's legal opinion held the *Gaspée* raid was grand treason, and the deliberate shooting of the English ship captain an act of war.⁶² King George upped Wanton's reward to the stately sum of £1000 for

⁶¹ Staples, Op Cit, p29

⁶² From www.bucklinsociety.net



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the arrest and conviction of the leaders of the raid or the man who shot the ship's captain and £500 each of any other of the participants, with a full pardon to anyone who would expose the others.

A Royal Commission was appointed to investigate the matter and to discover any perpetrators, with the intent of sending any indicted persons directly to England for trial, an idea illegal and abhorrent to reason and justice, and exactly the type of injustice that enraged colonial leaders. Loyalist Massachusetts Governor Hutchinson, added more pressure,

demanding the Crown rescind Rhode Island's Royal Charter (which would probably make Rhode Island a ward of Massachusetts and under military rule)

However, Darius Sessions was not disposed to cooperate with the Crown that had harassed his colony's shipping and illegally threatened extradition of citizens. Together with his friend, neighbor, and former governor, Stephen Hopkins, who was then serving as Chief Justice of the Court, they countered the Royal Commission by concocting a plan to vex and confound attempts to apprehend and punish the *Gaspée* perpetrators.⁶³

⁶³ In the letter dated 1845 by Thomas Sessions, he states his father: "was Lieutenant Governor and *acting Governor* [italics added] of Rhode Island for many years," implying the impotence of Governor Wanton at the time.



Keeping the Conspiracy to Burn the Gaspée a Secret

It's estimated that over 100 men were involved in some way in the *Gaspée* burning, a significant proportion of the adult male population of Providence at the time.

How did the colonists block the Crown from learning the names of the conspirators? The Governor first pledged a reward of £100, a hefty sum in those days. Then the King upped the ante to £1,000, enough to buy a beautiful house at the time. How did the network of patriots stay so tight – not a crack in their loyalty? The network of revolutionaries was massive. For Darius Sessions and Stephen Hopkins to prevent the Crown from arresting and extraditing the *Gaspée* rogues, a special set of conditions must prevail:

The key to understanding how the secret was kept has to do with “trust” and “fidelity.” The circle of conspirators had to be extremely tight and loyal, pledged to both secrecy and higher values that would enable them to risk their lives and wealth in the face of British force and fury.

Woven throughout this history is a story that bespeaks to the answer – the Free Masons. (see: <http://www.rimasons.org/grand-lodge>) In fact, the Free Masons of Providence actually lay claim to many of the events during the regime of Deputy Governor Sessions (who was likely also a Free Mason, however the record is not clear, but his son Thomas was a Free Mason), including:

- **July 19, 1769** Free Mason Craftsmen were responsible for the destruction of the British revenue sloop *Liberty* at Newport, this being the first overt act of violence offered to the British authorities in America.
- **June 10, 1772** the British revenue schooner *Gaspée* was burned in Narragansett Bay, by a band of citizens, nearly all members of St. Johns Masonic Lodge of Providence, disguised as Indians, under the leadership of Capt. Abraham Whipple, causing the first blood-shed of the Revolution.
- **March 2, 1775** practically the same active colonists burned tea in Market Square, Providence; the town crier urged every citizen to bring and cast into the fire the “useless herb.”
- **June 15, 1775** the first naval engagement of the Revolution occurred, between the Colonial sloop commanded by Capt. Abraham Whipple and a tender of the British frigate *HMS Rose*; in which the tender was chased onto the Conanicut (Jamestown) shore and captured. In recognition of this patriotic act Capt. Whipple was made Commodore of the Rhode Island Navy, which at that time was of considerable account, and later made Admiral by Congress.
- **June 22, 1775** Masonic Brother Nathanael Greene was chosen Brigadier-General of the Rhode Island Army and on August 9, 1776 made a Major general by Congress, second in command to Washington.
- **April 5, 1776** General George Washington visited Providence for the first time and was loyally received by the Free Masons.
- **July 9, 1777** the capture of the British General Prescott by Col. William Barton (member of St. Johns Lodge, Providence) on the Island of Rhode Island was considered a most daring act.

To understand more of the Masonic role, see **Washington's 1790 Visit to Rhode Island** at the end of this story. Continually and steadfastly the Masons worked undercover as a team to undermine British authority. Many were Sons of Liberty and members of the secret Committees of Correspondence networking the patriotic orchestrators together from Massachusetts to Georgia.

Author's Note: This is not just another Illuminati Conspiracy Story and this author is not a Masonic member.



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Samuel Adams becomes Ally and Trusted Strategist



Governor Joseph Wanton

King George signed a decree establishing an investigative commission to bring the Gaspée perpetrators to justice. It appointed the Governor Wanton, James Horsmanden, Chief Justice of New York; Frederick Smythe, Chief Justice of New Jersey; Peter Oliver of Massachusetts and Robert Auchmuty, Judge of the Boston Vice Admiralty Court to unearth all causes of the event, along with details of their span of authority and scope of responsibilities.

Not realized by the King was that the commissioners would need local administrative assistance to conduct their inquiries – a role that Sessions and Hopkins in their positions as Deputy Governor and Chief Justice were happy to fulfill.

A ship arrived in December bearing notice of the appointments of the Commissioners. Montagu was undoubtedly pleased and sent off a letter to Governor Wanton:

To: Gov. WANTON.

BOSTON, 11th December, 1772.

SIR: Last night an express arrived with despatches from the Right Honorable my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, by which came under cover to me, the packet I send to you herewith. ... In my despatches from their Lordships I am directed to repair to Rhode Island to assist you, and the rest of the gentlemen in the commission, which I shall do as soon as you inform me that you are ready, with the commissioners, to proceed to business and deliver the commission, and the King's instructions to you ... Whenever you will favor me with your commands, you will find me ready to co-operate with you in every thing for the King's service.

I must beg leave to recommend to you, as first in the commission, to appoint a time for the first meeting, and to give notice to the other gentlemen named in the commission and me, and that you will make the time as short as you can consistent with proper notice, for particular reasons.

J. MONTAGU.

Wanton wasted no time in responding, acknowledging his receipt of the King's orders, and then sent letters to the other commissioners inviting their engagement. He assured Montagu that the King's Proclamation would be printed and distributed throughout the colony.

Sessions and Hopkins met to discuss how to proceed. Their subterfuge strategy aimed at subtly steering the Royal Commission, feeding it fuzzy testimony, thus confusing, complicating, and frustrating.

Positioning the impotent but loyal Governor Joseph Wanton as the head of the investigation was the first step. The plan, initiated by a letter to Samuel Adams on Christmas Day, 1772 was conceived jointly by the legal minds of Adams, Hopkins, and Sessions. As the plan unfolded, it triggered a series of events that were to change the course of history of the colonies and the destiny of the nation.



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The *Gaspée* Affair had sparked the oratory of Baptist minister John Allen in Boston on December 2nd, when he preached a sermon and published a pamphlet, *the Beauties of Liberty; or the Essential Rights of Americans*⁶⁴, in which he excoriated Lord Dartmouth, the King's Secretary of State for the Colonies, for his persecution of those who burned the *Gaspée* and for taking away one's birthright of freedom and liberty, chastising the King as a "Nero TYRANT" for his actions.

Certainly, Baptists ministers in nearby Providence, including Rev. Manning at Rhode Island College, were aware of his message, which staked out the Christian and moral rational foundation for resistance. Most likely the *Beauties of Liberty-Essential Rights of Americans* was quickly passed along to fellow Sons of Liberty in Providence and Newport as well.

Sam Adams' keen legal mind was engaged and enflamed; he recognized endangerment. On the heels of Allen's treatise, Adams penned a letter under the pseudonym *Americanus*⁶⁵ just before Christmas, published in Boston, then the *Newport Mercury* on December 21 and the *Providence Gazette* on the 26th.



Reverend James Manning

To be, or not to be, that's the question; whether our unalienable rights and privileges are any longer worth contending for, is now to be determined. Permit me, my countrymen, to beseech you to attend to your alarming situation.

But behold, an evil infinitely worse, in its consequences, than all the revenue laws which have been passed from the reign of Charles the First, to this time, now threatens this distressed, piratically plundered country.

A court of inquisition, more horrid than that of Spain or Portugal, in established within this colony, to inquire into the circumstances of destroying the *Gaspée* schooner; and the persons who are the commissioners of this new-fangled court, are vested with most exorbitant and unconstitutional power. They are directed to summon witnesses, apprehend persons not only impeached, but even suspected! and them, and every of them, to deliver them to Admiral Montagu, who is ordered to have a ship in readiness to carry them to England, where they are to be tried.

This [is an] alarming star-chamber inquisition.....Is there an American, in whose breast there glows the smallest spark of public virtue, but who must be fired with indignation and resentment, against a measure so replete with the ruin of our free constitution? To be tried by one's peers, is the greatest privilege a subject can wish for; and so excellent is our constitution, that no subject shall be tried, but by his peers.

[The] establishment is the grand barrier of our lives, liberties and estates; and whoever attempts to alter or invade this fundamental principle, by which the liberties of the people have been secured from time immemorial, is a declared enemy to the welfare and happiness of the King and state ... as are suspected of being guilty of a crime, are ordered to be transported to Great Britain for trial, in open violation of Magna Carta.

⁶⁴ <http://americainclass.org/sources/makingrevolution/crisis/text6/allenororationbeauties.pdf>

⁶⁵ According to Rory Raven, author of *Burning the Gaspee: Revolution in Rhode Island*, 2012, p 89 "It should be noted that some historians suspect Sam Adams was *Americanus*, while others think it was Stephen Hopkins, himself a sharp critic of the British authorities and one of the men who joined Sessions in seeking Adams' advice." Adams used the name *Junius Americanus* as early as 1770, and the fiery style of the letter is certainly similar to Adams; certainly his reference to the Magna Carta is typical of his legal basis for objecting to the Crown's violation of rights. Others in the network of the Committees of Correspondence had also used the name *Americanus*, but were not likely the author.



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Thus are we robbed of our birth-rights ... it is your indispensable duty to stand forth in the glorious cause of freedom, the dearest of all your earthly enjoyments; and, with a truly Roman spirit of liberty, either prevent the fastening of the infernal chains now forging for you, and your posterity, or nobly perish in the attempt.

To live a life of rational beings, is to live free; to live a life of slaves is to die by inches. Ten thousand deaths by the halter, or the axe, are infinitely preferable to a miserable life of slavery in chains, under a yoke of worse than Egyptian tyrants, whose avarice nothing less than your whole substance and income, will satisfy; and who, if they can't extort that, will glory in making a sacrifice of you and your posterity, to gratify their master the devil, who is a tyrant, and the father of tyrants and of liars.

AMERICANUS.

No doubt Sessions and Hopkins had seen the powerful letter from *Americanus* before Christmas. Seeking deeper legal justification to buttress the moral and spiritual foundation laid out by Rev. Allen, Sessions conferred with his friend, nearby neighbor, and fellow patriot, Justice Stephen Hopkins.

Then, in a letter dated Christmas Day, 1772, Sessions appealed to “several gentlemen in North America” (apparently referring to members of the emerging “Committees of Correspondence”) including Boston’s preeminent revolutionary strategist, Samuel Adams, for insight.

PROVIDENCE

December 25, 1772

Sir:

We doubt not you have before this heard of the difficulties this Colony labors under, on account of the destruction of the *Gaspée*, they being such as becomes the attention of the Colonies in general (though immediately to be executed on this only).

As they affect in the tenderest point the liberties, lives, and properties of all America, we are induced to address you upon the occasion, whom we consider as a principal in the assertion and defence of those rightful and natural blessings; and in order to give you the most authentic intelligence into these matters, we shall recite the most material paragraphs of a letter from the Earl of Dartmouth to the Governor of this Province, dated Whitehall, Sept. 4th, 1772. [Then follows the extract from the Secretary's letter.]

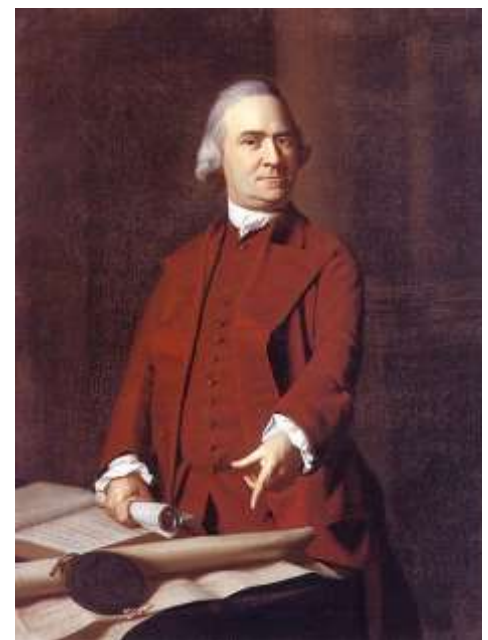
You will consider how natural it is for those who are oppressed, and in the greatest danger of being totally crushed, to look around every way for assistance and advice. This has occasioned the present troubles we give you.

We therefore ask that you would seriously consider of this whole matter, and consult such of your friends and acquaintances as you may think fit upon it, and give us your opinion in what manner this Colony had best behave in this critical situation, and how the shock that is coming upon us may be best evaded or sustained. We beg you, answer as soon as may be, especially before the 11th of January, the time of the sitting of the General Assembly.

Darius Sessions

Stephen Hopkins John Cole⁶⁶

Moses Brown



Samuel Adams by John Singleton Copley

⁶⁶ John Cole’s grandson would later marry Darius Sessions’ granddaughter, who later owned the Washington chair.



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Adams acknowledged the urgency, responding with three letters to Darius Sessions over the course of the next weeks, the first dated just three days later.⁶⁷

BOSTON

December 28, 1772

SIR

This day I had the Honor of receiving a Letter signed by yourself The Subject is weightya Matter which in my Opinion may involve the Fate of America ...Thus [it] seems to me to be obvious at first View, that the whole Act of Parliament ... is against the first Principles of Government and the English Constitution Magna Carta & many other Acts of Parliament declaratory of the Rights of the Subject. contrary to that Law which even so long ago was held to be *the old* Law of the Land.....It appears to me probable that the Administration has a design to get your Charter vacated.

The Execution of so extraordinary a Commission, unknown in your Charter and abhorrent to the principles of every free Government, wherein Persons are appointed to enquire into Offences committed against a Law of another Legislature, with the Power of transporting the persons they shall suspect beyond the Seas to be tried, would essentially change your Constitution; and a Silence under such a Change would be construed a Submission to it.

At the same time it must be considered that an open declaration of the Assembly against the Appointment & order of the King, in which he is supported by an Act of the British Parliament, would be construed by the Law Servants of the Crown & other ministers such a Defiance of the Royal Authority....⁶⁸

I remain Sir Your assured friend & humble servant

Samuel Adams

Adams advised Sessions that Rhode Island must remain defiant and not give in to illegitimate actions by the Crown, while making every attempt to stall by appealing the creation of the commission.

But he clearly cautioned walking a fine line that would not be “*construed as defiance*,” nor arrogant obstruction. That same day, Adams was very engaged writing two more poignant letters to the Committees of Correspondence of Boston and Cambridge, his cousin, John Adams was also emotionally and intellectually charged and revitalized, writing in his diary about the Gaspée Affair and Admiral Montagu on 29 December:

Heard many Anecdotes from a young Gentleman in my Office of Admiral Montagu's Manners. A Coachman, a Jack Tar before the Mast, would be ashamed – nay a Porter, a Shew Black or Chimney Sweeper would be ashamed of the coarse, low, vulgar, Dialect of this Admiral Sea Officer, tho a rear Admiral of the Blue, and tho a Second Son of a genteel if not a noble Family in England. An American Freeholder, living in a log House 20 feet Square, without a Chimney in it, is a well-bred Gentleman Man, a polite accomplished Person, a fine Gentleman, in Comparison of this Beast of Prey.

This is not the Language of Prejudice, for I have none against him, but of Truth. His brutal, hoggish Manners are a Disgrace to the Royal Navy, and to the Kings Service.

His Lady is very much disliked they say in general. She is very full of her Remarks at the Assembly and Concert. As to the Admiral his continual Language is cursing and



John Adams

Regarding the Gaspee Trials:
“I wonder how your Colony sleeps so soundly in a whole skin, when her sisters are so worried and tormented!”

⁶⁷ Given the rapidity of responses between Sessions & Adams, this correspondence must have been delivered by courier.

⁶⁸ Letters from Samuel Adams to Darius Sessions, Dec. 28, 1772 & Jan 2, 1773.



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damning and God damning, "my wives d-d A-se is so broad that she and I can't sit in a Chariot together" – this is the Nature of the Beast and the common Language of the Man. Admiral Montagu's Conversation by all I can learn of it, is exactly like Otis's when he is both mad and drunk.

The high Commission Court, the Star Chamber Court, the Court of Inquisition, for the Tryal of the Burners of the Gaspée, at Rhode Island, are the present Topick of Conversation. The Governor of that Colony, has communicated to the assembly a Letter from the Earl of Dartmouth. The Colony are in great Distress, and have applied to their Neighbours for Advice, how to evade or to sustain the Shock.

John Adams wasn't finished with his "sturm und drang." On 31 December he wrote a letter complaining

The Prospect before me, however, is very gloomy. My Country is in deep Distress, and has very little Ground of Hope, that She will soon, if ever get out of it. The System of a mean, and a merciless Administration, is gaining Ground upon our Patriots every Day. The honour Flower of our Genius, the Ornaments of the Province, have fallen, melancholy Sacrifices, to the heart piercing Anxieties, which the Measures of Administration have occasioned. A Mayhew, a Thatcher, an Otis to name [no] more, have fallen, the two first by Death and the last by a Misfortune still much worse, Victims to the Enemies of their Country. The Body of the People seem to be worn out, by struggling, and Venality, Servility and Prostitution, eat and spread like a Cancer. Every young rising Genius, in this Country, is in a situation much worse than Hercules ... a Path beset with Serpents, and Beasts of Prey, as well as Thorns and Briars, Precipices of Rocks over him, a Gulf yawning beneath, and the Sword of Damocles [over] his Head.

Later that night, Adams had dinner and his pressure cooker blew its lid about the *Gaspée Affair*.

This Evening ... I found that my constitutional or habitual Infirmities have not entirely forsaken me ... an English Gentleman ... in Conversation about the high Commissioned Court for enquiring after the Burners of the Gaspée at Providence, I found the old Warmth, Heat, Violence, Acrimony, Bitterness, Sharpness of my Temper, and Expression, was not departed. I said there was no more justice left in Britain than there was in Hell – That I wished for War, and ... avowed a thorough Dissaffection to that Country – wished that any Thing might happen to them, and that as the Clergy prayed of our Enemies in Time of War, that they might be brought to reason or to ruin.⁶⁹

Evidently Boston was abuzz and quite alarmed about the consequences of the Gaspée.

Author's Note: the following letter from Samuel Adams to Darius Sessions is abridged for brevity. (The original letter is 1500 words and reprinted in its entirety in the Appendix)

MUCH RESPECTED GENTLEMEN

...refute the insidious misrepresentation so industriously propagated on both sides of the Atlantic that the people have not Virtue enough to resist Efforts made to enslave them.... It shall be our constant Endeavor to collect and communicate to our esteemed fellow Countrymen every Interesting Information we can procure in pursuance thereof we take the Liberty to enclose a material Extract of a Letter from the Right Honorable the Earl of Dartmouth to his Honor the Governor of Rhode Island Dated White Hall Sept 7, 1772 which we have good reason to assure you is genuine.

⁶⁹ John Adams diary pp 8-10 December 1772, Massachusetts Historical Society
www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=D19



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.....and then to Plymouth imploring....

..... In pursuance of our Instruction from this Town to communicate any new Infractions of our Rights & Liberties we enclose an Extract of a Letter from Lord Dartmouth to the Governor of Rhode Island & shall take the earliest Opportunity to advise you of everything Important that may occur to us.

In his second letter to Darius Sessions, dated several days later on January 2nd, 1773, Sam Adams expressed his deepest concern on the enormity of the issues at hand, and additionally laid out a detailed strategic plan to subvert the King. The letter is so significant because the consequences sets the stage for the forthcoming Revolution, thus it is worthwhile to grasp the magnitude of Adams' response, which five days earlier had alluded to Sessions was a *"Matter which in my Opinion may involve the Fate of America:"*⁷⁰

BOSTON, January 2, 1773

Sir,

The Question proposed was in what manner your Colony had best behave in this critical Situation & how the Shock that is coming upon it may be best evaded or sustained.

It appears to me probable that the Administration has a design to get your Charter vacated.

The Execution of so extraordinary a Commission, ... wherein Persons are appointed to enquire into Offences committed against a Law of *another* Legislature, with the Power of transporting the persons they shall suspect beyond the Seas to be tryed, would essentially change your Constitution and a Silence under such a Change would be construed a Submission to it...

Should your Governor refuse to call the Commissioners together, or when called together, the civil magistrates refuse to take measures for arresting & committing to Custody such persons as upon Information made shall be charged with being concerned in burning the *Gaspee*, or if they should issue their precepts for that purpose the Officers should refuse to execute them, the Event would be perhaps the same as in the Case of an open Declaration ... would be urged for the Necessity of an Alteration in order to support the King's Authority in the Colony.

..... since the Constitution is already destined to suffer unavoidable Dissolution... 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 this enormous Claim of power would be made a Precedent for all the rest; they ought indeed to consider deeply their Interest in the Struggle of a single Colony & their Duty to afford her all practicable Aid. This last is a Consideration which I shall not fail to mention to my particular friends when our Assembly shall sit the next Week.⁷¹

Should the Commissioners call in the Aid of troops....it would be impossible for me to say **what might be the Consequence; Perhaps a most violent political Earthquake through the whole British Empire, if not its total Destruction. I have long feared that this unhappy Contest**

⁷⁰ see *The Uses of Law and the Gaspee Affair* by Neil L. York, published in RI History 1992, V50N1, pp 3-21 for an excellent treatise on the legal maneuvering that occurred in the aftermath of this incident. Also see York, Neil L.; *Gaspee Affair as Conspiracy*, published in RI History 1973, V32N4, pp 107-122

⁷¹ On January 8th, 1773, Adams was appointed by the Massachusetts Assembly to address these issues to Governor Hutchinson. Their report triggered a series of events, one of which was the famed Boston Tea Party later that year.



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between Britain & America will end in Rivers of Blood. Some such provocation as is now offered to Rhode Island will in all probability be the immediate Occasion of it.

If Governor Wanton, who is first named, the rest of the Commissioners should meet upon the Business of their Commission, ...they would do well calmly to consider and how far also they would be answerable for the fatal Effects that might follow such a forwardness all the world and Posterity will judge: For such an Event as this will assuredly go down to future Ages in the pages of History & the Colony & all concerned in it will be characterized by the part they shall act in the Tragedy.

Upon the whole it is my humble Opinion that the grand Purpose of Administration is either to intimidate the Colony into a Compliance with a Measure destructive of the freedom of their Constitution or to provoke them to such a Step as shall give a pretext for the Vacation of their Charter.

Thus I have freely given my Sentiments upon the Question proposed which I should not have ventured to do had it not been requested.....

I hope the Assembly of Rhode Island will, in their Conduct, exhibit an Example of true Wisdom Fortitude & Perseverance

I remain Sir Your assured friend & humble servant

Samuel Adams

Adams statements in his letters must not be overlooked, for they clearly lay out the urgency and importance of Sessions' and Hopkins' strategic handling of the next stage of the Commissioner' Inquiry, stating the magnitude of the burden placed on Rhode Island's shoulders:

"The Subject is weightya Matter which ... may involve the Fate of America...

"Should the Commissioners call in the Aid of troops....it would be impossible for me to say what might be the Consequence; Perhaps a most violent political Earthquake through the whole British Empire, if not its total Destruction. I have long feared that this unhappy Contest between Britain & America will end in Rivers of Blood. Some such provocation as is now offered to Rhode Island will in all probability be the immediate Occasion of it. ...

"The Commissioners should meet upon the Business of their Commission, ... calmly to consider and how far also they would be answerable for the fatal Effects that might follow such a forwardness all the world and Posterity will judge...

For such an Event as this will assuredly go down to future Ages in the pages of History & the Colony & all concerned in it will be characterized by the part they shall act in the Tragedy."



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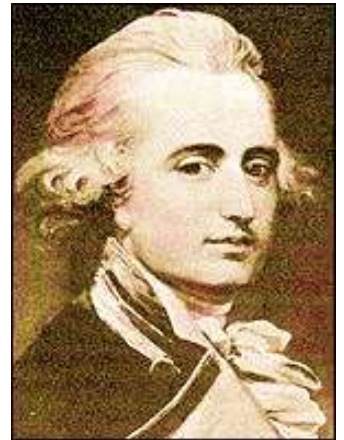
Avoiding and Bypassing the Investigation

Time was of the essence. Several of the Commissioners were destined to arrive in Newport in the first week of January. The first several days were insignificant; administrative procedures and accepting of existing transmission letters filled their time.

On Thursday, January 7, 1773, the minutes of the meeting indicate Sessions and Hopkins together:

Governor Wanton informed the commissioners that Mr. Sessions, Deputy Governor of the Colony, was in Newport and ready to attend the commissioners to give them an account of the steps he had taken in order to discover the persons who destroyed his Majesty's schooner Gaspée. A message was sent to Mr. Sessions requesting his attendance, who accordingly came before the commissioners and was by them requested to give in writing, upon oath, a full and particular account of the measures he had taken in order to the discovery of the persons who perpetrated the aforesaid crime, which he assured the commissioners he would do without loss of time.

Stephen Hopkins, Esq., Chief Justice of said Colony, also appeared before the commissioners and assured them he was ready and willing to aid and assist the commissioners in the exercise of the power and authority with which they are invested for discovering the persons who destroyed the Gaspée schooner, &c. The commissioners then requested Mr. Hopkins to give them in writing a full and particular account of all the proceedings had and done by him for discovering and bringing to justice the persons who committed the aforesaid offence, and also what knowledge or information he had obtained of the assembling, arming, and leading on the persons who perpetrated the same, which he also promised to do without loss of time.⁷²



Admiral Montagu

Sessions' testimony politely and successfully defused them. He told his carefully constructed story. He and Hopkins gently but firmly flexed their jurisdictional muscles, making it clear any arrests and convictions would be under the authority of Rhode Island's sheriffs, magistrates, and courts. Sessions and Hopkins firmly drove this point at the next meeting of the General Assembly. Hopkins reaffirmed his court would ensure anyone tried for the Gaspée affair would be native Rhode Islanders.

The Commissioners apparently did not push back by claiming they had superior jurisdiction. Montagu was not present at the hearings to demand his dominion.

Ironically, Montagu had not arrived in Newport for the commencement of the hearings. The following day the Commissioners decided to defer the examination of any of the witnesses until Montagu's arrival.

In a haughty response to the Commissioners, Montagu claimed other duties had delayed him, and the weather would not allow him to sail from Boston to Newport. Certainly, this must have annoyed the other

⁷² Staples, Op Cit p49



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Commissioners, many of whom travelled a far longer distance in mid-winter conditions. By now they must have surmised that the arrogant Montagu wanted to arrive in Newport Harbor to grandiose pomp and ceremony with a twenty-one-gun salute, rather than travel the distance overland by carriage. He demanded:

... if any person or persons should be arrested for the crime set forth in your commission, I am the only person to whom such prisoners can regularly be delivered for safe custody ... [I] refer you to the sixth paragraph of my Lord Dartmouth's letter to Governor Wanton, where you will see, "The prisoners are to be delivered to the care and custody of Rear Admiral Montagu, or the commander-in-chief in North America for the time being, or to such officer as he shall appoint to receive them."

By my instructions from the Lords of the Admiralty, I am directed to repair to Rhode Island as soon as conveniently may be with such of his Majesty's ships and vessels under my command as I shall judge proper, and give all the aid and assistance in my power for discovering and bringing to justice the offenders. The winter season is so far advanced as prevents my complying with that part of my orders, as it is very improper to move so large a ship as the *Captain* at this time of the year, and without her it is impossible for me to carry on the service.⁷³

Lt. General Gage, who commanded British forces in North America (and the next year played a role in drafting the Intolerable Coercive Acts and became Massachusetts' Military Governor) correctly speculated

"there will be no riots or insurrections, and I think there will not, but that more Subtle measures will be fallen upon to defeat the Enquiry."⁷⁴

As of January 16th, Montagu had still not arrived in Newport. He wrote the commissioners, essentially explaining that he really would rather that the Commission meet in the warmer seasons. What's more, he had the audacity to inform the Commissioners he would only be available for a short time:

LIZZARD, 16th January, 1773.

GENTLEMEN: .. [please be informed] of the improbability of my remaining here, to assist the commissioners, until I can come in a proper manner, at a proper season of the year ... I propose returning to Boston on Wednesday next, and shall, at a convenient time of the year repair to this place again agreeable to my instructions from their Lordships.⁷⁵

This was sure to anger the other Commissioners, not just Wanton, but those Chief Justices that had gone out of their way to commence the inquiry on time, and had suffered the burdens of abandoning their homes and duties in other colonies. Knowing that Montagu was out for revenge, seeking a trial of the perpetrators in London, then see them hang, and that convictions would surely get him promoted to a higher rank, his behavior was erratic at best, and polarizing at worst. This is the same man who was emphatic about assuring compliance to authority, and intent to "send to England for trial and execution" all the culprits responsible for the burning of the *Gaspée*.

⁷³ Ibid, p 51

⁷⁴ Lt. General Thomas Gage to Lord Barrington, Jan 6th, 1773, New York, Carter, *Correspondence of Thomas Gage*, Vol II, 631

⁷⁵ Ibid, p 52



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Up until this point, Montagu had insisted personally to oversee the Royal Commission in Newport.

The Commissioners, displeased with Montagu's arrogance, shot back a short message asserting their authority, stating unequivocally:

[We] refer you to the last paragraph in the Commission, by which you will perceive that we are expressly charged to conduct ourselves by such instructions as [directed by the King]... The difficulty did not arise on that head, but from a conviction of the irregularity of departing from our instructions.⁷⁶

Your absence from us ... as we yesterday informed you, must make an adjournment of this board necessary. Indeed, without this difficulty, it is highly probable we should find ourselves under a necessity of adopting the same measure for the want of Capt. Dudingston [who apparently was in England], and from the extreme rigor of the season, which renders it almost impossible to get witnesses who are at any distance from us.

Though the time to which the commissioners will adjourn is not absolutely fixed, yet it seems to be their opinion that it must be on or about the 26th of May next, which they hope will be agreeable to you.⁷⁷

Montagu, who had already been an irritating and polarizing figure in Boston, alienated all the Commissioners. This must have delighted Sessions and Hopkins. Montagu, their arch enemy, had overplayed his hand, stalemating the commission during the spring of 1773. Sessions and Hopkins, along with other officials in the Rhode Island government were more than willing to fill the breach with their maneuvers.

Montagu particularly alarmed the Sons of Liberty because the Admiral intended to capture colonists, imprison them, and ship them off to Britain for trial, violating the colonial charters.

With the weather being severe in January, sailing from Boston, then rounding Cape Cod, was not advisable. Instead, he took the land route to Newport, to an icy welcome, as reported in the *Newport Mercury*, January 25th, 1773:

Owing to winter conditions Admiral Montague traveled overland to Swansea on the Taunton River where he boarded a vessel for the remaining part of the trip to Newport. He sailed into the harbor, his Admiral's flag flying, and was promptly saluted by His Majesty's vessels at anchor there. The cannons at Fort George were conspicuously silent, an incident which so infuriated Montague that he refused to call upon Governor Wanton and wrote home to the Lords of the Admiralty bitterly complaining about the insult he had received.

Montagu's bark was far worse than his bite. He stopped his bluster. Why? He certainly began to recognize the brewing opposition to him would harm his chances for promotion in London.

The only testimony from a Providence-based person that might be damaging to the patriotic cause was from a mulatto named Aaron Briggs,⁷⁸ who rowed one of the long-boats out to the Gaspée. Montagu had

⁷⁶ Ibid, p53

⁷⁷ Ibid, p 55

⁷⁸ Aaron Briggs, an indentured servant living on Prudence Island, was about 16 years old when the Gaspée attack took place. Taken aboard a British ship *Beaver*, under threat of hanging, he gave an account of the event that



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hung a lot of credibility on this man's testimony. Upon returning to Providence after giving his own testimony, Sessions went right to work gathering more confounding evidence, taking special interest in discrediting Montagu's star witness. Sessions found many flaws, vagaries, and contradictions in Aaron's story. Additionally, they took the position that Dudingston and Montagu had intimidated the witness and held him without his consent, violating the law. One of those who testified before Sessions claimed:

I saw a mulatto fellow under the forecastle in irons. I said unto him, "so you are one of the rogues that have been burning the Gaspée;" he replied, "he never saw her, nor knew anything about her;" I then asked him what he came there for; he answered, 'his master had used him badly, and he was determined to leave him.' Two or three days afterwards, being on board said schooner, I heard Capt. Linzee order said mulatto to be carried out of the *Beaver* ... and then to be tied up to the mast and whipped; and after he was laid hold on, and they were about to tie him up to the mast, he began to declare he knew some of the people that burnt the Gaspée.⁷⁹

Sessions went out of his way to pen a letter to the Commissioners on January 18th stating:

it is impossible (as I think) that there can be a word of truth in it, and as I look upon it my duty to protect the innocent, as well as punish the guilty, I thought it my duty to let your honor know of some circumstances that may throw some light on this affair... , [those] who pretend to establish the negro's evidence, I think, must convince any one that their testimony is absolutely false.

The response of James Sabin, at whose tavern the plot was launched, is humorously instructive with the subterfuge of his response (likely written by another conspirator):

PROVIDENCE, January 19th, 1773.

To the Honorable the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the circumstances relative to the destroying the schooner *Gaspée*:

GENTLEMEN: I now address you on account of a summons I received from you, requiring my attendance at the Council Chamber in Newport, on Wednesday, 20th inst. Now, gentlemen, I beg leave to acquaint you what renders me incapable of attending.

In the first place, I am an insolvent debtor; and therefore my person would be subject to an arrest by someone or other of my creditors; and my health has been on decline these two months past, and it would be dangerous should I leave my house; and further, were I to attend, I could give no information relative to the assembling, arming, training or leading on the people concerned in destroying the schooner *Gaspée*.

On the 9th day of June last at night I was employed at my house attending company, which were John Andrews, Esq., Judge of the court of Admiralty, John Cole, Esq., Mr. Hitchcock, and George Brown, who supped at my house and stayed there until two of the clock in the morning following; and I have not any



Sabin Tavern c. 1880-90 -- the ale room was on first floor, far right in this picture

named several suspects. This account was given to Governor Wanton who was encouraged to arrest the men Aaron named. See <https://www.sos.ri.gov/assets/downloads/documents/Aaron-Testimony.pdf> for a detailed account.

⁷⁹ Staples, Ibid, p 79



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knowledge relative to the matter on which I am summoned; which I am ready to make oath to before any Justice of the Peace.

I am, gentlemen, most respectfully, your most humble servant, JAMES SABIN⁸⁰

Others simply stated they received the summons only the day before, pleaded ignorance of material facts, never showing up. Still other testimonies were convoluted, filled with hearsay, citing names like Brown and Greene, which were so common in the small colony as to lead nowhere, mutually discrediting evidence from numerous testifiers, and incredible stories about Indian assassins brandishing brass pistols that led into oblivion.

Sessions wrote the Commissioners on January 19th that other testifiers were:

"grievously afflicted with the rheumatism, attended with many symptoms of a paralysis, and that riding yesterday in the cold, stormy weather, has revived and so much increased his disorder, that he was unable to proceed to Newport, but must endeavor to return home as soon as possible."⁸¹

Wanton also gave testimony to the Commissioners with testimony centering on Dudingston's despicable behaviors. He also discredited the testimony of Aaron Biggs, undermining Montagu's key witness.

When Admiral Montagu attempted to interfere with the Commissioners, they responded by narrowly interpreting their investigatory charge, then turned over murky evidence to the Superior Court, where Chief Justice Stephen Hopkins found that the depositions "do not induce a probable suspicion" and inquired if the commissioners were "of a different sentiment," to which the commissioners replied,

"We decline giving any sentiment or opinion in the matter,"⁸²

thereby passing responsibility to Rhode Island Attorney General Marchant (later representative to the Continental Congress, and whose daughter later married Sessions' son), who said "the evidence wouldn't hang a cat," and was suspicious that the King's £1,000 reward was just a bribe to motivate giving evidence to make a fortune. Evidently the Commissioners, kept away from their homes, had lost interest in the whole affair.

By January 21st the Commissioners had enough, writing to the King that they had fulfilled their duties, and would reconvene in May after more evidence had been gathered. It's noteworthy that the Commissioners took issue with Admiral Montagu's interpretation of the King's directives and his lack of presence during the hearings. They claimed "it totally impossible at present to make a report, not having all the evidence we have reason to expect."⁸³

Irritated that the insolent colonists were unwilling to show respect for the King, Montagu complained to Lord Dartmouth, Secretary for the Colonies about superficial respect. Dartmouth was

"justly incensed" and ordered that "his Majesty's ships of war, coming into any of the ports within the colony of Rhode Island, and having an admiral's flag or broad pennant hoisted, be saluted in such manner as is usual in all other parts of his Majesty's dominions in America."

⁸⁰ Staples, Ibid, p70

⁸¹ Staples, Ibid, p 77

⁸² Staples, William R.; The Documentary History of the Destruction of the Gaspee, p95.

⁸³ Staples, Ibid, p 83



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Sam Adams wrote a third letter to Sessions in February 1773, anxious to know the steps the Commissioners were taking, urging Sessions ensure civility to give no reason for the opposition to cast aspersions upon the rationality of the Commissioners, urging the Commissioners of the importance of every movement and ensure no concessions be made that would set a dangerous precedent.

To DARIUS SESSIONS.

February, 1773.

SIR

As I am informed the Commissioners are all now in Newport, and your Assembly is to meet this day I am anxious to know precisely the Steps that are or shall be taken by each. I hope your Governor will not think it proper for him to act in the Commission if the others should determine so to do. Will it not be construed as conceding on his part to the Legality of it? Every Movement on the Side of the Commissioners & the Assembly must be important. I trust no Concessions will be made on your part which shall have the remotest tendency to fix a precedent; for if it is once established, a thousand Commissions of the like arbitrary kind may be introduced to the utter ruin of your free Constitution. The promoters of ministerial measures in this Town are pleased to hear from one of the Commissioners that they are treated with great respect: Even common Civility will be thus coloured to serve the great purpose. Will it not be necessary at all Events for the Assembly to enter a protest on their Journal against so unconstitutional a proceeding. This is the Sentiment of a Gentleman here whose Judgment I very much regard. Such has been the constant practice of the Assembly of this province in like Cases, for some years past. You will see by our Governors Speech what Use is made of Mistakes of this Sort; they are even Improved as Arguments of our having voluntarily consented to be the Vassals of the British Parliament. Indeed the Doctrine he has advanced strikes at the root of every civil Constitution in America. If it be admissible, you have no just Cause to complain of the present Measure for it is founded upon the Authority of that parliament, to the Jurisdiction of which notwithstanding your Charter, you remain subject.

I shall receive a Letter from you by the return of the post if your Attention to the publick Affairs will admit of it, as a great favor. In the mean time I beg you to excuse this hasty Scrawl & believe me to be &c

Samuel Adams

During subsequent formal inquiries, Sessions intentionally ensured evidence was lost, testimonies were confused, some witnesses were intimidated, and other key conspirators never called.

While it was clear to insiders that Abraham Whipple and John Brown coordinated the *Gaspée* attack, all conspirators had pledged absolute silence. Sessions asserted in his message to Governor Wanton that the names of the attackers were unknown. Despite the extensive knowledge of the affair, for the most part, the Rhode Island citizenry kept very quiet.⁸⁴

The word was out that other potential witnesses should either refuse to testify before the commission (by pleading ill health, bad weather, bankruptcy, business travel, or some other excuse) or simply to deny any knowledge of the case. Arthur Fenner, from whose wharf the conspirators launched their long-boats, stated by written letter he was

⁸⁴ One hundred and fifty years later, during the Prohibition era, Rhode Islanders behaved quite similarly, never successfully entering a Grand Jury indictment against any rum-runners of the time. My aunt Gene, who was a young lady during the Prohibition era, when interviewed by me in the 1970's innocently proclaimed "*Oh, we didn't have Prohibition in Rhode Island; that was for the other states!*" No Grand Jury members were willing to indict anyone.



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"very infirm, and at the time said schooner was taken and plundered, I was in my bed, and I knew nothing of it until next day; and as for my not attending as commanded, I must plead my age and infirmity in excuse."

It would have been on a cold winter's day, sitting close to the fireplace, that Darius Sessions read his letters from Samuel Adams.



Darius Sessions and Stephen Hopkins were delicately walking a tightrope together.

The eyes of revolutionary leaders – from Sam Adams in Massachusetts to Thomas Jefferson in Virginia -- were keenly aware that too much defiance would bring down the wrath of the Crown; and acquiescence to the Crown would result in a capitulation that would reverberate across all the colonies.

Their calculated strategy kept the fire of the Age of Enlightenment alive, a flame we must keep alive today.

He then would have contacted his friends and fellow compatriots, Stephen Hopkins and Moses Brown to share the contents of the letter. The next step was to execute the strategy, keeping Governor Wanton wandering in the dark.

The mantelpiece in the background was removed from a home on South Main Street, very near the Sabin Tavern, just before the home was torn down (about 1961). Mantel restored by the author. Partner's desk is from Rhode Island (c.1770)

The issue of Sessions' and Hopkins' handling of the *Gaspée* Commission was of deep concern to Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, prompting him to write to Sam Adams (a person with whom Lee had never corresponded). Lee commented that the "fatal precedent of removing Americans beyond the water, to be tried for supposed offences committed here ... 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 ... remains in America"

To Samuel Adams

Feb. 4, 1773

Sir,

From a person quite unknown to you some apology may be necessary for this letter. The name of my brother, Dr. Arthur Lee of London, may perhaps furnish me with this apology. To be firmly attached to the cause of liberty on virtuous principles is a powerful cause of union, and renders proper the most easy communication of sentiment, however artfully disunion may be promoted and encouraged by tyrants and their abettors. If this be



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true in general, how more certainly is it so in that particular state of affairs in which every scheme that cunning can form, or power execute, is practised to reduce to slavery so considerable a portion of the human species as North America does and may contain. Every day's experience proves this to an attentive observer.

Among other instances in proof, if I mistake not, the manner of resenting the loss of the *Gaspée* is one. At this distance, and through the uncertain medium of newspapers, we may never perhaps have received a just account of this affair. I should be extremely glad, sir, when your leisure permits, to have as true a state of the matter as the public with you has been furnished with. At all events, this military parade appears extraordinary, unless the intention be to violate all law and legal forms, in order to establish the ministerial favorite, but fatal precedent of removing Americans beyond the water, to be tried for supposed offences committed here. 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. The primary end of government seems to be the security of life and property; but this ministerial law would, if acquiesced in, totally defeat every idea of social security and happiness. You may easily, sir, perceive that I understand myself writing to a firm and worthy friend of the just rights and liberty of America, by the freedom with which this letter is penned. Captain Snow, of your town, who comes frequently here, and who takes care of this, will bring me any letter you may be pleased to favor me with.

Richard Henry Lee

The fear that the Crown would be provoked and Martial Law invoked was real. Parliament passed the reprehensible Quartering Act of 1765. While technically the Act only allowed soldiers to be quartered in inns, taverns, and barns, under martial law no one would trust that the British who commandeered communities would rule that the home of a Son of Liberty was a “barn” and invade the household, sequestering the revolutionary spirit

Beginning in 1768, searches and seizures of property on board ships without legal warrants had become a calamity. Colonists foresaw searches of their homes without a warrant the next protection to fall. (And indeed, this all happened with the Coercive Acts following the Boston Tea Party in 1773. – see below).



The mutual fear in Rhode Island and Massachusetts was if BOTH colonies were held under the thumb of martial law, it would mean a naval blockade of the major seaports in New England.

All the ports on Massachusetts Bay, Narragansett Bay, Buzzards Bay, and Long Island Sound would be shut down. (This happened in the War of 1812, with disastrous impact on the New England economy.)

This would result in economic ruin and even famine – which indeed happened in Massachusetts following the Coercive Acts in retribution for the Boston Tea Party in 1773.

However, Sessions and Hopkins avoided poking the Crown in the eye, sideslipping martial law.



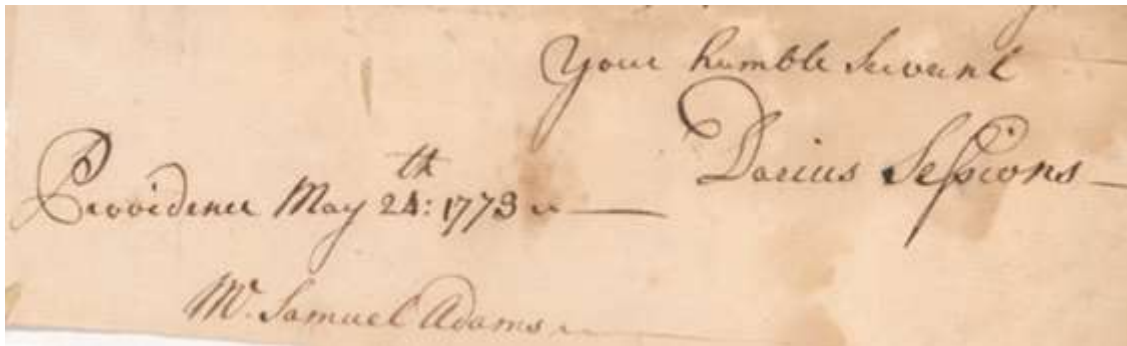
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SESSIONS & HOPKINS THWART THE CROWN

The concern that their civil rights would be violated (had the Commission succeeded) agitated Virginia's House of Burgesses, triggering their engagement in supporting Committees of Correspondence to coordinate resistance to the Crown, to which the Rhode Island Assembly affirmed in May, 1773.

Sessions wrote to Sam Adams:

I now have the pleasure to inform you that the address from the Burgesses of Virginia was received by our Lower House of Assembly with real Respect and Approbation; and they further adopted the Measures recommended, by appointing six Gentlemen of very respectable Character as a Committee of Intelligence & Correspondence.⁸⁵



Darius Session's Signature on Letter to Sam Adams

In early June, 1773, the King's Commission of Inquiry into the Burning of the *Gaspée* reconvened in Newport to hear further testimony. Admiral Montagu didn't show up, but sent numerous letters to the Commissioners demanding they subpoena key witnesses for testimony. None of those deposed under oath contributed any substantive evidence that would identify any of the culprits. Again, more evidence was introduced to discredit the testimony of Montagu's star witness, Aaron Briggs.

At the final hearings, again Sessions and Hopkins were both called upon to give testimony. Sessions focused on his March 21st letter to Governor Wanton where he questioned the actions and authority of Lt. Dudingston, revealing some new information that soon after he received a written request from several of Providence's prominent citizens protesting the actions of the *Gaspée*:

... hearing that the chief justice was in the court house near by, I wrote a line on the back of said paper and sent it to him, desiring his opinion on the affair; it was soon returned with something written under mine, to this purpose, viz: That is was his opinion that for any person whatever to come into the colony and in the body thereof, to exercise any authority by force of arms or otherwise, without showing his commission to the Governor, and (if a custom house officer) without being sworn into his office, was guilty of a trespass, if not piracy. All which proceedings, to the best of my remembrance, I afterwards sent to the Governor.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ As an interesting footnote to history, Sessions refers to "Committees of Intelligence and Correspondence" belying the underlying intent to act in a manner that would communicate "intelligence" – meaning critical information.

⁸⁶ Staples, Op Cit, p94



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The Commissioners, in their formal request to call Hopkins⁸⁷ to the hearings, were informed by Hopkins that a separate Rhode Island based Commission had been established in the intervening months to inquire into the matters concerning the burning of the Gaspée. Members of the Rhode Island Commission included Stephen Hopkins, Chief Justice, along with a supporting cast of Assistant Justices: Metcalf Bowler, J. Helme, and J. C. Bennet, who came to the revealing conclusion:

It [appears] to us ... that no particular person or persons are made mention of [concerning] that atrocious crime, except in the examination of Aaron Briggs, a negro, and of Peter May, one of the Gaspée's [crew]. The confession of the said Aaron upon his first examination was made in consequence of illegal threats from Capt. Linzee of hanging him (the said Aaron) at the yard arm if he would not discover who the persons were that destroyed the Gaspée; and besides, most of the circumstances and facts related in both of his examinations are contradictions repugnant to each other, and many of them impossible in their nature.

Upon the whole, we are all of opinion that the several matters and things contained in said depositions do not induce a probable suspicion, that persons mentioned therein, or either or any of them, are guilty of the crime aforesaid. It is, however, the fixed determination of the Superior Court to exert every legal effort in detecting and bringing to condign punishment the persons concerned in destroying the schooner Gaspée.

And if the honorable commissioners are of a different sentiment we should be glad to receive their opinion for our better information.⁸⁸

The Royal Commissioners responded: "we decline giving any sentiment or opinion in the matter"⁸⁹ The Commissioners wrapped up their hearings on June 23rd, 1773 with these conclusions:

... we have used our utmost care and diligence for the purpose of enquiring into and reporting to your Majesty all the circumstances relative to the attacking, plundering and burning the schooner Gaspee, wounding Lieutenant Dudingston, and all other matters in the same commission and instructions contained.

... after our utmost efforts, we are not able to discover any evidence of either; and therefore, are humbly of opinion, both from the unforeseen event of the Gaspee's running on shore, the suddenness of the undertaking and its accomplishment, and the total want of evidence of even an intention to destroy her, though many witnesses of credit as well inhabitants of Providence as other places, were strictly examined on this head, that the whole was conducted suddenly and secretly.

The Commissioners publicly applauded the actions of Deputy Governor Sessions, stating he: "behaved very properly [so] that the offenders might be brought to justice," acknowledging "he further informed the Governor, it was the unanimous opinion of a great number of the most respectable inhabitants of Providence, that a proclamation with a proper reward should, by the governor, be issued, for the apprehending and bringing to justice the persons concerned, which was accordingly done."

⁸⁷ It should be noted that Hopkins, serving in his position of Chief Justice would have been considered to be a peer of the other Commissioners.

⁸⁸ Staples, Op Cit, p 94

⁸⁹ Ibid, p 95



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In the larger view, the Royal Commissioners could have addressed the underlying root causes of the tensions between the Colonists and the Crown, which were considerable. Furthermore, doing so would require the Commissioners to jeopardize their standing with the King, who was not disposed to give the ungrateful insurrectionists any latitude. Because they were unable to find any culprits, the Commissioners were left, in the end, with only two targets –the Colonists in general and the Admiralty.

The Commissioners condemned the actions of the colonists, first in the burning of the *Liberty* four years earlier, and then the *Gaspée*.

After exerting ourselves to the utmost of our abilities to collect evidence against the persons concerned in burning the *Gaspée* ... we laid such before the deputy governor, the chief justice of the colony and three of his associates ... [who then concluded] It appeareth unto us from due consideration had thereupon, that no particular person or persons are made mention of as being concerned in that atrocious crime....

However, they balanced this condemnation with an acknowledgement of Sessions' advocacy in his letter of March 21st, 1772, supported by Hopkins' opinion that Lt. Dudingston "was guilty of a trespass, if not piracy," then leveled their guns on Dudingston with withering blame:

If Lieutenant Dudingston, on his first arrival in the harbor of Newport, had waited on the Governor, acquainting him with his power and authority, and thereby early made his duty a matter of notoriety, he would, at least, have acted a prudent part; but whether his duty obliged him so to do, we do not presume to determine. There is also too much reason to believe that in some instances Lieutenant Dudingston, from an intemperate, if not a reprehensible zeal to aid the revenue service, exceeded the bounds of his duty.

They finally concluded any further work would be futile:

May it please your Majesty, the civil magistrates being entrusted with the power of apprehending and committing, and having determined against both, upon the evidence before them, and there being no probability of our procuring any further light on the subject determines our inquiry.⁹⁰

In other words, the Commission's were unable to conclude there was a conspiracy; instead finding "that the whole [affair] was conducted suddenly and secretly," meaning the *Gaspée* Affair was *not calculated treason*. To the commissioners, it looked like a haphazard event composed of a small bunch of rowdy drunks acting spontaneously, recklessly, and irresponsibly.

Privately, Commissioner Chief Justice Horsmanden was far more critical, writing Lord Dartmouth that he viewed the self-determination of Rhode Island as a chaotic mess: "As to the Government (if it deserves that name) is a downright democracy; the Governor is a mere nominal one."⁹¹ He didn't stop there, describing the colony of Connecticut as being anarchic. In a few years he would learn the resolve of a "democratic anarchy."

Such discord among those on the Crown's side was precisely what Sessions and Hopkins were seeking. The well-orchestrated cover-up prevailed without a single indictment. Rhode Island's precious Royal Charter was

⁹⁰ Staples, Op Cit p 107

⁹¹Horsmanden to Earl of Dartmouth, Feb 20, 1773, New York, National Archives CO 5 1104 fos. 113-118d



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saved; the Crown stymied; and no issues were resolved – also exactly what Sessions, Hopkins, and Adams wanted; they successfully pulled off the complex gambits – a monumental strategic stalemate.

As Samuel Adams advised, the subversion, cunning and subterfuge of Sessions and Hopkins, had successfully walked the tightrope between capitulation on the one side and outright defiance on the other.⁹²

Historian Richard Deasy⁹³ points out that:

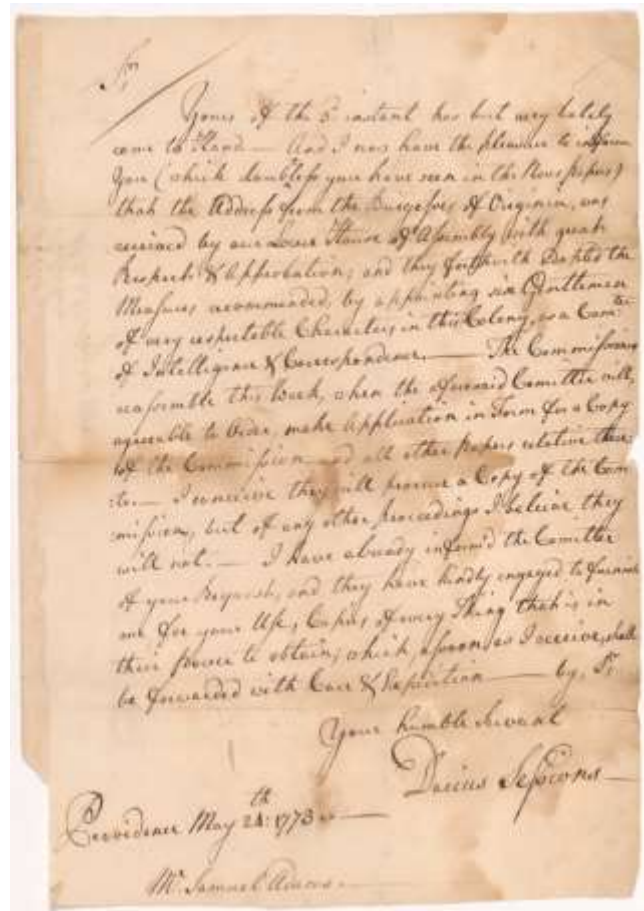
Sessions continued to discredit..... testimony, to excuse witnesses who had been summoned, and to take depositions on his own initiative. His self-imposed role as *amicus curiae* [friend of the court] clearly influenced the course of the inquiry.

Thus, Deputy Governor Sessions and Chief Justice Hopkins (who would later sign the Declaration of Independence) manipulated the power and influence of the Commission's proceedings with the inadvertent complicity of Governor Wanton, who showed genuine earnest to the Crown in his presumed zeal.

Throughout the colonies, the appointment by the King (which was a requirement) of any Royal Commission was highly distrusted. While a Royal Commission was supposedly non-partisan and impartial, requiring Parliamentary approval, it was seen by Colonists as “tacking the deck,” tantamount to an Inquisition which polarized reactions, while consolidating widespread indignation against infringement of liberties throughout the colonies.

In the case of the *Gaspée*, the Privy Council determined from very sketchy historic precedent that they had a somewhat dubious right to try any colonists in London.⁹⁴ Naturally, legal minds in America vociferously disagreed, as the precedents cited were archaic at best, and certainly deprived colonists' rights as Englishmen.

Letter from Darius Sessions to Samuel Adams
dated May 24, 1773 – Courtesy New York Public Library



⁹²Rhode Island's high proportion of patriotic Quakers involved in the cause of liberty may have squelched action that would be construed as outright aggression.

[Note: Today, The *Gaspee* Days Celebration Committee proudly recognizes Rhode Island Deputy Governor Darius Sessions as an 'unindicted co-conspirator' in the *Gaspee* Affair.]

⁹³ Historian Dr. Richard Deasy, points out that: *Sessions continued to discredit..... testimony, to excuse witnesses who had been summoned, and to take depositions on his own initiative. His self-imposed role as amicus curiae [friend of the court] clearly influenced the course of the inquiry.*

⁹⁴ See Steven Parks, *Op Cit*, Chapter 3 for a more detailed analysis of these deliberations and precedents.



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Sessions, Hopkins, and Adams intended to exploit this breach, driving a wedge between the two arguments.

Rhode Island jurists cited laws enacted in 1663 requiring a trial by a jury of one's peers in according with local laws. The fundamental colonial rights of self-determination were at logger-heads with the Crown's conception of its own omnipotence.

In response to the *Gaspée* Affair, the formation of colonial Committees of Correspondence⁹⁵ gathered momentum from Boston to Williamsburg, as patriots like Sam Adams in the north and Richard Henry Lee and Thomas Jefferson in the south orchestrated resistance. By the end of 1773, ten colonies had joined the network of Committees of Correspondence, further agitating resistance.

The Law of Unintended Consequences predicts:

Secrecy, coupled with adversarial leadership always fuels suspicion, which fuels more fears and deeper animosities, often triggering a chain reaction of unpredictable and uncontrollable events.

Quickly, word spread about the foiling of His Majesty's Royal Commission via the Committees of Correspondence. In Virginia the Committees of Correspondence buzzed in delight as the newspapers reported the unfolding of events over the course of the year between June 1772-3. Newspapers up and down the coast carried the stories. Col. George Washington at Mount Vernon was passionately engaged in the *Gaspée* Affair, as the following story recounts (author verified by the publisher but not disclosed).

Whilst I was a student at law, in the city of Annapolis, and the late Mr. John Parke Custis, was a pupil under the Rev. Jonathan Boucher, of the same place, by permission of his father-in-law, the then Col. George Washington, I accompanied young Custis to Mount

Vernon, and passed the last week of the year (I think) 1772, and the first week of 1773 (when the Commissioners of the were gathering for the *Gaspée* Inquiry)

A man of colour named Billy, Col. Washington's favourite servant, who had been sent by his master to Alexandria for letters and newspapers, entered the supper room and delivered to his master a large bundle containing letters and newspapers.

Col. Washington, with a cast of his hand, placed the newspapers about midway [on] the supper table, around which there were then sitting a large company... When Col. Washington so placed the papers, he requested that if they contained any important information, it might be read aloud to the company.

It so happened that I laid my hand on an Eastern paper, which contained an article of intelligence to the following effect—"That a Yankee smuggler, being pursued by one of the King's vessels of war,

⁹⁵ The term "Committees of Correspondence" is a fine example of the colonists' mastering the use of a "propagandistic euphemisms;" a rather innocuous term referring to a vast network of revolutionary patriots.



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(and I think she was called the Gaspée,) hugged the shore so closely that the former (the wind then blowing extremely hard,) missed stays and run plump ashore. The neighboring brother Jonathans [?] quickly collected in great numbers, the tide being at ebb, they soon boarded and burned her."

I read said article aloud to the company, and was immediately requested by Capt. Foye [a loyalist guest] to pass the newspaper to him, who, when he had read the article, had the audacity to declare that "The Yankees must be phlebotomized!" and that HE yes, that HE, " would engage, at the head of five thousand British regulars, to march from Boston to Charleston, South Carolina, and put down all opposition to the revenue acts," that had been recently passed by the British Parliament for the purpose of raising a revenue in the British colonies.

Col. Washington, at the close of this insulting declaration, instantly fixing his eyes on Capt. Foye, observed—"I question not, Sir, that you could march from Boston to Charleston, South Carolina, at the head of five thousand British regulars: but do you mean to say, Sir, that you could do so, as a friend, or as an enemy. If as the latter, and you will allow me a few weeks notice of your intention, I will engage to give you a handsome check with the Virginia riflemen alone."

When Col. Washington was uttering the words " with the Virginia riflemen alone," he struck the table so violently with his clenched hand, that some wine glasses and a decanter near him with difficulty maintained their upright positions.

Captain Foye made no reply; but turned his face immediately towards Mrs. Washington, said a few words to her, looked very silly, and soon after requested to be showed to his chamber!

Col. Washington appeared to be very much displeased. Not a word was said by any of the company, in reference to said article of intelligence, while They remained in the room; but when the Rev. Walter Magowan, who was one of the company, and who had resided some years before in the Mount Vernon family as a private tutor to young Custis, had, with two other gentlemen and myself, arrived at our bed chamber, he remarked that, during the whole time he had lived in Col.

Washington's family, he had never seen the master of Mount Vernon so displeased as he appeared to have been that evening with Capt. Foye.

This occurrence took place some years (say four or five) before the commencement of hostilities, between a detachment of the British army and the Provincials, at Lexington, and is now communicated as a strong proof that Col. George Washington had determined, long before hostilities did so begin, to oppose force to a British army should such attempt be made as the braggadocio Foye had the effrontery to say, in his presence, and at his own table, he would carry into effect, at the head of 5000 British regulars.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Gettysburg Compiler, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Wednesday, October 9, 1822 - Page 4 from the Washington Republican sourced at <http://www.gaspee.org/WashingtonGaspee.htm>



Underneath the Noses of the British

There is a very pivotal set of clandestine activities going on in plain sight of the British, but as beautifully camouflaged as hiding the *Gaspée* conspirators.

Iron played a critical role in the Revolution. It's needed for a wide variety of uses, from cannon, to entrenchment tools (axes & shovels), cannon balls, wagon wheel rims, chains, ship anchors, and a wide variety of hinges and fittings. Without iron, an army and navy must fight like Stone Age warriors.

In 1767, iron deposits were discovered in Western Cranston at Furnace Hill Brook.⁹⁷ John Brown, ever the entrepreneur, was more than just a trader in merchandise. He was a value creator, recognizing the significance of these deposits as a high value resource to provide metal implements, cannons, tools, nails, and iron billets to be used for hammering into fittings, nails, and gun barrels. All he needed was to build a high temperature furnace to smelt the ore into a useable material to sell to iron forges to turn the iron into a final product. Brown had the capital to construct the furnace and all the necessary machinery to produce the iron. What he also needed in abundance was fuel, and that was wood, which was turned into charcoal, which, with large bellows, was used to superheat the raw ore to produce iron. All he needed was a source for the fuel and transportation links to move the iron to the yet to be established forges. This is where the genius of Brown, Sessions, and Greene intersect.

Sessions' father had created a road (now Rte 101 – Providence Pike) west from Providence through what was then the Western Rhode Island wilderness to Pomfret Connecticut. It was an important transportation route for goods from Providence, and provisions from Western Rhode Island and Northeastern Connecticut. Additionally, Western Rhode Island natural lakes and rivers create both transportation of heavy machinery and goods (like cannons), iron ore, and water power to drive large waterwheels for power.⁹⁸ In addition to Darius Sessions serving as Deputy Governor, which required a close liaison with Rhode Island's wealthiest merchant, John Brown, Sessions also operated a retail establishment as well. This would have been one of the retail outlets for many of the imported goods brought to Providence by the seafaring families, such as Brown and the many branches of the Greene family.

⁹⁷ Location: just off Phenix Avenue, now a small heritage park. It's very likely there was a companion deposit at Dugaway Hill behind the Champlin Reservation about a mile to the east off Scituate Avenue. (This needs further research). See *Rhode Island – An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites*, American Historical Engineering Record, Gary Kulik, Project Director; 1978; pp 58-59 for more detail. Author's Note: High-grade iron ore must have a concentration of 65% iron or higher, and medium grade of 62% to 65%. Low-grade iron ore includes all mixtures below 62% iron concentration, which are not considered to be viable types of ore for use in metallurgy. At the high and medium grade levels, extensive smelting is not necessary. Thus, the furnace can melt out the impurities directly, resulting in a reasonably pure iron for the forge or foundry. However, there the typical remaining slag is about 3 tons of slag for every 1 ton of iron. Thus, most furnaces are located very near their parent ore body to limit the amount of transportation costs. This would lead one to believe there were other ore bodies west or south of the original discoveries, placing them in Scituate or Coventry. (more research will uncover the reason why the Hope Furnace was located nearly five miles away from Furnace Hill Brook. Most likely it was because the source of fuel – wood, was more plentiful near Hope – or possibly another ore body was located in the vicinity.)

⁹⁸ This is prior to the emergence of the first Newcomen steam engines used for pumping water out of mines. The first steam engines were introduced by John Brown and his brother in 1780, which, in turn triggered Providence to become a major center of the machine tool, steam engine, and locomotive engine industries in the 19th century.



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When Brown opened up the Hope Furnace, Nathanael moved to the smoky valley⁹⁹ of Coventry to use the Hope Iron to make anchors and chain for Brown's fleet of ships, many of which were built in Providence, Warren, and Bristol.

By 1773, relations with Britain were sinking fast. British ministers tried to find some legal loophole to revoke the charters of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, but were thwarted at every turn. It was not just a matter of political control; economics played a big part in the issue. The never-ending wars with France and Spain had drained Great Britain's coffers. English subjects were over-burdened with debt and the need to carry large armies and navies.

In Connecticut, where Sessions had extensive farmlands, relations with the Crown had soured severely: "the bonds of union with the Colonies were being destroyed. Lord Hillsborough, malignant against the Colonies [claimed] 'Connecticut is very deficient in its correspondence, so that we have too little connection with you.'"¹⁰⁰ Like Rhode Island, Connecticut's Governor Pitkin was a loyal tory, while Deputy Governor Trumbull was an ardent revolutionary. These splits enabled a nominal government to be subverted sub-rosa by the Sons of Liberty.

To understand how Rhode Island's iron industry functioned, and account from the times about the Salisbury iron works in Northwest Connecticut should provide a good indication:

"The iron works at Salisbury were working night and day under the directions of Colonel Joshua Porter."¹⁰¹ Dr. Porter was appointed Agent to oversee the works. "The Council of Safety expended £1,450 in fitting up the furnace, and they put it into full operations with a corps of 59 workmen, furnishing supplies to the Continental Army. Cannon of various weights up to 32 pounders were cast here, and shot and shell in abundance."¹⁰²

The naval cannon aboard *U.S.S. Constitution* and *Constellation* were outfitted from the Salisbury iron furnaces. These were located where acres of timberland provided charcoal for smelting, and the river was dammed to provide abundant motive power for the blowing engines. The finished iron products were then hauled by oxen to ports where they were shipped to the markets by water. Scattered along the stream were many forges making anchors, cannons, chain, and other essential iron tools and fittings.

Quietly militia began the importation and storage of gun powder. The local militia were on a high state of readiness to meet a hurried call to duty. Iron products were critical to the war – the militia were highly interested in getting the furnaces, forges, and foundries fired up producing needed war products.

⁹⁹ The smoke was probably the result of the burning of wood for the furnaces and forges, which aggravated Greene's asthmatic condition. According to records kept by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, Hope Furnace was founded in 1765 by the wealthy Brown family after the discovery of iron ore in Cranston. One of the company's partial owners was Stephen Hopkins, Rhode Island governor and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Hope Furnace is documented as having produced 1,000 cannons during the American Revolution and clients included the colony of Rhode Island, the Continental Army, the Navy Board, and privateers.

In 1779 the Hope Furnace company owned more than 1,200 acres of woodland in Scituate and Coventry.

¹⁰⁰ Burpee, Charles W.; *The Story of Connecticut*, Volume 1, American Historical Company, NYC, 1939; page 365

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p 385

¹⁰² Pinchon, W. H. C.; Iron Mining in Connecticut, *The Connecticut Magazine*, Hartford, Conn. May 1899P 278



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In Virginia in the spring of 1773, Thomas Jefferson and the House of Burgesses were on high alert over the transgressions of the Gaspée Affair. In his autobiography Jefferson wrote:¹⁰³

A court of inquiry held in Rhode Island in 1772, with a power to send persons to England to be tried for offences committed here was considered at our session of the spring of 1773 as demanding attention.

We were all sensible that the most urgent of all measures was that of coming to an understanding with all the other colonies to consider the British claims as a common cause to all, and to produce a unity of action, and **for this purpose that a committee of correspondence in each colony would be the best instrument for intercommunication**, and that their first measure would probably be to propose a meeting of deputies from every colony at some central place, who should be charged with the direction of the measures which should be taken by all. We therefore drew up the resolutions

In September 1773 Benjamin Franklin, in an attempt to diffuse the acrimonious flavor of the relationships between Britain and America, tried to turn Britain's strategies into satire. He issued a series of "Rules by Which a Great Empire May Be Reduced to a Small One"¹⁰⁴ which poked some fun into the foolishness of the King's poor handling of American Affairs. All the "rules" related to some law or edict or ill-behavior happening within the colonies, but purposefully not naming specifics to keep the ideas at a higher, more philosophic level. Rule #15 was obviously aimed at the Admiralty's handling of the *Gaspée* Affair:

Convert the brave honest Officers of your Navy into pimping Tide-waiters and Colony Officers of the Customs. Let those who in Time of War fought gallantly in Defence of the Commerce of their Countrymen, in Peace be taught to prey upon it. Let them learn to be corrupted by great and real Smugglers; but (to show their Diligence) scour with armed Boats every Bay, Harbour, River, Creek, Cove or Nook throughout the Coast of your Colonies, stop and detain every Coaster, every Wood-boat, every Fisherman, tumble their Cargoes, and even their Ballast, inside out and upside down; and if a Penny's worth of Pins is found un-entered, let the Whole be seized and confiscated.

Thus shall the Trade of your Colonists suffer more from their Friends in Time of Peace, than it did from their Enemies in War. Then let these Boats Crews land upon every Farm in their Way, rob the Orchards, steal the Pigs and Poultry, and insult the Inhabitants. If the injured and exasperated Farmers, unable to procure other Justice, should attack the Aggressors, drub them and burn their Boats, you are to call this High Treason and Rebellion, order Fleets and Armies into their Country, and threaten to carry all the Offenders three thousand Miles to be hang'd, drawn and quartered. O! this will work admirably!

¹⁰³ See <http://www.gaspee.info/history/importance.htm> for more detailed description of Jefferson's perspective

¹⁰⁴ These Rules were originally printed on Sept 11, 1773 in the Public Advertiser in Philadelphia. The British did not take heed – just the opposite: they upped the ante, turning Franklin's "rules" into the "Coercive Acts" in the spring of 1774. The rules can be found at <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-20-02-0213>



Boston Tea Party

Boston Tea Party¹⁰⁵ in mid-December, 1773 became the event that catalyzed a massive chain reaction that became explosive – just as Sam Adams had feared earlier in the year in his letters to Sessions – the Sons of Liberty raided a British merchant ship, *Beaver*, and destroyed its contents. Fire and brimstone then fell with a crescendo upon Boston.

As an isolated, individual event, the Boston Tea Party – compared to the destruction of the sloop HMS *Liberty* in by Newport patriots in 1769, or the burning of the schooner HMS *Gaspée* by Providence Sons of Liberty in 1772 -- was relatively insignificant. No one was killed (as had happened with the Boston Massacre in 1770, when British troops fire upon and killed five colonists). Only the *Beaver's* load of tea was destroyed, but the ship itself was not damaged. In fact, the incident was actually quite orderly, as reported by Robert Sessions (nephew of Darius Sessions), who was an active participant in dumping the tea into the harbor:

"On that eventful evening, I went immediately to the spot [where the *Beaver* was tied up at the wharf in the harbor]. Everything was as light as day, by the means of lamps and torches—a pin might be seen lying on the wharf. I went on board where they were at work, and took hold [of the chests of tea] with my own hands.

I was not one of those appointed to destroy the tea, who [had] disguised themselves as Indians, but [I] was a volunteer, the disguised men being largely men of family and position in Boston, while I was a young man whose home and relations were in [Pomfret] Connecticut.

The appointed and disguised party proving too small for the quick work necessary, other young men, similarly circumstanced with myself, joined them in their labors.

The chests were drawn up by a tackle—one man bringing them forward in the hold, another putting a rope around them, and others hoisting them to the deck and carrying them to the vessel's side. The chests were then opened, the tea emptied over the side, and the chests thrown overboard. Perfect regularity prevailed during the whole transaction. Although there were many people on the wharf, entire silence prevailed—no clamor, no talking. Nothing was meddled with but the teas on board.

After having emptied the hold, the deck was swept clean, and everything put in its proper place. An officer on board was requested to come up from the cabin and see that no damage was done except to the tea."¹⁰⁶

Yet the Boston Tea Party, judged in the larger context of other pre-revolutionary activities, represents the *straw that broke the camel's back, tipping the scales*.

King George had suffered enough anxiety to proclaim to Minister Lord North: "The die is cast. The colonies must triumph or submit." Military rule was on the immediate horizon. Opinion in the Colonies about loyalty or liberty split firmly, especially after the King overrode the Massachusetts Charter and declared the

¹⁰⁵ Darius Sessions' brother Alexander "was present and assisted in destroying the tea in Boston harbor," according to *Sessions Family in America*, by Francis Charles Sessions, 1890, p 39 Also, Alexander's son Robert Sessions --Darius' nephew -- later served in the Revolutionary army, attaining the rank of lieutenant. His first-hand account of the Tea Party can be found in Wesley S. Griswald's *The Night the Revolution Began* 1972, and Milton Meltzer, *The American Revolutionaries: History in Their Own Words, 1750-1800*, 1987. pp 50-5

¹⁰⁶ Meltzer, Milton; *The American Revolutionaries: History in Their Own Words, 1750-1800*, 1987. pp 50-5



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Colony a hostile entity, closing off trade. There was no real moderate position, spurred by anger and righteousness, reflected in Town Meetings across New England. Connecticut, like other Colonies came to the aid of Boston by sending hundreds of their choicest sheep and wagonloads of food. "The Postmen's saddlebags were packed with letters of encouragement." The day the new law went into effect, Hartford was draped in mourning. A rumor that Boston had been attacked called forth hundreds of volunteers. Rhode Island towns and villages gathered food and supplies to be brought to Massachusetts to aid families. Committees of Safety (the unthreatening name of local militia units) organized and joined forces.

PRELUDE TO WAR

Boston's actions were neither isolated nor without consequences on both sides; the Tea Party hardened the resolve across the colonies. Quickly, the Sons of Liberty unified support in commercial towns and rural villages across New England. Leaders crystallized the issues with clearly defined positions upon which to make their stand. Providence leaders at their Town Meeting called three weeks after the Tea Party passed a lengthy resolution, which began:

Inasmuch as the British Parliament have undertaken to raise revenue in the American colonies by a duty upon tea, we the freemen of the town of Providencecannot be silent on so interesting and alarming an occasion. Should we omit to assert and express the firmest resolutions to vindicate our rights, it might be construed as a cession of them into the hands of those who have wantonly invaded them....

We do therefore, in justice to ourselves, our posterity, and the sister colonies, openly and publicly make the following declarations; hoping that by a vigorous exertion we may in some measure contribute towards escaping the dreadful train of evils which must be the consequence of a tame submission to any invasions of American freedom.

In the body of the measure, the Town Meeting was intolerant of taxation without representation, asserted the rights of self-determination, decried the violation of liberties in America, declared anyone unloading tea that carried an illegal tax was an enemy to his country, and formalized the Committees of Correspondence to coordinate efforts with other towns within the colony and with

"neighboring governments on matters that effect the liberties of America.... and support their brethern of Boston, Philadelphia and New York in their spirited and resolute opposition..."¹⁰⁷

In Town Meetings all across Rhode Island, similar measures were enacted during the following months. The establishment of Committees of Correspondence had a dramatic effect on the Revolution's outcome:

The complete accomplishment of it in so short a time and by such simple means was perhaps a singular example in the history of mankind. Thirteen clocks were made to strike together: a perfection of mechanism which no artist had ever before effected. John Adams ¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ To understand the intensity and unity of resolve of the towns and villages, and the tight interactive network of aligned thought and planning across the colonies from Virginia to New Hampshire, it's highly instructive to read their Town Meeting resolutions of 1774, and Letters between the Colonial Committees of Correspondence, which can be found *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations ...*, Volume 7 edited by John Russell Bartlett pp272-298. Every small town apparently had a Committee of Correspondence that was active in keeping the vast network of partisans informed of threats and opportunities, as well as being highly synchronized in their actions.

¹⁰⁸ John Adams, Letter to Hezekiah Niles, 13 February 1818, *The Works of John Adams*, vol 10 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co. 1856) p 283



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Coercive Acts

The Crown responded to the Boston Tea Party with an iron fist and a heavy hammer, but aimed principally at Massachusetts, not recognizing the massive resolve of resistance emerging within all the other colonies.

The King demanded retribution, reparations, and draconian control.

As the Coercive Acts were being debated in Parliament in London, alarm spread across the colonies.

Burlington, New Jersey,

March 16th, 1774.

Sir:

—The representatives of this colony having received a letter from the truly patriotic House of Burgesses, in Virginia, enclosing their resolutions to obtain the most early intelligence of all such acts and resolutions of the British Parliament, or proceedings of the administration, as may relate to, or affect the British colonies and to maintain a mutual correspondence and communication, concerning these important considerations, have come to the enclosed resolutions, which we have the honor to send you.

The utility of the plan proposed, at a time when claims are made on the colonies to which they cannot give their assent, appeared so evident, that they unanimously and cheerfully adopted the design of uniting in every prudent and constitutional measure, necessary to defeat every attempt to deprive them of the inestimable rights and privileges of British subjects....¹⁰⁹

Meanwhile, Massachusetts was thrown into famine. Financial aid and food was sent from dozens of New England villages and towns to Boston to help stave off hunger. Towns across Rhode Island called meetings of their citizens to condemn the British aggression and raise funds for Boston.

Rather than quell revolutionary spirit, the Coercive Acts backfired: resistance increased; moderates who were mildly defiant shifted allegiance to the patriot cause; colonial troops drilled and marched; the Sons of Liberty rallied; villages and towns armed themselves. Militia officers and men who were known to be Loyalists were removed from the ranks. The Committees of Correspondence continued an outpouring of rage at every new transgression, which were coming fast and furiously.

Parliament pushed through the Coercive Acts, which were essentially the equivalent of throwing the entire colony of Massachusetts into a “communal jail.” Referred to as the “Intolerable Acts” by colonists, Britain aimed at shackling the rebels with a four-fold strategy:

- 1) Closing the Port of Boston until rebels repaid the value of the tea and order was restored. It authorized the Royal Navy to blockade Boston Harbor because “the commerce of his Majesty’s subjects cannot be safely carried on there,” forbidding any exports to foreign ports or provinces. The King demanded reparations for the losses from the Boston Tea Party, and would keep the port closed until the colonists coughed up the cash. The blockade commenced on June 1, 1774

The Coercive Acts are a perfect example of why reparations seldom work. Payments for the repayment of losses from the Tea Party were coupled with abuses of power, which were then met with enormous counter-resistance, which eventually triggered armed rebellion.

The Law of Unintended Consequences always goes *badly* in adversarial situations.

¹⁰⁹ Bartlett, Ibid, p 289



Darius Sessions – History’s Hidden Hero

- 2) Revoking the Massachusetts Charter, replacing it with Martial Law and limiting Town Meetings. The martial law governor could appoint justices and sheriffs, who in turn could appoint jurors to bias the outcome of any trial.
- 3) The Governor was granted the sole power to extradite those arrested by power-thirsting sheriffs. The accused, without legal counsel or guarantee of a fair trial would be hauled off in irons in the bowels of a ship bound for to England for trial by a phoney hangman’s jury. This violated the protections of the Magna Carta. Besides essentially revoking their right to a fair trial by peers, it was tantamount to a death sentence for members of the Sons of Liberty.
- 4) Quartering of Soldiers Act was decreed the next month to be applied not just in Massachusetts, but throughout *all* thirteen colonies. While technically the Act technically stated soldiers were to be housed in “uninhabited houses, out-houses, barns, or other buildings” at the colonists’ expense, everyone expected under the iron fist of martial law, no one could protest soldiers living in one’s house, else they be arrested for sedition and hauled off to prison in London.

Significantly, the first three of the Coercive (Intolerable) Acts did not include Rhode Island.

But why?

After all, Rhode Island had been outwardly antagonistic to the Crown for years. Both the King and Prime Minister had seriously considered revoking Rhode Island’s Royal Charter and invoking martial law. Given Rhode Island’s small size and strategic water access, consolidating the Massachusetts and Rhode Island into one, secure militarized jurisdiction would be far easier to defend and control. Had they consolidated, subsequent events would be dramatically different.

Evidently the Sessions-Hopkins strategy of subterfuge, tempered by superficial civility, coupled with a more pacifistic Quaker influence woven into the fabric of Rhode Island leadership, created a less aggressive profile in the eyes of the Crown and Parliament than the firebrand oratory in Boston.

Massachusetts may have had greater writers and orators who created the headlines of history, but Rhode Island got better results.

RHODE ISLAND CALLS FOR A CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

As the spring of 1774 brought martial law to Massachusetts, General Gage took over the dual duties of both Commander in Chief and Governor, replacing Hutchinson. Sam Adams, John Hancock, and Dr. Joseph Warren were ordered to trial in England. They needed to duck for cover quickly.

The King’s gambit backfired. His edicts were aimed at making the colonies submit; instead they reacted in anger. Committees of Safety started arming themselves through each village and town’s local militia. Guns were inventoried. Ammunition was stock-piled. Troops began training.

Each colony’s Committees of Correspondence agreed to share any news coming from Britain’s latest Parliamentary aggression immediately and each colony’s counter-responses with all the other members in their now vast network.

Rhode Island’s Committees of Correspondence responded rapidly, stalwartly, and often quite eloquently, expressing a strong unity of brotherhood.

Westerly,

May 19, 1774.

Gentlemen:

—With mingled concern and indignation, the committee of correspondence for this town, have seen an act for blocking up the harbor of Boston.



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Rome, designing to destroy the city of Carthage, barbarously required of the Carthaginians that they should forsake their city, and remove their habitations twelve miles from the sea. The consideration of the inveterate hatred, occasioned by the long and bloody wars which had subsisted between Rome and Carthage the remembrance of several hundred thousand Romans killed in those wars, and several hundred towns plundered by the Carthaginians, are some excuse for the Roman severity; but the cruel and unnatural treatment which the town of Boston has received from Great Britain, will admit of no palliation.

The metropolis of a most affectionate and loyal colony, which in all the wars of Great Britain hath gloriously supported the British interest in America; and even by their wise and vigorous efforts made a conquest which gave peace to Europe, is now threatened with destruction, for no other cause, but because the people have bravely determined not to become slaves.

We have long felt for the town of Boston; we heartily sympathize with our brethren upon this alarming occasion; we are much pleased with the noble firmness with which this cruel edict is received in Boston.

We highly approve the measures taken by the town and are entirely of opinion, that the joint resolution of the colonies, to stop all importations from, and exportations to, Great Britain and the West Indies, until the act is repealed, will infallibly produce the desired effect.

The country which we possess, blessed be God! affords every necessary of life.

We are morally certain, that, with the common blessings of Heaven upon our industry and frugality, we can live comfortably, without importing a single article from Great Britain or the West Indies; and we are equally certain, that neither England nor the West Indies can subsist long without us; their own preservation, therefore, will compel them to do us justice.

This horrid attack upon the town of Boston, we consider not as an attempt upon that town singly, but upon the whole continent.

We are therefore, determined to use our whole influence for the support of the town of Boston, in the same manner as if the attack had been made on the metropolis of this colony; and we doubt not but the other colonies will consider this arbitrary and tyrannical edict in the same light, and heartily unite with the friends of liberty in Boston, in support of the common cause.

That infinite wisdom may direct and preserve all the colonies, is [our] ardent prayer...¹¹⁰

The statement “We are therefore, determined to use our whole influence for the support of the town of Boston, in the same manner as if the attack had been made on the metropolis of this colony” is a significant affirmation of solidarity and resolve – the identity of a nation is beginning to congeal. Similar empathy poured out from other towns

Newport,

May 20th, 1774

Gentlemen:

—Your letters, together with one from Mr. Adams, upon the late most alarming occasion of shutting up the port of Boston, was considered in a full meeting of the freemen of the town,

¹¹⁰ Bartlett, Ibid p 289-90 (note: the Town of Westerly had only 1,800 inhabitants.



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legally assembled this day; and the enclosed resolutions entered into, with not more than two or three dissenting voices.

We have no doubt but a hearty union of the colonies in the measures necessary to be taken in this important crisis, will open the eyes of our fellow subjects in Great Britain, and operate effectually to the redress of the grievances of the colonies.

We deplore the present unhappy situation of our brethren in Boston, and assure you that every consolation and relief in the power of Newport, may be expected and depended upon.

Signed by— JOHN COLLINS, AVILLIAM VERNON, SAMUEL FOWLER, HENRY WARD, Newport Committee of Correspondence.¹¹¹

At a propitious Providence town meeting, on 17 May, 1774 two pivotal resolutions were passed:

1) Continental Congress to be Established

First, Providence initiated the primary call for convening a Continental Congress to address the transgressions of Britain against Boston and consider arming for the defense of the colonies.

Resolved, that this town will heartily join with the Province of the Massachusetts Bay, and the other colonies, in such measures as shall be generally agreed on by the colonies, for the protecting and securing their invaluable natural rights and privileges, and transmitting the same to the latest posterity... for promoting a congress, as soon as may be, of the representatives of the General Assemblies of the several colonies and provinces of North America, for establishing the firmest union ; and adopting such measures ... to answer that important purpose...

That the committee of correspondence of this town ... to assure the town of Boston, that we [are] greatly interested in the present alarming conduct of the British Parliament towards them; and view the whole English American colonies equally concerned in the event; and that we will, with the utmost firmness, act accordingly, whenever any plan shall be agreed on. In the mean time, we are of opinion, that an universal stoppage of all trade with Great Britain, Ireland, Africa and the West Indies, until such time as the port of Boston shall be reinstated in its former privileges, &c., will be the best expedient in the case.¹¹²

James Angell, the Town Clerk, was appointed to the Committee of Correspondence to communicate to all the colonies the request for a Continental Congress be convened. Unity among the colonies was the key to achieving the noble cause of liberty. Virginia's Committees of Correspondence quickly responded affirmatively, and eventually all colonies replied favorably.

Williamsburg, Virginia,

May 28th, 1774

Gentlemen:

The enclosed papers will explain to you our present political state here, with respect to the unhappy dispute with our mother country. The propriety of appointing deputies from the several colonies of British America, to meet

¹¹¹ Bartlett, Ibid, p 290

¹¹² Bartlett, Ibid, p 280



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annually in general congress, appears to be a measure extremely important and extensively useful, as it tends so effectually to obtain the united wisdom of the whole, in every case of general concern.

We are desirous to obtain your sentiments on the subject, which you will be pleased to furnish us with. Being very desirous of communicating to you, the opinion and conduct of the late representatives on the present posture of American affairs, as quickly as possible, we beg leave to refer you to a future letter, in which we shall more fully express our sentiments on these subjects.

PEYTON RANDOLPH, K C. NICHOLAS, DUDLEY DIGGE, Virginia Committee of Correspondence¹¹³

Angry Colonial Assemblies joined in by approval of sending representatives to a Continental Congress (Rhode Island appointed aging former governor Stephen Hopkins and former governor Samuel Ward, once rivals, as delegates.)

It would be a mere two years later when Rhode Island, a beehive of the spirit of freedom and liberty would be the first sovereign state to Declare Independence from Britain, fully two months before the rest of the colonies signed the Declaration of Independence from Britain on 4 July, 1776.

2) Abolition of Slavery

As detailed earlier in this document, the Sons of Liberty had more on their minds than resistance to royal hegemony. The second item on the Town Meeting agenda was equally important. The Abolitionist movement had been brewing; at the meeting, a resolution was passed to abolish slavery:

Therefore, it is voted by this meeting, that it is unbecoming the character of freemen to enslave negroes; Whereas, the inhabitants of America are engaged in the preservation of their rights and liberties; and as personal liberty is an essential part of the natural rights of mankind, the deputies of the town are directed to use their endeavors to obtain an act of the General Assembly, prohibiting the importation of negro slaves into this colony; and that all negroes born in the colony, should be free, after attaining to a certain age.¹¹⁴

The fact that both the call for a Continental Congress *and* the call for the abolition of slavery came at the same meeting is more than coincidence. The confluence of these two events was an affirmation to uphold the five core ideals of the American version¹¹⁵ of the Age of Enlightenment:

- 1) **Reason, Logic, and Rationality** should reign over the passions of anger, hatred, and revenge.
- 2) **Divine Natural Moral/Ethical Order** gives each individual rights the state must not usurp.
- 3) **Progression of Civilization**, with the perfection of the human spirit as the quest.
- 4) **Democratic Governance** as the only means of prevention of abuses of power.
- 5) **Making Well-Being (pursuit of Happiness) and Freedom** the measure of successful civilizations

(Note: These five ideals will be explored in detail later)

¹¹³ Bartlett, Ibid p292

¹¹⁴ Bartlett, Ibid p 280 (note: While Darius Sessions presided over most of Providence's Town Meetings, in this case, the record does not indicate who presided over this particular meeting.)

¹¹⁵ Unlike the European version, which was far more philosophic, the American version of the Age of Enlightenment was designed and implemented by the founding fathers, who, building on European philosophy, crafted a highly practical, structural sound version of governance, that culminated in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. The Founding Fathers' efforts were strongly grounded in a deep understanding of Greek, Roman, and Renaissance efforts to create governance systems that would stand the onslaught of time.



The Gaspée Remembered in Virginia

Prior to the Battle of Lexington and Concord (19 April 1775) the important symbolism of the Burning of the Gaspée sparked great admiration throughout the colonies. Two years after the incident, it was still a *cause celebre* as George Washington's Diary reports that on June 11th, 1774 he "Dined at the Raleigh Tavern and went to the fireworks."¹¹⁶

Historian Shelby Little, writing about what George Washington wrote in his diary comments on the event:



Raleigh Tavern, Williamsburg, VA

Through all the growing agitation, Washington moved quietly, unobtrusively, thoughtfully. His actions might have been a little puzzling if any one had been calm enough to notice. At the dwindling meetings of the dissolved Burgesses, he was always to be observed paying earnest attention; he visited his plantation and farms in the vicinity of Williamsburg and once he took a gay party of friends by water to look at Woromonroke plantation; on June 1st, he went to church with the rest of the town and was strict in his observance of the fast; ten days later, he spent 3shillings 9pence to see the fireworks in celebration of the anniversary of the burning of the Gaspée; and just before leaving for Mount Vernon, he dined again with the Royal Governor of Virginia. He may have believed that this, like other disputes with England, would blow over. The situation was anything but clear.¹¹⁷

It is ironic that Washington then met with the Royal Colonial Governor following the Gaspée Fireworks. At that time the Virginia House of Burgesses was bristling from the news of the Intolerable Coercive Acts notification the month before and was calling for a Continental Congress less than three months from Washington meeting with the Governor. Given Washington's passions about freedom and liberty, the meeting with the Royal Governor would not have been cordial, but to discuss the inflamed relations between the Colonists and the Crown.

In September 1774, Washington, a delegate from Virginia would meet Hopkins, his counterpart from Rhode Island in Philadelphia at the first Continental Congress. No doubt Washington would have admired Hopkins for his courage, his rectitude, and his cunning in outfoxing the Gaspée Royal Commission.

The Quest for the Enlightenment Ideal Gathers Momentum

¹¹⁶ The Diaries of George Washington. Vol. 3. Donald Jackson, ed.; Dorothy Twohig, assoc. ed. The Papers of George Washington. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978. Page 255 available on-line at: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html>

¹¹⁷ Shelby Little; George Washington - New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1929. Page 99. The commentator on www.Gaspee.org states: "In this book, the author writes about what Washington wrote in his personal diary; unfortunately, we do not have the exact writing in Washington's own words" The importance of all this, is that in Virginia, the first state to reestablish the Committees of Correspondence in reaction to the Gaspée Affair, also celebrated its importance in starting the united colonies on a path towards independence. Such a celebration would have been....unwise in Rhode Island at the time. Any talk leading to the identification of those who took part in the Burning of the Gaspée would have still possibly led to the demise by hanging of those so identified.



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in July, 1774 young patriot, Nathanael Greene, whose ship was taken by the *Gaspée*, was readying to renounce his Quaker upbringing. Apparently, the Coercive Acts antagonized him more than his pacifistic Quaker mind would tolerate. He wrote a letter to Samuel Ward, one of the two representatives for the upcoming Continental Congress:

The Ministry seems to be determined to imbrue [drench] their cursed hands in American Blood, and that once Wise and Virtuous Parliament, but now Wicked and weak Assembly lends an assisting hand to accomplish their hellish schemes—The Soldiers in Boston are insolent above measure, soon very soon expect to hear the thirsty Earth drinking the warm Blood of American Sons. O how my eyes flashes with indignation, and by bosom burns with holy resentment,¹¹⁸

All during June, July and August, letters were received from Committees of Correspondence from New England, Atlantic, and several Southern Colonies (who began referring to themselves as Provinces) responding affirmatively to Rhode Island's advocacy of a Continental Congress, declaring their representatives for the session in September in Philadelphia. Virginia began championing the cause.

By August, 1774, at a Town Meeting presided over by Darius Sessions in Providence, armed insurrection was in the air:

“Whereas at the last session of the Assembly an order was passed, thatthe quota of the arms belonging to the county of Providence [be] delivered to His Honor the Deputy Governor [Sessions]. Whereupon it is.... votedto procure the said small arms to be cleaned and made fit for use, and to procure proper chests for the same; all of which expenses to be paid by this town....”

Strained relationships between Tories and Patriots became ugly, mobs were forming. By August, Deputy Governor Sessions, using executive authority, ordered the Artillery and Light Infantry militia to intercede to prevent riots as Tories in East Greenwich, instigated by Tory Judge Stephen Arnold, began planning their own revolt.¹¹⁹ Sessions was called upon again later that month to quell disturbances in Providence:

Town Meeting	Providence	31st day of August, 1774,
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The Honourable DARIUS SESSIONS, Moderator:
On the evening of the 30th August,...a number of persons imprudently and tumultuously assembled themselves together in a manner that did disturb the peace and order of the town, and as such proceedings are of evil example, and repugnant to the good and wholesome laws of this town and Colony,and such doings being ever derogatory to the honour of the town, and subversive of our rights and liberties to their very foundation, this town do protest...and desire the Civil Magistrates therein to exert themselves to their utmost to prevent and suppress all such unhappy disturbances in future,....

As animosities deepened, and new wounds were opened raw; the burning of the *Gaspée* became just one incident in what soon became a long string of spats between British taxation officials and Rhode Island merchants and their captains, who ran rum, illicit trade, and guns. Rhode Island, often referred to as “Rogue’s Island,” was plagued with smugglers, pirates, and tax evaders. Official action was required.

¹¹⁸ Nathanael Greene, Coventry, to Samuel Ward, Jr., Westerly, 10 July 1774, Nathanael Greene Papers, Rhode Island Historical society, Providence.

¹¹⁹ MacGunnigle, Bruce; The Tory Uprising of Sept. 13, 1774 The Independent , 4 June 2015



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The first meeting of the Continental Congress was held in Philadelphia on September 5th, 1774. Henry Ward and Stephen Hopkins, former adversaries now friends, represented the colony. There they met in secret session with Patrick Henry, George Washington, John and Samuel Adams along with the delegates from the colonies except Georgia.

While the Declaration of Independence would not be signed for nearly another two years, this group flat rejected a plan for reconciling British authority with colonial freedom.

With the fortitude of vision, the first “Founding Fathers” adopted a declaration of personal rights, including life, liberty, property, assembly, and trial by jury. The same declaration denounced taxation without representation and maintaining a British army in the colonies without their consent. This was not a full separation, as Parliamentary regulation of American commerce was accepted. The delegates voted to petition the Crown for a redress of grievances that had been building and threatening since 1763.

It voted to boycott imported British goods and form a security alliance whereby each colony would mutually provide support if attacked. Military preparedness became a central issue, especially for the New York and New England colonies. Providence quickly responded with a list of all banned items, and pledged to ensure they would not be traded in the port.¹²⁰

The *Providence Gazette* and *Newport Mercury* newspapers carried strong headlines and letters to the editor condemning Britain and raising the alarm about military or political concerns.¹²¹

By October 1774, King George recognized armed insurrection was clearly more than just a remote possibility. An edict was conveyed by Lord Dartmouth to Governor Wanton in which His Majesty would:

“Prohibit the exportation from Great Britain, gunpowder or any sort of arms or ammunition” and the Governor was ordered to “take the most effectual measures for arresting, detaining, and securing any gunpowder or any sorts of arms or ammunition, which may be attempted to be imported into the province under your government.”

All this did was to evoke more resistance, while bypassing trade with England. Colonists called for the formation of an Army of Observation that would be ready for action if the British engaged in armed provocation. Attention began to be focused on logistics and supply – having sufficient munitions, gunpowder, artillery, muskets, and provisions for supporting an army. Central storage depots were quickly decentralized into the local villages and towns so no single British raid could wipe out a colony’s stockpile.

Rhode Island responded by chartering a handful more militia units across the state for its defense. To arm the new units, the Assembly ordered more than forty cannons to be taken from Fort George on Goat Island off Newport for issuance to local militia; Deputy Governor Sessions complied, ordering the militia to strip the Island, thus keeping them out of the hands of the British.



Continental Congress 1774

¹²⁰ Bartlett, Ibid, p 285 <https://archive.org/download/recordsofcolonyo07rhod/recordsofcolonyo07rhod.pdf>

¹²¹ Survey of Providence & Newport Newspapers, Trogdon, Maj. Gary, The Political and Military Effectiveness of the Rhode Island Militia in the American Revolution, Naval War College, 1992, p 71



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Smuggling imported guns and powder from Europe became ever-more important. The state's militia began ramping up access to more munitions, and the militia's organizational structure streamlined for war.

Donations continued to pour into Boston. At a town meeting, held at Providence on the 21st day of November, 1774, James Angell, who had been appointed to the Committee of Correspondence reported:

Voted, that the committee of correspondence, for this town, be hereby empowered to receive of the town treasury the sum of £125, lawful money, and to transmit the same to the committee in the town of Boston, for receiving donations for the distressed inhabitants of the town of Boston and Charlestown; and the treasurer is hereby ordered to pay said sum out of the first money he shall receive of the tax now ordered.
JAMES ANGELL, Town Clerk.¹²²

Colonists in Rhode Island became increasingly concerned that British military forces would be invading. The Continental Congress urged Committees of Safety (which, in reality meant "militia") be formed. In Rhode Island, a number of Militia Units were formed in 1774, including the Kentish Guards, Pawtuxet Rangers, and Gloucester Light Infantry plus The United Companies of the Train of Artillery of the Town of Providence (Chartered three days after the Battle of Lexington and Concord). These units are still operational today.



The King Sends a Frigate to Enforce the Law

Confronting resistive force with power, the King responded with bigger guns, intending to enforce his edicts with more than just a small eight-gun schooner -- this time the Admiralty sent a man-of-war under Captain Wallace in *HMS Rose*, a full 20-gun frigate, armed with heavy cannon for bombardment. It arrived in Newport in November, 1774.

Wallace was intent on ensuring Narragansett Bay would no longer be a safe haven for criminal behavior. Upon arrival in Newport, he was shocked to find a gang from Providence had raided a Fort George and scurried off with its forty-four long and medium range cannons.

Captain Wallace demanded to know from Governor Joseph Wanton, a declared Tory, if he could count on the local provincial government for aid; to which Wanton impotently proclaimed he was personally powerless, and should expect nothing but opposition from the rest of the colony's leaders.

¹²² Bartlett, Ibid, p 284



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Wallace notified his superiors the rebels intended “to procure powder and ball and military stores of all kinds, whenever they can get them.” Tough and punitive, Wallace had no respect for the scoundrels and rogues that plied the Bay. Five hundred British soldiers and sailors under his command were ready to enforce the King’s laws regardless of their legitimacy. Clearly, danger was lurking on the verge of 1775.

HMS Rose became the scourge of the seas. It not only patrolled Narragansett Bay but harassed Connecticut towns along Long Island Sound, keeping people along the Sound shore in a state of anxiety, indicting shipping and shelling Stonington while a few privateers slipped into the shelter of the harbour.



HMS Rose (Modern Replica)

Rhode Island Prepares for Its Defense

Alarmed by the predator *HMS Rose* in December 1774, the Rhode Island Assembly convened a committee, headed by Deputy Governor Sessions, to examine Rhode Island's Military Preparedness and revise the militia laws and response plans.

It would be good timing – the late winter and spring of 1775 ensured Rhode Island would be ready as the winds of war were swirling with increasing intensity. Britain’s uncompromising attitude toward the Colonists made war look inevitable.

Through the establishment of Committees of Correspondence and Committees of Safety, the colonists began sharing their structure of militia command planning, including staffing, training, coordination, command structures, and logistic planning. Neighboring Massachusetts created a shadow Provincial Congress. In October it enacted a thorough militia strategic and operational program which empowered local Committees of Safety to order their local militias into action in the event of emergency. One quarter of the men were to be ready on a minute’s notice.¹²³

Historians relish and delight in writing about the battles and the commanders, while overlooking what seem like more mundane factors that supported them: spies, provisions, logistics, and coordination prior to the battles.

Darius Sessions was responsible for Rhode Island being ready to act to defend itself and other colonies. Moreover, as a ship owner, merchant, and owner of large tracts of farmland, he knew the importance of supply and logistics in winning a war.

Sessions Appoints Greene to Assess Military Preparedness

¹²³ My ancestor, Nathaniel Porter, was one of the Minute Men who fought at the Battle of Lexington & Concord



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Nathanael Greene, then a member of the Kentish Guard Militia who had been studying military strategy and law, was asked to serve on Sessions’ committee.¹²⁴ Greene, then presumably a “mere militia private,”¹²⁵ just six months later would be appointed as Brigadier-General in charge of the entire Rhode Island Brigade.¹²⁶ then chosen as George Washington’s second in command just a few months later at the Siege of Boston.

Greene’s sudden rise to power can only be explained by understanding the circumstances of the times, and the connections to powers of influence. Greene was no country bumpkin; he came from a highly influential family that accompanied Roger Williams from Massachusetts when he founded the state in 1636.¹²⁷ The family iron and trading business not only prospered, but also was a mainstay of the local economy. In a General Assembly resolution in 1770, legislators acknowledged the contribution of Nathanael Greene and his family:



General Nathanael Greene

Nathaniel Greene and Company, John Greene and Company, Griffin Greene and Christopher Greene, have been at a very great expense in erecting and building dams, forges, anchor works and saw mills upon the south branch of Pawtuxet river, in providing a very considerable stock, and employing a great number of hands, to prosecute the business; the emolument arising from which, is the principal support of themselves and their dependants, amounting to upwards of one hundred in number.....¹²⁸

¹²⁴ The historic record may not have been unearthed to determine exactly what Greene’s role was on the Military Preparedness Committee. Some historians have been “puzzled” by Greene’s rapid rise from the lowest to the highest rank in the Militia. However, it would be reasonable to assume he played a significant role in the planning and organization of the Committee, because of his intimate knowledge of all the military and logistical supply issues as well as good working relationships with a large number of influential people. This would justify his rapid acceleration in the command hierarchy just a few months later. Appointments like this are typically the result of a combination of merit, seniority, and politics. It is most probable that he demonstrated to Sessions and other members of the Military Preparedness Committee the same qualities that were soon to be recognized by George Washington during the Siege of Boston, which ultimately made Greene the second ranking General during the Revolution. It certainly was an asset that he also belonged to the Free Masons.

¹²⁵ Greene was instrumental in forming the Kentish Guards. However, when the unit elected their leaders, Greene, who had a limp, had no military experience, and was badly asthmatic was not selected as their leader. Out of pride he considered resigning, but out of patriotism he accepted the lowly position of Private.

¹²⁶ Greene, and his entire extended family was highly prominent and respected in the state. The appointment of Greene from private to Brigadier General of the State Militia should perplex any military historian. This simply is not done – taking the lowest ranking enlisted man and propelling him into the officer ranks headlong over every major, colonel, and general is far more than extraordinary. Military advancement protocol was very laden with the tradition of seniority, which at this time would normally countermand such a promotion; age and rank was the prime determinant as to who would command. Greene was also a Free Mason, which connected him to the Revolutionary power centers in Rhode Island and beyond, it meant he could be trusted in the inner circles of the Sons of Liberty.

¹²⁷ Greene’s family owned many hundreds of acres of land on the western side of Narragansett Bay. He was born at Forge Farm in Potowomut on Greenwich Bay, thus he knew the business of operating a forge and Greene’s brother continued with this business as well.

¹²⁸ Bartlett, Ibid, Volume 07, 1770, p7



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Discussions with the curator of the Nathanael Greene Homestead revealed he ran a very profitable foundry along the Pawtuxet River. The foundry was provisioned with iron from just up river in Hope, R.I. where the Hope Forge was converting bog iron ore into iron ingots. Hope Forge was owned by none other than John Brown and Stephen Hopkins, who were also casting cannons at that location.

The remaining iron was sent down-river to a series of foundries along the Pawtuxet River. Some of those foundries made cannon balls (such as the foundry at Furnace Brook in Cranston), while other forged anchors and iron fittings for ships being built in Narragansett Bay. Others fabricated iron farm implements such as shovels and axes, which were also needed to establish militia army encampments. All these were critical implements in the logistics supply chain to be used in the impending war.

Apparently, in the years leading up to the Revolution, Greene, along with other family business interests, had been orchestrators of the supply chain of iron goods along the Pawtuxet Valley, and knew all the key players in the logistics network.



Engraving depicting the burning of the *Gaspee*. Source: *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, No. 399, August 1883.

However, with the arrival of *HMS Gaspee* on Narragansett Bay, the stable underpinnings would be shaken for the young Quaker entrepreneur. *Gaspee* captured one of his business' ships. Greene's fighting spirit and study of law roused his ire; he brought suit against the Crown and won his case. Although he apparently did not participate in the burning of the revenue cutter on the June 9th 1772, he came to understand how raw power could abuse all his fine principles of pacifism.

Quickly Greene's religious background became problematic. Greene was nominally a reluctant Quaker. Apparently, he was forced into his religion as a young boy by his father. While Greene's Quaker father¹²⁹ discouraged formal education, Nathanael convinced his father to hire a tutor who was apparently Ezra Stiles, future President of Yale. In 1773 he was disfellowshipped from his local Quaker meeting. To be disenfranchised, Greene must have been outspoken about his disagreements with Quaker teachings.

By the next year, he began helping form the Kentish Guard militia unit in East Greenwich. At that time, he was clearly in conflict with his pacifistic Quaker faith. The fact that he and his family had been seen as pacifists and an ambiguity about his willingness to fight may have been a major consideration for his lowly appointment to a private, rather than being elected as an officer in the Kentish Guard militia unit. Historians have attributed his limp and lack of military experience as leadership impediments,¹³⁰ which, while true, Greene's progressive rejection of his Quaker faith between 1773 and 1775 is obviously part of his active attempts to position himself favorably as a military leader. Greene formally gave up his pacifistic faith in

¹²⁹ After the passage of revenue-raising measures that colonials derided as the "Intolerable Acts," Greene helped organize a local militia known as the Kentish Guards. Ref: Carbone, Gerald; *Nathanael Greene, a Biography of the American Revolution*

¹³⁰ Officers were not appointed to their positions; they were elected by the men of the unit.



Darius Sessions – History’s Hidden Hero

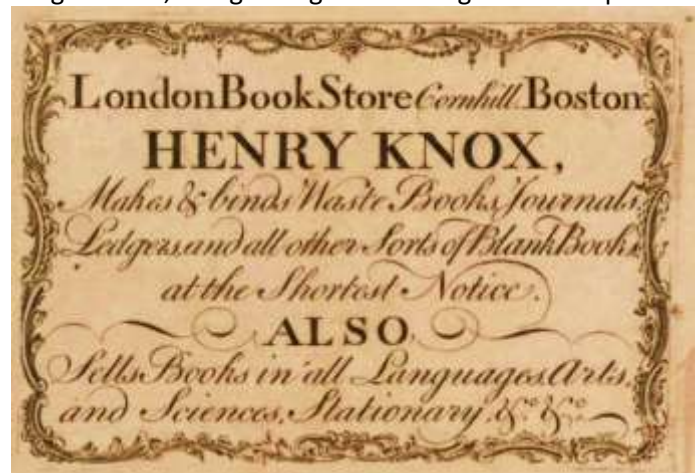
1775 citing it was too restrictive, it had deprived him of the full education his mind had craved, and limited his ability to engage in the fight for freedom. Once he renounced his faith, he was free to rise to higher ranks. More than likely, he was told by other militia leaders that unless he formally renounced pacifism, his future in the military would not be. He renounced his. Given Greene’s apparently brilliant mind, the decision to leave the Quaker faith was at cross-roads in destiny for him personally and for our nation.

Historians seem somewhat perplexed that Greene, then a mere militia private, would, just six months later, be appointed as Brigadier-General in charge of the entire Rhode Island Brigade and then rise to Washington’s second in command just a few months later at the Siege of Boston. The erasure of pacifism from his personal portfolio answers the question.

Greene’s capabilities had been well demonstrated prior to enlisting in the Kentish Guards. While he may have lacked military experience, his studies of military history and strategy, along with a sharp mind and dedication made him stand out among leaders.

He apparently had an insatiable appetite for learning, amassing 250 books for his library.¹³¹ It’s clear that Greene was not just an ordinary, backwoods “farm boy.” Deputy Governor Sessions was well aware of his skills and capabilities. Thus, it would be reasonable to assume Greene played a significant role in the planning of the Militia’s strategy and organization, principally because his intimate knowledge of the interplay of military matters, logistical operations, and legal issues, along with good working relationships with key suppliers and merchants. This would justify his rapid acceleration in the command hierarchy just a few months later. Appointments like this are typically the result of a combination of merit, seniority, and politics. Greene had already proven his substantial business and organizational skills at an early age, bypassing seniority.

By 1774, as tensions were tightening around the Coercive Acts, Greene was travelling to Boston on the pretext of visiting future General Henry Knox’s¹³² London Bookstore, where he bought



¹³¹ According to the curators at the Greene Homestead Museum (visit June 24, 2019) the books in his collection included Shakespeare, Philosophy, Military Strategy, Mythology, Bible, among many others.

¹³² Reported by Greene Homestead Curators. Henry Knox was also member of the Sons of Liberty and was a leader in the Artillery Militia. Knox sold Greene books on Military Strategy. When Greene arrived to join Washington in Boston, it is likely that Knox vouched for Greene’s character and competence, endearing him to Washington. Knox was famous for taking large cannons from Ticonderoga and delivering them against enormous obstacles to Washington during the siege of Boston. He later became Secretary of War during Washington’s presidency. While there is no direct evidence, it is also possible that Greene’s purchases of books from Knox was merely a guise for weapons dealing. Greene may have been acting as an informal agent for Brown and other forges along the Pawtuxet River, ensuring adequate supplies of cannon and other war arms were provided to Knox, who used his book store as a front for more clandestine activities. Knox was also known to court the graces of the loyalists in his book store, probably gathering information to feed to the Revolutionaries. Any serious observer of the inner workings of the American Revolution would suspect that buying and selling books was just a superficial cover for something far more important in the course of events of the impending war of independence. It would be quite reasonable to speculate that Nathanael was acting as an agent for all the network of iron furnaces and forges in the Western Rhode Island region,



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books on military strategy, and, more than coincidentally returned with a new musket ¹³³ (or maybe more concealed in an innocent looking farm wagon). Clearly, provisioning for the Revolution had begun in earnest well before the battle of Lexington and Concord.

As Jack Kelly, writing for the *Journal of the American Revolution*¹³⁴ said, it was a

...remarkable friendship between Henry Knox and Nathanael Greene. In the eighteenth century, bonds of friendship rivaled or surpassed those of romantic love in depth and intensity. Friendship was emotionally sustaining. It was a cohesive force in military and civilian organizations. Cicero, revered in the Revolutionary era, had written, “If you should take the bond of friendship out of the world no house or city could stand.”

In spite of the military flavor of these two friends’ conversation, neither had known combat first hand. Knox, born in 1750, had been too young for the late French war. Greene, eight years older, came from a pacifist Quaker family in rural Rhode Island. It’s hard to imagine two men less likely to play leading roles in a war that would change the course of history.

The catalyst was knowledge. Theory and systematic thinking were having an impact on warfare during the Enlightenment, as they were on many fields. A grounding in the latest system for managing troops was essential for a commander. Artillery was growing more important in battle, and handling big guns required an understanding of mathematics, geometry and chemistry.

Knox had access to knowledge because he ran a bookstore and could indulge his interest in military science. Greene, with his brothers, had inherited a prosperous iron and trading business and could afford a substantial library of military volumes, the titles recommended to him by the more savvy Knox.

Living in the cockpit of revolutionary fervor, Knox had been studying war for some time.

They were two very different men. Knox was a fat, self-assured city boy. He had grown up on the raucous Boston streets, where his fists had been a match for those of tough sailors and dock workers. An apprenticeship in a book shop had given him the chance to indulge his wide-ranging intelligence. The boom of a cannon celebrating the king’s birthday in 1767 had drawn him to the intricacies of artillery. He had practiced with a militia unit, then started one of his own.

Into his late twenties, Nathanael Greene had been dominated by a strict, religious father. But Greene loved to read and after the *Gaspée* affair he had veered ever farther from the pacifism of his Quaker background. Under Knox’s tutelage he had filled his mind with military matters. Soon after the outbreak of violence at Lexington, Greene was ... showing off his familiarity with the writings of Maurice Comte de Saxe, a leading eighteenth-century authority on warfare. Knox had recommended Saxe’s book to John Adams and probably sold a copy to Greene as well.

Greene demonstrated to Sessions and other members of the Military Preparedness Committee the same qualities that were soon to be recognized by George Washington during the Siege of Boston, which ultimately made Greene the second-ranking and youngest General during the Revolution. Having a close relationship with Henry Knox, and thus the Massachusetts militia certainly helped. Kelly continues:

The two friends reunited in camp during the siege of Boston. Knox must have been surprised to see Greene arrive at the head of the 1,500 troops sent from Rhode Island.

orchestrating the purchase of cannons, cannon balls, shell shot, chain, anchors, fittings, axes, and shovels via Henry Knox.

¹³³ Carbone, Gerald, *Ibid* (RPL Note: It’s probable Greene bought more than just one gun!)

¹³⁴ Kelly, Jack; *Revolutionary Friendship*, *Journal of the American Revolution*, July 22, 2014



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Only months before, Greene had been denied a position as lieutenant in his local militia unit because of his limp. A combination of luck, political connections in the Rhode Island legislature and Greene's deep book knowledge had catapulted him to the fore. He would soon be named the youngest brigadier general in the Continental Army.

Nathanael Greene, Knox would later write, "came to us the rawest, most untutored being I ever met with," but in less than a year, the Rhode Islander "was equal, in military knowledge, to any General officer in the army, and very superior to most of them."

Impressed by Greene's supply chain logistical skills, in 1778 Washington requested Greene take over the duties of Quartermaster General, when the threat of lack of supplies threatened the existence of the entire Army.

And it certainly was an asset that Greene also belonged to the Free Masons, Washington's trusted circle.

RHODE ISLAND EMBRACES THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

As we look back on history into the massive shift in attitudes, unity of spirit, and willingness to challenge the world's mightiest power, the period between 1774 and 1776 stands out.

In 1774, the Coercive Acts enacted by Parliament at the behest of King George III triggered a tectonic shift on the other side of the Atlantic. Within two years, open rebellion swept the colonies. The Continental Congress in Philadelphia culminated in the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Signing the Declaration was, essentially, a death sentence.

What would compel these men, representing legislatures that appointed them from all the colonies, to decide to create an independent nation, risking a war and their lives and their property?

How could thousands of patriots form a bond that would cause them renounce the safety and security of the mother country to embark on a courageous but highly uncertain venture, filled with incalculable risks, even death, for a cause of freedom that no nation had ever embarked upon in nearly two thousand years since the Greeks?

Understanding these fundamental questions is essential to comprehending the force of spirit that would spur the massive sacrifices the American Revolution demanded. The answer to these questions lies not in the resounding anger from the intolerable strictures of the Coercive Acts. Anger is typically tied to revenge not vision, retaliation not a new structure of governance, reprisal not justice.¹³⁵

The Founding Fathers¹³⁶ (those who signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and later created the Constitution) had a powerful set of core beliefs that then drove them to create a new nation based on a system of governance for a democratic republic.

They had a vision, a mission, now they needed an operating plan – that was first the Constitution, and then a government that could be controlled by the Constitution.

¹³⁵ The French Revolution, with all its horrible atrocities, is a good example of what happens when rebellion is not grounded in strong ideals and ethical boundaries of civility.

¹³⁶ Generally the Founding Fathers are considered the signers of the Declaration of Independence, the framers of the Constitution & Bill of Rights, plus Thomas Paine, the most articulate and passionate of the advocates.



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Fundamentally, the “gap” between their anger on the one hand, and their vision on the other, was so conspicuous that something had to give. Fortunately for our nation, it was the force of their ideals, not their anger, that set the course of destiny.

Anger had to be transformed into a higher reality – that’s what the Age of the Enlightenment gave the Founding Fathers. What were those ideals?

The Enlightenment was characterized by Five Core Beliefs (“Penta-Quests”):

The synergistic impact of these five principles working in unison cannot be overstated.

In a synergistic system, the Law of Unintended Consequences shifts to positive outcomes.

#1—Reason & Logic:

By using logical thinking and reasoning the philosophers analyzed truth in the world. Logic and reason can lead you to the right and moral answer. Reason is the primary source of authority and legitimacy. This embraces the idea of finding meaning and purpose as a fundament striving for all humans Science will uncover new truths that should alter our core understandings about reality and nature.

#2 – Natural (Divine) Order:

All the forces and phenomenon in nature were part of the Creator’s plan. Thus, human behavior must be in alignment with the larger order of the universe. Nature was not random nor irrational. A strong moral/ethical character was borne into humans as part of Divine Order. All people were created equal. Understanding the Divine is an act of personal conscience, not to be imposed by any single organized religion. Integrating Divine Order, Reason, and Log will help in the next principle.¹³⁷

#3 – Progression of Civilization:

Affirming the belief that each human being, together with civilization should be on a steady trajectory of improvement embracing deep wisdom from our Greek and Judeo-Christian heritage.¹³⁸ Each citizen must continually be striving to make their community better. Both society and individuals must dedicate themselves toward a never-ending process toward perfecting our flawed humanity and civilization. Each citizen should have the opportunity to own property and never be beholden to feudal landowners in the European form of serfdom, nor should any man be enslaved by another.

#4 -- Democratic Governance:

An enlightened society of responsible moral citizens must be capable of establishing a republic that existed for the people, by the people, and of the people. Building self-governing democratic communities, which balances individual rights with social obligation. Forces of oppression should be able to be effectively neutralized and unalienable rights and liberties preserved. No religion

¹³⁷ Washington wrote at White Plains: “In the series of marvelous occurrences during the present war, he must be blind who does not see the divine working thereof.....” Burpee, Charles W.; *The Story of Connecticut*, Volume 1, American Historical Company, NYC, 1939; Ibid p 409

¹³⁸ Books like *Aesop’s Fables* or the Old Testament *Book of Proverbs* and Aristotelian concepts of *Virtue & Ethics* were favorite readings of the time.



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should dominate, but each should be able to flourish and be protected. The endless cycles of war that sucked the life out of European economies was the result of illegitimate predatory kings.

#5 – Happiness & Well-Being:

Unlike the medieval belief that life was meant for suffering and happiness to be acquired in the afterlife, happiness was part of the Creator's Natural Law, and that by engaging in the other four principles, a profound sense of well-being could be attained. People could trust their neighbors, trust their leaders, and trust that the universe in their world was a "friendly" place. This was not Hedonistic indulgence, nor unrestrained pursuit of self-interest – happiness was a balance of self-interest and mutual-interest, attained in creating a friendly community of well-being with people synergistically serving each other – the whole was greater than the sum of the parts. This was not to be a fully harmonious world of placid contentment, but a vibrant world with civil debate and dedication to the principles of justice and equity.



Part III. The Shots Heard 'Round the World

War or Peace? The Pot Boils Over

A heated battle of words was brewing a storm between revolutionary and loyalist elements in the American colonies, and war was seen as probable, though not yet inevitable.

Some, apparently including Sessions, still hoped for some form of reconciliation -- he knew there were very big differences -- and consequences -- between *civil rights*, *civil disobedience*, and *civil war*.

Up until this point, the Rhode Island rebels had remained somewhat clandestine -- under-cover agents, black market traders, and underground guerrillas in a *cat-and-mouse* game with the King. As a leading merchant, ship owner, and Deputy Governor, Darius Sessions had purposefully kept a rather low profile as a patriot. All was about to change.

As the winter of 1774-5 turned into spring, harsh words and fiery emotions boiled over into defiant actions.

In March, 1775 Providence colonists burned 300 pounds of tea in Market Square in support of non-importation agreements throughout the colonies. It was more of a symbolic gesture than a damaging blow to coffers of the East India Company.¹³⁹

The following month armed violence erupted in neighboring Massachusetts. Word of the April 19th 1775 battle at nearby Lexington and Concord reached Providence that evening.

Two members of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress—James Warren of Plymouth and Dr. Charles Pyncheon of Springfield—arrived in Providence to request assistance from the Rhode Island Assembly and Militia. Stephen Hopkins sent militia commander Simeon Potter¹⁴⁰ from Bristol a letter requesting he come to Providence with the directive to coordinate responses with Deputy Governor Darius Sessions, who was in charge of military preparedness. Hopkins proclaimed:

The King's Troops are actually engaged butchering and destroying our brethren in the most inhuman manner. The inhabitants oppose them with great zeal and courage.



One can only speculate what patriots sat with Darius Sessions during the period of the Gaspee Affair that helped fire the Revolutionary storm in America. His friends included Stephen Hopkins, Nathanael Greene, along with George Washington.

¹³⁹ Compared to the Boston Tea Party, this was miniscule. It's estimated that the Boston protestors tossed more than 92,000 pounds of tea into Boston Harbor -- enough to fill nearly 20 million teabags.

¹⁴⁰ Evidently the volatile Col. Potter, who had briefly been appointed Major General had a falling out with other commanders. A week later he was replaced by Thomas Church as commander the Bristol/Newport regiment. Nathanael Greene was catapulted from lowly private to Brigadier-General in charge of all three Rhode Island Regiments. (see *Beggarmen, Spy: The Secret Life and Times of Israel Potter*, by David Chacko & Alexander Kulcsar)



Rhode Island Declares War

Quickly the Rhode Island militia mobilized and was ready to cross the border into Massachusetts to aid their comrade's call to arms. Sessions ordered the three militia units to hold at the border until it could be resolved whether one colony's militia could "invade" another colony.

Neither the Bay Colony's rapid militia mobilization, nor Rhode Island's call to arms in response was a haphazard, spontaneous incident. Planning for some form of insurrection must have been in the works all winter to muster and provision a full Army. The tiny colony of only 60,000 people¹⁴¹ was flexing its muscles. Events in Rhode Island following the Battle of Lexington and Concord quickly escalated at a scorching pace.¹⁴² On April 22, only three days after the "shots heard around the world" the Rhode Island legislature met in emergency session to pass a lengthy, detailed set of Acts for the Governor's signature.¹⁴³

It is voted and resolved, ...to proportion to the several towns in this colony two thousand five hundred pounds of the powder, and one quarter part of the lead, bullets and flints, belonging to the colony ; and ... to take the care and have the direction of all the cannon, powder and all other warlike stores, in the magazine, at Providence ; and to deliver the same out, agreeably to the orders of the General Assembly that the trustees appointed in the several towns, to receive the powder, lead and flints, be, and they are hereby, authorized to deliver the same out to the captain or commanding officer of each company, in their respective towns, taking receipts for the quantities so delivered ; and that the captain or commanding officer of each company distribute the same amongst the soldiery, ...

At this very dangerous crisis of American affairs ; at a time when we are surrounded with fleets and armies, which threaten our immediate destruction ; at a time when the fears and anxieties of the people, throw them into the utmost distress, and totally prevent them from attending to the common occupations of life ; to prevent the mischievous consequences that must necessarily attend such a disordered state, and to restore peace to the minds of the good people of this colony, it appears absolutely necessary to this Assembly, that a number of men be raised and embodied, properly armed and disciplined, to continue in this colony, as an Army of Observation, to repel any insult or violence that may be offered to the inhabitants.

And be necessary for the safety and preservation ... that all the small arms belonging to the colony, dispersed and being in the several towns, be forth-with repaired, and fitted with bayonets, at the charge of the colony. That all such persons who have, at their own expense, so repaired any of the colony arms, upon bringing in their bills, shall be paid therefor, out of the general treasury; and

¹⁴¹ According to June 1775 census, Russell Bartlett, Vol 07, p 299 (54,435 whites, 1,482 Indians, 3,761 blacks =59,678)

¹⁴² According to the Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, in New England, edited by John Russell Bartlett from 1863

¹⁴³ While the historic record is not clear because the key players were acting surreptitiously, thus they didn't write down roles and responsibilities for fear the British would discover their plot, it's most probable Nathanael Greene's role on the Committee was to organize and draft the Preparedness Plan, which thus positioned Greene for a larger role as commander of the R.I. Militia Forces. (In today's military, this level of detail would be part of a Battle Plan and Table of Organization & Equipment.)



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that the same persons who are appointed to receive each town's proportion of powder, &c., take care to procure said arms to be fitted up.

Military officers throughout the colony, do forthwith enlist fifteen hundred good, effective men, for the service of the colony and that each man who shall enlist, shall receive a bounty of £4, and be entitled to the monthly wages of £1 16 shillings.

Nathanael Greene was appointed as a trusted lawyer¹⁴⁴ (and also a Son of Liberty member of the Kentish Guard Militia Unit) to act as liaison with neighboring Connecticut to ensure mutual defense of all the New England colonies. This role was essentially to coordinate any military campaigns, as the alliances between the colonies prepared to take their units into battle.

It is voted and resolved, that Mr. Nathaniel Greene, be, ... appointed [as liaison to] the General Assembly of the colony of Connecticut, to consult upon measures for the common defence of the four New England governments¹⁴⁵

Coordination both within the colony, and with neighboring colonies was essential for any form of mutual defense.

The Acts were so extensive and detailed it would have taken months of preparation to write. It required careful coordination and clear responsibilities. The Military Preparedness Committee, chaired by Sessions, had utilized brilliant minds; and its attention to order and detail was archetypical of Nathanael Greene, who was a key member of the Committee. The Preparedness Committee had done its job to a high standard of excellence; the legislation was simply a reflection of the Committee's diligence.

The Acts named scores of individuals; now everything and everyone came out of hiding: the ringleaders plus nearly thirty individuals were named in the bill to receive their allocation of armaments for each of their respective towns. These "trustees" were authorized to distribute the gunpowder and musket balls to their local militia companies in their towns. Commanders were named and appointed to head up the artillery and infantry units throughout the state. Pay scales and incentives were established to fortify the regiments. It called for 2,500 lbs. of gun powder and thousands of lead bullets being allocated amongst the various villages and towns throughout the state.

In other words, in no uncertain terms, the Rhode Island Assembly declared what was tantamount to war on the King, voting to enlist, raise, embody and expeditiously dispatch three full regiments totaling fifteen hundred men to march directly to aid in the defense of Boston.

Given the vulnerability of the state capital in Newport with the Frigate *HMS Rose* patrolling the Bay, the Assembly ordered the capital, along with the colony's treasury and official records, be moved from Newport to the Providence Colony House.

Sessions intervened, stating he did not have the authority to send troops into battle in another colony. Sessions, an ardent supporter of the struggle for freedom was now in an awkward position. His responsibility was to protect the citizens of the colony. To declare open war on the British at this point would provoke the ire of the world's most powerful army and navy upon a loosely organized and poorly funded militia which could not defend a British invasion force. Governor Wanton and Deputy Governor

¹⁴⁴ This is another example of subterfuge. Several prominent lawyers were also top commanders in the militia.

¹⁴⁵ Bartlett, Ibid, P 311



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Sessions both balked, rebuking the Assembly two days later for forming an army and giving it powers to march on British troops, protesting against this act as a measure that:

We, professing true allegiance to His Majesty King George beg leave to dissent from the vote of the House of Magistrates, for enlisting, raising and embodying an army of observation, of fifteen hundred men, to repel any insult or violence that may be offered to the inhabitants; and also, if it be necessary for the safety and preservation of any of the colonies, to march them out of this colony, to join and co-operate with the forces of the neighboring colonies.

... such a measure will be attended with the most fatal consequences to our charter privileges; involve the country in all the horrors of a civil war; and, as we conceive, is an open violation of the oath of allegiance which we have severally taken, upon our admission into the respective offices we now hold in the colony.¹⁴⁶

Each may have had very different reasons:

Wanton was a loyalist, swearing fidelity to the King; he was obliged to object.

While history does not record the detailed reasons for Sessions' objection, his actions before and after the event gives insight into his probable motives: He may still have held firmly to the advice Sam Adams gave him two years before:

The subject... is weighty, ...a matter which ... may involve the Fate of America ...common Civility will serve the great purpose..... I have long feared that this unhappy Contest between Britain & America will end in Rivers of Blood.

The superficial explanation portrays Sessions acting prudently, realizing bloodshed would be a game-changer. The colony had crossed the line from civil disobedience to civil war.

However, the historian as sleuth might "smell" a fox. As a wealthy merchant and lawyer, Sessions succeeded by being discreet, even surreptitious, as evidenced by his investigation of the *Gaspée* affair and chairing the Committee on Military Preparedness. He also did not see value in announcing to the King precisely who the conspirators might be – they would be instantly targeted for treason and hung without trial.

He believed Rhode Island was unprepared for war.

Announcing the formation of an Army would only induce the King to fortify the British army garrison and naval fleet in Newport. And, as a ship owner, he knew, without a Navy, how vulnerable Rhode Island was – not just with its hundreds of miles of coastline, but the adjacent colonies of Connecticut and Massachusetts were unable to prevent either a naval blockade nor amphibious assault. New England had not a single naval warship to counter the vast British Fleet – the most powerful in the world -- nor an army sufficient to repel a landing of troops.¹⁴⁷ Neither was a Continental Navy formed that could prevent

¹⁴⁶ Bartlett, Ibid, p 311

¹⁴⁷ There is another, very plausible explanation for Sessions' actions. Sessions understood clandestine operations and how to deflect attention, as evidenced from his handling of the *Gaspée* Affair. As a large landowner in Connecticut (known as the Provisioning State), Sessions was prominent in making sure the Continental Army had



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a blockade of ports or prevent a landing of troops on the colony with its enormous coastline. In a report to the Continental Congress at the end of 1775, many of Sessions' deepest fears were validated:

Unfortunately for the inhabitants, this colony is scarcely anything but a line of sea coast. From Providence to Point Judith; and from thence, to the Pawcatuck River is nearly eighty miles; on the east side of the bay, from Providence to Seaconnet [now Sakonnet] Point, and including the east side of Seaconnet, until it meets the Massachusetts line is about fifty miles; besides which are the navigable rivers of Pawcatuck and Warren. On the west side of the colony doth not extend twenty miles; and on the east side, not more than eight miles from the sea coast above described. In the colony are also included several islands, all which are cultivated and fertile, and contribute largely to the public expense; the greater part of the above-mentioned shores, are accessible to ships of war.¹⁴⁸

In addition, Sessions knew an open order to launch a war would be like painting a bright target on the backs of every individual who initiated or authorized the order. Sessions was a clandestine strategic operative, not a vociferous outspoken orator like Thomas Paine or Sam Adams.

Wanton, writing to the General Assembly on May 2nd pleaded:

"The dispute between Great Britain and the colonies is now brought to a most alarming, dangerous crisis, and this once happy country [is] threatened.to entreat you ... with that temper, calmness, and deliberation...and with that inclination to a reconciliation with the parent state.... The prosperity and happiness of this colony, is founded in its connexion [sic] with Great Britain.....torn from the body to which we are united by religion, liberty, and commerce, we must bleed at every vein..... the resolution for raising an army of observation¹⁴⁹ of fifteen hundred men within this colony, carried to execution, will be insupportable, and must unavoidably bring on universal bankruptcy throughout this colony."

Author's Note: It's important to distinguish Sessions' words from his actions. Rather than assume office under wartime conditions, it is also quite possible Sessions chose to decline to serve as Governor, while remaining a strong champion of the cause of liberty. He had other things in mind, and his wartime actions speak more loudly than his words. Upon resigning, he traveled to his farm across the R.I. border into Connecticut, apparently going "underground" to create a **Sessions' Command Center** in Connecticut from which to orchestrate clandestine strategy to support the war. This was likely part of the Revolution's clandestine spy network. The rather sketchy information about this coordination nexus makes it all the more intriguing to discover the realities of Sessions' silence between June and October 1775 and the obscure references provided by James Manning about his Command Center. Manning, under the guise of "preaching" in Connecticut, was more likely shuttling information between operatives in Providence and Pomfret,

Is this where Sessions shared Rhode Island's Operations Plan, and told Washington of Greene's strategic genius? Additionally, this evidentiary pathway would then make more plausible the story of Washington "discovering" (not by chance) Brigadier General Nathaniel Greene's superior capabilities.

food. As will later be evidenced, he established a secret command headquarters in Pomfret. He may have seen being Deputy Governor a major liability; he could serve the cause of liberty doing things surreptitiously.

¹⁴⁸ John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations: Volume VII* (Providence: A. Crawford Greene, 1862), 424-426. Report approved by General Assembly Jan 15, 1776

¹⁴⁹ The term "Army of Observation" is simply a propagandistic euphemism to disguise its aggressive power.



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Coup d'état

The response of the General Assembly was swift and irreconcilable. On the 3rd of May, 1775 the Assembly immediately swore in Nicholas Cooke, a retired sea captain and distiller, replacing Darius Sessions as Deputy Governor. Loyalist Governor Joseph Wanton remained in Newport, feigning illness, and was not sworn in for his next term of office,¹⁵⁰ and later that year was officially replaced by Cooke.

The General Assembly then invoked a lengthy Act that was clearly a Revolutionary insurrection.

Nathanael Greene¹⁵¹ was appointed Brigadier-General to command a brigade of three regiments,¹⁵² totaling fifteen hundred men from Providence, Kent and Newport/Bristol Counties.

Money was allocated to each soldier who enlisted¹⁵³ and to suppliers of army provisions, and to the R.I. delegates to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. A healthy sum of £20,000 was ordered to be printed to help finance the efforts.

Committees of Safety were established in each county throughout the Colony to act as “muster masters” of the troops now ordered to be raised.

The very lengthy resolution chastised the British Ministry and Parliament for:

"depriving His Majesty's subjects in America of every security for the enjoyment of life, liberty, and property; and sent, and are still sending troops and ships of war into these colonies to enforce their tyrannical mandates; and have actually begun to shed the blood of the innocent people of these colonies; in consequence whereof, this Assembly... passed an act for raising fifteen hundred men as an army of observation, and to assist any of our sister colonies."

The resolution then took direct aim at ousting the democratically elected Governor, essentially accusing him of treason and ousting him from power (but it deliberately does not mention Sessions):

"Whereas the Honorable Joseph Wanton, Esq., then Governor of this colony, did enter a protest against said act ... hath not attended at this General Assembly, and [not] taken the oath required by law, ... hath positively refused to sign the commissions for the officers appointed to command troopsby all which, he hath manifested his intentions to defeat the good people of these colonies, Be it therefore enacted by this General Assembly.... that the Deputy Governor are hereby forbidden to administer the oath of office.... it shall not be lawful for him to act as Governor of this colony, in any case, whatsoever; that every act done by him, in the pretended capacity of Governor, shall be null and void in itself.... And that His Honor, the Deputy Governor [Nicholas Cooke] be ... fully authorised and empowered, to call the General Assembly together...as he shall think most for the interest of the colony... and that this act be in force immediately. God save the King."

¹⁵⁰ The historic record is not clear on the actual events regarding Wanton's absence. Illness was probably not the real reason – more likely he may have felt unsafe given his loyalties and been placed under the protection of the British in Newport, or he may have even been detained by patriots who did not want him to serve.

¹⁵¹ Note: Greene's first name was actually spelled "Nathanael" but is very often referred to by the more traditional spelling "Nathaniel." In the Assembly's appointment, Greene is referred to as "Nathaniel Greene, Jr. Esq." which indicates he may have had some standing as a lawyer at that time, although in English tradition it could also mean a person of high rank. He, along with most of the Gaspee conspirators, Sessions, and Washington, was a Free Mason.

¹⁵² A typical Colonial regiment would consist of 500 men (8-10 companies of 50 men)

¹⁵³ Ironically, the Oath of Enlistment called for the soldier to pledge himself "in His Majesty's service" and absolved from debtor's prison for any debt less than £15.



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Formation of a Navy

Upon hearing the news from Concord, Captain Wallace threatened to reduce Newport to ashes if they joined the rebels. The British countered by blockading the entrance of Narragansett Bay, then they sent more occupational troops into Newport. The Assembly worried that Newport would serve as a home base for staging attacks on the rest of Rhode Island and New England, as Sessions had warned.

In June, 1775, plagued by the rough and tumble incursions of Captain Wallace, Governor Cooke resorted to a war of words, to which Wallace fired back (indicating he was still not sure of Cooke's motives):

"I must desire to know *whether or not*, you, or the people on whose behalf you write, are not in open rebellion to your lawful sovereign, and the acts of the British legislature!"¹⁵⁴

Responding aggressively, on June 15th, 1775 the General Assembly authorized a colonial navy by ordering two ships to be commissioned to protect the waters of Narragansett Bay, effectively creating the first official navy of the Revolution.

"It is voted and resolved ... to charter two suitable vessels for the use of the colony, and fit out the same in the best manner, to protect the trade of this colony.... the largest of the said vessels be manned with eighty men, exclusive of officers, and be equipped with ten four-pound guns, fourteen swivel guns, and a sufficient number of small arms."¹⁵⁵

Abraham Whipple, a ringleader of the *Gaspée* Affair, was made Commodore. He lost no time going into action. After receiving his commission, he led an attack on the HMS *Rose's* tender, driving her ashore on Conanicut Island (Jamestown) and seized her stores and supplies. Certainly bold action for a small squadron. This naval action represented the first armed clash between a British vessel and a duly commissioned colonial ship

"To Commodore Whipple, therefore, belongs the honor of firing the first cannon upon the seas in the defense of American liberty against any portion of the King's navy. Rhode Island's energetic action on the sea in her own behalf was followed, August 26, 1775, by the formal instructions of her General Assembly to the colony's Congressional delegates"¹⁵⁶

"to use their whole influence, at the ensuing Congress, for building at the Continental expense, a fleet of sufficient force, for the protection of these colonies, and for employing them in such manner and places as will most effectually annoy our enemies, and contribute to the common defense of these colonies"

Later the Rhode Island Navy, its captains, crew, and ships, were to form the core of the new Continental Navy.

Tragically, Sessions' worst fears about what would happen to Rhode Island came to pass. In a report prepared for the Continental Congress at the beginning of 1776 paints a gloomy picture:¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Records of the Colony of Rhode Island, June 15, 1775 7:13, 18, 8:79–80, 9:58; 7:337–38

¹⁵⁵ Note: Neither of these vessels could attack nor defend themselves against the much heavier fire-power of a frigate. Speed and maneuverability among the islands and channels of Narragansett Bay would be their best asset. By this time Capt. Wallace's squadron included: 20-gun frigate *Rose*, 20-gun frigate *Glasgow*, and the 14-gun sloop *Swan*.

¹⁵⁶ Lippett, Op Cit, p 35

¹⁵⁷ Bartlett, Ibid, pp 422-26



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... the whole number of inhabitants in the colony, amounted to fifty-nine thousand six hundred and seventy-eight; the town of Newport contained nine thousand two hundred and nine; was the principal place of trade, and paid above one-sixth part of the public taxes; a very considerable commerce was also carried on from Providence and several small towns in the colony were also concerned in trade and navigation; ship building was a great branch of business. In short, the inhabitants of this colony, derived their subsistence almost wholly from commerce.

The report continued on a very dour note. Because of Rhode Island's strategic location for receiving supplies from other colonies to support the Continental Army outside Boston, the British navy had blockaded the bay, captured numerous vessels, and

"have put almost a total end to commerce ... have kept our coasts constantly alarmed, and obliged the Inhabitants to keep almost continually under arms. The once flourishing town of Newport, by the loss of trade, and consequent cessation of all business, instead of being able to contribute to the expenses of the war, hath been reduced to so deplorable a state, that we have been obliged to grant money out of the general treasury for the support of their poor; and many of the wealthy inhabitants have not only left the town, but the colony.

The islands in Narragansett Bay were

" the scenes of the most wanton and savage desolation and barbarity, deserted ; New Shoreham [Block Island], from its situation, is rendered worse than useless to the colony ; and the other islands will no longer be of service to any but the enemy.

When the Assembly met in November, a regiment of five hundred men was ordered to be raised, for the defence of Rhode Island and the other islands ; notwithstanding which, we have been obliged repeatedly to call forth our minute men; to prevent the great charge of which, we have augmented the regiment ordered to be raised in November, to seven hundred and fifty men, exclusive of a company of artillery, consisting of one hundred and five men, with their officers ; and have also voted another regiment of seven hundred and fifty men, to be immediately raised and equipped ; besides two hundred and thirty-eight artillery men, for the managing of thirty-four field pieces, ordered to be procured and placed in the several towns, upon the sea-coast.

We have ordered sixty cannon, eighteen and twelve-pounders, to be cast and have already sent a vessel, with a very valuable cargo, to purchase powder and other warlike stores; and are fitting out another, which will soon sail.

[Considering] the exhausted state of the colony, and its utter inability to maintain the present force established ... We therefore request that you will ... take the most proper measures for defending the colony; otherwise, Rhode Island, and the other islands in the bay, with the surrounding sea coast upon the continent, must be depopulated, and the colony entirely ruined.

What was not said in the report is that the General Assembly had, by the end of 1775 into 1776:

Voted and resolved, that in case any body or detachment of the Continental troops shall march into this colony, the commanding officer, thereof, be, and he is hereby, empowered to impress horses, cattle, Carts and wagons, sufficient for the transportation of the provisions, baggage and



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ammunition of such body or detachment, to such places within the colony, as the service shall require.¹⁵⁸

Voted and resolved, that each town in this colony ... [equip] all persons in their towns ... with a good fire-arm, bayonet and cartouche [cartridge] box, and who are not able to purchase the same ... said town shall immediately make order for the supplying such persons with a good fire-arm, bayonet and cartouche box, at such town's expense, to be lodged with the captains of such district wherein such poor persons belong, for their use upon any proper occasion.¹⁵⁹

Voted and resolved, that this colony [procure] thirty eighteen-pounder cannon, and thirty twelve-pounders, at the of \$40,000 provided, they are ready for use by the 10th day of May next.¹⁶⁰

This was a boatload of money, for which the colony had borrow money to seal the contract.

Was Sessions retreating from the face of armed conflict, or was he reverting to his more surreptitious and clandestine manner of achieving a noble goal without irking powerful forces? Had Sessions remained in Providence as Governor, he would be presiding over a militarized state while his mercantile business dwindled. Instead, on his vast farms in eastern Connecticut, he was able to provision Rhode Islanders and Washington's army with food and supplies and surreptitiously recruit volunteers for militia units.

SESSIONS' COMMAND CENTER IN CONNECTICUT

Sessions seems to have been operating in the cloak of secrecy on his farm¹⁶¹ in his stately mansion in Pomfret,¹⁶² which became a "command center" during the Revolution, strategically located out of the line of fire between Hartford, Boston, and Providence. His son Thomas's account states he spent most of the war on the farm. Given what we know, there are probably three things Sessions was doing in Pomfret: 1) operating the Command Center, 2) growing crops for income and provisioning troops, and 3) recruiting troops for the war against the Crown. It wasn't until 1780, when Sessions served in the Rhode Island General Assembly representing Providence that he comes out in the open again.

¹⁵⁸ Bartlett, Ibid, P 422

¹⁵⁹ Bartlett, Ibid p 423

¹⁶⁰ Bartlett, Ibid, P 417

¹⁶¹ In October 1775, after the harvest season, Sessions wrote the General Assembly, acknowledging his protest against raising an army in April, and acceded to the fact that it "greatly displeased the General Assembly and the good people of the colony, for which [I] am very sorry and now crave their forgiveness, and as [I] am in principle a friend to the liberties of America, it is [my] determination to unite and co-operate with [my] countrymen in defending all our invaluable rights and privileges." The General Assembly promptly accepted his apology as fully satisfactory and voted to receive the Honorable Darius Sessions, Esq. in favor and friendship. Knowing Sessions' past record of out-foxing the British, there is probably more to this "apology" that was never recorded, especially if he was operating a clandestine command center in nearby Pomfret. Sessions was a partner in a privateer earlier; it is not clear if he owned a share in privateers during the Revolution. Sessions' original motives for not accepting the Deputy Governor's position in 1775 may also have been influenced by his wife, whose health may have been declining; she died four years later, aged 55. With a family of many young children, this also could have been a factor.

¹⁶² Pomfret at that time was linked commercially and socially to Providence, not Hartford once roads were opened up through the woods, according to historian Ellen Larned: "intercourse between the inhabitants of the neighboring colonies became more and more frequent and friendly. Heavy carts laden with country produce; horse-back riders with pillion and saddle-bag; foot-travelers with packs, way worn and weary, were ever passing to and fro. Hartford might be the political centre of these Connecticut towns, but Providence drew them by the stronger ties of business relations and social affinities." *Gleanings of Windham County*, 1899 p 138. Larned was elderly at the time of her writing, and may have learned many things when younger in the early 1800s that have since disappeared.



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According to Brown University President James Manning, who was a close friend and regarded Sessions as the “Governor” confirms the operations of the command center:¹⁶³

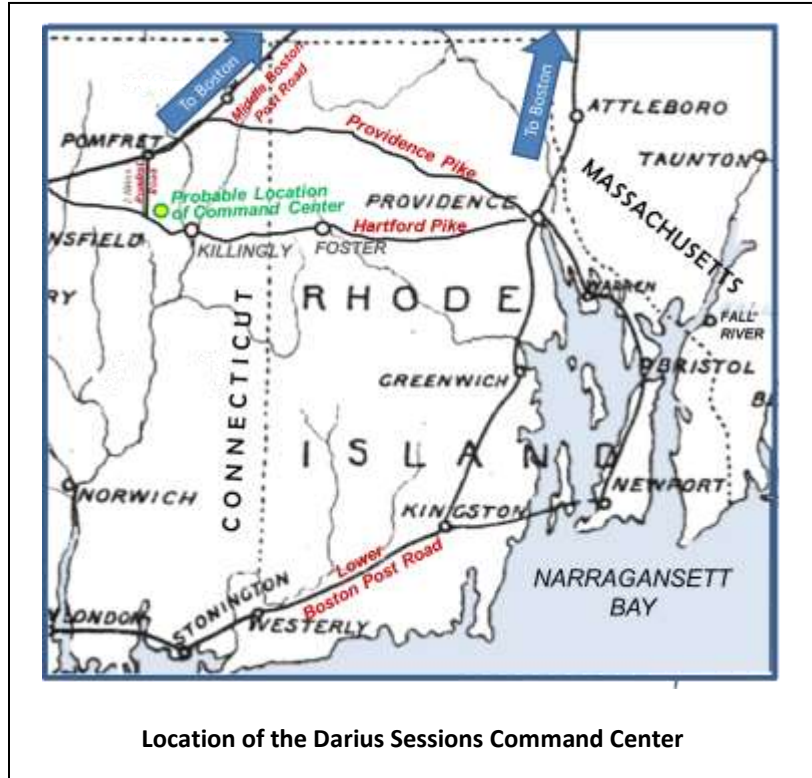
“Governor Sessions also took much pains with his grounds and farm, making “Truly Wonderful” accommodations. In this fine country seat many patriots found a safe retreat from the constant alarms and perils of the seaboard, making it almost a war office and place of general consultation.”¹⁶⁴

Local Pomfret historian, Ellen Larned, writing a century later, stated:

“During the Revolution this house was visited by many famous people including George Washington who was entertained there during one of his trips through the country.”¹⁶⁵

His Pomfret farm¹⁶⁶ would have been located very close to the “Middle”

Boston Post Road (connecting Hartford directly with Boston), and very near the Hartford Pike (connecting Hartford directly to Providence), thus a strategic nexus. Numerous prominent citizens passed on these roads, including Washington, Greene, Lafayette, and Rochambeau.¹⁶⁷ The lack of records about those conducting business would tend to confirm its surreptitious purpose.



¹⁶³ Sessions was a Trustee with Rhode Island College, which was moved to Providence in 1770 and then later was named Brown University; as Trustee, Sessions was a close friend of its first president, James Manning. Sessions has been credited with locating the College in Providence, using his influence in interesting the Brown family to be benefactors.

¹⁶⁴ Larned, Ellen D. *History of Windham County, Connecticut* & Charles Hamilton, 1858, p761. This account states: “As the Revolutionary war came on the whole valley was stirred. The old Cady homestead (likely located between Pomfret and Killingly on what is now Rte. 101) was purchased by Darius Sessions, then deputy governor of R.I. The house was thoroughly reconstructed, enlarged and beautified, transformed into a stately colonial mansion.” p 751 (Note: possibly the Military Preparedness Plan of 1775 called for a remote command center out of quick British reach.) Author’s Note: I spent a day in the Pomfret Library and found Larned’s book and references. However, I did not find any other references. I contacted the president of the local historical society, who knew of no further information. But he did say he’d start searching.

¹⁶⁵ Larned, Ellen D. *Historic Gleanings in Windham County, Connecticut*, 1899, p149.

¹⁶⁶ There is some confusion in the historic records regarding the location of this home. Evidently historians writing a century later inter-mixed two properties owned by Sessions in eastern Connecticut. One property, the old Captain Joseph Cady farm house (a rugged rural “salt-box” – see *Descendants of Nicholas Cady*, p 25 for picture), was located in East Putnam, about a mile from the R.I. state line, just south of the “Providence Pike”, which is now Route 44. This was not likely the command headquarters referred to as a “stately mansion,” located between Pomfret and Killingly, about ten miles from the R.I. border, near the “Hartford Pike,” which is now Route 101.

¹⁶⁷ The Town of Bolton has excellent records of who travelled through to and from Boston and Providence in this era, virtually all of whom would pass through Pomfret (see:<http://www.boltoncthistory.org/historicmoments.html>)



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Rev. Manning made frequent trips to Pomfret to preach while classes were suspended during the war.¹⁶⁸

Pres. Manning does not report to us the lasting effect of his preaching in Pomfret. From other sources we learn that it aroused much interest.... resulted in many conversions to Baptist principles and the formation of a Baptist church – a permanent memorial of the Revolutionary exodus.¹⁶⁹ The keen eye of President Manning recognized peculiar facilities in Pomfret, and especially its favorable position for "a boy's school," which he hoped to have established there as a feeder for his university.

Supporting Pomfret's role as a revolutionary hot-bed, local historian, Ellen Larned observed:¹⁷⁰

Windham [County, where Pomfret was located] did even more than furnish farms and homes to her eastward neighbors. These were the days of Rhode Island's extremity. Her exposed position on the sea-board brought constant peril and invasion. Time and again the militia of Windham was summoned to her aid. Companies hurried down in the autumn of '76 on receiving news of an approaching fleet, but were too late to prevent the occupation of Rhode Island by a strong body of British troops.

Windham County soldiers formed a part of the force retained for the defence of Providence, and aided in the several attempts to dislodge the invaders. In the stormy campaign of 1778, her services were especially valuable. The prospect of naval cooperation through the agency of the French fleet encouraged the patriots in their preparations for the recovery of Newport and Rhode Island by a strong movement on land. Powder, cartridges, provisions, everything that could be spared, were hurried down to Providence. Companies of militia and volunteers marched off with renewed spirit and hope.



Was the Washington Chair at Sessions' Revolutionary "Command Headquarters" across the border in nearby Pomfret?

Based on the evidence of Manning and Larned, Sessions' "command center" was used not just for raising troop enlistments. The vague use of these terms and the sparsity of information about the command center might lead one to suspect his home was being used as a spy network assimilating and distributing information. Washington was known to put a high level of importance on effective intelligence gathering.

¹⁶⁸ Larned, Ibid, p148. She states: "The meanderings of the good president give us glimpses of many of these new homes," noting a passage from Manning's diary: "Left Providence, Thursday, April 29, readied Col. Abraham Winsors, 10 miles; Traveled to John Brown's farm at Chepachet 6 miles; refreshed and proceeded to Capt. Corliss's, Killingly 12; road extremely bad; visited Mr. Jones; set out after dinner and visited Gov. Sessions. After tea traveled to Benj. Thurbers in Pomfret, 6 miles; roads better. Sunday A. M. Preached at James Thurbers; lectured at B. Thurber's at 5 P. M. house crowded; audience very attentive and affected. Monday. Visited Paul Tew at Woodstock, also at Mr. Cahoons, Thompsons, B. Lindsleys. Tues. Visited Col. Nightingales, Pomfret, dined. He lives most elegantly, has a grand farm, entertains hospitably. Thence to Jeremiah Browns and Captain Bowles's, Ashford." Note in this reference, about ½ the visits were to people with titles indicating military or governmental stature.

¹⁶⁹ The term "exodus" implies a number of people from Providence took refuge in Eastern Connecticut.

¹⁷⁰ Larned, Gleanings, Ibid, pp 149-151



CONTINENTAL CONGRESS APPOINTS WASHINGTON TO COMMAND TROOPS

After the news of the “shot heard ‘round the world” at Lexington and Concord, the Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia. George Washington was appointed to take charge of the Continental Army. He left Philadelphia aimed at Boston, traveling through Trenton, New York City, Hartford, and then on to Cambridge, taking the “middle” Boston Post Road through Pomfret from Hartford in late June.

If the oral legend is true, then perhaps it was at this time Washington conferred with Sessions at his “war office.” Did Washington ask Sessions to operate a “spy center” gathering information from the region?

An army of fourteen thousand, five hundred men were under Washington’s command. There was a shortage of ammunition -- only 9 cartridges per man were available. Many of the muskets were poor quality or in much need of repair. The siege of Boston was devoid of engineers and trenching tools to dig in and put up redoubts. Morale was high but discipline lacking.

The opposition, on the other hand, was well disciplined and fully entrenched – the best trained, best equipped army in the world.

Greene’s Rhode Island Brigade impresses Washington

Of all the militia brigades, only one stood out above the rest -- a newly appointed thirty-three-year-old Brigadier General from Rhode Island with a limited formal education, but an excellent student of military affairs, who had recently served on Sessions’ Committee for Military Preparedness -- Nathanael Greene.¹⁷¹

After arriving in Boston in June, 1775, Greene carefully observed the British order and discipline; he instructed his troops to emulate their high standards, which they did, and stood above the motley crews that constituted the militia of other states.

There he was reunited with his dear friend, Henry Knox.

When Greene welcomed Washington to the Rhode Island Brigade, he rapidly gained Washington's confidence and soon was made part of Washington’s inner circle. Greene would go on to be Washington's closest military associate and the second in command of the Continental army. A turn-of-the-century writer commented:

“He was a born soldier, and before he knew that he was to spend a portion of his life in the field he was thoroughly familiar with the theory of warfare. ...He was implicitly trusted by Washington, to whom he was scarcely inferior in generalship.”¹⁷²

Back in Rhode Island, it was essential to mobilize as much of the population as possible. Governor Cook commanded:

“every man in the Colony able to bear Arms to equip himself with Arms and Ammunition,”

Committees were appointed to visit all the houses to take account of arms and ammunition, admitting:

“these exertions in our present distressed state have nearly exhausted the Colony.”¹⁷³



George Washington

¹⁷¹ Rev. Ezra Stiles, later president of Yale University, is cited as tutor influencing young Nathanael's life.

¹⁷² Elson, Henry William; *History of the United States of America*, Volume 2, Macmillan, 1904 Chapter XII p. 247-250.

¹⁷³ State of Rhode Island & Providence Plantations at End of Century, Edited by Edward Field, Volume 1, 1902, p 231



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Greene clearly possessed several powerful qualities that lifted him into leadership:

- Competence: While lacking in formal education, Greene was apparently very smart, well read (owning over 250 volumes, including Shakespeare, Philosophy, Religion, Military Strategy, and History). His analytic skills were well displayed in the report he gave for organizing the R.I. Militia and later for examining the British forces at Bunker Hill.
- Character: This man was obvious highly trusted by all with whom he encountered. His humble, unpretentious Quaker demeanor would have belied his brilliant mind. In his business dealings, he must have been fair, accountable, respectful, truthful, honorable, ethical, stalwart, and open. Clearly, he had the courage of his convictions.
- Collaborative: Greene's approach to human relations was to empower others, make them stronger, rather than the traditional method of personal aggrandizement, confrontation, conflict, and power struggles. He seemed to delight in building organizations, while commanding them with a collaborative spirit. This made him, like Washington, an ideal Revolutionary War leader.
- Creative: Resources in the Colonies were scarce and scattered. To man an army, one had to recruit volunteers as there was no standing army. Pay was low, so Greene had to show courage, and creativity while lifting the spirits and morale of his men. He managed to marshal his resources, tapping into other people, and organizing the unheralded supply lines and logistics with aplomb (something most historians tend to overlook or minimize.)
- Connected: Nathanael Greene was not just a common local farm boy from the hinterlands. The Greene families were a nexus for many of the political, social, economic, and military affairs of the Rhode Island Colony. It is through these existing networks of trustworthy families that the Revolutionary Committees of Correspondence and of Safety could become quickly established and function quietly right under the nose the British authorities. Nathanael Greene was probably already embedded in one or more of these Committees well before the Battle of Lexington and Concord. His personal integrity, his reputation, and his membership in the Free Masons made him readily accepted by Washington's inner circle.
- Champion: Nathanael Greene possessed the seven qualities needed to be a great leader in the Revolution (which were also George Washington's unique traits):
 1. *Commitment* to the Ideals of Liberty, Freedom, and Rights of Citizens
 2. *Courage* to use his *Commitment* to overcome *Fear* of Death and Great Odds
 3. *Belief in a Divine Destiny* for America to thwart the fallacious Divine Right of Kings
 4. *Strategic Capabilities* to understand how to use limited resources and compete successfully against overwhelming odds
 5. *Spirit of Collaboration* to build a culture within his military ranks of trust, teamwork, with courage and a positive response to adversity that reflected American values to ensure morale stays at a high peak
 6. *Operational Excellence* to ensure management of all the details of battle, including battle tactics, enemy engagement, supply, logistics, battle readiness, and provisions are always at their peak at critical times.
 7. *Dynamic Realignment* and Adaptation to constantly changing conditions, changes in strategy, willingness to innovate, reposition troops, reorganize command structures, live off the land, and change timing to take advantage of enemy vulnerabilities.

These were the qualities perceived by Darius Sessions and George Washington.



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Greene must have been regarded as a man of great value, not necessarily monetarily, but in the way he built network of organizational relationships that had profound impact on the winning of the Revolution.

It's worthwhile to understand in greater detail the qualities of Nathanael Greene, (see prior page) for our generation might benefit from what first Darius Sessions, and later George Washington saw in this man.



Commemorative stamp of George Washington and Nathanael Greene, Issue of 1937

British Vacate Boston

Boxed in by land by the Continental Army, the British Army had only one option left -- abandon Boston and the harbor. In March 1776, General Howe, with all the British ships, bearing eight thousand soldiers and nearly two thousand American loyalists, set sail for Halifax, Nova Scotia, setting Massachusetts Bay Colony free.

When they did, Rhode Island was concerned that a contingent of the British from Boston would round Cape Cod, head south, and land troops in Rhode Island, then attack Washington's Continental Army from the rear. Nathanael Greene's Brigade was sent south back to Rhode Island to protect the Army's flanks.

Washington, sensing the Royal Navy would split its forces, a northern group escorting loyalist Bostonians to Halifax and a southern group heading to New York, he began dispatching his forces. On March 19th he sent Brig. General Heath to take his brigade to New York via Norwich, Conn.

On March 24th, Washington ordered more troops south based upon "motions of the Enemy, and the Operations of the ensuing Campaign, renders it indispensibly necessary that a very large Body of Troops should be immediately near New York."¹⁷⁴

By the 29th, based on new information, Washington was convinced the British fleet was headed for New York, and would attempt to link up with Canada via the Hudson River. But was also alert that the British might double back on Boston and "that we are in no further Danger of their returning to attack us at a Disadvantage,"

He wrote to his brother just before leaving Boston:

As New York and the Hudson's River are the most important objects [the British] have in view, as the latter secures the communication with Canada, at the same time that it separates the Northern and Southern Colonies; and the former is thought to abound in disaffected Persons, who only wait a favourable opportunity, and support, to declare themselves openly, it became equally important for us to prevent their gaining Possession of these advantages.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Washington's Military Orders, Library of Congress, <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/mss/mgw/mgw3b/001/001.pdf>

¹⁷⁵ Library of Congress, George Washington to John A. Washington, March 31, 1776, The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799, [George Washington to John A. Washington, March 31, 1776, The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799](https://www.loc.gov/rr/holdings/docs/washington/washington_31_1776.html). John C. Fitzpatrick, Editor. (loc.gov)



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There was little doubt by April 3rd about reinforcing New York. He ordered Henry Knox “that the main Body of the Regiment of Artillery, together with the Field Cannon, Ammunition, Stores &c. should as speedily as possible be assembled at New York.” Similar orders were sent to the Chief Surgeon of the medical corps, and the Quartermaster of the supply corps.

Washington leaves Boston for New York

General Washington left his headquarters at Cambridge, Massachusetts on April 4th, headed for New York¹⁷⁶ to ensure the safety of that city and the Hudson River. En route, Washington passed through Providence, Rhode Island, "in order to see and expedite the embarkation of the Troops."

Washington was in Providence on the morning of April 6, 1776. He visited and stayed at the Stephen Hopkins house during his visit.¹⁷⁷ A Providence history from 1918 tells us:

“In 1776 Washington reached Providence. This visit followed closely the evacuation of Boston. The general and his staff, and General Gates, "were invited to an elegant entertainment at Hacker's Hall, provided by the gentlemen of the town, where, after dinner, a number of patriotic toasts were drunk.

The town authorities considered, and decided that no place of entertainment was so appropriate as Governor Hopkins's house. The master of the house was in Philadelphia [attending the Continental Congress], but his daughter Ruth was at home; and, when the town representatives brought General Washington, Ruth calmly set herself about making her guest comfortable. Many were the suggestions, if tradition may be relied on, that were offered to Ruth Hopkins by her anxious neighbors. Silver was tendered, and linen, food, and china. But to all these overtures Ruth turned a deaf ear, asserting, with all respect to her distinguished guest, that what was good enough for her father was good enough for General Washington. ["She adored her father," a dear old soul added.] The room where Washington slept became, from that day an historic place, and it was counted a great privilege to sleep in it.”¹⁷⁸



Stephen Hopkins House

Originally located on northeast corner of Hopkins and South Main Street. Moved in 1804 & 1927

¹⁷⁶ Lest anyone have illusions that George Washington was always congenial, his letter to COLONEL RICHARD GRIDLEY New York, April 28, 1776. Makes it clear Washington demanded excellence:

Sir: It gives much Concern to hear from every one that comes from Boston, that those Works that were laid out for it's Defence, are in little more Forwardness, than they were when I left that Town. Who am I to blame for this shameful Neglect, but you, sir, who was to have them executed? It is not an agreeable Task to be under the Necessity of putting any Gentleman in Mind of his Duty; but it is what I owe to the Public. I expect and desire, Sir, that you will exert yourself in completing the Works with all possible Dispatch, and do not lay me under the disagreeable Necessity of writing to you again upon this subject.

¹⁷⁷ Stephen Hopkins' home was first built in 1742. The Hopkins home is very small, only one room deep, making entertainment, dining, or meetings difficult. This is probably the basis in the legend for the idea that Washington visited the Sessions home, which was grander and could accommodate more people. As the date of Washington's visit was too early for planting at the farm, it is reasonable to guess Sessions might have been at his home in Providence, not at his Connecticut farm, at this date.

¹⁷⁸ From Merchant's National Bank History of Providence, *A Collection of Facts and Traditions*relating- to Various Buildings and Sites of Historic Interest in Providence*, 1918, p 17



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The Hopkins home was exceedingly small; its Spartan furnishing reflected Hopkins' Quaker beliefs. It is quite possible that many of the other meetings were actually held in the more elegant home of Darius Sessions, nearby at the foot of the hill diagonally from the State House. Washington's deep interest in the Gaspée Affair and his close acquaintance with Stephen Hopkins in the Continental Congress makes it highly likely Sessions entertained Washington at this time. It was just before planting season, so Sessions would not be constrained from being in Providence. Sessions would have honored Washington by seating him in a chair of this stature. And this may have been the reality of the oral legend that Washington planned the Revolution in this chair with Session. Certainly, Sessions' access to food, supplies, and troop recruitments would have caught Washington's attention.

Governor Nicholas Cooke invited Washington "to an elegant Entertainment at Hacker's Hall, provided by the Gentlemen of the Town, where after Dinner a Number of patriotic Toasts were drank" (*Providence Gazette; and Country Journal*, 13 April 1776)

Upon leaving Providence, Washington headed west to Norwich to load cannons on ships bound for New York, because at that time of year the roads were thawing and dangerously muddy.

Along the way to Norwich, there is no notation in his diary or other records where he stayed on the night of April 7th. Some surmise he may have traveled west through Coventry, or to Plainfield via the Plainfield Pike, where he might have met Sessions to exchange spy intelligence without revealing the location of the "war office" or via the Old Hartford Pike at Sessions' the "stately mansion" in Pomfret

Rhode Island Declares Independence

Washington must have inspired the citizenry of Rhode Island, for within a month of his visit the State General Assembly declared its independence from Britain, fully two months before the Declaration of Independence was signed in Philadelphia by the Continental Congress on July 4th.¹⁷⁹

The Assembly met May 1st, 1776, at the State House on Benefit Street in Providence. It was to be the final session of the Assembly under colonial rule. The House debated the issues of Independence for three days. Then, on May 4th declared itself a sovereign state no longer pledging allegiance to Britain. It passed unanimously in the upper house, and ninety percent of the lower house.

Compared to Jefferson's July 4th Declaration of Independence, what the Rhode Island version lacked in eloquence, it brandished in utter defiance.

AN ACT REPEALING AN ACT, INTITLED "AN ACT FOR THE MORE, EFFECTUALLY SECURING TO HIS MAJESTY THE ALLEGIANCE OF HIS SUBJECT, IN THIS HIS COLONY AND DOMINION OF RHODE-ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS;" AND ALTERING THE FORMS OF COMMISSIONS, OF ALL WRITS AND PROCESSES IN THE COURTS, AND OF THE OATHS PRESCRIBED BY LAW.

The Preamble directly pokes in the eye of the King, laying the blame for independence solely in his despicable actions, while calling for all the other colonies to unite:

¹⁷⁹ One of the central issues in the *Gaspée* Affair was indicting and transporting accused beyond the seas for trial, which Jefferson made one of the injuries and usurpations by the King of England in the Declaration of Independence.



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WHEREAS in all States, existing by Compact, Protection and Allegiance are reciprocal, the latter being only due in Consequence of the former; And whereas GEORGE the Third, King of Great-Britain, forgetting his Dignity, regardless of the Compact most solemnly entered into, ratified and confirmed, to the Inhabitants of this Colony, by his illustrious Ancestors, and till of late fully recognized by Him-and entirely departing from the Duties and Character of a good King, instead of protecting, is endeavoring to destroy the good People of this Colony, and of all the United Colonies, by sending Fleets and Armies to America, to confiscate our Property, and spread Fire, Sword and Desolation, throughout our Country, in order to compel us to submit to the most debasing and detestable Tyranny; whereby we are obliged by Necessity, and it becomes our highest Duty, to use every Means, with which God and Nature have furnished us, in Support of our invaluable Rights and Privileges to oppose that Power which is exerted only for our Destruction.

The Act repeals the Parliamentary Act that established the colony and its allegiance to the Crown, disavowing all authority of the King and the powers it granted, requiring the state's population to pledge their allegiance to the new-born state's government. The Act then stated that any laws, commissions, or legal documents omit the name of the King and substitute the name of the Governor of Rhode Island, thereby leaving intact the normal process of law. Lippett quotes Greene's 1877 *History of Rhode Island*:¹⁸⁰

The last colonial assembly of Rhode Island ... solemnly renounced its allegiance to the British crown, no longer closing its session with 'God Save the King!' but taking in its stead, as expressive of their new relations, 'God Save the United Colonies!'

The RI Declaration of Independence cleared the decks for running the state totally independent of any authority of Great Britain, and established the legal structure for its future. Moreover, this was not dependent on how any of the other colonies might respond or unite. But the language laid the foundation for a higher jurisdiction of a confederation of united colonies. Freedom from oppression was not reliant upon the bullet and musket, but upon self-determination.

Immediately upon the passage of the act it was printed on a suitable broadside, duly signed by the authority of the colony, and distributed. It was at once noticed in the local papers. The next morning the Providence Gazette forever removed from the head of its columns the arms of Great Britain and substituted therefor the arms of Rhode Island. The proclamation was forwarded to the assemblies of other colonies and was prominently noticed in newspapers of the day.¹⁸¹

Governor Cooke wrote to General Washington, on May 6, 1776:

"I also enclose a copy of an Act dis • charging the inhabitants of this Colony from allegiance to the King of Great Britain, which was carried in the House of Deputies, after a debate, with but six dissentient voices; there being upwards of sixty members present."

¹⁸⁰ Lippett, Op Cit, p 30

¹⁸¹ Lippett, Op Cit p 26



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Broadsides were published, and the resolution made headlines throughout the colonies and made their way across the Atlantic, published prominently in several London papers. This must have infuriated the Crown, but it was just the beginning of an avalanche. Within two weeks other colonies took strong action.¹⁸² The colony of Virginia convened its House of Burgesses on May 15, 1776 to escalate the cause of freedom.

Imagine today any state legislature having the unity of purpose to pass a controversial piece of legislation with unanimity. Or having other state legislatures act in concordance on such a thorny issue.

"Resolved unanimously, that the delegates appointed to represent this colony in General Congress, be instructed to propose to that respectable body to declare the United Colonies free and independent states, absolved from all allegiance to, or dependence upon, the crown or parliament of Great Britain; and that they give the assent of this colony to such declaration, and to whatever measures may be thought proper and necessary by the Congress for forming foreign alliances, and a confederation of the colonies at such time and in the manner as to them shall seem best: Provided, that the power of forming government for, and the regulations of the internal concerns of each colony, be left to the respective colonial legislatures."

The day prior to the Virginia resolution, the idea of uniting all the colonies into a new nation and proposing a sense of national identity was advocated in the "Providence Gazette" for May 14, 1774:¹⁸³

"It seems to be the universal opinion in America, that the Union of the Colonies is of the greatest Importance to their Security, and therefore ought to be pursued by every good Man in this Country. It is hoped that the Wisdom of this great People will ever be exerted to make the Union perpetual; and for this Purpose it is proposed that there be an Assembly of the AMERICAN STATES, consisting of Deputies from the Representative Body in each Colony, to form a League and COVENANT for the Colonies to enter into, and fix the Union upon a basis which may, by the Blessing of Heaven, be durable as the World, and lay a foundation for Freedom and Happiness in America to all future Ages."

"The American will undoubtedly, in future Time, make the most grand and noble Figure that ever was exhibited by any People under Heaven, and their Conduct, at this important Era, will be of infinite Moment to their future Glory and Happiness; therefore we may justly expect the greatest Exertions of our Patriots to complete the Freedom of America, for which they have long and gloriously contended. Then will they reap the full Harvest of Fame, and when their Praise is echoed from Tongue to Tongue, all the People will say, Amen. Britain will also unite her voice (for she will soon be sensible that the LIBERTY of America is Life to her) and sound their fame to distant Nations. The Glory of American Freedom will startle Europe, alarm the World, rouse up the Spirit of Liberty in despotic Regions, and kindle the heavenly Fire in the Bosoms of Slaves. Tyrants will be bound in Fetters of Iron, and their insulted People will resume their native Majesty; the Nations

¹⁸² Lippett, Op Cit, p 31

¹⁸³ Lippett, Op Cit p 33 & Exhibit K, p xxx – the identity of the author is not clear.



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will be dressed in new Colours and appear in the new Dignity of human Nature. But we forbear; if the one Half should be told, the World would not contain the Pages that must be written.

"It is proposed that the constitutional Toast to be drank forever hereafter, be ' THE UNION OF THE COLONIES AND THE FREEDOM OF AMERICA.' [Signed] NEW ENGLAND.

In reading this "letter to the editor," one can quickly grasp that the fervor of the Revolution was not about rebellion, but about a new vision, powerful values, and grounded upon "the new Dignity of human Nature." Taken in its entirety, this letter is more than flowery hyperbole; it proposes a clear basis for a National Identity (something clearly lacking in America today).

The following month, the General Assembly elected Stephen Hopkins and Samuel Ward to represent the colony in the Continental Congress. Given the legal tenor and language in the RI Declaration, they were probably its principal authors.

Britain Punishes Rhode Island

Unfortunately, Darius Sessions' concerns about the damage of a hostile engagement with the British proved true.

In October, 1776, Washington intercepted information from Lord Dartmouth advocating the abandonment of Boston in favor of establishing a stronghold in Rhode Island as an intercession point between Boston and New York, and was easy to defend. General Gage replied:

"As the King's forces are too weak to act in more than one point, New York is the most eligible situation to hold. The friends of government could rally there, and, from every account, numbers would join them. That city could be easily defended, and supplied by a water communication. But there is much difficulty in leaving Boston. It requires secrecy and is of great detail. It is too important a step to be put in execution without knowing his Majesty's pleasure. Preparations will however be made for it, not knowing but instructions to this effect may be given, in consequence of intimations in a former letter from me."¹⁸⁴

Dartmouth recognized the strategic value of evacuating Boston, moving his naval command to Rhode Island, which would be a locus point for penetrating all New England by land or sea. This would put both Massachusetts and Connecticut in jeopardy by compelling these colonies to reinforce their homeland defenses, siphoning off troops needed by the Continental Army. After evacuation, Boston Harbor could easily be blockaded by a small naval force.

In December, 1776, the British Army under General Clinton took possession of Newport. During the period of 1777-1780 the British punished Rhode Island. According to his son Thomas, Darius Sessions apparently stayed at the Pomfret command center for most of this time.

Outgunned and outmanned, the Rhode Island militia simply extended their cat-and-mouse tactics of guile and intrigue from the *Gaspée* days.

¹⁸⁴ George Washington Papers, Series 2, Letterbooks 1759-1799



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A daring plan resulted in the kidnapping of General Prescott in Portsmouth in July of 1777. He was taken to Providence and ransomed. Patriots cheered, the British vowed to get even.

In New York in October, the Continental Army won a major battle over the British at Saratoga, which ultimately convinced the French to enter the war in 1778. General Burgoyne agreed to terms of parole that the surrendering troops were to be allowed to depart with "honors of war," allowing the units to retain their colors, but not their arms, and, in exchange for a promise not to return to action in the American war, the surrendering troops were to be transported to England and their freedom.



Capture of General Prescott

In November, 1777, Burgoyne was marching his troops across Massachusetts to Boston where he expected to embark to return to England. Would Burgoyne honor his parole? Or would his army be rescued by British forces in Newport? Honor was not forsaken, Burgoyne kept his word; tensions eased.

By December 1777, Rhode Islanders had renewed cause for alarm. New barracks were being constructed in Newport, signalling large reinforcements were expected. On the 5th of December the British man-of-war *Raisonable* arrived off Newport with a flotilla of twenty-six transports under convoy from the Delaware. The threat of more hostile attacks led Governor Cooke to alert Massachusetts that Rhode Island may soon need reinforcements.

When the Assembly met on the 19th of December, they weren't timid, nor prudent; two major decisions were made, the first understandable and bold, the second extraordinary, vindictive and illegal:

First, two battalions of infantry and one regiment of artillery -- totalling fifteen hundred men -- ordered to be raised for the defense of the United States in general and of Rhode Island in particular, commanded by William Barton, (who had engineered the capture of General Prescott). To augment the Militia, the Assembly made a bold move by authorizing the enlistment of

"every able bodied negro, mulatto or Indian man slave in the state into either of the two battalions....Whereas history affords us frequent precedents of the wisest, the freest and bravest nations having liberated their slaves and enlisted them as soldiers to fight in defense of their country."

The bill called for an enlistment bounty, absolute freedom, and compensation to their masters.

Second, to draft legislation to confiscate and sell the real estate and personal property of Tory sympathizers within the state.

Banishment and confiscation of the property of one's enemies resurrected the illegal action of proscription that harked back to Roman times, when an emperor confiscated the property and wealth of any who opposed him. There would be no compensation, and no protection under the law.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Note: such action was later specifically prohibited in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution.



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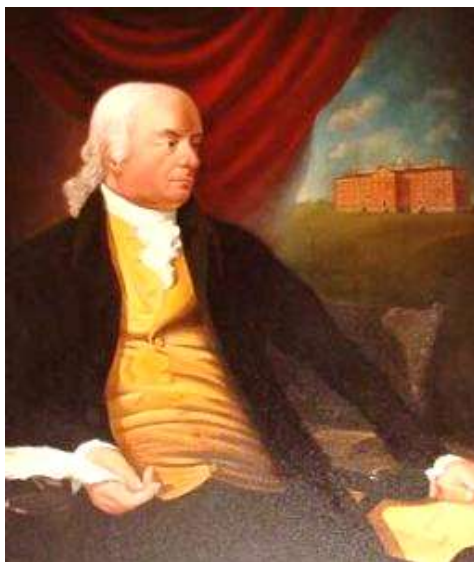
This was a terrible blow to many rich merchants and large landholders in Newport who had pledged allegiance to the Crown. All that was necessary was finding a person's signature on an oath or petition to provide sufficient proof for forfeiture. Four lawyers, including Henry Marchant, delegate to the Continental Congress, and William Channing, Attorney General to the state, were tasked with drafting the act.

The adverse side of the Law of Unintended Consequences intervened with vengeance. The British reacted by pillaging and partly destroying the rebel towns of Bristol and Warren in May of 1778. Commerce slowed as sea trade suffered from the British blockade of the Bay. Continental paper money was worthless, and food scarce, "a hundred families in the Town who have not a mouthful of bread ... nor can they get it with their money," reported a Providence citizen in August, 1778.

Finally, the July arrival of the French fleet brought new hope, with the Battle of Rhode Island ensuing the following month. But the British stayed; finally evacuating Newport a year later in October, 1779. Newport Tory merchants, under the threat of *proscription*, took everything they could load aboard:

Newport was left only a shadow of her former importance. More than 500 dwellings had been destroyed, three quarters of the inhabitants had fled; the commerce that was formerly so active and prosperous was ruined, and most of the merchants had begun business operations elsewhere. The British on leaving had taken away everything of value that was possible.¹⁸⁶

Late in 1779, during a frigid winter, the Council of War voted to discontinue use of University Hall at Rhode Island College by Continental troops which had used it as barracks while the British army occupied Newport. The College began renovations to the building that winter. Darius Sessions, a trustee of the College, was reelected to the State Assembly in the spring of 1780, just as the College was set to resume classes. In the *Providence Gazette* of April 29, 1780 President Manning announced the reopening of the College:



Stephen Hopkins, Chancellor of Rhode Island College (now Brown University)

Providence April 13, 1780

NOTICE is hereby given that on the 10th of May next the College in this Town will be opened, to receive the Youth who desire to prosecute their Studies under my Direction: And that a Grammar School will be opened at the same Time and Place. The Terms of Tuition, and Boarding may be known by applying to the Subscriber; who will pay particular Attention as well to the Morals¹⁸⁷ as Instruction of those committed to his Care.

JAMES MANNING

As the French fleet approached America, their ultimate destination where they intended to establish their headquarters was top secret until they approached land. Were they destined to establish their headquarters in Newport, Providence or Boston?

¹⁸⁶ State of Rhode Island & Providence Plantations at End of Century, Ibid, p 246

¹⁸⁷ Note in this statement Manning's emphasis on *moral responsibilities* are as important as *individual rights*.



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Historian Howard W. Preston¹⁸⁸ recounts that the idea of French troops occupying Providence was met with frigid hostility.

A bill was drawn up by Rhode Island College Chancellor Stephen Hopkins and Rev. James Manning, which was then approved by the Town Meeting in Providence and later by the General Assembly in June to:

Adopt legal and proper Measures to prevent the establishment of an Hospital in this Town for receiving the Sick on Board the fleet.....expected to arrive in this State from Europe."



President Manning's House and University Hall – Hospital for French Troops

As soon as the Assembly adjourned for the summer, the Council of War countermanded the Assembly. Colonel de Corny claimed the building was appointed by the Court of France and Doctor Benjamin Franklin for the reception of the sick of the French army.

He requested that the building be turned over to him without delay.¹⁸⁹ The French used the building for almost two years, from June 1780 to the end of May 1782. The first French troops occupied Providence in July, 1780; then sick French troops from the fleet arrived the next month, as shown by an advertisement in the Providence Gazette of August 12, 1780:

Notice is hereby given That a Number of Sick belonging to his Most Christian Majesty's Fleet and Army are to be sent to the College Edifice in the Town of Providence, for whom will be wanted immediately a Quantity of fresh Provisions, also Cider and Hay or Straw, for which articles a Generous Price will be given in Hard Money. It is earnestly wished that a full Supply may be immediately brought in, and it is hoped that No Person will be so sordid as to demand extravagant Prices from our great and generous Allies, who have come so great a Distance to our Relief. Attendance will be given to receive the articles and Payment made by the Subscriber.

Benoni Pearce

Providence August 4, 1780

The promise of "hard money" meant all was not dire for Rhode Island merchants and farmers, who took advantage of the extra five thousand troops quartered in the state; many charged the French what Rochambeau considered exorbitant prices.

Rochambeau arranged to have some troops shifted to Connecticut where forage for their animals and firewood was fairly priced. Darius Sessions probably used this time to make up for losses over the last three years, working his farm in Connecticut and trading mercantile goods extensively in Providence. Connecticut, referred to by the united colonies as the "provisioning state," would play an important role in keeping the Revolutionaries and their alliances fed.¹⁹⁰ While headquartered in Newport, Rochambeau

¹⁸⁸ Preston, Howard, *Rhode Island Historical Society Collections*, Volume XVII, No1 January 1924 pp 1-22

¹⁸⁹ Preston, Howard; *Ibid*, p 4 The French actually chose Newport for their larger Command headquarters.

¹⁹⁰ The provisioning headquarters of Connecticut was in Lebanon, about 25 miles south of Sessions' farms in Pomfret.



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visited Providence several times, where some of his officers were quartered. One aide observed they were:

met with many difficulties among the Americans, who dislike to lodge troops, and who, as I have already mentioned, are slow and even mistrustful.

WASHINGTON RETURNS TO PROVIDENCE IN 1781

In the spring of 1781, with French troops still encamped in Newport, Washington visited Rhode Island for the second time. After a conference with General Rochambeau, he left Newport, passed through Bristol and Warren, and on the 13th of March arrived in Providence. It was during his stay that Washington again visited the home of Stephen Hopkins. Moses Brown tells of his visit:

"I was with him, sitting, when General Washington by himself alone called to see him. I sat some time, viewing the simple, friendly and pleasant manner" in which these two great men met and conversed with each other on various subjects. Sometime afterward, Mr. Brown spoke of again seeing Washington and of being impressed with his easy, simple manner — very like that of Stephen Hopkins."

While in Providence on March 14, he made an address to the inhabitants of the town, telling them how very moved he was by "those demonstrations of attachment" they had exhibited. Washington continued by expressing his:

"confidence and affection of his fellow Citizens," who were "the most valuable and agreeable reward a Citizen can receive. Next to the happiness of my Country, this is the most powerful inducement I can have to exert myself in its Service. Conscious of a sincere desire to promote that great object, however short of my wishes the success of my endeavors may fall, I console myself with a persuasion that the goodness of my intentions in some measure justifies your approbation."



Again, it was quite possible that General Washington visited Sessions' larger, more spacious home near the State House to be entertained and to plan the next stages of the war.¹⁹¹

Washington's journey was originally designed to plan an attack on New York City, expecting Count Rochambeau to follow behind soon. From Providence, Washington headed west destined for New Windsor, New York, just north of West Point. The record shows he stopped in Bolton, just east of Hartford, which would have been the second day of a two-day journey from Providence.¹⁹² Pomfret would easily have been the likely first night's stop on the "Old Hartford Pike" (now Route 101) carved out of the woods by Sessions' father. Washington likely visited Sessions' elegant mansion command center for a relaxing evening before hitting the dirt trail across Connecticut. As this command center was actually somewhat clandestine, it is probable the record purposefully kept the location secret to prevent British spies from discovering the true nature of Sessions stately farmhouse.

¹⁹¹ At some point, according to Sessions' great-grandson, Washington Cole, the Providence home moved several blocks to Constitution Hill, north of the Old State House. The shop could still have been on South Main St.

¹⁹² *Diaries of Geo. Washington*, Vol. 4, 19. 12 Sept 1784 entry indicates "usual travelling gate" was "5 miles an hour."



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The French Army, which had been quartered in Newport nearly a year awaiting the right opportunity to attack, received a communiqué in May from Admiral De Grasse: his fleet and 3,000 additional French soldiers were sailing from the Caribbean to provide additional armament to support General Washington and Count Rochambeau. The joint force was to rendezvous off Virginia by September. The bulk of Rochambeau's army, encamped in Newport for nearly a year, began their trek to Yorktown commencing in mid-June, 1781. Count de Deux Ponts stated:

"We shall remain eight days in camp at Providence and this time is necessary for us to collect horses for the artillery and the ambulances wagons to carry our baggage, oxen to draw them, and to await four hundred and fifty men for our army who have just arrived at Boston upon the convoy coming from France"¹⁹³

By then, with a more robust economy, the reception of French officers in Providence had become decidedly warmer. In a Town Meeting on March 23, a week after Washington departed, it was voted to house French officers for no charge by the residents, with more than fifty officers -- including Counts Barons, and Chevaliers -- being quartered in town at the homes of prominent revolutionary citizens.

By the end of June, French troops had departed Providence on their march to Yorktown. Each day a division left Providence on the dirt trails through Connecticut on their way to New York. They marched all summer, eventually arriving in Yorktown, where they were met by Admiral de Grasse's navy and army, bottled up the British forcing a defeat, and ultimately an American-French victory to end the war.

A two-year armistice followed after the Franco-American victory at Yorktown in the fall of 1781, while a peace treaty was being negotiated in Paris that would put an actual end to the war in 1783.

Washington's Third Visit to Providence in 1783

During the two years of negotiations between the Americans, French, and English, the French Army remained. Washington came to Providence for the third time in 1783, accompanied by Count Rochambeau on his way to Boston to return to France in October 1783, passing through Pomfret, where Sessions had his Command Headquarters. Count Segur, the eldest son of the Minister of War, and the French State Secretary of the Order of Cincinnati, commented:

"the autumn was like winter, the cold was sharp and the snow fell in abundance."¹⁹⁴

Many French officers stayed in town, and were quartered with various families, who gave up or shared their homes with their French guests. The record shows no French officers or troops were quartered in either of Sessions' two home in Providence. However, it's likely Darius Sessions was one of those who offered his home's hospitality, with the Washington Chair sitting by the parlor fireplace. Perhaps snuggled by the fire, a French officer sipped a glass of claret.¹⁹⁵ Within six months the long war ended with the Treaty of Paris.

There may have also been another reason for Washington's Rhode Island visit in 1783 as recounted by former Governor Lippett in 1904:¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Preston, Op Cit, p 12

¹⁹⁴ Merchants National Bank of Providence, Old Providence: A Collection of Facts and Traditions, p29

¹⁹⁵ Correspondence with Robert Selig, June 2016: regarding French officers in Providence. "There is indeed a list but it is very faded and rather difficult to read." A more readable copy shows that Sessions did not house a French officer, but likely entertained them in his home. Rhode Island Historical Society Manuscripts XV, folder 361.

¹⁹⁶ Lippett, Op Cit p37



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Rhode Island was equally marked for her financial support of the patriot cause, as stated by the late Judge Horatio Rogers:

"In 1783, the Continental Loan Office accounts show that only four states had contributed more to the public treasury than Rhode Island, diminutive as she was, and in proportion to population none could compare with her.

"With less than a quarter of the inhabitants of Maryland she held half again as much of the public debt. Though only one-eighth as populous as Virginia, she was a public creditor in more than double the amount of that great state; and while North Carolina and South Carolina each possessed more than three times the number of inhabitants of Rhode Island, yet this state held upwards of six times more of the public debt than the former, and upwards of seven times more than the latter."

In proclaiming the action of Rhode Island and her people in the conflict for American liberty, and in submitting evidence of their services in the Continental cause, it is never to be forgotten that each of the thirteen colonies was inspired with similar patriotism and an equal determination to achieve Independence. Each furnished its quota of ennobling sacrifices and heroic deeds.¹⁹⁷

Who exactly contributed this money to support the war effort? Further investigation is needed to unearth the sources of capital. But if you want to understand history, never neglect following the money. The most likely sources of capital were, of course, the Brown brothers, John, Joseph, Nicholas and Moses. Other Providence merchants, such as Darius Sessions would also be contributors.¹⁹⁸

The Fight for Freedom:

Our conception of freedom in the 21st century is quite different from the colonists. Freedom was not a free pass to do as they pleased, nor the abdication of social responsibilities. Freedom was a quest that enabled the Five Principles of the Enlightenment to flourish, creating the foundation of one's personal and national identity.

In my extensive research on the Sessions-Washington connection, I searched through Washington's Diaries and Letters to see if Sessions' name surfaced. Nothing. We could draw three conclusions: 1) there was no connection. (Yet, there is too much evidence that says this conclusion is invalid), 2) the connection was so minor and incidental that it was never mentioned, or 3) Sessions was actually considered part of Washington's extensive spy network that played a substantial part in winning the war, and therefore they formed a pact to keep their relationship secret. The lack of evidence could, by and in of itself, be the "smoking gun" indicating another cover-up, just like the Gaspée.

We know that Washington met Stephen Hopkins at the 1774 and 1775 meetings of the Continental Congress and that the Gaspée cover-up was of deep interest to Washington. The two must have discussed the matter along with the name of Darius Sessions would have surfaced in both the news articles and Committees of Correspondence dialogue. If Washington called up Hopkins' household in his 1776 visit to Providence (when Hopkins was in Philadelphia), it would be logical and proper decorum for Washington to call upon Sessions. However, Sessions may have asked that their meeting be somewhat clandestine in order to preserve the hidden identities of many of the Sons of Liberty in Providence who were supplying guns and stores to the Revolution.

Only further investigation will reveal the truth.

the war. However, one possible source was the Jewish population in Newport that may have funnelled money into supporting the war effort. The connection between Moses Seixas and the Masons may reveal further details.



Part IV: An Uneasy Peace and Reuniting a Nation

A POLARIZED CITIZENRY

A war of *words* is quite different from a war of *weapons*; peace is not simply a harmonious contrivance, and politics can be pugnacious.

While the war may have liberated Rhode Island, it did not unify it. In fact, having a common enemy – the King – masked pre-war underlying divisions that the war actually exacerbated, and then became inflamed after the war ended.

Many of the Providence merchants survived the war outfitting commercial trading vessels with cannon, acting as "privateers" that attacked British shipping, then selling their booty on the open market across the Atlantic and Caribbean. Such "legalized piracy" brought needed money and goods into Rhode Island, while helping cripple British trade and forcing the King's warships to escort trading vessels. Providence merchants thus continued to do business, some prospered and some got by in a survival mode.¹⁹⁹

After the war, divisions between the rural and commercial centers manifested with the emergence of the Country Party made up of farmers and agricultural interests, many of whom were deeply in debt after the war. In 1786 they won the election, throwing the merchants – the Town Party -- out of dominance in the Assembly. Paper money was the new policy to help pay debts, while the merchants preferred hard currency in silver or gold. When the new government issued £100,000 in paper bills to help finance loans for back taxes, inflation immediately set in, sending the state's economy into a downward spiral of turmoil.

The Country Party was extremely wary of any power outside the state's borders, refusing to send any delegates to the Federal Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787. When the Convention sent the Constitution to the R.I. Assembly, it simply refused to vote on it. The schism was so severe that in 1788 Nicholas Brown outlined a plan to form a separate state, calling for "Newport, Providence, Bristol, Warren and East Greenwich to breakaway and join the Union on their own terms." Vice President John Adams concurred with the plan to split Rhode Island.²⁰⁰



The Country Party passed an act issuing £100,000 of paper money to assist farmers borrowing from the state to pay back taxes.

(Image courtesy of Patrick T. Conley)

Finally, the U.S. Senate threatened to tax all trade from Rhode Island, claiming it was a foreign country.²⁰¹ Representative Henry Marchant,²⁰² from Newport, who had served the state as Attorney General and in the Continental Congress, negotiated passing an act that called for convening a constitutional convention, thus staving off Congress from either isolating or dividing Rhode Island.

Rhode Island insisted on protection from a centralized government in the form of the Bill of Rights -- twelve Constitutional amendments to protect people's freedoms and rights.

¹⁹⁹ Some Providence merchants clearly prospered during the War, as evidenced by John Brown's elegant mansion.

²⁰⁰ www.providenceri.com/archives/influence-of-merchants-during-the-ratification-of-the-constitution

²⁰¹ Richard Dilworth, editor, *Cities in American Political History*, p 57

²⁰² Four years later, Darius Sessions' son, Thomas, married Elizabeth Marchant, the judge's daughter, in Newport. Thomas would inherit the George Washington chair, which now had significance as a symbol for Elizabeth's family.



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Finally, in May and June 1790, with the added assurances of the Bill of Rights to satisfy the rural concerns that an abusive central government would be limited, the Assembly narrowly approved (34-32 margin) the proposed Constitution and subsequently most of the amendments in the Bill of Rights. Thus Rhode Island finally ratified the Constitution (the final state to do so).²⁰³

Washington, who was reluctant to visit the state during his 1789 New England tour while Rhode Island stayed out of the Union, was now comfortable knowing he would be welcomed in friendly territory.

WASHINGTON VISITS RHODE ISLAND IN 1790

Washington's fourth and final visit to Rhode Island began with an arrival in Newport from New York, the U.S. Capital, on August 17, 1790 with his entourage on the packet boat²⁰⁴ *Hancock*, under the command of Captain Brown, after a two-day sail from Long Island Sound. As his ship entered Newport Harbor, church bells rang out, ships in the harbor flew their colors, and the fort fired a salute.

When he landed, in tribute to his role negotiating the Constitution's approval, Judge Henry Marchant²⁰⁵ presented Washington to local dignitaries. Likely Marchant's nineteen-year-old daughter Elizabeth, who was soon to marry Darius Sessions' youngest son, Thomas, was presented to the President that morning.²⁰⁶ In return for his role in rallying Rhode Islanders to ratify the Constitution and as devoted member of the Continental Congress, Washington had appointed Marchant to be the Judge of U.S. District Court a month earlier.²⁰⁷

The trip was to be more than just a celebratory visit – it had broad-ranging significance; Washington had other important agendas that spurred the trip.

What motive would justify his bringing an entourage consisting of the U.S. Secretary of State and author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson; the Governor of a major state, George Clinton of N.Y.; a U.S. Supreme Court Justice, John Blair; and a Congressman from the South, William Loughton Smith – all representing different branches of the government?



George Washington c 1795



Henry Marchant

²⁰³ President Washington promptly rewarded Marchant by nominating him on July 2nd to be Federal Court Judge for Rhode Island. After confirmation, Thomas Jefferson wrote Marchant with congratulations. (FoundersArchives.gov)

²⁰⁴ A packet boat typically carried mail, passengers, and cargo on a regular run between large ports. This was one of the few recorded trips of Washington travelling by boat, other than river crossings.

²⁰⁵ Marchant died in Newport in 1796. He also owned farms in South Kingstown and Newport, the latter given to his daughter Elizabeth Marchant Sessions, according to the 1845 letter by Thomas Sessions.

²⁰⁶ Marchant was a Sons of Liberty patriot, replacing Stephen Hopkins whose health declined, served as state Attorney General during the time Darius Sessions was Deputy Governor, and was delegate to the Continental Congress from Rhode Island from 1777-79 during which he was a signer, Articles of Confederation and again in 1783-4 according to his Granddaughter, Elizabeth Bicknell, cited in *Sessions Family in America*, gathered by Francis Charles Sessions, 1890, p 236. During the visit, presumably Jefferson met with Marchant to discuss judicial matters.

²⁰⁷ See Letter from Marchant to John Adams, 5 July 1790: "Col. Peck came in from New York, & informs that His Excellency the President & Senate have been pleased to honor me with the Appointment of Judge of this District.—They have my most grateful and dutiful Acknowledgments.—And to You Sir, I am most feelingly obliged"



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Could it be this was a potent lobbying team pushing for full ratification of the Bill of Rights²⁰⁸ in Rhode Island (the Second Amendment – Militia, had not been ratified), thus gaining momentum by popular acceptance? Perhaps it was to enlist Rhode Island's aid in jawboning neighbouring Connecticut and Massachusetts (which had not ratified any of the Bill of Rights) into action – after all if highly independent Rhode Island felt its rights were preserved, so shouldn't others?

Of the twelve amendments in the Bill of Rights, the first amendment addressed the issue of freedom of religion and of the press. Clearly one part of Washington's agenda was to stake out the high ground on religious freedom. Rhode Island, with its very early foundational position on religious rights through Roger Williams, would be a proper pulpit to define the meaning of the First Amendment clause stating:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof....”

This would be the centrepiece of his address in Newport.

But why did Washington choose Newport? He could have more easily addressed the Jewish congregation in New York City (where the U.S. Capitol was located at the time).

The answer lies in the leader of the congregation at the Touro Synagogue, Moses Seixas, a first generation Jewish-American whose parents migrated from Lisbon, Portugal to Newport.

A month before Washington's visit, Seixas explained to the New York Israel Congregation why he had refrained from writing a joint letter to President Washington with the synagogues in New York, Richmond, Philadelphia, and Charleston; instead he chose to address Washington individually, writing his own letter to ensure that "the Enfranchisement which is secured to . . . Jews by the Federal Constitution" was upheld.²⁰⁹



Touro Synagogue, Newport RI

Why would a Jewish leader in a Christian country break ranks with his fellow Jewish leaders?

The answer to this puzzle probably lies beneath the surface in Free Masonry. Washington was deeply concerned about having people on his team he could trust; it was a major issue throughout the war and afterwards in his presidency. And the people he could trust unequivocally were his Masonic Brothers.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ By August, 1790, it was not clear that all the amendments would be approved, as the ratification had been sporadic at that time, ratifying some and disapproving others. Massachusetts and Connecticut had not affirmed.

²⁰⁹ "Items Relating to Correspondence of Jews with George Washington, Moses Seixas to Kaal Kadosh Seerit Israel Congregation in New York," (in American Jewish Historical Quarterly 27 New York: American Jewish Historical Society, 1920): 219.

²¹⁰ At Washington's first Presidential Inauguration in New York City in 1789, he was surrounded by Richard Henry Lee, Henry Knox, Arthur St. Clair, Baron Von Steuben, House Speaker Frederick A.C. Mulenberg, and New York Governor George Clinton — all Freemasons. (themasonicleader.com). Supreme Court Justice Blair was the Washington's first appointment to the Federal Judiciary, and later the Supreme Court. He had been the Grand Master of the Williamsburg, Virginia Lodge, and then in 1778 was elected Grand Master of Masons for the State of Virginia. (The New Age Magazine, Volume 26, January, 1918). (Supreme Court Justice John Marshall was also a Masonic Leader). Of the fifty-five members of the Constitutional Convention, fifty were Masons. (*The Masons as Makers of America: The True Story of the American Revolution*, by Madison Clinton Peters, 1917, p 59-60) Congressman Smith was Provincial Grand Master in South Carolina. There is no evidence that Thomas Jefferson was a Mason, but, as a disciple of the "Age of Enlightenment" Jefferson certainly adhered its fundamental values.



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Most important, Seixas had an inside track to the power structure of the time, because Seixas was also Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Rhode Island,²¹¹ as well as a co-founder of the Bank of Rhode Island five years later, serving as its first cashier.²¹²

Seixas sent his letter shortly before Washington's arrival (which suggests Seixas' letter and Washington's oratory were orchestrated well in advance), stating that Jews would be entitled to the same privileges as an American of any other religious denomination, having been previously "deprived . . . of the invaluable rights of free Citizens." Seixas's intent was to elevate the thinking of the time by leveraging the Revolutionary Principle of Liberty, asserting that the ideals of the First Amendment guaranteeing religious freedom were more than a statement of "tolerance,"²¹³ but *integral* to the republic's "basic ideals" that:

"Gave to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance – but generously affording to All: liberty of conscience, and immunities of Citizenship; deeming every one, of whatever Nation, tongue, or language, equal parts of the great governmental Machine."²¹⁴

Washington endorsed this ideal by making one of his most important addresses on the subject of religious liberty. To the members of the Hebrew Congregation at Touro Synagogue, he expressed his appreciation and assured the congregation that they could expect safety and continued freedom in the future:

"The Citizens of the United States of Americaall possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the

²¹¹ Many are surprised to learn that the Masonic Rites are Greco-Judaic-Christian in nature, and are not a conspiracy, but rather a repository for holding and preserving the Values of the Enlightenment. Jewish Mason, Moses Michael Hays was Deputy Inspector General of Masonry for North America in 1768, and Grand Master of Massachusetts from 1788 to 1792, when Washington was visiting Newport. Paul Revere served under Hays as Deputy Grand Master. Jewish Masons played an important in leading Washington's army with 24 of them serving as officers. (*Freemasonry and Judaism* by Paul M. Bessel, July 1989 www.masonicworld.com) Jewish members of the Free Masons of modern times have included Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, David Sarnoff, Ernest Borgnine, Eddie Cantor and Harry Houdini. Today's scores of anti-Masonic Web sites spreading conspiratorial tales of a nefarious network of financiers, plotters, cosmopolitans and no-good connivers is foolishness. (BTW, this author is not a Mason)

²¹² <https://www.ricurrency.com/bank-name/bank-of-rhode-island-newport/> The institution was originally located in Seixas' at 29 Touro Street, a building of wealth and exists to this day.

²¹³ Today we have little conception of the intolerance that existed in this period. To illustrate, this is the affirmation the Royal Commissioners of the Gaspée Affair had to swear to ensure no Catholic thinking existed in the decisions:

We do solemnly and sincerely, in the presence of God, profess, testify and declare, that we do believe, that in the sacrament of the Lord's supper there is not transubstantiation of the elements of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, at or after the — thereof by any person whatsoever: And that the invocation or adoration of the Virgin Mary, or any other Saint, and the sacrifice of the Mass, as they are now used in the Church of Rome, are superstitious and idolatrous: And we do solemnly, in the presence of God, profess, testify and declare, that we do make this declaration and every part thereof, in the plain and ordinary sense of the words read unto us, as they are commonly understood by English Protestants, without any evasion, equivocation, or mental reservation, whatsoever, and without any dispensation already granted us for this purpose by the Pope, or any other authority or power whatsoever, or without any hope of such dispensation from any person or authority whatsoever, or without thinking that we are or can be acquitted before God or man, or absolved of this declaration or any part thereof, although the Pope, or any other person or persons, or power whatsoever shall dispense with or annul the same, or declare that it was null and void from the beginning.

We do swear, that we do from our hearts, abhor, detest, and abjure as impious and heretical, that damnable doctrine and position that princes excommunicated or deprived by the Pope or any authority of the See of Rome, may be deposed or murdered by their subjects or any other whatsoever. And we do declare that no foreign prince, person, prelate, state, or potentate, hath, or ought to have, any jurisdiction, power, superiority, pre-eminence or authority, ecclesiastical or spiritual, within this realm. So help us God – Source: Staples, Op Cit. pp 100-101

²¹⁴ "Moses Seixas to George Washington, 17 August 1790," *Papers of G. Washington*, Presidential Series, Vol. 6, 286.



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indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support."

Washington's letter to the synagogue, delivered on the same day, is as instructive as it is famous for clarifying and reinforcing the ideals of true religious liberty, an engrained tradition in American life since Rhode Island's founding by Roger Williams in 1636. Reflecting Seixas' sentiment, Washington pledged the Jewish congregation more than mere religious "tolerance," but true protection for living virtuously as good citizens:

"It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights.....the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support." ²¹⁵

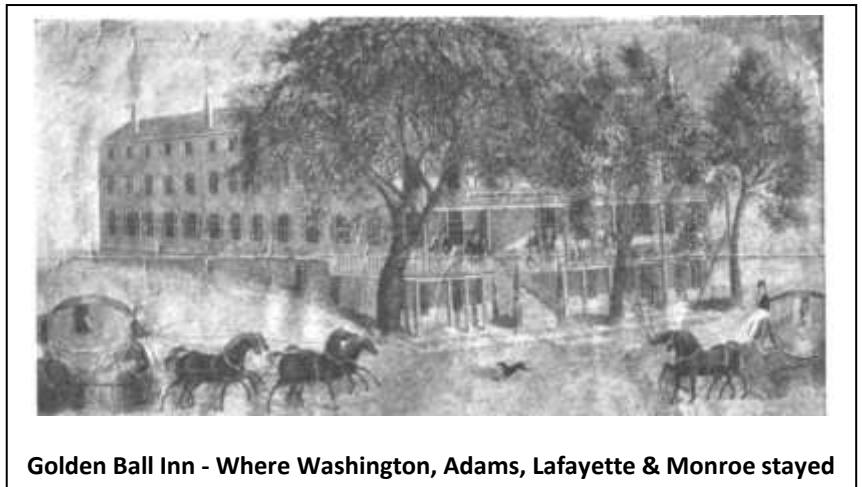
More than likely, a private meeting of Free Masonry leaders followed where Seixas delivered his private letter, but the record would never reveal such an event.

The following day Washington arrived in Providence, giving an address that proclaimed:

"The energy of government is so increased as to promise full protection to all the pursuits of science and industry; together with the firm establishment of public credit, and the vindication of our national character. It remains with the people themselves to preserve and promote the great advantages of their political and natural situation." ²¹⁶

Washington then proceeded to a private dinner and tea²¹⁷ at Abner Daggett's Golden Ball Inn (later known as the "Mansion House") behind the State House. The next morning, August 19th Washington delivered an address to the Corporation of Rhode Island College. (As a Trustee and friend of James Manning, Darius Sessions was undoubtedly in attendance.)

(Note: this following letter, dated Nov. 1790 to Reverend Manning reflects



²¹⁵ From George Washington to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, 18 August 1790," Founders Online, National Archives. Note the same phrasing for both Washington and Sexas "gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance." For the suggestion that Thomas Jefferson, David Humphreys, or even Tobias Lear might have written the draft of Washington's response, see Hirschfeld, 31-3.

²¹⁶ From George Washington to Rhode Island Legislature, 20 November 1790," *Founders Online*, National Archives.

²¹⁷ More than likely this was also a private meeting of Free Masons, but there would be no record of such an event.



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Washington’s views on education and possibly his comments to the College during his last visit.)

Gentlemen,

.....While I cannot remain insensible to the indulgence with which you regard the influence of my example & the tenor of my conduct; I rejoice ...to find in the measures adopted by the *guardians of literature* in this place, for *improving the morals*²¹⁸ *[italics added]* of the rising generation, and inculcating upon their minds principles peculiarly calculated for the *preservation of our rights & liberties*.*[italics added]* You may rely on whatever protection I may be able to afford in so important an object, as the education of our Youth.

I will now conclude in giving you the best of its blessings in this World, as well as in the world to come. – George Washington²¹⁹

After attending celebrations at the College in the morning, Washington spent a couple of hours making the rounds of honored people, such as John Brown, Governor Fenner, and others.²²⁰ At this time he may also have paid another visit to Sessions. Then Washington proceeded to a large honorary dinner for 200 people served in Washington’s honor at the Old State house, with thirteen symbolic toasts.



Providence Map - 1790 (source: Bucklin Society with Reference Points provided by author)

²¹⁸ Note, like James Manning earlier, Washington’s emphasis on *moral responsibilities* as a foundation of education.

²¹⁹ <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-06-02-0139> Governor Fenner was related to Darius Sessions through his wife, Sarah Antram, by then deceased..

²²⁰ The Journal of Congressman William Loughton Smith states: “Thursday morning [19 Aug. 1790] began with heavy rain and cold easterly wind. It cleared at nine o’clock, and then the President, accompanied as before, began a walk which continued until one o’clock and which completely fatigued the company which formed his escort. We walked all around the Town, visited all the apartments of the College, went on the roof to view the beautiful and extensive prospect, walked to a place where a large Indiaman of 900 tons was on the stocks, went on board her, returned to town, stopped and drank wine and punch at Mr. Clarke’s, Mr. Brown’s, Gov. Fenner’s, and Gov. Bowen’s, and then returned home. As soon as the President was rested, he received the addresses of the Cincinnati, the Rhode Island College, and the Town of Providence, and then went immediately to dinner to the Town Hall” (Matthews, *Journal of William L. Smith*, 38). (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-06-02-0139>38). (Author’s Note: Thomas Jefferson’s record of activity during this day seems quite vague.)



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After dinner, Washington was escorted to the wharf, where he boarded the packet boat to return to New York. The trip to Rhode Island was both joyous and considered a successful conclusion to the long journey of building a new republic out of the remnants of old colonial injustice.

From the historic evidence, Washington may have occupied this historic chair several times between 1775 and 1790, either in Providence, Rhode Island or in Pomfret Connecticut, or both.

Author's Note for this 4th edition of the Working Document: **What Happened between 1775-1780?**

Whenever history's evidence and information is vague, unclear, missing, and timelines have holes, it is our obligation to fill in the missing pieces with facts. The timeline between May 3rd 1775, when Sessions declined to accept the Governorship and 1780 lacks significant concrete evidence about Sessions' activities. I have spent considerable hours digging for facts and fragments, with very poor results in this five-year gap. However, the shards of information do fit a pattern, which allows me to construct an educated guess about what probably happened (this is just a hypothesis that will need to be "pressure-tested").

First, Sessions and Hopkins were intimate friends and strategic partners in their efforts to create a just system of governance for America. They were close confidants – neither one would make a major decision without consultation and debate with the other. This is how they aligned to confound the British during the Gaspée Affair.

Second, while Sessions may have had some second thoughts about open warfare, his actions during February and March 1775 clearly show he was actively engaged in war planning. So why did he say he didn't feel a war declaration was advisable? The answer may never be known, but there is a plausible explanation – there was another plan in mind. Hopkins needed to play wide open because he was a delegate to the Continental Congress meeting in June. Sessions, the other master-mind partner, needed to go underground to orchestrate a clandestine network of provisions, munitions, recruitment, and information about enemy activities, routing all those elements to the right places.

Third, when Hopkins met in Philadelphia at the opening session of the Continental Congress in June, 1775, he spoke with Washington about Sessions' role and the importance for conferring to assure proper coordination. Washington travelled the Middle Boston Post Road, going through Pomfret on the way to Boston to take command of the Continental Army. That's the reference made by Ellen Larned, regarding Washington's visit. She was elderly when she wrote her history 100 years later, and knew the stories of her grandparents and other family members who were alive at the time.

As with many spies, they left no paper trails that could jeopardize their mission, especially if they got caught. Most likely as soon as action was taken, the paper trail was immediately destroyed.

In Pomfret were many other Sons of Liberty with Providence connections, such as Col. Joseph Nightingale. As Rev. James Manning of RI College mentioned in his diary, many circulated in and out of Pomfret for a "rest," which really meant meeting to discuss plans as well.

The Washington Chair was probably owned by Darius Sessions' father or grandfather in Pomfret about 1690 and then passed down through the family. It was a fine chair when first acquired, and sat on a brick fireplace hearth for many decades, which wore down 3 inches of the front feet. Later the chair was brought to Providence.



Part V: Epilogue

Inevitably, the legacy of Darius Sessions is tightly tied to the importance of his role in the Gaspée Affair.

After the Revolution, the burning of the Gaspée lost the significance it had during the Royal Commission hearings and the period leading up to the Battle of Lexington and Concord.

Why? While many historians have downplayed or overlooked the Gaspée Affair, there are several reasons why it lost its historic prominence (which it truly deserves).



1. Harvard Bostonians wrote the histories after the Revolution. Naturally they promoted native sons. Brown University, on the other hand, did not produce a series of Presidents, Jurists, or historians that would have linked to Rhode Island heroes. Strong newspapers promote stories. Those newspapers emerged around large cities, leaving the Providence media in the shadows.
2. Bostonians were more eloquent, audacious, and loquacious. Their oratory was far more quotable. A rousing speaker like John Adams or Patrick Henry made quotable headlines which neither Sessions nor Hopkins equalled.
3. While the actual burning of the Gaspée was an exciting event, without identifiable leaders there could be no legendary heroes. The Gaspée Affair, as Sam Adams urged, avoided a direct confrontation and conflagration that makes great story-telling. The Gaspée story is all about invisible maneuvering, not guns. Thus, its prominence subsided, unlike a battle like Lexington and Concord or Bunker (Breed's) Hill where heroes could be identified with the events.
4. Unlike George Washington or Thomas Jefferson, or Nathan Hale, the Gaspée conspirators lack the heroic imagery needed to create legends. We don't even know what Darius Sessions looked like. Great stories emerge with strong heroic images to build upon.
5. Essentially the Gaspée Commission came to no conclusions – no confrontational issues emerged that triggered a significant event. This was exactly what Sessions and Hopkins and Adams intended. Thus, there is no dramatic and symbolic "milestone marker" in history that sets the Gaspée Affair apart as a high-water mark or cross-roads in destiny.
6. With no great stories nor memorable symbols nor a great document (like the Declaration of Independence), it's easy to overlook this highly impactful incident – buying time for the colonists to become aligned, organized, and unified.

Is this fair? No, but it is the reality of how humans consecrate their history. Often subtly and subterfuge is the difference that changes the course of history, but few knew why or how. In the case of Darius Sessions, much of what we don't know about him is what may later be revealed as the most important.

However, there are far more profound reasons for us to acknowledge the importance of the Gaspée Affair in the 21st century. As is clear in the study of Darius Sessions, thoughts and decisions evolve over time and trying circumstances. As with the Brown brothers - John, Nicholas, Joseph, and Moses - what may have been normal and acceptable in the 1760s can be wrong and divisive just twenty years later.

While history doesn't repeat itself, it does rhyme, in patterns that can be easily distinguished. These patterns of particularly decipherable when viewed through the lenses of human behavior, leadership, and the exercise of power.



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There are fundamentally three basic archetypal patterns of human behavior we can see emerging and interplaying throughout the course of recorded history, going back to the histories in the Bible, and Greek historians, such as Homer, Herodotus and Thucydides, and Plutarch.

THREE BASIC FORMS OF CULTURE, LEADERSHIP & ECONOMICS

Adversarial



- Always Take Advantage
- Manipulation, Distrust
- Win-Lose, Dog Eat Dog
- Survival of Fittest
- Might makes Right

Transactional



- Everything’s a “Deal”
- Hierarchical Power
- Quid Pro Quo , Trade
- Buy Low - Sell High
- Almighty Self Interest

Collaborative



- Teamwork & Trust
- Synergy – Aligned Energy
- Work Ethic, Integrity
- Value/Cherish Differences
- Mutual Benefit

Those three archetypal patterns are embedded in our DNA, and drive behavior, culture, leadership, and who we transact or evolve or devolve economic value.

All people have these archetypal drives – and each of use choose, by the way our character is formed, to use the drives in different ways. Each of us have a primary drive, a secondary drive, and a default drive under pressure and stress. These are the rhyming patterns within history played on today’s stage.

Using this simple framework when assessing history, one can predict, with a reasonable level of accuracy, how protagonists and antagonists will behave. All great leaders know how to exercise power, and the three archetypes provide a lens throw which to see their power patterns.

Of course, in real life, human behavior is far more complex, as any psychologist will explain. When it comes to the complexity of organizations, these three archetypes are mingled, mangled, and thus muddled. If we are to learn from history, we must recognize what happened centuries ago and see the interplay of the past and present.

One dynamic that is clearly evident in the stories of the Revolution that may pose somewhat of an enigma to modern readers is the polarity of moral foundations for each side. British royalty, coming from a long tradition of hierarchical class structures simply could not countenance the far more liberal and collaborative culture of Americans. The continuous misreading of American character led the British down a road of fighting and failure, rather than accommodation and acceptance.

Another dynamic easily missed is the emphasis on moral character in colonial culture. Whether it be a speech by George Washington, or a description of the value of education by the local school master, there was a heavy emphasis on moral character development. The prominence of this value structure enabled a far greater coherence between colonial leaders. Thomas Jefferson, the father of American education, expected that it was the quality of our nation’s character that would enable stability of democratic institutions, providing a foundation of mutual values and trust. The withering of morality as a central organizing principle of human interaction in 21st century America makes this coherence far more difficult – and may cause the unravelling of our social, economic, and political system. (see [Education on the Edge](#))

Leadership is one critical dimension often overlooked by historians. A distinguishing factor that differentiates the American Revolutionary leadership was its ability to gain consensus, making decisions



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collaboratively that aligned people and unified efforts. The leaders had enormous levels of character, integrity, and moral standards that engendered trust in those whose lives they touched.

Harvard Professor Paul R. Lawrence observed there is a truth that prevails across the ages:

*“Trust determines the Course of History,
the Destiny of Nations,
and the Fate of People.”²²¹*

This is one of the primary reasons why America won the Revolutionary War, and why we selected George Washington to be our first President – He was America’s most trusted man, a lesson we must not forget; history should also be a lesson in leadership.

History is the Navigational Landmark from which to plot a course to the future; for the past contains the sparks that can ignite our imaginations, or cause us to reject and vilify transgressions -- but neither ought be neglected. Too often our view of history focuses on those that have already been written about scores of times. History’s Hidden Heroes unearths new insights and people who played an important role in shaping our nation, but have been overlooked for centuries.

How we perceive history is a personal choice; however, we must never carry our current biases into the past, seeking to cherry-pick the retrospective facts simply to justify a position today: especially a “one line” statement out of context. This is all-too-often a contravention used to distort reality and manipulate the truth.

Our word “history” comes from the Greek “historia,” which meant “inquiry into meaning.” Thus, history aims for insights, for learning, and for deeper understanding. The Greeks revered knowledge (gnosis), but elevated wisdom (Sophia) even more: to the status of a goddess. Too often we overlook the application of wisdom in history, opting instead for the important (but lesser) value of knowledge solely focused on facts.

The story of Darius Sessions is not finished – this document is just a stepstone to further understanding of the nature of this man and the times in which he, as Sam Adams alluded, effected the “Fate of America.”

WHY STUDY HISTORY?

Since I was a very young boy, my father imbued the importance of history into my mind and soul.

If there was anything that triggered my imagination, it certainly was not the memorization of facts, dates, and names.

What I recalled from my childhood is how my father made history become real, present in the historic antiques in our home that gave our ancestry a sense meaning and purpose today. My father also put a face, a personality, a place, and, most important, values on those personae that played a part in the formation of our nation and its culture.

He bought me books like [Johnny Tremain](#) or [You Were There at the Battle of Lexington and Concord](#). These books made history come alive and gave a personal feeling about history.

In this document, I’ve tried to do the same – make history come alive and make it personal so one can understand the character of *History’s Hidden Heroes*. In addition, having studied Organizational Development and Human Behavior professionally, I’m compelled to assess “who was interacting with whom?” “Who is influencing others in what ways?” And “how are critical decisions made?”

²²¹ Told to the Author in personal discussion, March, 2009 (my friend, mentor, and co-author)



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April 19, 1775 was the historic day of the Battle of Lexington and Concord.

As a boy, my father reveled in telling me the story of my ancestor, Nathaniel Porter, aged 13, who marched nearly 25 miles from his farm just north of Salem to take up arms against the most powerful military in the world at that time, armed with only a one-shot, short range, hunting musket (that required up to a minute to reload).

As Americans today we should be asking the question: What inner energy would cause men and boys, who were plowing and harrowing their fields for spring planting in a week or two, to take up arms against the mightiest army?

Community militias in Massachusetts were rapidly reinforced by units from Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Connecticut.

While popular lore created the legend that Paul Revere shouted “The British are coming! The British are coming!” the reality was the riders warned the King’s troops were on the march to burn the gun powder arsenals held by local militia units. Farmers in the villages surrounding Boston were, at that time loyal subjects to England’s King George the III. Real independence was not the highest priority; rather, the Minute Men assembled to defend their rights, as they understood them under long-standing English law.

The British mustered 700 soldiers to march in what was anticipated to be a stealth operation to destroy the storage of flintlock muskets, gunpowder, and a few cannons the town of Concord.

Inadvertently it triggering the Law of Unintended Consequences: not only were more than 70 of the King’s seasoned troops lying dead on the road back to Boston, with a significant number seriously wounded, but it generated a long Revolution that left Britain without its valuable American colonies. More important, the dream of America was born and the world was forever changed.

A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

What Inspired America?

To understand this question, one must time-travel back to the 1770s to understand the mentality of Americans, who, at the beginning of the decade, were under the grips of Great Britain.

While America was growing and beginning to prosper, there was deep unrest across the 13 colonies. The anxiety came from a growing tension between what a fair system of governance should be and what people were receiving. That “tension gap” kept growing wider as Americans became clearer about what could be versus what was – they named the gap “tyranny” and “oppression.”

To understand the thinkers of the Enlightenment, one must understand the world that preceded them – a world of skullduggery, feudal manipulation, irrational abuse of power, and the notion of the “divine right of kings” to do anything they so desired, no matter how villainous. The churches of the time teamed with royalty to exercise mind control over the people, creating a nearly impenetrable block against individual liberty and freedom.

Why did Americans rebel?



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The Last Collaborative ReBirth

After the bubonic plague decimated half of the European population in the Middle Ages, there was widespread despair. Thought leaders broke out of this malaise with the ideals of the "Renaissance" -- the rebirth of values and vision, derived primarily from the Greeks, and secondarily Romans.

The Renaissance then evolved into the 18th century "Age of Enlightenment," which produced America's Founding Fathers, and inspired scores of leaders to create the resilient structures that now constitute the foundation of our modern civilization.

Divine Right of Kings?

One of the most regressive vestiges of the Dark and Middle Ages was the complete belief in the "divine right" of kings which asserted that they were anointed by God,²²² and held the power vested in them by God, and thus could do anything they wanted because they were the word of God in their realm of sovereignty. Of course, today we think this to be outrageous, and it was then, but people *believed* it to be true. This became the key enabler that justified kings trampling over the rights of everyone, and overrule duly elected parliaments, and enact laws that were unjust.

The central question Americans should be asking about the Revolution:

"Would the anger colonists had about the unfair taxes imposed by the English King George III be sufficient to trigger a massive Revolution in all thirteen colonies?"

There's a very big difference between scattered one-event protests, like the Boston Tea Party (1773) or the Burning of the *Gaspée* (1772), and a full blown, large scale, sustained Revolution (1775-1781).

The Continental Congress in Philadelphia resulted in the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Signing the Declaration was, essentially, a death sentence.

One of the most intriguing, but seldom addressed questions is "why did ancient Greece produce so many thought leaders and innovators in such a short period of time in such a small region of the world?"

Think about the names we all know from school days: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, Archimedes, Euclid, just to name a few.

They weren't genetically different, so why so many keen intellects? Just as many bright people are born to every age.

The answer is in the Greek Culture (~350 years BC), which nurtured and supported such minds and the collaborative synergies that evolved. Science, Mathematics, Engineering, Astronomy, the Arts, Medicine, Music, Law, History and Philosophy (*love of wisdom* in Greek) flourished.

In contrast, the Roman era (700 years) produced no great scientists, no great philosophers, no great astronomers – their only truly great evolutions were in Engineering. Other major evolutions were from Greeks living in the Roman era (i.e. Epictetus in Philosophy whose teaching impacted Marcus Aurelius, Galen in Medicine, Polybius in Political History, and Plutarch in Biography).

And the Dark Ages (700 years) produced regression.

Similarly, it was culture that nurtured the Founders in America: it was the emerging Culture of the Age of Enlightenment that nurtured so many highly energized, fine-tuned intellects that were so curious and imaginative, while only holding degrees from rudimentary colonial colleges. The times were challenging, but the Founders were ready to rise to their highest and best destiny.

²²² Some in America believed a modern version of Divine Right in 2016 when they believed that Donald Trump was send by God to rule America by Divine Right. It made no more sense in 2016 than it did in 1716.



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What would compel these men, representing legislatures that appointed them from all the colonies, to decide to create an independent nation, risking a war and their lives and their property?

The Five Quests -- Core Beliefs of the Enlightenment

The answer lies in understanding the other key factor: the Founding Fathers²²³ (those who signed the Declaration in 1776 and later created the Constitution) had a powerful set of core beliefs that then drove them to create a new nation based on a system of governance for a democratic republic.

They had a vision, a mission, now they needed an operating plan – that was first the Constitution, and then a government that could be controlled by the Constitution.

Fundamentally, the “gap” between their anger on the one hand and their vision on the other was so conspicuous that something had to give. Anger had to be transformed into a higher reality – that’s what the Age of the Enlightenment gave the Founding Fathers.

The Enlightenment was characterized by Five Core Beliefs (Quests):

#1—Reason & Logic:

By using logical thinking and reasoning the philosophers analyzed truth in the world. Logic and reason can lead you to the right and moral answer. Reason is the primary source of authority and legitimacy. This embraces the idea of finding meaning and purpose as a fundamental striving for all humans. Science will uncover new truths that should alter our core understandings about reality and nature.

#2 – Divine Natural Order:

All the forces and phenomenon in nature were part of the Creator’s plan. Thus, human behavior must be in alignment with the larger order of the universe. Nature was not random nor irrational. A strong moral/ethical character was borne into humans as part of Divine Order. All people were created equal. Understanding the Divine is an act of personal conscience, not to be imposed by any single organized religion. Integrating Divine Order, Reason, and Logic will help in the next principle.

#3 – Progression of Civilization:

Affirming the belief that each human being, together with civilization should be on a steady trajectory of improvement embracing deep wisdom from our Greek and Judeo-Christian heritage.²²⁴ Each citizen must continually be striving to make their community better. Both society and individuals must dedicate themselves toward a never-ending process toward perfecting our flawed humanity and civilization. Each citizen should have the opportunity to own property and never be beholden to feudal landowners in the European form of serfdom, nor should any man be enslaved by another.

²²³ Generally the Founding Fathers are considered the signers of the Declaration of Independence, the framers of the Constitution & Bill of Rights, plus Thomas Paine, the most articulate and passionate of the advocates.

²²⁴ Books like *Aesop's Fables* or the Old Testament *Book of Proverbs* and Aristotelian concepts of *Virtue & Ethics* were favorite readings of the time.



#4 -- Democratic Governance:

An enlightened society of responsible moral citizens must be capable of establishing a republic that existed for the people, by the people, and of the people. Building self-governing democratic communities, which balances individual rights with social obligation. Forces of oppression should be able to be effectively neutralized and unalienable rights and liberties preserved. No religion should dominate, but each should be able to flourish and be protected. The endless cycles of war that sucked the life out of European economies was the result of illegitimate predatory kings.

Compare these core beliefs with today's beliefs about America's future.

What are our core beliefs today?

Perhaps our cynical world has no positive core beliefs.

Thus, we have no vision, no centre, no core, no inspiration.

The result is a collective angst that makes the future of democracy uncertain.

#5 – Happiness & Well-Being:

Unlike the medieval belief that life was meant for suffering and happiness to be acquired in the afterlife, happiness was part of the Creator's Natural Law, and that by engaging in the other four principles, a profound sense of well-being could be attained. People could trust their neighbors, trust their leaders, and trust that the universe in their world was a "friendly" place. This was not Hedonistic indulgence, nor unrestrained pursuit of self-interest – happiness was a balance of self-interest and mutual-interest, attained in creating a friendly community of well-being with people synergistically serving each other – the whole was greater than the sum of the parts. This was not to be a fully harmonious world of placid contentment, but a vibrant world with civil debate and dedication to the principles of justice and equity.

The synergistic impact of these five principles working in unison cannot be overstated.

Coupled with the vast network of influence created by the linkages in the Committees of Correspondence, the Penta Quest of the Age of Enlightenment became imbedded in colonial thinking, while beliefs simultaneously became elevated while grounded in reality. Colonist became aligned and unified.

Declaring Enlightenment Ideals

To illustrate these five quests, Thomas Jefferson's opening paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence personifies Enlightenment thinking:

"When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.-That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, -That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."



Darius Sessions – History’s Hidden Hero

The Enlightenment invigorated leaders to think and act rationally, to build morality and character into community decision-making, to provide a full, well-balanced education to all, to explore new lands, to invent breakthrough technologies and advance scientific progress, to question and create, to unify in diversity, to ensure basic freedoms and liberties, to secure vibrant religious expression with the separation of church and state, and advance constitutional democracy with checks and balances to avoid extremes and mob rule.

In essence, the Penta Quests became “top-of-mind” for a generation of people in the late 1700s. Attention was focused, debate prolific and ideation profound. The energy around these core issues generated its own synergy and self-fulfilling prophecies.

What was *implicit* in the Penta Quests was that there was a high degree of cooperation and collaboration needed to execute the strategies. In [Creating the Age of ReEnlightenment](#), which addresses the new American Age of ReEnlightenment, we will make this idea of Collaborative Excellence explicit, and operational that would reflect the architecture of where the arch of the earlier Age of Enlightenment might have taken us. This is not to advocate we base our foundation on the unaltered perspective of the 18th century, but instead to upgrade the core of this thinking to build common unity (community)

Today, America has strayed far off the mark from the Founder’s essential vision and values. We have lost our “north star” that guides leaders and culture to produce extraordinary results. When most of us read the Penta Quests, we may treat them nonchalant or intellectual indifference. And that’s part of the problem.

To the Founders, these Five Quests ignited passionate engagement as they aligned to solve the great challenges of humanity. We should be responding the same way today, but instead we chase the latest Tweet or the impunity of adolescent name-calling.

The Founders knew that passionate emotions would never go away, but human energy needed to be channeled to *support* the Five Quests, *not be the prominent force of reaction* as we experience today.

America Produced a Unique Application of Enlightenment Philosophy

In pursuing these the Penta Quests, most academics look to the “big-name” philosophers of the times – Des Cartes, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau to name a few – as the “guiding thought leaders” of the Enlightenment. While this may be true in Europe, the American Enlightenment was its own unique breed. Yes, the Founders were influenced by the European philosophers, but there is more to this story.

The Founders were always seeking practical structures and solutions that would become the architecture of a new nation. For this reason, it was more than Enlightenment philosophy that would provide the answers. They read history carefully, especially the experiments with democracies and republics in Greece and Rome. The Founders were lawyers, legislators, merchants, governors, and farmers. They understood that no philosophy was worthy that could not be practically implemented.

In Rhode Island, the 1663 Royal Charter²²⁵ that empowered the authority the colony was profound in that granted both the rights of religious freedom and democratic self-determination by election of the governor by the people, *not* by Royal Appointment by the Crown. Colonists fought to protect these rights.

²²⁵ See <https://www.sos.ri.gov/assets/downloads/documents/RI-Charter-annotated.pdf> for an annotated transcription



The Nature of Human Nature

What’s more, they also sought insight into human behavior, trying to codify strategies to undermine tyrants, energize citizens, and define the qualities of personal character that would support a new nation.

For example, *Plutarch’s Lives*, which focused on comparing the moral character, virtues and vices, of Greek and Roman leaders, was a perennial best seller in America, being widely read by the Founders, in particular, Alexander Hamilton.²²⁶

In the 1700s there were no professions like sociology, psychology or psychiatry that specialized in human behavior. The prevailing opinion was that man was half human, and half beast. Observation and literature, such as Shakespeare, confirmed this duality of the human being. Unlike today, where we know that *culture* and *leadership* can bring the best or worst in people, in that era the debate about the nature of human nature was important, because the architecture of a national governance structure was highly dependent upon what determined human behavior.

The Compelling Choices

At that time there were two opposing opinions.

From Thomas Hobbes, who wrote in 1651, there was darker answer: Man was inherently selfish, because man was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish,” and would default to warfare, unless checked by a monarchy that could compel a higher order on an unruly populace.²²⁷ Of course, those holding the reins of power strongly stood behind Hobbes.

It is worthy to note: behind the scenes there are fundamentally different views regarding the nature and causes of historical progression. For example, social thought leaders in Age of Industrialization that followed the Age of Enlightenment believed that economic conditions drove the social structure, which means the social structure would change as economic conditions changed. This implied that democracy was the product of the impending Industrial Revolution. Karl Marx would develop his theory of economics and communism around this idea.

Clearly, the Founders would have rejected this idea as fallacious, instead asserting that democracy was part of “divine natural law.”

Today, after a century and a half of communism, which has shown its terrible weakness, it is easy to conclude that Marxist beliefs that the economic conditions drive social order is wrong.

The reality is that there are many external forces that change social order, such as technology, laws, wars, innovations, weather, and so forth.

The fundamental flaw in most economic theory (including capitalistic economics) is that they lack an understanding of and consideration for the key factors that drive human behavior. (In other writings at www.ICLInstitute.org/Publications we set forth a powerful framework for human behavior that enables leaders to instill strong levels of trust in their organizations, while aligning people around a common purpose.)

In the other corner were John Locke (1632-1704) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, (1712-1778) who had a far more optimistic opinion of humanity. Contrary to Hobbes, they envisioned humans as inherently good, ethical, cooperative, and rational, who go astray when poorly led and exposed to a foul social culture.

²²⁶ Carl J. Richard, “Plutarch and the Early American Republic” in *A Companion to Plutarch*, ed. Mark Beck, (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 598.

²²⁷ Hobbes’ perspective on the nature of humanity was orchestrated in large measure by his entanglement in the English Civil War, (1642 -1649) which ended with the beheading of King Charles I. This was followed by a chaotic era and then another Revolution (named “Glorious” by the victors who were Protestants that finally deposed the Catholics). Hobbes first hand observation of humanity and dysfunctional sovereignty gave credence to his negative views about the nature people.



Darius Sessions – History's Hidden Hero

Rousseau proclaimed "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains"²²⁸ because of oppressive authoritarian regime. Locke advocated an extraordinary proposition for the time: the legitimacy of any government is affirmed only by "individuals consenting to be governed."²²⁹ Rousseau viewed man as perfectible, that men are equal and compassion with each other. The state has a "social contract" with the people they governed that justified the authority of the "state" to serve their common interests. The "contract" meant that all citizens would fairly and equally relinquish some of their natural rights in order for there to be a larger social good (such as safety or health) to be preeminent. Such a "contract" should enable a citizen to be

Absorbed into the common, general will, without losing his own will. ... He loses nothing and gains in return the assurance that he will be protected by the full force of society against the encroachment of individuals and groups. He is now a member of a society of equals and has regained an equality not unlike the one he enjoyed in nature – but in a new form and on a higher level...²³⁰ according to Rousseau.

Like Locke, Rousseau believed in self-determination where "all individuals share equally in the construction of laws for their common general happiness."

These were the compelling choices: stay trapped in the Authoritarian paradigm of Hobbes, or break free into the energizing, but untried and untested waters of democracy. It was like the Shakespearian crossroads in destiny from *Hamlet* (edited for clarity and brevity) that stretched from the philosopher's conscience and words, far beyond ... over the horizon, to the leader's courage, faith, and action:

"To be, or not to be?" That is the question.
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing, end them? ...
Perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub...
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time?

²²⁸ Zeitlin, Irving M.; *Ideology and the Development of Sociological Thought*, fourth edition, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice Hall, 1990 p. 23

²²⁹ Locke believed in the equality of men and women, and both should have freedom, but nevertheless justified the domination of men over women because of "natural differences." While these views seem horribly arcane today, this was the standard belief system of the 1600s. It was not until 1792 that Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1799) in Great Britain began to stake out a counter-position in favor of feminine equality. She wrote *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, from Locke, framing her position in the tradition of the "liberal model of the rational, self-determining individual" (Eisenstein, Zillah; *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*; Northeastern University Press, 1986 pp. 89-90) She pointed out that are rational beings just as capable of reason as men. She advocated equal opportunities to develop their "virtues such as courage, temperance, justice, and fortitude" just as men, (Tong, Rosemarie; *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*; Westview Press, 1989, p. 14) which would enable them to be far better wives and mothers. Using Locke's stance against the *divine right of kings*, she challenged the *divine right of husbands*. In America, it was not until 1848, when Elizabeth Stanton & Susan Anthony began a movement for women's rights.

²³⁰ Zeitlin, Irving M.; *Ideology and the Development of Sociological Thought*, fourth edition, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice Hall, 1990. P 25



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The oppressor's wrong? The proud man's insolent treatment? ...
The law's delay? The insolence of office? And the spurns...of the unworthy? ...
When he himself might his put all this to an end...
Or must our conscience make cowards of us all...
Sickened by the pale cast of thought?
And great enterprises ... have their currents turn awry
Only to lose the name of action?

In the context of the Age of Enlightenment, they knew that the evidence about human behavior was certainly mixed, with the good, bad, and misguided manifesting all the time.

Mentally, the Founders were playing a chess match with the Authoritarian Dark Quadrad (Narcissists, Psychopaths, Machiavellians, and Sadists) along with the greedy and power-hungry. These tyrannical nemeses practiced the advice in Machiavelli's *Prince* which they used as a handbook providing expert guidance.

Rather than make the leap of faith that humans would behave properly given freedom and liberty, the Founders invoked deep wisdom to install checks and balances into the structure of the Federal government, along with a balance between Federal and State authority. Additionally, they realized that a free citizenry must be educated and moral, otherwise the awarding of a carte-blanche to anyone and everyone would be extraordinarily foolish.

Today we know far more about human behavior. Humans operate in the zone of the three archetypal modes – *Adversarial*, *Transactional*, *Collaborative*. With the exception of the Authoritarian Dark Quadrad (sociopaths, narcissists, machiavellians, & sadists), good leadership and a strong collaborative culture will generally bring out the best in human behavior.

(See www.ICLIInstitute.org/publications for modern “upgrades” that enable collaborative leaders to come close to Rousseau’s and Locke’s optimistic prediction about humanity.

Leader as Architect

Roger Williams in the 1600s in Rhode Island, made what was, in retrospect, one of the biggest bets and leaps of faith in world history – to choose the path of a democratic republic. A century later the Founders had to come to grips that -- regardless of all the eloquent words of Locke and Rousseau in Europe and Thomas Paine in America -- the power of an idea and ideal is hollow unless placed in the hands of an expert team of architects, designers, and builders who can turn a vision into a real structure that can survive the winds and quakes and assaults on its structure.

In viewing the Gaspée Affair, Session and Hopkins, along with Sam Adams, served as master architects by integrating practical experience with philosophy, history, law, and human behavior. This is the real genius the orchestrators of Rhode Island’s foiling of the Crown. So too were the Founding Fathers serving as collaborative leaders and organizational architects: they could take a concept, design a simple framework for governance, cross-brace it to be strong, interlink it to be effective, and put it into operation that would last for centuries while adapting to change.



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The idea of “leader as organizational architect” goes deep into the roots of American genius, but is today largely overlooked.

In the 21st century, this idea of making the “systems architecture” of governance work for the people has been lost in the fracas of political maneuvering. Those who serve the people were supposed to be of the highest moral character – not Machiavellians whose main purpose is to aggrandize power. The political parties and the media were supposed to purge Authoritarians from the ranks of power; now they are a havens for the beasts. (see [Beware the Authoritarian Dark Triad](#))

The governed were supposed to be educated and have refined moral character so they could distinguish truth from deception, and recognize corrupt leaders from those with moral standards.

We are failing on every dimension, with potentially disastrous results, as our democracy crashes on the rocks of power and self-interest.

How the Enlightenment Beliefs Guided America

The Penta Quest formed an integrated belief system that energized, aligned, and synergized individuals like Sessions and Hopkins and Adams deflecting the Admiralty and Crown, and later Madison, Jefferson, Franklin, Adams, Jay, Hamilton and Mason in framing the Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights. These men were not the arm-chair philosophers like Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, or Kant, they were practical men who absorbed philosophy but were challenged with making things work in the crucible of action.

Their task was to think, evaluate, find solutions, then try to turn an idea into a movement that would be accepted by leaders and the public.

The American Enlightenment was a transformational paradigm-shift – an extremely difficult process in in any era.

If you want to understand an organization, just try to change it.

Kurt Lewin, father of the field of Organization Development

The ideas of the European philosophers also required major adaptations to make them practical in a newly formed democracy. While America was not shackled with the European burdens of class divisions and feudal cultural dogmas, we had our own growing pains and another war in 1812 where Britain’s intent was to take back their former colonies. Yet these pains, to a large extent, were ameliorated by the blossoming spirit of growth, opportunity, and technical invention.

The power of their beliefs enabled them to overcome often major personal and philosophical differences. The Founders and Framers realized they were designing a destiny, not just a set of documents.

As illustrated by the Learning Loop, a sharp mind will attempt to refine and align the steps in the sequence of paradigm shifting. *Beliefs* will become fine-tuned to enable *Perceptions* of what’s possible and what might go wrong, which, in turn, enable the mind to *Conceive* new ideas and plans, then *Achieve* high-spirited goals, which then produce a set actions, that manifest in the results *Received*, which can be used to reconfigure or elevate the next cycle in the Learning Loop. Because the Founders and Framers had a high degree of integrity and trust in each other, they engaged in a highly “co-creative” process that evolved dramatically from the first meetings of the Continental Congress in 1774 to the final Constitution in 1789.





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When a community collectively starts to develop a like-minded set of beliefs, a synergistic effect occurs as multiple people join together with an alignment of ideas that catalyze a myriad of possible innovations that help enable the community to shift to a higher level of thinking, problem solving, and innovations that create paradigm shifts. This is what happened in the culture of Athens that gave birth to extraordinary thinkers, like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, to name just a few. The same phenomenon happened in Colonial America with the Founding Fathers. They were energized because they were on a quest that *elevated the dignity of the human spirit*.

Rights AND Responsibilities

What has gone unsaid in all too many of the discussions about *liberties* and *rights*, is the other side of the equation: the *responsibilities* not just of government, but of every citizen to participate in building community. This *dutiful bond* was an accepted and understood element of the “fabric” of our early American culture, at the family, friendship, community, and national levels.



My father, who thought more like an 18th century patriot (it was part of his upbringing that transferred the values of that era to me), always reminded me:

“Hold your rights as dearly as your responsibilities.”

When patriots of the Revolution spoke of the liberties and rights, they were equally aware of the duties as a citizen to work for the good of the community; it was an assumed duty and need not be stated during the era of the Revolution; but it needs to become reintegrated into American culture.

“The world owes nothing to any man, but every man owes something to the world.”

— [Thomas A. Edison](#)

The Spiritual Centre of America

Some may say that God must be our Spiritual Centre, and they are right; however, there is more to this question of our Spiritual Centre than just God; it must also be dedicated to *Elevating the Dignity of the Human Spirit*, and more.

After the Revolution, the “Quest” to attain the five Enlightenment principles became a “central core” of what made America blossom. These five principles created a force of alignment for both leaders and the citizenry.

The economy flourished, colleges sprung up across the land, and people in oppressed Europe fled to America to farm its lands, set up shops, build its industry, and fish its coasts.

People believed in the future of a great nation.

Certainly, the period after the Revolution was not idyllic, there were rocky times and adversarial animosities that threatened to derail the quest.

The failure of the Articles of Confederation in the four-year period after the war ended, showed that each state, pursuing its own diverse self-interest, could threaten the Union, requiring a Constitutional Convention to remedy the inequities.



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The Gaspée Affair represents America’s on-going struggle was to find the right balance and centre of gravity between liberty and freedom on the one hand and structure and order on the other. Such a centre of gravity required an enlightened set of synergistic “guiding principles” that were the “north star” to keep our ship of state on course, ever innovating, while buffeted by whirling storms and heavy chaotic seas.

For this reason, the Founding Fathers carefully studied past successes and failures, particularly the ideals of Greece and the fall of the Roman Empire.²³¹

It’s imperative to understand how the Age of the Enlightenment influenced the course of American’s *destiny*, because its lessons can guide us out of our befuddled state of affairs. Americans of this era believed in themselves; they held an intimate confidence that their Creator and the Quest would ultimately, despite the struggles, give each person, both individually and collectively, a realizable goal with a brighter future than any other alternative Europe, which, in its post-feudal governance, could not provide. In other words, America was a golden land of the better opportunities than the past. Authors of the era wrote stories that personified the struggle, the quest, and heroics needed to conquer fear and malaise.

Americans believed they were destined for greatness. For some this destiny was to cure the wrongs of European culture – the horrible inequities of a class-ridden society imposed on people.²³²

As we will see, the Founders were seeking more than a system of justice or governance, there was a much greater yearning – to evolve a democracy that was synergistic based on people working together.

In particular, the disparity between the upper royal class and the lower serfdom class roiled Americans, who were resoundingly committed to overturn such injustice. This injustice was equally evident in the European system of governance that still bowed to the authority of kings; America was committed to be sure it did not repeat the pathways of injustice. In the north, by 1790, when the Constitution was ratified, the abolitionist movement had gathered steam to remedy the injustice of slavery. Tragically the free labor afforded by slavery was too strong to be overturned by moral argument, and we pay the price to this day.

E Pluribus Unum

Upon the founding of the United States, the motto “E Pluribus Unum” (*Latin: out of many: one*)²³³ was chosen to symbolize unifying the original thirteen colonies. The original shield also showed symbols of the six major cultures (English, Scotch, Irish, Dutch, French, German) that composed the thirteen colonies.



The European Union’s motto: “*Unity in the Diversity*” is closer to where we need to be thinking today given the passage of the last 250 years.

²³¹ Many of the Founding Fathers were trained classically and understood both Greek and Latin. They studied classic works, such as *Plutarch’s Lives*, which compared Greek and Latin leaders; studied the works of Polybius, the Greek political systems analyst of the early Roman era for insights about what constituted a great republic; as well as devouring Edward Gibbon’s 1776 book *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, which they were determined to avoid.

²³² It wasn’t until the great social upheaval of 1849 that riots and strikes rolled like thunder across Europe that any quantum change was to happen in the European system of justice and governance.

²³³ Probably from Greek philosopher [Heraclitus](#): “*The one is made up of all things, and all things issue from the one*” (ἐκ πάντων ἓν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντα)



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Minting coins that state “In God We Trust” was to symbolize the spiritual importance of Divine Natural Law on the direction of America, as well as our commitment to the natural rights and responsibilities of government to protect and guide its people at a higher order of thinking.



The most important factor shaping human existence is the goal of building a community of free and happy human beings who, by constant endeavor, strive to liberate themselves from the inheritance of anti-social and destructive instincts. – Albert Einstein

Building Upon a Vision

The *ideals* and *beliefs* of the Enlightenment Quest has value only if its foundational beliefs can be

- *perceived* as opportunities, possibilities, and differentiated from current realities, then
- *conceived* as a probabilities, strategies, plans, and visionary realities, and subsequently then
- *achieved* by being translated into concrete actions that produce measurable results

The Gaspee Affair’s success in preserving Roger Williams’ vision and protecting Rhode Island and the other colony’s rights and freedoms is noteworthy two hundred and fifty years later. Then the Enlightenment Quest was guiding and driving their destiny – today we are befuddled without a Quest, without a central theme, without a common vision, without mutual values for mutual benefit, without which we default into the darkness of demagoguery, distrust, and divisiveness.

Well-Being

Looking back at the founding of America, when one reads of writing of Jefferson and many of his contemporaries, one is struck with the sense of optimism, vision, and expanding possibilities that the new America will provide. It was the Age of the Enlightenment – a time when people believed in and sought solutions aimed at the ultimate perfectibility of human nature and humanity’s conditions of the world. The harmonized integration of governance, nature, economics, technology, and community was the aim of many of the leaders of the time. Jefferson’s vision of “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness”²³⁴ was an aspirational goal universally accepted as worthy of collective energy.

To best understand this *alignment of energies* – otherwise known as *synergies* – it’s valuable to hear the words of those on the scene in their own words:

“It may in truth be said, that in no part of the world are the people happier ... or more independent than the farmers of New England.” – Encyclopedia Britannica 1797 ²³⁵

²³⁴ In Jefferson’s philosophy, happiness could only be attained by leading a moral, ethical life.

²³⁵ See Marx, Leo; *The Machine in the Garden – Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*; Oxford University Press, 1964, page 73 (this book is a noteworthy documentation of the exuberance of the era).



Deep Roots of Democracy

Lest we forget, the roots of American democracy and freedom are deeply embedded in the foundations of our culture. The Founders understood that the democratic ideal should always be aiming for bettering the condition of the people.

This ideal of well-being of the people is reflected in three of the original colonies incorporating the name “Commonwealth” in the name and charter (Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia). Massachusetts chose the name for the expressed purpose of expressing the ideal that “the people ... form themselves into a free, sovereign, and independent body politic, or state.” This thinking comes from earlier Enlightenment English thinkers that believed in the goal of creating a political entity for the common good, which expressed the ideals of a new democratic state.

From the outset, democratic self-rule was top-of-mind and centre-of-heart. Four hundred years ago, in 1620, *before* the passengers on the *Mayflower* landed in Plymouth, they signed the *Mayflower Compact*. It was a truly historic event, because it marked the first time a diverse group (40% religious Pilgrim separatists, 60% freedom seekers) outlined a democratic form of government, with fair laws, and elected governance. In the Compact (which was brief – only about 200 words – a conciseness of thinking that seems to elude lawyers today), the signers pledged to abide by those laws and regulations that served “for the general good of the colony.” In New England it sprang from adapting congregational patterns of their church behavior to their civil governance, embracing fundamental principles of self-government and common consent

When Sessions, Hopkins, and Adams teamed together to blunt and beguile the British, it was to preserve and protect the hard-won heritage of their ancestors, just as many historians do today.

It was this group of Boston centered Puritans that propagated across New England, and inculcated their thinking about congregations into their political structures. The hundreds of small towns that sprung up were democracies. They believed that self-rule was a divine gift, and their loyalty to the King was subordinate to God, whose laws were paramount. To this day, most small New England towns still have their annual Town Meeting, ²³⁶where residents now approve the annual budget. In colonial times they conducted all major affairs through the Town Meeting structure. Sessions and Hopkins used the Town Meetings to unify the Sons of Liberty.

Fight for Freedom of Thought & Religion

Rhode Island, often referred to as “Rogue’s Island” even to this day had a heritage of challenging conventional thinking. Roger Williams, considered a renegade Baptist minister, was very vocal about the way Native Indians were being mistreated by the Boston Puritans. Moreover, he had deep disagreements with how the church elders treated those of other religions, namely Quakers, Catholics, and Jews. Williams was decreed to be banished from the colony because of his “liberal” heretical thinking. In the dead of winter of 1636, Williams fled south to a safe place, which was soon named Providence, symbolizing the divine nature of his cause.

²³⁶ This should not be confused with “Town Hall Meetings” today, which are essentially gatherings where politicians can hear the opinions of local folks.



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Williams was determined to make Rhode Island a safe haven for all faiths and people with "distressed of conscience," as well as being committed to a harmonious integration with the native population.²³⁷

Soon the new colony attracted a broad range of groups who were labeled heretics and non-conformists in other colonies. Could such a mish-mash of misfits co-exist? Roger Williams was determined to be sure they could.

It was upon this foundational thinking, culture, and heritage that Sessions and Hopkins took their stand in defending those who attacked the Gaspée – which had become a symbol the Crown's and Admiralty's callous and antagonistic attitude to Rhode Island's freedoms of self-determination and religion. Sessions was likely a Baptist, and Hopkins converted to Quakerism, but that did not interfere with their commitment to purposeful values.

In Rhode Island, from the beginning, a "majoritarian democracy" prevailed, where governance was reliant upon majority vote of the heads of households, *but only in civil matters*. Determined "still to hold forth liberty of conscience," within a year after its founding in 1636, the little settlement had put in place agreements to separate its government from any religious matters, marking the first American distinction between church and state. In no way did this mean disavowing religious beliefs, but it allowed Catholics, Quakers and Jews to create thriving communities in Rhode Island without fear of retribution.

Like the Plymouth Pilgrims, Williams insisted all land be purchased from the native people. Williams was to go far beyond a hands-off "transactional" interaction with the native communities, he sought deeper personal friendship, and was able to create strong, trustworthy bonds with Indian leadership. This enabled him to serve as a trusted intermediary and mediator between tribal Indian leaders and more adversarial Puritans in neighboring Massachusetts when potential hostilities arose. Williams trusted the native tribes probably more than any other colonial leader, seeing their moral character often to be on a higher plane than the sanctimonious Puritans, who read the Bible and could see no connection between the "red man" and the tribes mentioned in the Old Testament's passages. Therefore, the Puritans, to Williams's dismay, myopically concluded that American natives could not meet the Biblical standard of a human being.

The European Age of Enlightenment was just in its infancy at this time. Williams proved that out of discord, harmony is possible, out of problems one may find opportunity, and out of differences lies an engine of innovation – if one seeks to move polarization to paradox to paradigm shifting.

However, as with all change, conflict and stress are its companions, however painful.

In the case of Roger Williams, his deep commitment to fairness, respect, and honorable purpose made him a trusted leader. His willingness to continually listen, negotiate, and seek innovative solutions sets a standard we should all try to attain today.

He exemplified raising the dignity of the human spirit, for his quest for synergy, and his commitment to using differentials in thinking as a source of innovation – the essence of collaborative excellence in leaders.

²³⁷the east side of Rhode Island the territory of the Wampanoag tribe, extending to Plymouth; and the west side was the territory of the Narragansetts. The towns now in Bristol County R.I. were then in Bristol County, Mass, which as Wampanoag territory. The Bristol County towns in RI were not annexed until 1747.



Cherishing Differences

Williams knew, from his time in the forest with the native tribes, while he was eluding arrest, the native tribes could be moral, kind, and intelligent. To help build bridges between the new colonists and the established native culture, he wrote a landmark book only seven years after the founding of Providence: [A Key into the Language of America](#). Its purpose was to provide a means of communicating and understanding the native life and culture, addressing things like key phrases, salutations, and rites of passage. Another objective of the book was to remedy the haughty attitude of colonists toward what they considered backward people:



A mid-19th century depiction of Williams meeting with Narragansett leaders

Boast not, proud English[man]... of thy birth and blood;
Thy brother Indian is, by birth, as Good.
Of one blood God made Him, and Thee and All;
As wise, as fair, as strong, as personal.²³⁸

Williams sought to inculcate respect for cultural differences, both between the Colonists, and with the Natives, knowing this was the only way to keep the peace. Intuitively, Williams was injecting some very powerful collaborative constructs into American culture. In particular, the Greek concept of introducing a system of trust where highly differentiated cultures²³⁹ could actually generate major shifts in thinking, producing strong, innovative communities. The tension between the any two poles of thinking can lead to either strife or innovation, depending upon whether the parties holding those beliefs trust each other and if they see, as the Greeks saw, that polarized thinking can be transformed into new, innovative thinking.

Regrettably, the surrounding colonies chose not only to reject Williams’ progressive thinking, but to form a confederation (United Colonies of New England, comprised of the colonies in both Massachusetts and Connecticut²⁴⁰) who then took military action to obliterate any vestige of it by declaring war on all the New England tribes, resulting in their near total annihilation by 1678.²⁴¹

²³⁸ Gaustad, Edwin S.; *Liberty of Conscience* (Judson Press, 1999), p. 62, Ernst, *Roger Williams: New England Firebrand* (Macmillan, 1932), p. 227-228; Warren, James A. [God, War, and Providence: The Epic Struggle of Roger Williams and the Narragansett Indians against the Puritans of New England](#). 2019, Simon and Schuster. p. 150. [Roger Williams - Wikipedia](#)

²³⁹ [How the Greeks created the World’s First Age of Innovation](#) by Robert Porter Lynch & Ninon Prozonc.

²⁴⁰ This alliance, established in 1643, marked the first time the colonies united for mutual aid. The idea of forming a higher commission for handling trade disputes, Indian affairs, religious disputes, and aggression from the French and Dutch was admirable in theory. In practice, the commission needed a three-quarters majority to pass a resolution, but it had no executive power to ensure the decision was carried out. Massachusetts Bay Colony, the largest member, often overrode the majority if it didn’t approve of the decisions. And worse, it excluded Rhode Island, strictly because it was not a religiously “pure” state. Then, the Confederation turned on Rhode Island, sending in an invasion force of militia to attack its native people. Thus, the Confederation worked when all its members presumably benefited, but failed to truly unite all the people under one unifying theme. America’s first attempt to unite several colonies ended in failure.

²⁴¹ Sadly, the surrounding colonies distrusted what they saw in Rhode Island: a bunch of heretics forming alliances with the Indians, without being open to seeing the enlightened strategy that Williams was evolving. To enforce their



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Williams was at least a century and a half ahead of his time; it wouldn't be until the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights in 1789 that religious freedom and other basic human rights would be framed into the Constitution and mandated to be the law of the land.²⁴²

Roger Williams is the First Practitioner of the Core Beliefs of the Enlightenment

The Age of Enlightenment is generally acknowledged to have begun with Rene Descartes' publication of rational philosophy in 1637 and Isaac Newton's mathematical principles in 1687.

A solid case can be made that Roger Williams' founding of the Colony of Rhode Island (1636) embodied the five core principles Thomas Jefferson and the Founding Fathers embraced a century and a half later. In this perspective, Williams was the Enlightenment's first *thinker, champion, and practitioner*. Certainly, he preceded Locke and Rousseau who proclaimed that a government's authority is based upon the consent of the governed.

Like the American Enlightenment thinkers that would follow more than a century later, his real value lay not in mountains of philosophy books and writing, but in practical adaptation of ideals in the real world where resistance to change, adherence to old ideas, and religious fundamentalism created massive confrontations.

It was the coherence and commitment to these five fundamental ideals that united the colonists and created our national identity. These principles are so universal, transcending time and culture – and needed so much in today's troubled world.

The truly unsung hero in this story is the long-departed Roger Williams, who, a century earlier, laid the cornerstones of core beliefs for the smallest, and most vulnerable colony to stand strong and firm under pressure and threats.²⁴³

It is upon this foundational context that today we must evaluate the importance of the Gaspée Affair. Sessions and Hopkins were guardians of both Rhode Island's heritage and its future evolution. While the British may have viewed them as dastardly, they were legitimate American heroes worthy of our admiration.

power, the larger and more powerful colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut an alliance themselves intent on putting miniscule Rhode Island out of business. Williams was able to secure a Charter from the King in England, but the adversarial forces outside the state continued, irritating the Indians, who revolted in 1675 in King Phillip's War. The war lasted nearly three years. The New England colonies lived in terror. The tragic result, a typical lose-lose outcome was the heart-breaking demise of most Indian communities in New England. More than 1,000 Colonists and 3,000 Natives died. More than half of all New England towns were attacked by native warriors, and many were completely destroyed, including Providence. The economy was devastated. One tenth of the military age population was wiped out. Hundreds of natives were later executed or enslaved.

²⁴² Given Rhode Island's history of experiencing abuse of basic freedoms, it was no wonder that the state was the very last to sign the Constitution in 1790, withholding its approval until the Bill of Rights was added as a safeguard.

²⁴³ Any 21st century criticisms of Roger Williams' fallibilities in his treatment of Indians and Negroes really don't take into consideration the enormous criticisms he received in his times that caused him to be called a heretic, and be banished from Massachusetts Bay. His thinking was responsible for the Towns of Providence and Warwick to outlaw slavery in 1652. While these laws were difficult to enforce, his bold attempt was certainly enlightened and honorable.



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CONCLUSION

The Gaspée Affair is actually a prelude to the much more volatile Revolution that would follow three years later – a seemingly unprepared cluster of colonial organizers, with few resources except for their passionate commitment, wit, and guile, with a rag-tag militia and vagabond navy confronting the most powerful and feared authority in the world. All aimed at a fulfilling a dream that had yet to be designed.

The events set in motion by Sessions, Hopkins, and Adams were extraordinary in that they bolstered the spirits and unified the intentions of key leaders of the emerging Revolutionary movement, while at the same time not triggering a British back-fire.

Had the Rhode Islanders failed to stalemate the Crown, the most probable course of events would be for King George to order Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and probably Connecticut to be placed under martial law, along with a full-scale naval blockade. This would probably have led the arrest, conviction, and hanging of key Revolutionary leaders, effectively quashing the rebellion. Indeed, the course of human events would have been significantly altered.

In this respect, the Gaspée conspirators, by playing coy, bought time for unity in the cause of liberty. The eyes of all the Colonies were on Sessions and Hopkins at this juncture, and the result was a reinforced confidence that the cause of self-determination could be the basis of a successful form of governance, that free people needed not the superior authority of a Royal Crown to ensure order.

Timing is the often-overlooked factor in history because it is invisible. As Napoleon said:
“I can recover lost ground, but not lost time.”

The unfolding of events surrounding the Gaspée demanded neither money nor sacrifice, just the alignment of interests and the commitment to honor their mutual pledge disable the illegitimate authority that deprived them of their “divine rights granted by natural law.”

Like the Founding Fathers who soon after gathered in Philadelphia two years later, the leaders of the Town of Providence reached deep into their souls to propagate a spirit of unity to reach higher than the onerous laws and brutality of the British. The arrogance of the British was the primary reason they lost the Gaspée chess game. This was exemplified in every way – Admiral Montagu’s treatment of Governor Wanton and the Commissioners, Lt. Dudingston’s brutality with merchant crews, and the King’s attitude toward the lowly colonies. Had their attitude been more congenial and open to compromises, the result would have been decidedly different. The camaraderie of Sons of Liberty sealed the Crown’s fate.

Neither Sessions nor Hopkins nor any of their other cohorts were geniuses, but collectively their stratagems displayed remarkable master-mind capabilities. A shared vision, common high-order values, contained in a crucible of trust and courage produced synergies well exceeding the sum of the individuals and their roles.

*Courage enlarges, cowardice diminishes resources.
In dangerous straits, the fears of the timid
aggravate the dangers that imperil the brave.*

– Christian Neville Bouvee (1820-1904)

The real significance of the Gaspée Affair and the strategic minds of Sessions and Hopkins was that their adroit handling of a potentially explosive situation changed the course of history, steering the ship of fate toward a bold new future.



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Afterword

Western civilization has been marked by cultures that progressed with an inner confidence in their future, contrasted with those caught in a regressive spinning gyre expressed by William Butler Yeats a century ago in the aftermath of the “Great War” that was to end all wars in his poem *the Second Coming*:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

We are still trapped in that retrograde spiral which is growing worse. We all know something is wrong with our world, and we need a massive shift in thinking. Looking back to the Revolution for insights about a centre that *will* hold, Connecticut delegate to the Continental Congress, Silas Deane, remarked:

Times like these call up Genius which slept before, and stimulate it in action to a degree that eclipses what might before have been fixed as a Standard.²⁴⁴

Elevating the dignity of the human spirit was recounted by surgeon David Ramsey, a delegate to the Continental Congress, pointing out in his 1789 history of the American Revolution:

“... called forth many virtues and gave occasion for the display of abilities, which, but for that event, would have been lost to the world....It seemed as if the war not only required, but created talents... Men whose minds were warmed with the love of liberty... spoke, wrote, and acted with an energy far surpassing all expectations which could be reasonably founded on their previous acquirements [accomplishments] ... the necessities of the country gave a spring to the active powers of the inhabitants and set them on thinking, speaking and acting in a line far beyond that to which they had been accustomed.”²⁴⁵

Writing regretfully about the American Revolution forty years ago, historian Edmund Morgan doubted we could ever recreate such results. Even after a thorough study of the Founding Fathers:

“Does not bring us any closer to an explanation of why the Revolution created such an array of talent. If we knew what the conditions were for generating talent of this kind, we ought all to be busy trying to reproduce them, for we certainly need it now. Unfortunately, I do not know how the Revolution created talent.”²⁴⁶

This question has vexed scholars for centuries, including this author. However, the conditions for creating extraordinary talent can be reproduced using formulae originally created by the Greeks and replicated in extraordinary times. It is all about *Collaborative Excellence* and how leaders build a culture of trust and innovation. This architecture is revealed in our other studies focused on “cracking the synergy code.”

²⁴⁴ Silas Deane Letter to his wife Elizabeth Deane, July 1st, 1775, in Paul Smith edition of *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, p 567

²⁴⁵ David Ramsay, *The Advantages & Disadvantages of the American Revolution and Its Influence on the Minds & Morals of the Citizens-The History of the American Revolution 1789*
<https://americainclass.org/sources/makingrevolution/independence/text2/ramsayhistoryamerrev.pdf>

²⁴⁶ Edmund S. Morgan, *The Genius of George Washington*, Norton, 1980, p 4



APPENDIX A – FULL TEXT OF SAMUEL ADAMS LETTERS

Between John Allen's oratory along with the publication of his *Beauties of Liberty* in early December, 1772, and the formal correspondence initiated between Sessions and Adams, Sam Adams penned another letter under the pseudonym *Americanus*, which must have been received in Providence about December 20th, 1772, and published in the Providence Gazette on December 26th:

From the *Providence Gazette* (founded by Stephen Hopkins) Saturday, December 26, 1772 - also republished in many other American newspapers and later in the *London Evening Post*, Saturday March 20th, 1773:

To be, or not to be, that's the question; whether our unalienable rights and privileges are any longer worth contending for, is now to be determined. Permit me, my countrymen, to beseech you to attend to your alarming situation.

The stamp act you opposed with a spirit and resolution becoming those who were truly solicitous to transmit to posterity those blessings which our forefathers purchased for us in the wilds of America, at an immense expense of blood and treasure.

But behold, an evil infinitely worse, in its consequences, than all the revenue laws which have been passed from the reign of Charles the First, to this time, now threatens this distressed, piratically plundered country.

A court of inquisition, more horrid than that of Spain or Portugal, is established within this colony, to inquire into the circumstances of destroying the Gaspée schooner; and the persons who are the commissioners of this new-fangled court, are vested with most exorbitant and unconstitutional power. They are directed to summon witnesses, apprehend persons not only impeached, but even suspected! and them, and every of them, to deliver them to Admiral Montagu, who is ordered to have a ship in readiness to carry them to England, where they are to be tried.

Three of the commissioners are a quorum, who are directed to apply to General Gage, for troops to protect them in their offices, and preserve the colony from riots and disturbances. The royal commission for these gentlemen, together with their instructions, transmitted to Admiral Montagu, who, upon being notified that they are convened in conformity to their appointment, is to attend them, and then deliver their commission and instructions, and to be aiding with his sage counsel and advice, whenever necessary.

So much has transpired, respecting this alarming star-chamber inquisition. And who among the natives of America, can hear it without emotion? Is there an American, in whose breast there glows the smallest spark of public virtue, but who must be fired with indignation and resentment, against a measure so replete with the ruin of our free constitution? To be tried by one's peers, is the greatest privilege a subject can wish for; and so excellent is our constitution, that no subject shall be tried, but by his peers.

Tina [The] establishment is the grand barrier of our lives, liberties and estates; and whoever attempts to alter or invade this fundamental principle, by which the liberties of the people have been secured from time immemorial, is a declared enemy to the welfare and happiness of the King and state. The tools of despotism and arbitrary power, have long wished that this important bulwark might be destroyed, and now have the impudence to triumph in our faces, because such of their fellow subjects in America, as are suspected of being guilty of a crime, are ordered to be transported to Great Britain for trial, in open violation of Magna Charta.



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Thus are we robbed of our birth-rights, and treated with every mark of indignity, insult and contempt; and can we possibly be so supine, as not to feel ourselves firmly disposed to treat, the advocates for such horrid measures with a detestation and scorn, proportionate to their perfidy and baseness?

Luxury and avarice, a more fatal and cruel scourge than war, will ere long ravage Britain and ultimately bring on the dissolution of that once happy kingdom. Ambition, and a thirst for arbitrary sway, have already banished integrity, probity and every other virtue, from those who are entrusted with the government of our mother country. Her colonies loudly complain of the violences and vexations they suffer by having their moneys taken from them, without their consent by measures more unjustifiable than highway robbery; and applied to the basest purposes, — those of supporting tyrants and debauchees. No private house is inaccessible to the avarice of custom-house officers, no place so remote whither the injustice and extortion of those miscreant tools in power, have not penetrated.

Upon the whole, it is more than probable, it is an almost absolute certainty, that, according to the present appearances, the state of an American subject, instead of enjoying the privileges of an Englishman, will soon be infinitely worse than that of a subject of France, Spain, Portugal, or any other the most despotic power on earth; so that, my countrymen, it behooves you, it is your indispensable duty to stand forth in the glorious cause of freedom, the dearest of all your earthly enjoyments; and, with a truly Roman spirit of liberty, either prevent the fastening of the infernal chains now forging for you, and your posterity, or nobly perish in the attempt.

To live a life of rational beings, is to live free; to live a life of slaves is to die by inches. Ten thousand deaths by the halter, or the axe, are infinitely preferable to a miserable life of slavery in chains, under a yoke of worse than Egyptian tyrants, whose avarice nothing less than your whole substance and income, will satisfy; and who, if they can't extort that, will glory in making a sacrifice of you and your posterity, to gratify their master the devil, who is a tyrant, and the father of tyrants and of liars.

AMERICANUS.

The full text of the Letter from Samuel Adams to Darius Sessions laying out the subterfuge strategy to confound the Governor and the King:

BOSTON

January 2, 1773

Sir,

I wrote you on Monday last acknowledging the Receipt of a Letter directed to me from yourself & other worthy Gentlemen in Providence.

The Question proposed was in what manner your Colony had best behave in this critical Situation & how the Shock that is coming upon it may be best evaded or sustained.

It appears to me probable that the Administration has a design to get your Charter vacated.

The Execution of so extraordinary a Commission, unknown in your Charter & abhorrent to the principles of every free Government, wherein Persons are appointed to enquire into Offences committed against a Law of *another* Legislature, with the Power of transporting the persons they shall suspect beyond the Seas to be tryed, would essentially change your Constitution and a Silence under such a Change would be construed a Submission to it.



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At the same time it must be considered that an open declaration of the Assembly against the Appointment & order of the King, in which he is supported by an Act of the British Parliament, would be construed by the *Law Servants* of the Crown & other ministers such a Defiance of the Royal Authority, as they would advise proper to be recommended to the Consideration & Decision of Parliament.

Should your Governor refuse to call the Commissioners together, or when called together, the civil magistrates refuse to take measures for arresting & committing to Custody such persons as upon Information made shall be charged with being concerned in burning the *Gaspée*, or if they should issue their precepts for that purpose the Officers should refuse to execute them, the Event would be perhaps the same as in the Case of an open Declaration before mentioned, for in all these Cases it would be represented to the King & the parliament that it was to be attributed to what they will call the overbearing popularity of your Government, & the same pretence would be urged for the Necessity of an Alteration in order to support the Kings Authority in the Colony.

As the chief Object in the View of Administration seems to be the vacating your Charter, I cannot think the Commissioners in case they should meet together, would upon any of the aforementioned Occasions, choose to call upon General Gage for the Aid of the Troops or make any more than the Show of a Readiness to execute their Commission; for they might think the grand purpose would be sufficiently answered without their Discussing such danger to their Reputation, if not their persons.

If the foregoing Hypotheses are well grounded, I think it may be justly concluded that since the Constitution is already destined to suffer unavoidable Dissolution, an open & manly Determination of the Assembly not to consent to its ruin would show to the World & posterity that the people were virtuous though unfortunate & sustained the Shock with Dignity.

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 this enormous Claim of power would be made a Precedent for all the rest; they ought indeed to consider deeply their Interest in the Struggle of a single Colony & their Duty to afford her all practicable Aid. This last is a Consideration which I shall not fail to mention to my particular friends when our Assembly shall sit the next Week.²⁴⁷

Should it be the determination of a weak Administration to push this Measure to the utmost at all Events, and the Commissioners call in the Aid of troops for that purpose it would be impossible for me to say what might be the Consequence, Perhaps a most violent political Earthquake through the whole British Empire if not its total Destruction.

I have long feared that this unhappy Contest between Britain & America will end in Rivers of Blood; Should that be the Case America I think may wash her hands in Innocence yet it is the highest prudence to prevent if possible so dreadful a Calamity.

Some such provocation as is now offered to Rhode Island will in all probability be the immediate Occasion of it.

²⁴⁷ On January 8th, 1773, Adams was appointed by the Massachusetts Assembly to address these issues to Governor Hutchinson. Their report triggered a series of events, one of which was the famed Boston Tea Party later that year.



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Let us therefore consider whether in the present Case the Shock that is coming upon you may not be evaded which is a distinct part of the Question proposed.

For this purpose, if your Governor should omit to call the Commissioners together, in Consequence of a representation made to him by the Assembly, that the Innovation appears to them of a most dangerous Tendency; and altogether needless inasmuch as the same Enquiry might be made as effectually (and doubtless would be) by a Grand Jury; as is proposed to be made by the Commissioners; which would be agreeable to the Constitution & in the ordinary Course of Justice.

A representation of this kind made by the Assembly to the Governor, would afford him a reasonable plea for suspending the Matter till he could fully state the Matter to Lord Dartmouth & the odious light in which the Commission is viewed by that & the other Colonies as a measure incompatible with the English Constitution & the Rights of the Colonists together with the fatal Consequences of which it might probably be productive.

This perhaps could not be done till the rising of Parliament & before the next Session a war or some other important Event might take place which would bury this Affair in Oblivion Or if it should ever come before Parliament in this Manner the Delay on the part of the Governor would appear to be made upon motives of sound prudence & the best Advice which would tend to soften their Spirits And besides its appearing to be founded not directly on the principles of Opposition to the Authority of Parliament the sacred Importance of Charters upon which many of the Members hold their Seats might be considered without prejudice & the Matter might subside even in Parliament Should that be the Case it would disappoint the designs & naturally abate the Rigour of Administration & so the Shock might be evaded.

If without being called together by Governor Wanton who is first named the rest of the Commissioners should meet upon the Business of their Commission which I cannot suppose they will do especially if the Governor should acquaint them with the Reason of his not calling them it would show a forward Zeal to execute an order new arbitrary & universally odious & how far that might justly incense the people against them personally & lessen them in the Esteem of all judicious Men they would do well calmly to consider and how far also they would be answerable for the fatal Effects that might follow such a forwardness all the world and Posterity will judge: For such an Event as this will assuredly go down to future Ages in the pages of History & the Colony & all concerned in it will be characterized by the part they shall act in the Tragedy.

Upon the whole it is my humble Opinion that the grand Purpose of Administration is either to intimidate the Colony into a Compliance with a Measure destructive of the freedom of their Constitution or to provoke them to such a Step as shall give a pretext for the Vacation of their Charter which I should think must sound like Thunder in the Ears of Connecticut especially.

Whatever Measures the Wisdom of your Assembly may fix upon to evade the impending Stroke I hope nothing will be done which may by the Invention of our Adversaries be construed as even the Appearance of an Acquiescence in so grasping an Act of Tyranny.

Thus I have freely given my Sentiments upon the Question proposed which I should not have ventured to do had it not



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been requested. I have done it with the greatest Diffidence because I think I am fully sensible of my Inability to enter into a Question of so delicate a Nature & great Importance especially as I have not had that opportunity to consult my friends which I promised myself. I hope the Assembly of Rhode Island will, in their Conduct, exhibit an Example of true Wisdom Fortitude & Perseverance And with the greatest Respect to the Gentlemen to whose superior Understanding this and my former Letter to you is submitted.

I remain Sir Your assured friend & humble servant

Adams notes in the postscript the necessity to re-establish the Committees of Correspondence²⁴⁸:

P.S. I beg just to propose for Consideration whether a circular Letter from your Assembly on this Occasion, to those of the other Colonies might not tend to the Advantage of the General Cause & of Rhode Island in particular; I should think it would induce each of them, at least to enjoin their Agents in Great Britain to represent the Severity of your Case in the strongest terms.

The third letter to Sessions was in February, 1773

TO DARIUS SESSIONS.

[February –, 1773.]

SIR

As I am informed the Commissioners are all now in Newport, and your Assembly is to meet this day I am anxious to know precisely the Steps that are or shall be taken by each.

I hope your Governor will not think it proper for him to act in the Commission if the others should determine so to do. Will it not be construed as conceding on his part to the Legality of it?

Every Movement on the Side of the Commissioners & the Assembly must be important. I trust no Concessions will be made on your part which shall have the remotest tendency to fix a precedent; for if it is once established, a thousand Commissions of the like arbitrary kind may be introduced to the utter ruin of your free Constitution.

The promoters of ministerial measures in this Town are pleased to hear from one of the Commissioners that they are treated with great respect: Even common Civility will be thus coloured to serve the great purpose. Will it not be

²⁴⁸ Committees of Correspondence were a network of patriot leaders throughout the colonies to coordinate their actions in opposition to the King's illegal or unethical incursions on rights and liberties. Acting as an alliance, this coalition of similarly motivated leaders performed multiple roles, including: developing enlightened positions on issues, rallying opposition, coordinating strategies, sharing plans, publicizing events and positions of other members, aligning their thinking and writings, and unifying their responses to England in a highly systematic way. By 1773 they were emerging as oppositional governments, superseding appointed royal officials, taking over colonial assemblies and establishing the Continental Congress. About 7,000 to 8,000 Patriots served on these committees at the colonial and local levels, comprising most of the leadership in their communities—Loyalists were always excluded. The letters between Sessions and Adams are an example of how Committees of Correspondence between the colonies functioned for mutual aid and benefit. (see Letter from Sessions to Adams May 1773 announcing the appointment of "six Gentlemen of very respectable Character as a Committee of Intelligence & Correspondence.")



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necessary at all Events for the Assembly to enter a protest on their Journal against so unconstitutional a proceeding. This is the Sentiment of a Gentleman here whose Judgment I very much regard.

Such has been the constant practice of the Assembly of this province in like Cases, for some years past. You will see by our Governors Speech what Use is made of Mistakes of this Sort; they are even Improved as Arguments of our having voluntarily consented to be the Vassals of the British Parliament. Indeed the Doctrine he has advanced strikes at the root of every civil Constitution in America.

If it be admissible, you have no just Cause to complain of the present Measure for it is founded upon the Authority of that parliament, to the Jurisdiction of which notwithstanding your Charter, you remain subject.

I shall receive a Letter from you by the return of the post if your Attention to the publick Affairs will admit of it, as a great favor.

In the mean time I beg you to excuse this hasty Scrawl & believe me to be &c

Samuel Adams



APPENDIX B – TESTIMONY OF DARIUS SESSIONS

Transcription January 7th, 1773 – Newport Rhode Island before the Gaspée Commissioners²⁴⁹

That in the evening of the ninth of June last, at about nine o'clock, he heard a drum beat in the street opposite to his house. Soon after he went to his window and looked out, and saw the drum surrounded by a number of boys at some distance from the house going up street; in a short time afterwards he heard the drum returning, whereupon he went back to his window, where he remained until it passed his house, and as the moon shone very bright, he could plainly discover they were only a company of boys, not exceeding ten or twelve in number, two or three of which appeared to be about thirteen or fourteen years of age, the others about ten or twelve; and concluding they were gathered together with no other design than to divert themselves with the drum, he retired from his window without saying anything to the boys, soon after which the noise of the drum ceased; the remaining part of that night he heard not the least noise or disturbance in the streets or in any other part of the town, nor received any the least hint, suggestion, intimation or information of any riot, outrage or tumultuous assembling of the people, nor intention thereof, neither did he then know there was an armed vessel in the river nearer than the town of Newport, which is thirty miles from Providence; had he known or even suspected any riot, his utmost endeavors would have been exerted in suppressing it.

The next morning one of his neighbors came and told him the Gaspée was burnt and the captain wounded, and that an express had arrived in town for a surgeon to dress the wounds of the officer who lay then at Pawtuxet, about five miles from Providence. Immediately upon hearing this disagreeable news, he set out with a design to examine into the affair, and when he reached Pawtuxet he saw the schooner on fire, lying on a point of land called and known by the name of Namquit Point, about two miles from Pawtuxet, in the town of Warwick, in the county of Kent, and colony aforesaid.

He made inquiry if any of the offenders were known, but could get no information; he then went to a small house by the shore, where he heard Lieutenant Dudingston was lodged, and there found him in dangerous circumstances. He told Lieutenant Dudingston if he wanted money, surgeons, or better lodgings, or any kind of assistance, he should have every relief in his power. Mr. Dudingston replied, that he had saved his money, which was about one hundred dollars, and therefore wanted no favors for himself, but desired that some care might be taken of his people, that they might be collected together and sent to the Admiral to Boston, or on board the Beaver at Newport, which the deponent promised he would do.

He then told Mr. Dudingston the design of his visit at that time was not only to afford him any assistance he might need, but also to procure such a declaration from his own mouth respecting the attack that had

²⁴⁹ Source: Staples, Op Cit pp 57-60



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been made on his person, and the vessel he commanded, that the offenders might be brought to justice. Mr. Dudingston answered, that he would give him no account of the matter; first, because of his indisposition of body, and second, because it was his duty to forbear anything of that nature until he had done it unto a court martial, unto which, if he lived, he would be called by his commanding officer.

The deponent then asked him if he was willing he should examine his officers and people, which, after some refusal, he consented to, and they all agreeing nearly to everything material relative to the destruction of the schooner, he forthwith transmitted copies of their examinations to the Governor.

The deponent then gave orders that the seamen should be collected together and provided with victuals and lodgings, and that a boat should be got ready by the next morning to carry them on board the *Beaver*, all which was executed with care and expedition.

The deponent also gave orders that the stores and remains should be collected and lodged in a ware house, which was done, and soon after delivered to Capt. Linzee, of the *Beaver*. He also desired a gentlemen, who lived near Mr. Dudingston, to supply said Dudingston with any thing he wanted, and also that he would lodge and entertain any surgeons or others who might come to visit him, and which the deponent verily believes he verily complied with.

These expenses were recommended by the deponent to the General Assembly, who ordered payment out of the public treasury. The deponent consulted with the Chief Justice, and most of the civil authority in that part of the colony where he resides, who highly disapproved of the riot, and universally declared they were ignorant of any of the proceedings, and gave it as their opinion that measures ought to be pursued for discovering and bringing to justice the perpetrators.

A proclamation was soon after issued by the Governor, which was posted up in all the towns near where the offence was committed; but as yet the deponent has not received any information of any of the persons concerned in that offence, neither has he ever heard that information has been made to any of the civil authority within the colony, and further this deponent saith not.

DARIUS SESSIONS.



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APPENDIX C -- THE WASHINGTON CHAIR'S PROVENANCE

After the Revolution

Excerpt from 1907 news article which interviewed Washington Cole, great grandson of Darius Sessions.

In the living room of the old house is an upright arm chair, of the type in common use in the better houses in England at the time the Pilgrims left their English homes, at the beginning of their journey to the New England. It has a straight high back and low, rush seat. The chair was occupied by George Washington while he was a guest of Darius Sessions, Deputy Governor of Rhode Island from 1763 to

1775, and great-grandfather of Washington L. Cole. The chair was then in the home of Deputy Governor Sessions, on Constitution Hill, then one of the fine residential sections of the city.

It is quite possible that Washington sat in the old Flemish chair more than once, but any oral histories attached to the chair may be lost forever, illustrating what happens when someone communicates a story by word of mouth, but doesn't write it down.

The historic record shows that the facts are far richer than the sparse legend in the old 1907 article.

Washington Cole's farmhouse still stands at 12 Cole Farm Court (near Blackstone Blvd) in Providence, where the chair was from most of the 1800s to 1964.



Cole Farm -- Current Photo

Sessions, in addition to being active in the state's militia, also was one of the founders of the Mount Vernon Lodge of Free Masons, which was dedicated to the honor of George Washington.

After the Revolution, Darius, along with his youngest son Thomas, formed Darius Sessions & Son which invested in shipping between Rhode Island and St. Croix in 1795; he was 78 at the time.

In 1791, Thomas Sessions married Elizabeth Marchant of Newport, daughter of Henry Marchant, the noted Federal jurist appointed by President Washington.

During the Federal era, commencing about 1790, South Main Street became more commercialized, and residences were turned into storefronts.

Apparently, in this time period, Darius moved from his home on South Main Street (across from the Old State House) to a more elegant home on Constitution Hill. The chair moved with him. Thomas and Elizabeth likely lived with Darius in this home as the patriarch of the family was advancing in years.

As Darius grew older, he reportedly lived the remainder of his life on his farm, (likely the farm in Providence that was located on the Eastside (Brown University Stadium is on this old farm) where Sessions Street ran through the farm fields.

Darius declined public honors; he died in 1809 at 92 years of age, "to appearance in full strength of mind" and was returned to Providence to be buried in the Old North Burial Ground. This cemetery is where many of those involved in the *Gaspée* affair were ultimately laid to rest.

The Washington chair passed to his affectionate son, Colonel Thomas Sessions, who had served as an officer in the Providence regiments of the militia from 1797 to 1806.

The old Pomfret farm went into decline and was reported uninhabited in 1893. Colonel Thomas



Darius Sessions – History's Hidden Hero

Colonel Thomas and Elizabeth Sessions had several children, including Henry, Darius, William Marchant, Elizabeth Bicknell and Frances (1800-1870), who later married Samuel J. Cole (1803-1873).

Elizabeth Marchant Sessions' father Henry died in 1796, from whom she and her husband Thomas inherited his Newport farm near Brenton Point, overlooking Newport Harbor; it was a strategic defense location.²⁵⁰ In 1824 to the United States government they sold a portion of the old Marchant farm to allow for the expansion of Fort Adams, protecting the entrance to the harbor and the East Passage. In 1845, Thomas Sessions stated he was still visiting the farm in Newport annually.

His beloved wife, Elizabeth Marchant Sessions, died at Providence September 7, 1839, aged sixty nine.

After his wife passed, Col. Thomas Sessions moved into the Cole farmhouse with his daughter, Frances Sessions Cole, who had married Samuel Jackson Cole. The Washington chair moved with Thomas into the old farmhouse.

Thomas lived on the old Cole farm until he died in 1845. Biographers state: "He was a man highly respected for his excellent qualities of mind and heart. He was successful in business and had a substantial fortune. He was an excellent neighbor and citizen."

The inscription on Col. Thomas Sessions tombstone verifies his character:

Col. Sessions was the youngest son of the late Hon. Darius Sessions,
formerly Lieutenant Governor of this state.

He was the solace of his venerable Father in his declining years,
an affectionate Husband, an indulgent Parent,
and an obliging Friend, ever anxious to possess a
"Conscience void of offence toward God and toward man."

Samuel Jackson Cole was the owner of a large farm estate on the east side of Providence, near today's Cole and Sessions Streets. He married Thomas and Elizabeth Sessions' daughter, Frances.

After Thomas Sessions died, the Washington chair passed to his daughter Frances, who then passed the General Washington chair, the legend, and the honor of his name on her son Washington Leverett Cole (1841-1911).

Washington Cole remained on the estate, where he farmed and operated a milk delivery service.²⁵¹



**Thomas Sessions tombstone
in North Burial Ground**

²⁵⁰ In 1817, President Monroe, to prevent the kind of attack that resulted in the burning of Washington in 1814, initiated a study to fortify coastal defenses. In 1821, a plan was developed for a major refortification of Fort Adams, including a major expansion of the fort, making it 'the largest coastal defense works of its kind in the United States.' which apparently included the Marchant farm. The Navy board responsible for the system of coastal defenses recognized "only Narragansett Bay among northeastern harbors could shelter ships during violent storms, and between Cape Cod and Cape Hatteras only Narragansett Bay and Hampton Roads (Virginia) were regarded as 'proper for naval rendezvous.'"

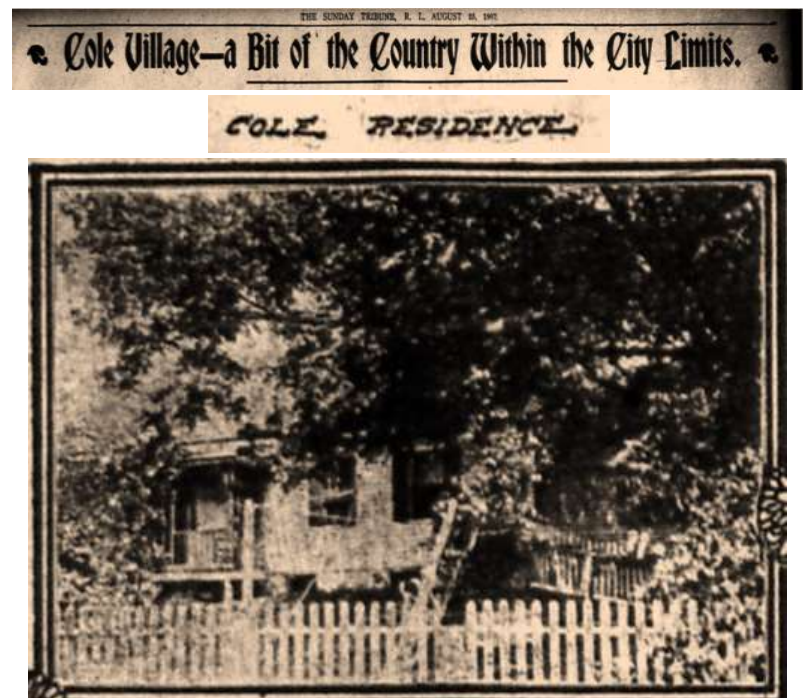
²⁵¹ Thomas Sessions Family Papers, 1784-1926. Bulk 1790-1845. Catalog number: MSS 712 , Rhode Island Historical Society, Manuscripts Division, <http://rihs.org/mssinv/Mss712.htm> ,.



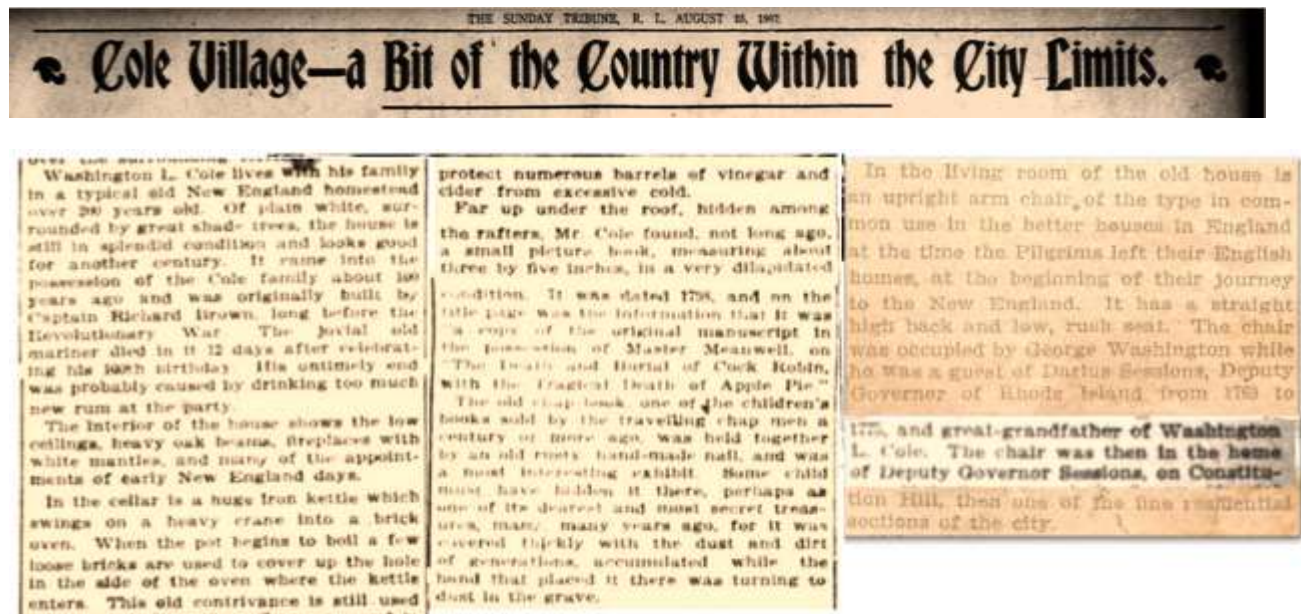
Darius Sessions - History's Hidden Hero

It was Washington Cole who was interviewed in the 1907 newspaper article in the *Providence Morning Tribune*;²⁵² he was 66 years old at the time. Below is a description of the home, which, in 1907 was over 200 years old. "The interior of the house shows the low ceilings, heavy oak beams, fireplaces with white mantels and many of the appointments of early New England days." The house still stands today (but there are no artifacts from the era remaining in the home).

From the 1907 article in the *Providence Morning Tribune*:



Full Reference to the Washington Cole Story -- From the 1907 article in the *Providence Morning Tribune*:
Courtesy RI Historical Society.



²⁵² Article, August 25, 1907 in RI Historical Society Library on microfiche, drawer marked "Providence Morning Tribune."



Darius Sessions – History's Hidden Hero

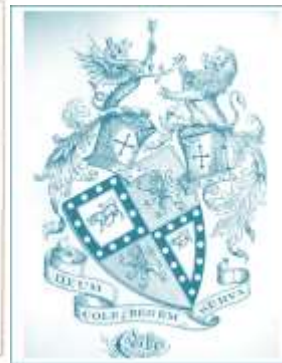
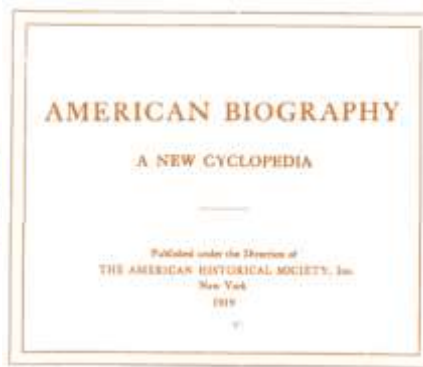
The Washington Chair is again mentioned in the Memorial Encyclopedia of the State of Rhode Island in 1916. The Washington Chair is referred to again in the *1919 American Biography, The New Cyclopedia*, Volume VI, published by the American Historical Society, pp 238-9:²⁵³ authored by the President of the

Washington Leverett Cole



ON MARCH 17, 1911, Washington Leverett Cole breathed his last in the old home on Cole avenue, opposite Sessions street, Providence, in which he had drawn his first breath sixty-nine years previous, and in which he had always lived. All about him were evidences of the many, many years the Coles had occupied the land, even Cole avenue and Sessions street were reminders of his paternal and maternal ancestors, and in the house were relics of the great Washington, and his noble comrade-in-arms, Lafayette, both of whom had been entertained by members of the Cole family then living. Among the relics of that period of past glory is the chair Washington occupied, and other mute witnesses of the great age and prominence of his family.

Rhode Island Historical Society.



Washington Leverett Cole was born in Providence, R. I., August 10, 1841, descendant of ...James Cole, through his son, Hugh Cole [of Warren, R.I.], and son of Samuel Jackson [who] was a man of means and position in Providence a gentleman farmer, and the owner of a large estate, located [near] Blackstone Boulevard. He married Frances Sessions, member of a prominent old family of Providence.

Their son, Washington Leverett Cole, was educated in the private school of Samuel J. Austin, in Providence, and on completing his studies, became interested immediately in the management of his father's large property and of his farm..... He was widely known in Providence, and highly respected for the stern integrity and consistent justice of his life and of his business policies.....

On December 28, 1872, Mr. Cole married Martha Stalker, who was born in 1848 in Greenwich, R. I., daughter of Duncan and Lucy (Spencer) Stalker, her father a native of Glasgow, Scotland, and her mother of Warwick, R. I.. Washington Leverett Cole died at his home in Providence, March 17, 1911. Mrs. Cole survived her husband, until November 15, 1916, when she passed away at the Cole home on Cole Avenue, opposite Sessions Street, in Providence.

The Cole home has been preserved in, as nearly as possible, the form in which it was when early members of the Cole family entertained Washington and Lafayette, (see note*) and contains, among other relics of that day, the chair in which the commander-in-chief sat.

²⁵³ Monro, Wilfred Harold; Memorial Encyclopedia of the State of Rhode Island, The American Historical Society, New York, 1916



Darius Sessions - History's Hidden Hero

*Author's Note: I lived in the Town of Warren for over 25 years. Among other things, I was the President of the local Historical Society, and intimately involved with preserving the town's history. The reference to Lafayette (above) likely refers to when he was quartered in Warren during the cold winter of 1778-9. Lafayette frequently ate at Ebenezer Cole's Tavern in the center of town. According to local turn-of-the-century historian, Virginia Baker, "The gallant French officer was very popular with the townspeople, his frank and engaging manner winning all hearts. Tradition states that he was extremely partial to Polly Cole's old-fashioned Rhode Island johnny-cakes." George Washington also stayed in Warren.



Fig. 7: Cole's Hotel (1762, burned 1893), Main/Joyce Street

The Chair is again cited in the Biographical History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in 1920.²⁵⁴

WASHINGTON LEVERETT COLE --- The name of Cole has been identified with the history of Rhode Island since the early years of the struggle of the little colony for existence. ... The Cole home has been preserved in as nearly as possible the form in which it was when early members of the Cole family entertained Washington and Lafayette, and contains other relics of that day the chair in which the commander-in-chief sat.

Washington Leverett Cole and his wife Martha Stalker (1848-1916), had at least six children, including Francis Sessions Cole (1873-1964), who married Ada Hopkins Tucker. Francis was a graduate of Brown University, receiving his Bachelor's Degree in 1900, (with a date of 1899). His sister, born in 1878, was named Martha Washington Cole, continuing to honor the family tradition.

The Chair was again referenced in a story about Cole Village in 1929 referring to the Old Cole Farmhouse:

"As the house has been continuously in the possession of the [Cole] Family, it has many valued relics, chief among these is an arm chair brought to this country from England by Darius Sessions,²⁵⁵ Colonial Lieutenant [Deputy] Governor about three centuries ago, a chair Washington is said to have used when a guest of the former Rhode Island Lieutenant Governor after the Revolution.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ The History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations – Biographica; The American Historical Society, New York, 1920, pages 260-1

²⁵⁵ Actually it is far more likely brought by his father, and at the time was probably a family heirloom by that time.

²⁵⁶ This account, written 130 years after the event, this puts the date of Washington occupying the chair at 1790. However this just begs a deeper question "why would Washington visit Sessions fifteen years after the start of the



Darius Sessions - History's Hidden Hero

After Washington Cole died (1911, aged 70), his will passed his property to his son Francis Sessions Cole;²⁵⁷ and when he passed away in 1964 at the age of 92, the chair transferred from the estate to a Bristol antique dealer named Church, from whom my father acquired the chair.

The Washington Chair Today

Thus the chair has an **unbroken chain of custody**, from Darius Sessions to today:

Darius Session → 1809 → Col. Thomas Sessions (son) → 1845 → Frances Sessions Cole (granddaughter) → 1870 → Washington Leverett Cole (great grandson) → 1911 → Francis Cole (great great grandson) → 1964 → Bristol Antique Dealer → Robert Barrows Lynch → 2003 → Robert Porter Lynch (son).

After my father purchased the chair, he wisely did nothing to it, proclaiming "it still had the finish that George Washington had touched!" He asked my mother to sew two velvet pads, which dad carefully mounted, one on the back and one with plywood on the seat to prevent any further damage to the chair's delicate original caning.

Today, this 325-year-old chair is a beautiful example of early colonial craftsmanship; still retaining its original finish, just as it was when George Washington sat in it nearly 250 years ago.

Indeed, the facts are far more illuminating than the legend.

#12 Cole Farm Court...continued

1911 WILL: Washinton Leverett Cole:... "I give and bequeath to my wife Martha S Cole all of my Homestead Estate bounded: W by Cole Avenue; N by Martha Lippitt Land; E by Slater Avenue; and Thomas Kennedy; S by Mount Avenue (now Sessions Street) and Thomas Kennedy to have and to hold during her life and after her death to become the property of my son Francis Sessions Cole"...Wills 114.61

1949 Property was taxed to Francis Sessions Cole

1961 Francis S Cole sells to Kavin Corporation that certain lot of land with all buildings and improvements thereon on the N/ly side of Cole Farm Court, being Lot#3 on that Plat entitled: "Cole Farm Plat, Providence R I, belonging to Francis S Cole" Platted by Waterman Engineering Company, May 1948..Plat Book 41.p 65 (see Map)..DB 1111.1101 #2

Proof of Passage through Wills (source Providence Preservation Society on line)



Washington Chair 1964-2003 (home of Robert B. Lynch) 421 Comstock Parkway, Cranston, Rhode Island



Revolution?" One would surmise that most likely this was not their first visit, there must have been a prior relationship between the two for Washington to carve out precious time from such a short visit.

²⁵⁷ I contacted Dr. Francis Sessions Cole who lives in St. Louis. They have no family files that could shed any deeper light on the chair or the Washington connection. They were unaware of any of Darius Sessions' papers.



Is a Chair Just a Chair?

In today's throw-away world, perhaps a chair doesn't mean much.

But for those who love America and the values for which it stands, this chair much more:

It's a symbol of what made this country great, of what happens when people have qualities beheld by our forefathers of the Age of Enlightenment that are quite rare today:

- Power of Purpose and Vision
- Strength and Toughness of Character
- Ideals and Values Balancing Self Interest with Community Benefit
- Unity of Trust and Fidelity to Others
- The Religious Rights of All Americans
- Holding Civic Responsibilities as dearly as Civil Rights
- Leadership with Courage and Conviction to build a better world
- Striving for Knowledge and Deeper Wisdom through education

When people were charged with a force to create a better world and build a bold new future.



Darius Sessions was likely sitting in this chair by the fireplace on the bitterly cold night of New Year's Eve, 1772, when he read the hallowed words written to him personally by Sam Adams telling him the actions he and Stephen Hopkins were about to take:

“... may involve the Fate of America”

Gen. George Washington sat in this chair to plan Revolutionary War strategies with the Sons of Liberty



About Flemish Chairs

Flemish chairs are rare in America. Many were made in Europe and shipped here as precious cargo. They were certainly not common. Here is an excerpt from ***Furniture from the Pilgrim***

Century 1620-1720 by Wallace Nutting (1921), an early authority on Pilgrim Furniture describing the rarity of these chairs 100 years ago:

The feature of the Flemish chair that most impresses one is the famous Flemish scroll. A fine feature of the [Flemish arm chairs] is the so-called ram's horn arm, which gains this name when it curves outward as well as downward. The back legs are never carved.

These chairs are a far cry from the simplicity of the turned chair. They represent very well the reaction against Puritanism. They

It awaits the right curator to continue to preserve this unique artifact, and its dramatic history for generations to come.

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eir too*

ornamental character for a new country and a simple generation.

The caning of these chairs is of the finest character and some of it remains in the examples we show.

The elaborate chairs heretofore shown are too rare to be within the reach of the average collector. The finish is preferably natural but many specimens are painted black.....



The George Washington Chair
2016 Photo



A Fine Specimen from
Wallace Nutting, 1921

The Chair is of the "Flemish" Style, dating from c. 1690-1700.
The wood in the chair is maple and beech – probably from England originally.
The finish is original (likely shellac) and apparently has never been refinished.
The cane seat is original and well worn with some broken cane.



Darius Sessions – History's Hidden Hero

Pictures and Authentication



Detail showing the 4" of wear on the Washington Chair



Comparing a chair of the same period whose legs are nearly the original configuration to the Washington chair with worn feet



What the foot of the Washington Chair would have looked like before sitting on a hearth for a couple of centuries

Note: This picture imposes a digital image on the shortened foot – the chair's feet remain exactly as they were a century ago – with 4 inches worn off.



Detail of Lower Crest Rail

Contact: Robert Porter Lynch -- Current Owner
Phone: 239-537-6441
Email: RobertLynch@warrenco.com

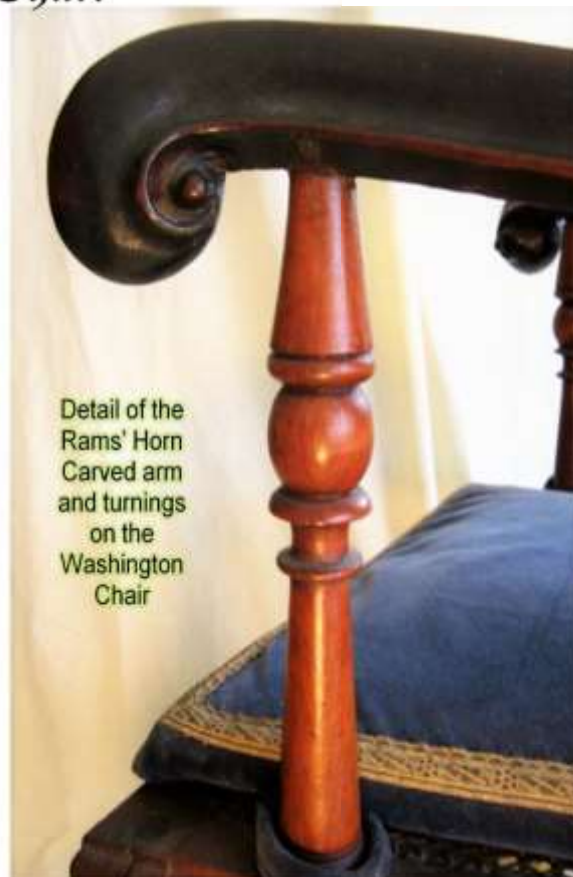


the George Washington Chair





the George Washington Chair





Darius Sessions - History's Hidden Hero the George Washington Chair

Validation of Age of the Chair by Alan Miller, Consultant to Southeby's and Christies

ALANMILLERANTIQUES.US

Alan T. Miller Antiques Consultant
2315 Township Rd
Quakertown, PA 18951

610-346-8938

AlanMillerAntiques@verizon.net

via email

October 17, 2016

Ref: George Washington Chair

Dear Robert,

Your research on the chair is impressive and exhaustive.

As you suggest, "When is a chair more than a chair?"

When it is history.

As an antique chair without history, this is a likable but not top-quality 17th century British chair. There is a faint possibility it might be Flemish or Scandinavian, but British is more likely.

Its value as such might reach the \$10,000 range.

The real value of this chair is its history and Washington association.

As such, it is more important as memorabilia than as an antique.

The strength of the historical proof establishes the value of the chair much more than its art.

The last I heard, Mt. Vernon is mainly interested in furnishings that were there when Washington lived there, although it would be worth checking this.

There are many collectors of Washington memorabilia as you no doubt know. I have no good way to reach them. One of the major auction houses could.

Best regards,

Alan Miller



Darius Sessions - History's Hidden Hero

On 10/16/16, Robert Porter Lynch<RobertLynch@warrenco.com> wrote:

Dear Alan,

Nancy Johnston, from Morristown (formerly Israel Sacks) suggested I get in touch with you to provide an independent validation of the chair I own that came from Darius Sessions, Deputy Governor of Rhode Island from 1769-1775. I hope to work with Nancy going forward to ensure the chair finds the right home.

I have attached a detailed history of the chair, including its:
Provenance, Events surrounding the Chair, and the People who were intimately intertwined in the life of Darius Sessions.

It is my assumption that your role might be to authenticate the originality/authenticity of the chair. As a third party expert, your objective verification is presumably quite important.

I would be happy to send detailed photos, and make the chair available to any expert (including yourself) for precise on-sight examination. (I might add, as an amateur historian and having detailed knowledge of antique furniture, I have absolute confidence this chair will pass the most intense scrutiny.)

Let me state my objectives (I am 69 years old, with no heirs, and want to be sure the chair passes into the right hands while I am still in good health):

- * Ensure the Chair is cherished and preserved properly for posterity
- * Preferably the Chair would be the Centerpiece of a Living Exhibit in a Museum or on Public View
- * Educate today's leaders on the Values and Trustworthiness of Revolutionary Leaders

I am currently launching a Leadership Institute <<http://www.iclinstitute.com/>> (501c3 Not-For-Profit) that instills the Values of the Leaders of the Age of the Enlightenment (Founding Fathers) into American Institutions, specifically:

- * Trust & Respect,
- * Cooperation & Teamwork,
- * Collaborative Innovation
- * Visionary Mission and Unity of Purpose

At least half of the proceeds of the sale of the Chair would go to the Institute.

Please let me know of your interest, how we could work together, and your best advice about how to proceed. I have not been involved in the very rarified world of museum-quality antiques, your advice would be quite helpful.

Thank you for getting back to me so quickly,
Sincerely,
Robert

Authentication by Armand La Montagne

In 2003, after my father passed away, [Armand La Montagne](#) the famous wood sculpturer and artisan, best known in the antiques world for his nearly impossible fake of the Brewster Chair, stopped by to pay his respects. He was a long-time friend of the family.

He examined the Washington chair and confidently said it was all original from the Flemish period.



La Montagne's reproduction home in the next town