

RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

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BENJAMIN BOWEN CARTER, 1771-1831

This oil by Francis Alexander was given to Brown by Dr. Carter's sister, Elizabeth Ann Danforth, widow of Walter R. Danforth. The portrait now hangs on the second floor of University Hall.

Courtesy of Brown University

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BENJAMIN B. CARTER, PHYSICIAN EXTRAORDINARY

by ROBERT W. KENNY

Professor of English, Brown University

THE CLASS OF 1786, the eleventh to be graduated from Brown University, numbered fifteen members, and was the largest graduating class up to that time. Its most famous member, undoubtedly, was Nicholas Brown, the second of that name in his family, philanthropist and merchant, from whom Brown University took its name. A second interesting member of '86 was Benjamin Bowen Carter, Nicholas Brown's brother-in-law. Carter was a linguist, physician, ship's surgeon, mathematician, speculator in oriental commodities, book collector, biographer, world traveler, ardent anti-Jeffersonian, crusty bachelor and a frequent dealer in moral bromides. He has particular interest for us as the author of the vivid "Journal of the Ship Ann and Hope on a Voyage to Canton, China in 1798/99," and for the materials he collected for a life of James Manning, Brown's first president.

Benjamin Bowen Carter was born in Providence on 16 December 1771, the second of twelve children and the eldest son of John Carter, the printer, patriot and publisher of the *Providence Gazette*. Benjamin Carter entered Brown University at the age of eleven and was graduated as a Bachelor of Arts in 1786. He continued his studies for the master's degree which he received three years later on 4 September 1789. As part of his Senior Exhibition Carter wrote a colloquy *The Four Elements*: earth, air, fire, and water. It is in blank verse reminiscent of Thomson's *Seasons*. The virtue of each element is narrated in turn by the youths Palamon, Amyntas, Emilius and Daphnis. I confess I was not in on the last word of the last element; however I did glance at the last page and was comforted to note that many years later Carter had added a note excusing the effort as that

of a lad of fifteen.

Jonthan Maxcy, Brown's second president, was in the class behind Carter's. Judging by the few letters which remain of their correspondence, there seems to have been a warm friendship between the two young men. In May, 1786, Maxcy wrote to Carter from Wrentham that although at college he had looked forward to solitude, he was now suffering from melancholia. Carter had complained that a fellow student, John Wheaton, had carved his initials in their room. Maxcy replied, "Tell John Wheaton devil take him. Oh, I abhor these fellows who try to immortalize themselves by notching pine boards." Carter was to be graduated in September. "Oh, my dear Carter, think on next fall when we must part." They did not part at this time, however, as Carter stayed on for three more years and obtained his master's degree in 1789. He then asked Maxcy's advice about going to medical school and received this reply:

You inform me in your last that you think of studying Physick. If it pleases you you will excell in it & as you have a good opportunity to study it, I think you had better employ it. Tell me in your next who is at College.

Maxcy, at his father's farm in Attleboro, also commented on his summer's reading in the Latin poets:

Lucian tells a droll story with a serious face, and talks of little things as matters of great importance. Horace is very sensible, very solid, very witty, a delicate courtier, a lover of wine, a whoremaster & a dirty blackguard.

With this tidbit of classical criticism to ponder Carter departed for Philadelphia where, in the fall of 1789, he enrolled at the Medical College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania Medical School) and the Pennsylvania Hospital where he studied under Benjamin Rush, William Shippen, James Hutchinson, and Caspar Wistar. Dr. Carter's "Diagnosis, Prescription and Treatment Book," now in the Brown University Archives, indicates that in the summer of 1792 he started the practice of medicine in Woodstock, North Parish, Windham County, Connecticut. He had considered setting up practice in Genesee in the Western Reserve but was dissuaded from this by his father, Dr. Pardon Bowen, and Nicholas Brown, who suggested Georgia as a promising spot for a young doctor. In letters to his sister, Ann, Carter complained that he found Connecticut dull after Philadelphia. The next year he moved to Charleston,

South Carolina, and later to Savannah, Georgia, where he practiced until he returned to Providence in 1798.

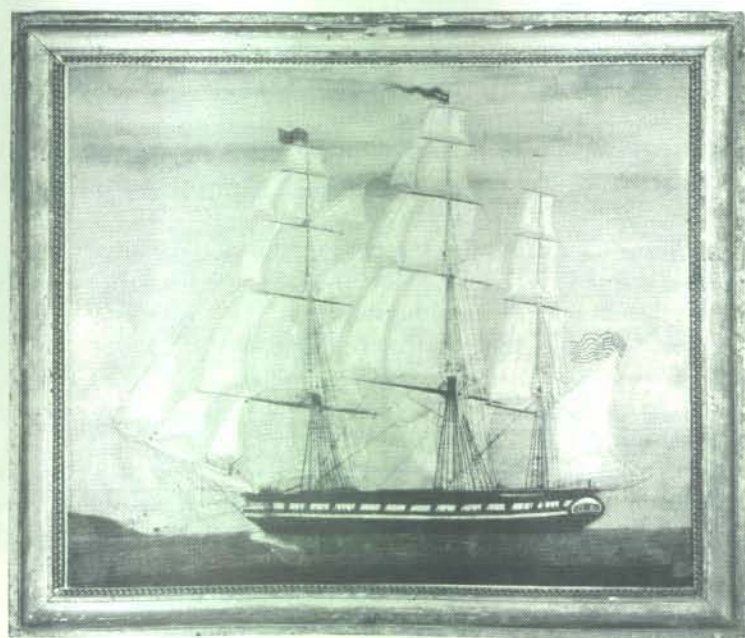
A letter from Maxcy to Carter dated at Providence on 13 January 1792 expresses gratification that Carter wishes to resume the correspondence of "our boyish days." Maxcy is "rejoiced" that Carter's faith is "confirmed in our blessed heaven-born religion. How little, alas, did I once esteem the Gospel of Jesus. You inform me that you have formed some acquaintance with Dr. Rogers. Do you think he would do for President of our College? I feel much interest for the welfare of the College & long to see it in more prosperous circumstances."

There is no evidence as to how lucrative a practice Dr. Carter had relinquished in the South, but he willingly signed on as surgeon of the *Ann and Hope* for \$17.00 per month with a one ton privilege. This privilege was increased on later voyages, and the profits from his speculations during the four voyages he made in the *Ann and Hope* and during his later residence in Canton enabled him to build up what his father described as a "handsome competency." Nicholas Brown requested Captain Benjamin Page, the master of the *Ann and Hope*, to be "helpful to our brother-in-law and friend" on this his first voyage as a ship's surgeon.

The ship *Ann and Hope* of approximately 550 tons burden, built in Providence by Benjamin Tallman, had been turned over to her owners, Brown and Ives, in the spring of 1798. She had been expressly built for the China trade and little time was lost in getting her ready for sea. The *Ann and Hope* went out in ballast as the New England hinterland could supply no products for the Chinese market. Deep in her hold was \$80,000 in hard money with which to purchase teas, nankeens, and porcelain for the American market. The voyage and Dr. Carter's *Journal* commence on 9 July 1798. Throughout the voyage the doctor kept a full and meticulous journal. He set out, apparently, to learn navigation, and he worked out the ship's positions daily in great detail during the early weeks of the voyage. Later many of the steps in the calculations were omitted or abbreviated. The doctor's nonprofessional observations are keen, but at times self-consciously "cultured."

The maiden voyage from Providence to Canton by way of Australia and the Marianas was an exciting, rapid, and profitable ex-

perience. On this voyage the *Ann and Hope* made a name for herself as a very rapid sailer, traversing the distance from the Providence River to Tasman's Head, New Holland, in just ninety days. This was no fluke as she covered the same distance on her second voyage in ninety-one days. Dr. Carter wrote vividly about Botany Bay, the then very young town of Sydney, New South Wales, and about a spear throwing battle between two groups of aborigines. At Tinian Captain Page took aboard an East Indian from Bombay who had been marooned on that island for eighteen months. Comments on Cantonese life, the diseases of the Orient, and an account of a skirmish between the *Ann and Hope* and a French privateer are narrated in spirited fashion marred only now and then by some platitudinous moralizing. The voyage and the *Journal* come to a close when the



BROWN AND IVES' SHIP *ANN and HOPE*

in which Benjamin Bowen Carter made four voyages to the Far East as ship's surgeon

Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. R. H. I. Goddard

Ann and Hope reached Newport, Rhode Island, on 15 June 1798 with a rich cargo for her owners.

Dr. Carter was surgeon on the *Ann and Hope* for the ship's first four voyages. Voyages two and three were to Canton, July, 1799-August, 1800, and December, 1800-April, 1802. The second voyage has particular interest as Captain Christopher Bentley, who had succeeded Benjamin Page as master, discovered and accurately located some outlying islands in the Fiji group. Again, as on the first voyage, the *Ann and Hope* exchanged shots with British and French privateers. The third voyage, again to Canton, was by way of London, where the hull of the *Ann and Hope* was sheathed in copper. On each succeeding voyage the doctor's tonnage allowance was greater as he speculated in Chinese commodities for the American market. The fourth and last voyage of Dr. Carter as ship's surgeon was to Batavia, May 1802-September 1803, where the *Ann and Hope* was loaded with sugar for the European market. The passage from Batavia was so rapid that the *Ann and Hope* arrived in Cowes, England, before instructions from Brown and Ives in Providence. Since the English Navigation Acts prevented the sale of the sugar in England, on the advice of the supercargo, Thomas Thompson, Captain Laing, the master, sailed for Amsterdam. Here Thompson negotiated with Dutch merchants and Dr. Carter traveled in Holland visiting the universities of Leyden and Utrecht where he had letters of introduction to mathematicians and scientists; he attended lectures and visited laboratories at both institutions, conversing with his hosts in Latin. With Thompson, the supercargo, Carter bought various medicines in Amsterdam from which he realized a tidy profit in New York. Carter was a member of Mt. Vernon Lodge in Providence, and while in Europe attended several Masonic gatherings, notably the Loge de Paix in Amsterdam.

From Amsterdam the *Ann and Hope*, in ballast, sailed for Krons-tadt where she was loaded with sable iron, hemp, duck, and sail-cloth. Carter invested in three tons of Russian merchandise, which again netted him a good profit from his agents, King and Talbot, in New York. Carter's Memorandum Book for this voyage contains scraps from Latin and Greek authors, English weights and their Russian counterparts, his impressions of the Summer Palace at St. Petersburg, a Russian hospital, and his satisfaction in being able to

converse with Russian priests in classic Greek. The *Ann and Hope* arrived home in September, 1803; the doctor did not sign on for what turned out to be the last two voyages of the *Ann and Hope*; instead he spent the fall and winter visiting friends in Philadelphia and New York.

Carter's letters from 1800 on show a dislike bordering on contempt for the Republican Party and its leader Thomas Jefferson; concomitantly a vast admiration for England and English institutions. These sentiments fill a large portion of his letters from Canton, to which city he had sailed on the new Brown and Ives ship *Asia* in July, 1804. In the *Asia* he had an adventure insured for \$7,000 and appears to have been quite the man of substance. In Canton, where he arrived in December, 1804, he took up residence with Edward Carrington of Providence, who had succeeded his fellow townsman, Samuel Snow, as United States Consul in 1802. Dr. Carter was soon enjoying a lucrative medical practice among the European colony and trading in Chinese goods. In a little over a year he dispatched more than \$16,000 worth of Chinese commodities to his agents in Amsterdam, London, New York, and Providence.

The first of the anti-Jeffersonian letters to survive was one to his brother Crawford in Providence, dated Canton 27 November 1805. Crawford Carter had apparently indulged in the very human failing of writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper. The replies to it were apparently wounding to the sensibilities of a Federalist and gentleman. The doctor in an "I told you so" manner wrote: "To this levelling age and among the vile Republicans of America, Abilities and Learning are looked upon with horror and denounced with no less certainty than in the days of Robespierre. — America has long to groan under the lash of negro driving Presidents and Committees."

In a letter of condolence to his brother John, from Canton, written 2 December, 1805, the doctor indulged his bent for moral bromides. Part of John's illness was traceable to intemperance, and the doctor urged the drinking of tea, citing such worthies as Dr. Johnson and Edmund Burke to prove that the "cup that cheers but does not inebriate" cuts down the longing for ardent spirits. "The ingenious Doctor Darwin compared the inventor of them [ardent spirits] to Prometheus, who stole fire from heaven for which theft he was punished by a vulture gnawing at his liver, which well allegorizes an

intemperate person laboring under hepatic disease."¹ Nothing in the letter has foreshadowed his attack on America but it appears none-the-less:

"There is a better country than America where your abilities would be more likely to meet with encouragement among men of learning and religion than among the brutal, ignorant, impious and atheistical Americans. The country I mean is England. I sometimes entertain hope that I may be permitted to spend the remainder of my life on the classic ground of England."

While in Canton Dr. Carter made a serious and apparently successful effort to learn the Chinese language. Under the date of 24 June, 1844, John Carter Brown wrote on a blank page of the *Dictionarum Sinicum*, now in the Brown University Archives: "This book belonged to my maternal uncle Doctor Benjamin Bowen Carter, a graduate of B. U. Class of 1786. Dr. Carter was a fine linguist, and particularly versed in Oriental languages and literature." Dr. Carter was taught the Chinese language by a Chinese seminary of the Jesuit College in Peking, whose Europeanized name was Abel Xaverius. The instruction was carried on in Latin, Xaverius transcribing the Chinese-Latin dictionary of over 15,000 ideographs from the manuscript copy of the author, Father Basilico de Clemona, a Portuguese missionary, who compiled it about 1726. Among the Carter-Danforth Papers are several letters to Chinese merchants in Carter's handwriting, in most cases accompanied by an English translation. Such fulsome phrases as: "I place myself under your feet;" "I rejoice, while I put confidence, in the beneficence of superior beings;" "I have considered offering you presents that would be worthy of you to receive," appear to be the conventional language of Chinese trade.

In 1805 Dr. Carter's linguistic knowledge was useful to the U. S. Government:

In October 1805, Mr. Carrington, the American Vice-Consul at Canton wrote to the Viceroy complaining of the violence offered by the English in taking American seamen out of our ships. This memorial Mr. C. desired me to translate into Chinese characters. Though I had studied Chinese some time, yet not being used to compose in the language, I was dubious whether my style would be sufficiently accurate to present to a man of his rank, as the Chinese are extremely fastidious of any inaccuracies in their language, and

¹Erasmus Darwin, 1731-1802, the English physician and botanist. He was the grandfather of Charles Darwin.

a vulgar and impolitic address to a man of high rank might defeat the object of the remonstrance. By permission of Mr. Carrington I called in the aid of my learned instructor Abel Xaverius, having first engaged his secrecy. As Xaverius was totally unacquainted with English and, of course, unable to read Mr. Carrington's petition, the first thing requisite was for me to translate Mr. Carrington's ideas into Latin. By the assistance of Xaverius the petition was translated from the Latin into Chinese, and signed by the American Captains, Super Cargoes and merchants resident at Canton. This being the 1st official paper from America ever presented to the Government of China.²

Political considerations aside, Dr. Carter seems to have enjoyed pleasant relations with the Canton merchants, and many years later in letters to his brother Crawford, a resident of Canton, he asks to be remembered to Houqua, Consequa and other merchants.

In the spring of 1806 Dr. Carter returned to Providence, where he remained until October 1807 when he took passage in the ship *Robert Burns* for Liverpool and "the classic ground of England." He lived abroad for eleven years, most of this time in England, although after Waterloo he spent more than a year in Paris and in the summer of 1816 traveled through Scotland. Dr. Carter studied mathematics for a time at Cambridge, but for the most part remained in London attending lectures at St. Thomas' and Guy's hospitals and studying Hebrew and Syriac, languages in which he seems to have acquired a substantial competence.³ During 1810 and 1811 he assisted Dr.

²This incident impressed upon Carter the need of a Chinese speaking member on the consular staff in Canton to make representations to the Chinese Government and to assist American merchants who were bilked of large sums each year by the Chinese. Carter nominated himself for the position in a letter to Jonathan Russell, Brown 1791, written from London on 12 February 1811, urging Russell to use his influence for Carter with the Secretary of State. The post was not created at this time. Carter may have been conscious of his political enemies when he wrote: "Some persons may have represented me as a Tory and unworthy of confidence. I am opposed to the principles advocated by the *Providence Gazette* and never took my political creed from Wm Sheldon and Wm Goddard. When my brother published the *Providence Journal* I prevented several things being inserted which were levelled at Mr. Jefferson."

³I am indebted to several members of the Departments of Egyptology and Religious Studies at Brown who examined various linguistic exercises of Dr. Carter. They felt that he had a substantial competence in Hebrew and Syriac, as well as Greek and Latin. In addition to Chinese Dr. Carter apparently knew French and some Portuguese. An admiring relative wrote that Dr. Carter knew twenty-nine languages. This is possibly true, but there is no evidence for it, and Dr. Samuel Johnson has reminded us that "in lapidary inscriptions a man is not on oath."

Joseph Fox in editing a third edition of Fox's treatise *The Natural History of the Teeth*. The correspondence indicates that Carter had a very considerable share in revising the earlier editions of the work (1803, 1806). Fox writes of his entire satisfaction with the copy submitted by Dr. Carter.

About this time Carter seems to have prepared a rough draft of a life of James Manning, the first president of Brown University. There are many blanks in the text; doubtless Carter intended to fill in names, dates and places upon his return to America. He never did so, however. Carter showed the manuscript to Dr. Fox who wrote on 4 January, 1811: "I return you also your mss of Dr. Manning. I think that his life & the History of the College could be very interesting, particularly the first years of his progress."⁴

Carter seems to have had persuasive letters of introduction for he soon had a rather extensive acquaintance with persons of considerable standing. His correspondence shows that he numbered among his associates Sir Joseph Banks, the president of the Royal Society and the botanist of Cook's voyages; Sir Astley Cooper, the surgeon and lecturer at St. Thomas Hospital; Henry Cline, also a surgeon; and Dr. Charles Burney, the organist. He was friendly with Dr. John Rippon, the eminent Baptist preacher to whom he wrote a letter introducing John Carter Brown as "a graduate of Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island and a gentleman of an unblemished reputation travelling in England for his health and for information."

As has been noted, Carter had developed a dislike and distrust for many of his countrymen. This feeling is explicit in a letter to Nicholas Brown written from London at the beginning of the War of 1812.

I regret that the Commencement of hostilities obliges this gentlemen [Russell the U. S. Ambassador] to leave the Court of St. James where he has resided with so much honour to our Country. The late papers from America inform us of the massacres in Baltimore by which it appears that the war has begun, as I always thought it would, not by openly assaulting the fleet and armies of Britain but by privateering against and wantonly burning defenseless merchant

⁴The manuscript of this, the first, life of James Manning is in the Ann Mary Brown Library. It is my hope to make the editing of this manuscript the next order of business.

vessels and by one party of American citizens robbing and murdering one another. It is impossible to ascertain how far the war against Great Britain will be pursued, but I am apprehensive the Civil War in the United States will not soon terminate.

A change of property seems to be the great object with certain men and when they have once begun to taste the sweets of being rich without labour they will not easily be prevailed upon to quit their prey or relinquish their projects. It will be much easier to confiscate the property of rich Federalists than fight 74s. In this melancholy state of affairs it becomes a question what part we are to act so as to preserve our lives and properties until the storm subsides. We cannot expect that the British will respect American property at sea when we are at war with them; and we know that the American Jacobins will not respect the property of political antagonists.

I hope you will be blessed with wisdom and spirit to defend your life and property. My little property, my only provision for old age, I confide to your care in full reliance on your ability and friendship.

The cisatlantic prospect brightens. The defeat of Marmot by the Marquis of Wellington has elevated the spirits of the nation and the funds have advanced in price. Napoleon is advancing towards Moscow slowly. The Russians retreat but often turn and chastise their pursuers. I still hope that Napoleon will not be able to subdue Russia, if she wisely perseveres in her system of retreating and avoiding a general action. If the Russians act with wisdom and courage the monster may find his grave on the banks of the Borysthènes.

Your Commencement was no doubt celebrated in the usual manner, notwithstanding the somber aspect of political affairs. Literature ought to be exempt from the turbulence of party.

I think sometimes of returning to N. Y. but know not when.

The scuttling of Col. Smiths and Sam Thurburs privateers was unexpected. Who would think the Providence men had spirit enough for such an enterprise. I do not however commend the unlawful actions of the mob in the destruction of private property.

After Waterloo Dr. Carter visited Paris, where he remained for more than a year. During this time he became acquainted with Abbé Jean Pierre Abel Remusat (1788-1832), the orientalist, with whom he corresponded for many years. Enough of the Remusat correspondence in the Ann Mary Brown Library and The Rhode Island Historical Society remains to make clear that their principal interest was in Chinese versions of the Gospel, and that Dr. Carter arranged through John Ryland for the Abbé to receive Chinese publications

of the Baptist Missionary Society.⁵ It is also apparent that on Dr. Carter's suggestion Abbé Remusat withheld publication of articles which might offend the Chinese; Remusat wrote, "I easily forsook the thought of publishing them when I heard it would be unpleasing to your venerable friends."

In the summer of 1816 Carter visited Scotland. Although he spent much of his time in Edinburgh he made an extensive walking tour of the northern portion of Scotland, retracing the route of Johnson and Boswell. The journal of this trip is in The Rhode Island Historical Society. Unfortunately the early pages are missing, and the later ones do not indicate the identity of Dr. Carter's companion, although it is evident that he had one. In Glasgow the doctor visited a cotton factory and noted, apparently as an example of Scottish enlightenment, that no boys under ten were employed in the factory and at that age the wage was two shillings per week.

In Edinburgh the doctor seems to have had a very good time; as usual he arrived with numerous letters of introduction. He was a frequent guest at the home of a widow, Mrs. Anne Grant of Laggan, nee Macvicar, an authoress who had spent her early married years in the Mohawk country of New York State and written about it in *The Memoirs of An American Lady*, 1808. Mrs. Grant, imitating Bishop Percy, had also written a highly popular *Essay on the Superstitions of the Highlands* in 1811. Carter found the Scots still ardent for Macpherson and unwilling to believe that his Ossianic poems were forgeries. Mrs. Grant spoke of America as a land of promise and not of performance, to which Dr. Carter took no exception. Carter also met a Baptist preacher, Doctor Charles Stewart, who showed him copies of Roger Williams' *Key Into the Language of America*, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*, and *A Letter of Mr. John Cottons to Mr. R. Williams*. Stewart also showed Carter, to the doctor's amazement, a very old map of New England which Dr. Carter described as engraved on wood. Carter seems to have had a genuine interest in Americana and it is a harmless conjecture that the interest stimulated at this time was passed on to his nephew and resulted in the priceless collections of the John Carter Brown

⁵John Ryland (1753-1825), a Baptist minister, preacher, president of a Baptist college in Bristol, England. 1793-1825, founder and later secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society.

Library. Dr. Carter was already familiar with White Kennet's *Bibliothecae Americanae Primordia*, London, 1713, a promising beginning for a collector of Americana.

In 1819 Dr. Carter returned to America and settled in New York, where he lived for the remainder of his life. His visits to Providence seem to have been infrequent as there had been some sort of quarrel or misunderstanding between the Browns and the Carters. The cause and date of this misunderstanding I cannot determine. As late as 1815 Carter was writing to his classmate and brother-in-law, Nicholas Brown, in a cordial enough manner. When the quarrel was patched up, if it ever was, I do not know either. However, Nicholas Brown was an honorary pallbearer at Dr. Carter's funeral in Providence in 1831. In New York City Carter seems to have led a full life; he was a member of the Medical Society of the City and County of New York and the New York Lyceum of Natural History to which he occasionally sent specimens. He corresponded with his two nephews, Nicholas Brown Jr. and John Carter Brown, and apparently they visited him in New York when on their way to the western landholdings of the family. One letter, that of 29 June 1819 is of particular interest for the information it contains on the Carter family origins.

Tontine Coffee House, New York
June 29, 1819

Mr. Nicholas Brown Jun.

Dear Nephew

Your letter of June 21st by post has been received. As you did not acknowledge the receipt of two vols of Cobbett's Years residence which I sent to Mr. Francis by packet I conclude you did not receive them. I regret this as I wish you to read Mr. Hulme's travels into the Western territory and Cobbett's remarks on emigration.

I saw your beloved brother John several times in N York & regret that he did not stop longer but as he and you will of course be travelling Westward now & then I hope to see him and you again. In this respect my central situation is favorable. I am desirous that you both may be true friends of our poor shattered family, as your father by listening to the perfidious counsels of Ives has proved himself to be a most destructive enemy. I do not expect that you will be able to repair the devastation and havoc that has been made in our family, but surely it must be a more agreeable

task to a man of Good heart to mend rather than destroy, to heal rather than to wound and lacerate.

I am willing to give my aid in searching the records of this island, but I have little hopes of any benefits from the results. I will make enquiry as you request about the land on this Island formerly belonging to our ancestor, but I calculate to receive very imperfect information, having been disappointed before when asking information on this subject. When in Philadelphia in the winter of 1791 & 1792 I often conversed with my aunts Tolwell and Jones about the lands. They lamented that my father should have failed in his attempt to recover them. You say that Mrs. Jones wrote my father in 1779. I do not know the date of the letter having never seen it, but it was, I think, in the year 1787 that my father went to Long Island & to Philadelphia on this business. It can do no harm to rake up & investigate this business, but I think we shall never recover one foot of land, as I remember to have heard David Howell say, more than 30 years ago when speaking of these lands, "Oh there the title does not seem to be complete." These were nearly his words. Our ancestor who owned the land in this island was named John Spragg if I mistake not. He was an Englishman, I think, a man of wealth, an Episcopalian and he is said to have given an organ to some church. This person who occupied the land in question showed my father a deed but there was no signature to it. If the deed was not signed by the conveyer it could be of no validity & of course the Occupier could have no title to the land except by possession. I have heard my mother speak of some farms in Rhode Island that were lost to her family by this possession of 21 years.

I will take some opportunity & write to my first cousin Saml Tolwell in Philadelphia on this subject & others connected with it but I have not heard from Tolwell in many years.

My father was always very shy in speaking of his family in Philadelphia, I never heard him speak one word about his father and mother or brother James. I wish you would favor me with the few pencil notes you took from him. He once said that he was born in the year of the Scots rebellion (which was I think in 1745). I heard when in Philadelphia that he was a posthumous child having been born after the death of his father who was mate of a vessel and was killed in a sea fight in the old French War by a shot. His brother James was a last maker in Philadelphia. Mrs. Tolwell told me that her brother James Carter was a gay man, fond of company, and now and then apt to drink too much. He was neat in his dress, particularly his shoes and she has seen him for half an hour with a shoing horn trying to put on a new pair of shoes which were too small for him. In other words he was one of the Philadelphia dandies of the last century. He died young. Few persons are as

ignorant of their own families as I am. My mother used to discourse frequently about her family and on her side I have a little information, but my father for reasons best known to himself always observed a profound silence respecting his family. My first cousin Richard Tolwell, from whom I learned what little I know of our family once told me that there had been a family quarrel among them in Philadelphia. This and his natural austerity might have caused my father's silence on the subject. When I called on Dr. Benj Rush to enter myself as his pupil he asked me my name & residence. He then asked me if my father was not a printer in Providence. He then observed that he was formerly well acquainted with my father. Mrs. Tolwell told me that Dr. Rush and my father were once very intimate. At that time Dr. Rush's mother was a very poor widow and kept a huckster's shop in Philadelphia. Mr. Tolwell who married my father's sister Elizabeth was a cabinet maker. Daniel Spencer formerly a cabinet maker in Providence & grandfather of the late William Lawrence your clerk used to work with Mr. Tolwell as a journeyman. After the death of Mr. Tolwell she married Col. Robert Roberts who served during the American war. Mr. Jones who married my father's other sister Rebecca was I think a Shoemaker. After the deaths of Mr. Tolwell and Mr. Jones my father's two sisters kept boarders and lodgers, and in 1787 Mrs. Tolwell told my father (as she said to me) that she and her sister had each 500L Pennsylvania currency out at interest when he replied that it was much more than he had. In this he spoke the truth for at this time he was deeply in debt to Thomas Diskason & Co. & not worth a cent. Thus our family had neither riches, nor titles nor honours to boast of. If I were to say that we were persons of humble birth it might be inferred that there were some persons of exalted birth in these States. If we have no noble blood in our veins we are no worse off on that account than our neighbors for show me the man in America that has noble blood in his veins. Thus I have told you all I know of our Philadelphia relations.

It is a curious fact that letters to you should be inclosed to Mr. Francis for fear that they should not faithfully be delivered to you, but fall into other hands and be broken open. . . .

Your anxiety and solicitude for your succumbing relations is extremely honourable to you and I hope your good wishes & endeavours may be attended with better success than were mine. My heart was wrung with the keenest sensations to see the destruction that was preparing for my unfortunate relations, who seemed insensible of their approaching fate & laughed at my warnings. I stretched out my hand to help them but some of them tried to bite off my hand & came near destroying me. My want of success does not indispose me from doing a good action but it suggests the

necessity of prudence & discrimination. You must not put yourself in the power of a dishonest ungrateful person merely because he is your relative & you feel for his misery. This was the point in which I erred

I am your faithful friend and uncle

Bnj. B. Carter.

Dr. Carter at one time apparently contemplated writing a history of Rhode Island. His long residence in New York may well have been the reason that the project got no further than a long series of questions which he wished to resolve in the work. The questions concern the climate, natural resources, working habits of the people, the relations between Providence and Newport, the early slave trade, the extent of manufacturing in the state. Some idea of the scope of the intended work can be gained by noting the subjects for which Dr. Carter was seeking answers.

At what precise period before 1700 did they [the citizens of Providence] begin to prosecute commercial enterprises, particularly the slave trade. Were there negroes in N England previous to 1730? When did the whale fishery commence? Nature and amount of exportation from Providence before 1775.

The yellow fever, was it imported or of domestic origin—in Providence—contagious or not. Pardon Bowen has written an article, in the Medical Repository of New York in which he endeavors to prove that it was imported. This essay seems to be a defense of Jos. Nightingale, John Innes Clarke, and Ephraim Bowen for keeping hogs & other nuisances in the lower part of town rather than a candidate investigation of the subject.

Slave trade—what number of slaves appear to have been regularly imported, in vessels, into the port of Providence, before & during the war? What duty per head paid to the Government? When did the odious traffic cease?

Smuggling in Rhode Island, under the British dynasty, appears to have been carried on extensively—its amount, nature, punishment for.

At what time did the Baptists begin to remit their hereditary contempt & hatred of learning? Was the improvement in their liberality the effect of Dr. Manning's efforts? Were the Latin & Greek languages taught in Providence before Manning came? What progress has been made in Hebrew? Dr. Styles, President of Yale College, formerly a minister at Newport, learned the Hebrew of some Jews settled there.

Did not R. Williams commit an absurdity in exercising the functions of a Civil Officer, as Governor and Minister of the Gospel at the same time. Dr. Charles Stewart of Edinburgh says he did not.

Comparison of Smithfield marble with Grecian marbles seen in the Louvre.

Are the Indian languages of New England totally lost? Can any person in Rhode Island speak the primitive aboriginal language if so procure a vocabulary of as many words as possible.

The burning of the Gaspee, at Providence, being the first act of aggression against the British, the first hostile fire lighted up in America—it is desirable to obtain the particulars of that act.

Other suggestive topics are elaborated: the building of University Hall, the Baptist Meeting House, the Market House, the Gortonians, the extinction of wolves and deer, the burning of Providence in the Indian war of 1676. It is unfortunate that Dr. Carter's self-imposed exile in New York made the historical project impossible. The notes indicate that he had strong views on local matters. It is my guess that the history, if written, would have been salty and opinionated, with little trace of scholarly detachment.

It seems clear that the member of the clan who described Dr. Carter as a "particularly crusty old bachelor" had some evidence for that opinion. One last item confirms this impression. In February, 1826, when he was nearly eighty-three, Thomas Jefferson found himself in dire financial straits. To pay the more urgent of his debts he proposed selling some of the acreage around Monticello by lottery. For this, however, he had to have permission of the Virginia legislature. When the sad tale of Jefferson's plight became known subscription lists were started in various cities. In Providence a committee headed by David Thomas, divided the town into districts and canvassed for funds, with teams, quite in the manner of present day fund drives. In Baltimore over \$3,000 was raised; in Philadelphia, \$5,000; in New York, \$8,500. Virginia made no effort to aid the ex-President. Carter's hatred of all that Jefferson stood for was still ardent. A copy of a letter to the Editor indicates the doctor's somewhat uncharitable feelings.

JEFFERSON SUBSCRIPTION

Having been called upon to subscribe to the relief of Mr. Jefferson a respect for public opinion induces me to state some of the reasons

why I have declined giving my signature.

1. I do not believe that Mr. Jefferson is in want. The plan of a lottery appears to be got up by some artful persons who have taken advantage of Mr. J's dotage to feather their own nests out of the credulity of the public.
2. Mr. J has been paid long ago & well paid while many soldiers of the Revolution remain unpaid or were paid in a depreciated paper money.

The letter continues, blaming Jefferson for the War of 1812, the failure of the United States Bank, the prostitution of the judiciary, and his importation of foreign scholars at the University of Virginia. Carter was most incensed about Jefferson's embargo and non-intercourse acts by which "he made bankrupt our merchants and traders, drove our seamen from the ocean to fill the prisons at Dartmoor, laid our capital in ashes, and caused the grass to grow on our wharves." The irascible doctor suggested that a township in Louisiana be granted to the aged President, a township which contained a salt mine.

On this somewhat ungenerous note the Carter correspondence ends. The doctor, I assume, continued his life in New York in his by now usual crusty manner. He died there on 24 April 1831. His body was brought to Providence where it was placed in the Carter family lot in the North Burial Grounds. The doctor seems, without much question, to have grown rather difficult as he aged. This cannot detract, however, from the fact that he had an eager and inquiring mind, was well thought of in his profession, and in his avocations, mathematics and linguistic studies, he attained a competence far beyond that of most college graduates of his day whether American or English.

REFERENCES

- The Carter-Danforth Papers. The Rhode Island Historical Society.
 "The Journal of the Ship Ann and Hope on a Voyage to Canton, China, 1798-99." The Rhode Island Historical Society.
 Letters and Miscellaneous Papers of Dr. Benjamin Bowen Carter, Class of 1786. Brown University Archives, The John Hay Library.
 Letters in the General Rush C. Hawkins Correspondence, Ann Mary Brown Library, Brown University.

THE OLD ORIGINAL

by LESLIE ALLEN JONES, Assistant Professor of English;

Technical Director of Dramatics, Brown University

IT WAS shortly after noon on Sunday, March 3, 1957 that the phone rang in my home on Power Street. The lady sounded distressed. Mr. Monahan, of the Historical Society, had given her my name and suggested that I might be able to do something. Would I like a clock? Well, practically a clock — there might be a few parts missing. It was very old and it had to be moved at once — by tomorrow night. Where was it? In the belfry of the meeting house of the First Baptist Church. How big was it? Well, Mr. Watson had told her that it weighed about half a ton.

Now my hobby is clocks — but half a ton of clock? It was Sunday — and why the rush? They were starting the renovation of the building on Monday and it had to be stripped of everything — so it was either me, or the ancient wreck would be thrown out. And that did seem a shame.

For many years I have conducted the rehearsal for graduation in the old meeting house. I had graduated from it myself many years ago and I was more or less familiar with the structure and the massive beams of the steeple. Mr. Norman M. Isham, in his *A History Of The Fabric* (Providence 1925) had this to say about the clock:

"A clock and a bell were provided at the outset. Stone, in his *Mechanic's Festival* records a tradition that the committee purchased a one-day time piece and notes Caleb Wheaton's comment that the clock was built by a Christian since it was so well made. At any rate it did not cease to tell time for the congregation until 1873 and is still on duty in the tower of the Congdon Street meeting house."

The late Professor Arthur E. Watson (Electrical Engineering, Emeritus), had rescued the old clock from the Congdon street building and placed it in the sub-belfry of the meeting house. So the Mr. Watson who said it weighed half a ton must be his son — and what was his telephone number?

Mr. Watson said it was the old original as far as he knew. There was no name on it. He would be glad to help if he could — he had the key to the belfry and he would be home all afternoon.

My next call was to a student at Brown—one of my stagehands.

1957]

The Old Original

115

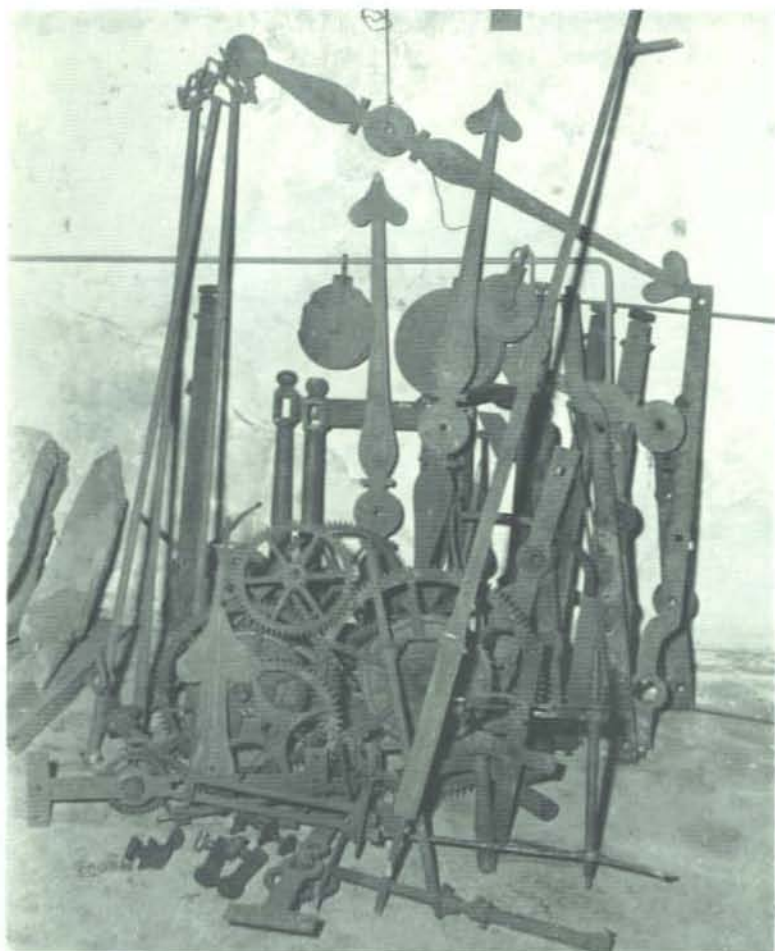
"This sounds like fun," he said and readily agreed to round up some of the stage crew.

In half an hour five members of my student crew were at my door in a station wagon. Two girls and three boys with rope and wrenches did not seem to alarm Mr. Watson, who led us into the meeting



house. There was a hum of activity as furnishings were being moved but we climbed above all that — and I met my old original for the first time while its successor beat out the time overhead. Did you realize that in the sub-belfry you can hear the beat of the clock and the thump of the striking — but not the sound of the bell? It is too far above.

Trap doors came into play and the bell rope was pulled up to lower parts of the old original to the ground. Finally it was done



and the back of the station wagon was so full of iron that Mr. Watson elected to walk up the hill to his home on Congdon Street. The car sagged as it chugged along Power Street to my house.

When Mrs. Jones came home that afternoon it was to find the cellar heaped with wheels and shafts and pulleys — and five dirty and hungry student stagehands with an equally disheveled professor making raids on the pantry.

It is a beautiful old clock. Handsomely made with brass gears

and steel pinions (showing little wear for a hundred years of going) and set up in a cage of iron straps. The end gates are like the ends of a narrow four-poster bed—of cast iron with balls on the top of the posts — the whole $32\frac{1}{2}$ inches high. The side rails are of forged iron, 35 inches long, and there are four of them. Upright straps of hand forged iron, about 3 inches wide and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick carry the arbors in brass bushings. All gears are of brass and range from the great wheel on the strike side with a diameter of 20 inches to the smallest wheel in the clock — the escape wheel, which is only 7 inches across. This escape wheel has thirty teeth and the pallets are of the recoil variety.

The pendulum rod is 7 feet and 4 inches, and a beautifully tapered piece of ironwork it is, terminating in a cast-iron lentil shaped pendulum bob that weighs exactly 70 pounds.

Christian Huygens (1629-1695), a great Dutch scientist and clockmaker, invented a method of pendulum suspension that enjoyed a short vogue. Cycloidal cheeks, it was called, and this clock has it. One of the secrets of the old original's long life may be the fact that it beat only once in one and one-half seconds—a grandfather's clock beats once a second, or 3600 times an hour. Old original's hour rate was 2400.

The great wheel on the time side has a solid wood barrel 9 inches in diameter, and the winding crank — with a nice free curve to it — has a one-foot radius and was fitted directly to the arbor or shaft of the main wheel. So the clock could not have required too heavy a weight to run it — though the handle of the winding crank is for two hands and is much worn — think of the men who wound this clock daily for almost a hundred years.

There is a mass of shafting and yokes that carried the motion to the three faces of the clock. I have three minute hands of copper, 52 inches long, and one and a piece of one hour hands, 20 inches long — which means the dials must have been better than four feet across. The hands have the characteristic English spade shape.

The fineness of the work and the sturdiness suggested to me that it might have been English in origin. Imagine my glee when a search of the many loose parts brought forth the chapter ring — a circle of brass attached to the clock in such a manner that the man who wound it could read the time without seeing the dials.

A thorough cleaning of the blackened brass ring brought to light some fine bold engraving, and finally it was possible to read beyond a doubt the words "Ayns. Thwaites Clerkenwell London 1784"

Britten's *Old Clocks and Watches and their Makers* (7th Edition, 1956) has this to say:

Thwaites, Ainsworth. *Rosoman Street, Clerkenwell*. Made the Horse Guards Clock, 1756; 1740-80.

Thwaites, Benjamin, son of Ainsworth. *London*. Apprenticed 1762 C. C. (Clockmaker's Company) 1770.

Thwaites, John. 4 *Rosoman Street, Clerkenwell*. Master, C. C. three times, 1815, 1819, 1820

Thwaites & Reed, 4 *Rosoman Street, Clerkenwell*. 1817-42. The firm still exists.

Thinking of the builders of the meeting house you think of the famous Brown brothers. And when you think of the Brown brothers you think of Professor James B. Hedges, the authority on the Brown papers. Professor Hedges surprised me with his instant recall of three letters written in the spring of 1775 to Hayley & Hopkins, London correspondents of the Browns. These letters, by Nicholas Brown, ordered and discussed the clock and bell — Hayley & Hopkins had hopes, but the times were slightly troubled — but Professor Hedges remembered an item in the *Providence Gazette* October 9, 1784.

"In the ship *General Washington*, Captain Simon Smith, from London, came passengers Mr. Elkanah Watson, Mr. Wheelock, Mr. B. Mason, and Mr. Whitworth. A large and elegant Clock, also a Bell weighing 25 Cwt. have been received by Captain Smith for the Baptist Church in this town."

So it rests in my cellar — one hundred and seventy-three years old — the old original. Surely when the renovators have done their work and the First Baptist is sturdy once more there will be those who will see that there is a place where once again the old original can be at home.



NATHANAEL GREENE'S LETTERS TO "FRIEND SAMMY" WARD

edited by CLIFFORD P. MONAHAN and CLARKSON A. COLLINS, 3rd

[continued from July, 1957, v. 16, no. 3, page 88]

Aunt Greens [February or March, 1773]

Here I am strokeing my head and adjusting my Band, with as much formallity and importance as Doctor Babcock introduces a subject of Science. Matrimony between Miss Patia and Mr Arnold flourishes like a "green Bay Tree"³⁷ You come within one of having a Visit from them, but they turned their Course to Block Island, and was gone a whole Week almost. They had a Yanka frolick there. Silk and flannel join'd hand in hand to carry on the Dance. I Should laught heartily to have seen Flannel salute Silk, his rough coat Sliding a cross Silks Soft Skin, would have made her Grin as bad as your Sanford³⁸—I have not got our Ticket yet but expected it soon. I intend to turn Beau with my part of the Money, and make a Shincing Figure amongst the Greenwich Bucks—I fear I shant be able to equal Doctor Joslin³⁹ in powder, for he only Shook his Head yesterday in the Barbers Shop and he made such a dust that I mistook Mrs Hubbard for Mina Brown—What do you intend to do with your part of the increase, Caps Lawns Laces Furbalocs &c &—will swallow it all up—I warrant it—We are so much politer in Greenwich in common than you at Westerly I fear youl outshine me with equal expence—There is another advantage you have over me, you are sure to be repaid by the poor Country Gentry who endeavours to ape you in the Fashions, whereby you sell a large quantity of Goods every new mode thats introduced thus you follow the maxims of the Wise and prudent, prey upon other Peoples follies and turn their pride to your own advantage. Miss Suca will be with you this Evening. But I hope your fears are abated, if they are not, youl agree you may abate a great part of them, when I tell you She has been twice to Coventry and once to Block Island—Ile warrant her, as Doctor Swift says, she has by this got a Set of Durty Ideas—She is a chearful agreeable old

³⁷Welcome and Patience (Greene) Arnold had been married recently. See note 23.

³⁸Probably Sanford Noyes, a neighbor with whom the Wards were enbroiled in legal actions.

³⁹Daniel H. Greene in his *History of East Greenwich* (Providence, 1877) states, "Joseph Joslyn, an accomplished physician from Scotland, came to East Greenwich in 1770, having been enduced to settle here through the influence of Governor Greene and other gentlemen of the neighborhood. He was esteemed not only as a skillful physician but as an accomplished gentleman and a great acquisition to the social circle."

Soul, make things agreeable to her in your usual way and I presume she will be much pleas'd, Farewell amen

N Greene Jr

To
Miss Polly Ward
at Westerly

Coventry 21 July 1773

Dear Sir

Whats your amusements, whats your employments, whats the object in view Happiness I warrant. The anxious mind of man is ever in busy quest of those Objects that promise much Felicity in the Acquisition. The prospect however engaging at first often terminates in empty disappointment, and sometimes in bitter regret. We all with eagerness grasp at the substance but too many embrace the shadow. How happy he whose most Elevated expectations are answered in Fruition. Gratification upon [Barter]⁴⁰ is like a fleeting Vapour, but when heithened by the Smiles of Virtue how sublime. every enjoyment is ennobled by Esteem, how the approbation of our friends warms out Heart, and instead of inducing Chagrin & Inquietude, assists the gentler calls of Nature to a kind repose; and then, when Kind Zephyrs fan us awake, the Graces dance anew. I have been reading Butlers Analogy bet[ween] Natural and revealed Religion⁴¹, and find that its not eve[ry] one that draws a fine picture of Moral Excellence, that [feels] the Benefit of Virtue, but he who bends his Mind to the p[ractice] of her sacred rules. I have not fulfilld my promise to Ha[nnah;] tell her Pride and the Worlds dread Laugh, baffles all my res[olutions.] I should be glad to see her, to give scope to the exercise of Gratitude, [friend]ship & Benevolence. permit me to mingle my joy with the re[st] of her friends and relations for the partial recovery of her H[ealth.] I saw Mr Arnold yesterday & heard of the welfare of Mr. Harr[is]. Perry⁴² saild about two weeks past. I heard of Kitt a few Day[s ago] in health but perplex with

⁴⁰Words and letters enclosed in brackets are now missing in the original manuscript. They are supplied from a transcript which appears to have been made before the mutilation took place.

⁴¹*The Analogy of Religion Natural and Revealed to the Course and Constitution of Nature* by Joseph Butler, bishop of Durham, English divine and philosopher, published in 1736.

⁴²Perry Greene, one of Nathanael's brothers, was a partner in the forge and master of trading vessels. He was born in 1749, and served in the army during the Revolution.

bad Markets. All friend[s well] except Elihu.⁴³ John Pettingill is [torn] Griffin pursued him through Connecticut as Death did Tristram Shandy through France, many are likely to be great sufferers by him and amongst the rest poor me. Make my Compliments agreeable to your Family. I hope to see some or all of you at Commencement, let Coventry share with the rest of your friends part of the Time you spend this way. Charles⁴⁴ hurries me blame him for bad writing and a bad Letter for I knew not of his going till a few minutes ago In haste am your sincere friend

Nath Greene

⁴³Elihu Greene (1746-1827), also a partner in the family business.

⁴⁴Probably Charles Ward, eldest son of Governor Samuel Ward. Little is known about him except that he was born in 1747, served during the Revolution, and was living in 1777.

LECTURES

October 24, 1957, Thursday 8:15 p.m.

Savages and Settlers in Old Rhode Island

J. LOUIS GIDDINGS, Associate Professor

Department of Sociology, Brown University

November 24, 1957, Sunday 3:30 p.m.

Clocks in The Rhode Island Historical Society

LESLIE ALLEN JONES, Assistant Professor, Department of English

Technical Director of Dramatics, Brown University

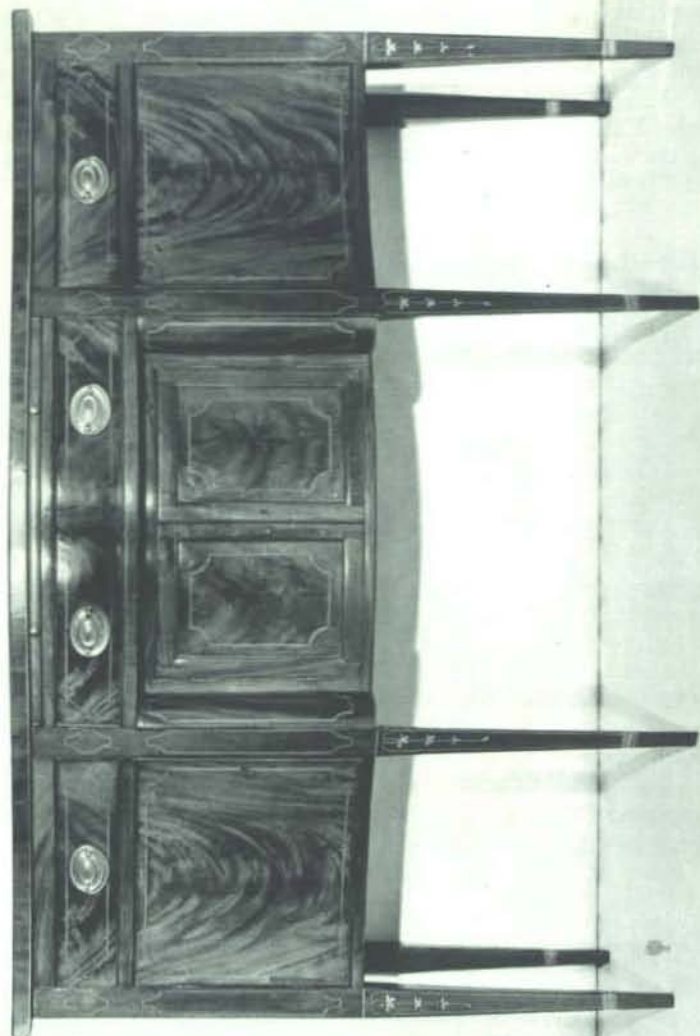
January 9, 1958, Thursday 8:30 p.m.

(following the Annual Meeting for members)

Steamboating on Narragansett Bay

A. LIVINGSTON KELLEY

Chairman of the Board, Providence Institution for Savings



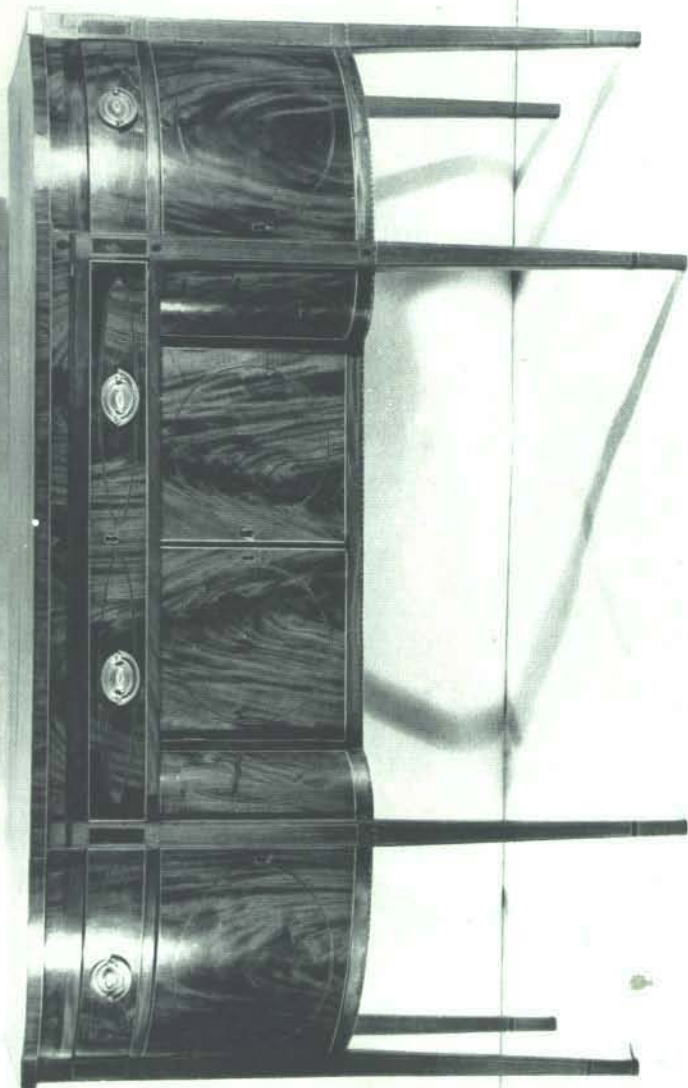
33. SIDEBOARD

Mahogany

Probably Rhode Island c. 1785

Sideboards of this type were unknown in the style-periods prior to Adam and Hepplewhite. During the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century tables were used in the dining rooms as serving tables. They were placed against the wall; and in the better houses the top of the table was often of marble, and the wooden frame was shaped and carved so as to produce a very stylish piece that went with the chairs of the period. Two such tables are listed in the inventory of Jonathan Nichols (Newport — 1756) "2 marble side boards £252." See page 100, *Arts and Crafts of Newport*. Several sideboards similar in style to the one illustrated above bear the label of Matthew Egerton of New Brunswick, N. J., who died in 1787. And so, stylistically, it is reasonable to assign 1785 as the approximate date of this sideboard. It originally belonged to John Brown of Providence (1736-1803).

Gift of Grace Herreshoff Sperry



34. SIDEBOARD

Mahogany

New England c. 1800

A comparison of this sideboard with Number 33 shows one principal difference — the shaping of the cupboard doors and drawers at each end. In the earlier style they are concave. In the later they are convex. We have grown into the habit of calling pieces of this period either Hepplewhite or Sheraton; and have in general accepted the notion that inlay and square tapered legs are a sign of Hepplewhite, and that lack of inlay and round legs make a piece Sheraton. By these terms we mean the designs taken from the books by Hepplewhite and Sheraton. A reference to these works will show that legs and inlay are not to be relied on in many instances. These design books indicate that the convex and concave shaping of the ends are better clues.

Ex-collection Henry A. Hoffman



35. TALL CLOCK

Mahogany

Newport c. 1790-1800

A comparison of this clock case with one bearing the label of Holmes Weaver, No. 33 on page 60 of *Arts and Crafts of Newport*, shows great similarity of design throughout the details of the case. While the fret-carving has a little different design, the feeling and execution is very similar. The moldings of the hood, the quarter-columns, beginning at the top and going part way down, are different only in the fact that in this instance the flutes have brass stops. The center finial is more attractive, being in the form of a Phoenix. The feet are typical of Newport, as is the fine quality of the mahogany. The dial in this instance has the added feature that the moon and stars go through their various phases through the medium of a secondary movable dial in back of the face dial.

Ex-collection C. Prescott Knight



36. TALL CLOCK

Mahogany

Probably Newport c. 1800-1810

Comparing this clock with that shown on the previous page, No. 35, illustrates clearly the style changes which took place during the few years after the previous clock was made; for example, the emphasis of the crotched veneer throughout the clock. We find here cross banding emphasized around the dial, around the door and around the base. We also find that the bracket feet are now designed after the fashion of the so-called French feet, with a scalloping of the skirt around the bottom of the base of the clock. The inlay has disappeared, having given way to cross-banding veneer. A later day is also seen in the twisted rope turnings of the columns of the hood. Even the painted design on the dial has a later feeling.

Ex-collection C. Prescott Knight

THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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