NATHANIEL WHEELWRIGHT

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Robert Hewes and the Frenchmen. A Case of Treason?

BY EDWARD P. HAMILTON

The deposition by Robert Hewes which formed the starting point of this spy story of the 18th century and some futher amplifying material was discovered by my dear friend, the late Seth Turner Crawford. Most unfortunately he did not live to finish the work, and I have done what I could to complete this story in his memory.

ROBERT HEWES welcomed the jailkeeper's suggestion. When one was in jail, even if only for debt and with the free run of the place, life was dull and any sort of a change most welcome. So Hewes became an attendant and unofficial watcher over the French prisoners.

In 1734 Robert Hewes, originally of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, his brother George, and Nathaniel Cunningham had formed a partnership as tanners and had invested quite material sums. Through some dissension or disagreement the partners became involved at law, and in 1743 Robert, and probably George as well, were clapped into jail for an unpaid judgment of £123/13/6 in favor of Cunningham. The Suffolk County court records for the next several years list a great many actions between the partners, too many and too involved to describe.

Hewes had learned French in a Boston school run by a man named Bargier and had practiced it on several voyages to the West Indies. It seemed wise not to let the French prisoners know that he was familiar with their tongue, so everyone around the jail was warned to say nothing of it,

and Hewes pretended to be a rather simple minded countryman.

The Frenchmen had been brought in and locked up for safe keeping lest they should get away and warn their countrymen at Louisbourg of the great expedition that was preparing against them. War had broken out between France and England early in 1744, yet it was only now on January 26 of the following year[1] that these enemy aliens had been collected and restrained. There was about a half dozen of them, sea captains and merchants.

Captain Jean Joseph LeGras was one. His privateer, hailing out of Louisbourg, had been captured a few months before by Captain Spry of His Majesty's bomb ketch *Comet* after a notable engagement lasting for several hours. Boston gave Spry a piece of plate in appreciation of his services. LeGras had apparently just been turned loose to do as he would. Using Elisha Gray, a ship's officer, as a cover, he had tried to charter a newly launched schooner from Thomas Newman, ostensibly to bring flour from Philadelphia to Boston, but actually to take supplies to the French at Louisbourg. When Newman refused Gray's request, he was taken to LeGras, who offered to buy the vessel or to go shares with the Boston shipowner, but to no avail. Within a day or two the schooner was broken into and some of Gray's gear found aboard, so Newman swore out a warrant against Gray, fearing that he was planning to steal the vessel.[2] That was the end of the matter and LeGras was now confined in the Boston jail.

Captain Doloboratz commanded a twelve gun privateer out of Louisbourg. It was a sloop and carried a crew of 94 men. In June, 1744, he was cruising off the New England coast seeking to pick up some prizes, but he had the mis-

[1] On this same day the Legislature enacted Chap. 161, 1744/5, which forbade any vessel whatsoever to sail from Massachusetts unless it had a special license from Governor Shirley himself.

[2] Thomas Newman, Affidavit, May 2, 1750, in Mass. Archives, CV, 570–571. The basic source for this article is Robert Hewes's statement of April 5, 1758, *ibid.*, 263–285.

fortune to run into the Massachusetts man of war *Prince of Orange*, a snow-rigged galley of 180 tons carrying sixteen six pounder guns, and commanded by Captain Tyng. The French privateer was captured and taken into Boston, where the Massachusetts officer was made much of as this was the first French vessel to be taken in New England waters since the war started.[3]

Doloboratz enjoyed very considerable freedom and was able to travel at least as far as Rhode Island. He succeeded in getting away and was back in Louisbourg by November, when he made a report on the New England defenses. While in Newport, he made the acquaintance of a man named Peter Simon, a native of Brest, who had recently married a Rhode Island woman and settled there. Doloboratz gave Simon an order for a thousand barrels of flour to be delivered at Louisbourg in April of the following year, and provided him with a special passport issued by Bigot, then the intendant at Isle Royale, as the French called Cape Breton.[4] This same Simon was among this group of French prisoners[5] in the Boston jail.

Hewes served the Frenchmen's various wants, taking them firewood, cider, and rum, and keeping his ears open. They asked him if he could speak French, but he gave them an evasive answer that led them to believe that he could not. The result was that they talked freely in his presence.

The prisoners were completely at a loss as to why they had suddenly been thrust into jail. One of them said that he believed that it was to prevent any possibility of their sending news of the proposed Louisbourg expedition, while others pooh-poohed it, saying that everybody knew all about it anyway, even as to just where the landing was to take place. Captain Botin, who had been lodging at the Royal Exchange Tavern, spoke up and said that he had heard some of the

[3] J. S. McLennan, *Louisbourg* (London, 1918), p. 118; Howard M. Chapin, *Massachusetts Privateers in King George's War* (Providence, 1928), pp. 68, 76–77.

[4] Parkman Mss. (Mass. Hist. Soc.), Acadia, III, 460.

[5] Mass. Archives, CV, 580.

members of the General Court talking freely about the whole scheme. Then one of the Frenchmen said that perhaps the two vessels now loading in Braintree Bay might have something to do with it. Another said that he had seen Elisha Gray, who captained one of the ships, talking to the Sheriff the day that he was brought to jail and perhaps Gray had let the cat out of the bag. Someone else said no, that Gray might be talkative but that he could be trusted, and anyway the schooner was almost ready to sail. Then they went into a discussion as to how Louisbourg could be warned if the two vessels were discovered, and the use of Indian messengers was considered. They chattered on, expecting to be released within a week or so, and drinking a health to the King of France and "King George to the gallows."

Either that evening or the next day one Demoulin, a merchant, was added to the little group. He was at once plied with questions as to why they were in jail and how long they would be kept there. Was it because of the expedition, or had the vessels in Braintree Bay and their connection with them been discovered? Demoulin said that the schooner and the sloop were all right. All was well there and there was an armed guard of four men on the larger vessel. The flour was all on board, and excellent flour it was, he knew because he had tasted it.

This was enough for Hewes, who, hearing Sheriff Pollard's voice in another room, went to him and reported what he had learned. Pollard departed in haste. A day or two later Hewes heard that action had been taken to stop the craft from sailing and that a committee of the General Court was coming to examine him about the affair. This committee soon appeared in the person of Thomas Hutchinson, James Bowdoin, and John Choate. After hearing Hewes's story, they called in one of the Frenchmen, who denied all knowledge of the business. Bowdoin then tested our prisoner's knowledge of French and found it to be excellent.

Demoulin was then brought in, and he said that he knew nothing of any such vessels in Braintree Bay. When, however, his report to his fellow prisoners in almost his own precise words was read to him, he collapsed in fear and confessed everything. Hutchinson then asked who had provided the vessels and Demoulin replied that it was John Wheelwright and his son Nat. The committee immediately became much concerned and told him to stop joking. He assured them that he was not joking but had told the truth. The committee then sent for Hewes and ordered him to forget that they had ever come to the jail.

There was a great to-do among the Frenchmen as to who had talked, and there was much swearing, arguing and some very hot words. Each took solemn oath that he had not let the secret out, but Captain Botin was finally believed to be the culprit and put in Coventry by his countrymen. They were also still suspicious of Hewes and from time to time accused him of being able to speak French, but he stoutly denied it. They made sudden remarks to him in French, but he was not caught.

At about this time, Hewes learned that despite his warning the two vessels had gotten safely away. He finally became fearful that the Frenchmen would do him bodily harm, since they continued very suspicious, and he decided to reveal his secret. One of the Frenchmen named Guybode came downstairs for a mug of cider and Hewes saluted him in perfect French. Guybode dropped his mug and dashed madly upstairs, where the entire group went into a huddle for half an hour. They then sent for Hewes to bring them firewood, and when he appeared, shaking somewhat in his shoes, demanded if he were the one who had revealed their secret. He replied that he had only done his duty as an Englishman. Hewes also told them that Demoulin had named the Boston men associated with them in the project, upon which they became very much excited and cursed Demoulin bitterly. Finally, seeing that the harm was done,

the Frenchmen calmed down and told our prisoner that he had done only what he should have, and they all had a drink together. Some eight or ten weeks later, the expedition having sailed and Louisbourg having been successfully invested, the French prisoners were released.

Hewes stayed on in jail, and later, when some members of the General Court paid a visit there, he told his story. They advised him to petition for a reward for his services. This he did, and the petition was referred to a committee consisting of Colonel Samuel Miller, Captain John Hobson, and James Foster. They examined Hewes and other witnesses, including some of the Frenchmen. Evidently nobody cared to mention the names of the two Wheelwrights. An award of £5 was made to Hewes, but it was never paid. A group in the Lower House, displeased with the size of the reward, said that Hewes deserved much more of his country, which his actions had probably saved from dire disasters (despite the fact that the vessels got away after all). Some said the reward would be greatly increased if only he would disclose the names of the Boston men back of the affair. A new committee, of which Samuel Welles was chairman, summoned the previous Miller committee and Hewes, and the latter repeated his entire story, but did not mention the Wheelwrights. The new committee told our prisoner that he had done a great thing and ought to be well rewarded for it, but begged him to name the Boston men associated with the Frenchmen. Hewes replied that the original Hutchinson committee knew the names but had silenced him and told him to forget that he had seen them. If the present committee, however, still wanted the names, he was under oath and would name them, which he did. The committee immediately left, telling Hewes not to say that they had been there, but that he would hear from them later. They then reported unofficially that the charge was preposterous, that the people concerned were of such station and spotless character that accusation by a Frenchman was meaningless.

The committee appears to have made an official report that they had learned nothing.

All the years that Hewes remained in jail had seen various legal actions in the old case of Hewes vs. Cunningham. Eventually Cunningham's son, now the executor of his father's estate, also became a lodger at the jail because of a debt due to Hewes. At last in August, 1749, what apparently was the final trial in the long series, awarded £558/19/4 to Hewes from the younger Cunningham, and our prisoner became a free man.[6] Whether Cunningham paid or remained in jail does not appear.

Hewes made further petitions to the General Court, but never received any reward. He went to England shortly after his release from jail and proposed to publicize the matter there. Sir William Pepperrell and William Bollan, the Massachusetts agent in London, advised him to keep quiet as he might upset the Colony's apple cart by his revelations. If he would return to Boston, something would be done for him.

Back home again, he put in another petition. One of the legislators said that Hewes should be punished for slandering a great man, while others praised him for telling the truth. An undisclosed sum of money was voted, but the Council nonconcurred and there the matter rested. Hewes for some three years tried to get copies of his petition and the other papers from Secretary Josiah Willard, but some excuse was always given and the papers never materialized. Thus matters stood on April 5, 1758, when a committee consisting among others of Benjamin Pickman and Robert Hooper was directed to investigate Hewes's charges "greatly affecting the character of several gentlemen in office in the government and others."[7] The tone now seems to change to a threat of punishment rather than of reward. In October the Council decided that all of Hewes's charges were groundless and the Lower House concurred. A new committee was

[6] Early Files in the Office of the Clerk of the Suffolk Supreme Court, 58,556, 66,269, 67,677.
[7] Mass. Archives, CV, 577.

appointed to see what further should be done,[8] but it appears that this was the final end of the matter, and thereafter the records are silent.

In November, 1759, some officers, lately returned from the capture of Quebec, were spending an evening in a Roxbury tavern with a group of convivial friends. In the course of their conversation Captain Arthur Loftus said that "the French very well know their [our] numbers and everything that passed and that a correspondence was carried on with the French from this town by a person of consequence." One of the company remarked that no person of consequence would be fool enough to take so great a risk, and it must have been some of the exiled Acadians in Boston that had gotten word back. Captain Loftus then stated that Nathaniel Wheelwright was the man. Some one said that was impossible, Wheelwright's name was used because he had been in Canada as a commissioner to repatriate prisoners and had a relative there, and hence was well known to the French. Loftus then stated that the French had told him that they had received an unsigned letter from Wheelwright which had been positively identified as being in his handwriting. He also said that he would not be at all surprised if General Amherst arrested and hanged Wheelwright. Captain Thomas Smelt corroborated all that Loftus had said.[9]

Nathaniel Wheelwright, hearing of the accusation, immediately had recourse to law and sued both officers for libel. The cases came up in the Suffolk County Court in July, 1760, and the jury found for the plaintiff, assessing damages against Smelt of the considerable sum of £500 and against Loftus a staggering £2,000. James Otis was the defendant's lawyer.[10] The two appealed and the cases were tried again in the Superior Court of Judicature, with Thomas Hutchinson sitting as Chief Justice. Wheelwright

[8] *Journals of the House of Representatives* (Boston, 1758), Oct. 12, 1758.
[9] Suffolk Files, 80,987.
[10] *Ibid.*, 82,627, 82,636.

again was successful, but the judgment against Loftus was reduced to £1200, while Smelt's remained as before.[11] Damages totalling £1700 were an extremely stiff penalty to assess against two soldiers just back from the most victorious campaign yet to be waged upon this continent, who had merely reported statements made to them by the French. It is obvious that Wheelwright had either a reputation of the very highest, or that he had connections that could assure him of securing a friendly jury.

John Wheelwright was the son of Colonel John Wheelwright of Wells, in what today is Maine. He was a merchant in Boston before he was thirty,[12] and married Mary Allen in that town in 1715. She died and he married Elizabeth Green three years later. John Wheelwright became a prosperous merchant and also had a long career as a public servant. He acted as commissary general of the Province for some thirty years up to 1760, although the formal title was not given him until 1744.[13] In 1745, he was elected to the Governor's Council and served on it for the next ten years. The Pepperrell papers[14] include many invoices of his shipments of supplies to the troops at the first siege of Louisbourg, but it is not clear whether they were made as commissary general or for his own account as a merchant. After the fall of the fortress, Sir William Pepperrell used John Wheelwright as agent for the disposal of some of the captured French shipping. Boston Town Meeting often called him to audit the accounts of the town treasurer and referred to him in its records as the Honorable John Wheelwright. In the early 1750's his name is found in a letter of a French officer at Louisbourg as one who was selling them flour (a nominal peace then existed) and he was then in communication with Bigot, the Canadian intendant.[15] It

[11] Suffolk Superior Court Minutes, 1760–62, p. 288.
[12] Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Publications*, I, 322.
[13] *Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1759–60.
[14] Pepperrell Mss. (Mass. Hist. Soc.), *passim*.
[15] Parkman Mss., New France, III, 101.

is obvious that he was a man of very considerable standing in his time and place. He died in 1760.

Nathaniel Wheelwright was born on October 25, 1721, and married Ann, daughter of Charles Apthorp, who was fourteen years his junior. Presumably he was associated with his father in business and probably had visited Canada after King George's War, for he was selected by Governor Phips, along with Captain Phineas Stevens, in 1752 as a commissioner to visit Canada and attempt to repatriate New Englanders "captivated" by the Indians and taken to Canada. Wheelwright left Boston early that spring, meeting Stevens on the way to Albany. He spent six weeks in Canada, both in Montreal and in Quebec, and made a considerable number of friends. The two commissioners returned to Massachusetts in the late summer with a group of freed prisoners.[16]

Governor Shirley in November, 1753, sent Wheelwright to Canada again upon a similar mission, and he was gone for nearly a year. He kept a detailed journal of this trip which is full of interest.[17] From Boston, he went to Springfield and on over the southern Berkshires to Kinderhook on the Hudson. Arriving at Albany, he at once went to the house of Lydius, where he tarried for a day or two.

John Henry Lydius, 1704–1788, was the son of a Dutch clergyman at Albany. As a young man, he had lived in Canada for some five years and had married a French half-breed, Genevieve Masse. The French accused him of tampering with their Indians and exiled him from Canada. He returned to Albany and soon established a trading post on the Hudson at the point where the portage to Wood Creek and Lake Champlain started. Fort Edward was later built on this site. Lydius appears to have been of a dubious reputation,[18] although Governor Shirley had con-

[16] "Journal of Phineas Stevens" in N. D. Mereness, *Travels in the American Colonies* (New York, 1916).

[17] Nathaniel Wheelwright, Journal (Mass. Hist. Soc.). The portrait of Wheelwright here reproduced also belongs to the Massachusetts Historical Society.

[18] Matt B. Jones, *Vermont in the Making* (Cambridge, 1939), pp. 142–143.

fidence in him. As a Dutchman of Albany, he naturally had no feeling of loyalty to the English. In 1746 he was accused of giving information to the French.[19] In October, 1756, Captain Shepherd, a New Hampshire officer just escaped from Canada, brought back word that Lydius had been acting as a spy for the French. Lord Loudoun wrote home that he strongly suspected him to be a spy.[20]

Lydius and his son Nicholas accompanied Wheelwright north from Albany part way up Wood Creek. Lydius then returned with the horses, while his son continued on to Canada with Wheelwright. In Montreal the two lodged with Mons. François Decouagne, referred to in the journal as the uncle of young Lydius.

From some of the entries, it appears to be almost certain that Wheelwright spoke fluent French. He apparently was on very friendly terms with the governor of Canada, the Marquis DuQuesne, and dined with him on a number of occasions. He had several other close Canadian friends, made either on his previous trip in 1752 or possibly at some other time. He of course made more on this visit to Canada, including some at Louisbourg, where he was delayed for almost a month waiting for a passage back to Boston. He visited and dined with Bigot, and knew Rigaud, the governor of Three Rivers, and brother of the next governor of Canada.

The partisan and Indian commander St. Luc de la Corne was his "particular friend," and he had travelled from Montreal to Quebec with Penisseault, one of the notorious profiteers of the Bigot clique. Wheelwright had one most extraordinary connection with Canada, an aunt who was a nun in the Ursuline Convent at Quebec, and who, moreover, was later to become the first and only mother superior of that convent who was of English blood. Esther Wheelwright had been captured by Indians during a raid on Wells

[19] William H. Hill, *Old Fort Edward* (Fort Edward), pp. 29, 36.

[20] Francis Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe* (Boston, 1884), I, 435.

in 1703 and eventually arrived at the convent as a pupil. When she took the veil, she was known as La Mère de L'Enfant Jesus. Nathaniel saw much of her while he remained in Quebec as the rules of convent visits were waived in his case. He also often visited with the Bishop of Quebec. Wheelwright at last returned to Boston by water in August, 1754, after a far from fruitful trip as far as redeemed captives were concerned, for he brought back only two.

In February, 1755, Governor Shirley was informed that a packet of letters written by Nathaniel had been intercepted at Albany on their way to Canada. Shirley wrote back that they should be examined and if anything improper was found to return them to Boston. There is no further record of this incident, and the letters presumably were considered harmless.[21]

Upon his father's death in 1760, he inherited a very considerable fortune, which he proceeded to augment by his own efforts. Perhaps he was not as astute as his father or perhaps the family luck had played out, for he ran into trouble before many years had passed. In July, 1764, he was caught smuggling wine, and whispers were circulating that there might be some doubt as to the soundness of his credit.[22] James Bowdoin became suspicious and succeeded by December in getting a debt of some £2100 owed by Wheelwright to Colonel George Scott, governor of Granada in the Windward Islands, covered by mortgages on a group of Boston warehouses. Scott and Bowdoin married sisters, and it is through the latter's sprightly and interesting letters to his brother-in-law, as recorded in his Letter Book, that the final phases of Wheelwright's activities have been preserved. In January, 1765, he was head over heels in trouble. John Rowe's[23] diary for January 16 noted that Nathaniel had stopped payments and that a "great number of people will suffer with him—the trade has been much

[21] Mass. Archives, IV, 476.
[22] James Bowdoin, Letter Book (Mass. Hist. Soc.), p. 83.
[23] Mass. Hist. Soc., *Proceedings*, 2nd Ser., X, 52.

alarmed." James Otis' letter to correspondents in England dated a few days later,[24] was more explicit: "till the failing of Mr. Wheelwright which happened here last week and has given as great a shock to credit here as your South Sea Bubble did in England some years ago—the great business he was in for the Government at home during the wars acquired such an undue credit that he became, next to the treasurer, banker general for the Province and almost for the continent. His notes passed at par with those of the Province, which are as good as your bank notes. —but last week, I say, the bubble broke, some say for £10,000 sterling, and I can compare it to nothing but the late earth quake at Lisbon such was the consternation—he had made over all his estate and effects to a brother."

A few days later his debts were believed to be £80,000, but they eventually were found to total £154,000, a colossal sum for those days. At first, it was hoped that the assets would reach nearly the same figure, but in the end they appear to have amounted to perhaps only a quarter of that owed. In the middle of June bankruptcy proceedings were taken against Wheelwright and he immediately vanished. By August it was reported that he had fled to Dominica. In the spring of 1766 George Scott, now promoted to the governorship of Dominica, wrote Bowdoin that Nathaniel Wheelwright had died on May 2 at Guadeloupe. Among his effects were found promissory notes of New England merchants having a total face value of £12,000, all that he had been able to lay his hands on when he absconded.

These various bits of information on Wheelwright's activities certainly incline one to believe that he was a knave. The following incident, however, makes one feel that he was also something else.

"January 26, 1763. At the Superior Court at Charlestown, Samuel Bacon of Bedford and Miriam Fitch, wife of Benjamin Fitch of said Bedford, were convicted of being

[24] *Ibid.*, XLIII, 205.

Notorious Cheats and of having by Fraud, Craft and deceit, possessed themselves of 1500 Johannes [about £2700], the Property of three Gentlemen; and were sentenced to be each of them set in the Pillory one hour, with a paper on each of their Breasts with the Words A Cheat wrote in Capitals thereon, to suffer three Months Imprisonment, to be bound to their good Behaviour for a year, and to pay Costs. The above-said Miriam Fitch came to Boston, and waited upon Mr. Christopher Clarke, and told him for 1500 Johannes, she could shew him a Vault in Bedford where was concealed a large Chest of Money, which he might have if he could get it out, & She would assist him in doing it. Mr. Clarke, elated with the proposal, and thinking by the Enterprise to make his fortune, agreed to go to Bedford with the Woman, if he could raise the Money. Accordingly he went to Mr. Nathaniel Wheelwright, and communicated the Affair to him, who was willing to supply the Money, provided he could have a share in the Treasure, which, Mr. Clarke agreed to, rather than have the Matter any further delayed. The Money was bro't out and tendered to Madam Fitch, but it being chiefly in Silver, she said she could not carry it home conveniently and desired she might have it in Gold. Mr. Wheelwright not having Gold enough in the House, went into one of his Neighbours to procure it, and after letting him into the secret, told him he should be jointly concern'd with himself and Mr. Clarke, if he would furnish his proportion of the Money, which he cheerfully complyed with, and mustered up the Gold. After Mrs. Fitch had pocketed up the 1500 Johannes, she told the Gentlemen she would now be ready to accompany them to the place where the Treasure was to be found. They immediately mounted their horses, and proceeded with her to Bedford. When they came there, she conducted them to a Mill, and opening a Trap Door pointed them to a large Chest under the Mill about ten feet deep. She told them if they would go down and get it to the head of the Stairs,

she with Mr. Bacon, (her accomplice) would help them get it through the Trap-door, which Proposal they agreed to, and went down the hole; but no sooner were they at the bottom of the Stairs, than she shut down the door upon them, and locked it upon the Top, and run off with her 1500 Johannes. The Gentlemen now, to their inexpressible grief, found it was all a deception, they were shut up in a place of darkness and knew not which way to get out, till A Man who was passing by the Mill, heard their Cries and went in to their Relief. Had they remained there but a few hours longer, they must inevitably perished, as it was near the Time the Flood-Gates were to be hoisted, when the Water would have been let in upon them."[25]

Wheelwright left a young son in Boston, who, however, quitted that town in the Tory exodus. None of this branch of the family ever returned to New England.[26]

Both the British and the French governments put restrictions or prohibitions upon trade between the American colonies and the French settlements in North America, even when a state of war did not exist. Canada's constant food scarcity, however, caused trade in food stuffs to be winked at and even encouraged by the French. In May, 1744, after war was known to have been declared, the authorities at Louisbourg were still hoping to get food from New England.[27] There is an entry in the Journal of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, dated June 18, 1755, that is of interest. Governor Shirley, in a message to the House, stated that there were a number of French vessels hovering off the coast with the obvious intent of securing food for Louisbourg and other parts of Canada, "and as there are so many persons among us, that are so false to the interests of their country, and so mad after this pernicious trade, that no laws will restrain them," he asked that an armed vessel be provided to intercept the would-be traders.

[25] New England Hist. Gen. Soc., *Register*, LXXXIV, 160.
[26] Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Publications*, I, 302.
[27] Parkman Mss., New France, I, 21.

In judging the possible actions of the Wheelwrights, we must avoid the error of measuring them against the morals of today. Rightly or wrongly, the standards were different then. Some of Boston's most prominent citizens were actively engaged in smuggling and its necessary accompaniment of bribing the King's officials, yet such actions were not held against them. It seems most unlikely that trading with the enemy was considered a very heinous sin. Most merchants probably considered it just too risky.

Giving information to the enemy must be condemned both legally and morally by the standards of any day, yet we know that it went on. Boats sailing under a flag of truce to exchange prisoners are known to have exchanged cargoes of merchandise as well.[28] Is it not equally possible that a note or a verbal message may also have passed? In June, 1755, when the war was again under way, Prevost, the intendant at Louisbourg, wrote to his superior in Paris that: "Some Englishmen to whom our [fishing] vessels have spoken on the [Grand] Banks say. . . ."[29] Pargellis says: "Surprise, as an element of strategy, the British could rarely use, for knowledge of every expedition reached the French either through colonials who traded with the enemy, or through London offices."[30] It would be easy to clear one's conscience and justify his actions in giving information to the enemy by reasoning that they probably knew anyway, so no harm would be done, and why not benefit financially or at least gain the good will of those with whom one would be trading again just as soon as the war was over.

That is all that we know of Robert Hewes's story and its sequel, and we must consider the case as non proven. Perhaps some day in a dusty closet there will be found papers that will substantiate the charges, or perhaps they will refute them. Probably we shall never know more than has here been told.

[28] McLennan, pp. 406–407; Parkman, *Half Century of Conflict* (Boston, 1892), p. 104.
[29] Parkman Mss., New France, III, 328.
[30] Stanley Pargellis, *Military Affairs in North America* (New York, 1936), p. xv.