

*Preserving All Others: A New One-Act  
Play about Isaiah Thomas*

JAMES DAVID MORAN

INTRODUCTION

I HAVE A UNIQUE perspective on the American Antiquarian Society, for not only do I administer the Creative and Performing Artists and Writers Fellowship program in my responsibilities as director of outreach, I have also worked in the collections as an artist myself. In my dual role I have come to understand that historians and artists approach our collections in very distinct ways. Although historians must investigate every lead and gather as much information as they can, artists tend to be much more selective and idiosyncratic in their search for materials. They need only find enough information to spark their imaginations. Frequently our artist fellows tell me that they don't want too much information because knowing too much about the real world can hinder their created one. The artist's imperative is to create a work of art, and the demands of their chosen medium supercede any imposed by the historical record.

I understand these sentiments. I know all too well the challenges and joys of discovering historic truth and then using that knowledge to invent an imagined truth. As a playwright, I aim to create a world that although not real, appears so; if this appearance is powerful enough, my audiences will, in the words of the English poet and critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'suspend their disbelief' and join me in this imagined reality. Hopefully, this

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imagined world will also illuminate the real one, and as Shakespeare said, 'hold the mirror up to nature.'

When I was asked by AAS President Ellen Dunlap to create a play commemorating the 250th anniversary of the birth of Isaiah Thomas, I was immediately presented with two challenges. The first was to find out as much as I could about the man and the times in which he lived. This is, of course, a challenge faced by most historians as they seek to understand the past. But my second challenge, unique to a playwright, was to find a vital conflict by which I could propel the action of my imagined world.

Essential to the art of drama is conflict. All plays are, at heart, about opposing people or forces that struggle for some kind of victory. This struggle can be external—the protagonist battling another person, idea, or corporation—or it can be internal—the protagonist battling with his own thoughts and emotions. Character is expressed through this conflict. And although a play involves many other elements, it must have at least one central conflict or it is not a play, merely a presentation. The struggle between these opponents and its eventual outcome is the plot of the play, and our interest in the outcome can be described as the suspense or rising action. On the most basic level, we enjoy plays to find out what happens next. Will the boy get the girl? Will the bad guy lose? How will this all end? I mention these elements of dramatic art to give context to an essential dilemma facing dramatists working with historic themes—how do we create suspense in a conflict when we already know the outcome?

My research taught me the facts of Isaiah Thomas's life that I would need to relay to my audience. But if that were all I did, my accomplishment would be merely an interesting lecture by a man wearing a wig and 'small clothes.' If I were going to create a play, I would have to find some battle to engage Mr. Thomas and this struggle would need to engage not only Thomas but my audience as well. My audience would need to feel suspense in the outcome of the fight; they would need to wonder what would happen next?

I hoped that this conflict would also elucidate some profound characteristic of Thomas's personality and/or his time.

I eventually found what I needed in Thomas's wills and journals. Thomas was notorious for drafting wills and created nine in all. Many have considered the execution of these wills to be driven by his egotism, and, although Thomas was egotistical, I came to believe that there was more involved in this action than mere promotion of self-esteem. Thomas's fortunes changed greatly over his lifetime, as did those of his beneficiaries, all of which necessitated revisions in his bequests. Additionally, there is something in the language and nature of the wills that speaks to a desire to control both his legacy and his reputation throughout history. For example, he provided most generously for the welfare of AAS, yet he also details in the ninth will specifically what should be done with his bequest if the Society should fail.<sup>1</sup>

As I thought about the drafting of the wills and the taking of the portraits, I saw a deep-seated insecurity. As astonishing as Thomas's successes were, he was a man who literally created himself and his place in society by virtue of his own talents, abilities, and hard work. But he grew up in an age where great faith was placed in the order of society and where social prestige was unquestioned. Although he was part of a generation that did much to change that in American society, was there also some element in his psyche that questioned his own legitimacy? He was, after all, an impoverished printer whose early circumstances effectively orphaned him and placed him at the mercy of the overseers of the poor. In some senses he was not so different from the broadside ballads that he first learned to set in type and print. No matter how exalted he became, he was of humble origins and, no matter how popular he was or how widely his praises were sung, like those ballads, he could soon be forgotten and discarded. Here was a man who witnessed history happen in his youth and who in later

1. Will of Isaiah Thomas, November 13, 1820. Isaiah Thomas Papers, Box 14, American Antiquarian Society.

years became preoccupied with his own place in it. In this he seemed to share a universal concern. Do we not all ask at some point, will I be remembered when I am gone? And if I am remembered, how will they know me?

His wills are also a testament to his generosity. On page after page there are lists of bequests, often to people who created many problems for him in his lifetime. His daughter and third wife are examples of this. But what struck me most was his bequest to his first wife, Mary Dill. In his second will created in 1797, twenty years after their painful and humiliating divorce, and long after she ceased to be a member of his household and family, he was still providing for her. Clearly, she was still the mother of his children, and there is some evidence that at least Isaiah Junior may have interceded on her behalf at various times, which may have compelled Isaiah to continue her support.<sup>2</sup> Yet Thomas's support of his first wife strikes me as an incredible act of benevolence. In all cases Thomas is the preserver, the strong one who through his money and power is assisting those who are weaker.

But it was in his journals that I found an intriguing comment that became the central focus of my play. On November 10, 1820, Thomas wrote, 'Began to make a new Will—assisted by E. E. Bangs, Esq. Several Changes in my affairs rendering it necessary.' For the next two days he worked with Bangs on this endeavor and then on the thirteenth, he made a curious one-line entry, 'Executed another Will.'<sup>3</sup> This differed from other passages in not mentioning Bangs or why he is composing yet another will. As a historian I knew enough to question the significance of this passage. Thomas continued to associate with Bangs, naming him executor of this new will. In the second codicil to this will, dated February 26, 1830, he excused Bangs from being executor because he had just been elected Secretary of the Common-

2. See, particularly, correspondence from Isaiah Thomas, Jr., to his father, dated May 6, 1814, in which he makes reference to what is apparently a cash payment to Mary Dill: 'I have been duly favored with your two last, with an enclosure in one, for my mother, which was delivered.' Isaiah Thomas Papers, Box 6, Folder 7, American Antiquarian Society.

3. *Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society*, 10 (1909): 69-70.

wealth. So they maintained a relationship for the next ten years. As a playwright, I saw in this short passage an opportunity for conflict and my imagination took over. What transpired between the young lawyer and the old printer that made the latter want to start fresh? Did they quarrel? Or did something in the interaction cause the older man to question himself? In the process of reviewing his accomplishments and evaluating his material worth, could he also question his metaphysical value? I decided to use this moment as the launch into my fictional world.

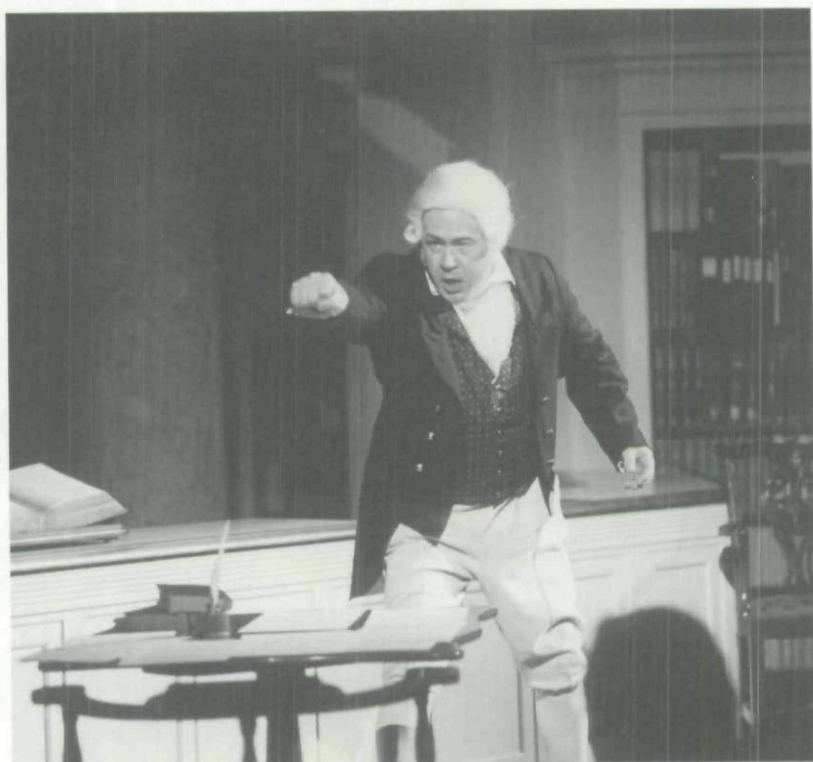
*Preserving All Others*

ISAIAH THOMAS.....Neil Gustafson  
 DIRECTOR.....James David Moran  
 STAGE MANAGER.....Alice Wilkes Gardiner  
 PROPERTIES.....Babette Gehrlich and  
 Caroline Sloat

*Preserving All Others* was performed in Antiquarian Hall on Thursday and Friday, October 22 and 23, 1999.

*[This is a one-man play. The action takes place in the small library office of Isaiah Thomas. This room is located in his mansion in Worcester. The only scenery is a table and a chair. Spread across the table are papers, previous wills chiefly, and a book or two. Throughout the play Isaiah speaks to and reacts with an unseen Edward Dillingham Bangs, who sits at the table. It is November 10, 1820. Thomas is 71 years of age, but still a powerful presence. He walks with a slight limp, a result of his early years working at a printing press. Thomas is still an imposing figure. He is at turns charming, boastful, insecure, angry, and reflective.]*

ISAIAH THOMAS: Mr. Bangs, so good of you to come and help me with my will. My, but you remind me more of your father every day. Ah, not a bad thing at all; why the Bangs family has graced this region since the days of the Pilgrims. *[Listening]* 1623 is it. We do share a love for history, don't we? Well, I am most honored that you have consented to help me draft my will. *[Listening]* This will be my *ninth* will and testament. The severe losses and other unfortunate circumstances that have occurred within two years past have rendered this action necessary. I greatly appreciate your assistance. This process of organizing my bequests always makes me wonder what is my true worth. What will be my greatest legacy? Yes, of course, I have much to be thankful for, that by the great providence of God I have amassed a fortune, and now I converse with the finest and most learned gentlemen. This in spite of the fact that I taught myself to read and write.



Actor Neil Gustafson performing the role of Isaiah Thomas in the premiere of *Preserving All Others*, Antiquarian Hall, October 22, 1999.

You know they call me the old printer, as I believe I am the oldest living printer still alive in the nation. My dear friend Benjamin Franklin once called me the Baskerville of America for my mastery of printing—the art that is the preserver of all other arts. I still walk with my printer's gait; it comes from the pulling of the bar. [*He demonstrates.*] It increases the muscles on the side you favor. I can tell a printer from three chains away by the way he walks down the street. I still have it, although I have not pulled or beat at a press in many a year.

Do you realize that at the height of my business, I operated sixteen presses throughout the country and employed some 150 hands in Worcester alone? I had a controlling interest in three

newspapers, a magazine, and eight bookstores in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Maryland. I erected a paper mill and set up a bindery and thus I was able to go through the whole process of manufacturing books. Indeed, there are few Americans of your generation who did not learn to read with my primers, study their geography from my textbooks, plant crops by my almanacs, pass time with my novels, or worship with my Bibles. I have sold books to learned gentlemen and poor farmers, skilled craftsmen and shopkeepers; the finest ladies and the bawdiest wenches have all turned my pages. And for all that I have been amply rewarded; by God's good grace I have amassed one of the largest fortunes in these United States—the country that I helped to create. I helped establish a republic of liberty and equality and usher in a new order for the ages filled with virtue, learning, and religion. These are the values of both our country and Freemasonry. I was a grand master from 1802 to 1805 and again in 1809, and I have strived always 'to walk in the light and do the truth.' But for all of that, how will I be remembered? What have I accomplished that will still be of value in, say, two hundred years?

Let us attend to the solemn business before us. First and foremost, I must provide for my heirs. I have besides my own household two other families that are dependent upon me for support, those of my daughter and of my son. Isaiah was my only son. He was forty-five years of age when I buried him last year on June 25, 1819. I had such hopes for him! I taught him the mysteries of the printing trade. Indeed, we were in business together—Isaiah Thomas and Son. When I retired in 1802, I turned my business over to him. He published the *Massachusetts Spy* from 1802 to 1809. But his business acumen was not always keen; time and again I had to intervene to preserve our interests. Eventually he moved the business to Boston. And then there was his fall. I buried him in my tomb in Boston. I am still settling his accounts, paying off debts I knew nothing about.

[*With grandfatherly pride*] My son and his wife together had six sons and six daughters, of which nine are still alive, one or another



of which is a continual presence in this house. I am now the sole support for my son's widow and her children. I want to insure that this support shall continue after my death.

I must, of course, make suitable arrangements for my daughter, Marianne. My daughter has had three marriages; the first ended with the death of her husband, the other two in divorce. Her first husband, James Reed Hutchins, was also a printer who published a newspaper entitled the *Federal Spy* in Springfield, Massachusetts. Marianne has four children. I provide for her and the three children that are in her care.

Her conduct towards me and the way she has managed her affairs have occasioned me much trouble and great expense. I agreed to pay her the sum of \$350 annually. I positively will not pay more than that. This would be more than adequate if she would agree to board out somewhere locally, but she insists on living independently and keeping a house in Vermont. She receives no good from keeping house and she does not know how to manage her own affairs. Why she should wish in direct opposition to my opinion who is to pay her expenses, I know not. If she provided for herself, without my paying for it, she undoubtedly may do as she pleases, but if I am to pay, unquestionably it should be as I please. [*Hearing Bangs*] The will? Oh yes, as to the will. As my only surviving child, Marianne shall be the principal beneficiary. I shall leave to my daughter, with the remainder to her children and their heirs, some property and land that shall value \$20,000.

My children were the product of my first marriage to Mary Dill. We were divorced in 1777. My first wife ran off with a British officer, Major Benjamin Thompson. [*In response to Bangs*] Yes, he was later known as Count Rumford. Yes, the same inventor who made substantial improvements to fireplace chimneys. I grant you he knew a thing or two about hot air! My wife ran off with him in February of 1775, just before the Revolution began. I begged her not to go, but she proclaimed she would go if it were to her eternal ruin. She abandoned our children to go with him. Shortly after our wedding I discovered to my astonishment that

she had a bastard son. Years before she had been prostituted for the purposes of more than one. No wonder then that she ran off with one of His Majesty's finest. The two of them were heard uttering such expressions of endearment and affection to each other as plainly indicated the wickedness of their hearts. [*In pain*] They stayed at an inn as husband and wife and were discovered in bed together! What? Yes, I provided for her years after our divorce, as you noticed there was a provision for her in my first will of 1792, and in my will of 1797, witnessed by your father, I provided a sum of \$500 for her to be given through Isaiah Junior. She was the mother of my children. I could not abandon her, no matter what pain she caused me.

My second wife, Mary Fowle Thomas, God rest her soul, in six days she will be dead two years. She was my best friend and consort with whom I lived forty years. She treated my children and grandchildren as if they were her own. The late Mrs. T. was exceedingly generous with all the members of this household. Keeping the affairs of this very busy house is a very difficult and at times a most demanding task and she managed it all very ably. I miss riding with her in the coach, or reading together in the evening, or in church—I think I miss her most at church. She joined the second parish when it was formed and we both so enjoyed Dr. Bancroft's sermons. Her presence next to me was always such a comfort.

After she died, I took Mary's cousin and housekeeper, Rebecca Armstrong, to be my present and third wife on August 10, 1819. Why, just last night Mrs. T. had a party. Seven married ladies—seven young ladies—two gentlemen, Dr. Bancroft, and, at a very late hour, the Reverend John Brazer. Eight or ten voices going at once. Where is the satisfaction to a rational mind? [*To himself*] A very bad headache—and I may add, heartache—these have attended me since my marriage to that woman. [*To Bangs*] To provide for her, I shall make good on a contract I signed with my present wife whereby I shall allow her to live in the house and lot called the Maccarty House. After my wife's decease that property should go to my daughter during her life with the remainder to her children and heirs. By that same contract my wife has relin-

quished all claims to her widows' third of my real and personal estate. I shall also give my wife one-third part of the silver and silver-plated ware.

I wish to make provisions for my servants. Indeed, many members of my household staff have become part of my family. I shall also want to provide for my surviving brothers, Joshua and Peter, and their children. My brother Peter appears to have no wants, and I am inclined to believe is a very contented man. I shall give Peter some books.

Much of my wealth, of course, is in stocks of books, which I have in my warehouses. I pray the executors of this will shall employ some experienced person acquainted with the book-selling business and particularly with books in sheets of which I have still a large quantity. This person can take an account of my books, stock inventory, and put it in the proper order. Among these sheets of books are 4,000 or 5,000 octavo Bibles. [*With great pride*] My Bibles, I wager, are my greatest achievement in publishing. All the clergymen of Worcester and other capable persons carefully examined every sheet of the text before its commitment to the press. I spared no expense, care, or labor to make this work correct, neat, and elegant. I provided Christians of every denomination American-made sacred scriptures. I had other achievements of note, such as being the first American to print musical notations or my profitable association with Mr. Webster and his spelling books. I also published the first American edition of Mother Goose's nursery rhymes, and the first American novel, *The Power of Sympathy*. But none of these shall surpass in quality to that of my Holy Bibles.

What is my worth? I calculate it to be about \$110,000. Nine years ago, my estate was worth \$200,000; I hope I shall be able to get through with the concern of business, and leave something for my heirs and for public benefit. 'We bring nothing with us into this world, and we can carry nothing away with us.'

I certainly came into this world with nothing. I never knew my father. He left to go to Carolina and was never heard from again. My grandfather so disapproved of my father's actions, he disin-

herited him. My mother was then left with five children to bring up without any means for her own or their support. She did the best in her power but was forced to abandon many of her children. Two children stayed with friends in Long Island, one was apprenticed to a tradesman in Cambridge, another, a daughter, she kept at home, and myself, the youngest, was placed in an apprenticeship with Mr. Fowle by the overseers of the poor. I was but six years of age.

Zechariah Fowle was a printer and seller of ballads and peddlers' small books. Although Mr. F. was honest in his dealings and punctual to his engagements, he was uncommonly ignorant. He was an irritable and effeminate man, better skilled in the domestic work of females than in the business of a printing house.

Despite his promises to my mother to provide me with a good school education, his printing office was the only school I ever had. I was left to teach myself. Twice he whipped me and made me confess to crimes I never committed. I had to do all the servile employments of his family that I could perform and, when that work was wanting, he placed me at the type cases. That is, I was put to setting type for the press. Why, I was so small that in order that I might reach the boxes of both the upper and lower cases, he had a bench eighteen inches high made for me to stand upon. I stood on this bench and set my first printing job. It was a licentious ballad entitled *The Lawyer's Pedigree*. I remember that some of it went like so, 'The nun, she was with child and so her credit sunk. The father was a friar, The issue was a monk. The monk he had a son, with whom he did inhabit, Who, when the father died, the son became Lord Abbot.' [*Laughing*] It was that sort of thing.

My master, Mr. F., did some business selling such ballads that would be sung over a tankard in a tavern or tacked up to a wall or against the broadside of a barn. They were the lowliest form of literature quickly printed then posted and read once or twice before being forgotten and left to the elements or taken down and wrapped around the day's catch of fish.

It took me two days to set *The Lawyer's Pedigree* in double pica;

you see, I knew then only the letters. I had never been taught to put them together and spell. I was only six years old. And yet as I picked up each letter and placed it in the composing stick I felt a certain magic transpire over me.

*[Through the next speech Isaiah pantomimes the actions of setting type and working an old wooden 'blaeu' style printing press.]* As I matured, I began to understand the mysteries of the trade and to comprehend the possibilities in the art. Mr. F. had an ink-stained Bible and a tattered dictionary, and with these I learned to read and to comprehend that each piece of type was vested with a great transcendental power; each sort was potent with possibilities. When all the type was set and placed in a chase, it could weigh over a hundred pounds and yet, when invested with intellectual power, it could soar with untold energy. Here was truly the art from which all other arts derived. When I grew older and strong enough to operate the press, I would pull on the devil's tail. *[Pantomime pulling on the bar]* I made the press an extension of my own body. *[Pull]* But I didn't get closer to the devil in this act; I got closer to God! And with each torment of the devil, I worshiped the deity with letters, words, sentences—thoughts, feelings, proclamations, declamations! Here was my destiny! The loss of my father, *[pull on the press]* the breech from my mother, *[pull on the press]* and my own destitution *[pull on the press]* could not keep me from this pull.

By the time I was sixteen I verily burned with a desire to acquire a perfect knowledge of printing. I left Mr. F. without heed to the fact that I was bound by law to stay with him until I reached maturity. I sought to go to London, the very center of the English printing world. But alas, I landed short of my goal. I landed not in London, but in Halifax, Nova Scotia. There I worked with the town's only printer, a Mr. Anthony Henry in putting out the Halifax *Gazette*. Mr. Henry was a Dutchman, who, although good natured and pleasant, was an unskilled printer. To his want of knowledge or abilities in his profession, he added indolence.

I did not stay in Halifax for long, but my time there was noto-

rious for my spirited and successful opposition to the British Stamp Act. I found that piece of British legislation so distasteful that I immediately began printing articles in the *Halifax Gazette* describing how much the populace hated it and I generally denounced it in any way possible. Eventually, I was summoned before the secretary of the province.

[AS SECRETARY] Are you the young New England man who prints for Henry? [As himself] Yes, sir.

[AS SECRETARY] How dare you publish in the *Gazette* that the people of Nova Scotia are displeased with the stamp act?

[AS HIMSELF] I thought it was true.

[AGAIN, AS SECRETARY] You had no right to think so. If you publish anything more of such stuff, you shall be punished. You may go; but remember, you are not in New England.

[AS HIMSELF] Not in New England.

Soon the newspapers from Philadelphia arrived by packet. On the day before the Stamp Act was to take effect the *Pennsylvania Journal* appeared in full mourning, complete with thick black lines surrounding the pages and a death's head of a skull and cross bones above the title. I wanted to do the same with the *Gazette*, but thought of the secretary's warning. Then it occurred to me I could publish an account of what the *Pennsylvania Journal* looked like and in that way reproduce the mourning columns and death figures in my own paper. This I did. The appearance of this issue of the *Gazette* made no trifling bustle in that place 'not in New England.' I might have accomplished much more mischief, but you see I only stayed in Halifax some seven months.

Eventually I returned to Boston and entered into partnership with my old master, Zechariah Fowle. In 1770 I began publishing a new newspaper for the middling class—this was the *Massachusetts Spy*. I soon purchased the press and cases from Fowle and continued on my own. I, like most provincial printers, found it to be prudent business to publish all political opinions. But as the conflict between the Tories and the Whigs became more inflamed, I found remaining impartial to be detrimental to my business. As

indicated by my actions in Nova Scotia, my personal sympathies were against those of the British authorities. The *Spy* soon became a voice for the Whigs. Fortunately, my own politics improved my business. My printing establishment was called the 'sedition foundry.' The Sons of Liberty occasionally convened there and I published a handbill or two in support of their cause.

I have always believed in a free and unfettered press. Should the liberty of the press be once destroyed, farewell the remainder of our invaluable rights and privileges! We may next expect padlocks on our lips, fetters on our legs, and only our hands left at liberty to slave for worse than Egyptian task-masters, or——or——fight our way to Constitutional freedom. The freedom of the press, on which depends the freedom of the people.

Soon the *Massachusetts Spy* became famous throughout all the colonies. On July 31, 1771, the loyalists of New Bern, North Carolina, took such exception to an article published in the *Spy* that they hanged me in effigy. To have oneself hanged in effigy is a distinct honor of which I remain very proud. Of course the *effigy* is an essential component in the success of this endeavor.

Mind you, I was also concerned with being hanged in the flesh during my tenure in Boston. The authorities frequently threatened me. I lived in fear of assassination and my press was threatened with destruction! My friends insisted that it was no longer safe for me to operate within Boston and with the assistance of Joseph Warren and Timothy Bigelow I packed up my printing office, including my press called Old Number One. I stole it out of Boston during the night of April 16, 1775. First, it was ferried across the river to Charlestown and thence by wagon onto Worcester. Three days later the Regulars viciously attacked our militia at Lexington.

I set my press up in the basement of Mr. Bungalow's home and waited for paper to be delivered. When it finally arrived, I was able to resume publication of the *Massachusetts Spy*. In the May 3, 1755, issue of that paper, the first to be published in Worcester, I published one of the first printed accounts of the battles of Lex-

ington and Concord. It began: 'Americans! Forever bear in mind the BATTLE of LEXINGTON! Where British Troops, unmolested and unprovoked wantonly, and in a most inhuman manner fired upon and killed a number of our countrymen, then robbed them of their provisions, ransacked, plundered and burnt their houses! Nor could the tears of defenseless women, some of whom were in the pains of childbirth, the cries of helpless babes, nor the prayers of old age, confined to beds of sickness, appease their thirst for blood!—Or divert them from the DESIGN of MURDER and ROBBERY!' All this over a masthead that proclaimed: 'Americans! Liberty or Death!—Join or Die!' Soon the post riders were spreading this copy of the *Spy* all up and down the colonies and it even made its way to England. The cause of America was just, and it was only necessary to state this cause in a clear and impressive manner to unite the American people in its support. And so we began this glorious country.

But those early years were difficult ones. The Rebellion caused general distress and commotion, which was very injurious to my business. The subscribers to the *Spy*, which had numbered 3,500 souls throughout the colonies, had shrunk to 200. Once again, I found myself in destitute circumstances. I struggled to procure paper and ink and pleaded for business from whatever sources I could find. Often my meals consisted of a penny's worth of bread and milk, which I ate with my 'prentices in the shop.

Gradually through hard work and determination my condition improved. In addition to the *Spy*, I continued to publish almanacs and I gradually increased my business to include the publication of all kinds of books and pamphlets. My business prospered. Why I built this mansion in 1783, and I was the first man in Worcester to own a coach and livery. I set many of my apprentices up in their own businesses, which became branch establishments in my publishing empire. One of those apprentices, Ebenezer Andrews, and I entered into a partnership that lasted thirty-one years. Indeed, I just sold out to Mr. Andrews last August bringing our concerns to



a close. When we started, he had no property at all; now he is rich and by his management is worth four times as much as myself! [*Thoughtfully*] 'We can carry nothing away with us.'

I want to provide funds and land for Worcester to construct a charity house for the dwelling of poor persons. I also want to insure that each year on thanksgiving days the town provides a good and liberal dinner suitable for the occasion and half a pint of common, but good, wine for each person. In this way they may have the means of rejoicing, like their more affluent neighbors, in some of the essential good things of this life bestowed by a bountiful Providence. I wish for them to unite in grateful visions for the peace and felicity of our country.

[*Responding to Bangs*] Do you really think I will be remembered for my book, *The History of Printing in America*? It took me eight years to complete the two volumes, which I first published in 1810. I retired to devote my energies to writing this work. I am currently revising it in preparation for another edition. In doing my research for this work, I amassed a great many books and publications by American printers and considerable expense and time; why the purchase of old newspapers alone cost me upwards of a thousand dollars. Some have likened my collecting books and printed materials to that of a gentle madness. I am afraid it is more like raving lunacy. For you see I have a tendency to clutch at examples of the printed word the way others grab at money and jewels. My collection I shall bequeath to the American Antiquarian Society; that is, what I have not already transferred to them.

No society for benevolent and patriotic purposes can be really useful without funds, and there is no Institution with which I am acquainted more in need of support than the American Antiquarian Society. I want to bequeath some thirty thousand dollars to this institution. I believe my greatest legacy may rest with the American Antiquarian Society. This is how they shall know me in two hundred years. I founded it just eight years ago, and I have served as its president ever since. Yes, I did build the new library

building with my own funds. We dedicated it this past August, the mere building without land, or fences, or fixing the grounds, cost \$6,763.84. It is a very elegant and commodious structure.

*[Very excited, like a boy showing his latest toy.]* And now the library contains some seven thousand books besides several hundred volumes of newspapers neatly bound and lettered and a very considerable collection of manuscripts and pamphlets. Many of the books and manuscripts are rare and ancient, and some are the only copies known to exist in the United States. The collections include the old library of the Mathers, which had belonged to Doctors Increase, Cotton, and Samuel. I purchased this from Mrs. Hannah Mather Crocker, great-granddaughter of Cotton Mather. It contains about 700 volumes and many valuable manuscripts. It is unquestionably the oldest library in New England.

The American Antiquarian Society is not just for my personal gratification. The Society is in some respects very different from other SOCIETIES established in the United States. Membership is restricted to no state or party. There are no members merely honorary but all have an equal interest and concern in the affairs and objects of the institution whatsoever part of the United States they may reside in. It is truly a national institution.

*[Listening]* It has no local views or private concerns; its objectives, 'to collect and preserve,' embrace all time past, present, and future. Age will increase its utility. The Society's property shall not, at any time hereafter, be divided amongst its members, but is to remain, to be increased, and ever to be preserved for public benefit.

You see, the benefits arising from other benevolent societies are generally local and designed for the good of the present generation. Their members therefore feel a closer interest. But the benefits resulting from the American Antiquarian Society will increase with time and will chiefly be received by a remote posterity. Therefore, the Society's members must entertain a more generous and enlarged benevolence.

The history of Europe is, of course, majestic, but this nation

has greatness in it, too. We are able to convey to posterity, a correct account of the manner in which we have grown up to be an independent people with a degree of certainty which cannot be obtained by the nations of the old world.

Yes, history is made up of great men and events. But, pray sir don't forget the common men, the vulgar men who took up arms along with gentlemen and together overthrew the tyranny of England. Those common men who sing their bawdy ballads and laugh at each other's jests are as much a part of this country as anyone. Let us preserve their ballads and their jests so that people two hundred years from now will know how they lived.

We must preserve all manner of printed things and all kinds of objects great and ephemeral, so that those who come after may know us and by their knowledge will never forget us. Newspapers and periodicals are read once and then thrown away. I say pass them onto this Society so that it may preserve them for future readers. [*Listening*] No, I think it is essential that we collect such modern works that describe the progress of literature, the arts, manners, customs, and the discoveries of this age with accuracy. For time will make those that are modern, more precious—they will become antique.

We cannot know what will come in the future, but we can know the past. We must preserve that past for the future. It is a debt we owe our forefathers.

[*Listening, he becomes crestfallen.*] Yes, it is true that life is very capricious, just look at the changes in my own fortunes. Nothing is certain, is it? The future success of the American Antiquarian Society is far from secure. We are constantly struggling for support, why we could not even induce the legislature to grant us a lottery to raise money for the building. Indeed it was the want of other funds that induced me to finance the construction. [*Sadly*] I fear that the members may not take the Society's objectives to heart. They live so remotely from each other and the inconvenience of assembling may cause them to dissolve the society or in some other way the charter will be revoked. In time our treasures

may be scattered or lost. Just as we have lost all knowledge of the ancient people who once inhabited America, those in the future may have no knowledge of us. We will have ceased to exist.

I think that shall be all for today Mr. B. I am all worn through. Perhaps it is the cholick that has troubled me so of late, returning. [*Distracted*] Yes, I am sure that tomorrow I will be refreshed and we can continue.

Good day, sir.

[*Speaking to himself*] I remember so clearly how once, when I was a young lad of thirteen years, I came upon a broadside posted in an ill-traveled lane. It was tattered and bleached and flapped in the breeze, being secured by a nail in just one corner. It looked so forlorn in its abandonment. All the lettering was faded, but the words were still visible. I could read every letter imprinted in the fiber of the sheet. It was *The Lawyer's Pedigree!* The very same broadside I had set with my own hand when just a lad. I carefully took it down and brought it home. I have been preserving them all ever since. Pray God there will always be someone to receive them!

[*The End*]

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