

## NEW ENGLAND ALMANACS, 1766-1775, AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION<sup>1</sup>

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FEW topics in modern history are more interesting than the American Revolution, especially if that revolution be defined in the words of John Adams as meaning not primarily the war, but that radical change, nearly complete before the war began, "in the principles, opinions, sentiments and affections of the people."<sup>2</sup> An unknown writer in the "Postscript" to the *Massachusetts Gazette and Boston Weekly News-Letter* for March 8, 1770, finds the beginning of this new attitude toward England almost immediately after the close of the Seven Years' War:

In the year 1763, and before that unhappy period, so great was the veneration the Colonists had for the old countries, that it was by much, more easy to incense a Marylander against a Virginian, or any one Colonist against another, to such a degree, that they would decide their difference by fighting, than to stimulate any of them to fight with an Englishman; but the stamp-act, and subsequent revenue laws, have already raised a flame in the colonies, which will not now be speedily allayed.

To follow that change of feeling in the case of the

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<sup>1</sup>Through its donors, bibliographers, and officials, the American Antiquarian Society has done so much for students of our early almanacs that it has been a great pleasure to co-operate with them a little by attempting this preliminary study.

On the bibliography of New England almanacs see: for Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, Dr. Charles L. Nichols in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* for April, 1928; for Massachusetts, Dr. Nichols, *ibid.*, New Series, Vol. 22, Part I (April, 1912); for Rhode Island, Howard M. Chapin, *ibid.*, April, 1915; for Connecticut, Albert Carlos Bates, *ibid.*, April, 1914.

One reason for the especially frequent use of the Ames almanacs throughout this article is that they had a wide circulation outside Massachusetts as well as within that province: see, for example, Albert Carlos Bates (*op. cit.*, pp. 6-7) on their circulation in Connecticut.

<sup>2</sup>John Adams, *Novanglus and Massachusettsensis*, Boston, 1819, p. 233.

leading men in the American colonies is sufficiently difficult, even though for most of them we have at least biographical outlines and a few letters, while in certain instances we are fortunately able to consult avowals of political theory, perhaps to know something about their reading at college, or possibly to have a partial catalogue of the books in their personal libraries.

But how shall we explain the well-drilled rank and file? We cannot assume a college education or much reading in books. Yet apparently they had pretty well formed their opinions and had somehow kept along not far behind their leaders through the period from 1766 to 1775. That they learned much from newspapers no one doubts. And that they learned much from the pulpit besides theology has been made clear.<sup>1</sup> But another possible source, the humble almanac, has hardly received sufficient consideration, though the extent and character of its circulation unquestionably lend great weight to whatever revolutionary propaganda it may contain. One cannot too strongly emphasize the point that throughout this paper material in almanacs is presented as important, even though it—or its equivalent—may have appeared elsewhere in more costly form, on account of the wide circulation of the almanac in homes where there was little or no other reading matter.

Daniel George, addressing the "Kind Reader" in his almanac for 1776, concludes thus: "I do not pretend to direct the Learned;—the rich and voluptuous may, perhaps, scorn my direction: But should this sheet enter the solitary dwellings of the poor and illiterate, where the studied ingenuity of the Learned Writer never comes, it will rejoice the heart of their most humble Servant, Daniel George."

And Joseph T. Buckingham (1779–1861), whose testimony is especially important on account of the

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<sup>1</sup>Alice M. Baldwin, *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution*, Duke University Press, 1928.

meagreness of his facilities for reading, tells us what almanacs meant to him as a book-loving child.

But I had access, for amusement, (not on Sunday or Saturday night,) to another set of works, such as I have never seen since, and to which I was indebted for much useful instruction. We had on our book-shelf a regular file of *Almanacks*, for near or quite fifty years. Some of them were dated as far back as 1720, and some were made by "Nathaniel Ames, *Philomath*." These periodicals I read often, and with never-relaxing interest. They contained many fragments of history, scraps of poetry, anecdotes, epigrams, &c. One of them had a long poetical account of Braddock's Defeat. Others contained accounts of events which led to the Revolutionary War. One in particular made a deep impression on my mind. The title page had on it a large picture of a female, representing America, in a recumbent position, held down by men representing members of the British ministry, while Lord North was pouring Tea down her throat from an immense teapot. From his pocket was represented as falling out a roll of parchment, labeled "Boston Port Bill." The Articles of Confederation between the colonies, Petitions to the King, the Declaration of Independence, and many other papers connected with the history and politics of the country, were preserved in these useful annuals, and afforded me ample food for study. But what excited my especial wonder was the calculations of the eclipses, and prognostications concerning the weather. To me these old periodicals were sources of delight and instruction.<sup>1</sup>

In the seventeenth century the almanac-maker seems to have been regarded—by the wits, at any rate—as a pretender to knowledge which he did not possess.

In 1614 one of the Overbury group of "character" writers—possibly Sir Thomas Overbury himself—portrayed "An Almanac-Maker" as "the worst part of an astronomer," whose verses "have a worse face than ever had Rochester hackney" and whose prose is "dappled with ink-horn terms." As "for his judging at the uncertainty of weather, any old shepherd shall make a dunce of him." "To be brief, he falls three degrees short of his promises, yet is he the key to unlock terms and law days, a dumb mercury to point

<sup>1</sup>Joseph T. Buckingham, *Personal Memoirs, &c.*, Boston, 1852, I, 20.

out highways, and a bailiff of all marts and fairs in England."<sup>1</sup>

From much the same point of view Richard Brathwait, in his *Whimzies* of 1631, creates "An Almanack-maker"<sup>2</sup> whose "usual dialect" includes "Horizons, Hemispheares, Horoscopes, . . . Astrolabes, Cycles, Epicycles, . . . ; yet I am perswaded they may bee something to eate, for ought he know . . . Hee would make you beleeve hee had a smacke of poetry, by the verses which hee fixeth above every moneth: but doe not credit him, hee is guiltlesse of that art: onely some stolen shreads he hath raked out from the kennell of other authors." Perhaps more can hardly be expected, for Brathwait is writing of one whose "yeerely pension upon every impression" is only forty shillings.

Readers of Swift will recall his devastating skit upon John Partridge, the almanac-maker, in "Predictions for the Year 1708," an attack no doubt made with added zest on account of Partridge's political leanings, which were the opposite of Swift's own. And there were many similar attacks, on the whole, no doubt, deserved.

But by the middle of the eighteenth century, at least in New England, almanacs seem to have become much more respectable. The Amesese, father and son, were Harvard graduates; and in general the almanac of their day seems to represent honest calculation and writing of average journalistic quality, with perhaps some allowance here and there for bits of doggerel and humorous precepts about thrift that long remained traditional among almanac-makers.

The New England almanac of the 1760's and 1770's invariably had for each month a page of information about sunrise and sunset, tides, sessions of courts, weather predictions, and the like. At the top of the page there would be a few lines of verse, and sprinkled in the empty spaces short bits of verse or prose. Such was the body of the almanac.

<sup>1</sup>Henry Morley, *Character Writings of the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>2</sup>Rich. Brathwait, *Whimzies*, reprint of 1859, ed. by James O. Halliwell, pp. 13-17.

More than equalling these twelve pages in bulk would usually be the varying contents of the front matter and end matter, which almost always included an address to the reader from the publisher, relating to the general state of public affairs; special articles; lists of important events, with dates; recipes; lists of public officials; tables of distances; and not infrequently poems and stories running to a considerable length. "Continued next year" occurs more than once, and seems to indicate that almanacs were usually not thrown away, but preserved as in the home of the youthful Buckingham, whose recollections have already been cited.

Thus the almanac fulfilled some of the purposes now served by the calendar, register or gazetteer, and magazine. That it was often used as a diary is clear from the annotations in many surviving copies. We shall probably not misconceive the past if we regard the almanac as read from cover to cover by many thousands of people whose other reading was very slight indeed.<sup>1</sup>

Just before our period the Seven Years' War had found New England rejoicing in the successes of British arms:

"AMHERST with Glory triumphs o'er his Foes,  
And rests for want of Countries to oppose.  
CANADA conquer'd! Can the News be true!  
Inspir'd by Heav'n what cannot *Britons* do.  
The News with Haste to listning Nations tell,  
How *Canada*, like ancient *Carthage*, fell."<sup>2</sup>

And in his issue for 1762, Ames addresses the ladies with a light article in praise of tea-drinking. "There

<sup>1</sup>The price of the almanac varied: usually single copies cost about five coppers; on large quantities the price was much reduced.

Almanacs seem to have gone to press early: Nathaniel Ames, the younger, sent his copy for 1769 on October 29 (Samuel Briggs, *Nathaniel Ames*, p. 34). And on November 1, 1760, the elder Ames notes in his diary (*Dedham Historical Register*, I, 113): "Almanacks for 1761 come out." But Edes & Gill's *North American Almanac* for 1770 is advertised as "this day published" on March 8, 1770 (*Mass. Gazette*).

<sup>2</sup>Ames, 1761.

may," he admits, "be some considerable political Objections against the Utility of so great a Consumption of a foreign Commodity; *but as I meddle not with Politicks, so I shall not pretend to answer this Objection.*"<sup>1</sup> The whole passage—unfortunately too long to quote—is extraordinarily at variance with the attitude so soon to be taken on the subject of politics in general and tea in particular.

Let us now run through typical New England almanacs from 1766 to 1775 to see what they say about public affairs.

### 1766

With the Stamp Act, the protests against it made at the New York meeting of delegates from nine colonies, and the Virginia Resolves freshly in mind, and with the writings of Otis and Patrick Henry only a little less so, an almanac-maker preparing his copy for the year 1766 could hardly keep silent on public affairs.

Nathaniel Ames's address to the "Generous Reader" for this year is highly interesting:

. . . Here I should conclude, did I not share in the general distress of my countrymen, and think it out of character, not to condole with them in their present distressed circumstances, who not only groan, but almost sink beneath a load of debt; our merchants continually breaking; no money to be had, even for the most valuable articles; and all threatened with ruin, without the lenity and assistance of our superiors; yet so far from this, that we are shocked with a new demand, which, it is thought by many, all the current specie among us is not able to satisfy; and after that is gone, then go houses and lands, then liberties! and all the land that we can then get will be only in vassalage to some hungry Lord, which Heaven avert! But this is only a conjecture of what might be, should we prove very tame and easy at putting on the yoke . . . But, above all things, let us rely on the goodness of that Power . . . who . . . , as long as we do our duty, will continue to defend us from foreign and domestic enemies, and *stamp* with eternal infamy and disgrace, those who would oppress or tyrannize over us.

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<sup>1</sup>Italics mine.

For January 1766, Ames has these verses:

Columbian Genius hear our pray'r:  
 O! let us all with lustre rise  
 Beneath thy tutelary care;  
 Retain our dear bought liberties;  
 Let not the voice of native freedom sound  
 Alone in realms which Albion's shores surround.

For April 1766, he gives us the familiar political maxim: "The sole end of government is the happiness of the people." And for November 1766, this jingle:

If each blade, would mind his trade,  
 Each lass and lad in home-spun clad,  
 Then we might cramp the growth of stamp.

West's Almanac (Providence, Rhode Island) publishes "A Short View of the present State of the American Colonies, from Canada to the utmost Verge of His Majesty's Dominions. July . . . 1765," containing:

(1.) Evidence that "the whole of English America" is "in the Depths of Despair upon the Loss of Privileges, the most dear and invaluable."

(2.) The conclusion that "such being the deplorable Situation of this Country, once renown'd for Freedom, it is hoped a Review thereof will excite such a universal Spirit of Patriotism in every Inhabitant, that our Liberty and Property may be yet rescued from the Jaws of Destruction."

(3.) These final thoughts: "I can now only add the following political Sentences, which I hope will be duly considered, viz.

1. Power, like Water, is ever working its own Way; and, wherever it can find or make an Opening, is altogether as prone to overflow whatever is subject to it.

2. Though Matter of Right overlooked, may be re-claimed and reassumed at any Time, it cannot be too soon re-claimed and re-assumed.

3. And if the Representative Part of Government is not tenacious almost to a Fault, of the Rights and Claims of a

People, they will, in a Course of Time, lose their very Pretensions to them.

1767

The greatest recent public event was of course the repeal of the Stamp Act, in March 1766, though the jubilation thereat was no doubt a little clouded by the Declaratory Act whereby Parliament still asserted its right to tax the colonies. The name of William Pitt naturally stood out as the colonists thought of the victory for their cause.

West's *New-England Almanack* in the dedication "To my Countrymen:" first thanks his patrons for buying the almanac, and then acknowledges this higher obligation to them:

It is to you, my countrymen, I am in a great measure, indebted for my freedom; it was you, that so nobly exerted yourselves to bring about a repeal of the Stamp-Act, that so lately hung over our heads like a heavy cloud; an Act, in its nature detestable; plotted and contrived by a set of wicked designing men; and had it taken place among us, would have enslaved millions of loyal subjects, and subverted the whole constitution of *English America*. It is generally believed those wicked fowlers had something of a worse nature in view; but thanks be to GOD! the snare is broken,<sup>1</sup> and we are escaped; and we may well say, the Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.

Ames's general address to the Reader for 1767 is especially important. In part it runs thus:

Reader,

I most heartily congratulate thee on the happy prospect of the publick affairs of this Country, so different from what it was last Fall, as nearly to exceed the most sanguine expectation; and which, however unwilling some few may be to own it, was produced by the exertion of that noble spirit of *Freedom*, which every thinking honest Man that has never been galled with the *chain of slavery* is possessed of—a spirit which GOD

<sup>1</sup>This phrase suggests, and was probably intended to suggest, Jonathan Mayhew's *The Snare broken, A Thanksgiving Discourse, . . . Occasioned by the Repeal of the Stamp-Act*. It was delivered in May, 1766, and published in that same year, with a dedication to Pitt, to whom, "under God and the King, grateful America chiefly attributes it, that she is now happily re-instated in the enjoyment of her former liberties and privileges."



grant no tyrant may ever be able to extinguish amongst us: to the first excitors of which we are so superlatively indebted on so many accounts, as would far exceed the limits of my page to express. I only hope that you will always show your sense of the obligation by rewarding them and their posterity, so long as they shall hold their integrity, with all the most important posts of honour and profit that you are capable of bestowing; and that whenever a *Virginian* shall visit this part of the *Land of Freedom*, you will be no niggard of *Hospitality*. Having these matters so far settled according to our wishes, let us turn our thoughts on the arts of peace.—Oh! ye husbandmen, too happy would ye be, did ye know your own advantages; did ye turn your minds to the cultivation of ingenious arts, that soften the manners and prevent our being brutish; did ye neglect the vain amusements and idle tattle of the town and rather strive to know the life and manners of young prince *Heraclius* of *Georgia*, than whether neighbour *Such-a-one* married a month too late to be honest. What fine opportunities have ye to improve yourselves by study above tradesmen and mechanicks, whilst your fruits and herbage are growing? At the intervals of cultivating your fields, ye might be enriching your minds with useful knowledge—by perusing the *Roman* history, ye might learn how gradually a rough and ignorant people, by cultivating the study and practice of useful arts and manufactures, did emerge from obscurity to a state of grandeur and affluence inconceivable; so great that their relics are at this day the wonder of the world—how at last, they became indolent and luxurious, and therefore vitious and ignorant, which made them a prey to tyranny; and tyranny always ends in the extinction of a nation, as is evident to those that take notice of what passes in the great world, that is, read history. Ignorance among the common people is the very basis and foundation of tyranny and oppression. With what absolute and despotick sway did that grand tyrant and impostor the Pope of *Rome* rule the consciences and purses of mighty sovereigns and most of the people of *Europe*, *Britons* among the rest, so long as he kept them in ignorance, making them pray in *Latin* like a parcel of parrots, nor suffering the common people to keep Bibles in a language they understood.—But happy for the world he is dwindling away, many nations have thrown off his saddle, and are not quite so much priest-ridden. Let us then, my countrymen, study not only religion but politicks and the nature of civil government; become politicians every one of us; take upon us to examine every thing, and think for ourselves; striving to prevent the execution of that detestable maxim of *European* policy among us, *viz.* That the common people, who are three quarters of the world, must be kept in ignorance,

that they may be slaves to the other quarter who live in magnificence: and for this end I should recommend to you, first, the study of Geography, that is, the situation, extent, government, commodities, &c. of all countries upon earth. *Salmon's*<sup>1</sup> or *Gordon's* Geographies are as good as any that are published; and in *Salmon's* *Gazeteer* you have in few words an history of any country in alphabetical order, that you may turn to it in a moment. An *English* dictionary will be a vast help to you. The Knowledge of geography will fit you for reading history: it is proper to begin with the history of your own nation; *Rapin's*, *Echard's*, or *Hume's* histories of *England* are most approved of.—Yet let not these amusements intrude upon the more important occupations of life: our bodies must be fed and clothed. But that is not all; we must do more; we must raise something to sell for exportation, if we would increase in wealth. We are not tenants but *lords* of the soil, and may live as genteel tho' not in such splendour, as lords, by increasing trade and commerce, which are as necessary to a state as wings to a bird; encouraging all kinds of tradesmen and artificers among us, diligence and industry in every one, keeping all sorts of lawful business constantly going on, every wheel in the grand system continually moving; despising foreign luxury and effeminacy, banishing from among us immorality and idleness. He that will not work, neither shall he eat.

The remainder of the address (a full page) is of the greatest interest to the student of economic history: it is a plea for the home manufacture of potash and for the planting of mulberry trees, the culture of silk worms, and the manufacture of silk.

Ames's almanac for March 1767 calls attention to the anniversary (March 18) of the repeal of the Stamp Act, and in the following doggerel proposes Pitt's health:

Let's drink to PITT  
The English pearl;

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<sup>1</sup>John Mein's Catalogue of his Circulating Library, Boston, 1765, includes (p. 23) *Salmon's Geographical and Historical Grammar . . . in which the History of England and other States is brought down to the End of the Year 1763.* 10s. 6d.

Mein's note thus recommends the book: "Containing also the present State of all the Kingdoms of the Known World, with an Account of the Air, Soil, Produce, Traffic, Arms, Religion, Universities, Manners, Habits, Revolutions and memorable Events of the different States described; illustrated with Maps. A very useful Book, and Equally entertaining and Instructive."

May he shine yet  
Tho' made an earl.<sup>1</sup>

1768

For the year 1768, just after the Townshend duties, Ames is again an important witness as he eloquently sets forth the grievances of the colonists and bids them be frugal and stout-hearted:

Friends and Country-Men! Our Fathers came into this Wilderness, encouraged by the word of a King, that they shou'd enjoy their Civil & Religious Liberties! They lived upon Boil'd Corn and Clams, and laboured hard to clear and cultivate the Country they purchased of the Natives, and defended the same at the Expençe of their own Blood and Treasure: We have often aided the Crown with Men and Money; and by the Conquest of Cape-Briton, gave Peace to Europe: Our Taxes, till very lately, have been granted by our own Representatives for the Support of Government; and we have given Old England Millions of Money in the way of Trade: Our Growing Extravagancies have run us amazingly into Debt; and the Moneys that should go in Payment, are now to be taken from us, *without our Consent*, to support, independent of the People, and in greater Affluence, the Officers of the Crown; as also to maintain & keep up a large body of Regular Troops in America. Duties, unknown to our Fathers to be paid here upon Sugar, Molasses, Wine, Rum, Tea, Coffee, Cocoa, Paper of all kind, Painters Colours, Window and other Glass, &c. will carry off all our Silver and Gold, without other Taxes, which are talk'd of upon Salt & Land, to the Ruin of Trade, and in the end of the whole Province, unless prevented by the Virtue of the People. Boston has set a noble Example for the Encouragement of Frugality and our own Manufactures, by the Agreement *unanimously* come into; and may it be followed by all the other Towns: Nay, let them go further by agreeing not to sip that *poisonous Herb*, called Bohea Tea as also not to purchase any sort of Woolen Goods made abroad, for 12 or 18 Months to come, but to wear their old patch'd Cloaths, till our own Manufacture can be bought, as many in New-York, Connecticut and Philadelphia are now doing.—If

<sup>1</sup>In his diary for March 31, 1766, Ames notes: "Mr. Pitt that best of men and true Patriot engaged on b'h'lf of America." On July 2, 1766, Ames "went to Boston. Bespoke Pitt's Head for the Pillar of Liberty." Concerning this very interesting Pillar of Liberty, in Dedham, Massachusetts, see pp. 170-177 of the *Proceedings at the Celebration of the Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary . . . Of the Town of Dedham . . . Cambridge, 1887.*

this Saving is not made, Interest must rise, Mortgages cannot be cleared, Lands will fall, or be possess'd by *Foreigners*: Families impoverish'd and our Goals filled with unhappy Objects.—If these wise Measures should be come into, a whole Province will be saved from Slavery, and this dreadful Ruin, and we shall become a Free, Rich, and Happy People!—That the Things which belong to our political Peace, may not be hid from the Eyes of Americans, as it seems to be from the Eyes of Britons, is the hearty wish of—A NEW ENGLAND MAN.

On the leaf facing December in this same issue, Ames reprints the vote of the Town of Boston, 28 October, 1767, on "Measures to encourage the Produce and Manufactures of the Province, and to lessen the Use of Superfluities."

## 1769

The New England almanacs of 1769 naturally made use of such momentous events of the preceding twelve months as the non-importation agreements in response to the Townshend Acts, the Circular Letter of the Massachusetts House of Representatives and the order to rescind it, the arrival of military forces, the case of John Wilkes, and the publication of Dickinson's "Letters of an American Farmer."

"Abraham Weatherwise," in the final paragraph of his address to the "Courteous Reader of 1769," observes that his "Almanack<sup>1</sup> being printed on Paper manufactured in this Colony . . . , those who may be kindly pleased to promote and encourage its Sale, in Preference to *others*, published out of the Government, and done on Paper of the Manufacture of Europe, will do a singular Service to their Country, by keeping among us, in these Times of Distress, large Sums of Money, which will otherwise be sent abroad for this Article."

The front cover of this "Weatherwise" almanac for 1769 is adorned by a crude portrait of John Wilkes, with verses underneath as follows:

<sup>1</sup>The *New-England Town and Country Almanack*. Providence, Rhode Island.

Hail Wilkes, immortal in the List of Fame,  
Thy hateful Foes shall hide their Heads in Shame,  
When you the Sweets of *Liberty* restore  
To *Britain's* Isle, and who can wish for more?

This is followed by two pages and a half of matter on Wilkes, entitled "Anecdotes of Mr. Wilkes." The ending is: ". . . it will never, can never be denied, that his steady opposition to illegal general warrants, has been, and ever will be, of lasting benefit to the subjects of Great Britain; that, if he is not virtuous, he is a lover of virtue; and a friend to the civil and religious liberties of mankind; which we have no doubt of his displaying upon all future occasions, if he should sit in the House of Commons." Considering the rather unpromising nature of the material, from the moral point of view, and the fact that Wilkes' seat was still in question, the New England writer has done about all that he could.

Edes and Gill's almanac for 1769 gives us an extended piece of political allegory, inspired by the extreme unpopularity of the Governor, "An Extract from the History of Publius Clodius Britano Americanus" which begins thus: "Publius Clodius Britano Americanus was born in one of the European Islands, his Parents were probably obscure Persons, as upon the most careful Enquiry I can find no one able to give an Account of them; but the great Bustle which our Hero has occasioned in the World, renders it not improper to transmit him down as a Warning to Posterity."<sup>1</sup> In the end-matter of this same issue we have "The Charter of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay" (18½ pages), followed by "The Explanatory Charter granted by His Majesty King George" (2½ pages). This is a good example of one very important feature of the New England almanacs of the period: they put before a very large body of readers the actual text of certain important public documents.

<sup>1</sup>The subject is continued in the almanac for 1770.

Low's (Boston) almanac for 1769 gives its readers this bit of political theory in a quotation from *Cato's Letters*:<sup>1</sup> "unlimited Power is so wild and monstrous a Thing, that however natural it be to desire it, it is as natural to oppose it; nor ought it to be trusted with any mortal Man be his Intentions ever so just: For besides that he will never care to part with it, he will rarely dare.—A FREE PEOPLE will be shewing that they are so, by their FREEDOM OF SPEECH."

Among the contents of Ames's almanac for 1769 are: A general article "On the Manufacture of Silk" (2 pages).

For February, eight lines of verse, beginning:

What! Shall a Tyrant trample on the Laws.

For March, these outspoken verses:

Lives there a Wretch whose base degenerate Soul,  
Can crouch beneath a Tyrant's stern Controll?  
Cringe to his Nod, ignobly Kiss the Hand,  
In galling Chains that binds his native Land!  
Purchas'd by Gold or aw'd by slavish Fear,  
Abandon all his Ancestors held dear!

These verses for April are equally significant:

Tamely, behold that Fruit of glorious Toil,  
The People's Charter made the Ruffian's Spoil?  
In Luxury's Lap, lie screen'd from Cares and Pains,  
And only toil to forge the Subjects Chains?  
Hear, unconcern'd, his injur'd Country's groan,  
Nor stretch an Arm to hurl them from the Town.<sup>2</sup>

The page for April also contains this rhetorical question: "Who would sell his Birth Right for a Mess of Soup, or risque his Constitution for a Sip of Tea?"

Not least interesting in Ames's almanac for 1769 are the crude lines which follow: they show that desire to discover Americans equal to the great British

<sup>1</sup>*Cato's Letters; or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and other important Subjects*, originally published, 1720-23, in the *British Journal*, had reached a sixth edition in 1755.

<sup>2</sup>"Throne" would be the word expected; perhaps "Town" was substituted to avoid legal consequences.

names in literature that is so evident in the poetry and journalism of the early national period of our literature.

Some future Locke with Reason's keenest Ray,  
 Pierce the rich Font of intellectu'l Day.  
 The subtil Ties of Complex Thought unbind,  
 And fix each Movement of the varying Mind.  
 Some second Newton trace Creation's Laws,  
 Through each Dependance to the Sov'reign Cause.  
 Some Milton plan his bold impassion'd Theme,  
 Stretch'd in the Banks of Oxellana's Stream.  
 Another Shakespear shall Ohio claim,  
 And boast its Floods allied to Avon's Fame.  
 There too shall Sculpture warm the featur'd Stone,  
 And Canvas glow with Beauties not its own.

## 1770

A New England almanac for 1770 would naturally be to some degree a reflection of such events as the Virginia "Resolves" and the departure of the unpopular Governor Bernard. Edes and Gill's (Boston) almanac has been selected as a good representative of that year: its ample contents are especially significant in relation to the economic grievances of New England.

The imprint of this almanac is significant: "Boston: Printed [upon Paper Manufactured in this Country] and Sold by Edes & Gill."

Of similar import is a list of eleven merchants "who AUDACIOUSLY continue to counteract the UNITED SENTIMENTS of the BODY of Merchants thro'-out NORTH-AMERICA; by importing British Goods contrary to the Agreement" and the text of the votes passed "At a Meeting of the Merchants & Traders at *Faneuil* Hall, on the 23d January 1770," whereby certain merchants are designated as "obstinate and inveterate Enemies to their Country, and Subverters of the Rights and Liberties of this Continent." It is proposed "that all who with us are exerting themselves to maintain and secure the invaluable Rights of our

Country, may refuse to sell to, buy of, or have any intercourse with the said [persons, whose names are given, being four merchants of Boston<sup>1</sup>] not only during the present Struggle for Liberty, but *for ever* hereafter."

The proceedings of this meeting next recite that

Whereas John Bernard, James & Patrick McMasters and Company, Anne & Elizabeth Cummings, and John Mein, most of whom being Strangers in this Country, have set themselves in open Defiance to the Body of Merchants and others throughout this Continent, by importing British Goods contrary to the known Sentiments of the Merchants, Freeholders, and Inhabitants in every Colony:

Therefore *Voted*, That they have in the most insolent Manner *too long* affronted this People, and endeavored to undermine the Liberties of this Country, to which they owe their *little* Importance, and that they deserve to be driven to that Obscurity, from which they originated, and to *the Hole of the Pit from whence they were digged*.

The proceedings of this meeting also include a record of the following vote concerning the use of tea:

Whereas the greatest Part of the Revenue arising by Virtue of the late Acts of Parliament, is produced from the Duty paid upon TEA, and it appearing to be the Determination of the Ministry to continue the said Duty:

*Voted*, That we will each of us strictly and religiously enjoin it upon our respective Families, totally to abstain from the Use of Tea upon *any Pretence whatever*; and each of us will also recommend to his Country Customers and Friends not to buy, sell, or use it, until the said Duty shall be taken off.

The annual editorial address, usually the most important single feature in the almanacs of this period, runs in part as follows:

We congratulate you that the most infamous G.B. [presumably Governor Bernard] has now come to the End of his Tether; and may all such Governors and Enemies of our natural and Charter Rights and Privileges meet with no better a Fate. The Time to elect Town Officers and Representatives approaches: If you regard the Well-being of your Posterity, do not promote such Men as have kept a *base Neutrality* in these Times of *Danger*, any more than you would those who have *appeared openly*

<sup>1</sup>William Jackson, Theophilus Lillie, John Taylor, and Nathaniel Rogers.



*against your Rights* and on the Side of *Power*, and who for Pensions, Commissions and other Bribes, would have sold us all long ago; but on the contrary, advance *those* to Places of *Honor* and *Trust* who have nobly given up their Ease, their Time, and personal Advantage to preserve America from Slavery and Ruin. By proper Votes and Resolves, strengthen the Hands of the Merchants, who are worthy of double Honor, for shewing themselves so wise and virtuous as to call upon you not to purchase any Goods, that may be imported contrary to an Agreement they have come into, as the most *easy and sure Method* to get clear of the *present imposed Duties*, and to prevent *future ones* being laid upon us to pay American standing Armies, and to support Commissioners and a swarm of dirty Placemen and Pensioners, who we have already experienced to be Disturbers of the Peace, and the proper Caterpillars of the State. Encourage Religion and Virtue, Frugality and Industry in your several Towns: Follow the Example of those Ladies of Boston, Charlestown, Leicester, and other Places, who knowing that the Duties laid on Foreign Teas, is the chief Support of the Commissioners, &c. and that the Use of it is the Cause of all our nervous Disorders, will not now taste it at Home or Abroad, any more than they would Ratsbane: Purchase no *Foreign Nicknacks* and Fopperies and as little as possible of any *outlandish* Wares; for remember, that saving your Money is saving your Country.—Go on as you have wisely begun, to increase your Flocks of Sheep, and the Growth of Flax; and let Ministers and People still go Hand in Hand in encouraging every kind of Home-made Goods; and when you see a Rag on the Floor or in the Street let it remind you that two new Paper Mills have lately been erected. And remember it to be a certain Truth, that with the Blessing of God, manufacturing will soon make you a rich and *independent* People. To be sure instruct your Representatives to continue steady in the *good Cause* now we are coming to the *Pinch . . . the Game*, as it should be remembered for our Warning that many a free People have been *coaxed* to give away or sell those *invaluable* Rights, which their Enemies had in vain attempted to deprive them of by *Force*.—If these few short and broken Hints are regarded as they ought to be, we may then hope that the late Revenue Acts will be repealed, and the Soldiers and Commissioners, &c. removed, when all will be well.

Even the verses at the top of the twelve pages, one for each month, which constitute the workaday part of the almanac, are evidence of its preoccupation with public affairs.

'Tis gone, the memorable Year is past,  
 And honest Execrations seal'd its last;  
 Plagues, Taxes, lawless Rage and ranc'rous Foes  
 Distract our Cities, and forbid Repose;  
 Tho' Heav'n's rich Bounties load the generous Land,  
 They snatch the Harvest from the Labourer's Hand.  
 (January)

E'en yet one Hour of Freedom, one blest Hour,  
 May sure be rescu'd from the Gripe of Power;  
 Let us improve the poor, the scanty Space,  
 The mock Reprieve, the Penury of Grace;  
 Assert your Rights and brave the menac'd Rod,  
 Wouldst thou be free and happy, hope in God.  
 (February)

What shall we think, can People give away  
 Both for themselves and Sons, their native Sway;  
 Then they are left, defenceless, to the Sword  
 Of each unbounded, arbitrary Lord;  
 And Laws are vain by which we Right enjoy,  
 If Kings unquestion'd can those Laws destroy.—Dryden.  
 (September)

The end matter begins with lists of officers of the government of Massachusetts Bay; Members of the House of Representatives; Officers of the Courts; Justices of the Peace: Harvard College; Ministers; Military Officers; the Ancient and Honourable Artillery Company;<sup>1</sup> Officers of the Town of Boston, &c. &c.

Finally comes "A List of Commissioners and other Officers of the Revenue, with their respective Salaries." The list begins with the five commissioners whose salaries at £5000 each amount to £25,000 (Old Tenor). Messrs. Green and Russell are listed as Printers and Messrs. Mein and Fleming as Stationers

<sup>1</sup>With the following footnote to explain why no Captains of this Company are given for 1686-90: "Sir Edmund Andros upon his Arrival, turned out all the Magistrates, Judges, and Officers of the Militia, chosen by the People, and appointed others in their Room; he overturned by Degrees the whole Constitution; and stretched his Prerogative to such an Height, as made it impossible for the People to live under him; which prepared the Way for the Revolution that soon followed."

to the Revenue Office. Their salaries come to £10,900. To that the addition for "blanks," incidental charges, and secret services is estimated at £25,320, making £76,220. Then come Admiralty, Judges, &c., after all which we are told:

We cannot say that these are all upon the American Pension List; as a Veil of Darkness is carefully thrown over it, to prevent if possible the Public Odium, and to answer other Purposes of Ministry.

A Number of new Revenue and Custom-House Officers thro' the Colonies, which cannot be distinctly enumerated;—Add to these a Swarm of petty Officers, Spies and Informers, whose Pay and Rewards cannot yet be ascertained.

Behold Americans part of a List of Officers and Placemen unknown to the Colonies before the late Revenue Acts, all supported by Taxes drawn from you, without your Consent.—A small Specimen of what you are to expect, if these Acts should be continued.

## 1771

To represent the New England almanacs for 1771, a significant article from Ames on non-importation will serve. Under the title "A Discourse on what is not done, and on what may be done, from a late eminent writer," it begins thus: "Let the world go as it will, do your Duty indifferently and always speak well of the Prior,' is an ancient maxim among the Monks; but it is capable of leaving the Convent in mediocrity, negligence and contempt." It ends: "What fruit is the good seed sown likely to produce in the minds of our great, who can supinely behold the Philadelphians not only outstrip us in the liberal arts but also in the mechanic Arts, who instead of importing immense quantities of British manufactures, have their ships enter their ports laden with cash and manufacturers from England. Golden Fruits of the Non-importation Agreement!"

## 1772

Among the claims of the New England almanac upon the student of history is the fact that it so fre-

quently enlarged the reader's knowledge by telling him who the eminent writers on Liberty were, both in the American colonies and in England. Ames's almanac for 1772 does that in two important cases.<sup>1</sup>

The first is John Dickinson of Pennsylvania, "The Patriotic American Farmer . . . Who with Attic Eloquence, and Roman Spirit, hath asserted the Liberties of the British Colonies in America." Below an atrocious engraving of Dickinson, who stands with his elbow resting on "Magna Charta" and with a scroll inscribed "Farmer's Letters" in his hand, are these lines of bad but historically interesting verse:

'Tis nobly done to Stem Taxation's Rage,  
And raise the Thoughts of a degenerate Age,  
For Happiness and joy, from Freedom spring;  
But Life in Bondage is a worthless Thing.

These lines, curiously enough, are a reminder that Addison's *Cato*, at least as a political document, had a certain vitality in the Massachusetts of 1772. For they are obviously adapted from Eusden's verses to Addison on his *Cato*:

'Tis nobly done thus to enrich the stage,  
And raise the thoughts of a degenerate age;  
To show how endless joys from freedom spring,  
How life in bondage is a worthless thing.

When Nathaniel Ames made these lines partly his own and decorated his almanac with them, he perhaps remembered that performance of *Cato*, and the rehearsals for it, which he certainly witnessed and perhaps took part in, as a Harvard undergraduate in 1758.<sup>2</sup>

The other friend of Liberty to whom Ames's almanac pays the tribute of a very badly executed engraving is Catharine Macaulay Graham (1731-

<sup>1</sup>It also, of course, contains additional material of the various sorts already indicated. For instance (on the page for January), it boldly remarks that "Justice will overtake even KINGS."

<sup>2</sup>See his diary (*Dedham Historical Register*, I) for July 3, 6, and 14, 1758.

1791), whose violently republican "History of England" (1763-71), handsomely printed and bound in the style of his "republican classics," was presented to the library of Harvard College by Thomas Hollis, who wrote in the first volume: "'Liberty the Nurse of all great Wits,' as see beautifully illustrated, o Youth, ingenuous, of Harvard College, in the *Areopagitica* of the MATCHLESS John Milton.—T.H."

In recommending Mrs. Macaulay to his readers, Nathaniel Ames was endorsing one of the very outspoken liberals of the time. For in the introduction (p. xi) of her first volume Mrs. Macaulay had written: "Whoever attempts to remove the limitations necessary to render monarchy consistent with Liberty, are rebels in the worst sense; rebels to the laws of their country, the law of nature, the law of reason, and the law of God." And on the execution of Charles I she had gone so far as to declare (iv, 433<sup>1</sup>) that "to attempt the defence of that eminent act of justice, the King's death, on the narrow bottom of constitutional forms, is to betray the cause of Liberty, and confound both truth and reason."<sup>2</sup>

## 1773

We shall again let the New England almanacs of a year be represented by Ames, whose issue for 1773 has a certain grave force, especially to be seen in his general article of a page and a half on "How a Nation may be ruin'd and reform'd." Two topics are discussed: "There are two pernicious things in the government of a nation which are scarce ever remedied. The first is an *unjust* and too *violent authority* in Kings: the other is *luxury*, which viciates the morals of the people."

The first topic is thus treated: "When Kings acknowledge no law but their own will, and give a loose

<sup>1</sup>Misnumbered 415.

<sup>2</sup>For evidence of Mrs. Macaulay's popularity in America in 1769, see Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Transactions*, xxvi, 188, 191.

to their most exorbitant passions, they may do any thing; but by this very power they usurp of doing any thing, they sap the foundation of their regal power; they go by no certain rules, and govern by no fixed maxims; all try who shall flatter them most: they loose their people and have nothing left them but slaves, whose number diminishes every day. Who shall tell them the truth? Who shall set bounds to this torrent? Every thing falls before it: the wisest fly away, hide themselves and groan in secret; nothing, but a sudden violent revolution, can bring back this exorbitant power into its natural channel; nay some times the very means made use of to reduce it, irrecoverably destroy it. Nothing threatens so fatal a fall as an authority that is strain'd too high: it is like a bow that is bent, which at last breaks on a sudden if the string be not slacken'd. But who is he that will dare to slacken it? A King thus corrupted can scarce expect to be reformed without a kind of miracle."

The tone is quiet enough, but the writer is not afraid to mention the possibility of "a sudden violent revolution."

Outspoken also were the following verses which appeared on the front cover of the almanac, and which, we happen to know,<sup>1</sup> were written by Ames himself:

Our great Forefathers, fir'd with virtuous Rage,  
 Did all the Perils of the Deep engage,  
 To fly those Realms where proud tyrannic Sway,  
 And horrid Persecution scout for Prey;  
 Their native Soil and youthful Scenes they fled,  
 Where bounteous Nature all her Blessings shed,  
 And sister Art had ransack'd foreign Shores,  
 Made every Dainty croud their British Stores,  
 Had rais'd the ample Dome and lofty Spire,  
 And spacious Theatre, w[h]ere Crouds admire  
 The mighty Feats perform'd in ancient Days,  
 That spring to Life, reviv'd in English Plays.

<sup>1</sup>From Ames's diary for April 20, 1772.

These Pleasures all, our Fathers left behind,  
 But bro't the Seeds of Science in their Mind,  
 Here planted first fair *Freedom* with Applause,  
 Which gives the Relish to all other Joys:  
 Guard then the Plant,—this savage Land adorn,  
 This Work they left their Children then unborn.

1775

Though the almanacs of 1774 are by no means uninteresting,<sup>1</sup> those of 1775 demand so full an account that we shall turn to them without delay.

West's *New-England Almanack* (Providence, Rhode Island) bears on its front cover twelve lines of verse, of which the last six are:

Americans! for Freedom firmly join,  
 Unite your Councils, and your Force combine,  
 Disarm Oppression—prune Ambition's Wings,  
 And stifle Tories, e'er they dart their Stings:  
 And then your plunder'd Rights shall be restor'd,  
 And Tyrants tremble when you grasp the Sword.

Later in the same number (November) are these lines:

The Genius of America to her Sons.  
 Are Americans born to bear  
 The galling weight of Slav'ry's chain?  
 A patriot's noble ardor share,  
 And freedom's sacred cause maintain.  
 Arise, my sons, shew your unconquer'd might,  
 A freeman best defends a freeman's right.  
 Look back on every deathless deed  
 For which your sires recorded stand;

<sup>1</sup>Ames, for example, recommends Locke's *Essay on Government*, briefly but very strongly: "As it is unpardonable for a Navigator to be without his charts, so it is for a *Senator* to be without His, which is Lock's *Essay on Government*?"

Ames also has a longish article (about a page and a half) on agriculture and wine-making, led up to by an important paragraph urging that such economic activities "will turn to infinitely greater profit than manufacturing, and . . . will, instead of discouragement meet with the protection of our Mother Country as soon as we have brought her to her former senses."

To battle let your heroes lead  
 The sons of toil, a hardy band;  
 The sword on each rough peasant's thigh be worn,  
 And war's green wreaths the shepherd's front adorn.

But much the most important feature of West's Rhode Island almanac for 1775 is a three-page general article entitled "A Brief View of the present Controversy between Great-Britain and America." It will be noted that "America"—not "the American colonies"—is here spoken of as if it were already a separate country. The complete text of this article follows:

In our last year's Almanack was inserted "a brief historical account of the rise and settlement of Rhode-Island government." We then proposed to enlarge and continue that account in our present Almanack; but in the course of the preceding year some very surprizing and important events have taken place, which perhaps will render some observations upon another subject more useful and agreeable to our readers in general.

Never perhaps was there a period more important to America than the present. Great-Britain is now carrying into execution a claim, assumed but a little while since, and which, if acceded to, will involve us in the most abject slavery. The year 1774<sup>1</sup> will hereafter be reckoned as a great æra in the history of America. The blocking up the port of Boston, the metropolis of a powerful government, will, in all probability, bring on a decision of the grand dispute now subsisting between Great-Britain and America. Britain claims the right of taxing America, whensoever, wheresoever and how much soever she pleases, without our consent, and of making *laws binding upon us in all cases whatsoever*. We think that we ought to have a voice in the disposal of *our own property*. The dispute is not whether the tea destroyed at Boston shall be paid for, or whether it shall cost us three-pence more in the pound; but, whether Great-Britain shall *tax America at all?* "If they have a right to levy a tax of *one penny* upon us" (says the illustrious Farmer) "they have a right to levy a *million*; for where does their right stop? An any given number of pence, shillings or pounds?—To attempt to limit their right, after granting it to exist at all, is as contrary to reason, as granting it to exist at all is contrary to justice. If they have any right to tax us, then

<sup>1</sup>Note year. Was this a reprint? Of what?



whether *our own* money shall continue in our pockets or not, depends no longer *on us*, but on *them*."

"Taxation and representation" (says the great Earl of Chatham) "are inseparably united: God hath joined them: No British Parliament can separate them; to endeavour to do it, is to stab our vitals. This position is founded on the laws of nature; it is more, it is itself an eternal law of nature:—For whatever is a man's own, is absolutely his own, and no man hath a right to take it from him without his consent, either expressed by himself or his representative; whoever attempts it, attempts an injury;—whoever does it, commits a robbery;—he throws down the distinction between liberty and slavery." These are the sentiments of the greatest men in the English nation, and of every man of sense and virtue in all North-America, except a few *narrow-soul'd* selfish tools, who would be glad "to owe their greatness to their country's ruin." The letters which some have written to people of influence in England, recommending the abolition of our charters—"an *abridgment of English liberties*"—and the introduction of an arbitrary power, sufficiently shew us who are our greatest enemies. Nothing can more deserve the just indignation and resentment of an abused people, than those infamous wretches, whose names will be execrated by all posterity, the *mandamus Counsellors* of a neighbouring government, who stubbornly continue to do their utmost to enslave their country. A few persons, with a view of aggrandizing themselves, and growing eminent by the misfortunes of others, have set on foot the destructive measures now pursued by the British Parliament; measures which, if persisted in, are big with the fate of Europe and America, and ruinous to both. The wisest men in Britain strongly recommend to us to oppose them by *every means*. We must oppose, or we must be slaves. It is possible that another revolution may soon take place—that Britain (as the patriotic and benevolent Bishop of St. Asaph<sup>1</sup> supposes) is blindly rushing on to her own destruction.

When a man, only because he has more strength and greater bones and sinews than his neighbour, undertakes to deprive him of his life, liberty or property, resistance is justifiable: So when a nation, only because they have more strength and

<sup>1</sup>Jonathan Shipley (1714–1788), Bishop of St. Asaph from 1769. He was an intimate friend of Franklin, who (*Works*, ed. Sparks, VIII, 40) declared in a letter written from London in 1773 that Bishop Shipley by his "liberal and generous sentiments, relating to the conduct of government here towards America" had "hazarded the displeasure of the court, and of course the prospect of futher preferment." In his famous published (but undelivered) speech of 1774 Shipley said: "I look upon North America as the only great nursery of freemen left on the face of the earth." There is a picture of "The Patriotic Bishop, Dr. Jonathan Shipley" in Daboll's *New-England Almanack* (New London, Connecticut) for 1775.

power, attempt to invade the liberty, or unjustly to take the property of a weaker state, opposition with the sword for their defence, even unto blood, would be justified, nay even is commanded, by the laws of God and nature. Such is the importance and situation of North-America, that very probably war may be brought into our territories, even in our days. France and Spain remember their losses, and perhaps, did they deem themselves able, would be glad to add this whole continent to their dominions. Great-Britain, lead by mistaken principles, seems fond of exercising a despotic rule over this continent; she has established the Roman Catholic religion in Canada—in a country of greater extent, and capable of supporting more inhabitants than Great-Britain itself. All her dispositions towards America, lately, have seemed inimical. We know not what may be attempted; fire and sword may be unexpectedly sent into our country. If the Ministry succeed in their designs, the French and Indians of Canada will be at their disposal, to pour in upon our back settlements.

We ought therefore to prepare for our defence, and accustom ourselves to arms and discipline. These colonies, like the little kingdoms of ancient Greece, are growing into empire; they have spread and are spreading every day through many latitudes, over a vast extent of territory, of whose width as yet no bounds have been discovered, wherein are supposed to be five millions of inhabitants. The Americans are descended from brave ancestors; they inherit their spirit; they, in general, love their liberty; they want not courage: It is discipline alone in which they are exceeded by the bravest troops that ever trod the earth. From the martial spirit which seems lately to have diffused itself over the country, we may hope that our militia will soon be on a footing equal with any troops in the world. History shews us what a militia, fighting in their own country, even in a bad cause, and much more so in a good one, are capable of doing.—In the late rebellion in Scotland, the King's troops, though considerably superior in numbers, were beaten and put to flight in their pitched battles. The rebels were however finally conquered in the field, though they *now* seem to have the ascendancy in the *cabinet*. The Rhode-Island *militia*, in the last war, were honourably distinguished by their bravery and courage. The taking the important fortress of Louisburgh, at Cape-Breton, which gave peace to Europe, in the year 1745—the defeat of the French army, commanded by Baron Dieskau, and taking their General by Sir William Johnson, in the year 1756—the defeat which Sir William Johnson with only 600 men, gave to the French army, consisting of 1700, commanded by M. D'Aubry—and the taking Niagara, on the twenty-fourth day of July, 1759—all which achieve-

ments were performed by the forces of the colonies, are sufficient proofs of the military courage of English Americans. Art and discipline are very necessary and important in war.—The histories of all countries shew us, that a few regular well-disciplined troops have worsted armies, not so well disciplined, very far superior in number to themselves.—It is not so much the multitude of numbers, and undisciplined courage, as art and regularity which carry the victory. It is therefore incumbent upon us all to study the art of war, that we may be ready, if necessitated to have recourse to arms. But at the same time it is a duty highly incumbent upon us to promote concord and unanimity—"as much as in us lieth, if possible, to live peaceably with all men," and never to apply to the *ratio ultima*, as long as it can possibly be avoided, and our liberty secured.—May the Parliament of Great-Britain see the *injustice and impolicy of taxing America*, before civil distraction, the result of imperiousness and oppression, shall enervate the English empire dividing against itself.—May they be induced to repeal all the acts which have caused such universal uneasiness throughout America.—May our land yet be a land of peace; a land of liberty—the seat of virtue—the asylum of the oppressed.—May there yet be a constitutional and perpetual union and harmony between Great-Britain and America, and may they both for ever hereafter, in *one* great empire, be free, flourishing and happy.

Ames for 1775 is, as usual, important. Let three items suffice.

The first is the brief but suggestive observation opposite the day (January 30) which was the anniversary of the execution of Charles I: "K. Cha. I established a *Memento for Tyrants*."

The second is the series of continuous verses at the top of the twelve pages (January to December) which constitute the body of the almanac. Not for their poetic quality are these lines especially important, or because no earlier almanac had contained such exhortations as

Stand forth the champions of your country's cause,  
Nor fear the traitors aided by their laws.

What one does find important in these verses is, first, a certain practical realism and confidence about the manner and outcome of the actual fighting,—should

fighting come. And this in spite of periphrases and an inept touch generally. For example:

Our practis'd huntsmen, sure of flying game,  
 Ne'er fight in phalanx when they've surer aim.  
 No dazzling arms our steady marksmen hold,  
 No heavy panoply, or casque of gold.  
 But sure as death, the trusty piece he bears,  
 And fears no wild, or powder'd son of Mars.

And, secondly, one commends the shrewdness of the author—poet though he may not be—for reminding his readers that not by mere physical bravery and good marksmanship could they gain their cause. He bids them also consider

How one grand centre must the whole survey,  
 By posts and couriers it's resolves convey.  
 How civil wisdom must the arms controul,  
 To act in concert, like one mighty soul!

The third item in Ames's almanac for 1775 is perhaps the most interesting of all. It is found on the page opposite that for the month of December and is entitled "The Method of Making Gun-Powder. By following which Directions every Person may easily supply himself with a sufficiency of that Commodity."<sup>1</sup>

To sum up: the New Englander who had saved his almanacs since 1766, possessed in 1775, even if he had nothing else to read, the means of becoming well prepared to take an intelligent part in the great events that lay just ahead.

1. He had a fairly adequate record of the recent great public events.
2. He had the text of various charters and other important public documents.

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<sup>1</sup>Bickerstaff's Connecticut almanac for 1776 follows suit: its very title page advertises as the first of its special features for the year "The Method of making Gunpowder, which at this Juncture may be carried into Execution in a small Way, by almost every Farmer in his own Habitation."

For further information on the manufacture of gunpowder in early New England, see William B. Weedon, *Economic and Social History of New England, 1620-1789*, II, 772-3.

3. He had some hundreds of lines of the better English poets, especially of what they had written in praise of Liberty, and a lot of native verse, mostly on that theme.

4. He had been urged to become more politically minded, had been given a considerable amount of political doctrine about his rights and liberties, and had been told where he could find more.

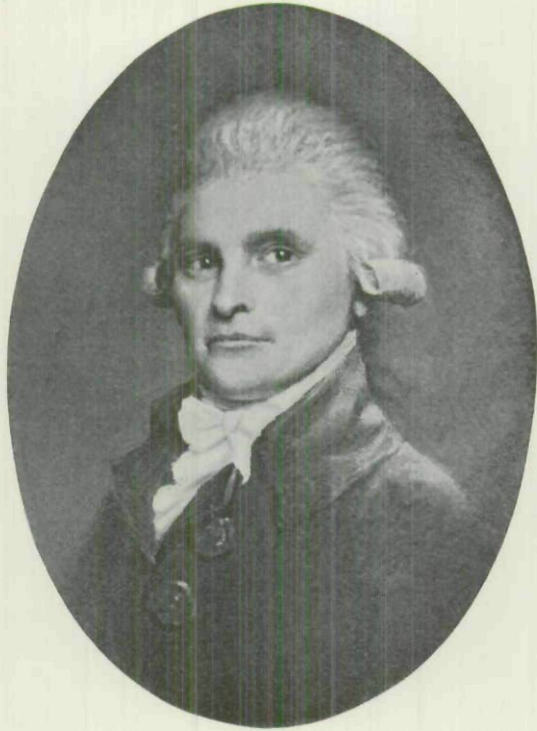
5. He had been introduced to the idea of economic resistance and had been shown several practical methods of decreasing his economic dependence upon the Mother Country.

6. He had been told who his best friends were in England,—Chatham, Bishop Shipley, Wilkes, and Mrs. Macaulay. He knew about John Dickinson. He knew something about the Virginia statesmen and had been urged to greet a Virginian as his brother.

7. He had even been introduced to the idea of armed resistance and told how he could make his own little store of gunpowder.

All this, barring occasional quips and doggerel verse, had been presented to him with a fairly creditable dignity and restraint, tending to arouse a patriotism not incompatible with a love of God and of peace.

Therefore, it is submitted, the New England almanacs from 1766 to 1775 establish a presumption that the body of almanacs of which they form a part deserve more attention than they have apparently received from those who would understand the growth, among the rank and file, of American thought just before the Revolution.



*Samuel Stearns*

*From a daguerreotype of a miniature by James Earle*

An engraving, by T. Robinson, from this portrait, appeared as a frontispiece  
in "Dr. Stearns's Tour from London to Paris" (London, 1790)

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