The First Press in Providence

A Study in Social Development

BY LAWRENCE C. WROTH

HISTORIANS of several sorts, book collectors, amateurs and practitioners of typography found themselves in the year 1939 entering upon the celebration of three important anniversaries in the history of the press. The first of these, of course, had to do with the invention of the printing art. The conception and development of the type mould were the essential factors in the invention of printing from movable metal types. The testimony adduced in a tedious lawsuit at Strasburg in 1439 made it clear that the defendant in that suit, Johan Gutenberg of Mainz, had recently completed the invention of certain mechanical implements which, it is generally believed today, were the printing press and the type mould. Just one hundred years after this beginning, less than half a century after the discovery of America, the earliest press of the New World was set up in Mexico City by Juan Pablos, a journeyman of the house of Cromberger of Seville. Through some twist of circumstance, it was again a full century that intervened between events celebrated in our year of anniversaries. In 1639 Stephen Daye, brought to this country by the Rev. Jose Glover, began the operation of a press in Cambridge, Massachusetts, establishing by that action the earliest printing house of the United States and the first to print in the English language in the New World of America.

The coincidence of these anniversaries was responsible for many celebrations and for the expression of innumerable

affirmations upon the changes worked in the life of the nations by the coming of the press. Despite a real sympathy with Sir William Berkeley's dictum that "learning has brought disobedience, and heresy and sects into the world, and *printing* has divulged them," one must agree with the anniversary orators that in general the changes brought about by the press have been beneficent in character. None the less there are moods in which one feels constrained to examine accepted generalizations in the light of specific experience; in such a case as this, for example, to inquire into the degree and kind of alteration brought about in the life of a community, a New England town, let us say, by the operations of a printing press within its bounds.[1] So it came about that in the months following the printing anniversaries I sought for an answer to this inquiry in the experience of my own community, in the life of Providence, Rhode Island, in the years of its typographical beginnings.

THE "NOBLE BUSINESS OF PRINTING"

At the Annual Meeting of the Providence Library Company, held on September 5, 1763, the Proprietors passed a resolution which might serve as a text if I were disposed to sermonize on the subject of the press. "It is voted," says the record, "that Mr. William Goddard Printer in Consideration of his eminent usefulness to this Part of the Colony by introducing and carrying on amongst us the ingenious and noble Business of Printing shall have free Liberty to use the Books belonging to the Library. . . ."

Not every printer in every town was so fortunate as William Goddard in the recognition he received from the intellectual leaders of his community. But though the resolu-

[1] The address from which this paper was adapted was delivered at Brown University on January 18, 1939, as one of the John Franklin Jameson Lectures, a series on the aspects of life in the colonial New England town, sponsored by the University. It is printed here through the courtesy of the Corporation of Brown University.

tion of the Library Company proprietors displayed at its best the attitude of the New England town towards the first man who came to it with press and types, the difference expressed in its phrases from the normal showing of appreciation was more in degree than in kind. Barring the circumstance that modern man is unable to employ with ease and without self-consciousness the happy magniloquence of the eighteenth century, I might have chosen for my own some such phrase as "the ingenious and noble business of printing" to represent the thought and feeling of the period in contemplating the art by which events are recorded and ideas conveyed from mind to mind. It was still possible for the man of the mid-eighteenth century, three hundred years after Gutenberg's invention, to regard the mechanics of printing as "ingenious," and still possible, after those centuries of familiarity with the effects of the printed word, for the man of sensibility to think of the printer as carrying on a "noble business."

This attitude towards the press was not peculiar to New England. Almost the first issue of the William Parks printing house in Williamsburg, and, incidentally, the earliest contribution of English America to the literature of typography, was a long poem in praise of the art of printing, in which the community was congratulated upon the blessings about to descend upon it as the result of the coming of the press. Mr. John Markland, the author of this *Typographia, an Ode on Printing*, hopeful in his philosophy, exalted in his language, thus expressed his century's view of the function of the Press:

> Happy the *Art*, by which we learn
> The Gloss of Errors to detect,
> The Vice of Habits to correct,
> And sacred Truths: from Falshood to discern!
> By which we take a far-stretch'd View
> And learn our Fathers Vertues to pursue
> Their Follies to eschew. . . .

And, going further, this admiring devotee of literary culture was able to poeticize the very act of typesetting. "For this," he wrote,

> . . . the careful *Artist* wakes,
> And o'er his countless Brood he stands,
> His numerous Hoards,
> Of *speechless* Letters, *unform'd* Words,
> *Unjointed* Questions, and *unmeaning* Breaks,
> Which into Order rise, and Form, at his Commands.

Towards the end of the century, in the small town of Lexington in the Kentucky wilderness, the proprietor of a newly established press described himself as the "first adventurer" in those parts "in a business which has been chiefly instrumental in bringing mankind from a state of blindness and slavery to their present advancement in knowledge and freedom." The Age of Faith had gone by, and the Age of Reason had come, but the faith of eighteenth-century man in Reason and its implements, intellectual and material, was complete, naïve, and as unquestioning as that of Joan of Arc in her Voices or St. Teresa in the golden arrow that pierced her heart.

BEFORE THE COMING OF THE PRESS

But coming back to our Rhode Island town and the local application of the text, we find in the resolution of the proprietors of the Providence Library Company another phrase that seems especially significant in this inquiry. Mr. Goddard was being shown this courtesy, it seems, for "introducing and carrying on amongst us" in "this Part of the Colony" the business of printing. Until the year 1727 the printing of Providence and of all Rhode Island had been sent to London or to Boston for its execution. The book with the celebrated punning title, *George Fox Digg'd out of his Burrowes*, Boston, 1676, was the only one of Roger Williams' numerous and important works to be printed elsewhere

than in London. The first collection of the Acts and Laws of the colony was printed in Boston in 1719. But London was far away and Boston itself at an inconvenient distance. We recognize very little in the way of printed expression proceeding from this colony in the half-century between the death of Roger Williams and the establishment of a press in Newport in 1727. Even the government in that long period made no effort towards the regular embodiment in type of its session laws and proceedings of assembly.

But though the coming to Newport of James Franklin, brother and former master of Benjamin, offered the government of the colony and the inhabitants of its chief town the benefits of an active press, there was little comfort to be derived by the people of Providence from his presence in the nearby city. Sending printing jobs to Newport was expensive, and often the need would have passed before the job could be completed and returned to the customer. From that period between 1727 and 1762, when Providence acquired its own press, there remain a bare handful of books or pamphlets of Newport printing which had a Providence origin. When the *Newport Mercury* was established in 1758, Providence began occasionally to make use of the facilities it offered for municipal publicity. "A List of Numbers draw[i]n[g] Prizes in the Providence-Library-Lottery, in June, 1760" occupied the whole front page of the *Mercury* for July 15, 1760, and nearly a column on page three of that same issue was taken by the managers of a lottery for purchase of land for the Providence courthouse, the stately building now standing on North Main Street which we know as the Old State House. But in the other columns of that paper there was no item of news from Providence nor a single advertisement of one of its active merchants. Nor was the case different from this in regard to the relations of Providence people with the press of Boston. Their isola-

tion was of such a character that they were constrained to do without the immense convenience, to put it on no higher basis, that the press brought into the affairs of a community.

William Goddard Sets Up His Press

The condition we have just contemplated as existing in Providence was changed permanently by the coming to the town of William, the son of Dr. Giles Goddard, of New London, and of his wife Sarah, born Updike, and by that circumstance a Rhode Islander of distinguished ancestry. In his apprenticeship to James Parker of New Haven and New York, William Goddard had learned the art of printing and the business of newspaper and book publishing from one notable among his contemporaries for skill in craftsmanship and enterprise in affairs. Goddard had hardly completed his articles when he heard the Macedonian cry from Providence. It was doubtless his mother's Rhode Island connection that opened his ear to it, and judging from later events, or, rather, guessing upon the basis of later events, it was Stephen Hopkins, the leading merchant and first citizen of the town, who uttered the call. At any rate the young man went over to help, armed with a good printing-house equipment and an unusual degree of technical skill and taste in its employment.

In the conduct of this first printing venture of the city, begun in July, 1762, Goddard was aided by the business acumen, good judgment, and strong maternal affection of Sarah, his mother, and by the practical skill in printing, soon acquired, of his sister, Mary Katherine. Despite the auspicious circumstances of his beginning and the stimulus to success provided by the women of his family, his career in the city of his first establishment was brief and, from the financial standpoint, disappointing to the ambitious and

impatient young man. It is not our business at this time to follow his later career as the center of political storms in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, or to do more than mention in a few words his great and generally unrecognized national service as the founder, single-handed and on his own initiative, of that same United States Post Office system which this morning brought a handful of assorted mail to each of our front doors. Upon this figure of a man who stood daily at work in the printing-office "opposite the Court House," and later in "the Store of Judge Jenckes, near the Great Bridge," or in his book shop "at the Sign of Shakespear's Head," we are able to fit the garment worn by the printer of all New England towns, though here and there the garment may show some stretching of its seams. I could almost say, indeed, of all English-American towns, for the problems of most of the communities of the Eastern seaboard were much the same, and there was a great similarity in the solutions offered by the printers who served them. The output of their presses fitted into the same categories, and there was little difference in content between the *Newport Gazette* and the *Virginia Gazette* of Williamsburg. A subtle reader of them might comment upon the fact that while Rhode Island merchants could, without loss of caste, advertise slaves for sale, in Virginia it was respectable only to buy them. There are other differences for him who is seeking them, but they lie well beneath the surface.

THE CUSTOMARY SERVICE OF THE COLONIAL PRESS

The Blank Form

It is our business now to consider just what was the place of the printing house in this community of some 3,500 inhabitants, a seaport already busy, prosperous, and

exceedingly ambitious to become busier and still more prosperous and to force its proud sister, Newport, to take second place in the political and economic affairs of the family. Suppose we begin our consideration of the printer's place in the town by recalling a certain humble service we are apt to overlook in the indulgence of our interest in the political and literary productions of the printing house. I mean the workaday production known as the blank form. If we give a moment's thought to it we realize how often as private citizens we are called upon to fill in blanks with names, dates, and other specific bits of information which, completed by a signature, turn a partly printed piece of paper into a legal document. We may visualize the matter by thinking at once of the simplest and the most complicated business procedures of our own experience, the filling in of a blank cheque, and, at the other end of the scale, an income tax return. Ordinary citizens of today make use of blank forms of one sort or another with considerable frequency: the lawyer and his office folk, the court official, business men of all grades and kinds use them every day of their lives. In the Providence of 1762 the case was no different except that all these multifarious business and legal forms had customarily to be written out completely in longhand for each individual use, though it is true that sometimes, when printed forms produced in Newport and Boston were available, this laborious procedure was avoided. On October 30th of that year Goddard advertised that he had for sale "all sorts of Blanks used in this Colony, neatly printed," a statement which he elaborated a week later by announcing his ability to supply wholesale or retail, neatly printed, and cheap—"Policies of Insurance, Portage Bills, Bills of Lading and Sale, Letters of Attorney, Administration Bonds, common Bonds, Deeds, Writs, and Executions." Here was evidence of a small revolution in local business methods, for

because of the printed blanks office procedure must inevitably have been speeded up, leisure acquired in the counting rooms for other employment, clerks thrown out of jobs, and the professional copyist or engrosser forced back upon the writing of contracts and other specific instruments for which law or custom could provide no set form of words. It was probably because of business thus lost that in the *Providence Gazette* of October 1, 1763, Silas Downer, attorney-at-law and scrivener, advertised himself as engaging "to write cheaper than any Scrivener in America" and to give free legal advice to all who allowed him the writing of their contracts. What seems a still more unusual bid for patronage, Mr. Downer also announced that "All such as want Letters written to their Friends abroad, may have them done by him at their own Price." It is probable that a year earlier than this Mr. Downer's office had been the chief source of the business forms of all kinds mentioned in Goddard's advertisement. An upset in old custom of a character similar to this had occurred in Newport years earlier when the acts and proceedings of assembly had first been given regularly to the printer for record and duplication. Thereafter, as always before, the newly-made laws were proclaimed at Newport by beat of drum, read to the people thus assembled, and, within thirty days, a handwritten copy of them sent to each township in the colony. At the session of October, 1747, however, the township copies were ordered to be printed instead of written in longhand. The chief reason for the change given in the preamble of the act was the avoidance of delay in distribution. "Moreover," the preamble tersely concludes, "it is conceived that it will be cheaper to the colony to have them printed." Everybody must have been happy about this change except the clerks in the Secretary's office and the professional scriveners, but probably even these did not

realize that the machine age, with all its social implications, had made its modest entry into the community.

The Almanac

A town such as Providence, a seaport surrounded by an agricultural community, based its life upon certain elemental facts of nature which today are so indirect in their effect upon most of us that generally we are able to disregard them in planning our daily lives. But Providence citizens of the period which we are discussing had need every day to know the time of high tide in Narragansett Bay, and to keep in mind the hours of sun setting and sun rising. To them, on sea or land, the changes of the moon had meaning as related to tides and to seed time and harvest. It was to their interest also to know the schedule of the postriders, and the days upon which the local courts sat for judicial proceedings. An almanac adapted to the local meridian and containing local information of the sort suggested was, therefore, an aid of conspicuous usefulness to the machinery of life in an eighteenth-century seaport. There had been, it is true, no absolute dearth of almanacs in Providence before the establishment there of a press. Poor Richard had come to the town from Philadelphia, as he had gone also, under the propulsion of his celebrated maker, to every English colony of North America and to many of the English West Indies. The Franklins in Newport and various printers of Boston had seen to it that Mr. Oliphant, the Providence bookseller, as well as a number of those travelling booksellers who plied the roads of colonial America, should sell in that city the almanacs of their publication. But, desirable as these were for their general astronomical information, a Boston, New York, or Philadelphia almanac was hardly the same thing as an almanac calculated for the

meridian of Providence with the tides of Narragansett Bay and other local information authoritatively set forth. That need was met, for the year 1763 and thereafter, when in the autumn of 1762, Goddard began the publication of Benjamin West's almanac under the title *An Almanack, for the Year of our Lord Christ, 1763 . . . calculated for the Meridian of Providence.* It was from this beginning that West continued for more than forty years to provide Providence, Boston, and Halifax with various series of almanacs, some of them bearing the pseudonym, Isaac Bickerstaff. Goddard's enterprise thus created an outlet for the talent of a self-taught mathematician and astronomer long resident in the town. Supported by Stephen Hopkins, merchant and statesman, and by Joseph Brown, merchant, architect, and scientist, Benjamin West some years later gave Providence, in the minds of contemporary scholars, an honorable place among the cities by his publication of *An Account of the Observation of Venus upon the Sun, the Third Day of June, 1769.* That astronomical observation of the Transit of Venus is memorialized for Providence people by reason of the fact that West set up his instruments upon the brow of the hill where the present Transit Street prepares to cross Benefit and begin its descent to the water.

Mr. West's almanac became essential to the householder of the Providence Plantations. Many persons bespoke interleaved copies of the little book, and upon the clean, blank pages thus provided kept a brief diary, a line-a-day book of the owner's personal history for the year, recording weather, the planting and harvesting of garden or fields, the prices of butter and eggs, the more important sales and purchases, the births of children, the deaths and burials of neighbors and relatives, all the facts and incidents, in brief, small and large, which made up the history of the family establishment in that year. The little book lay or hung

conveniently somewhere in the house for the daily use of young and old. Because of another development the American almanac underwent in the period of which we speak, it became an educational factor of a new kind in the life of those who through long custom read the homespun philosophy with which it was embellished, for these same persons were inevitably led by curiosity, if by nothing else, to read and ponder the political essays which crept into its pages as thoughtful Americans began to foresee the constitutional struggles of the last half of the century. Not many years ago a historian gave all of us much to think about when he analyzed this aspect of the American almanac and traced the lines by which its influence must have been brought successfully to bear upon the crystallization of opinion that made possible the successful outcome of the War of Independence.[2]

In these customary issues of the colonial American press, the blank form and the almanac, and in the newspaper of which we shall speak in the ensuing section, we find the printer performing utilitarian service to his neighbors which brought him, when it was acceptably done, a steady, dependable profit and which at the same time improved the operation of the town machinery to an extent that may only be appreciated by recalling the conditions which existed before that service had been made available.

The Newspaper

It was probably early in October of 1762 that William Goddard issued a Prospectus in which he asked support for a newspaper he proposed to issue under the title of *The Providence Gazette and Country Journal.* From the only known complete copy of the broadside containing that

[2] Chester Noyes Greenough, "New England Almanacs . . . and the American Revolution," in *Proc. Am. Antiq. Soc.*, vol. 45, pp. 288-316.

Prospectus we learn that young Mr. Goddard had already acquired the effective style which marked whatever he wrote for publication in later years. All his addresses to the public, whether proclaiming his wrongs at the hands of a mob, attacking his personal enemies, demanding aid in putting the British General Post Office out of business, or, more simply, asking subscriptions to his newspaper, had about them the quality of a manifesto—expansive phrases and large ideas voiced at a pitch which suggests that customarily he had little trouble in working himself into a state of excitement. The townspeople were ready enough in this instance to give him what he wanted, for they, too, wanted that same thing with all their hearts. On October 20, 1762, appeared No. 1 of *The Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, marking the entrance into the field of another of those admirable newspapers which distinguished the production of the colonial American press. Towards the end of the century an English commentator on the press in the United States named Rhode Island among those states in which the newspapers were "unequalled, whether considered with respect to wit and humour, entertainment or instruction." So far as I am aware no one has yet sounded those depths of the Anglo-Saxon's psyche which would explain why he has thrown so much of his energy, intelligence, and wealth into the production of newspapers, making them always (if not actually better) larger, more vigorous in tone, and more varied in content than those elsewhere published. From an early period in the history of their press the English Americans had shown themselves possessed of this racial characteristic both as makers and as readers of newspapers. The people of Providence were no exception to the rule: they received Goddard's newspaper eagerly and some of them must soon have recognized that its printer and editor had brought into being one of the finest journals of the colonies, both as to interest of matter and typographical form.

Newspaper Advertising

The people of Providence wanted a newspaper for various reasons: all of them wanted to be entertained by its literary essays and its occasional verse; all of them wanted that feeling of being part of the world of cultural ideas and events which reading these productions surely brought. They needed also to be kept in touch with the political affairs of Europe and, in lesser degree, it seems, to be informed of events in the neighboring American colonies. Through its columns, moreover, they might gauge the effectiveness of their own government and officials. But what particularly stirred their interest in the new *Providence Gazette* was its value as a medium for the publication of advertisements. Wholesale buyers and retail shoppers read those matter-of-fact statements of cargoes arrived and of specified articles for sale as the most engrossing news that could be brought them. Trade was the life of that community, and henceforth in the columns of the last two pages of its newspaper was to be portrayed a weekly picture of the real news of the place.

The first issue of the *Providence Gazette* contained but five advertisements: in the fourth were to be found fourteen paid advertisements and two proceeding from the printer himself. A brief analysis of the two advertising pages of November 13th shows that Arthur Fenner had a sloop of 53 tons for sale; that Nicholas Brown & Co. wanted freight and passengers for their sloop, the *Four Brothers*, which was to sail in six days' time for Philadelphia. John Cole advertised cordage; Mr. Lodowick Updike in Narragansett expressed anxiety to recover a black gelding lost a month before; Bennet & Nightingale wanted their debtors "to make speedy Payment" of their bills; three individuals had houses or farms for sale; John Jenks and Joseph Olney were concerned with a land development scheme in Nova Scotia;

Joseph & William Russel were advertising at length what might be found in their general store "at the Sign of the Golden Eagle, near the Court-House;" James Green had for sale "At the Sign of the Elephant" a large recent importation of cutlery and other English goods from London and Bristol, as well as New England rum, molasses, tea, and fine groceries. Mr. Green also wanted to buy a large quantity of flaxseed or to take it in trade for salt or West India goods, or anything a "Country Trader or Farmer can want." Three lottery advertisements and William Goddard's announcement of imported books and stationery for sale conclude a group of advertisements which fairly indicate the direction of interest of the pleasant and busy little port at the head of Narragansett Bay.

Political Influence of the Newspaper

There was another function of the newspaper which has not yet been mentioned; that is, the formation of opinion on public questions. There were no editorials, it is true, in these early journals, but they did conduct correspondence columns for the expression of the views of citizens on questions which concerned the state. Almost invariably letters to the editor were signed with pseudonyms, as when, for example, in an early issue of the *Gazette*, Philomathes, who may have been Benjamin West, urged upon the community the need of a larger schoolhouse. Behind such a screen, doubtless transparent to a good part of the community, the public-minded man could express opinions and make proposals intended to influence his neighbor. The editor, or, as he called himself without pride, the Printer, could control this situation if it went against his personal or party interests by declining to print letters offensive to him or by pseudonymously replying to his

correspondent in the same column. This practice unquestionably prevailed, and there is no doubt that printers and their employees frequently used their columns for satirical and literary efforts, or for the airing of their own views upon local political matters, witness Franklin in Boston with his Dogood Papers and later in Philadelphia under a variety of pseudonyms. But we are not able to fix upon Goddard any unfair treatment of his correspondents. It is gratifying, on the contrary, to observe the truly liberal conception held by him of the function of the newspaper as the clearing house of ideas. Later I shall be speaking more at length of the fact that in the currency controversy of 1763 Goddard not only issued an anti-administration pamphlet by an individual claiming to represent the poor people of the colony but afterwards reprinted this pamphlet in its entirety in the columns of his *Gazette*. In another of his early issues he permitted a citizen of Connecticut, involved in litigation in Providence, to express freely his opinion of the local courts and their officers. In that instance he realized his own temerity in risking the charge of contempt, but prefacing the article with a statement on the liberty of the press, he printed and abided the issue. So far as the record shows there was no issue. We shall never know the rights or wrongs of that obscure case, but this disclosure of it in the newspaper must have told the citizens of the town that a healthful public influence existed in the form of its newest social institution, Mr. Goddard's *Gazette*.

Belles Lettres in the Newspaper

Every editor of the time was hospitable to the contribution of literary essays and poems of local composition. The young literati of the town found ready-made for them in the newspaper a vehicle for the expression of their elegant

aspirations in prose or verse. Little has proceeded from this source that need be remembered, but the presence in the weekly paper of a poets' corner provided entertainment for readers and served to keep alive in small isolated communities that desire for expression in print upon the results of which literate, modern man depends almost as much as for the food which sustains his body.

The Newspaper in Town Leadership

The paper which William Goddard published in Providence was given to a high ideal of local helpfulness. The Providence Plantations at that time had begun to resent playing second to Newport and its dependencies. Though distanced in commercial competition by the town at the mouth of the Bay, its people of the old stock could not forget that theirs was the first settlement of the colony and that within it Roger Williams had lived and given to Rhode Island certain principles of individual freedom which it cherished as the basis of its communal life. Before this awakening local self-consciousness could become effective it was necessary that the people, not all of them descendants of the original settlers, should be instructed about their origins. One does not know by whom was initiated the unusual project of publishing serially a history of Providence, but obviously it was by someone awake to the opinion-forming power of the press. "The Planting and Growth of Providence," by Stephen Hopkins, which began publication in the very first issue of the *Gazette*, was one of the earliest American local histories, written with intent to stimulate community pride through a presentation of facts then in danger of being forgotten. For some reason this excellent series was temporarily discontinued after its first issue and was not resumed until nearly three years later when it ran for seven nearly consecutive numbers of the *Gazette*. But in

the meantime, Stephen Hopkins, who, it has been assumed, was one of the chief backers of the local press, contributed other articles to the newspaper and published through Goddard's office a political pamphlet which is regarded as an important utterance in the Stamp Act controversy. Later we shall examine some of these writings in our discussion of the service given by the press to the thought and action of the community.

It was at this time that the rivalry between Providence and Newport assumed concrete form in the struggle between the protagonists of the two towns—Stephen Hopkins, representing Providence, and Samuel Ward, representing Newport. It is a fact which may have significance that the year after the establishment of the *Gazette*, the Providence champion regained the office of governor of Rhode Island, which he had lost the previous year to his Newport opponent, an event that was rather less a personal victory, perhaps, than a victory of his community over the greater commercial town near the mouth of the Bay. It is difficult to show here an association of cause and effect, so we shall content ourselves with the simple statement that after Providence acquired a newspaper it elected its candidate for the governorship, Stephen Hopkins, with only one interruption until his voluntary retirement in 1768.

There is no question of the deliberate character of the Providence effort at this time to increase the prosperity and importance of the town. The Brown brothers and other merchants were associated in efforts to this end, and behind them was the urge of the ambitious and patriotic citizen and official of whom for the moment we are speaking. "Stephen Hopkins," wrote a Rhode Island author of the mid-nineteenth century, "taught Providence her capabilities, and calculated, rather than prophesied her future growth and prosperity." Those words were extraordinarily well chosen.

The efforts of Hopkins and the leading merchants seem, indeed, to have been calculated in their character, and among the means they chose to advance the interests of the town was the utilization of the press. An advertisement of the sort that would bear today the signature of a chamber of commerce appeared in the *Gazette* of February 26, 1763, informing the world that "The following Tradesmen are much wanted in the Town of Providence, namely a Brazier, a Potter, a Stocking-Weaver, a Clock and Watch-maker." No artisans of three of these categories lived nearer than thirty miles, and there was no potter closer than Boston. It paid to advertise. In the issue of August 13th, a brazier from Boston announced that he had opened a shop near the Court House, and on September 3rd, a Boston clock maker removed his establishment to that busy little area of Providence, bounded by the Court House on the north and the eastern end of Weybosset Great Bridge on the South, where were carried on so many of the local activities. Not long afterwards the industrial forces of the town were augmented by the coming of a soap-boiler, a founder, and two wig makers. These advertisements did not bear at their end any such announcement as "factory sites available on deep water, tax-free for twenty years," but none the less the spirit of town boosting was in them.

The effort of Stephen Hopkins and the Browns and other Providence merchants towards increasing the importance of their town reached the climax of deliberate and calculated action when in 1770 they drew together the whole strength and wealth of the community for the designation of their town instead of Newport as the future site of Rhode Island College. In this effort, of course, the aid of the press of the town, or, rather, of the presses, for by this time there were two, was called upon in the natural course. Through newspaper and handbill the press kept the appeals of the pro-

moters before the citizens, and at the victory of Providence over Newport in February, 1770, it led their rejoicings.

There were other means, less direct in application, by which the press must have advanced the fortunes of the town. The *Gazette*, for example, went by exchange to every other newspaper office of the British continental colonies and the West Indies, carrying on its masthead the name of a deep-water port, relatively little-known, anxious for visitors by sea and land. Through its advertisements the outer world of merchants must have become aware that in a town where the Browns, the Russells, and the Arnolds were active there were opportunities for profitable business correspondence. Ship captains would learn that through the Providence rope walk supplies of rigging could be obtained, that after 1765 the Browns were making anchors and other articles of maritime equipment at the nearby Hope Furnace, that sloops and other sailing craft could be bought and sold from the shipyards on Weybosset Point, that, in brief, ships were being built, outfitted, and repaired in the town at the head of Narragansett Bay. Farmers and merchants would learn that James Green was a large dealer in flaxseed; and throughout the colonies dealers would be informed that the town was become a center of the spermacetti candle business, with, since 1753, the workers congregated in a factory built by Obadiah Brown on India Point instead of scattered about the town in the kitchens of their homes. The newspaper advertisement was, of course, only one of the mediums for the transmission of knowledge of this sort, but it probably stood high among the effective agencies employed.

THE PRESS IN POLITICAL CONTROVERSY

The Stamp Act

It was in 1765, with the Stamp Act imminent and the whole subject of Parliamentary taxation coming to the

front that Stephen Hopkins issued through the Providence press a pamphlet which takes place among the most influential political utterances of the period. *The Rights of Colonies Examined*, republished in London in 1766 under the title *The Grievances of the American Colonies Candidly Examined*, was a discussion on a broad general base of the question of the right of Parliament to tax the American colonies, standing in this respect with the treatises on that subject of James Otis of Massachusetts and Daniel Dulany, Jr., of Maryland. Hopkins's tract drew replies from Martin Howard of Newport under the fictitious guise of a *Letter from a Gentleman at Halifax* and *A Defence of the Letter from a Gentleman at Halifax*. James Otis of Boston entered the controversy with his *Brief Remarks on the Defence of the Halifax Libel, on the British-American-Colonies;* and Hopkins came back to it in four contributions to the *Gazette* in February, March, and April, 1765. This exchange of pamphlets and articles in what came at a later day to be known as the "Halifax Gentleman Controversy" helped to bring the great question of the day squarely before the people of Providence and carried throughout the colonies and to England evidence of the growth there and elsewhere of the new spirit of independence.

Though we are concerned chiefly with the function of the press in Providence of the eighteenth century, we may digress for a moment to remark that the existence of these printed remains of Stephen Hopkins is a splendid example of the agency of printing as the "art preservative of arts," for here was a valuable gift of the press to posterity. Little remains in manuscript form of the private papers and documents which would attest the long-continued and useful service of this colonial publicist and man of affairs. It is recorded that he left behind him at his death "a large trunk of papers, connected with the transactions of his public

life," but that in the great storm of September, 1815, "the tide swept through the house where they were lodged, and they were carried off and lost in the multitude of waters."

The Currency Problem

One of the most vexatious aspects of life for the colonial Rhode Islander was the degraded state of his currency. In 1710 the Assembly had provided for the issue of £5,000 in bills of credit and thereafter had frequently increased the amount of its indebtedness by similar issues without making at any time adequate provision for the security or redemption of its paper. In all that period the currency of the colony had been going from bad to worse. It is obvious that a community was in an uncomfortable condition which conducted its business in several currencies of different values. At one and the same time Rhode Island was using Old Tenor currency, worth at times as little as one twenty-third of its face value; a more stable currency known as New Tenor or "Lawful," issued under restrictions imposed by Parliament in 1751; English Sterling money; and Spanish milled dollars, or pieces of eight. To remedy this unhappy state of affairs the Assembly in March, 1763, proposed the establishment of gold and silver alone as the currency of the colony in a drastic bill which provided for the payment of debts contracted in Old Tenor at the rate of £7 for one Spanish milled dollar. There was immediate protest on the part of the "have nots," whose wealth, such as it was, lay in the depreciated currency. Goddard gave the "have nots" the opportunity for expression. A satirical poem "On the Conviction of Old Tenor before her Death" appeared in the *Gazette* in the same issue that advertised a pamphlet described as follows: "A Cooper's Letter to the Common People of the Colony of Rhode-Island: Concerning the unjust Designs and actual Attempts of a Number of Misers,

and Money-Jobbers (particularly such of that Character as are in Place and Power) to compel all the Old Tenor Debtors in this Colony, to pay three Times as much as they owe." In a later issue of the *Gazette*, "The Cooper's Letter," signed "T. R.," was reprinted in full, and a vigorous statement of the opposition point of view it proved to be. When the stabilizing bill became law in June, 1763, it could not be alleged that those who felt injured by its terms had lacked a hearing.

The Anglican Episcopate Controversy

The columns of the *Gazette* were not taken up wholly with discussions of an economic and political character, though those were clearly the dominant interest of the community. Rhode Island was moderately free of religious controversies in this period, and the publication of sermons never became so important a part of the printer's business in Providence and Newport as it had continued to be in Boston and other New England towns. Goddard published an occasional sermon of general or local interest, but the chief contribution of his press to religious or ecclesiastical matters was its entry into the Anglican Episcopate controversy with a reply to Jonathan Mayhew's *Observations on the Charter and Conduct of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel*, a book which became the center of a New England storm. In May and June of 1763 there appeared in three numbers of the *Gazette* a series entitled "Verses on Dr. Mayhew's Book of Observations on the Charter and Conduct of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, with Notes, critical and explanatory." A satiric poem of nine rather poor stanzas was followed in this contribution by a commentary of force and power on the opinions of the Boston minister. Soon afterwards two separate editions of the piece were published by Goddard in pamphlet

form. This expression from a minority came to the right shop when it was brought to Goddard's door, for by birth, on both sides of his family, and by rearing, he was Church of England in belief and practice. One authority, indeed, has said that Goddard was himself the "Gentleman of Rhode-Island Colony," the pseudonym under which the book was published, but it seems more likely to others that the author was John Aplin, a Rhode Island lawyer of prominence at that time. It was a vigorous and firm piece, not to be overlooked in the literature of a controversy which engaged some of the best thinking of the colonies.

THE GOVERNMENT WORK

At this point we must leave Providence for Newport, to examine there a function of the colonial printer whereby the machinery of government was kept oiled and the interests and convenience of all citizens of the colony were advanced. The "government work," carried on in Rhode Island until the Revolution by the printers of Newport, comprised the printing of the statutes, the proceedings of Assembly, the governor's proclamations, and other papers that had to do with the political administration of the community. We have seen already that while the method of publishing laws by beat of drum and subsequent public reading, and the method of recording them by longhand in a single copy for each township achieved in theory an adequate publication of their matter, yet because of the small number of persons reached by the voice of the sheriff or town clerk and of the relative inaccessibility of the written record, this ancient procedure must have been unsatisfactory in practice. To such an extent was this true that governing bodies everywhere gave encouragement to printers to settle in their communities by the offer of fixed salaries or the assurance of

a definite amount annually of government work. In that earliest of American poems on the press, the *Typographia* of Williamsburg, 1730, we find a passage which expresses the common experience of every colony from Georgia to New Hampshire. In speaking exultantly of a printed collection of the laws of Virginia soon to appear, the author wrote of

> . . . *Virginia's* Laws, that lay
> In blotted *Manuscripts* obscur'd,
> By vulgar Eyes unread,
> Which whilome scarce the Light endur'd,
> Begin to view again the Day,
> As rising from the Dead.

So much for the attitude of these orderly people of the colonies towards the printing of their laws! An even more important function of the press in the eyes of the people was the publication in print of the votes and proceedings of the assemblies. The day-by-day record of the sessions, thus made available to every freeman who cared to examine them, was supposed to enable the voters to keep a check upon their representatives in assembly and to observe the temper and tendencies of the politics of their colony. By the publication of such a record, begun by the New York Assembly in 1695, was provided, it was commonly believed, another safeguard of the people's liberties. In some of the colonies the publication of votes and proceedings came to be a practice only after there had occurred a battle between liberal and conservative elements in the local political alignment. There is reason to believe that in some instances it was successfully postponed by the influence of those government clerks whose perquisite it was to duplicate in longhand the documents that proceeded from the Assembly and the offices of administration.

The Rhode Island government was slow to take advantage of the facilities offered by the printing house. Though

James Franklin's press was set up in Newport in 1727, it was not until 1730 that a piece of government printing came into his hands. In that year he printed *The Charter* [*and*] *Acts and Laws* of the colony, the first printed publication of Rhode Island laws since the appearance in Boston in 1719 of the laws in force at that time; in 1730, 1731, and 1737 he printed supplements to this collection. In the publication of laws and votes of assembly was performed what many regarded as the highest service of the colonial press to the community. In most colonies such service once begun has continued without interruption to this day, but Rhode Island chose to be different in this particular as in everything else. No sets of session laws were put into print in the ten-year period from 1738 to 1747, nor were the votes and proceedings of the Assembly ever printed until 1747, twenty years after a press for such service had become available. A new collection of the laws was finally published in 1745, and beginning with 1747 a volume of the "schedules," a strictly Rhode Island form of legislative publication, combining the proceedings of a session of assembly with the text of the statutes therein passed, was brought out annually by the Franklins and their successors in Newport. So far as I recall no other colony was so slow as Rhode Island in taking advantage of the press for government work, nor does there appear to have existed in the colony any condition of deep political villany which might account for this neglect of opportunity.

The government printing remained a perquisite of the Newport press until, in 1776, it was driven to Providence by the British occupation of the island of Rhode Island. There it remained virtually throughout the century. Having lost through the evil fortune of war its most valuable piece of business, the Newport press thereafter played second in all things to the press of Providence. That town, indeed, was now well on its way to victory in the long rivalry for com-

mercial supremacy between the two ports; the paralysis of Newport shipping throughout the British occupation was the determining factor in the struggle. The busy press of Providence of the ensuing generations as compared to the press of Newport was one of the indications that the vital force of progress had changed its lodging. It would be an unconscionable bit of special pleading to suggest that the press had been more than one of the many agencies and circumstances to have part in bringing Providence to the fore among the American communities of the period. None the less we permit ourselves the observation that throughout the period in which occurred this change in the status of the town the presses of William Goddard, of Sarah Goddard & Co., of John Waterman, and of John Carter, Mrs. Goddard's partner and successor, took their places among the most respected printing establishments in the American colonies.

INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION INDUCED BY THE PRESS

The Paper Mills. Non-Importation

The coming of the press to Providence was directly responsible for the establishment of a second new industry of consequence in the town. In an advertisement, published in Goddard's edition of West's *New England Almanack for 1765* we find the following address to the townspeople announcing the establishment of a paper mill in their city:

> As the present embarrassed Situation of the Trade of these Northern Colonies, renders it utterly impossible for us to pay for the large Quantities of Goods that are annually imported from Great-Britain, without reducing ourselves to the State of Slaves and Beggars, it is reasonable to suppose, that every Attempt to lessen the Demand for such Goods, by establishing Manufactories amongst ourselves, for the making those Things which are really beneficial, must meet with the Approbation and Encouragement of all who wish well to this Country.—Amongst many laudable Endeavours in the different Provinces, for the Purpose afore-

said, a spirited Effort is now actually making in the Town of Providence, for carrying on a Paper Manufactory, a spacious Mill being already built, and will be speedily set to work, which, if it can obtain a proper Supply of Linen Rags, old Sail Cloth, and Junk, those being the principal Articles necessary for making that useful Commodity, it's Utility to this Part of the Country will be soon demonstrated by a Saving of some Thousand Dollars, that are annually sunk to us in the Pockets of the European Merchants.

The phrasing of this address with its appeal to the people to save their rags would cause us to suspect that William Goddard was behind the project even if his participation in such a scheme were not to be expected in view of the enormous saving and increase of convenience resulting to any printer through the operations of a local paper manufactory. The suspicion is verified when we find that at the conclusion of the notice the printer of the almanac in which it occurred joined with Jonathan Olney, John Waterman, and Jonathan Ballou in their agreement to pay cash for rags for the new paper mill. A pretty competition and a consequent increase in business came into being when, fifteen years later, Samuel Thurber set up a second paper mill in the north end of the town.

That advertisement of Goddard's served the people of the town further by bringing to their attention in practical fashion the disadvantages the colonies were laboring under in being compelled to send their hard money to England for manufactured articles. In it we hear the murmurings which, four or five years later, came to the point of loud and determined utterance in the universal non-importation resolutions of 1769. Inside the paper mill itself was printed in 1768 an oration in which, at the dedication of the Liberty Elm, Silas Downer had restated for popular understanding the fundamentals of the American opposition to Parliament set forth three years earlier by Stephen Hopkins in his *Rights of Colonies Examined.*

OTHER CUSTOMARY ACTIVITIES OF THE PRINTER

The Book Shop

The coming of a printing house to Providence was responsible for still another enlargement in the life of the people, for like the more enterprising of the printers everywhere Goddard established a book shop in connection with his main business. This was not, of course, the beginning of book ownership in the town. Among those who agreed to take subscriptions for the newly established *Providence Gazette* was a Mr. Oliphant, bookseller. The Providence Library Company, still active today as the Providence Athenæum, had been in existence some ten years when Goddard opened his shop "at the Sign of Shakespear's Head" in the house still standing on Meeting Street and preserved as a museum. Many private citizens, also, as we well know, possessed libraries of greater or less pretension. But Goddard's venture seems to have been the beginning of contact with the outside intellectual world through the regular and direct importation to the city of new books and classics from the London market. In his first list of books advertised as just received from London were, in addition to the usual religious works, such titles of current significance as the *Tatler*, the *Rambler*, *Clarissa Harlowe*, *Roderick Random*, *Tom Jones*, and the *History of Charles XII* of *Sweden*. In that consignment came also "a few elegant Pictures, viz. of His Majesty King George III . . . the great Mr. Pitt, and the immortal General Wolfe. . . ."

The Press and the Post Office

The admirable service performed by the printer as a vendor of books, stationery, and frequently of fancy groceries, and notions combined with his legitimate business to make his establishment a center of interest of the towns-

people. But it was another of his functions that made this condition even more a matter of inevitability. His patronage of the mails in the receipt of newspaper exchanges and local communications and in the distribution of his own newspaper caused it to be almost routine that the printer of a town should be appointed its postmaster. This circumstance brought it about (if I may quote what I have previously said on this subject) that "to the door of the printing office came the post rider with his mails, and on the heels of this exciting personage came the citizen for his private letters, the official for his instructions, and the merchant for his remittances or for the latest 'prices current' from the larger centers of trade—all of them, once their personal mail had been received, eager to learn what news of the outside world had come to the printer through his 'exchanges' from New York, Philadelphia, or Boston. Inevitably under these conditions the printing office became one of the focal points of the town's life, a place of congregation and of interchange of gossip. . . ." We may think of the office of the *Providence Gazette* as the frequent stage of such a drama, for William Goddard was one of those printers who held office as postmasters of their communities, a significant event in view of his later service as the founder of the Constitutional Post Office, which supplanted in the colonies the British General Post Office and became almost at once after establishment the national postal system of the United States.

THE PRINTER'S PLACE IN THE TOWN LIFE

The printer's position as postmaster gave him an undeniable influence in the community and in the larger world. Reflection upon that fact brings us to the consideration of the general position of the printer in the American community. The printer of the English provincial town, unless

he raised himself to eminence by publication of an unusual sort, was by the nature of his occupation classed in the social scale among the skilled craftsmen of his community. The business of government printing was confined in Britain to a small number of official printers in London, but in British America where each colony maintained its own representative assembly and its own administration, the printer of the colony found placed in his hands the honorable task of printing the laws and proceedings, the proclamations and notices, and, a much more exciting piece of work, the paper money of the colony. Responsibility of this sort meant an increase of dignity; compared to the London printer his shop and equipment were small, hardly that of the job printer of the older world, but as an agent of the local government, the editor of a newspaper and, frequently, a postmaster in the British General Post Office he found himself in the eyes of his community a personage far superior in rank and importance to the normal printer of the English small town. Not all printers attained all these offices, it is true, but the fact that they came within the reasonable expectations of the more competent among them advanced the standing of the whole craft in America.

In exchange for his public service the community gave the intelligent printer a decent living and in a few instances something more. Franklin tells us that his tenders of marriage in one instance were rejected by a father who thought printing an insecure and badly rewarded business. That father, it turned out, was a poor judge of suitors: by industry and attention to business Franklin built up his own establishment to such a standard of productivity that he was able to draw an annual income of some £467 sterling from the firm of Franklin & Hall without turning a hand in its operation for the period of eighteen years in which he was engaged in politics or scientific pursuits at home and abroad.

The record of American printing history, however, is full of failures; too often these came about because every printer thought he was capable of running a newspaper successfully and of conducting the business of publishing at his own charges. Then as now many who flourished for a time as master printers ended as journeymen in the establishments of their rivals. William Goddard was not one of those though he never held for long the position to which his unusual abilities entitled him. In Providence, he found the sort of success he demanded of life too slow in coming. Leaving the business in that city in the hands of his mother, he departed for points south and a career of incident and uneven success. Some years later Mrs. Goddard was able to turn the shop over, a going concern, to her young assistant, John Carter, whose grandson was John Carter Brown. John Carter, of Providence, partner and successor of the Goddards, did not always find life easy. Elected a trustee of Rhode Island College in the year 1782, he declined that service on the ground that as the printing business in Providence did not make possible the decent support of his family, he would soon be moving elsewhere. But he did not move to another town, and so far as we know he managed to extract a living from his business for many years after that period of discouragement. Briefly, like all other businesses then and now, printing had its failures and successes, but as Franklin said it was a good trade when properly tended, and the record, in the main, shows that the competent and industrious printer made a respectable place for himself in the community and was reasonably well repaid in material things for his service to it.

THE PRINTER IN THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the opening words of this discussion we made reference to the single press at Cambridge, Massachusetts, with

which the typographical history of the country began. By the year 1774 there were actively at work in twelve British colonies seventy printing establishments. We have been told a great deal in recent years of the different groups responsible for the successful outcome of the American Revolution and the building of the nation in the Constitutional period. From historian and partisan we have heard this happy eventuation attributed variously to the embattled farmer, the backwoodsman in coonskin cap, the merchant, the scientist, the clergyman, and the planter, or, if we may shift to categories of another sort, to the Irish, the Germans, the Scotch, or the Scotch-Irish. I present to you another candidate for this distinction—a harassed individual with ink-stained fingers, half craftsman, half man of letters, who in dim and cluttered shops in all the considerable towns of the continent was fighting the battles of the Nation long before most of his fellow citizens realized that a war was in progress or that a Nation was being born.

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