

Revolutionary Newport, Rhode Island by John Fitzhugh Millar, 2026

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The Reverend John Clarke (1609-1676) Baptist Minister

For generations, Rhode Islanders have been told that their colony/state had been founded by Roger Williams in 1636, and that Williams had first promulgated the idea of complete freedom of religion, including freedom to have no religions at all. Although this is not the place to discuss the matter fully, I do want to set forth a correction: the first permanent English settlers in Rhode Island arrived in 1634, led by Episcopal priest, the Reverend William Blackstone. Blackstone had been booted out of Weymouth, Massachusetts for religious reasons by the so-called Pilgrim Fathers in 1623. At that point, he purchased from Indians the Shawmut Peninsula. Seven years later, he welcomed John Winthrop and his hundreds of Congregationalist settlers to his little town, which he renamed Boston at Winthrop's request. Using force majeure, Winthrop ordered all the Episcopalians to depart for religious reasons in 1634 (the Boston Common had been Blackstone's farm). Blackstone and his followers were farming the Providence area in 1636, when Williams arrived with the idea of making the area a Baptist colony. Blackstone told him that Baptists were welcome to settle, as long as they agreed to complete freedom of religion. It is important to state where the revolutionary idea of religious freedom in Rhode Island came from, before John Clarke carried the idea to its next step.

Even though England had not been thrown into its Civil War until 1639, the unrest that led to the war was already under way many years earlier, hence the various documents supporting English approval of the new colony were not regarded as having sufficient force for the long haul. Clarke, born in England, and trained as a theologian, a physician, and a lawyer, arrived in Massachusetts in 1637, but moved to various places before settling on Newport in 1639. There, he founded the First Baptist Church. In 1651, he was arrested in Massachusetts and imprisoned for being an active Baptist, and after he was released, he traveled to England to complain about his ill treatment. In 1660, the monarchy was restored with Charles II, who was arguably the best king England ever had, and officials in Rhode Island asked Clarke to be Rhode Island's agent. He petitioned Charles to write a new charter for Rhode Island. In his petition were the words 'to hold forth a lively experiment that a most flourishing civil state may stand ... and best be maintained ... with a full libertie in religious concernments.' Charles liked the idea of such an experiment, and actually repeated that sentiment in the charter. The charter also provided that all Rhode Island officials from the governor

on down were to be elected, and no one appointed from London. The 1663 charter, brought back to Newport, was so revolutionary and suitable that it remained in force decades past independence, for a total of 180 years.

Captain William Mayes II, ca. 1667-1718 Privateer/Pirate

The Edict of Nantes, which had guaranteed civil rights to French Protestants, was revoked by Louis XIV in 1685. One of many families that emigrated to colonial English America just before the predicted revocation was that of William Mayes, who came to Newport and started running a tavern (which was given the name of the White Horse Tavern in 1730). One of Mayes' sons, Guillaume/William II, remained in France, where he spent a year at prestigious Angers University. Then he joined the French Navy and was assigned to the [rented] 18-gun corvette La Victoire. When the ship visited Italy, he met a renegade Dominican priest named Caraccioli, who filled his head with ideas of human rights, so he persuaded the priest to join the crew. In a battle near the Island of Martinique against a more powerful English ship, the English ship suddenly blew up, and the explosion killed all the officers on the French deck. The crew told Mayes that he was the senior surviving officer and therefore the new captain, and the crew would prefer to make the ship a pirate. After many adventures, they founded a settlement near the northeastern corner of Madagascar. Thomas Tew, a pirate from Newport, introduced himself to Mayes, and the two became fast friends. Between Caraccioli's ideas of human rights and Tew's reports of Rhode Island's wonderful Charter, they drew up a constitution for their settlement about 1693, which gave the vote to all adults of all races and religions, including women. They called the settlement Libertatia. The chief executive had a three-year term, and was called the Conservator. Abraham Samuel, a free Black sailor from Rhode Island aboard Captain John Hoar's pirate ship John & Rebecca, arrived at another port in Madagascar in 1697, and the queen there recognized him as her long-lost son, who had been captured by slave traders, so he suddenly found himself as king of that territory, close to Libertatia. Other neighbors, however, did not care for Libertatia, and frequently assaulted it. At the same time, numerous pirates came ashore at Libertatia, notably Henry "Long Ben" Every, who used it as a base for attacking rich merchant ships from India. Thomas Tew joined Every's attack, but was cut in two by a cannonball. Most of Every's men were eventually rounded up and punished, but Every himself was never caught. Next came William Kidd, who had an English commission to round up pirates,

but who could not resist the temptation of becoming a temporary pirate himself. With all of these difficulties surrounding Libertatia, Mayes resigned as Conservator and returned to Newport and his family, who gave him their tavern to run in 1702 until his death in 1718. Libertatia continued to its 25th birthday in 1718, when it was overwhelmed by local tribes. Its revolutionary constitution can be closely identified with Rhode Island's Charter.

The Very Reverend Dr George Berkeley (1685-1753) Irish Philosopher

Berkeley (pronounced 'Barkly') was an Irish Episcopal priest, who taught philosophy at Trinity College, Dublin (he famously said, 'If a tree falls in the forest, and there was nobody there to hear it, did it make a noise?'), and was assigned to be the Dean of Saint Columb's Cathedral, Derry. About 1725, he decided to establish St Paul's College in Bermuda to educate Indians, which some people thought to be very amusing, because there were no Indians in Bermuda. However, Berkeley's point was that all the American colleges that attempted to educate Indians, quickly found their students melting away to local tribes when the studying got too difficult, but in Bermuda there were no such tribes, so the students would have to stay at school. King George, I promised to pay for the college, and sent Berkeley off to Newport, where he arrived in 1728, to wait for the money. George II promised to follow his father's plan, but when General James Oglethorpe asked the king for money to found Georgia, the king could not finance both, and he thought Georgia was a better bargain. Berkeley had brought some of his faculty to Newport, including painters Richard Dalton and John Smibert, and music composers John James and Carl Theodore Pachelbel, and together they raised the cultural life of the town. Their frequent cultural discussions continued after Berkeley returned to Ireland in 1731 (where Berkeley was made Bishop of Cloyne), and the informal cultural seminars in Newport eventually resulted in Quaker Abraham Redwood establishing the Redwood Library in 1748. Dalton, who had designed Berkeley's house Whitehall (still standing in Middletown) as the first example of Palladian architecture in North America, returned to London, where he was one of the founders of the Royal Academy of Art. John James had been sent home in disgrace as a perpetual drunkard, but Smibert became colonial America's leading portrait painter, and Pachelbel (son of composer Johann) became organist in Boston, then at Trinity Church, Newport, then in New York and Philadelphia, and finally at Charleston SC. Berkeley asked Handel to advise on ordering an organ to send as a gift to Trinity Church in 1733 (which still survives in part). Berkeley's time in Newport was brief, but the after-effects were revolutionary.

Governor and Chief Justice Stephen Hopkins (1707-1785)

Although Hopkins was a Providence resident, he lived in Newport much of the time for his official colony duties. If the reader could magically ask Continental Congress delegates, 'Who was the most important person in getting the Revolution going?', they would answer, 'Are you crazy? Everyone knows it was Stephen Hopkins.' However, everyone does not know it was Hopkins, all of whose papers were carefully collected in his house in Providence for scholars to study, but an 1815 giant hurricane pushed water 21 feet deep in Providence. Although the house is still there, the papers were destroyed. Hopkins' most recent biography was published in 1883! A self-taught lawyer, Hopkins was one of the law teachers of John Adams.

Hopkins was elected to nine one-year terms as Governor of Rhode Island, and later as Chief Justice. He was one of the two conveners of the 1754 Albany Congress, whose votes unsuccessfully proposed a union of the colonies and the creation of an American Navy. As

early as 1756, Hopkins publicly asked why king and parliament had any right to make American laws. In 1764, he wrote the influential book *The Rights of Colonies Examined* and co-founded in March 'The College at Rhode Island' (Brown University), and on 9 July he fired the first cannon shots of resistance against British authority in America, damaging the British warship Saint John. In 1765, he founded the Stamp Act Congress. In 1769, he opened America's first cannon foundry, later providing nearly all the cannons for the Continental Navy. In 1773, when Sam Adams failed to find traction for something similar, Hopkins founded the Continental Committees of Correspondence. In 1774, Hopkins founded the Continental Congress, and on 10 June of that year he introduced the Rhode Island bill that outlawed the importation of slaves (the first in America), and in December he warned all the colonies about the British intention to confiscate all the public gunpowder (hence Fort Pownall, Concord, and Williamsburg next April). On 26 July 1775, Hopkins founded the American Post Office, and on 13 October the Continental Navy, and on 10 November the Marine Corps, and he worked out all the complicated details for getting the Navy going. In 1776, he informed Congress that Rhode Island had already declared independence on 4 May, and then affixed his wobbly signature to the national Declaration two months later. In 1777, he retired from Congress due to ill health, but then he sent to Congress the clever pattern they then used for financing part of the war.

While doing all this important revolutionary work for the creation of the United States, he successfully introduced several laws that made it easier for Rhode Island slaves to gain freedom. Many people identify Hopkins with the man in the hat in the Trumbull painting, but he was actually sitting in the front row, bare-headed.

Peter Harrison (1716-1775) World-Wide Neo-Palladian Architect Harrison, apprenticed to William Etty in Yorkshire, designed his first two churches (actually built) at age eleven, making him a prodigy for architecture similar to Mozart. His first major commission was Queen Square for builder John Wood in Bath – at age 14 – the first of many buildings in Bath up through the famous Royal Crescent of 1767 and the Upper Assembly Rooms of 1769. At age 17, Harrison designed two giant Yorkshire mansions, Wentworth-Woodhouse, and Nostell Priory, as well as Prior Park, Bath with its first-ever designed Palladian Bridge. When Harrison was 18, Etty died, so Harrison asked his older brother, Joseph, a sea captain, to teach him to be a captain. Harrison then undertook a long voyage in 1738, designing 36 important buildings in Venice, Gibraltar, Suriname, Demerara (now Guyana), Barbados, Jamaica, Georgia, South Carolina (Drayton Hall), North Carolina, Virginia (Stratford Hall), Maryland (His Lordship's Kindness), Pennsylvania (Belmont), Connecticut (New London Statehouse/Courthouse), and Boston (Christ Church steeple). In 1739, he visited Newport, where he designed a new steeple for Trinity Church, and a folly popularly known as the Old Stone Mill. In 1744, he was captured at sea by a French privateer, and was sentenced to house arrest in the architect Col. Etienne Verrier's house at Louisbourg, Nova Scotia. He secretly drew plans of the Louisbourg fortifications so that Massachusetts Governor William Shirley could capture Louisbourg in 1745, and that capture prevented the French planned permanent conquest of North America, and therefore saved the British Empire. Also, while a prisoner, he invented the world's first successful flush toilet (thank you!) for the French hospital, and he included 36 such toilets each in his Liverpool Infirmary and York Infirmary the following year.

Harrison designed in the neo-Palladian style, and invented wooden rustication (a way of making less expensive wooden buildings look as if they were made of expensive cut stone). His 1770 Maryland

large Statehouse project eventually became the 1792 US Capitol. His large Virginia College (deliberately blown up by Patriots in the Revolution) was imitated by Jefferson for his 1819 University of Virginia. Harrison was the first person to design buildings on every known continent, a total of almost 700 buildings, and he drew America's finest and most valuable furniture, having been the inventor of the coveted block-front. His best-known buildings in Newport are the Redwood Library, Touro Synagogue, the Brick Market, the Bowler-Vernon House, the Buliod House, and the Francis Malbone House, but apparently his buildings are not safely protected, because in the last years of the 20th century, a mansion on the west side of Thames Street (once Salas' Italian Restaurant) was demolished with no one lifting a finger to prevent it. Nearly all Harrison's papers were burned by a mob of drunken teenagers shortly after his death in New Haven. As a result, due to lack of documentation, many of his buildings are often attributed to others who had been hired only to construct them. Harrison revolutionized architecture, both in Newport and in the larger world.

John Goddard (1723/4-1785) and John Townsend (1732-1809)

Newport, the fifth largest city in British America, like the other larger cities, made substantial amounts of furniture out of Virginia walnut, Caribbean mahogany, American cherry, and maple, both for local consumption, and for export. One Quaker family, the Townsends, dominated Newport's production, and their work was characterized by simplicity and by the finest quality. John Goddard, also a Quaker, married a Townsend woman, making him a part of the family's work. Architect Peter Harrison first visited Newport in 1739, the year after he had invented the first block-front secretary for Boston furniture-maker, Job Coit. Harrison, who had been brought up as a Quaker, soon became friends with Goddard, and suggested some designs that he thought might sell well. Some of them were reminiscent of French furniture, but not directly copied from French. When he saw how well Goddard made the pseudo-French pieces, Harrison shared some other elegant designs, such as the block-front. He capped some of those blocks with stylized scallop shells of his own design. He also designed somewhat similar furniture for Massachusetts (Benjamin Frothingham, John Cogswell) and Connecticut (Benjamin Burnham, Samuel Loomis) furniture makers, but he made sure to make enough differences so that the individual makers' work could be recognized. Goddard's younger cousin-in-law John Townsend showed enough promise that Goddard introduced him to Harrison, and Harrison invented exclusively for him something that they called 'stop-fluting,' whereby some legs and bed-posts were carved with the fluting and reeding that decorated some columns. Harrison also invented a type of tea-table that was related to his French designs, and most members of the Goddard and Townsend families adopted that design, as well as the block-front and sometimes the addition of the large shells. One six-shell secretary-desk/bureau-bookcase made by John Goddard sold in 1989 for a world record price for any wooden furniture of \$12.1 million, and one of those tea tables sold for over \$8 million, a world record price for any table. Other local furniture-makers, such as Benjamin Baker and Grindal Rawson, copied some of the revolutionary Harrison designs used by the Townsends and Goddards.

Lieutenant-General the Comte Jean-Baptiste Donatien De Vimeur De Rochambeau (1725-1807)

After an illustrious career as a French army officer fighting against Great Britain in the two wars of the 1740s and the 1750s, Rochambeau was promoted by Louis XVI and assigned to command the French expeditionary force of about 8000 men sent to America in 1780, and ordered to cooperate closely with George Washington in order to secure American independence. The British, in a vain effort to persuade Congress to sign a peace treaty with Britain, had conveniently evacuated Newport (the finest naval

base in North America) the previous year, so it was to Newport that the French army came. Although senior officers (including Count Axel von Fersen, rumored to be Marie-Antoinette's lover) were billeted in houses in town, most of the soldiers lived in tents and temporary barracks near the southern end of modern Bellevue Avenue. At first, the townsfolk were suspicious of the French, but relations between the army and townsfolk warmed rapidly when it was seen that they paid for everything in real gold and silver. The French remained at Newport for one year before they marched past New York City and down the Eastern Seaboard to Yorktown, Virginia. British General Clinton in New York had given General Cornwallis clear orders to make his winter quarters at Portsmouth, Virginia, where shallow waters would have made the town impossible for the French and Americans to capture it, but Cornwallis disobeyed orders and selected Yorktown instead. When French Admiral the Comte De Grasse used his fleet to chase British warships from the Chesapeake Bay, the fate of Yorktown was sealed, and the British were forced to surrender an entire army to the Americans and the French on 19 October 1781. American independence was secured, thanks to revolutionary leadership of Rochambeau, who lived in Newport for one year. Afterwards, Rochambeau narrowly escaped being guillotined in the French Revolution, and was eventually given awards by Napoleon. Without huge sums of French money and the army led by Rochambeau, US independence could not have happened.

The Reverend Dr Ezra Stiles (1727-1795) Congregationalist Pastor Stiles received his MA from Yale College, and was ordained as a Congregationalist minister in 1749. After further study, he decided to become a lawyer, and qualified for the New Haven bar in 1753, but after two years, he returned to being a minister, and even flirted with becoming an Episcopalian. In 1755, the Second Congregational Church in Newport (the 1735 building, much altered, still stands on Clarke Street, converted into condos), issued a call to him, and they built a parsonage for him across the street. The following year, Stiles was made the official Librarian of the Redwood Library and Athenaeum, which gave him prime access to all available new books. That same year, he bought for a hogshead of rum a 10-year-old boy from Africa, whom he renamed Newport, but he also joined with the Reverend Samuel Hopkins of the First Congregational Church (the 1729 building still stands, much altered, at the corner of Spring and Mill Streets, converted into condos) in pointing out the "great inhumanity and cruelty of slavery." When he first heard about the possibility of founding a college, he and William Ellery, Jr jointly wrote the college's charter, which was accepted by the General Assembly in 1764, but he was appalled when Baptist members of the Assembly rewrote it so as to give Baptists control over the college, and in 1770 he presented a petition to found a second college (with no religious affiliation) at Newport. Rhode Island's pre-eminence in the molasses-rum trade had provided the money for the college at Providence, but that trade was not substantial enough to pay for two colleges, so his petition failed to find adequate traction. Many Newporters admired Stiles's sharp intellect and deep scholarship in a variety of fields. However, he left Newport in 1776 when he saw war clouds gathering, and took positions in Dighton, Massachusetts and Portsmouth, New Hampshire, before being appointed President of Yale College in 1778, a position he held for the rest of his life. He freed his slave Newport before moving to New Haven, and later hired him back on an annual basis. Stiles was a Newport revolutionary thinker.

The Most Reverend Samuel Seabury (1729-1796) First American Episcopal Bishop

At the end of the Revolutionary War, most of the various churches had no trouble continuing as they had previously done

– Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Friends/Quakers, Dutch and German Reformed, German Lutherans, the recently formed Methodists, in-the-process-of-forming Unitarians, the yet-to-be-formed African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Orthodox Jewish congregations. However, four American churches had a feature known as Apostolic Succession, in which clergy could be ordained only if it were by bishops who had had hands laid on them by previous bishops in an unbroken line from Christ's apostles. The four churches were the German-speaking Moravian Church, the very few Swedish Lutherans, the Roman Catholics, and the Episcopalians. Roman Catholic bishops had functioned in Quebec for centuries, and John Carroll was sent to be the first Catholic bishop in the United States in 1790. The English church sent Charles Inglis to be the first Episcopal bishop of Nova Scotia in 1787, and Jacob Mountain to be the first Episcopal bishop of Quebec in 1793, but what of Episcopalians in the United States? A committee of Episcopal priests in Connecticut in 1783 elected Samuel Seabury to be their first bishop and sent him off to England. English bishops were apologetic that their own ordination oaths prevented them from consecrating anyone as a bishop unless he swore allegiance to King George III, so Seabury moved north to Scotland where the Episcopal Church was not the official church of Scotland, and where at least some of the bishops had never sworn allegiance to the king. Seabury was consecrated at Aberdeen in November 1784, and then sailed back to New England. His ship sailed first into Newport, and his first service as an American bishop was at Newport's beautiful Trinity Church, where he also preached the sermon. Of course, he was expected to sail further west to Connecticut, where he made his home at the recently rebuilt Saint James' Church, New London, a much less impressive setting than Trinity. By virtue of the fact that he had started his new ministry at Trinity, Rhode Island Episcopalians asked him to be in charge of the church in Rhode Island as well as in Connecticut. Soon afterwards, the church in England persuaded parliament to pass legislation permitting English bishops to consecrate new American bishops without having them swear allegiance to the king. Seabury was then joined by William White of Pennsylvania and Samuel Provoost of New York in 1787, and James Madison of Virginia in 1790. They elected Seabury as the first Presiding Bishop (they felt uncomfortable using the title Archbishop), a Revolutionary position for a man who began his new ministry at Newport. Seabury, who had been briefly imprisoned early in the Revolution as a Loyalist, was firmly committed to the new country. Of course, American Episcopalians could have been consecrated by any of the Moravian bishops in the country, but apparently nobody thought of that. Seabury's time as a bishop was marked by his calling for the Eucharist to be celebrated at every church on every Sunday (not widely observed until the late twentieth century), and by his founding of Cheshire Academy boarding school in Connecticut in 1794.

Newport Gardner (1746-1826) African-Born Enslaved School Teacher

As part of the almost continuous inter-tribal wars in West Africa, fourteen-year-old Nkrumah Miereku was taken as a prisoner-of-war in Ghana, and sold to be a slave in America in 1760. He was likely placed on a small ship about 65 feet long on deck with only a dozen or two slaves. He was fortunate enough to be bought by 21-year-old Caleb Gardner in Newport, unlike many of the other slaves aboard, who were sold elsewhere. Caleb named him Newport Gardner, but he arrived knowing no English or French. The lad eagerly lapped up everything he was taught, including English, French, arithmetic, penmanship, history, music, and English Country Dance. It seems that he was taught by tutors and not in the Bray School that had been founded on Division Street

in 1760 to educate Black boys and girls, but he may actually have taught there briefly before the approaching Revolution caused it to close in 1775. He is believed to have learned English Country Dance at Mary Cowley's School of Dance near the corner of Church Street and Thames Street. He is known to have written at least two English Country Dances and their tunes that were published in London: a 40-bar version when he was only 22 years old (after only eight years in America!), published by Bride in 1768 called *The Seaside*, and a 28-bar version published by Thompson a few years later called *Bill of Rights*. Other Country Dances likely to have been written by Gardner include *Ticonderoga* and *The Rose* (both 1778, Thompson), *Newport Assembly* and *Hopkins' Whim* (both 1780, Thompson), *New London Assembly* (1785, Griffiths, USA), *La Petite Province Cotillion/Square Dance* (1788, Griffiths), *Boston Assembly* (tune played by RI Militia at Battle of Bunker Hill 1775; 1794, Griffiths), *Rhode Island March Country Dance* (1794, Griffiths), *Sea Flower* (the name of the first American slave ship to arrive in Newport in 1696; 1794, Griffiths), *The Bells of Newport* (1798), *Hopkins' Fancy* (1799) and *Crooked Shanks* (1803). Gardner, who was ordained as a deacon at the Reverend Dr Samuel Hopkins' 1729 First Congregational Church at the corner of Mill Street and Spring Street (still standing in much altered condition as condos), also wrote church anthems, all lost except for the words of *Promise* written in the 1790s. He seems to have learned keyboard at Trinity Church from Josiah Flagg, William Sampson Morgan, and William Selby, who were organists there, and he taught music to Congregationalist composer Andrew Law when Law was a college student in Providence.

Under Rhode Island Common Law, Gardner would have been eligible for release from slavery at age 28 in 1774 (and no doubt he had some influence on Samuel Hopkins and the Reverend Dr Ezra Stiles with Providence Quaker Moses Brown as they worked with former Governor Stephen Hopkins to get the Rhode Island General Assembly to pass America's first law banning the importation of slaves on 10 June 1774), but he remained enslaved until 1791 at age 45, at which point he won a lottery that provided enough money to buy his wife and children out of slavery and buy a house on Pope Street. In 1794, he and most of the Black members of Hopkins' church separated amicably and founded their own Black church on Division Street. Gardner became headmaster of a school for educating people of all races about 1791, probably in the building with a belfry still standing at the corners of School, Mary, and Touro Streets, most recently serving as Shiloh [Black] Baptist Church. That building ought to be purchased and opened as a museum of Newport's keystone role in slavery and the slave trade. Gardner and many members of his Division Street congregation were impressed at the apparent success of the British colony for former slaves at Sierra Leone in West Africa, so when President Monroe seized land next door to Sierra Leone as America's first overseas colony, Liberia (he thoughtfully named its capital city after himself, Monrovia), they decided to emigrate to Liberia. Their ship left Boston in January 1826 after the Park Street Church there performed a "triumphal anthem" written by Gardner (also lost). Unfortunately, the Newporters had no immunity to West African diseases, and Gardner died at age 80 only weeks after arrival, along with many of the others. Newport Gardner, a veritable polymath, traced a revolutionary path in Newport.

Captain Robert Gray (1755-1806) Circumnavigator

Robert Gray was born in Tiverton (then part of Newport County). He served in the Continental Navy in the Revolution, at which time he was blinded in one eye. On 30 September 1787, he departed Boston in command of the Rhode Island sloop *Lady Washington* in company with the larger ship *Columbia*, commanded by John

Kendrick. They sailed around Cape Horn in hopes of arriving on the northwest coast of North America, but they were separated at sea. Gray arrived first at one designated meeting point, now the town of Aberdeen or Gray's Harbor, and proceeded to explore the coast as far north as Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island on 17 September 1788. Kendrick arrived soon after. The next year, a Spanish warship arrived to arrest various British traders, but permitted the Americans to stay. The little sloop (then re-rigged as a brig) gave her name to the State of Washington, and the ship gave her name to British Columbia and the Columbia River (the latter discovered by Gray). Kendrick ordered Gray to swap ships with him, so Gray sailed Columbia back to New England (the first American ship to sail around the world) while Kendrick sailed the brig to Hawaii, Japan, and Canton, trading goods, especially sea otter pelts. Gray's voyage was so profitable (also sea otter pelts) that he set sail again only six weeks later, arriving at Nootka Sound in June 1791. He had a number of major disagreements with local Indigenous, resulting in numerous deaths. He met British explorer George Vancouver, and the two men exchanged notes on the geography of the coast. Gray got on well with the Spanish commander of the area Juan Francisco Bodega y Quadra, and they departed on good terms on 3 October 1792. Gray stopped at Hawaii and Canton on the way home, arriving in Boston in July 1793 after his second circumnavigation. He was married in 1794, and set sail for the Northwest again in 1798 on the barque Alert, but in the South Atlantic he was captured by a French privateer, so when he got home, he commanded a small privateer against the French, and then undertook various voyages in the North and South Atlantic until his death at sea. As an explorer and circumnavigator, he was a revolutionary. Note: the author designed the reproduction of the brig Lady Washington built in the 1980s at Aberdeen WA; she often sails with passengers in the waters from San Diego to Alaska.

Newport and the Continental Navy

The amazing Charter secured from Charles II by the Reverend John Clarke in 1663 permitted Rhode Island to do things that other colonies were not allowed to do. Since the French did not permit Haiti to make rum out of the molasses they produced, Haiti donated the molasses to Rhode Island traders, who turned it into rum for export to all the other North American colonies, mostly for use as a food preservative. This trade was legal, but British officials did not like it, so they sent a series of small warships to Newport to stop it. One warship was damaged and three were destroyed before the British sent a much larger vessel, the frigate Rose of sometimes 20 and sometimes 24 guns, arriving in late 1774. The rum traders could not resist such a powerful ship, so all the distilleries (whose profits had paid for what was later called Brown University) closed. The Rhode Island General Assembly sent instructions to Delegate Stephen Hopkins to introduce legislation in Congress to establish a national navy to get rid of Rose. He did so, and the bill passed on 13 October 1775. The first ship of the Continental Navy was the Rhode Island Navy 12-gun sloop Katy, renamed Providence. The first ships were merchant ships armed with cannons, but in less than two months Congress ordered thirteen new frigates built, ranging from 24 to 32 guns apiece, two of which were built in Providence. The first fleet operation for eight former merchant ships was to Nassau, Bahamas to bring back gunpowder for the use of Congress, but the British were able to spirit away nearly all the powder. When the fleet returned to Newport, planning to drive out Rose, they found she had just left. Seeing only Continental ships in Rhode Island waters gave the General Assembly an idea: the best way to discourage the British ships from returning would be to declare independence from Great Britain, which they did at the Statehouse in Newport

on 4 May 1776, two months ahead of the national declaration. Word of what Rhode Island had done reached Virginia legislators, who declared independence only eleven days after Rhode Island. Congress was no doubt spurred to follow suit.

What is the purpose of a wartime navy? Most people would agree that it is to beat up the other side's navy and merchant marine, but that was not the primary purpose of the Continental Navy. Gunpowder is one-third sulfur, and sulfur (at that time) came exclusively from Italian volcanoes. Therefore, powder could not be made in America, but had to be imported. The Continental Navy's top job was to purchase, beg, borrow, or steal all the powder required by the land forces, and it is a measure of how successful the Navy was that the land forces never ran short, even for a day (except at the Battle of Bunker Hill, which occurred before the Navy was founded). Many people then and now complained that the Continental Navy was far too expensive, with many pricey frigates built that surrendered without firing a shot. Any ship loaded with all that gunpowder was better off surrendering when confronted by a British warship. Without the Navy bringing in the powder, American independence could not have been secured. Thank you, Revolutionary Newport!

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