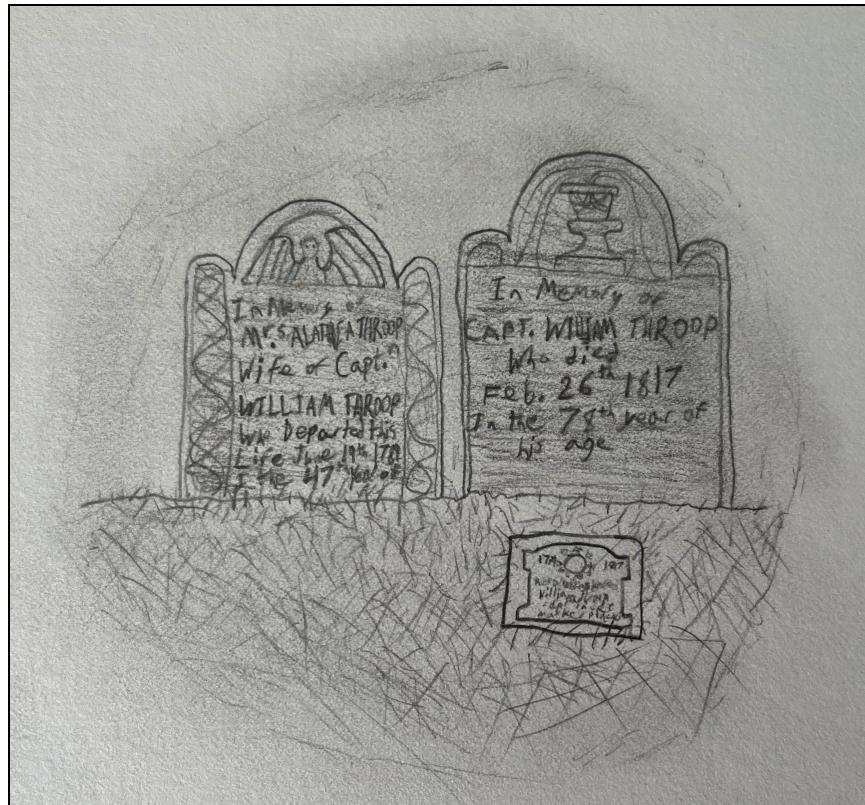


Warm Advocates for the Cause of American Liberty: Bristol, Rhode Island and the Revolutionary War



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Introduction

In 1840, Nelson Miller of Bristol, Rhode Island took his final breath.

In 1817, William Throope.

In 1812, Nathaniel Phillips.

In 1808, William Bradford.

In 1785, Sion Martindale.

In 1780, Juba Smith.

These people were connected, some more closely than others: they, along with many others from Bristol, Rhode Island, served on the American side during the Revolutionary War. Some were army officers, some were politicians, some served on privateer ships, many were regular soldiers. Some served in the militia, protecting their hometown. Some served in regiments of state troops, defending Rhode Island as a whole. Others enlisted in one of Rhode Island's Continental regiments, fighting the main British Army. All of them, at some point between 1775 and 1783, contributed to winning America's War for Independence. On April 22, 1775, just two days after the Battles of Lexington and Concord, *The Providence Gazette* published these words: "Thus, through the sanguinary Measures of a wicked Ministry, and the Readiness of a standing Army to execute their Mandates, has commenced the American Civil War, which will hereafter fill an important Page in History." The people of Bristol did many things to resist this "wicked Ministry" throughout the eight years of war.

In Independence Park, on Thames Street in Bristol, stands a stone monument. On the front is a metal plaque celebrating Bristol's involvement in the war. On the back is an alphabetical list of 168 names, from James Allen to William Wilson.¹ "Bristol Men who Served Their Country In The War of Independence," it says. Over the course of two and a half centuries, this war has filled many important pages. Many have written about the battles and campaigns, the strategy, the generals on horseback leading their troops. Much less has been written about the people of this town, and their fight for American independence. There was a vast range of experiences and outcomes for these people. Telling their stories creates a more complete story of the American Revolution.

¹ This research began with the names on this monument. The list of veterans has expanded over time, and is still likely incomplete.



The Revolutionary War Monument in Independence Park. Photos Taken February 14, 2024 by the Author

Before the War: The Beginning

In the year leading up to the beginning of the American Revolution, with tensions rising in neighboring Massachusetts, Rhode Island began to prepare for conflict. Many Bristolians were strongly opposed to the closing of the port of Boston (the primary British response to the Boston Tea Party). In the fall of 1774, the people of Bristol sent money, nearly 50 pounds, to Boston to aid the people there.² Protests against British government policies continued in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island. On March 2, 1775, people in Providence gathered and burned a quantity of tea. All over Rhode Island, new militia units were created, and the existing ones spent more time training.

Several of Bristol's Revolutionary War veterans had personal or family connections to the local militia. Edward Talby's father, also named Edward Talby, had served as an officer in Canada in the 1750s.³ Loring Peck's older brother, Jonathan, rose through the ranks of Bristol's militia company, becoming captain in 1762.⁴ Newby Coggeshall was born in Portsmouth in 1726.⁵ During his time on Aquidneck Island, he served as Quartermaster of the Newport County Troop

² Wilfred H. Munro, *The History of Bristol, R.I.: The Story of the Mount Hope Lands* (J.A. and R.A. Reid, 1880), 197

³ Joseph Jencks Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850, Volume 1* (Preston and Rounds, 1900), 177

⁴ Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850, Volume 1*, 233

⁵ James Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island, Volume 4, Portsmouth*, (Narragansett Historical Publishing Company, 1894), 64

of Light Horse.⁶ After he moved to Bristol, he became captain of the Bristol Militia Company, succeeding Jonathan Peck and rising to the rank of major in 1764.⁷ During the Revolution, Newby's son, James, served in the Bristol militia.⁸

Several of the families who sent men to the Revolutionary War had lived in Bristol for decades. The Throope family were longtime residents, with Mary Throope marrying John Barney there in 1686, six years after Bristol was founded as part of the Plymouth Colony.⁹ Thomas Throope, Jr. was clerk for the Bristol County Court of Common Pleas in 1746, the year Bristol became part of Rhode Island, a position he held until his death in 1771.¹⁰ Two of Thomas' sons, Billings and William, served for the cause of Independence. The Wardwell family also dates back to the first decade of the town's existence – Uzal Wardwell was a veteran of King Philip's War (1675-76), the conflict that led to the English settlement of Bristol.¹¹ He moved to Bristol from Massachusetts, and went on to serve as constable. Several of his descendants served in America's War for Independence: Benjamin Wardwell was a militia sergeant (spelled "serjeant" at the time), and Daniel Wardwell was an artilleryman. Other families were more recent arrivals. Sion Martindale was originally from Newport, but had married Bristolian Sarah Peck in 1758, and seems to have spent the rest of his life in Bristol.¹² He bought a house for 75 dollars and worked as a sailor.¹³ Some, like Nelson Miller, didn't live in Bristol until after the war was over.¹⁴

Apart from any previous military experience, Bristol's veterans had varying levels of life experience prior to their Revolutionary service. Some were married and had children before the war began. William Lawless, a shoemaker who served as an officer in multiple organizations during the war, married Rebecca Dyer on June 21, 1761.¹⁵ The couple had two children who died young, both prior to the start of the war. Others, like Joseph Munro, aged 16 in 1778, were just barely old enough to serve as soldiers. Future Revolutionary soldier Samuel Royal Paine lost his father Stephen at a very young age.¹⁶ In 1766, Mary Bailey Paine applied to the town council to be made the legal guardian of her nine year old son, Samuel.¹⁷ Before the war began, Samuel lived in a house built on land he inherited from his grandmother.¹⁸ When the war began, four days before his eighteenth birthday, he was ready to fight.

⁶ Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850*, Volume 1, 181

⁷ Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850*, Volume 1, 246

⁸ U.S. National Archives, *Pension Application for James Coggeshall*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/54257580>

⁹ Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island*, Volume 6, Bristol, 52

¹⁰ Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850*, Volume 1, 116

¹¹ George M. Bodge, *Soldiers in King Philip's War: Containing Lists of the Soldiers of Massachusetts Colony, Who Served in the Indian War of 1675-1677. With Sketches of the Principle Officers, and Copies of Ancient Documents and Records Relating to the War* (David Clapp and Son, 1891), 216

¹² Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island*, Volume 6, Bristol, 146

¹³ Bristol Town Land Evidence Records Book 3, Page 245

¹⁴ U.S. National Archives, *Pension Application for Nelson Miller*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/196256941>

¹⁵ Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island*, Volume 6, Bristol, 31

¹⁶ Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island*, Volume 6, Bristol, 153

¹⁷ Bristol Town Probate Records, Will Book 2, Page 70

¹⁸ Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, *Historic and Architectural Resources of Bristol, Rhode Island* (1990), 47

The War

In the early hours of April 19, 1775, shots rang out in the small town of Lexington, Massachusetts. British light infantry, under the command of Major John Pitcairn of His Majesty's Marines, killed and wounded 18 members of Captain John Parker's Lexington Militia Company. The news traveled as quickly as horses could carry it. As soon as word that the war they had been preparing for had actually begun reached Rhode Island, the militias readied themselves for a march to Boston.¹⁹ Within days, the Rhode Island General Assembly announced the creation of the Army of Observation. Three infantry regiments, each consisting of five hundred men, would be sent to Boston.

In the spring of 1775, Hezekiah Salisbury marched away from his home in Bristol. He had just enlisted as a soldier in Captain Sion Martindale's Company in the Army of Observation. In the same company, Nelson Miller, a young blacksmith from Warren, served as a drummer.²⁰ This company was part of the Newport and Bristol County Regiment commanded by Thomas Church (their regiment, and the two others from Rhode Island, were commanded by Nathanael Greene of Coventry, who would go on to see prominent service as commanding officer of the Southern Army later in the war). With their unit, Salisbury and Miller made their way to Boston to take part in the siege of that city. They did not see combat at the famous Battle of Bunker Hill that June, instead continuing their siege camp duties in Roxbury. Later that year, Captain Martindale, a sailor, was made captain of a vessel called the *Washington*. This vessel had a short and disastrous career; it was captured by the Royal Navy on December 4, 1775.²¹ Martindale and his crew were sent across the Atlantic to be punished directly by the British government.

In the spring of 1775, while the Army of Observation was participating in the war in Massachusetts, it was still under the direct command of the Government of Rhode Island. The colonies had not yet formed a united military force. This situation would soon change. When the Continental Army was created by Congress, the three regiments of Rhode Island's Army of Observation were folded into it. In August of 1775, Thomas Church's Regiment was recorded on a "General Return of the Army of the United Colonies, Commanded by his Excellency George Washington Esquire, General and Commander in Chief."²² Rhode Island's soldiers were now American soldiers.

As autumn arrived and these men from Bristol and Newport – Salisbury and Miller among them – sat in their chilly camps encircling Boston, the British Royal Navy patrolled the waters of Narragansett Bay. Bristol, being situated on a peninsula, was particularly vulnerable to attacks from the water. Ichabod Williston of Tiverton, who went on to serve several terms in the militia, later recalled that the people living on the eastern side of the bay were known to be "warm

¹⁹ Providence Gazette, April 22, 1775

²⁰ Bristol Town Land Evidence Records, Book 7, Page 254

²¹ David Chacko and Alexander Kulcsar. "Israel Potter: Genesis of a Legend." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (1984): 365–89. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1922730.377>

²² U.S. National Archives, *Compiled Service Record of Thomas Church*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/142031060?objectPage=4>

advocates for the cause of [A]merican liberty.”²³ This sentiment may have caught the attention of British Royal Navy Captain James Wallace. In October, 1775, he threatened Bristol, sending a boat to shore to warn that if the townspeople did not hand over their livestock, his ships would fire on Bristol. When negotiations failed, the town was bombarded, although not much damage was done.²⁴ A couple of months later, still hungry for supplies, the British looked to the thinly populated islands of Narragansett Bay. Militia forces in the local area prepared to defend Prudence Island, just off the northern tip of Aquidneck. When his enlistment in the Army of Observation expired at the end of the year, Hezekiah Salisbury reenlisted, this time serving under Captain Coggeshall Olney in Daniel Hitchcock’s Regiment.²⁵

The Colonial government continued to work on expanding its military capability, particularly in coastal towns like Bristol.²⁶ Even as the war began and men were sent to other theaters, in 1776, more units were created to defend Rhode Island. The newly commissioned, 31-year-old Captain Loring Peck of Bristol, served in one such unit, commanded by Colonel Henry Babcock and referred to as an “Additional Regiment for Defence.”²⁷ Overall, it was not a good time in Captain Peck’s life. Within the preceding three years, he had lost his one-year-old daughter and his wife of seven years, both named Sarah.²⁸ Now, he served for the defence of the colony and his hometown. Coastal towns like Bristol had extra work to do. They always had to keep an eye out in case Wallace returned. In addition, an artillery company, the Bristol Train of Artillery, was chartered by the General Assembly.²⁹ Bristol was not alone in this; every town on the coast was required to form an artillery company of 14 men.

This preparation and constant attentiveness was very important, as information moved slowly and not always reliably. On January 12, 1776, a Royal Navy Force landed men on Prudence Island, captured a large number of sheep, and drove off the island’s militia.³⁰ Rhode Island’s military leaders sent troops from nearby towns, including Bristol and Warren, to reinforce the island. Billings Throope’s Company of William Richmond’s Regiment was among these units. Billings Throope was a 40 year old wheelwright from Bristol. He had joined Richmond’s Regiment less than three months previously, but this was not his first experience as a military officer. Between 1765 and 1766, he had served as captain of the Bristol militia. Billings and his

²³ U.S. National Archives, *Pension Application for Ichabod Williston*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/111734242>

²⁴ Edward Field, *Revolutionary Defences In Rhode Island: An Historical Account of the Fortifications and Beacons Erected During the American Revolution, with Muster Rolls of Companies Stationed Along the Shores of Narragansett Bay* (Preston and Rounds, 1896), 59

²⁵ U.S. National Archives, *Pension Application for Hezekiah Salisbury*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/144230363>

²⁶ Field, *Revolutionary Defences In Rhode Island*, 27. Providence Gazette. Advertisements were printed by the General Assembly, seeking to purchase quantities of weapons for Rhode Island’s troops. Different military units handled the supply of weapons in different ways. Many men serving in the militia carried their own personal firearms. In Providence, however, the local government held a stockpile of muskets, which would be distributed to the townsmen in the event of an emergency.

²⁷ Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850, Volume 1*, 317

²⁸ Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island, Volume 6, Bristol*, 156

²⁹ Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850, Volume 1*, 317

³⁰ Providence Gazette, January 20, 1776

wife, Hannah had eight children between 1759 and 1772.³¹ By 1774, he was an insolvent debtor.³² Nearly a decade after his previous militia experience, he joined Richmond's Regiment to protect Rhode Island's coast from the British Royal Navy. The reinforcements landed on Prudence and engaged the British in an hours-long skirmish. There were multiple casualties on both sides, with one of the American casualties being Captain Throope himself.³³ Billings did not live to see the end of the month, dying of his wounds on January 24. Then, on April first, a rumor went around Bristol that the British navy was once again preparing to attack. Militia companies arrived from neighboring towns. But the rumor proved false.³⁴ Bristol was safe for the time being.

Bristol's soldiers also continued to serve in the military outside of Rhode Island. When the Siege of Boston ended with the British evacuation in March, 1776, the focus of both British and American armies shifted south to New York. One of the regiments sent by Rhode Island to defend that city was commanded by Christopher Lippitt.³⁵ Lippitt's Regiment contained several Bristolians, including Captain Loring Peck, at least two sergeants, one corporal, and seven privates, of his company, along with the regiment's quartermaster, Benjamin Bourne. In mid-October, 1776, Peck's company had an on-paper strength of around 40 rank and file soldiers, though due to a number of men who were either sick, away from the company, or both, the effective strength of the company was a bit lower.³⁶ Many of the casualties taken during the war resulted not from battle, but from illness. On October 12, specifically, Peck's company contained 32 privates and corporals who were both present and fit for service. Four days prior, that number had been only 29.

Few men serving in the Continental Army had significant past military experience. This situation affected their ability to plan and coordinate successful military operations. For instance, Loring Peck's Company left Newport for the first time in early September, 1776. Supply issues began before they'd even left the state, and certainly continued after that. When the Company crossed Narragansett Bay initially, they faced difficult conditions without any fresh water onboard. Then, while enjoying some early morning rum on the western shore, courtesy of Ensign Joseph Read, they were ordered back to Newport. They boarded the boat once again, "with out thinking to

³¹ Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island, Volume 6, Bristol*, 106

³² Newport Mercury, May 30, 1774

³³ Robert Grandchamp, "Rhode Island Militia Battles the Dreaded British Captain James Wallace on Prudence Island", Small State, Big History

³⁴ Field, *Revolutionary Defences In Rhode Island*, 105

³⁵ The surname Lippitt, or some variation thereof, was a common one in Providence County, Rhode Island. On the list of Cranston militia officers in 1767, is the name Christopher Lippitt, listed as captain of that town's third militia company.# The year before the war began, he was Lieutenant Colonel of the Third Providence County Militia Regiment. As the war began, Lippitt kept the same rank in Babcock's "Additional Regiment for Defence." Later in 1776, as independence became the official goal of the war, Colonel Henry Babcock was dismissed from the service due to insanity. Christopher Lippitt was appointed in his place as colonel of Rhode Island's Second Regiment, soon to be deployed with the Continental Army. This was his final active military command before being appointed to the Council of War, The governing body for Rhode Island's military forces, in 1777.

³⁶ U.S. National Archives, *Compiled Service Record of Loring Peck*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/142040342>

teak any fresh water on board.³⁷ The soldiers were rescued from their thirst when some of their number swam from the boat to nearby Conanicut Island to retrieve some water. Upon their arrival in Newport, Peck's Company was immediately sent to garrison Fort Liberty on Goat Island. There, they were briefly forbidden from retrieving water until their company's officers conversed with those of the fort regarding the troops' situation. After several days at this post, on September 14, Peck's company set out once again for New York. While some Continental troops were lucky enough to make the journey to New York aboard transport ships, Peck's company instead marched the whole way from the western shore of Narragansett bay. The two week march began with Captain Peck going ahead of the division he commanded to instruct tavern owners not to sell alcohol to his soldiers. The men foraged for food along the way, capturing and cooking several animals of various types. Multiple of the soldiers were arrested and confined overnight after an unspecified "Dispute" with their commanding officer. By the time Peck's Company arrived at their camp in Harlem in early October, the fighting in New York had already begun, and Washington's Army had already suffered a major defeat at the Battle of Long Island.

The job of a quartermaster in the Continental Army was certainly not an easy one, a fact with which Benjamin Bourne of Bristol would have been very well acquainted. As quartermaster of Christopher Lippitt's Second Rhode Island Regiment, the supply of these men was his responsibility. Bourne had first become a quartermaster at the age of 20 in 1776, at the same time Loring Peck became a captain. Incidentally, Benjamin's older brother, Shearjashub, also served as a quartermaster. Shearjashub Bourne (the latest in a long line of Shearjashub Bournes going back to the 17th century) worked for many years as a tavern-keeper in Bristol.³⁸ Unlike his younger brother Benjamin, however, Shearjashub served with the militia in Bristol, and therefore never had to leave the state during his service. Benjamin, on the other hand, served with Peck in the Second Rhode Island when they were both deployed with their regiment to New York in 1776. That fall, William Howe's combined army of British and German soldiers arrived in New York. Lippitt's Regiment, along with thousands of other American soldiers, dug in to defend the coast.³⁹ Despite their efforts, Washington's army was forced to retreat.

As part of Washington's army, Benjamin Bourne and the other Rhode Islanders continued south. They followed Washington through New Jersey and into Pennsylvania. Supply issues worsened as winter began. Continental soldiers plundered houses as they passed through towns. Loring Peck himself was among the many to become ill on the campaign, and had to stay behind as the army continued on. Just to further worsen matters, toward the end of December, a poorly managed campfire destroyed three tents, one of which was inhabited by Quartermaster Bourne. Incidentally, Lippitt's men would not cross the Delaware to Trenton, but instead heard the

³⁷ Louise Rau "Sergeant John Smith's Diary of 1776." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 20, no. 2 (1933): 247–70. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1896993>. 249

³⁸ Charles O. F. Thompson, *Sketches of Old Bristol* (Roger Williams Press, 1942), 151

³⁹Information for this section is largely taken from the diary of John Smith, a sergeant in Loring Peck's Company, with some additional details coming from the diary of another Rhode Island soldier, Jeremiah Greenman. Robert Bray and Paul Bushnell, editors, *Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution, 1775-1783: An Annotated Edition of the Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman* (Northern Illinois University Press, 1978)

sounds of battle from their camps on the Pennsylvania side. Lippitt's Regiment was eventually disbanded early the following year, 1777.

In November, 1776, soldiers in Washington's Army were told "By some Diserters that the Enemy intend to winter in Newport."⁴⁰ Newport, the commercial center of Rhode Island, was also a center of support for the British government. This resulted in Rhode Islanders who were suspected to favor King George being forced to sign oaths of loyalty to the Continental Congress. In early December, just after a meeting of Rhode Island's General Assembly in Newport, a British Navy force commanded by Sir Peter Parker was seen off of Block Island on their way to Narragansett Bay. On December 7, Newport was taken by the battalion of the British 10th Regiment of Foot along with a force of grenadiers and light infantry.⁴¹ The small force of American militia stationed on the Island vacated their fortifications and evacuated to Bristol without a fight. The British troops were led into the city by "a Set of well-known infamous Tories,"⁴² and immediately began building new fortifications.⁴³

In the fall of 1777, Patriots made their first major attempt to retake Aquidneck Island. The expedition was commanded by Major General Joseph Spencer of Connecticut, and was made up largely of Rhode Island militia. One of the militia companies serving under Colonel John Cooke of Newport was commanded by William Throope of Bristol. William was a younger brother of the late Captain Billings Throope. He was a leather-dresser by trade, and had been given five acres of land by his father in 1762.⁴⁴ In 1765, he married Alathea Fales, with whom he

⁴⁰ Rau, "Sergeant John Smith's Diary of 1776", 260

⁴¹ Christian M. McBurney, *The Rhode Island Campaign: The First French and American Operation in the Revolutionary War* (Westholme Publishing, 2011), 14

⁴² Providence Gazette, December 14, 1776

⁴³ Around that same time, the prominent merchant brothers John and Nicholas Brown were working with state officials to acquire clothing for the Continental soldiers. This task was easier at some times than others. In August 1777, just before the British capture of Philadelphia, Colonel Israel Angell wrote that his regiment had been described as the "Ragged Lousey Naked Regiment," due to the poor state of their uniforms and supplies. A year and half later, after receiving new headwear, they were "as well cloathed as any troops in the Servis." (Field, *Diary of Colonel Israel Angell*, 36) Along with their supply troubles, dissent and disobedience to orders were a frequent reality in the Continental Army. On the 28th of January, 1779 while encamped with General Varnum's Brigade in his home state, Colonel Angell, after reporting nothing remarkable that morning, wrote briefly about a mutiny of Webb's Additional Continental Regiment. On July 25th of that same year, the colonel received a "mutinous paper from one of the Soldiers." Six days after this, while staying in Warren, Angell was informed that his regiment, stationed on the opposite side of Narragansett Bay, had, in fact, mutinied. By the time Angell arrived, the disorder had ended, with one man being arrested, and the rest pardoned. The one man who was arrested was George Milliman of Coggeshall Olney's Company. Milliman was sent to Providence for trial, and eventually escaped and deserted. Mutinies, often due to lack of supplies, seem to have taken place rather frequently among the Continental Regiments during the war. Another, slightly less conventional act of disobedience to the orders of their officers took place exactly one week prior to the mutiny. On July 24th, the day before the threat of mutiny, a majority of the sergeants in the regiment removed the bindings from their hats. In all probability these were the same hats which made the regiment so "well cloathed" at the beginning of the year. Angell was furious to discover that this had taken place. He sent out orders that if the hats were not as they had previously been by the following morning, any such offenders would be "reduced to the ranks with out the formality of a Court Martial." (Field, *Diary of Colonel Israel Angell*, 66) This order was complied with, and by 8:00 AM, all was as it had been.

⁴⁴ Bristol Town Land Evidence Records, Book 3, Page 6

had a son, William Jr. in 1771. In August 1776 (The same year as the deaths of Billings and another younger Throope brother, Samuel), the 37 year old William was first listed as lieutenant in the militia company of his hometown, then commanded by Captain Stephen Smith. The following year, William had been promoted to captain. After eleven years, the militia of the Town of Bristol was once again known as Throope's Company. He served in this role until at least 1781, overseeing the Bristol militia's service during the major events of the war in Rhode Island.

The first of these was Spencer's Expedition. The Bristol militia deployed to Tiverton where boats were gathered for the crossing. There were multiple delays due to poor coordination and bad weather and as a result, Spencer never landed a large force of troops on the Island, and the expedition ended in total failure. At the end of October, after the failed expedition, Throope's Company numbered three officers (Captain Throope, Lieutenant Joseph Reynolds Jr, and Ensign Jonathan Diamond), four sergeants, and 41 corporals and privates present and fit for service. Roughly one out of every thirty Bristolians was present with William Throope at the end of the expedition. Though Spencer's Expedition failed, news of a great victory soon arrived in Rhode Island. British General John Burgoyne had surrendered to Horatio Gates at Saratoga, New York. This news, when it arrived in Europe, convinced King Louis XVI's France to officially enter the war on the side of the United States of America.

During Spencer's Expedition, two members of Throope's Company deserted. Who these men were is not listed, but their reasons for desertion are not difficult to infer. The weather that had delayed the landing of troops on the island also severely damaged morale. These men hadn't willingly enlisted into the army; they had been drafted by the state for service under General Spencer. During the British occupation of Newport, the militia had to be alert at all times. Throope's company was split in two, with each platoon taking a one month shift guarding the shore. These men then spent weeks encamped at Tiverton before the expedition was called off. These factors combined to create a rather miserable situation that these men were likely eager to escape.

During the cold winter encampment with Washington's Army at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania (1777-78), a major change was made to the organization of Rhode Island's Continental Regiments. As an organization, the Continental Army almost always struggled with maintaining troop strength. The longer the service, the harder it was to convince people to join up.⁴⁵ Rhode Island's two Continental regiments, under the command of Brigadier General James Mitchell

⁴⁵ A relatively small portion of a soldier's time was spent actively fighting. There were few large engagements during the winter months. Both of the main armies usually settled into winter quarters around December and stayed in place until spring. Probably the most well-known of these encampments was Valley Forge. This was where Angell's Second Rhode Island Regiment spent the winter of 1777-78. There the troops lived in huts with twelve men in each. In mid-December, Continental troops in New York saw the Northern Lights. In early January "a ball of fire fell from heaven" within sight of the Rhode Island troops (perhaps a meteor). (Bray & Bushnell) These must have been a nice if brief distraction from the general misery of camp life. In 1779, while stationed in North Kingstown, one of the responsibilities of Angell's Regiment was to enforce regulations on local shipping. On October 4th, they stopped a "Sloop going from this port to Seaconk with twelve thousand weight of Chease." (Field, *Diary of Colonel Israel Angell*, 75) The sloop was allowed to continue on its voyage when it was revealed that its cargo of cheese had been purchased as provisions for the Continental Navy.

Varnum, were severely under strength. The decision was made to amalgamate the existing Rhode Island Continentals into a new Second Rhode Island Regiment, commanded by Colonel Israel Angell. To fill the ranks of a new First Regiment (commanded by Christopher Greene), the state looked to its many enslaved people. In February of 1778, the General Assembly of Rhode Island voted to change the requirements for service in the Continental Army. The Assembly now allowed "every able-bodied Negro, Mulatto, or Indian Man Slave, in this State"⁴⁶ to enlist in the new regiment. In exchange, they would receive their freedom, along with the same wages and supplies given to all other soldiers. In order to gain their freedom, several of Bristol's enslaved men enlisted.

On February 20, less than a week after it was established, Thomas LeFavour of Bristol joined the First Rhode Island.⁴⁷ He served in the company commanded by Elijah Lewis. During his time in the army, he was paid two pounds per month, which is around twice the pay of a British soldier during the war (8 pence per day).⁴⁸ On July 21, 1780, after nearly two and a half years of service, he deserted, perhaps deciding that he shouldn't have to earn his freedom, and taking it for himself. Another member of the same company was Plato Van Doorn. In September 1779, Plato was away from the regiment working as a tailor, probably making uniforms for his regiment. A member of the family that had enslaved him, Anthony Van Doorn, was a tailor by trade, which would explain Plato's knowledge of tailoring.⁴⁹ 18th century armies couldn't bring everything they needed with them, so they had to be somewhat self-sufficient. Some, like Plato, made and repaired uniforms. Others, like Aaron Bourne, a baker and soldier in Archibald Crary's Regiment, prepared food for their comrades.⁵⁰ Between February of 1780 and January of 1781, Plato Van Doorn was again away from his regiment, this time manning fortifications. Juba Smith enlisted on the 1st of April, 1778. He spent some of his service on guard duty in East Greenwich. During his time stationed in Newport in late 1779, he became ill. He seemingly never recovered, dying on the 15th of April, 1780. Prince Ingraham, who had been serving since early 1777, also got sick, and was absent from the regiment in July of 1779.

As the spring of 1778 arrived and Rhode Island's Regiments were combined, a number of officers and men of Angell's Regiment were sent back to their home state to recruit and train this new First Regiment. John Usher of William Tew's Company, the same company that Bristolian Daniel Maxfield served in, seems to have been among these men. While his regiment stayed at Valley Forge, Usher was in Rhode Island. After his mission there had been completed, he returned to the main army, just in time to be instructed in the new drill manual that had been introduced by General von Steuben. In May of 1778, Daniel Maxfield was away from the regiment due to sickness. He was lucky enough to recover, just in time to see service in the

⁴⁶ Rhode Island Secretary of State's Office "Act creating the 1st Rhode Island Regiment, also known as the 'Black Regiment,; 1778."

<https://docs.sos.ri.gov/documents/civicsandeducation/teacherresources/Black-Regiment.pdf>

⁴⁷ U.S. National Archives, *Compiled Service Record of Thomas LeFavour*,
<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/141498222>

⁴⁸ Don N. Hagist, *Noble Volunteers: The British Soldiers Who Fought the American Revolution* (Westholme Publishing, 2020), 200

⁴⁹ Bristol Town Land Evidence Records, Book 4, Page 172

⁵⁰ U.S. National Archives, *Pension Application for Aaron Bourne*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/54017754>

major battles of that year. The regiment was also issued new clothing and informed that the British Army planned to leave Philadelphia.⁵¹

As the main armies of both sides continued their operations in the area around Philadelphia, the people of Bristol remained on a front line of their own. Before dawn on May 25, 1778, a force of British soldiers were transported in boats from Newport to the Mount Hope Peninsula. They landed between the towns of Warren and Bristol. First they made their way through Warren, then marched south through Bristol. As the *Providence Gazette* reported a few days later, “They afterwards set fire to the Meeting House, Parsonage, and several other Houses.” The “Meeting House” mentioned was Saint Michael’s Church, which was later rebuilt in the same location, and the “several other houses” numbered some 39. The British took prisoners, both soldiers and civilians, as they went. Sion Martindale, who had returned to Bristol from captivity in England and been promoted to major in 1776, was among them. The redcoats eventually met with resistance from militia units as they continued their march south, “burning, plundering, and destroying whatever their Haste would admit.”⁵² Major Martindale would later return to Bristol and rejoin the war effort. In 1779, he commanded an armed boat called the *Bradford*.⁵³ Among his crew was Samuel Royal Paine, a Bristolian in his early twenties and a veteran of the 1778 Rhode Island campaign.



⁵¹ Bray and Bushnell, *Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution, 1775-1783*, 120

⁵² *Providence Gazette*, May 30, 1778

⁵³ *American Journal and General Advertiser*, September 16, 1779

Saint Michael's Episcopal Church on Hope Street. Building built 1860. Photo Taken March 27, 2025 by the author.

During the raid, Bristol was defended by Crary's Regiment. Archibald Crary, in February of 1776, had briefly commanded the First Rhode Island Continental Regiment as a lieutenant colonel. In June of 1777, he was assigned to command an eponymous regiment in the service of the State of Rhode Island, and by February, 1779, he was serving as Adjutant-General of the militia.⁵⁴ During his time as a commander of state troops, several Bristolians enlisted and served as long as Crary's Regiment existed.⁵⁵ Crary's Regiment was crucial in the defense of Bristol during the 1778 British raid.⁵⁶

The lives and military careers of some of Bristol's men are well-documented enough to follow them through the war. William Lawless had served as a sergeant in Sion Martindale's Company in 1775.⁵⁷ He received his first officer's commission in Henry Babcock's "Additional Regiment for Defence." In December of 1776, he was a lieutenant in Thomas Allin's Company of Benjamin Tallman's Regiment, part of the brigade "for the Defence of the United States in general and this State in particular," which was commanded by James Mitchell Varnum. Also serving in that same regiment was Major William Bradford, Jr., son of the deputy governor. By February, 1777, Lawless was a captain, serving under Brigadier General Ezekiel Cornell. He also at one point served as captain-lieutenant of the Colonel's Company in Archibald Crary's Regiment of Rhode Island State Troops.⁵⁸ After the British raid, in 1780, Lawless commanded his own company in the regiment commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jesse Maxson.⁵⁹

Alongside Lawless in Crary's Regiment was his fellow Bristolian, Edward Talby (also spelled Talbee). In 1776, Talby served in the New York Campaign with Christopher Lippitt's Regiment.⁶⁰ After his term of service expired, he seems to have returned home. In August of 1778, alongside many of his neighbors, he served in Throope's Company of militia. The following year, he was serving under William Lawless in Crary's Regiment. This was by no means an uncommon military career path. James Smith, for example, served in the same three units, though at different times.

Nelson Miller also served in Crary's Regiment. After the siege of Boston had ended, Miller had continued to serve as a drummer in Loring Peck's Company of Christopher Lippitt's Regiment.⁶¹

⁵⁴ Captain Benjamin West and Corporal George Reynolds, both from Bristol, also served in the service of the State of Rhode Island in John Topham's regiment.

⁵⁵ These men appear in the regiment's documents in 1777, 1778, and 1779.

⁵⁶ While it is not possible to be certain which soldiers in Crary's Regiment were at the Bristol Raid, it is assumed that because the Regiment was there, those serving in it were present.

⁵⁷ U.S. National Archives, *Pension Application for Stephen Hix*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/54889042>

⁵⁸ In the weeks leading up to Spencer's Expedition in 1777, multiple advertisements for deserters from Crary's Regiment appeared in the newspaper, including a man from the aforementioned Thomas Allin's Company.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850, Volume 1*, 393

⁶⁰ U.S. National Archives, *Compiled Service Record of Edward Talby*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/142040892>

⁶¹ U.S. National Archives, *Compiled Service Record of Nelson Miller*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/142040205>

He completed multiple terms of service, including a short time sailing on a privateer ship.⁶² Privateer ships were very active in Rhode Island, frequently bringing in captured British ships to the state's ports. In 1776, Miller married a woman named Sarah, with whom he would go on to have ten children. During the British occupation of Aquidneck Island, he was part of an ambush on a guardhouse there, during which he claimed a British musket for himself.⁶³

Within Crary's Regiment, multiple Bristolians served in Thomas Allin's Company, including Jonathan Drown, Thomas Jethro, and Samuel Reed. From the action in Bristol on May 25, 1778, Allin's Company reported the loss of a musket, cartridge box, and bayonet, along with three blankets, some clothing, and a couple of canteens.⁶⁴

Alongside Crary's Regiment at the Bristol Raid was Robert Elliott's Artillery Regiment. That Regiment also contained several Bristolians, including Nathaniel Gladding, and Daniel Wardwell. The regiment saw service with George Washington, being listed as among the army encamped on the banks of the Delaware River in December of 1776.⁶⁵ They were also with Washington's Army in Pennsylvania in 1778. That year, his men were also present during the burning of Bristol.

Crary's and Elliott's men didn't have to wait long to take revenge for the destruction of their hometown; both regiments were involved in the Battle of Rhode Island in August, 1778. Crary's Regiment was part of the main American army, serving under the immediate command Brigadier General Ezekiel Cornell. The artillery were spread out between the different fortifications. Nathaniel Gladding of Bristol served as an officer under Colonel Elliott from Elliott's days as a captain in 1776 up to 1779. Gladding and the other Bristolians would have manned the batteries which laid siege to Newport. In preparation for the invasion of Aquidneck Island in 1778, men from Crary's Regiment were tasked with building and transporting boats.⁶⁶

Joining Crary's and Elliott's Regiments at the Battle of Rhode Island was that of Israel Angell of Johnston, who served as colonel of the Second Rhode Island Regiment in the Continental Army for about half of the war.⁶⁷ Since Angell's regiment was made up of troops from all over the state, several of Bristol's men served in it. One of these soldiers from Bristol was Philip Drowne. Less than a month after his 18th birthday in 1777, Drowne enlisted for a term of three years

⁶² Bristol Phenix, *Obituary of Nelson Miller*, March 7, 1840

⁶³ Bristol Phenix, *Obituary of Nelson Miller*, March 7, 1840

⁶⁴ Although this is purely speculation, one might wonder whether the loss of a single musket, bayonet, and cartridge box may imply the loss of a man from Allin's company during the fighting.

⁶⁵ Robert Elliott married Abigail Searing in Newport in 1765. The couple had two daughters in Newport. Right around the time his older daughter turned ten, Robert became a captain of artillery. In December of 1776, Robert Elliott received a promotion to colonel, commanding the train of artillery in Varnum's Rhode Island State Brigade. Later on in the war, he served in multiple government positions, including as a member of the Council of War.

⁶⁶ McBurney, *The Rhode Island Campaign*, 103

⁶⁷ Angell was an experienced officer, having been a lieutenant in Seth Tripp's militia company in 1769. He held the rank of major in Daniel Hitchcock's Providence County Regiment in the Army of Observation during the Siege of Boston, and first commanded his own Continental Army regiment in February of 1776.

service in Christopher Greene's First Rhode Island Regiment.⁶⁸ Just a few months after he enlisted, the British army under General William Howe defeated Washington's army at the Battle of Brandywine and took the American capital, Philadelphia. Two Rhode Island Regiments were sent to man two forts on the Delaware River, Fort Mifflin and Fort Mercer. Their goal was to stop British ships from going into and out of Philadelphia, and eventually force Howe to abandon the city.

Rhode Island troops, with Drowne among them, arrived at Fort Mercer on October 18, 1777. British forces sent ships and built batteries to besiege the forts. On October 22, a flag of truce was sent to the American lines to demand their immediate surrender. Colonel Christopher Greene of the First Rhode Island Regiment "answered with disdain, that he would defend it 'till the last drop of his Blood."⁶⁹ The fort faced a British bombardment, followed by a disastrous infantry assault. As the fighting continued, the British ship HMS Augusta was destroyed when its powder magazine was ignited by American artillery fire. Fort Mifflin, located on the appropriately named Mud Island, was blasted into rubble by British cannon fire.⁷⁰ Its garrison was evacuated when it became clear there was nothing more they could do, what was left of their artillery having been destroyed. The next morning, British forces occupied Mud Island, pulling down the American flag from what was left of Fort Mifflin. Fort Mercer, too, was soon evacuated, and the survivors of its garrison were issued fresh clothes and new ammunition. Drowne survived all this, reaching the rank of sergeant. The next October, he was transferred to Angell's Regiment and was a private once again. He would go on to see service in some of the largest engagements in the war.⁷¹

As August 1778 arrived, so did a French fleet commanded by the Comte d'Estaing. They sailed up Narragansett Bay, exchanging fire with British artillery on the island. The British sank several of their own ships at the entrance to Newport Harbor to prevent the French from sailing in. The combined forces of the French army and navy, along with Major General John Sullivan's force of Continental soldiers, state troops, and militia would, it was hoped, succeed where Spencer had failed. They would again attempt to retake Newport and capture the British garrison under the command of Major General Robert Pigot. This engagement saw the greatest number of Bristolians serving together and was the largest to take place in Rhode Island. Throope's company, once again under the command of Colonel John Cooke, deployed first to Tiverton, and from there to Aquidneck Island. Sullivan's army occupied abandoned British fortifications on

⁶⁸ U.S. National Archives, *Compiled Service Record of Philip Drown*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/141494771>

⁶⁹ Bray and Bushnell, *Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution, 1775-1783*, 82

⁷⁰ Joseph Plumb Martin, a Continental soldier from Connecticut, spent a rather unpleasant couple of weeks stationed at this post. He writes that, due to shortages of ammunition, British cannonballs were collected and fired back out of the fort's guns. Joseph Plumb Martin, 78

⁷¹ In June of 1778, when the British army abandoned the city, Angell's Regiment was one of the many engaged in the Battle of Monmouth. Although it was not an outright victory for the Continental Army, it was still considered a success. One year later, the officers of Angell's Regiment held a party to celebrate the anniversary. (Edward Field, *Diary of Colonel Israel Angell: Commanding the Second Rhode Island Continental Regiment during the American Revolution 1778-1781* (Preston and Rounds Company, 1899), 56) Not long after Monmouth, Daniel Maxfield and the rest of Angell's Regiment were on the march again, making their way back to their home state under the command of General Varnum.

the northern end of the island. During the Battle of Rhode Island on the 29th of August, Throope's men, along with other militia units, acted as a reserve force behind the main American line.

While these militia units were called out quite frequently to keep watch within their hometown, active service outside of Bristol was comparatively rare, and usually wasn't for particularly long amounts of time. During the British occupation of Newport, the militia operated in two shifts. This system continued when the company was deployed elsewhere. Half of the men would be sent. When their time expired, the other half would replace them. While some men sat in camps in Portsmouth or Middletown, others kept watch from fortifications in their hometown across the water. During the campaign of 1778, which lasted around a month, William Throope himself was in active service for ten days. William Bosworth, a private in his company, served for six days. A sergeant in the same company, Nathaniel Phillips, served only five days, from the 27th of August to the 1st of September. 16 year old Joseph Munro, however, was in the campaign from beginning to end.⁷² Munro (who had also served as a boatman with General Spencer the previous year) took the place of his father during the first draft of militia. When his father's term expired, he himself was drafted.⁷³

Many families contributed multiple men to the fight. Four men of the West family, two of them named Nathaniel, were present with William Throope for the Rhode Island Campaign. The highest number came from the Munros. At least 15 of Bristol's Munros served during the war. Of these, seven were with Captain Throope on Aquidneck Island in August, 1778. Earlier in the war, William Munro had been one of many Bristolians to serve under Captain Loring Peck in New York. Although, aside from Captain Throope, there were no men with his surname present at the Battle, multiple of his brothers in law and at least one of his nephews served in his company. The average birth year for the Bristol militia present for the battle of Rhode Island was 1753, so the age of an average militiaman was around 25. He was likely baptized in the Congregational Church in Bristol shortly after his birth. He probably wasn't married and didn't own land prior to his military service, but would later go on to do both of those things.

Before French troops could be landed, a British fleet under the command of Richard Howe was spotted sailing for Newport. As the French ships sailed out to meet the British, a storm arrived. Both fleets were scattered and suffered severe damage to their ships, forcing them to go elsewhere for repairs. Back on Aquidneck island, tents were blown down and the whole of the American force was thoroughly drenched. Buildings burned after being struck by lightning.⁷⁴

⁷² U.S. National Archives, *Pension Application for Joseph Munro*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/196293195>

⁷³ It appears to have been quite difficult to get people to serve their required time in the militia, as short as it may have been. The issue of the Providence Gazette from August 22, 1778 contains two separate advertisements for members of John Mathewson's Regiment. They had been called to service three weeks earlier and had already been deployed to the Island itself. The second advertisement, written by Lieutenant Colonel Simon Whipple, warned all noncompliant persons, that if they did not join the regiment "they will be dealt with in such Manner as such Disobedience deserves, and must abide the Consequences thereof."

⁷⁴ Providence Gazette, August 22, 1778

Many American officers, including General Sullivan and Rhode Island's Colonel Angell were furious at the French for their departure.⁷⁵

After the departure of the French fleet, the American Army's chances of success continually decreased. Fearing the arrival of British reinforcements, General Sullivan removed a large portion of the army's supplies to the mainland. The number of troops present and fit for service was down to 5,400 by August 28.⁷⁶ That night, the army withdrew to Portsmouth, on the northern end of the island. When the sun rose, British officers discovered that the Americans had vacated their lines. General Pigot hoped he could catch Sullivan in the middle of his retreat, and immediately sent troops north on the east and west roads.⁷⁷ Unfortunately for Pigot, Sullivan had moved quickly, retreating "with the greatest Order" before 2:00 AM on the 29th.⁷⁸

When the British troops found the Americans, the First Rhode Island Regiment was on the front lines during the fighting. Their commanding officer, Colonel Christopher Greene, commanded a brigade of militia, while the regiment was commanded by Major Samuel Ward. During the fighting on August 29, the First Rhode Island defended an entrenched position against a division made up mostly of Germans commanded by Major General von Lossberg. A German account of the battle describes "large bodies of troops behind the work and at its sides, chiefly wild looking men in their shirt sleeves, and among them many negroes."⁷⁹ This force included several Bristolians, who stood their ground in the August heat. The exhausted men on both sides stopped fighting at nightfall. After a quiet day on the thirtieth, Sullivan and his officers decided to evacuate the island.⁸⁰ This decision was soon justified; the anticipated British fleet arrived the next morning, less than 12 hours after the last boats left Portsmouth. Bristol was suddenly flooded with soldiers. Militiamen returned to their families and their regular daily work. Professional soldiers set up another camp. General Lafayette, who had just returned from Boston, took up quarters in the house of Joseph Reynolds. Many of these soldiers would remain in the vicinity of Bristol County well into the next year.

In the fall of 1779, the British garrison left Newport. The moment the people of Rhode Island had waited years for had finally arrived. They were replaced by another occupying army, though a much more welcome one, when French ships returned to Narragansett Bay. The militia didn't have to worry as much anymore, but they evidently were still called up for occasional service, as in August of 1780, a man named Charles O'Neal was reported as a deserter from Throope's Company.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Field, *Diary of Colonel Israel Angell*, 4

⁷⁶ Providence Gazette, September 5, 1778

⁷⁷ Samuel G. Arnold, *The Centennial Celebration of the Battle of Rhode Island, At Portsmouth, R.I., August 29, 1878.* (Sidney S. Rider, 1878), 90

⁷⁸ Providence Gazette, September 5, 1778

⁷⁹ Arnold, *The Centennial Celebration of the Battle of Rhode Island*, 60

⁸⁰ On August 30, 1778, Colonel Angell, who, like most of his men, had not slept in a long time, "took a good knap." Field, *Diary of Colonel Israel Angell*, 9

⁸¹ Providence Gazette, August 12, 1780

The next major deployment of Bristol's militia, and the final one of the war, came in 1781. The French troops, commanded by the Comte de Rochambeau were moving to Virginia to challenge the British army under Lord Charles Cornwallis. American soldiers hoped that this engagement would replicate the success they had had against Burgoyne at Saratoga four years earlier.⁸² As part of this deployment, Rhode Island militia were sent to Newport to assist the French in loading their supplies.

The last of the fighting would be left to the Continental Army and the French. In 1781, Colonel Israel Angell left the service when the two Rhode Island Continental regiments were again amalgamated into one. After Angell's retirement, the remaining soldiers, black and white, served together, briefly, under the command of Colonel Christopher Greene. After Greene was killed by loyalist forces in New York, the Rhode Island Battalion was commanded by its lieutenant colonel, Jeremiah Olney. In preparation for the Siege of Yorktown, Prince Ingraham was transferred from the Rhode Island Battalion to the Corps of Sappers and Miners. He would now be put to work constructing the fortifications for the siege. Olney's Battalion saw prominent service at Yorktown, storming one of the British redoubts under the command of Alexander Hamilton.⁸³

As time passed, more enlistments ran out. More men returned home. By 1780, Benjamin Bourne, the former quartermaster of Lippitt's Regiment, was serving on the Council of War and was also an Inspector of the Markets in Bristol. He also still served in the militia as Assistant Deputy Quartermaster General. William Gladding, a former gunner in Elliott's Artillery, married Rebecca Tomlin in Bristol in February 1781.⁸⁴ Elsewhere the war raged on. Philip Drowne's initial enlistment would have expired in April of 1780. Instead of returning home, however, the term of his enlistment changed from "3 years" to "War."⁸⁵ By the time he reached the three year mark, he was a sergeant again, serving under Captain William Humphrey. As the war drew to a close, William Throope faded away from command of the militia. Many of the soldiers had initially enlisted for the duration of the war. Plato van Doorn was one of them. He continued to appear on Continental Army documents well into 1783. Barnard Salisbury enlisted in Olney's Battalion on March 27, 1782. He served for nine months, spending some of that time ill.⁸⁶ David Maxfield, a veteran of Billings Throope's Company and Crary's Regiment, served almost the same term, being discharged in mid-January, 1783. Even the newly married William Gladding briefly got back into the fight

Negotiations to end the war proved successful. In 1783, guns all around the world went silent. The formal treaty wouldn't be signed in Paris until September; British troops garrisoned posts in upstate New York into the 1790s, but the fighting ended. The longest engagement of the war was the Siege of Gibraltar. On the Iberian Peninsula, an ocean away from Bristol, it had been

⁸² Bray and Bushnell, *Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution, 1775-1783*, 216

⁸³ Geake and Spears, *From Slaves to Soldiers*, 79

⁸⁴ Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island, Volume 6, Bristol*, 24

⁸⁵ U.S National Archives, *Compiled Service Record of Philip Drown*,
<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/142017384>

⁸⁶ U.S. National Archives, *Compiled Service Record of Barnet Salisbury*,
<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/196293195>

begun in 1779. In early 1783, four and a half years after the Rhode Island campaign, Admiral Richard Howe came to the rescue of yet another besieged British garrison. Firing in Gibraltar ended on February 2, 1783.

After The War - The End

Several of Bristol's veterans didn't live to see the conclusion of their War for Independence. Billings Throope was mortally wounded before the Declaration of Independence had been written while protecting a small community just a short boat ride from his home. Juba Smith died of disease while on garrison duty in the war's sixth year. He had enlisted to earn his freedom, but died before he could enjoy it. About some of the others, not much is known. A young man named David Wilson lost his life during the New York Campaign of September, 1776.⁸⁷ What unit he served with, or even the exact date of his death, was not recorded. The 22-year-old Wilson seems to have recognized the danger of military service, recording his last will and testament in April, 1776.⁸⁸ Toward the end of its report about the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the editor of the *Providence Gazette* wrote: "That [the war] may speedily terminate in a full Restoration of our Liberties, and the Confusion of all who have aimed at an Abridgement of them, should be the earnest Desire of every real Friend to Great-Britain and America." The better part of a decade later, the American War for Independence was finally over. Bristol, Rhode Island, was no longer subject to British rule.

On July 4, 1785, the Town of Bristol celebrated the anniversary of American Independence for the first time. This annual celebration has continued, and grown over time. Today, people come from all over Southern New England to see the legendary Bristol 4th of July Parade, the longest running annual Independence Day celebration in the country. For many years, Revolutionary War veterans took part in these festivities. The 1838 parade included a number of "Officers and Soldiers of the Revolution."⁸⁹

Though he had survived the war, Sion Martindale was dead before the first celebration of independence; he died at the age of 52 in 1785. He and his wife, Sarah (who outlived him, dying in 1794), had three daughters, Sarah, Nancy, and Patty. At the time of his death, Sion was an insolvent debtor.⁹⁰ Samuel Royal Paine, who had sailed under Martindale's command six years earlier, was one of the commissioners appointed to examine Martindale's estate. Loring Peck continued his service in the local militia long after the war's conclusion, eventually reaching the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1794. Property records from this same time period indicate that he had also attained the social rank of "gentleman."⁹¹ Later in life, Peck moved to upstate New York, where he died in 1833. In 1788, Captain William Lawless purchased a piece of land from Joshua Ingraham. Property records reveal that he had died by the end of the year 1800.

⁸⁷ Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island, Volume 6, Bristol*, 174

⁸⁸ Wilson left his home and most of his possessions to his 12-year-old half sister Mary, and his clothing to the sons of John Howland Jr.

⁸⁹ Thompson, *Sketches of Old Bristol*, 382

⁹⁰ United States Chronicle, July 27, 1786

⁹¹ Bristol Town Land Evidence Records, Book 4, Page 218

Christmas Hunt of Bristol had served in Greene's Regiment during the war. He died in Rehoboth in 1822 at the age of 100.⁹² Nothing is known, however, about the later life of Prince Ingraham, or many of his other comrades in the First Rhode Island who survived the war. Information does exist about the later life of Jeremiah Ingraham, the man Prince was forced to serve.⁹³ Jeremiah was also in the service of the State of Rhode Island during the war, though in a much different capacity. He served as Captain of the town militia (prior to Stephen Smith) and was among a group of wealthy men tasked with overseeing the construction of fortifications in Bristol, along with William Bradford, Simeon Potter, and Benjamin Bosworth.⁹⁴ Captain Jeremiah Ingraham died in Bristol on September 30, 1807, aged 75, leaving behind (among many other things) a chaise and horse, thousands of dollars, and stock in multiple insurance offices.⁹⁵ His house, which has changed very much since its construction in 1785, now stands on Summer Street in Bristol (having been moved there later from its original location).

Jeremiah Ingraham's fellow construction overseers were also involved (though all in a somewhat detached way) in the war. William Bradford, named for and descended from the Plymouth Colony Governor of the same name, served during the Revolution as Deputy Governor of Rhode Island. Simeon Potter owned privateer ships during the Revolution. Both Simeon Potter and William Bradford had served as officers in the militia in the months surrounding the war's outbreak; Potter had been Colonel of the Bristol County Regiment of militia between 1767 and 1773, and by 1774 had been promoted to major general.⁹⁶ Along with holding multiple other government positions, William Bradford also served for a few months as Major General of the militia in mid-1775.⁹⁷ The final overseer of fortification construction in Bristol was Benjamin Bosworth. Bosworth served as Major of the Bristol County Militia Regiment for multiple years. In 1777, he was a justice of the peace.⁹⁸

Most of the actual fighting was left to the younger generation. William Bradford's son, William Jr., was an officer in the Continental Army, at one point serving as an aide to Major General Charles Lee. In 1744, Simeon Potter's sister, Abigail, had married Mark Anthony DeWolf and many of the DeWolf children took part in the war.⁹⁹ 18-year-old John DeWolf served under William Throope during the campaign of 1778. Multiple of the DeWolf brothers also took to the sea on board their uncle Simeon's ships. John was among them, eventually being captured and spending time aboard a British prison ship in New York Harbor. James DeWolf, who was not yet a teenager when the war began, went on to become the wealthiest man in Bristol, largely through the slave trade.¹⁰⁰ As his wealth grew, he bought large amounts of land, both in Bristol

⁹² Geake and Spears, *From Slaves to Soldiers*, 119

⁹³ Prince made the decision to enlist in order to earn his freedom.

⁹⁴ Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850, Volume 1*, 334. Field, *Revolutionary Defences In Rhode Island*

⁹⁵ Bristol Town Probate Records, Will Book 4, Page 23

⁹⁶ Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850, Volume 1*, 305

⁹⁷ Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850, Volume 1*, 319

⁹⁸ Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850, Volume 1*, 362

⁹⁹ Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island, Volume 6, Bristol*, 44

¹⁰⁰ Christy Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work: The Business of Slavery in Rhode Island* (NYU Press, 2016)

Cynthia Mestad Johnson, *James DeWolf and the Rhode Island Slave Trade* (Arcadia Publishing, 2014)

and elsewhere. Some of this land was purchased from other veterans of the Revolution, or their descendants. In 1802, Sarah, or Sally Smith (a daughter of former militia Captain Stephen Smith, who had died in 1799), and her husband, Doctor Luther Andrews Crossman, sold a piece of land to James DeWolf.¹⁰¹ Upon his death in 1837 at the age of 73, James DeWolf left behind a massive amount of money and land, including multiple Cuban plantations.

Several veterans saw continued prosperity after the war. Following in the footsteps of his father (who had served as a justice of Rhode Island's Superior Court), quartermaster veteran Shearjashub Bourne held multiple positions in the field of local law enforcement. As the war came to an end in 1783, he became a justice for the Court of Common Pleas.¹⁰² He owned a tavern in Bristol, which hosted meetings of the town government in the early 19th century, and he also owned a distillery.¹⁰³ The rum from this distillery was used to purchase enslaved people in Africa. Like many of his contemporaries in Bristol, Bourne was heavily involved in the slave trade; he died in 1821. Shearjashub's brother, Benjamin, also served for several years as a justice of the peace, and died in 1808. When an inventory of Benjamin's estate was recorded in 1812, his possessions were valued at \$7,585.17, an amount over ten times the median value of personal estates in Bristol at this time.¹⁰⁴ And, apart from his brief wartime service, Sergeant Nathaniel Phillips of William Throope's Company was a fairly prosperous sea captain, with a career that included multiple voyages on slave ships. He lived in a large house on Thames Street overlooking Bristol Harbor. When he died at sea off the coast of Maine in 1812 at the age of 65, his personal possessions were valued at a combined \$1,167.95.¹⁰⁵ His estate value may be contrasted with that of Thomas Waldron, who had been a private in Throope's company in 1778. Waldron died in 1821 at the age of 59, leaving behind a personal estate valued at a mere 56 cents.¹⁰⁶

William Throope's wife, Alathea, died in 1789 at the age of 46 (having been baptized by the Reverend Henry Wight two days earlier).¹⁰⁷ The following year, William married Mary Healy. In 1795, 24 year old William Throop, Jr. married Hannah Walker of Tiverton.¹⁰⁸ Following in the footsteps of his father and uncle, William Jr. became a second lieutenant of the Bristol Train of Artillery in 1806.¹⁰⁹ Four years later, he became Captain William Throop Jr., 33 years after his father's commission for the same rank. In 1811, the same year as the birth of his fourth child, Jane Augusta, William Throope Jr. became sheriff of Bristol County. Meanwhile, on February 26, 1817, at the age of 77, Captain William Throope Sr. died in his hometown of Bristol, whose men he had led in defence of their homes four decades before. All of his personal possessions at the time of his death were valued at a combined \$151.73. His second wife, Mary, died 17 years later

¹⁰¹ Bristol Town Land Evidence Records, Book 6, Page 332

¹⁰² Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850*, Volume 1, 425

¹⁰³ Thompson, *Sketches of Old Bristol*, 151

¹⁰⁴ Based on Estate Inventories

¹⁰⁵ Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island*, Volume 6, Bristol, 157

¹⁰⁶ His most valuable possession(s) consisted of two chairs, worth 25 cents each. (Bristol Probate Records Inventory Book 2, Page 56)

¹⁰⁷ Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island*, Volume 6, Bristol, 166

¹⁰⁸ Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island*, Volume 8, 319

¹⁰⁹ Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850*, Volume 2, 261

at the age of 90. William Jr. (also known as the Honorable William Throop, Esq.) continued to serve in various official positions in the town and county of Bristol until his death at the age of 79 in 1850.

Loring Peck wasn't the only veteran who continued to serve after the war. Benjamin Wardwell, who had been a sergeant in the Bristol Militia Company during the Rhode Island Campaign of 1778, was the commanding officer of that same company in 1790.¹¹⁰ He continued his rise through the ranks. Four years later, he was a major, second in command to Lieutenant Colonel William Tew. That same year, another Wardwell, Samuel, a veteran whose Revolutionary service is somewhat mysterious, became the captain of the Bristol Train of Artillery. He still held this office when William Throop Jr. joined the company. On June 30, 1793, Samuel and his wife Lydia had their nine children baptized in Bristol.¹¹¹ He was involved in the slave trade with Shearjashub Bourne, and at various points owned large quantities of land in Bristol (including the land on which the home of Nelson Miller would later be built).¹¹² Samuel also purchased the home of militia and privateer veteran Samuel Royal Paine.¹¹³ In 1817, after another war with Britain had come and gone, Samuel Wardwell Jr. served as a junior officer in his father's old company.¹¹⁴ The elder Samuel Wardwell died in 1819, aged 64.¹¹⁵

The average Bristol man who had served in the campaign of 1778 died in 1821, aged 68. Many of those who had remained in Bristol advanced socially in town. Several of them gained titles like "Gentleman" or "Esquire". Some were referred to simply as "merchants". Many of these wealthier men made their fortunes in the slave trade and other connected businesses. Others continued working in their previous trades; house carpenters, sailors, shoemakers, and coopers.

Post-War Titles

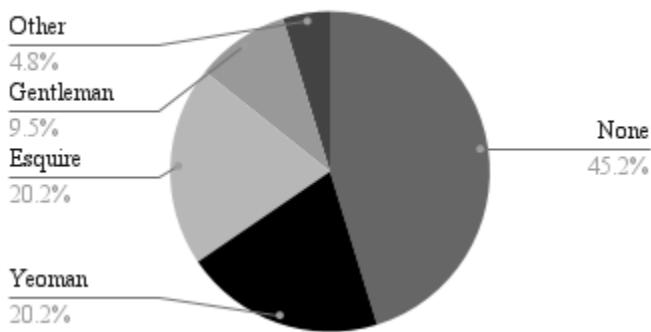


Chart: Revolutionary Veterans Purchasing Land. Titles, if listed.

¹¹⁰ Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850, Volume 1*, 481

¹¹¹ Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island, Volume 8*, 291

¹¹² Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, *Historic and Architectural Resources of Bristol, Rhode Island*, 52

¹¹³ Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, *Historic and Architectural Resources of Bristol, Rhode Island*, 47

¹¹⁴ Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1636-1850, Volume 2*, 261

¹¹⁵ Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island, Volume 6, Bristol*, 171

Post-War Occupations

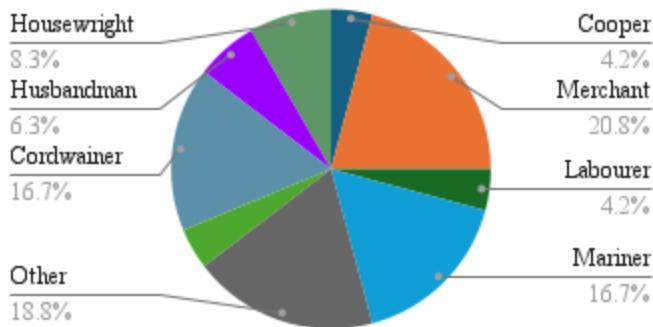


Chart: Occupations, if no titles listed

Some of Bristol's veterans moved elsewhere after the war. Loring Peck moved to upstate New York. Constant Church, a veteran of Billings Throope's Company, among other units, moved to New York in the 1820s.¹¹⁶ Hezekiah Salisbury moved to Brattleboro, Vermont after his service in the Siege of Boston and the New York Campaign.¹¹⁷

Other veterans, like Nelson Miller, found their new home in Bristol after the Treaty of Paris was signed. Henry Wight's studies at Harvard were interrupted by the war and he served as a surgeon before going back to complete his degree.¹¹⁸ After graduating, Wight then moved to Bristol to become pastor of the Congregational Church. He organized the first Independence Day celebration in 1785 and his signature can be found as a witness on the pension applications of many other veterans.¹¹⁹ Coggeshall Butts was born in Portsmouth and worked as a sailor from Newport.¹²⁰ Early in the war, he joined the Continental Navy and sailed to the Bahamas under the command of Commodore Esek Hopkins. In 1777, he took part in Spencer's Expedition. Long after the war, he moved to Bristol to live with his daughter. Stephen Burgess of Middleborough, Massachusetts, was in the war at the very beginning. He served in Massachusetts in 1775 and New York in 1776. In 1835, he relocated to Bristol to be near his two sons.¹²¹

Bristol was a port town. The wealthiest people in town owned the ships and then made more money and bought more ships. All other business depended on money brought in by these ship-owners. During the Revolution, these vessels (like Sion Martindale's boat *Bradford*) returned to port with captured British ships to be sold. About 30 years later, during the War of

¹¹⁶ U.S. National Archives, *Pension Application for David Maxfield*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/196226767>

¹¹⁷ U.S. National Archives, *Pension Application for Hezekiah Salisbury*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/144230363>

¹¹⁸ William Ward Wight, *The Wights. A record of Thomas Wight of Dedham and Medfield and of his descendants, 1635-1890.* (Swain and Tate, 1890), 61

¹¹⁹ Bristol Town Website, <https://www.bristolri.gov/418/Bristol-4th-of-July-Celebration>

¹²⁰ U.S. National Archives, *Pension Application for Coggeshall Butts*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/54132065>

¹²¹ U.S. National Archives, *Pension Application for Stephen Burges*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/54108571>

1812, privateer ships again sailed out from Bristol for the same purpose. This time, they were owned by the aging soldiers and sailors of the Revolution. Bristol was still Bristol.

Decades after the war ended, Congress began offering pensions to the old soldiers. Dozens of Bristol's veterans submitted applications. Men in their sixties, seventies, and eighties recounted their stories of war from their younger days. Men who served under Sion Martindale, Billings Throope, Jeremiah Ingraham, and other long-dead officers, told the tales of their involvement in the struggle for America's freedom. Many of these stories were dutifully recorded in the Bristol County Court of Probate by William Throop Jr. Nelson Miller, for his service as a drummer through large portions of the war, received a pension of 108 dollars per year in the early 1830s.¹²² Samuel Royal Paine got 86 dollars and 61 cents per year.¹²³ Even John DeWolf, a member of the town's wealthiest and most prominent family, applied for and received a pension in 1833. For some, a pension was vital. Benjamin Bosworth II had been a sergeant in Billings Throope's Company in 1776.¹²⁴ Following his captain's death, Bosworth had received a promotion to ensign, but even officer's pay wasn't enough to support his family. He resigned from the army, determined to "try my fortune at sea." Unfortunately, Bosworth was captured and held on a prison ship in New York harbor. Eventually, he was released and continued his service to his country. When he applied to the government for a pension, he was once again in desperate need of money for his family. Unfortunately, his pension application was not approved.¹²⁵ He died in 1825 at the age of 72, leaving behind possessions valued at a combined \$114.19.¹²⁶ Others died before pension applications could be filed. In some of these cases, their surviving wives would apply for pensions for their husbands' service. Martha Coggeshall, the widow of James Coggeshall, a private in William Throope's Company (who had died in 1807), submitted a pension application in 1838.¹²⁷ Quartermaster Shearjashub Bourne's widow, Rachel, did the same the following year.¹²⁸

In the early years of the 19th century, Nelson Miller bought a house in Bristol from housewright Asa Hart (on land previously owned by veteran Samuel Wardwell). His wife, Sarah, died in 1838, one week before her 86th birthday. In 1839, Nelson attended an Independence Day celebration in Providence. Of the 22 Revolutionary veterans present, he was the sixth oldest, and the only one visiting from Bristol.¹²⁹ The following year, on March 2, 1840, Nelson Miller died at the age of 84, having outlived three of his children, and the vast majority of his old

¹²² U.S. National Archives, *Pension Application for Nelson Miller*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/196256941>

¹²³ U.S. National Archives, *Pension Application for Samuel Royal Pain*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/196340742>

¹²⁴ U.S. National Archives, *Pension Application for Benjamin Bosworth*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/54015559>

¹²⁵ According to National Archives Correspondence in 1927, this was due to his service having been in the militia and not the Continental Army. After his death, his wife Sarah continued trying to get a pension.

¹²⁶ Vital Record of Rhode Island, Volume 6, Bristol, 118, Bristol Town Probate Records, Inventory Book 2, Page 353

¹²⁷ U.S. National Archives, Pension Application For James Coggeshall, catalog.archives.gov/id/54257580

¹²⁸ U.S. National Archives, Pension Application for Shearjashub Bourn, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/54017708>

¹²⁹ Providence Journal, July 6, 1839

comrades.¹³⁰ His obituary records that he “died in full hope of a blessed immortality.”¹³¹ Nine years later, Joseph Munro, probably the last surviving Revolutionary War veteran in Bristol, who had been in the field with Throope’s Company at age 16 in 1778, died at the age of 87.¹³² By the 75th anniversary of the war’s beginning, all of the Bristol’s men who had fought in it were dead. William Throope was buried in the East Burial Ground, just across from the town common. There, he lies next to his first wife, Alathea. In front of his headstone, a bronze plaque sits, embedded in the soil. Placed by the Daughters of the American Revolution, just below his birth and death dates, it reads, “Revolutionary War Soldier William Throop.”

The author of this work expresses gratitude to the following: to Dr. Catherine Zipf, for her guidance and patience during every step of the research and writing process, to Rei Battcher for his wealth of knowledge on a variety of subjects and his help with research, to the town of Bristol, one of my favorite places in the world, to Glenn Siner, the late Brian Mello, and all the other members of the recreated Captain William Tew’s Company for the large part they have played in nurturing my love of history from a young age, to my parents and everyone else who has listened to my excited rambling with every new-found piece of information, and to all the historians and archivists whose work has been built upon with this research, without whom, none of this would have been possible.

¹³⁰ Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island, Volume 6, Bristol*, 147

¹³¹ Bristol Phenix, *Obituary of Nelson Miller*, March 7, 1840

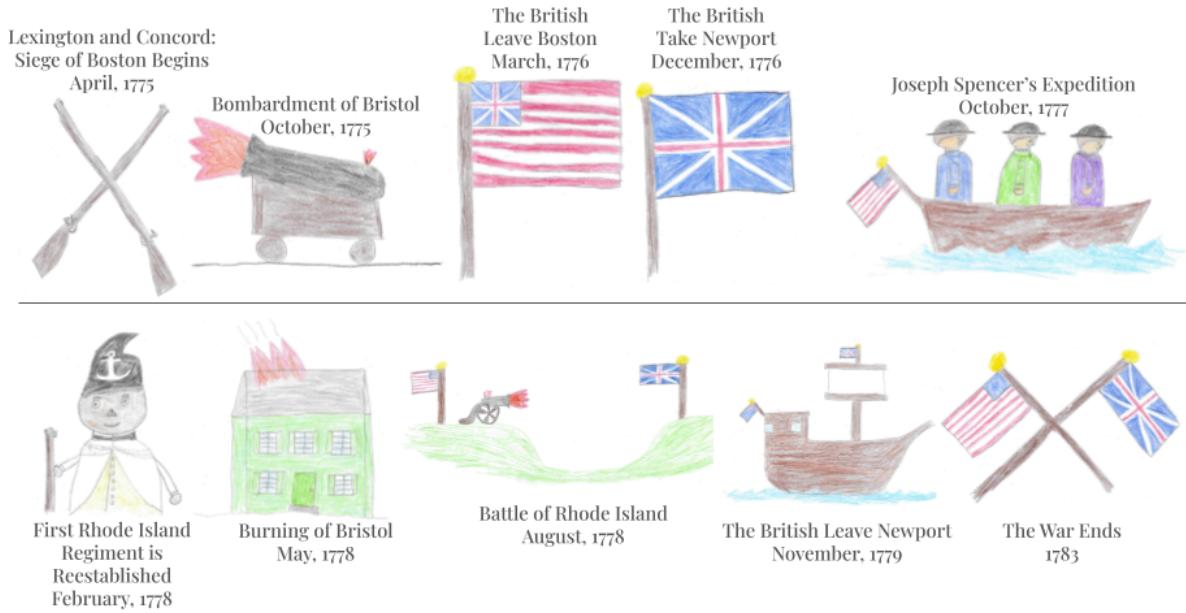
¹³² Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island, Volume 6, Bristol*, 151



The Graves of Alathea Fales Throope (1743-1789) and Captain William Throope (1739-1817),
East Burial Ground, Bristol, Rhode Island. Photo Taken March 20, 2025 by the Author

Appendix A

Visual Timeline of the Revolutionary War from the Perspective of Bristol, Rhode Island



Appendix B

Known Members of the Bristol Militia present during the Rhode Island Campaign, 1778 Compiled From the United States National Archives and Records Administration

Captain: William Throope **Lieutenant:** Jonathan Diman **Ensign:** Thomas Pearse

Sergeants: John Norris, Nathaniel Phillips, Richard Smith, Benjamin Wardwell

Corporals: Simeon Ingraham, Newton Waldron

Privates: Samuel Bosworth, William Bosworth, Simeon Bullock, Thomas Church, James Coggeshall, John Coomer, John DeWolf, Timothy Diman, Solomon Drowne, Charles Easterbrooks, Timothy Fales, William Fales, Nathaniel Manchester, John May, Benjamin Munro, Edward Munro, Joseph Munro, Matthias Munro, Nathaniel Munro, Samuel Munro, William Munro, Joseph Oldridge, Samuel Royal Paine, Preserved Pearse, Jonathan Peck, Thomas Peck, William Read, Samuel Reynolds, George Sanford, Royal Sanford, Samuel Smith, Edward Talby, Stephen Talby, Thomas Usher, Nathaniel Waldron, Thomas Waldron, Jonathan Wardwell, Stephen Wardwell, Asa West, Nathaniel West, Nathaniel Hicks West, William West, Samuel Wilson, William Wilson

Appendix C

Succession of Officers in the Militia Company of Bristol, Rhode Island 1760-1790

As Recorded by Joseph Jencks Smith in the *Civil and military list of Rhode Island 1647-1800*
(Published 1900)

Year	Captain	Lieutenant	Ensign
1760	Nathaniel Carey	Daniel Bradford	Jonathan Peck
1761	Daniel Bradford	Jonathan Peck	Rogers Richmond
1762	Jonathan Peck	Samuel Pain	Nathaniel Waldron Jr.
1763	Newby Coggeshall	William Martin	Richard Pearce
1765	Billings Throope	Richard Pain	Peter Church
1766	Billings Throope	Richard Pearce	Peter Church
1767	Richard Pearce	Nathaniel Munro Jr.	George Pearce
1770	Jeremiah Ingraham	Stephen Smith	Hezekiah Munro
1776	Stephen Smith	William Throope	Joseph Reynolds Jr.
1777	William Throope	Joseph Reynolds Jr.	Jonathan Diamond
1783	Benjamin Bosworth III	Shubael Kinnicut	Daniel Kinnicut
1788	Solomon Peck	Benjamin Bosworth II	Nathan Bardin
1790	Benjamin Wardwell	Joseph W. Greene	Thomas Church

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