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A Letter from the Council of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay to the Council of Connecticut

Edward Rawson

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*A Letter
from the Council
of the
Massachusetts Bay*

Archives

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1921

A LETTER

From the Secretary
of the
Colony of Massachusetts Bay



to the General Court of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay
at the City of Boston

Received of the Secretary of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay

the sum of _____ Dollars

for _____

Witness my hand and the seal of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay
at the City of Boston this _____ day of _____ 17____

A LETTER

From the COUNCIL
of the
Colony of MASSACHUSETTS BAY
To the COUNCIL of the
Colony of CONNECTICUT

Written April 7, 1676, by
EDWARD RAWSON, the Secretary

ISSUED at the *General Court* of the SOCIETY OF COLONIAL
WARS in the *State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*
by its

Governor, FREDERICK DICKMAN CARR, Esq.
and the
Council of the Society

December 30, 1921

PROVIDENCE: Printed for the Society by the Standard Printing Co., from
the original MS. in the Archives of the State of Connecticut

F
67

M324

1921

A LETTER

From the Council
of the
Colony of MASSACHUSETTS BAY
To the Council of the
Colony of CONNECTICUT

Written April 2, 1784, by
Howell Lynde, the Secretary

Printed at the Press of the Council of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay
in the City of Boston, by the Council of the Colony of Connecticut

by the

Government, President Thomas Cresswell, Esq.

and the

Council of the Colony

December 10, 1784

Printed at the Press of the Council of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay
in the City of Boston, by the Council of the Colony of Connecticut



GOVERNOR JOHN WINTHROP of Connecticut died in Boston on April 5, 1676. The Council of the Bay despatched to the authorities of the sister colony a formal notification of the Governor's death, and with it sent the letter of condolence written and signed by the noted Edward Rawson,¹ which, by the courtesy of Mr. George S. Godard, Librarian of the State Library of the State of Connecticut, is printed in the following pages.

This is in many ways a curious epistle. It begins with a formal, dignified and even stately expression of sympathy and condolence. That over, the Secretary rather unexpectedly introduces, gently and deprecatingly, two matters of diplomacy, the impressment of Massachusetts sojourners in Connecticut, and the embargo or "stop" on the exportation of corn. With this second part, which seems rather out of place in a letter of condolence, the letter itself comes to an end. Then follows the third part, the postscript which is nearly as long as all the rest.

It is this postscript, written evidently in the greatest haste, with stumbling pen, in broken sentences, which contains, to Rhode Islanders, the most important part of the letter. It gives the news, then only a few days

old, of the burning of Providence and Rehoboth, and of Captain Peirce's defeat which led to those two disasters. The "larg Discorse" which "Mr Wms" had held with the Indians is a very certain confirmation of our ancient tradition that the aged Founder of the Colony went out and parleyed with the savages when they appeared before the town. It gives, too, evidently upon the same information of Mr. Williams, the number of houses, "not above 30,"² which had been burned in Providence.

Another aspect of the letter is of great interest. It bears the evidence of great perplexity and fear—nay, almost of panic. The war was going very badly for the colonists. One disaster after another had befallen in the west, and now the foolhardy attack by Captain Peirce had brought both Providence and Rehoboth to destruction and left the flank of Massachusetts exposed to fifteen hundred Indians under the command of the stern and resolute Canonchet.

The Council of Massachusetts, in fact, was reaping, in this hour of extremity, what it had sown in the Swamp Fight campaign of the previous December. Most statesmen try to prevent alliances between their enemies. The Bay Colony had deliberately driven the Narragansetts into union with Philip. This letter, in-

deed, should be read with that of Captain Waite Winthrop written in the preceding July to his father, the Governor, whose death was the occasion of this condolence. In young Winthrop's letter, published by this Society in 1919, we see the Massachusetts envoys, Savage, Hutchinson and Moseley, held back by young Winthrop with the help of Roger Williams, and, no doubt, of Richard Smith, from attacking the Narragansetts then and there, in spite of the early summer season. In Rawson's letter, written at the darkest moment of the war, we find the Secretary, in the name of the Council bewailing the judgments of the Lord upon "his poore people in these Colonies." Perhaps, after all, Edward Rawson was not far from right. At any rate, the elaborate attempt to wrest the land of the Narragansetts from Rhode Island by a conquest which should afford a legal claim to jurisdiction had led to this threat almost of destruction.

THEODORE EVERETT DEXTER

HOWARD WILLIS PRESTON

NORMAN MORRISON ISHAM

EDWIN AYLSWORTH BURLINGAME

FREDERICK WILLARD EASTON

Committee

Harvard College

If having placed designs for in part a period
to the life of the former gentleman your Honor of
Lectures, who had for many a year been constantly
in a posture with your Honor & showing not only in
your Country in parts also but this whole Country with
could not only for his first Speech. These times as you
shall see again and know the things thereof with you
these times of his death & sorrowful. See also if it
will not hurt that you shortly coming with you in
the end of the year 1688. The year 1688 it
is a further proof of the great & strong

The Letter

and against his great power in these Countries with
great privileges of his authority & authority. Instruction of
his Majesty's instructions, you are hereby directed to that
end you are and are hereby directed to be
made in the year of all such Instructions and that
it should be the pleasure of that Majesty of England
and Scotland & civility of his Majesty's Majesty
and should not will be directed by all that are
Sovereign & subject and in public places, always so.

Grant that you are very willing in your time to do
any thing that is worthy of your Majesty's Majesty
and you are hereby directed to be
done that you are and are hereby directed to be
done that you are and are hereby directed to be
done that you are and are hereby directed to be
done that you are and are hereby directed to be
done that you are and are hereby directed to be
done that you are and are hereby directed to be

Honored Gentn

It hauing pleased almighty God to put a period to the life of that worthy Gentleman your Honored Governor, who hath for so long a tyme been eminent-ly a publicque ornament Honor & blessing, not only to your Colony in particular but this whole Country wee could not but by the first Dispatch these lines to you that wee might accompany the tidings thereof with our Deepe Sence of So Awfull & solemne a Stroake & to lett you know that wee heartily Condole with you in this sad bereavement, wee must needs looke upon it as a further proceeding of the displeasure of Almighty God against his poore people in these Colonies when such pledges of his presence & eminent Instruments of Good are withdrawne, And our hearty prayer is that both you and wee may be humbled under & suiteably make Improovement of all such Prouidences and that a proportionable measure of that spirit of wisdome reall moderation & charity which was poured forth on the deceased may still be Inherited by all that doe Survive & may stand in publicke place amongst vs.

Gentⁿ Wee are not very willing at this time to Ad any thing that is matter of greivance to us as to yourselves yet we cannot but freindly intimate to you our desire that you would not Impress any of our Inhabitants that are following their occasions in your parts & so hasting their returne homewards againe as also that

you would please thoroughly to Consider whither the Stop which you continue vpon that Corne which our Inhabitants haue bought & payd for & which lies vpon their account with you might not speedily so be taken off least publick inconvenience ensue thereon: That wee avoyd all occasion of offense & trouble each to other & that wee strengthen each others hands in these times of Comon Dainger & Distresse is Doubtless our great Duty & in the practise thereof wee shall studiously endeavour to be at all times found desiring the Good Lord to Guide & prosper both you & vs in all our Consultations & enterprises for the Glory of his name & Good of his people. wee remaine =

Gentⁿ

Boston 7th Aprille
1676

Your very loving freinds &
Confederates Edward Rawson
Secrety In the name & by order
of the Council

Postscript

Much Honrd Gentn.

Since the ennemys Appearance abt Springfeild in Shooting down some of Springfeild Going to meeting on the Lords Day: on y^e lords Day being the 26 of march Capt Pearse not contenting himself with the success God Gave him on Saturday 25 ag^t the ennemy proceeding to follow & pursue the enemy near to M^r

Blakstons feircly with his company engaged them & no doubt did execution on them Causing them to retreat was over powerd by their number fueteen³ hundred himself his leifteint & a 63 more was slayne on y^e place y^e same Day & about the same time as nere as Cann be Guest in time of y^e after noone exercise the ennemy appeared at marlborow burnt a 13 houses kild one man & wounded another was beat of & reported a 3 of them seen to fall Down halled away they Drew of & y^e night not aboue a mile from y^e Towne by a smale party in y^e night 40. 20 from Sudbury led on by Ephraim Curtis left with 20 of marlborow fell on y^e enemy whiles at Rest in their fires Did good execution tho y^e number slayne not known on 28 Day of sd march y^e ennemy fell on Rehoboth burnt a 66 houses & barnes. at y^e first onset kild a man⁴ stragling from the Garrison Cut of his head Gashed & staked it Rept up his belly⁵ filled it with sand on y^e 29 fell on Prouidence burnt not aboue 30² houses & barne There. & killed one Wright⁶ (y^t was neither Quaker nor Annabaptist well verst in the Scripture but opinionated would not retire to any Garrison listlesse to medle nay Refusd to have to do with any Civil business) with his owne hammer as M^r Wms Informed who had a larg Discorfe⁷ with the Indians y^t Came here mention noe time to transcribe they sd Anyhow y^t Philip was Come a this side y^e River, y^t Canonicus⁸ & Qennancet⁹ were at Narryganset that they were 1500³ men yt had burnt Rehoboth & proui-

dence left Capt Parse & 64 slayne on y^e Ground [*]
were Narrygansets Nipmuck Wampanooges Qua-
beogs¹⁰ boasting of ther strength [*] when on 4th
Instant a smale breach made by them at Andiuer one
man kild & one house fired at Chelmsford one house
fird & Judgts y^t is come in as a flood but our hopes are
God will sett up his Standard amongst you & us &
come in & help & saue his poore people with his Salva-
tion. time will not permitt to Add but y^t I am

Y^r Humble Servant

Edward Rawson Secy

* Illegible

Notes

1. Edward Rawson was Secretary of the Massachusetts Bay Colony from 1650 to 1686. He was born in England April 16, 1615, and died in Boston August 27, 1693. His wife was Rachel Perne.

2. This must be the most reliable information as coming from Roger Williams, an eye-witness. The other accounts vary from it and from each other, except William Harris, who says the Indians burnt "allmoste all in providence." (R. I. H. S. Coll. X. 174.) Hubbard, *Narrative*, says fifty-four houses. The *New and Further Narrative* says "consumed the greatest Part of the Houses." (*Narratives of the Indian Wars*, p. 86.)

3. William Harris, in the letter quoted above, speaks of a thousand.

4. The *New and Further Narrative*, printed in London, and licensed October 13, 1676, says of this attack "but we do not hear of any Person there slain, (op. cit., p. 86). See, however, Tilton, *History of Rehoboth*, p. 78.

5. This is told of the Providence victim by the *New and Further Narrative*: "ripped him open and put his Bible in his Belly." The account before us must again, as that of an eye-witness, be the most trustworthy.

6. The *New and Further Narrative* is evidently confusing two occurrences. There was a man killed at Rehoboth, on the testimony of Roger Williams, who must have known. The Rehoboth account says he was shot in his house through the window, however. Tilton, *History of Rehoboth*, p. 78.

7. Two accounts of this discourse have come down. One is given in the *New and Further Narrative*, on page 86 of *Narratives of the Indian Wars*. The other appears on page 424 of the first volume of Backus' *History of the Baptists*.

8. Probably Pessacus.

9. Canonchet seems to be meant.

10. This word is difficult to decipher. This is the Committee's reading.

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