

A RELIC FOR RHODE ISLAND.

wounded in the fight. They landed the crew on the opposite shore, and after plundering the vessel, set fire to her, and then made their escape.

BURNING OF A SLOOP OF WAR.

DESTRUCTION OF A BRITISH ARMED VESSEL

—THE AFFAIR INQUIRED INTO BY ROYAL AUTHORITY—MISHAPS OF A CLERGYMAN'S SISTER—AN INCIDENT BEFORE THE REVOLUTION.

From Our Own Correspondent.

PROVIDENCE, R. I., Tuesday, Dec. 4, 1877.

This State has recently come in possession of a valuable document, it being the royal commission of King George of England to make inquiry into the burning of the sloop-of-war Gaspee by sundry persons of this place, while she was aground on Namquit Point, June 10, 1772. It appears she went ashore while chasing the sloop Hannah. The existence of the document was not known until it was found among rubbish and cobwebs in the upper story of the State-house. It is a monster sheet of parchment, and the State Department has had it neatly framed with historical wood, the panels of the frame being made from a piece of oak taken from Sabin's Inn, where the destroyers of the Gaspee assembled. The corner-pieces are each engraved with an oak leaf, and originally were a part of Gov. Bull's residence in Newport, which was built in 1640. The inside corner-pieces are of cedar, and were taken from the sills of the Vernon House, in Newport, which building, now standing, was the headquarters of Gen. Rochambeau when he received Gen. Washington. Pieces of wood taken from the Liberty Tree planted in Newport in 1776, have been neatly inserted in the panels of the frame. Surmounting the top is the seal and motto of the State engraved on a piece of wood once a portion of the old Benjamin Franklin printing-press, imported in 1636. A motto-frame, with the words "Gaspee Commission," rests on the bottom panel. The following is a copy of the commission:

George the Third, by the Grace of God of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, &c.

To our trusty and well-beloved Joseph Wanton, Esq., Governor of our colony called the English Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, in New-England, in America; our trusty and well-beloved Daniel Horsmanden, Esq., our Chief-Justice of our Province of New-York; our trusty and well-beloved Frederick Smyth, Esq., our Chief-Justice of our Province of New-Jersey; our trusted and well-beloved Peter Oliver, Esq., our Chief-Justice of our Province of the Massachusetts Bay, in New-England; and our trusty and well-beloved Robert Auchmuty, Esq., our Judge of our Vice-Admiralty Court, established at Boston, with jurisdiction in all cases arising within the limits of our Colonies of New-Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, greeting:

Whereas, Our armed schooner, called the Gaspee, commanded by Lieut. William Dudingston, under the orders of Rear Admiral Montagu, was stationed in Providence or Narragansett River, or near to our colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, in New-England, the said Lieut. Dudingston, having proper commission and authority, to seize to our use such prohibited and unaccustomed goods as he should find carried in and on board any ship, bottom, boat, or other vessels, contrary to law, whereby the same is forfeited. And, whereas, we have been informed that many ill-disposed persons have dared, from time to time, in defiance of our laws and authority, to insult, and otherwise hinder and obstruct the said William Dudingston, in the performance of his duty, and their boldness in that respect grew to so desperate an height, that on or about the 10th of June last great multitudes of people were assembled in our town of Newport, and places adjacent in said colony by beat of drum, armed with guns and other offensive weapons, and led on by two persons whom they called the Head Sheriff and the Captain, and so proceeded in warlike manner, with armed boats, to attack our said schooner; and having dangerously wounded the said Lieutenant, overpowered the crew, took, plundered, and burnt our said vessel, we, being desirous to be perfectly informed how so daring an attempt could be concocted, prepared, and carried into execution in the chief town of our said Colony, the residence of the Governor and principal magistrates thereof, not only for the purpose of bringing the said offenders, and their maintainers, aiders, and abettors to condign punishment, but also to the end that fit and speedy order may be taken for securing the future peace, obedience, and well government of our said colony; and placing much confidence in your wisdom, diligence, loyalty, and integrity, do, by these presents, appoint you, the said Joseph Wanton, Daniel Horsmanden, Frederick Smyth, Peter Oliver, and Robert Auchmuty, our Commissioners to inquire into and to report to us a full and true account of all circumstances relative to the attacking, taking, plundering, and burning our said schooner, and to the assembling, arming, training, and leading the people concerned therein; and to the concocting and preparing the said attack, and of all other insults and obstructions which have been given to the said William Dudingston, or to our service in general in our said Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, and of the causes which have occasioned so daring a violation of our laws and authority; and also to inquire and report what measures have been taken or used by the magistrates of our said colony, and our other good subjects therein respecting the same. And for the better execution of our royal will and pleasure therein, we do hereby give unto you, the said Joseph Wanton, Daniel Horsmanden, Frederick Smyth, Peter Oliver, and Robert Auchmuty, or any three of you, full power and authority to receive all such information and advertisements as shall be brought unto you by or from any of our loving subjects or others, touching the premises; and also to inquire, by the examination of witnesses on oath, which oath we do hereby give you or any of you, full power, warrant, and authority to administer, or by such other ways and means as you, or any three of you, shall in your discretion think fit unto the premises or any of them. And we do further give you or any three of you, full power and authority to send for such persons, papers, and records as shall be useful to you for the better carrying on the service hereby intended, willing and requiring you, the said Governor, the Deputy-Governor, and all other magistrates, officers, and loving subjects within the said colony to be in all things helpful, aiding, and assisting to you, and every one of you, in the execution of this our royal commission. And we do further strictly charge and command you that in the execution and performance of the powers and authorities to you hereby given, you, and every one of you, do carefully observe and conform yourselves to such instruction as shall be given and sent unto you in writing, under our sign manual, and to report to us a full and true account of your proceedings therein.

In witness whereof we have caused these our letters to be made patent, witness ourselves, at Westminster, the second day of September, in the twelfth year of our reign. By the King himself.

YORKE.

The commission met in Newport, Jan. 5, 1773, and continued in session until June 22 of the same year. A mass of testimony was taken relative to the matter, but the labors of the commission did not amount to much, as none of the witnesses seemed to know anything about the burning of the Gaspee. Among the witnesses summoned was James Sabin, the owner of the inn bearing his name, where the party, before burning the vessel, had assembled. He did not put in an appearance, but in a note to the commission stated that he could not accept their invitation, as he was an insolvent debtor, and therefore, according to the laws, would be subject to arrest. The precarious condition of his health was another reason why he did not appear.

The inside of the leather case which contained the commission is lined with a portion of the London *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* of Aug. 12, 1768. The excellent condition of the parchment is due to the fact that it was secured in this case. The following is a copy of an advertisement found in the paper alluded to:

"A clergyman's sister, with her young child, is confined in the Marshalsea Prison, through the treacherous treatment of a friar, who being entitled to £500, which sum being soon to be paid, on the most solemn assurance of discharging a sum of £200, which was through the recommendation of the above gentleman, got her credit for it, but on receiving her money refused payment of a just debt and involved her friend in misery and distress, being through her confinement hindered from pursuing an employment which procured her and her child a comfortable maintenance. The kind donations of the humane and those blessed with affluence will be thankfully received, and the truth confirmed by the under mentioned gentlemen, viz: Mr. Beckett, hatter and clothier, Lockville-street, Piccadilly, and others.

The borders of the parchment are neatly decorated with various kinds of figures. The letter "G," encircles the life-like picture of the King, and the first line, "George the Third, by the grace of God," is in large and well-proportioned old English letters. Connected by silk cords at the bottom is the King's massive seal, the inscription on which is almost obliterated, but the figure of a mailed knight armed cap-a-pie can plainly be seen. The reasons for destroying the Gaspee can well be imagined. On the pretense of preventing illicit trade and the violation of the revenue laws, armed British vessels lay up and down the beautiful Narragansett Bay. Had these vessels confined themselves to their legitimate business there would have been no serious trouble. As it was they plundered market-boats, and pressed into the service the crews of small coasting vessels, and also performed other acts of tyranny which so aroused the citizens that they were determined to do something to show the Britons that they had stood their insolence long enough. A large number of determined men assembled at Sabin's Inn, and at about 10 o'clock at night pulled down the river and boarded the Gaspee. After a struggle they became masters of the situation, the commander of the Gaspee being