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Stonington's Revolution: The Role of Small Port Towns in the American Revolution

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JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The Merchants and sailors of the small port town of Stonington, Connecticut capitalized on the chaos of the American Revolution by transforming their town into a prosperous hub of privateering and trade while the larger neighbor city of New York was occupied by British forces. The study of the experience of port towns in the American Revolution broadly has overshadowed the diverse experiences of different port towns and largely neglected the war-time relationship between smaller ports and their larger neighbors. By highlighting the financial success of Stonington and illustrating its context within the larger Atlantic World, this work highlights the ways individual actors, who were often motivated by their own financial well-being, were able to serve an important strategic and financial role in the American War effort as well as trace the regions slow return to the pre-war order in the decade after the war.

Introduction

During the summer of 1775 British vessels constantly sailed west through the Long Island sound towards the New York Harbor. As they made their way to rebellious North America's second largest port, they advanced past the small local port town of Stonington Connecticut, seemingly unaware of its existence. Upon reaching New York City, British forces were met by a divided local population and competing governments, both claiming legitimate authority to govern the colony. After hearing of the violence at Lexington and Concord earlier in the year, New York patriots formed a provincial congress in opposition to William Tryon, who remained royal governor. The merchant class was divided as well. Large international merchants who were financially tied to the British markets largely supported the stability offered by the British mercantile system and opposed war. Conversely, smaller more locally focused merchants saw the British system as limiting and hoped for opportunity in an independent America. As the war progressed and the British strengthened their hold on New York, the wealthier international merchants largely remained in New York City and continued their trade while the smaller merchants fled out of city and away from the British resulting in the local population of New York swaying decidedly loyalist.[1] However, patriots throughout the regions still desired connections to the rest of the Atlantic World and the merchants and mariners of previously overlooked town of Stonington capitalized on the on the desire and quickly filled the void.

[1] Mann, Frank Paul, "The British Occupation of Southern New York during the American Revolution and the Failure to Restore Civilian Government" (2013). History - Dissertations. 100.

Often overlooked in the historiography of Revolutionary America, American maritime communities played a crucial role during the revolutionary era. Historians Paul Gilje and Gary Nash wrote two of the most influential works on the topic. Gilje's *Liberty on the Waterfront* reassess what liberty meant to Americans by focusing on the personal liberties strived for by mariners rather than the political liberties commonly associated with the founding fathers.[2] Gary Nash's work, *The Urban Crucible* focuses on the idea of class consciousness in seaports and asserts the era prior to the War was defined by rising inequalities as merchants became wealthier and business became impersonal.[3] Building upon their predecessors, Benjamin Carp's more recent work *Rebels Rising* follows five unique settings in five different port towns to illustrate the shared experience of port towns. In his work he highlights the religious, political, domestic, and social aspects of port cities and how the uniqueness of the setting was crucial in city dwellers ability to mobilize in support of war.[4] Additionally, Donald Johnson's book examines the experience of Americans living in British occupied cities and asserts the experience of occupation resulted in many Americans opposition to a central authority. He additionally illustrates how political ideas about the post war government evolved slowly during the years of occupation.[5]

While all these works offer important assertions about the importance of seaport towns before and during the war, they often overlook the experience of smaller port towns in favor of New York City, Boston, and Philadelphia. In agreement with previous

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[2]Gilje, Paul A. *Liberty on the Waterfront : American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* . Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.
[3] Nash, Gary B. *The Urban Crucible : Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* . Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979.
[4] Carp, Benjamin L.. Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution. Oxford University Press, 2007.
[5] Johnson, Donald F.. Occupied America: British Military Rule and the Experience of Revolution. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020.

historians, this work will show that port towns nurtured rebellious ideas, however, it will further expand its inquiry to understand the vital functions small port towns served during the war. Additionally, this work will focus on the financial and strategic importance of merchants and sailors within port towns rather than the political sentiment of its residents. It will show that once the activity shifted to smaller ports, the motivations behind the activity also shifted by highlighting the unique personal and financial situations that caused individuals in port towns to align their actions in a way that benefitted the American cause. This understanding helps add nuance to why Americans were willing to endure the difficulties of armed conflict as well as further complicates the notion of the "typical revolutionary experience". It highlights the idea that citizens of small port towns had a unique set of circumstances to navigate during the war that were significantly different than in other parts of the United States. For instance, the citizens of small port towns were at the mercy of the British Navy financially, but did not experience the physical toll of war the same way citizens inland would have. Additionally, having access to the sea curbed the food and good scarcities experienced in other parts of the country to an extent. With these unique set of circumstances, it is important to consider the small port apart from the county's larger war experience. This work asserts that the small port town of Stonington, Connecticut assumed the function and financial importance of New York City while New York was occupied by the British.

The town of Stonington Connecticut is the ideal port town to set this story because of its pre-war function, geographic location, and its role during the war. In respect to the size and function of Stonington, it resembles countless other small ports along the New England coast. Prior to the war, Stonington's economy revolved around

fishing, ship-building and regional trade. Like so many ports throughout New England, Stonington was part of a larger cities economic ecosystem, in this case, New York's. Located only sixty miles east of New York, Stonington was able to rely upon New York City firms for access to international goods, however, during the occupation of New York, Stonington was able to accommodate ocean going vessels with ease due to their deep-water harbor. Although this type of access was common for many ports in the Northeast, smaller southern ports located on rivers were not as accessible by larger vessels. Another contributing factor was the emphasis British Strategists placed on small towns, unaware of the strategic importance they had economically and in transmitting vital information, the British only made sporadic attempts to shell them. Often they would fire from the frigates for a few hours before moving on towards another port.

To tell revolutionary Stonington's story, the work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter focuses on the economic prosperity of Stonington during the war. It highlights the capital generated by privateering and explains the downstream effects of the practice on the local economy. It uses newspaper advertisements and merchant's papers from Stonington based firms to recreate the types of financial transactions that occurred throughout the war. Additionally, this chapter explains Stonington's changing function as a regional port to a hub of local and international trade. Taken together, the first chapter gives insight into America's relative sustained financial success during a time when major ports were inoperable to patriots.

The second chapter expands upon the role of Stonington in the war effort by highlighting the information networks that flowed through the port. Stressing both the formal and informal ways information traveled, it explains Stonington was crucial in the

transmission of strategic military information as well as business-related news. Tracing specific news as well as the travels of sailors it provides a sense of an interconnected Atlantic World and stresses the way the war complicated the pre-existing networks and explains

Lastly, the third chapter examines the region in the decade following the war. It starts by highlighting the differences in the post-war maritime landscape by focusing on the consequences American Merchants faced outside of the British Empire. Specifically, it highlights the threats of privateers and pirates, severed trade networks, and the uncertainty of the country's financial industries. It continues with a discussion of the burgeoning maritime insurance on local banking institutions, asserting the rise of these industries were instrumental in reestablishing New York as the financial epicenter of the region and contributed to Stonington's eventual return to its pre-war prominence. This chapter illustrates this shift was not immediate nor linear as Stonington merchants capitalized on the war time connections for a decade with varying degrees of success.

Taken together, this work argues that the American Revolution was a chaotic period in which merchants of small port towns capitalized on the war to radically upend the economic hierarchy and establish themselves as vital players in the larger Atlantic World. However, their period of prosperity was limited to a revolutionary moment, and in the decade following the war, the pre-war status quo slowly returned as new financial businesses emerged that re-centered capital in larger cities.

Now is the Time for a Fortune

At first light on August 30th, 1775, three unmarked British tenders approached Stonington, Connecticut led by Captain Wallace onboard the *HMS Rose.* Made aware of the stored foodstuffs and cattle by Connecticut loyalists, Wallace approached the small seaport town with the intention of acquiring livestock for the British troops that were currently stationed outside of Boston[6]. Upon spotting the *HMS Rose*, the town of Stonington's militia, led by Captain William Stanton, quickly organized and marched to the point near the harbor to inspect the encroaching ships. The *HMS Rose* approached the militia's position on the point, refusing to yield to the cautious patriots calls for identification. Continuing into the harbor, the *HMS Rose* intended to acquire numerous American vessels docked there. With only their muskets to fend off the three vessels, the militiamen opened fire on the ships once they were identified as British. The musket fire drew the attention of the heavily armed *HMS Rose*, which subsequently turned broadside and unleashed a barrage of cannon and swivel-gun fire that lasted until dusk. While the militia was successful in keeping the British from apprehending the American vessels docked in the harbor, it was not without enormous losses to Stonington.[7] This incident caught the attention of bewildered men of nearby cities. One man from New London wrote to a merchant in New York City, that he "Cannot get any particulars how the

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[6] "Stonington Long Point, in Connecticut, Aug. 30." *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven, Connecticut), September 20, 1775: [1]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.*
[7] Richard Anson Wheeler. *History of the Town of Stonington* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc,).

Affray began," suggesting to the merchant that the British attack was largely unprovoked.[8]

Incidents such as the cannoning of Stonington were not unique in the early years of the war. In fact, following the shelling of Stonington, Captain Wallace sailed the *HMS Rose* a few miles north and fired 150 shots onto the seaport town of Bristol in Rhode Island.[9] Similar attacks occurred in Norfolk, Virginia; Falmouth, Massachusetts; and Machias in current-day Maine, among others.[10] It is important to note, that amongst those towns that received the cannon fire from the British Navy, it was Norfolk that felt the harshest consequences. Prior to the war, Norfolk was largest and most productive seafaring town, and hence why the British devoted the resources to attack it and see it destroyed. Small and mid-size versatile ports had plenty of potential for wartime mobilization and trade, which is why both sides were quick to see the potential of such places.

Prior to the American Revolution, small seaport towns were often focused on regional trade and revolved around a single export such as tobacco, as was the case in towns such as Annapolis Maryland and Yorktown Virginia. In comparison, the larger ports of New York or Philadelphia were hubs of international trade receiving local goods from the small ports and exporting them across the Atlantic world. In 1774 New York City newspaper advertisements listed goods from around the world for sale. However, during 1775 Boston Harbor was closed to trade following the Boston tea party and later

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[8] "Extract of a Letter from New-London, to a Merchant in This City, Dated August 31." *Pennsylvania Evening Post* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), September 5, 1775: 398. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.

[9] "Norwich, October 9." *Norwich Packet* (Norwich, Connecticut), October 9, 1775: [3]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

[10] Kennedy, Frances H. 2014. *The American Revolution : A Historical Guidebook*. ProQuest Ebook Central Leased. Oxford University Press.

in 1776 New York Harbor was occupied by 34,000 of General Howe's troops. Similarly, the city of Norfolk Virginia was leveled by cannon fire, and in Charleston, SC British forces occupied the town. Consequently, small seaport towns throughout the Northeast became crucial to the war effort. With many of the larger ports such as New York, Philadelphia, Norfolk, and Boston attracting the attention of the British Naval forces, these smaller seaport towns thrived due to their importance of replacing larger ports as centers for finance and hubs of international trade. This chapter will tell the story of the elevated financial importance of small port towns using the port of Stonington, Connecticut, and will highlight the ways in which small ports thrived during this period. The first part of this chapter will explain how privateering injected capital into the local economy, and the second section will focus on the other ways in which maritime communities benefitted economically as they transformed from regional to international centers of trade.

Stonington as a Privateering Base

Prior to the outbreak of the American Revolution, Stonington Connecticut was a sleepy port town that existed within a community of larger port towns to its east and west. With New York City as the major port of the Long Island Sound, Stonington and its merchants were relegated to conducting local trade up and down the coast of New England. During the Colonial period, Stonington's economy was centered on Fishing and shipbuilding, leaving the merchants of New York and Newport to engage in the international trade for the region.[11] With a much smaller population and a limited connection to the political ideas swirling around the Atlantic World, the town of

[11] Acheson, J., John T. Poggie and R. Pollnac. "Small Fishing Ports in Southern New England, Report to the National Science Foundation, Volume Ib." (1980).

Stonington did not experience the same tensions of the imperial crisis as its cosmopolitan neighbors. However, the pre-existing shipbuilding industry and the access to natural resources allowed the town of Stonington to become a hub of privateering during the American Revolution.

With the Continental Congress unable to fund and build an effective Navy to protect the interests of American merchants, they relied upon private citizens to outfit merchant vessels into sea-worthy ships able of protecting the coast and capturing British vessels. Both the Colonial governments and the Continental Congress issued letters of Marque which gave legal standing to the private vessels to capture enemy ships and sell their goods. The practice of privateering existed in the Atlantic world since the 16th century and offered those involved opportunities to make great fortunes. Strategically, privateering offered rebel forces access to captured war supplies and a distraction to the British Navy. During the first two years of the Revolution, American Privateers captured more than 350 British ships, which were crucial in supplying food weapons and gun powder to the grossly undersupplied continental forces.[12] Even with the successes of American privateers during the early years of the war, the British leadership still believed the war would be won on land by capturing the major cities and defeating Washington's army, because of this the British Navy was primarily focused on blockading cities and supporting its armies rather than putting an end to privateering. As mentioned before, the British often attempted to shell port towns in passing, however, these attacks were never sustained and often did not hamper the ports ability to continue to outfit privateering vessels.[13]

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[12] Preston, David L. The Royal Navy Lost the Revolution. Naval History, Jan, 1996. 10,
[13] Ibid.

Surviving the thousands of rounds fired from the *HMS Rose's* cannons in late August of 1775, Stonington managed to remain a vital and prosperous hub for privateering throughout the war. Like the other seaport towns of the Northeast, Stonington had a rich maritime history that spanned the 120 years since the town's founding in 1654.[14] With much of the population employed on the vessels frequenting Stonington's harbor, the emergence of Stonington as a base for privateering is not surprising. As Daniel Vickers explains in his in-depth study on the coastal town of Salem, Massachusetts, *The Young Man and the Sea,* many of the residents of coastal towns considered seafaring a part of their identity. When considering lines of work, the seafaring industry was one they were familiar with and tended to be drawn toward.[15] At the time of the revolution, serving on privateering vessels was the preferable and obvious choice for many young men as compared to service in the militia or the continental army. This was especially true for the young men who lived in Stonington.[16] John Palmer, a resident of Stonington, made the switch from soldiering to privateering during the early parts of the war. While the reasons for his switch were not explicitly stated in his journal, presumably the financial lure of privateering was the main driver of his decision. His letters indicate that he served in the militia during the summer of 1776 with a regiment in Rhode Island but was sailing aboard a privateering vessel by 1777.[17] Similarly, Timothy Boardman, a carpenter hailing from the Connecticut coast, fought under General George Washington at Dorchester Heights in 1775 and later marched to meet Burgoyne's army at

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[14] Richard Anson Wheeler. History of the Town of Stonington Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc.
[15] Vickers, Daniel, and Vince Walsh. 2005. *Young Men and the Sea : Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail*. Books at JSTOR EBA Leased. Yale University Press.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Coll. 53, Box 1, Folder 1, Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc

Saratoga. Shortly after the Battle of Saratoga, Boardman returned to Connecticut and joined the Privateering vessel *Oliver Cromwell*, in which he made two voyages from Connecticut to South Carolina and the Dutch Caribbean. Even after being captured by the British on multiple occasions, Boardman continued serving on numerous vessels throughout the remainder of the war rather than returning to the Army.[18]

The active privateering community in Stonington resulted in considerable wealth for the community compared to other parts of the country. The communities that relied on the British-occupied cities of Boston, New York, and later Charleston were at a loss for a viable market to sell their goods. Conversely, the communities involved in privateering (and the financiers backing their efforts) were positioned to amass great wealth during the war. Sailors employed on these ships often fared quite well. As in the case of the sloop *Hancock*, sailors were paid both a wage, denoted by the term "Share of Money" in the ship's account book, as well as "Shares" of the captured prizes.[19] For example: Jeffery Champlin, a sailor on the *Hancock*, received shares of three different prizes, the *Venus, Hibernia, and Comet* along with his wages totaling more than £1004. The money Champlain made during his time on the *Hancock* far surpassed anything Stonington residents who served in the Continental Army could possibly earn. Importantly, those financing privateering voyages were the wealthiest members of a community, and the credit they offered their sailors was more likely to be considered legitimate than payments offered by the Continental Congress.

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[18] Boardman, Timothy. Log-Book of Timothy Boardman Kept on Board the Privateer Oliver Cromwell, During a Cruise from New London, Ct., to Charleston, S. C., and Return, in 1778; Also, a Biographical Sketch of the Author. Log-Book of Timothy Boardman Kept on Board the Privateer Oliver Cromwell, During a Cruise from New London, Ct., to Charleston, S. C., and Return, in 1778; Also, a Biographical Sketch of the Author. Project Gutenberg, n.d.

[19] Coll. 37, Volume 2 Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.

As evident from the records of the sloop *Hancock*, a privateering vessel sailing from Stonington through the war, Captain Jeffery Champlin recorded payments of various kinds to outfit the ship as well as payment records for over seventy other sailors. On the page opposite the payment record, a list of purchases made by the sailor from the captain was debited from the sailor's account. For instance, John Cheesbrough, a sailor from Stonington, was recorded as having "butter, beef, wine, and Connecticut Monies" debited from his payment that consisted of "shares from the prize *Brig Friendship.*[20] In the account books from the *sloop Hancock*, Captain Richard Peter and agent Giles Mumford recorded the different commodities individual sailors purchased from him through lines of credit. As is the case for Henry Brim, who purchased foodstuffs like lamb and sugar as well as "2 small arms for £200" and shoes during his voyage in 1780.[21] Similarly, Benjamin Clout purchased muskets, handkerchiefs, buttons, and thread off of credit from the three ships that were captured during his service. While more than sixty sailors listed in the account book of the Sloop *Hancock* had purchased commodities from the captain during the multiple voyages, the sailors would have also been frequenting merchant houses and taverns while in port, both settings in which they would have interacted with sailors from other colonies.[22] When onboard the vessels, the sailor's ability to purchase goods from the ship's captains on credit helped to keep the maritime economy viable during the war. This system of credit was successful because the maritime economy was lubricated with the constant flow of capital coming from the prizes the privateers captured. Without the constant source of capital, the captains of the

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[20] Coll. 11, Volume 2 Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[21] Coll. 11, Volume 2 Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[22] Coll. 11, Box 2, Folder 1 Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.

ship may have been less inclined to sell commodities to their sailors through lines of credit.

In recruiting men to serve aboard privateering vessels, the potential for wealth was the major selling-point used by those recruiting sailors. Just east of Stonington in the small port of Groton, Thomas Chester wrote in the local newspaper "To all Gentlemen Sailors and Others- Now is the Time for a Fortune. There is Bound on a Cruize against the Enemies of America, the private sloop of War Two-Brothers, Thomas Chester, Commander, now laing at Groton, will sail in a few days". It is telling that Chester wrote about "great fortunes" rather than the strategic importance of privateering in his post in the local newspaper.

Aside from potential fortunes, many American sailors captured and brought to Europe joined privateering ventures to finance their return trips to America. As Paul Gilje notes in *Liberty on the Waterfront*, many of the records left by sailors recruited in Europe indicate that they were penniless and lacked any other way to return home. Interestingly, some of these men cited their desire to serve their country in writings penned later in life. It is probable that many of these sailors were inspired by self-serving motivations during the conflict, but later revised their legacy and emphasized their patriotic duty to serve against the British. Some sailors, such as Joesph Myrick and Thomas Haley, served onboard privateering vessels on *both* sides. Myrick served on the American vessel *Black Prince* before joining a French vessel and later serving on a British expedition. Haley served on both American and British ships as well. Cases such as these highlight the

emphasis sailors placed on their own personal motivations for serving rather than feelings of patriotic duty.[23]

Of the members of the privateering community that prospered from the war, it was Joseph Williams who perhaps benefitted the most amongst the Stonington seafarers. At the onset of the war, Williams was a merchant selling supplies to the Continental Army. However, the potential for large gains in privateering quickly drew him away from land-based commerce. Financing ships such as the *Surprise* and the *Nabby*, Williams and the men he employed earned incredible sums of money. By the end of the war, Williams owned two warehouses, a shipyard, and a fleet of over twenty vessels -- all of which he meticulously described in his various account books and letters. In fact, the war proved so prosperous for Williams that he continued his maritime ventures after the war. With connections established in the West Indies during the war, Williams' vessels remained active and prosperous until the time of turmoil in France. During the French Revolution his vessels became the target of French privateers in the Caribbean, resulting in numerous ships of his being captured as prizes. The account books left by Williams show a continued decrease in his wealth throughout the 1790's until his death in 1800.[24] As was the case for Williams, the relative peace amongst vessels of the North Atlantic following the war resulted in a significant decline in prosperity. After seeing the success of Williams and the other ship financiers like him, a market for vessels emerged. Many followed in the footsteps of Joseph Williams, hoping to achieve a similar level of wealth. Marketed to eager financiers of privateering vessels, "A Vessel about 170 tons Burthens"

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[23] Gilje, Paul A. *Liberty on the Waterfront : American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* . Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. 114.

[24] Coll. 37, Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.

was listed by George Sheffield in the April 4th issue of the Connecticut Gazette in 1777.[25] Sheffield hoped to attract a buyer with ambitions of staking claim in Stonington's privateering community. It is telling that such large investments were made during the war, the financial optimism within small port towns was unique compared to experience of other urban communities in North America.

Stonington's fiscal benefits from privateering were not solely restricted to the monetary gain for the sailors and financiers. After ships such as the *Hancock* or the *Revenge* captured a British vessel, they would accompany them into ports to sell the apprehended goods. This secondary market of apprehended goods bolstered the maritime communities' economies. Unlike many economies that experienced prolonged periods of hardship during the Revolution (due to the decrease in global and continental trade), certain sea towns with privateering activity were boosted by the commerce of selling goods commandeered by British ships. And in addition to those directly benefitting from the reselling of apprehended goods, numerous others enjoyed the ancillary benefits of Stonington's role as a privateering base. Prior to leaving on a voyage, ship owners like Joseph Williams would require things like "cleaning and oiling 3 guns" or "Nails, Beef, Sugar, Bread, Rum and Oil" purchased for £1005 on August 24th, 1780 for the *Sloop Surprise*.[26] Reading the receipts of the *Sloop Surprise*, it becomes clear that the local community providing services and supplies to these ships enjoyed consistent work throughout the year, a condition that did not exist in other parts of the colonies. Additionally, there was a market for weapons to outfit the privateering vessels. John

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[25] "Advertisement." *Connecticut Gazette* (New London, Connecticut), February 28, 1777: [3]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[26] "Advertisement." *Connecticut Gazette* (New London, Connecticut), April 4, 1777: [4]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

Rathbun, for example, advertised in the *Providence Gazette, "*Stonington Harbour, in the State of Connecticut, Six very neat Carriage Guns, Two pounders; also Six Swivels, 150 weight of powder, a Quantity of Swivel and Grape Shot."[27] Similarly, John Brown listed "number of muskets, cutlses, and spears, and a medicine box" in addition to carriage guns and swivels.[28] Understanding the types and amounts of supplies privateering captains had to purchase prior to a voyage gives a clearer sense of how privateering shaped the Stonington economy.

In 1779, a privateering ship captained by John Sloan sailed into the Rhode Island port town of New London having lost both its rudder and its Mast during an expedition in the West Indies. Just over a year later, Captain Sloan used the local newspaper to recruit sailors to serve on "a new vessel". In this instance he looked to transport "Rye, Indian Corn, Cheese, Flax, or leather." He also made clear that the new vessel was well-armed and "will sail in 15 days".[29] Captain John Sloan's ability to lose a ship and still purchase and outfit a new ship in the following year suggests that privateering and war-time trade was so lucrative that even losing a vessel was not enough to dissuade privateer captains from engaging in the practice.

The opportunity to serve as a privateering base kept Stonington's economy – and the economies of other privateering seaport towns - viable and resilient throughout the war. With major economic centers like Boston, New York, and Charleston hampered by British siege and eventual occupation, business shifted from cities to seaport towns like

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[27] "Advertisement." *Providence Gazette* (Providence, Rhode Island), January 10, 1778: [4]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[28] "Advertisement." *Connecticut Gazette* (New London, Connecticut), February 28, 1777: [4]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*
[29] "New-London, Dec. 8." *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven, Connecticut), no. 634, December 22, 1779: [2]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

Stonington. As a way for mariners to aid the war effort while still making enough money to support their families, privateering succeeded in countering the British naval presence and keeping maritime economies viable.

Stonington's Revolutionary experience was in many ways representative of other small seaport communities experience during the Revolution. Stonington's location on the Long Island Sound made it a logical alternative when the port of New York was occupied in 1775. Similarly, small seaport towns in other colonies experienced years of financial prosperity as other major ports were either shut down or destroyed. Examples include the prosperity of Portsmouth, Virginia after the burning of Norfolk and Salem, as well as Marblehead and Nantucket following the closure of the port at Boston.

Small Seaports as Centers for Exchange

Williams and Palmer are just a few of examples of the many men who reaped the benefits of privateering. The money generated by privateering shaped the revolutionary experience for most of the residents of port towns. With the well-documented financial struggles of the continental army and state militias, those working in port towns enjoyed more lucrative (and stable) pay, especially when as compared to those soldiering. Those with skills in the shipbuilding industry and outfitting processes were in the highest demand. As an example, a "Mr. McKoy" of Fredericksburg, Virginia sought carpenters near the Rappahannock river to help get his schooner *The Betsey* afloat. In his advertisements for carpenters, he wrote "Any Carpenter, or others, that would undertake to get said Schooner off, shall recieve form the Subsriber 120l. as soon as she is afloat.". Mr. Mckoy clarified that *Betsey* was not a privateering vessel, but a ship intended to transport dry goods. He further explains that it was built in Boston to ship barrels of flour.

Once the workers in Mr. McKoy's employment repaired the vessel, it would continue shipping flour to the soldiers through the small port towns like Fredericksburg or Stonington.[30]

In addition to private financiers, the Continental Navy also relied on the labor of workers in small port towns. In Virginia, the Williamsburg Gazette posted an advertisement for "a quantity of OAK and PINE PLANK for the purpose of Ship-Building"[31]. While Williamsburg was not a port town, the ship being built was presumably constructed in a small port town and employing local labor. Similar instances of government entities engaging with local economies to produce goods for the war effort was common in port towns up and down the eastern seaboard.

The Continental Congress relied on New England merchants to procure war supplies through unofficial channels. Before the French officially joined the war, they sent weapons and gun powder through the neutral ports in the Dutch Caribbean in exchange for raw materials such as tobacco. During this period of limited French assistance, neither country was willing to make formal communications so they both relied upon private companies and individuals. This arrangement allowed New England merchants to make money during uncertain times as well as set up networks that would continue to use throughout the war. Additionally, through this arrangement, the French allowed American privateers to refit their ships in French controlled Caribbean ports.[32] This further allowed American ship captains (who often were engaged with both

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[30] "Advertisement." *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg, Virginia), no. 1382, September 26, 1777: [3]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*

[31] "Advertisement." *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg, Virginia), no. 1332, February 14, 1777: [3]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

[32] Dull, Jonathan. "Diplomacy of the Revolution, to 1783." In A Companion to the American Revolution, 352–60. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000.

privateering and trade) to become more adept operating in the Caribbean. The ship *Amity* sailed form the Connecticut coast during the period and employed sailors from Stonington and the surrounding towns. Sailing on behalf of the Continental Congress and the government of Connecticut, the *Amity* made several trips to the Caribbean during this time securing war supplies.[33] Although arrangements were necessary and profitable for the merchants, they were not without their dangers. The British also had active privateers patrolling the waters of the Caribbean. As was the case for Timothy Boardman, it was not uncommon for American merchants to be captured in the waters between New England and the Caribbean. In 1779 he served on a vessel that was taken off the coast of Charleston. Luckily for Boardman, the British privateer vessel did not have the resources to keep him as a prisoner of war and allowed him to walk free in Charleston. A year later in 1780, Boardman was again captured by the British in the waters surrounding St. Eustatia before he could trade with the neutral Dutch island. Again, Boardman was able to walk free after his ship was taken to port and he was rendered little service to the capturing British captain.[34]

The increase in maritime activity during the Revolutionary war also led to greater prosperity for other nearby business owners, such as those operating taverns. Taverns were often sites of recruitment for sailors to serve onboard privateering vessels. As Paul Gilje explains in his book *Liberty on the Waterfront*, Privateer captains would often purchase drinks and food for all the sailors in a tavern. At the end of the evening,

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[33] VFM 2075, Manuscripts Collection, G.W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.

[34] Boardman, Timothy. Log-Book of Timothy Boardman Kept on Board the Privateer Oliver Cromwell, During a Cruise from New London, Ct., to Charleston, S. C., and Return, in 1778; Also, a Biographical Sketch of the Author. Log-Book of Timothy Boardman Kept on Board the Privateer Oliver Cromwell, During a Cruise from New London, Ct., to Charleston, S. C., and Return, in 1778; Also, a Biographical Sketch of the Author. Project Gutenberg, n.d.

intoxicated sailors were convinced to join the Privateering vessels. They also offered cash advances for sailors who had previously run up tabs and were unable to pay their tavern and boarding house debts. After the captain of the ship exhausted his recruitment abilities in a particular port, he would sail to the next port and use the same tactics until he had the desired number of sailors needed to operate his vessel. [35] The success of tavernkeepers in small port towns is unique compared to taverns located in the interior of the country. Outside of the maritime communities, the tavern business saw a steady decrease in business as citizens were less likely to be traveling from town to town.

The 18th century Atlantic world was defined by the mobility afforded to the maritime communities. Many sailors existed without a permanent home, opting to live aboard ships, and boarding while in port towns for months at a time. As Julius Scott explains in his monumental work *The Common Wind*, this mobility helped facilitate connections throughout the Atlantic world.[36] It also had a more tangible effect on port towns during this time. As these sailors entered port after a voyage onboard a merchant vessel, they had to rely fully on the local economy to provide them with lodging and food, In doing so, they would often pay for their time in port through credit from the captain of their next voyage. This created a cycle of reliance for sailors, in order to pay off their time in port they would have to join on as a sailor on a merchant vessel and in doing so they would sail to a foreign port in which they again would need to pay for food and lodging through credit from a ship's captain. Although this arrangement often

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[35] Gilje, Paul A. Liberty on the Waterfront : American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution . Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.
[36] Scott, Julius. The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution. The common wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution. Verso, 2018.

trapped sailors in the profession, it was crucial to bolstering the economies of port towns during times of war.[37]

As Serena Zabin explains in her book *Dangerous Economies,* the official transactions that occurred in port towns were only a part of the total economic activity that supported the region. She calls the other part of the economy "informal economy"; these included activities such as prostitution, non-registered taverns, and informal lodging agreements.[38] Although the records of these activities were not kept in any official capacity, they too benefitted from the influx of sailors and the money changing hands during times of war.

As previously stated, larger ports were generally closed to international trade because of British occupation and smaller port towns like Stonington received a greater quantity of exotic goods from places like the Caribbean and Europe. Prior to the Revolution, most of these exotic luxury goods would be directly imported into larger cities like New York and Philadelphia. However, with little trade being conducted in those ports, residents of smaller ports had immediate access to those goods, often for the first time. Some examples of new foreign goods included wine from Portugal, German seeds, and finished goods from France. With access to these goods, towns like Stonington or New London became centers of exchange. No longer did citizens of these smaller port towns need to travel to places like Newport or New York to purchase luxury goods, and in fact people from nearby localities now traveled to places Stonington to engage in high-end commerce.

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[37]Zabin, Serena. Dangerous Economies: Status and Commerce in Imperial New York. Dangerous Economies. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc, 2011. 63-64.
[38] Ibid, 57-81

As an example of this shift of power, merchants such as Williams Helms in smaller Connecticut port towns were able to compete in the international market which had previously been limited by the British mercantile system. In his 1780 advertisement in the Connecticut Journal, Helms listed goods such as "New England Rum, Molasses, sugar, bahen tea, Rock salts, he is willing to accept French Bills of exchange or "White oaks Planks or White Oake boards… for which he will give the highest price"[39] in exchange for his goods. Helms willingness to accept foreign bills of exchange or barter for raw materials suggests that the surge in international trade and the benefits of it were not limited to the individuals with access to financial instruments. Men who had access to white oak trees had the ability to participate in the international market.

Additionally, the same newspaper listed similar advertisements from the merchants such as Abraham Davenport, Stephen Atwater, Elias Beers, Elijah and Archibald Austin, Tho Wooster and Henry Daggett. Al of these merchants sold exotic goods such as Jamican spirits, Calico, German seed, and a host of goods from Lisbon and Madeira.[40] In return, those merchants were looking to buy wood planks, wheat, hops and white beans from the local community. This further highlights the newfound access to commerce that citizens from the interior had; international markets were no longer out of reach due to the increasing importance of small port towns like New Haven and Stonington.

In addition to the privateering John Palmer engaged in, he also sailed aboard ships sailing to the West Indies for the purpose of Trade. During the year 1779, he sailed on the

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[39] "Advertisement." *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven, Connecticut), no. 687, December 28, 1780: [3]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[40] Ibid.

sloop *Fairplay* and a few months later aboard the schooner *Little Rebecca* to engage in trade. Additionally, a map he drew in his diary depicts the coast of Aux Cayes in the French colony Saint-Domingue. Although Palmer's records of his time on the vessels don't give much insight into his thoughts as they are mostly nautical records of wind and location, they do highlight the economic networks that developed between small seaport towns of New England and the French ports of the Caribbean that had previously only been accessible by illicit means.

While the war did provide coastal Connecticut with a lift to its local economy, it also presented hardships for many merchants. While the waters around Stonington and New Haven were not as closely monitored by the British Fleet as New York Harbor, British ships did disrupt trade in the area by attacking local merchant vessels. An article in the Connecticut journal recounts an incident on March 21st 1777 in which a local "sloop from the Isle of Cape, with 80 hogsheads of Rum....drove on shore near Watch Hill by two men of war, who after the sloop was on shore kept up a heavy fire for Several hours". Luckily for the merchants who owned the vessel "A number of people assembled from Stonington, who having 2 field pieces twice hulled the ships. The Sloop got off the next day"[41]. While this incident ended well for the Connecticut sloop, it highlights a pair of telling points. The first being that the Long Island Sound was still a dangerous setting in which to conduct trade. Secondly, the people of Stonington were willing to mobilize to protect trade, using the resources they had available to them. Their willingness to move field pieces to Watch Hill to protect a trade vessel, for example, highlights the extent to which their livelihoods revolved around the successful operation of their port. Also

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[41] "New-London, March 21." *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven, Connecticut), no. 493, March 26, 1777: [2].

telling, is the decision of Timothy Boardman assistants to remain in Stonington while he left for privateering voyages onboard the *Oliver Cromwell*. Most of the work Boardman and his assistants performed he performed during the war was building and repairing ships. He notes in his journal that his assistants opted to stay in port and continue working as carpenters in the local economy while he sailed in search for British prizes.[42] It is telling that these unnamed assistants turned down the potential of fortunes through privateering to continue to work in and around Stonington. The Financial hardships that were felt by most of the rebelling colonies throughout the war, were not experienced to the same extent in port towns.

Conclusion

As has been documented here, the closure of major ports on the eastern seaboard allowed smaller such as Stonington, Connecticut to develop into prominent centers of business during the American Revolution. And relatedly, the privateering activity that was so important to the defense of America injected much needed capital into these local economies. Moreover, privateering afforded local men the opportunity to earn much more than soldiers in the Continental army or those serving in the local militias. They were able to pay off debts and enjoy greater prosperity. With this unanticipated boom in business, financial prosperity was felt in all sectors of the local economy. And for many merchants, laborers, and townspeople, it was the first time they experienced access to the international market and a wide range of luxury and exotic goods. In the next chapter, I will show the elevated importance of small seaport towns was not limited to financial

[42] Boardman, Timothy. Logbook of Timothy Boardman Kept on Board the Privateer Oliver Cromwell, During a Cruise from New London, Ct., to Charleston, S. C., and Return, in 1778

prosperity. These small seaport towns engaged in domestic and international trade; sailors also traded vital information from other parts of the colonies as well as the world.

Stonington's Connections

While the merchants and financiers of privateering ventures grew increasingly wealthy during the Revolutionary War, Stonington's strategic importance to the revolutionary cause grew in tandem. As ships left Stonington's harbor to conduct business around the Atlantic World, they also helped to facilitate the transmission of critical information to revolutionary supporters both in other colonies and around the greater Atlantic World. This chapter will explain the importance of these informal networks of correspondence and highlight the newfound centrality of small ports to this process. To do so, this chapter will first highlight the interconnectedness of the 18th century Atlantic world paying special attention to the role international trade had in shaping political ideas on both sides of the Atlantic. It will then illustrate the extent in which Stonington's seafarers continued linking New England to the larger Atlantic community during the occupation of New York by tracing the flow of information about the war to other colonies as well as foreign territories.

The Interconnected Atlantic

Throughout the 18th century, American merchants had connected the relatively remote North American colonies with the cosmopolitan centers of Europe and the Caribbean. Although the British colonies operated within a mercantilist system and were intended only to do trade with Britain, American merchants had a long history of engaging in illicit trade beyond the borders of the British Empire. Throughout the early 18th century, local administrators often overlooked the smuggling activities of merchants as they too benefitted from the cheaper goods supplied by smuggling. However, following the French and Indian War, the British Government undertook a series reforms

to curb smuggling activities and collect revenues from products that previously circumvented custom houses. While it was officially illegal, large port towns such as Boston, New York, or Philadelphia had access to exotic goods from around the Atlantic World.

As Benjamin Carp explained in *Rebels Rising*, port towns had "had seen the comings and goings of immigrants, travelers, troops, commodities, culture, and ideas for well over a hundred years. As travelers, immigrants, sailors, and laborers made their way around the Atlantic World, their first introduction to British North America was always through the major port towns. Because of this, port towns were on the forefront of cosmopolitan thought throughout the colonies."[43]As Carp, Gary Nash, and Donald Johnson have argued in their respective works, the cosmopolitanism of port cites make them ideal for challenging the status quo. They argue the diverse ideas and people of the port towns were the reason the American Revolution started in maritime communities. The cosmopolitan nature of port cities helped facilitate the collection and dissemination of vital information and the merchants within those port towns relied on that information for business, resulting in port towns simultaneously challenging the status quo but desiring to remain as the epicenters of global trade.

One example of this phenomena is Boston's response to the Sugar Act of 1764. In hopes of curbing the illicit trade entering the British empire, British officials decided to lower the tariffs on sugar in hopes of making the legal British sugar available at a comparable price to the smuggled sugar from the French Atlantic. They believed that if given the option between smuggled sugar and legal sugar, they British colonist would

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[43] Carp, Benjamin L. Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution. Oxford University Press, 2007.4.

choose the legal option if the prices were the same. Although the new lower tariffs did not increase the price of sugar in the colonies, many colonists still took offense to the new taxes because they believed the decision overstepped British authority. As was the case in other port towns in North America, intellectual leaders began making ideological ties between free trade and republican government.[44] In their eyes, any attempt to restrict trade was also an attempt to assert tyrannical authority over them. Merchants on both sides of the Atlantic understood both the opportunities and limitations the mercantilist system created, and their response to the imperial crisis highlighted which aspect of the system they saw as more impactful.

During the Enlightenment there was much political discourse about the inherent ties between monarchy and disadvantageous trade agreements on one hand and republicanism and free trade on the other. As these ideas grew more steadfast throughout the 18th century, greater importance was placed on the role of merchants in protecting the liberties of the American colonies.[45] With this understanding, it is hard to disentangle the seemingly self-motivated actions of merchants and revolutionary cause. It is because of these ideas about freedom, Historians like Gary Nash and Benjamin Carp attribute the origin of revolutionary movements to port towns. As Nash explains in his monumental work *The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution,* that the seafarers of Northern ports were able to recognize and leverage themselves as a single class in order to upend the British system of class.[46] Additionally,

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[44] Reeder, Tyson. “Smugglers, Pirates, and Patriots Free Trade in the Age of Revolution”. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2019.
[45] Reeder, Tyson. “Smugglers, Pirates, and Patriots Free Trade in the Age of Revolution”. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2019.
[46] Nash, Gary B. *The Urban Crucible : Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* . Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979.

Benjamin Carp's book *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution* uses cases studies to explain that revolutionary sentiment was not only forged onboards ships or on the docks, but was prevalent throughout all parts of port town society. While these two works offer compelling arguments about revolutionary port towns ability to nurture revolutionary ideas, they overlook smaller towns like Stonington.[47] While involved in similar movements towards revolution many smaller ports did not benefit from the pervasive enlightenment ideas as New York or Boston. However, much of their fundamental makeup was the same. The British too were aware of the role port towns played in the push towards independence and their importance to the British Empire. In a 1776 speech to the house of commons "On the Motion to address the King" Lord Mayor John Wilkes argued for a peaceful resolution between America and Great Britain by stating "I think this War, Sir, fatal and ruinous to our country. It absolutely annihilates the only great source of wealth, which we have enjoyed unrivalled by other nations... American Merchants are now deploring the consequences of a wretched policy, has been pursued to their destruction".[48] Suggesting that the trade from the America's was vital to the success of the empire and needs to be addressed to keep the wealth from the New World within the empire. Interestingly, this view was not held by all in Great Britain. In 1766, published letter titled *A letter from a merchant in London to his nephew in North America: relative to the present posture of affairs in the colonies: in which the supposed violation of charters, and the several grievances complained of, are particularly discussed, and the consequences of an attempt towards independency set in a true light*

[47] Carp, Benjamin. Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
[48] "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings." *Connecticut Courant* (Hartford, Connecticut), no. 575, January 29, 1776: [1].

written by Josiah Tucker argued against the contempt showed my his nephew and other Philadelphia merchants by writing "Taxes laid on by Parliament are constitutional, legal Taxes; and Taxes raised by the Prerogative of the crown, without the Consent of Parliament are illegal. Now remember, young man, That the late Tax or duties upon Stamps was laid on by Parliament; and therefore, according to you own Way of reasoning, must have been a constitutional, legal Tax". As a response when his nephew invoked the Magna Carta as justification for their anger towards the stamp tax.[49] It is important to note that this interaction is amongst merchants on both sides of the Atlantic which further shows that much of the discussion about independence centered on the ways merchants interacted with the British Empire.

However, once war became imminent, merchants in the British Isles started calling for Parliament to acquiesce to the Americans in hopes of re-establishing the profitable trade. During the imperial crisis, the Scottish Member of Parliament, George Dempster was the most vocal in support of Americans. "Dempster spoke and voted against the Stamp Act when it was first proposed, argued that the Boston Port Bill gave the King too much power over the port of Boston, and pleased for leniency in general"[50] This is not surprising considering the economic ties between Glasgow and America. Perhaps more telling than the actions of George Dempster were the opinions of Glaswegian merchants. In the decade prior to the conflict they largely called for restrictions to be lifted off American ports however, once the war began they quickly

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[49] Tucker, Dean. "Dean Tucker's Pamphlet. "A Letter from a Merchant in London to His Nephew in North America," 1766." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 25, no. 3 (1901): 307-22. Accessed January 21, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20085979.
[50] Fagerstrom, Dalphy I. "Scottish Opinion and the American Revolution." The William and Mary Quarterly 11, no. 2 (1954): 252-75

switched their support toward British policy in hopes a quick and decisive end to the war (and reestablishing trade with American ports). However, as the war began to prove that it would not end quickly, Glaswegian and London Merchants again switched allegiances and started calling for Parliament to end the war and allow for an independent America.[51] It is clear that Scottish merchants relied heavily on American trade and that American port towns were essential to the pre-war Atlantic system.

Aside from illuminating the limitations of monarchial government and rallying support from merchants across the Atlantic, Stonington's mariners were also crucial in linking the Connecticut coast to other maritime communities. As Julius Scott explains in his book *The Common Wind,* sailors were a mobile class of people and rarely lived in any one location. Instead, they traveled from community to community in search of work. Often, the mobile sailors of the Early Atlantic world would look beyond the borders of their own empire and would labor onboard foreign vessels. In doing so, sailors would engage with merchants, sailors, and dock workers of all empires during their time at sea.[52] One example of this interconnected relationship is highlighted by Bryan Edwards report on the British Island of Jamaica. He explains the merchants of Jamaica would constantly interact with the Spanish island of Cuba and the French colony of St. Domingue. Edwards's extensive account also records the trade between the British West Indies, Ireland, the Azores, America, England, and numerous Island within the Caribbean. In chronicling the webs of trade within the Atlantic world, Edwards suggests that "Navigation and naval power are the children, not the parents, of commerce; for if

[51] Ibid
[52] Scott, Julius S. The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution. Verso, 2018.

agriculture and manufactures, and mutual wants did not furnish the subject matter of intercourse between distant countries, there must be an end to navigation " suggesting that international trade is a universal desire, and the British navy was created as a way to protect that desire rather than a tool to create trade. He also claims that the best way to advance the British cause is by having the best fleet of merchant vessels which will lower the cost of British goods and make them their prices the most competitive on the international market. This sentiment echoes the same call for free trade that was made by the New England merchants prior to the revolution.[53]

As Edwards explained in his report, and further examined by Julius Scott in his book *The Common Wind*, the Caribbean world was defined by transnational connections. And those connections were dictated by the physical world as much as political ties. The currents of the Atlantic made travel between certain colonies much more accessible than to others. Because of this, merchants were more inclined to conduct business with regions in which they could travel quickly. In instances in which the most accessible ports were outside of a merchant's empire, they often resorted to forms of illicit trade.

Throughout the Revolutionary War, privateers sailing from Stonington continued to make important connections around the Atlantic World**.** At a time when news traveled slowly and misinformation was common, the direct communication links between seafaring towns (enabled by privateering crews sailing the eastern seaboard) proved critical to strengthening the ties between the colonies -- as well as establishing relationships that would prove valuable following the war. As Ruma Chopra explains in *Unnatural Rebellion: Loyalists in New York City during the Revolution*, the large

[53] Bryan Edwards, The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies (Dublin, 1793), 377.

British force occupying Long Island and New York City (less than 150 miles from Stonington) removed all patriot merchants from New York City, allowing only loyalist ships to sail in and out of New York Harbor.[54] As a result of its independence, Stonington gained wealth and strategic importance during wartime--benefits which extended after the conclusion of the war. While the coastwise network proved important during the war for exchanging information, it was the international trade networks that afforded people the opportunity to accrue vast amounts of wealth in the years after the war.

As Michael Jarvis explains in *In the Eye of All Trade*, seaport towns like Stonington experienced a "Maritime Revolution" in the first part of the Eighteenth Century in which, the maritime economies of British North America shifted from strict import / export processes to a carrier system. Essentially, producers on both sides of the Atlantic were no longer required to use their own ships to move product. Rather, they relied on mariners to transport their goods.[55] Understanding the carrier economy following the "Maritime Revolution", it becomes clear that maritime communities like Stonington strongly relied on connections with ports, merchants, and producers around the Atlantic to further their success in conducting business and engaging in commerce. With major ports in America closed or unavailable to the American cause, small seaports seized the opportunity to fill a vital role while establishing connections in seaports around the Atlantic.

Stonington's Connection to North American Ports

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[54] Chopra, Ruma. ""Quicken Others by Our Example": New Yorkers Welcome the British." In *Unnatural Rebellion: Loyalists in New York City during the Revolution*, 51-79. University of Virginia Press, 2011. Accessed February 7, 2020.
[55]Jarvis, Michael. In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. Accessed February 6, 2020.

Studying the voyages of the vessels *Revenge* and *Hancock,* it becomes clear just how interconnected the maritime community was during the American Revolution. Both the *Revenge* and the *Hancock* were privateering vessels that sailed out of Stonington and experienced success in disrupting British trade and capturing valuable prizes, some of which were brought back to Stonington. When Stonington's privateering vessels captured ships further away from the Stonington, it was not uncommon for them to sail their prize into other seaport towns. For instance, the sloop *Revenge* sailing from Stonington captured the *Anna Maria* on August 6th, 1776 and escorted its prize to port in the county of Essex in Massachusetts.[56] And just four days later, documentation shows the same ship anchored in Salem, Massachusetts, where it was granted another letter of marque to sail "Against the enemies of the United States of America"[57]. In September of the same year, the Revenge is recorded in the Independent Chronicle as being anchored in Massachusetts Bay[58]. In a span of two months, the sailors from Stonington spent time in Essex, Salem, and Massachusetts Bay --interacting with and establishing connections with other colonists in those ports.

Interestingly, following its time in Massachusetts Bay the *Revenge* engaged a British ship off the coast of New England. Without clear visibility, the captain of the British ship misidentified the *Revenge* as one of its own and sailed up next to it. The *Revenge* (which was not flying its flags), took full advantage of the situation; the captain invited the British captain onboard for a meal. While the officers dined, the Revenge

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[56] Advertisement." *Boston Gazette, or, Country Journal* (Watertown, Massachusetts), September 2, 1776: [3]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[57] "Advertisement." *Providence Gazette* (Providence, Rhode Island), August 10, 1776: [4]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[58] "Advertisement." *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, Massachusetts), September 26, 1776: [3]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

captain ordered his crew to capture the British ship. Incidents like this show the unexpected nature of privateering and the importance of having pre-existing contacts in local ports. Previously spending time harbored in Massachusetts Bay, the *Revenge* was able to again harbor there and sell its unexpected prize, presumably using the same merchants that it had interacted with during it previous time. The Boston Gazette mentions three other ships harbored at the same time as the Revenge, all of which might have been potential contacts for important trade of their unexpected prizes.[59]

In the sailing log of Joseph Williams, his writings indicate that he made multiple trips on the sloop *Surprise* across the Block Island Sound to trade with the patriots who were isolated on Long Island due to the British occupation. He also records “intelligence” he received regarding the movement of the British stationed on Long Island. On August 8th, 1780, he writes that he “got intelligence that the party which had been plundering the east end of the Island, was returning to Huntington".[60] The sharing of information regarding the British military was not uncommon for sailors on privateering vessels, as they realized they were part of the larger war effort and ultimately shared the same interests. Christopher Magra explains in *Revolutionary Marblehead* that General George Washington also understood the maritime networks and often relied on the network of seafarers to quickly move supplies for his army or quickly transform merchant vessels into ships capable of supporting his troops militarily.[61]

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[59] "Advertisement." *Boston Gazette* (Boston, Massachusetts), April 21, 1777: [4]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*

[60] Coll. 37, Box 1, Folder 6 Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.

[61] Magra, Christopher P. ""Soldiers... Bred to the Sea": Maritime Marblehead, Massachusetts, and the Origins and Progress of the American Revolution." *The New England Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (2004): 559.

Similarly, the Connecticut Gazette published in New London Connecticut often recorded the coming and going of British vessels as they sailed to and from New York Harbor. Because of the relatively small size of Stonington the British did not pay much attention to the port. Because of this, citizens located on Montauk (on the eastern tip of Long Island) and across the sound on the Connecticut coast were able to detail the movement of the British and disseminate it to the rest of the colonies. One instance of this arrangement was published in an article named “Intelligence from Montauk” in which it described things like "Thursday July 25. At 7 A. M; saw a Ship S. E. from the Point, stranding for Block Island; at 4 P. M. saw another ship S.E of the Point” as well as "Monday 5. At 5. AM saw two shops S. S. W. from the Point; at 11 came up with the point, Stood in for Watch-Hill till 3. and then went to Sea."[62]. This highlights the cooperation between private citizens in New York and printers in New London to help the merchants of Stonington and the surrounding communities in successful privateering. It also shows that the entire community strongly valued keeping smaller ports open throughout the war.

Stonington’s merchants were connected to other parts of New England through non-consensual linkages too. The Connecticut Journal chronicles an instance where a privateering vessel was taken by a British ship and after negotiating some prisoner’s release the others were taken to Rhode Island. The article reads "Last Thursday a small boat, belonging to Mr. Samuel Beebe of Stonington, was taken in the sound by the Amazon Frigate... the same day Mr. Beebe's book took the schooner Olive. On Saturday

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[62] "Intelligence From Montauk." *Connecticut Gazette* (New London, Connecticut) XIII, no. 665, August 9, 1776: [3]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

the Amazon came to anchor... sent in a boat as a flag to propose an exchange of some prisoners. On Monday morning the ship sailed for Rhode-Island."[63]

In a less local example, Connecticut newspapers illustrate the continued connection between towns like Stonington and New London on the Connecticut coast and ports in the south. Such as Savannah or Charleston. One example of this is an article originally from Charleston that arrived in Connecticut and was reprinted in the Connecticut Courant that stated ""On Saturday last the Marquis de Bretighy, who went lately in one of the gallies of this state to serve against the enemy in Georgia, Brought into port a larger prize sloop from New-Providence, mounting four guns" the article continues " We have abundance of intelligence from the American army commanded by the Hon. major Lincoln acting in conjunction in Georgia, with that of his most Christian Jamjest, Our great and most respectable ally, under the command of his Excellency General Count D' Eftaing- But , as it is likely that a general attack upon Savannah cannot be made before tomorrow or the next day".[64] Articles like this one highlight the maritime connections of American ports and informs other colonies of the war's developments in a certain region. This in turn created community amongst the American colonies. With British forces scattered throughout North America, travel by land was dangerous and unreliable. Even with the threat of British naval ships and privateers, New England vessels sustained ties to their southern counterparts to share news and goods from the south.

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[63] "New-London, March 21." Connecticut Journal (New Haven, Connecticut), no. 493, March 26, 1777: [2]. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.

[64] "Charlestown, Sept. 29." Connecticut Courant (Hartford, Connecticut), no. 773, November 16, 1779: [2]. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers

Scholars such as T.H Breen and Jack Greene have wrestled with the question of how thirteen distinct colonies evolved into one nation[65]. While competing arguments have merit in terms of how this evolution occurred, it is reasonable to assert that the connections made by seafarers in the seaport towns contributed in the transformation. Sailors from different colonies commonly interacted with merchants, sail makers, and other seaman along the Atlantic coast. Throughout the colonial period, small seaport towns like Stonington were part of a maritime economy that, in many ways, was distinct and more interconnected than the larger American economy. A relationship that only increased during the war. Ships employed sailors from these coastal towns, sold their goods to these citizens, and repaired their ships in their ports. Further, towns would offer lines of credit to sailors, which deepened their relationships and resulted in economic interdependencies. For instance, the papers from the sloop Hancock record that prior to their 1782 voyage, the ships agent, Giles Mumford sailed from Stonington to New London and then Greenwich where it was properly outfitted for its voyage.[66] As Paul Gilje explains in Liberty on the Waterfront, multiple stops prior to voyage similar to the ones made by the *Hancock* were not uncommon. Smaller towns such as Stonington would rarely have enough willing sailors and dry goods needed for a voyage, so agents such as Giles would have to purchase goods and recruit sailors in multiple towns prior to setting sail.[67] In stopping at multiple ports prior to a voyage, ships like the *Hancock*

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[65]T. H. Breen. 1988. "'Baubles of Britain': The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century." Past & Present, no. 119: 73.
Jack P. Greene, ed. The American Revolution: Its Character and Limits. New York: New York University Press, 198

[66] Coll. 37, Box 1, Folder 6 Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.

[67] Gilje, Paul A. *Liberty on the Waterfront : American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* . Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

actively connected people from disparate localities with each other. As the agent purchased things sails, candles, and nails for the voyage, he would bring the news of the day to those he did business with.[68] additionally, ships like the Hancock fostered economic relationships between small port towns that previously would have traded solely with large ports rather than with other smaller ones.

Moreover, the lines of credit established in these towns were not insignificant. In the account books from the *sloop Hancock*, Captain Richard Peter and agent Giles Mumford record the different commodities individual sailors purchased from him through lines of credit. As is the case for sailor Henry Brim, who purchased foodstuffs like lamb and sugar as well as "2 small arms for £200", and Shoes during his voyage in 1780.[69] Similarly, Benjamin Clout purchased, muskets, handkerchiefs, buttons, and thread off of credit from the three ships that were captured during his service. While being anchored in Massachusetts, Captain Peter, would have purchased these commodities from merchants away from his home port of Stonington. While completing the various transactions, it can be assumed that information about the war was also being exchanged. While more than sixty sailors listed in the account book of the Sloop *Hancock* had purchased commodities from the captain during the multiple voyages, the sailors would have also been frequenting merchant houses and taverns while in port, both settings in which they would have interacted with sailors from other colonies.[70] As money credit exchanged from the hands of sailors to store keepers of the local shops, so to would critical information about developments in the war and the imperial landscape.

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[68] Coll. 11, Volume 2 Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc
[69] Coll. 11, Volume 2 Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[70] Jarvis, Eyes of All Trade, 137.

Merchant vessels brought news up and down the seaboard. Among the ways they did this was carrying newspapers from port to port. Small-town papers such as the Norwich Packet in Norwich, Connecticut freely reprinted articles from other newspapers. This resulted in identical newspaper articles appearing at different times up and down the eastern seaboard. One side effect of this information network was that newspapers in smaller towns such as Stonington or Norwich received and printed vital news before papers in British-occupied cities such as New York. This was a stark reversal of the pre-war pattern.

News traveled slowly overland in colonial America and was often inaccurate, if it arrived at all. As a result, residents of towns such as New London relied on the Stonington harbor and its seafarers as their connection to the rest of the colonies. In advertisements of properties, it was common to mention that inland properties had access to Stonington harbor via "the High-Way, that leads from Norwich to Stonington Harbour"[71]. It is telling that the seller of the property decided to include the access to Stonington Harbor instead of the size of the property or what commodities the farm could produce. In coastal New England, people relied on heavily on seaports, as they not only provided necessary goods and services, but also served as their connections to the outside world and specifically the events and activities in other colonies.

International Connections

Connections made via coastal trade were not the only connections sailors of Stonington made during the Revolutionary era. Merchants such as Joseph Williams made connections internationally too, and these relationships extended following the

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[71] "Advertisement." *Norwich Packet* (Norwich, Connecticut), February 12, 1776: [3]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

conclusion of the war to varying degrees of success. The papers of Joseph Williams show that he financed voyages to the West Indies and South America. During these Voyages he primarily traded with the French island of Martinique selling lumber.

With records of trips to West Indies and South America, Williams (and captains like him) who gained financially through privateering maintained important contacts and relationships that resulted in international trade that proved to be very valuable to Stonington after the war[72]. And while the coastwise trade offered stability for merchants, it was the international trade (especially to the Caribbean) that offered the potential for the largest profits.

The Connecticut Journal details the ships that came and left form the Connecticut coast. For instance, they would detail arrivals like "Wednesday Night Capt. Rennels arrived here from the West Indies with 1500 bushels of Salt." Or A sloop from the Isles of Cape, with 80 hogshead of Rum, belongin to Vanwick and Son, of the State of New York, was last wednesday drove on shore". The latter being significant because it shows that the New York based firm was now using ports on the Connecticut coast to conduct business.[73] Similarly, a New Haven published a letter received by a merchant in Connecticut stating “We have just heard that a brig and a Sloop form some part of America, laden with lumber, are taken by one of the English Cruisers close in with St. Pierre, Martinico. This conduct enraged the French General, who immediately gave orders for one his frigates to cruise and protect every American Vessel within their

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[72] Coll. 37, Box 2 Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[73] "New-London, March 21." *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven, Connecticut), no. 493, March 26, 1777: [2]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

limits".[74] This letter highlights the continued communication between Connecticut and the Caribbean throughout the war and suggests that France found America trade as vital to their collective success as they were willing to protect American business interests. With America declaring independence, trade avenues in the Dutch and French Atlantic become more available. After the French alliance, America relied heavily on the island of Martinique as a trade partner.

The French Caribbean also connected the Connecticut coast to the happenings of the British Isles, letters “From Cork” or other cities were often brought to the New England presses “via the west Indies” such as a 1776 letter that alerted Americans that “Sir Peter Parkr commands the ships; it is thought they destined for the southern colonies of Virginia or South-Carolina, but no certainty can be had where they are really bound. Eight Regiments more are under orders to embark here next month and may amount to 3000 or 3200 Men- Not more. About 3000 from England and 3000 Highlanders are also to embark next month." the letter concludes by explaining "Ethan Allen, Esq; and 33 other Prisoners (taken in September last near Montreal) arrived here a few days ago from Falmouth, on board the Solbay Ship of War... Gentlemen from Cork and Dublin immediately contributed 130 to their relief, which was laid out in cloaths and other necessaries."[75]

In conducting trade with the Caribbean, New England merchants were able to secure the necessary supplies to continue the war effort. George Washington relied on the

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[74] "Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in the West-Indies to His Friend in This City, Dated Feb. 14." *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven, Connecticut), no. 440, March 20, 1776: [4]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

[75] "Extracts of Letters From Cork, via West-Indies." *Connecticut Gazette* (New London, Connecticut) XIII, no. 658, June 21, 1776: [3]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

individual states to organize the purchase of foodstuffs and other necessities while in New York during 1780 and 1781. The states of Massachusetts and Connecticut were instrumental in these supply chains and relied heavily on the merchants of small ports to facilitate the movement of the supplies to the Continental Army.[76]

While not from the town of Stonington, John Greenwood provides valuable insight (through his journal) into how privateers would have been connected to the larger Atlantic world. Greenwood, sailing from a seaport in Massachusetts, would have crossed paths with Connecticut-based privateers frequently. His memoir (transcribed from his journal) offers evidence of connections that would have been similar to those experienced by Stonington sailors. [77] Following his time as a fifer in the Continental Army, he sailed onboard the *Cumberland,* a privateering vessel under the leadership of Captain Manley. During his time aboard the Cumberland, he writes about the time he spent sailing around Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and ultimately the Caribbean. While in the Caribbean, he was captured and ultimately rescued by a French vessel. In the various Caribbean ports, Greenwood and his fellow sailors spoke about their travels and the places they have traveled. On a second voyage, the Brig Tartar, which Greenwood was aboard, began to sink and required him to return to Boston on another vessel. His experiences provide further evidence that as his vessel(s) moved throughout the Atlantic World, he (and the other one hundred other sailors onboard) interacted with other sailors as well as the people of the Caribbean. These connections resulted in sailors from various New England towns creating an important maritime network across the Atlantic World, which

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[76] Risch, Erna. *Supplying Washington's Army*. Washington, D.C: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1981.
[77] Greenwood, John, and Isaac John Greenwood. The Revolutionary Services of John Greenwood of Boston and New York, 1775-1783. New York: [The De Vinne press], 1922.

ultimately aided towns such as Stonington and contributed to their vitality well after the conclusion of the war.

Following the war, Joseph William's son, Isaac, became a merchant in Stonington, joining the family business. Isaac Williams had the advantage of his father's connections around the Caribbean and South America to help his import/export business flourish. In the Records of Isaac Williams, he operated ships that were previously owned and sailed by his father as he became successful in the trade of foodstuffs, primarily cheese and livestock. The successes of Isaac Williams are proof that the connections made by Joseph Williams during the American Revolution had a lasting impact in the merchant business in the years following[78].

Stonington's connection to the rest of the Atlantic served purposes beyond commerce and the information-sharing. As one port among a broader network of ports, Stonington represented a pathway to escape for slaves and apprentices seeking leave their current situations. Numerous advertisements in Connecticut's newspapers called for the return of apprentices. Advertisements such as these substantiate the assertion that seaports were a gateway to freedom. One example details a twenty-year-old apprentice by the name of Daniel Saunders who was feared to be looking to board a vessel in the Stonington to leave Connecticut and end his relationship with the man apprenticing him.[79] Similarly, in the Providence Gazette, runaway advertisements were published about "James Allen, a likely, well-fed Indian fellow, 22 years of age, 5 feet 5 inches," as well as a deserted solider from Captain James Parker's company and Bristol Prime -- "a

[78] Coll. 15, Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc
[79] "Advertisement." *Connecticut Gazette* (New London, Connecticut), March 13, 1778: [1]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

lusty Negro Fellow, 22 years of age, 5 feet 9 inches high".[80] Both of whom, presumably, were looking for refuge and a means to escape via one of Stonington's many ships. The nature of seafaring work made it an ideal occupation for runaway slaves. The steady wages and short contract times were conducive to runaway's desire to stay on the move. Additionally, life on ships was generally more egalitarian and accepting of African Americans compared to other forms of work. During times of war, runaway slaves capitalized on the demand for seafarers and were a reliable workforce for ship captains.

The American Revolution was a global conflict with naval engagements occurring in the waters of Newfoundland, the Caribbean, and off the coast of Britain. Aside from the diplomats that the Continental Congress sent to Europe, small seaports such as Stonington were the most legitimate link the colonies had to the wider Atlantic World. As the historiography has shifted to explain the American Revolution as a global war, towns like Stonington are often overlooked in favor of geographic regions outside of the thirteen colonies. Although many new connections were made during the war, other international connections were severed. In 1772, New England had a well-established trade partnership in Bermuda, however the war brought an end to that official partnership with the exception of a few Bermudians who continued to smuggle goods.[81] To gain a more complete understanding of the global nature of the conflict, the international network of trade must continue to be examined, including the ports of the network that were within the thirteen colonies.

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[80] "Advertisement." *Providence Gazette* (Providence, Rhode Island), March 28, 1778: [3]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[81] Jarvis, Eyes of all Trade, 132.

Although towns like Stonington played a critical role in connecting the American colonies with each other and the wider Atlantic world, the lasting impacts of the war varied for each of Stonington's residents. The following chapter will examine life in Stonington following the re-opening of major ports and highlight the societal changes that persisted through the wars and those that returned to their pre-war state.

The Re-Emergence of New York

As the American Revolution reached a conclusion following the battle of Yorktown in 1781 and the Treaty of Paris in 1783, Stonington's merchants found themselves in an entirely new economic landscape. No longer, were they a apart of the British mercantile system, and no longer were the major ports in the region occupied by the British Military. This chapter will first unpack the implications of the reopening of New York on the region by highlighting the state of the city and port at the moment of British departure. It will then explain the changes the city underwent to resume its place as the most prominent port city in the region. The following section will expand the scope of examination and discuss the implications of independence on the Atlantic world maritime community more broadly. This section will focus on the challenges of American merchants stemming from the lack of military protection, severed trade networks, and the uncertainty of the American financial system. It will also highlight some of the mechanisms merchants employed to combat these challenges. This chapter will conclude by highlighting the varied individual experiences of Stonington merchants as they grappled with the new constraints, they found themselves operating under after the American Revolution. The end of warfare brought new opportunities, but for merchants in Stonington and other small ports, it mostly brought diminishing opportunities.

The Re-opening of New York

In stark contrast to the war years, New York City was once again on its way to reestablishing itself as a bustling center of trade following the Treaty of Paris. As the British troops withdrew from the city, they left New York in shambles. Although business in New York did not return immediately following the withdrawal of British troops, the process of assuming a major portion of the trade for the region was underway and would continue throughout the next decade. By the time the French Revolution engulfed Europe, New York merchants had re-established themselves and were able to profit off the dangers of the conflict.

The return of American business to New York City was more nuanced than American firms simply re-opening their doors after the war. Donald Johnson explains that many of the loyalist merchants of New York found business competition heightened after the war. Many of the merchants who conducted business out of occupied New York did so under the threat of the British Military and after their retreat, faced uncertain futures in independent America. Johnson cites cases where merchants wished to remain in America but faced backlash from local communities. Men such as Tench Coxe "made alterations in his company's letterbook, cutting out sections of letters sent to others to hide his actions. Coxe excised names of ships he owned shares in, people he dealt with, and some of the methods by which he obtained his licenses to trade, as well as other aspects of his activities now completely lost to the historian. In one particularly egregious instance, Coxe ripped out almost all of a letter regarding a voyage to the Caribbean whose legality was dubious under both British and revolutionary law". Coxe and the numerous merchants like him give insight into the changes made to the New York Economy after the revolution. Rather than restarting all business from nothing, many

“forced loyalists” were able to cover up their involvement during the war and continue their business. They could build on existing networks—at least so long as they elided details about their wartime transactions. Many of those wartime transactions were illegal and questionable, but very much like those of all merchants. They skirted trade guidelines in the search for profit. Donald Johnson also recounts similar stories of tory merchants in Newport Rhode, Island. One example chronicles Mary Gould Almy’s post war actions, rather than hiding her involvement like Coxe, Almy was able to establish her business by emphasizing her ties to her patriot family members.

In stark contrast, the State of Connecticut legally declared they "Will not accept any consignments from merchants, or others residing in any port or place in the West-Indies, knowing the property to belong to the Inhabitants of islands whose ports are shut against us”.[82] Compared to the New York merchants such as Coxe, New York’s leveraging of loyalist merchants gave the city a leg up in their return to prominence in the 1780’s compared to Connecticut. Because Connecticut was stricter in prohibiting loyalist trade, after the war, their were less trade connections with British ports compared to New York. Although men like Coxe were hesitant to market the connections they continued to leverage with British firms following independence, they were able to adjust to the post war landscape easier than merchants who cut all ties with the British empire.

New York City Newspapers chronicle much of the early business following the withdrawal of the British Army. For instance, during 1783 the New York Packet published the occasional advertisement of European and West-India Goods for sale in New York City storefronts. However, in each subsequent year, the number of published

[82] "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings." *Independent Gazette* (New York, New York), no. VII, January 3, 1784: [2]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

articles in the New York Packet rose dramatically. Merchant firms such as Murray, Sandom, and Co. often advertised the sale of "German steel kettles, Poland Starch, Scotch Snuff and Burgundy wine" as well as domestic products such as Burlington Pork and Connecticut Beef" at their storefront on Queen Street.[83] Advertisements like theirs highlight the re-establishment of New York City merchants on a global stage, but also, as a center of coastwise trade. Once again, producers in Burlington and Connecticut were reliant upon the New York market to buy and distribute their goods.

In 1784 and 1785 Murray, Sandom, and Co. were hardly the only New York City firm engaged in domestic and international trade. The New York Packet consistently published advertisements from the firms of John Delafield and Giles Mumford. On January 3rd, 1784 John Delafield posted a notice in the Independent Gazette explaining that he is starting a Broker business and will buy and sell "Every Specie of dry goods; and warehouses are provided form rum, sugar, and other wet goods intended for public or private sale." He further explains that he " will purchase on the shortest-notice and on the best terms all kind of American and West-India produce" and will be obliged to "all merchants and traders".[84] Delafield's business suggests that businessmen understood the changes that were happening to the New York Economy and wanted to establish themselves within the prosperous trade. The all-encompassing nature of Delafield's business also suggests that he believed trade was going to increase so rapidly that it was unimportant to offer specialized service or expertise in a certain type of commodity.

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[83] "Advertisement." *New-York Packet* (New York, New York), no. 346, January 1, 1784: [1]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*

[84] "Advertisement." *Independent Gazette* (New York, New York), no. VII, January 3, 1784: [3]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

As men like Delafield began investing in the post-war economy, New Yorkers had to combat the overwhelming wartime debt and competing ideas about how the new nation should handle its finances. The years following the treaty of Paris were largely volatile and unstable in terms of finances. Prior to Hamilton's call for a national bank, the idea of a federally regulated and standard banking industry was controversial and unfeasible. This resulted in localized banking within the new United States. Although a federally backed bank was questioned, state backed ones emerged with little resistance. By 1791, the states of New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Maryland, and Rhode Island each had their own state bank. While still a volatile industry, these state banks were important in strengthening the post war economies.

The city of New York understood the effects reputable banks would have in making their business competitive on the global stage. In fact, the merchants and tradesmen took out advertisements in the Independent Gazette encouraging New Yorkers to keep their cash in the Bank of New York. They reasoned the more money that was kept in New York Banks, the more available credit would be to the citizens of the state, resulting in a healthier economy.

Post War Trade

Historians have long debated just how much radical change the American Revolution brought about. While historians like Gordon Wood have seen the Revolution as truly revolutionary, others debated whether the war led to transformative social and political change. American merchants trying to navigate the post war economic landscape had a slew of new changes to consider as they staked out their role in the changing Atlantic ecosystem.

One of the most immediate and pressing changes that merchants had to grapple with was the lack of military protections. Following the treaty of Paris, the United States lacked a naval force that could protect American trade. This resulted in America opting for neutrality with other Atlantic powers. Additionally, American merchants saw their centuries long trade connections with merchant houses around the British Atlantic severed. The relationships they had spent considerable time and effort cultivating through letter writing and moving family members suddenly became much less crucial to their success. On one hand, the removal from the British economic sphere disrupted well-established American merchants arrangements. On the other, established merchants could rely on their pre-war connections to gain a comparative advantage with their American competition. However, in the markets outside of the British empire, American merchants were on a similar playing field regardless of their pre-war status.

Beyond the threats from privateers and pirates, the British Navy remained a danger to American ships. Struggling to employ enough sailors to protect their interests overseas, the British navy resorted to the impressment of neutral sailors. Impressment is a system of preying upon neutral ships and instead of stealing cargoes as pirates or privateers would do, the British would force the sailors to join the royal navy. With this constant threat, the wages paid to sailors increased, furthering stressing the finances of merchants. Additionally, the threat of British impressment also made it more difficult for merchants from small towns to draw enough labor from their local community.[85]

Like American ports, the British city of Liverpool also experienced periods of economic growth and contraction due to the American Revolution. As Simon Hill

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[85] Brunsman, Denver Alexander. *The Evil Necessity : British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* . Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013.

explains in his article *The Liverpool Economy during the War of American Independence, 1775-83*. Liverpool experienced periods of economic stagnation after New York's economic output declined, but similarly to Stonington, experienced a boom after the town became a major outfitter of privateers. However, unlike its American counterparts, Liverpool was able to sustain its wartime boom because Great Britain continued to rely on privateers in their wars against the Netherlands, France, and Spain throughout the Eighteenth Century.[86]

Rise of Maritime Insurance

With the very real dangers of privateers and British impressment, American merchants invested large amounts into insuring their cargoes. Until the early 1790's American merchants relied upon private underwriters to insure their vessels as they took advantage of their newfound access to the world's markets following independence. The British Bubble Act of 1720 forbade the creation of insurance companies by Americans, forcing American merchants to insure their vessels and cargoes through British firms. Independence ended this restriction and gave rise to the marine insurance corporations. One hallmark of the new American insurance corporation was that stake-holders were now able to limit their liability. Insurance allowed many to focus their investments in their own industry, and to expand using capital they no longer needed as a safeguard. With this financial safeguard in place, large amounts of capital were freed to invest in the burgeoning industry by the end of the century.[87]

[86] Hill, Simon. "The Liverpool Economy During the War of American Independence, 1775-83." Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 44, no. 6 (2016): 835–56.
[87] Kingston, Christopher. "Marine Insurance in Philadelphia During the Quasi-War with France, 1795—1801." *The Journal of Economic History* 71, no. 1 (2011): 162-84.

However, merchants found the new insurance industry to be inhospitable to their industry. Without the security of an American Navy, and the looming threat of British, barbary, and French pirates and privateers, the price to insure vessels and cargoes beyond the dangers of the natural world rose to exorbitant levels. With many of the Marine insurance corporations located in larger cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Hartford, and New Haven much of the capital generated from merchants in smaller cities like Stonington eventually made its way to the larger cities, contributing to Stonington's eventual return to its pre-war prominence. While merchants like John Palmer and Joseph and Isaac Williams still conducted lucrative trade with the West Indies in the 1780's, much of their profit did not remain in the local Stonington Economy. Forced to insure their cargoes with policy's held by New York companies and bank with New York banks, the business conducted in Stonington became part of a larger economic system in which Stonington was no longer the epicenter. These implications of independence were not unexpected for the American Merchants, in fact, some merchants chose to support the British in the war in hopes of avoiding the financial uncertainty of independence. Take for instance, Henry Lloyd, a New England merchant turned loyalist

Although he could not have completely foreseen the shape of the post-war world, Lloyd's decision to align his interests with the British during the war stemmed from his desire to avoid the exact challenges explained above. On the eve of the Revolution Lloyd sensed the societal tensions rising and an armed conflict seemingly on the horizon, Lloyd began selling additional goods from his warehouse – namely gunpowder and other war materials: "Choice Gun Powder, glazed and unglazed, in half barrels and quarter Barrels to be sold cheap for cash or short credit by Henry Lloyd, at Warehouse No. 5 on the

Long-Wharf"[88]. In this situation, Lloyd was not favoring either side, as evidenced by his willingness to sell gunpowder in 1772 to all citizens of Boston (as well as the British). This is notable, as it further highlights Lloyd's prioritization of profit over political affiliations. By 1772, Henry Lloyd would have been fully aware of the increasing hostility between the two sides. Regardless, he avoided choosing sides in order to protect his ability to make money by continuing to sell to both sides.

Henry Lloyd's ties with the British cause began strengthening in 1775. He began work as an agent for Oliver DeLancey and John Watts, both of whom were powerful merchants in New York City, and found a good business in selling goods to the British Army. In a letter written on May 3rd, 1775, Lloyd writes to explain his difficulty fulfilling a British order for goods. He also mentioned to his business partners that their mail was being intercepted and read by the patriots:

"most of the Letters both publick & private were open'd before they got here & some of them stop'd, this Letter goes by a private Conveyance to Providence to be put into the Post Office there & hope it will reach you safe. The Countess of Darlington arriv'd here last Monday, by her I recd. Copy of yr. above Letter with another of 26th & am sorry to find I am not to expect any Supplys at present from you, I have been very lucky in the purchase of flour here, having procur'd near 2,000 barrells at 14/.15/. & 16/. & expect a Vessell with about 9800 Bushells of Wheat & 850 barrls. flour, that was bound from Maryland to Europe & has put into the Vineyard having sprung a Leak, will fall into my hands, the Admiral having dispatch'd a Cutter to bring her in here, but it is

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[88] "Advertisement." *Boston Post-Boy* (Boston, Massachusetts), no. 769, May 18, 1772: [4]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

probable the Navy Contractor may expect his Moiety* of her Cargo. Fresh provisions of all kinds"[89]

In prior work with the firm of DeLancey and Watts, Lloyd had received a shipment of tea chests that were destroyed by a group of angry colonists dressed as Mohawk Indians in a lesser known "tea party" that occurred a year after the first (and more well-known) tea party. Of the 28 chests of tea that were destroyed, sixteen were cosigned to Henry Lloyd[90].

As tensions between the two sides intensified, colonists became more aware of men like Lloyd who continued doing business with the British Army. By the time the British occupied the city of Boston, the lines between patriot and loyalist were clear in the mind of most Bostonians. Leaders of the patriot cause turned to the newspapers to ensure men like Henry Lloyd were outed for helping the British. This ensured that Lloyd and his fellow loyalist merchants – as well as others who did business with the British – could no longer operate within patriot territories. As Henry Lloyd became more steadfast in his support for the British, his loyalist ties became publicized in colonies up and down the eastern seaboard[91]. In 1775, the *Pennsylvania Journal* published a letter from Henry Lloyd to his business partner Dr. John Stevenson, written to convince Stevenson to continue selling supplies to the British troops in Boston. In the letter Lloyd explains the "stoppage of provisions from the southern governments for the use of his Majesty's troops, makes it necessary to endeavor to get supply, by concealing from the public eye

[89] Letter from Henry Lloyd to Messrs. Delancy and Watts, 1775
[90] "Loyalist Boston: 1775" Smithsonian Online, accessed April 1,2020 https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibitions/out-of-the-mails-the-mails-during-war/loyalist-boston-1775
[91] "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings." *Boston Gazette* (Boston, Massachusetts), no. 1514, September 1, 1783: [1]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

the destination of provisions shipped for that purpose"[92]. Lloyd also writes that Stevenson would receive payment for the supplies: “You make take up a vessel as large as 200 tons and give her a full freight. I should send you bills on the contract to execute this plan.” Lloyd also asks him to “inform me the name of the vessel and master you engage, that I may lodge a permit at the light-house in this harbour, for admission to come up to the town.” This letter was presented to the patriot government in Massachusetts, and the verdict stated, "On Motion Resolved, That Henry Lloyd of Boston, has knowingly and willfully violated the association of the American Congress, by endeavoring to supply the enemies of this country with provisions.” This action resulted in criminal punishment for any other colonist willfully choosing to do business with Henry Lloyd.

In all of Henry Lloyd’s surviving correspondence, he does not once refer to enlisting or even passing strategic military information to the British. Nevertheless, in the eyes of the patriots, his economic ties to the British army were just as damning. By the time the Continental Congress declared independence from King George III and the British Empire, reconciliation for Lloyd was no longer an option. Lloyd then realized that the business (and the life) he had built in America was no longer possible. He opted to move to Nova Scotia to ensure his safety. As Maya Jasanoff explains in her book, Liberty’s Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World there was a large diaspora of loyalists, especially from the Northeast[93]. Unfortunately for Henry Lloyd, New England communities were much less willing to allow Loyalists back into their

[92] "[Boston; Governments; Endeavour; Propose; Consideration]." *Pennsylvania Journal, or, Weekly Advertiser* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), no. 1701, July 12, 1775: [2]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

[93] Jasanoff, Maya. *Liberty’s Exiles : American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World*. 1st ed. Alfred A. Knopf, 2011.

society.[94].. However, due to the very deep ties Lloyd had established with the British Empire, it was improbable that Lloyd would be welcomed anywhere within the United States. Beyond the explicit support Lloyd offered the British, Arthur M. Schlesinger argues in his 1965 article *The Aristocracy in Colonial America* yet another reason why it would be highly unlikely for Loyalists such as Lloyd to return to Boston society: the upper-echelons of British colonial society were attempting to create an aristocratic class. He asserts that in the eyes of Bostonians, wealthy men like Henry Lloyd represented the English aristocracy, and the revolution, in part, was fought to rid Massachusetts of men like Lloyd[95]. After fleeing his Boston home in 1776, Henry Lloyd's first attempt to settle was in Nova Scotia. This was seemingly a decision that made practical sense, as Lloyd was familiar with the region due to the business he had conducted in that area for over a decade and he would have known other New England merchants making the same move. However, the Loyalist refugees in Nova Scotia received a cold and even hostile reception when they arrived in that area. Many Nova Scotians were hesitant to welcome immigrants, as they were scared of the strain immigrants would put on their society. While Lloyd's experience in Nova Scotia was not documented, Neil MacKinnon's book *Unfriendly Soil: The Loyalist Experience in Nova Scotia 1783-1791* gives insights to the lives of loyalists that did in fact migrate to Canada[96], which resulted in various hardships. Understanding the hardships that were experienced in Canada gives insight on why Lloyd

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[94] Brannon, Rebecca. *From Revolution to Reunion : The Reintegration of the South Carolina Loyalists*.University of South Carolina Press, 2016.
[95] Schlesinger, Arthur M. *"The Aristocracy in Colonial America."* Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society 74 (1962): 3-21.
[96] MacKinnon, Neil. *This Unfriendly Soil : The Loyalist Experience in Nova Scotia, 1783-1791*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986.

ultimately decided to leave Nova Scotia and move to London[97]. While little is written about Henry Lloyd's time in Nova Scotia, a Boston Newspaper reported that a twenty-two year old apprentice to Lloyd died while in Halifax "Drowned: At Halifax, Louis Turner, an Aprentice to Mr. Lloyd of that Place." [98] Details of this apprentice arrangement have been lost to history, but the fact that Lloyd had an apprentice while in Canada indicates that he was still involved in business in some capacity and was able to keep enough of his wealth to pay an apprentice. While in Nova Scotia, the property he left behind in Boston had been repossessed and put up for sale. In December of 1776, the Boston Gazette posted an advertisement for the "Prize Sloop Speedwell" which Lloyd had used to import goods in the decades prior to the war[99]. Henry Lloyd's time in Nova Scotia was short-lived, and he moved to London a few years later.

Upon leaving Nova Scotia, Henry Lloyd sailed to London to spend the rest of his years. As Jasanoff explains in *Liberty's Exiles*, Lloyd would have experienced a completely new world in London even though he would have thought he was "returning home"[100]. Lloyd was familiar with the most impressive luxuries the New World had to offer, but Colonial Boston did not compare in size or range of offerings available in London, even after supporting the British, loyalist refugees would have felt foreign in their new home. Jasanoff explains that loyalist migrants from America had a difficult time finding positions back in England: "Postwar Britain became the center of a parallel

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[97] Lloyd, Henry, *Henry Lloyd Letter Book, 1765-1767 (inclusive)*, 1765. Colonial North America at Harvard Library**.**

[98] "Advertisement." *Boston Evening-Post* (Boston, Massachusetts), no. 1595, April 7, 1766: [4]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

[99] "Advertisement." Boston Gazette (Boston, Massachusetts), no. 1128, December 30, 1776: [3]. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.

[100] Jasanoff, Maya. Liberty's Exiles : American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World. 1st ed. Alfred A. Knopf, 2011.

process of reconstruction. Individual loyalists sought to reestablish themselves with financial aid and new positions, while British authorities set about reforming imperial government." She further explains that loyalists seeking financial aid rarely got what they were looking for in Britain, and "though they strongly identified as British subjects, they felt estranged in this foreign land. Convinced they deserved compensation, they grew frustrated in their quest for support."[101] After spending most of their lives in America, loyalists forced to flee the New World often spent the rest of their lives in places that did not welcome them as their own or provide them any opportunity to start a new life.

Although representative of the loyalist merchant story, Henry Lloyd's story does not apply to all loyalists. As Joseph S. Tiedemann explains in his book *Other Loyalists: Ordinary People, Royalism, and the Revolution in the Middle Colonies, 1763-1787,* many loyalists from oppressed areas or poverty ridden backgrounds supported the British in hopes of gaining a more privileged position in the post-revolutionary war environment[102], as opposed to the goal of men like Henry Lloyd who sought to preserve their pre-revolution life

To maintain the life he had built for himself prior to the war, Henry Lloyd was compelled to remain loyal to the British Empire. Considering what was at stake for Lloyd, his support for the British was more of a necessity than an ideologically driven choice. Lloyd was not unique in this regard. Throughout the American colonies, other men found themselves thrust into the conflict without actively choosing one side or

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[101] Jasanoff, Maya. *Liberty's Exiles : American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World*. 1st ed. Alfred A. Knopf, 2011,116.
[102] Venables, Robert W., Eugene R. Fingerhut, and Joseph S. Tiedemann. *The Other Loyalists : Ordinary People, Royalism, and the Revolution in the Middle Colonies, 1763-1787*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009.

another. Men on both sides made decisions based on their own financial well-being. Nevertheless, loyalists of New England were largely relegated to living the rest of their lives in exile due to the choices they made and their ultimate allegiance to the British crown

The Outcome for Stonington

The merchants of Stonington saw their successes of the war diminish as New York reemerged as the prominent port of the Northeast, however the rate of regression was not uniform for all of the Stonington merchants nor was it immediate. Both Joseph and Isaac Williams and John Palmer continued voyages to the West Indies during the years immediately following the war. Both merchants continued to take advantage of the networks they built during the war.

Similarly, merchants in the surrounding small port towns were still engaging in International trade at a higher rate than their New York city counterparts. For instance, John Atwater commonly submitted advertisements to the Connecticut Journal seeking "a quanity of furs, such as foxes, filhers, otters, wild cats, Minks" in exchange for "payment made in either European or west-India Goods"[103] Similarly, the Connecticut merchants of William and Joseph Hart advertised "common West-India Rum" and "an assortment of European Goods, suitable for the season" in a 1784 issue of the Connecticut Courant.[104]

The Connecticut firm of Daniel and Elijah Boardman took full advantage of America's neutral status following the conclusion of the war. Their New-Milford based store front consistently imported "large and elegant Assortment of European & India

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[103] "Advertisement." Connecticut Journal (New Haven, Connecticut), no. 846, January 14, 1784: [4]. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers

[104] "Advertisement." Connecticut Courant (Hartford, Connecticut), no. 991, January 20, 1784: [4]. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.

Goods" between 1784-1787.[105] However, their story also highlighted the dangers of independence. In November of 1784, a ship captained by Johnathon Boardman was fired upon by a Spanish Vessel and promptly boarded. After discovering the ship only carried molasses, the Boardman ship could carry on with its business.[106] Although, this instance did not result in a loss of property, it highlights the changing position of American merchants following the Treaty of Paris, no more were they protected by Spanish or French war ships.

Like Boardman, Joseph Williams continued leveraging connections made during the Revolutionary War and continued to make economic gain throughout the 1780's. However, once the Haitian revolution started in St. Domingue, Williams found himself in a difficult position. With the Colony of St. Domingue in open Rebellion, conducting trade there was seen as an act of war against the French. However, because France insisted the colony was still part of their empire, the British understood trade with the colony to be aiding the French in a time of war. Both views resulted in the American merchants being the targets of privateering.[107] Joseph Williams downfall eventually came by the way of French Privateers. It is probable that they legal confusion surrounding trade with Haiti made acquiring insurance policies for voyages impossible, which is likely the reason Williams was unable to financially recover following multiple lost cargoes at the hands of French Privateers.[108]

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[105] "Advertisement." Connecticut Journal (New Haven, Connecticut), no. 866, June 2, 1784: [3]. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers

[106] "Newburyport, November 24." New-York Journal and Patriotic Register (New York, New York), no. 1988, December 9, 1784: [2]. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.

[107] Gaffield, Julia. Haitian Connections in the Atlantic World : Recognition after Revolution . Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

[108] Coll. 37, Box 2 Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.

In a local history of Stonington, R.A Wheeler explains that by the time tensions rose again with Great Britain in the early Nineteenth century, Stonington's international trade was "limited to the West Indies" and although fortunes could still be made from Stonington's trade, it was much limited in scope than during the American Revolution. Stonington continued its trade with the Caribbean, however much of the trade with Europe was conducted by New York City Merchants.

Conclusion

In 1783 the local economy of Stonington was much healthier than New York City's. While the economic success of New York is well known today, the futures of Stonington and New York were much more uncertain following the American Revolution. However, American's independence resulted in a break from British financial institutions and gave rise to American banks and insurance companies. The largest and most prominent of these companies were based in larger cities which resulted in a gradual movement of capital away from small port towns like Stonington towards larger cities like New York and Hartford. Although Stonington merchant families like the Palmers and the Williams could profit from their elevated wartime status initially following the war, eventually their reliance on the institutions of larger cities ensured their return to the pre-war status. This process was further perpetuated by the maritime violence of the late eighteenth century which bolstered the insurance industry.

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