



Gregg M. Amore
Secretary of State

Primary Source Document Transcription

Made available through the Rhode Island State Archives

Letter from Governor Wanton to Admiral Montagu, May 1772

Rhode Island Governor Joseph Wanton responds to a letter from Admiral John Montagu, commander of British naval forces in New England. After complaining about Lieutenant Dudingston's actions, he declares that, as governor of the colony, he is not subject to commands from a British naval officer and may send sheriffs where ever he pleases, highlighting the tensions between an elected official and someone in service to the king. (This letter was a copy retained for the files. The original letter would have been sent to Admiral Montagu, stationed in Boston.)

Rhode Island, May 8, 1772

Sir,

Your letter, dated April the 8th, at Boston, I have received. Lieutenant Dudingston has done well in transmitting my letters to you, which I sent him; but I am sorry to be informed there is any thing contained in them that should be construed as a design of giving offence, when no such thing was intended. But Mr. Dudingston has not behaved so well in asserting to you "He waited on me, and showed me the Admiralty and your Orders for his Proceedings, which agreeable to his instruction he is to do." But in that he has altogether misinformed you; for he, at no time, ever showed me any Orders from the Admiralty, or from you, and positively denied that he derived any authority either from you or the commissioners; therefore, it was altogether out of my power to know, whether he came hither to protect us from pirates, or was a pirate himself. —You say "he has done his duty and behaved like an officer." In this ~~you are altogether mistaken~~ I apprehend you must be mistaken, for I can never believe it is the duty of any officer, to give false information to his superiors.

As to your attempt to point out what was my duty as Governor, please to be informed, that I do not receive instructions for the administration of my government from the King's Admirals stationed in America.

You seem to assert that I have endeavored to distress the King's officers from strictly complying with your orders. In this you are altogether mistaken, for I have at all times heretofore, and shall constantly for time to come, afford them all the aid and assistance in my power in the execution of their office.

~~If you have really been informed, as you assert,~~ The information you have received "that the people of Newport talked of fitting out an armed vessel to rescue any vessel the King's schooner might take carrying on an illicit trade," ~~you have been greatly imposed upon~~ may be assured is without any

This transcript is intended to capture the substance of the document.

For details of capitalization, punctuation, spelling and spacing, we recommend consulting the original document.

foundation, and a scandalous imposition; for upon inquiring into this matter, I cannot find that any such design was ever laid, or so much as talked of, and therefore, I hope you will not hang any of His Majesty's subjects belonging to his colony upon such false information.

I am greatly obliged for the promise of transmitting my letters to the Secretary of State. I am, however, a little shocked at your impolite expression made use of upon that occasion; in return for this good office I shall also transmit your letter to the Secretary of State, and leave to the King and his ministers to determine on which side the charge of insolence lies.

As to your advice not to send the Sheriff on board any of your squadron, please to know, that I will send the Sheriff of this Colony, at any time, and to any place, within the body of it, as I shall think fit.

In the last paragraph of your letter you are pleased flatly to contradict what you ~~say~~ wrote in the beginning; for there you assert that Dudingston by his instructions was directed to show me the Admiralty and your orders to him, and here you assert, that I have no business with them, and assure me that it is not his duty to show me them or any part thereof.

I am, sir, your humble servant,

This primary source comes from the Rhode Island State Archives, C#0554 – Gaspee Commission Records 1772-1773.

The Rhode Island State Archives is responsible for preserving and maintaining access to the permanent, historical records of state government. Some records may contain content that is harmful, offensive, or difficult to view, as some of the materials presented in our collections may reflect outdated, biased, offensive, and possibly violent views and opinions that do not constitute the current opinions and views of the Department of State.