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Editor's Note

Elizabeth C. Stevens

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Editor's Note

This issue, we go back to the eighteenth century to delve into two very different aspects of life in Newport. In his “Freedom for African Americans in British-Occupied Newport, 1776-1779, and ‘The Book of Negroes,’” Christian McBurney explores the experience of some African-Americans during the American Revolution. When the British occupied Newport between December 1776 and October, 1779, enslaved African Americans in Rhode Island joined the Loyalist side in the town, hoping for possible emancipation. Other free and enslaved African-American men joined the First Rhode Island Regiment to fight with the rebels, also possibly gaining freedom from slavery at war’s end. As McBurney writes, both free and enslaved African Americans in Newport and elsewhere in the state, aided the British and the American efforts in numerous ways. For some who sided with the Loyalists, the end of the war meant exile to Nova Scotia, and freedom from slavery, as well. Christian McBurney is a lawyer in Washington, D.C., who has written numerous books and articles about the Revolutionary War in Rhode Island. He is also the publisher and chief editor of the Rhode Island history blog, www.smallstatebighistory.com.

Gabriella Angeloni’s article, “Writing in Books: Lessons on New England Readers from the Ellery Library Collection,” gives us a window into eighteenth-century Newport readers through their private libraries. She is able to do so because the Newport Historical Society has a fine collection of eighteenth-century books that belonged to residents of Newport, including leading citizen, William Ellery. Angeloni suggests that we not only examine the titles and contents of the volumes in the collection, but also look to inscriptions, marginalia, and condition as a way of understanding eighteenth-century Newport readers and their literary habits. Gabriella Angeloni is a Ph.D. candidate in History, and Presidential Fellow at the University of South Carolina. She currently works as curator of the Miles Brewton House in Charleston, S.C. In 2016, she was the Buchanan/Burnham Post-Graduate Fellow in Historical Interpretation at the Newport Historical Society.

Elizabeth C. Stevens

EDITOR