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Editor's Note

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Newport Historical Society

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Editor's Note

Newport's proximity to the sea and its favorable harbor drove the colonial town's economic fortunes for generations. Following Newport's mercantile decline in the nineteenth century, Newporters were drawn to careers at sea in the U.S. Navy. In this issue, Dr. Evelyn Cherpak relates the narrative of one such Newport native, Charles Hunter, who was living in Newport and on the retired list from the U.S. Navy, when Lincoln's call for volunteers went out in the spring of 1861. Hunter went back into active service and, within a few months, assumed command of USS *Montgomery*, one of the many U.S. Navy vessels charged with enforcing the Union blockade of Southern ports. As Dr. Cherpak vividly relates, his mission of chasing Confederate blockade runners led to some very unpleasant consequences for Hunter. With much recent public attention focused on the land battles of the Civil War, Cherpak's article recounts the story of one Newporter who engaged in the challenges of the Civil War at sea. Evelyn Cherpak is a graduate of Connecticut College who received a Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina. She recently retired as archivist at the Naval War College.

Every historian and genealogist yearns to find the one elusive source that will prove "pure gold" in illuminating a historical period, an incident, or a person's life. Cherry Fletcher Bamberg discovered just such a valuable prize in Newport in the winter of 2015. Her account of finding Ezra Stiles's eighteenth-century "Bills of Mortality for 1765-1777," and her analysis of its usefulness in describing and understanding Newport's pre-Revolutionary war population is our second article of this issue. Ezra Stiles, a Congregational clergyman in Newport who became president of Yale University, was a scientist, bibliophile, and theologian. Stiles's obsession with keeping careful tabulations of death records in Newport has furnished researchers with a bonanza of information. Bamberg reveals that a batch of his recently discovered "Bills of Mortality" are especially valuable as many records of the town of Newport were destroyed or badly damaged during or after the British occupation in 1776-1779. She makes the case that our ability to understand pre-Revolutionary War Newport's diversity of inhabitants would be greatly hampered without the results of Stiles's work. Cherry Fletcher Bamberg, FASG, is a fellow of the American Society of Genealogists, an independent elective organization of fifty living scholars. The editor of *Rhode Island Roots*, the quarterly journal of the Rhode Island Genealogical Society, since 2002, she is the author of numerous books and articles on Rhode Island families.

Bills of Mortality for Newport

Year	Month	Age	Name	Sex	Days	Count
1765	Jan	10	Sam ^r Mumford	Philborn	2	84
			2	Wm. J. Chapman	2	80
			B	Wm. Hammett		90
			2	Eliz ^a Borden	Causes	40
			2	Isaac Hall	Sea	27
			P	Wm. Goddard	Im. prog	36
			E	John	Son 8 th	
			2	Wm. Luzzan	Consump	35
			25	B. Edw ^d East		40
			B	John Atwood		79
				Sarah Molatto		18
			P	Irving	Son 2 nd	
			P	Capt Potter	at sea	30
				14 W	3 B	
			Man	Wife in Langly		25
			2	Rich ^d Waterhouse	Consump	19
			E	W ^m Springfield	Cont.	
			B	Wm Needon	Girl	1
				Molatto Girl		18
			20	B. Mary Drea		90
				Harty Dault		6
				Neg. man W ^m D. Dullis		
				Twin Children	at sea days	
			31	2 W ^m Scott	W	46
			2	W ^m Whitefield		89
			E	W ^m Davis	Inc	50
				a Man at Prison	prison	
				Neg. Boy	8 days	
				Tuller Negro		20
			J	J. Hooper	W 3 B	1
1765	Jan	47	W ^m Baileys Child			
			Neg. Girl	Im. prog		
			2 ^d Boy	Buckman		
			W ^m Deen			85
12	B		W ^m Sanford			69
			2	Capt Luzzan	Sea	40
			2	Rob. D.		25
			2	Ben. Edmund	Dead	25
				Indian Isaac		22
			E	Hannah Gibbon	Pass	55
22			2	Geo. Laylor	Im. prog	30
				a Girl		8
			2	Job Townsend		65
25			W ^m Deen	Aunt		
			E	Shuglaton	Daugh	8
				Neg. Girl	Tuesday	8
				2 ^d Man	Germ ^d	
			B	W ^m Sinkins	Causes	50
30				Neg. Neg. Child	Cont	50
				Neg. Man	Im. prog	22
				2 ^d Boy	Hony	8
				14 W	8 B	
Feb	4			Neg. Boy	M. Hood	6
			B	W ^m Vial	Son 8 th	
			B	Henry Sabins	Cont	65
			E	Nat Birds	by 2 W	
				W ^m Mason	Neg. man	

An excerpt of Ezra Stiles's Bills of Mortality, 1765-1776 (SEE PAGE 36).

Elizabeth C. Stevens
EDITOR