

Norwich Patriotic Subscription Post

1773 - 1775

John S. Olenkiewicz

Norwich an inland port, had grown to be the commercial center of eastern Connecticut prior to the Revolutionary War. It had a population of 7,327, the second largest town in the Connecticut Colony, and was the twelfth largest in all of the colonies. (New Haven had only about a thousand more inhabitants.) Local merchants prospered by trading with other colonial towns and the West Indies using ships that they owned themselves.

A close relationship existed between Norwich and Boston, which was based on strong family ties, friendship, and commerce. Norwich was the first Connecticut town to join with Boston in December 1767 favoring a "non-consumption agreement", that is, the colonists agreed not use certain goods of British origin. This boycott was the first in a series of many supportive gestures given to the people of Boston by their Norwich brethren in standing up to the British.

New London, about seventeen miles south of Norwich, had a British Parliamentary Post Office which was the central disbursing point for mail directed to towns in eastern Connecticut. It was located on the Lower Post Road which was the coastal route used by post riders between New Haven, New London, Westerly, Tower Hill and Newport. All of those towns had official Parliamentary Post Offices.

New London Parliamentary Postmaster, John S. Miller placed quarterly advertisements in the New London Gazette newspaper (Fig. 1) notifying those in the outlying towns that they had letters being held for them at the post office. Letters requiring pickup and payment would often remain at the post office for long periods of time before being claimed.

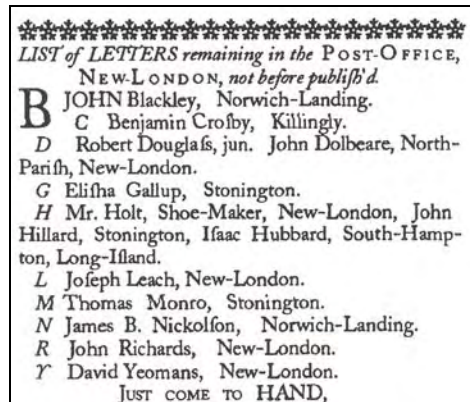


Fig. 1: New London Gazette, No. 532, 21 Jan. 1773

Although the trading ships carried personal letters, correspondence from Norwich was primarily commercial in nature. Merchants via their own vessels sent a major portion of those letters. Some letters were carried "by favor." These letters were sometimes delivered directly to the addressee free of charge. Other letters written off the post route were carried by personal favor for only part of the intended route and then placed into the Parliamentary Postal System.

The following typical business letter was not sent by land, (Fig. 2) but was sent to Samuel Vernon in Newport by ship "*pr. Capt. Sheldon*" and was datelined 2 December 1755.



Fig. 2: Letter datelined Norwich, 2 December 1755 Isaac Woodworth to Samuel Vernon. (Author's Collection)

The newspaper post rider's primary purpose was to circulate the paper. They also carried letters and performed other services for people in order to earn a living off the post road. Newspaper posts rode through Norwich in the late 1750's carrying the New London Gazette. Norwich's first newspaper did not begin publication until October 1773, some fifteen years later. It had the unusually long title of The Norwich Packet and Connecticut) New Hampshire & Massachusetts) Rhode Island Weekly Advertiser. Alexander Robinson, James Robertson, and John Trumbull printed this newspaper. It was in this newspaper that persons attempting to operate as post riders on a circuit Norwich placed a number of advertisements.

Norwich had no formal postal system before the Revolutionary War. The following series of advertisements represent a method of sending letters that existed before the establishment of a Congressional Post Office in Norwich. It will be referred to as the Norwich Patriotic Subscription Post. In February 1781 Postmaster General Ebenezer Hazard appointed Dudley Woodbridge as the first Congressional Postmaster of Norwich.

The earliest post rider advertisement found in the Norwich Packet was placed by 19 year old Moses Cleveland of Canterbury, Connecticut (Fig. 3) in November 1773. He offered his services as a post rider between Norwich and Albany, New York.

MOSES CLEVELAND begs Leave to acquaint the public, that he has engaged to ride between the town of Norwich and city of Albany in order to serve the subscribers with the **NORWICH PACKET**, &c. and carry small bundles, and memorandums for those who choose to employ him, on reaonable terms.

Fig. 3: Norwich Packet, Vol. 1 No.5, 28 Oct - 4 Nov. 1773

Cleveland's endeavor seems to have lasted through a very treacherous season. In a March editorial comment by the publishers he is referred to as the rider for the western circuit of the Norwich Packet (Fig. 4). The publishers offered an apology for the meager edition of the paper with the this explanation:

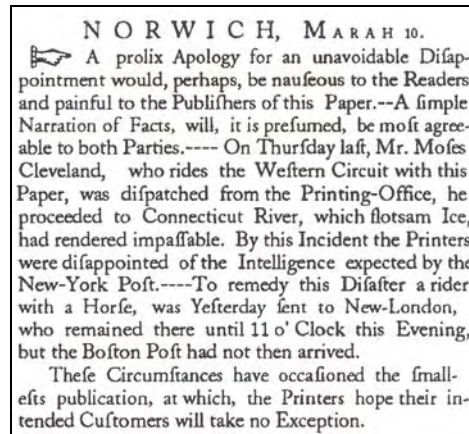


Fig. 4: Norwich Packet, Vol. 1 No. 23, 3 March -10 March 1774

The next letter (Fig. 5) is an example carried outside of the British Parliamentary Post before the existence of the Norwich Packet. Two characteristics differentiate it from folded letters processed by the British Post: firstly, the hands tamped Parliamentary marking in use at this time - the BOSTON magenta 43.5x7.5mm straight-line (Fig. 11) is absent; secondly, the manuscript postage troy weight rate 2:16 (Fig. 12) is in a penmanship different from that of letters out of the Boston Parliamentary Post Office during this period. The rate marking is, however, the same charge 2:16 (8^d (pence)) used by the British for letters traveling 100 to 200 miles. Other examples support the conclusion that post riders, outside the Parliamentary Post, carried this letter.

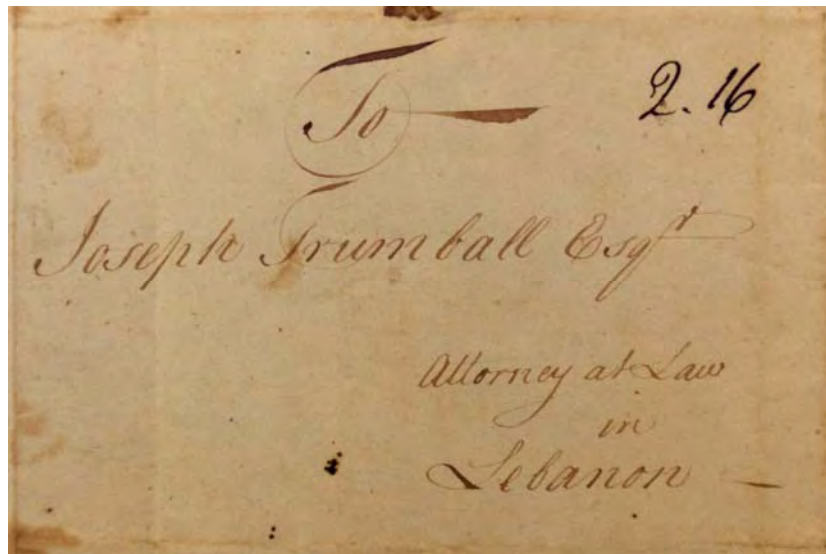


Fig. 5: Letter datelined Boston 25 August 1773, from Henry Hill to Joseph Trumbull at Lebanon (Connecticut Historical Society)

Daniel Carew of Norwich placed the first ad found in the Norwich Packet proposing to ride directly between Norwich and Boston on 3 February 1774. The same advertisement (Fig.6) ran in each issue of the paper until 3 March 1774. Carew intended to leave Norwich on Thursdays and depart from Boston on the following Monday, completing the round trip within a week.

To the Public.
DANIEL CAREW of NORWICH proposes, upon sufficient Encouragement, to ride Post from Norwich to Boston, he will set out from Norwich on Thursdays and from Boston on Mondays, and pass the middle Road (as it is called) through Pomfret, Mendon &c. he will make it his assiduous care to serve his Employers faithfully, with this Paper and in such other business as they entrust him with, and make the undertaking beneficial to them and the Public.
 Norwich Feb. 3. 1774.

Fig. 6:
 Norwich Packet, Vol. 1 No. 18, 27 Jan – 3 Feb 1774

At this time Baltimore newspaper publisher William Goddard began an important tour of the colonies from Baltimore eastward to what is now Maine. Goddard was the main proponent for the creation of a Constitutional Post to replace the British Parliamentary Post. He met with town committees along the way with the intention of explaining his proposals and garnering local support

Goddard arrived in New London on Thursday, the 3rd of March 1774. He met with New London's Town Committee of Correspondence. He did the same in Norwich prior to continuing his journey to Newport, Providence, Boston and points north. All four Connecticut newspapers mentioned Goddard's plans. The Norwich Packet was no exception. (Fig. 7)

In fact, it was the first Connecticut paper to print his ideas, just one day ahead of the New London Gazette.

BOSTON, March 21.
Last Monday arrived here from the Southern colonies, Mr. William Goddard, Printer in Philadelphia, and at Baltimore.
 Extract of a letter from a gentleman at New-York, to his friend in this town, dated Feb. 28, 1774.
"Our friend, Mr. Goddard, the bearer of this, is to leave town in a few hours for your place; on a matter of the utmost importance to the liberties of this country, viz. an intire abolition of the illegal and oppressive post-office act. a provisional subscription post is already established between Philadelphia and Baltimore, in Maryland, supported by the most eminent merchants and other gentlemen in those places. Our Committee of Correspondence writes to your Committee, on the subject, recommending in the strongest terms the proposals which Mr Goddard has to make, and our earnest desires to co-operate with you and the rest of our friends of just government in carrying this glorious plan into immediate execution, from the information which Mr. Goddard will give you, I think you will be convinced that, now or never, is the time; at least that so favourable an opportunity will hardly offer as the present. The friends of liberty in the Southern colonies, particularly Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, you may depend will establish riders upon the new plan, throughout those provinces, as soon as they obtain information of the concurrence and approbation of the town of Boston, and will do every thing in their power to extend them to the most eastern colonies immediately. That it will meet with the warmest approbation of the truly patriotic Bostonians, I cannot entertain the least doubt.
We hear a considerable fund is already raised for the support of new posts at Philadelphia and Baltimore, and the citizens at New York are determined to open subscription books for the like purpose, as soon as the town of Boston has given a sanction to the capital a sign of annihilating that fatal precedent against us — the post office.
We hear from New-London and Norwich, in the colony of Connecticut, that the plan for the total abolition of the parliamentary post office in America, by the establishment of new constitutional posts and post-offices in the several colonies, meets with general approbation, and will undoubtedly be patronized by every friend of American freedom, not only in those towns but throughout the continent.

Fig. 7:
 Norwich Packet, Vol. 1 No. 25, 17 March – 24 March 1774

William Goddard's return circuit after visiting Boston was through Providence, arriving there on the 9th of May, 1774, to Newport on the 14th, New London on the 18th, Norwich on the 19th, and finally to Hartford on Saturday, the 21st of May, 1774.

The citizens of Norwich found Goddard's suggestions well suited to their already keen patriotic temperament. The visit inspired the printers of the *Norwich Packet* as well as Moses Cleveland to propose the establishment of a subscription post between Norwich and Boston.

(Fig. 8) Goddard's grander scheme of a Constitutional Post did not come to fruition until a year later in May 1775 (one month after Lexington and Concord).

The below advertisement ran weekly the *Norwich Packet* from March into April, stopping with issue #29 of April 21, 1774. An almost identical advertisement appeared in Boston's, *The Massachusetts Spy*, which was published by Isaiah Thomas (Fig. 9). *The Spy* first ran the advertisement in issue #165 on March 31, 1774 and stopped it with issue #170 on May 5, 1774. Likewise the *Boston Post Boy* ran a similar add as in the Packet except for the last paragraph in issue #868 of April 4, 1774.

Moses Cleveland.

IN Confidence that the Example of those public spirited Gentlemen, who have subscribed to the Proposals for raising the Sum of Sixty Pounds, L. M. to enable a Post to ride weekly between *Norwich* and *Boston*, will influence others to be liberal to an Establishment which, it is evident, must be productive of great commercial Advantages to both Towns and the intermediate Country.---Induced by these Considerations, said Cleveland has undertaken (although there is 22 l. 10 s. wanting to complete the above-mentioned Sum) to set out from the Printing-Office in *Norwich* every Thursday, immediately after the Publication of the *NORWICH PACKET*, for the Space of one Year from the Date hereof. He will proceed through *Windham, Pomfret, Mendon, &c.* and arrive at *Boston* on Saturdays, remain there until Monday Morning, and return to *Norwich* by the same Road he went. He will carry this Paper, and deliver it to such Gentlemen as are pleased to encourage it, with the utmost Regularity. Those who choose to employ him, to carry Letters, small Bundles, or to do any Business for them, may depend upon his Care and Fidelity.

N. B. Said Cleveland has employed a Post to ride every Week from *Norwich* to *Hartford*, serve the Customers with this Paper, and do such other Business as he may be employed to execute.

Norwich, March 23, 1774.

Fig. 8:

Norwich Packet, Vol. 1 No. 25, 17 Mar. – 24 Mar. 1774

These ads demonstrate considerable effort on Cleveland's part to notify the people of both Norwich and Boston that there was an alternative to sending letters via the British system. Moses Cleveland planned to ride the same route to Boston that Daniel Carew did previously, i.e., the Middle Road, and within the same weekly schedule. From the letters shown the postage rate initially 2:16 in pennyweight and grain was increased and rated in Sterling at 1 Shilling.

The content of the second letter from this correspondence (Fig.10) would put the writer in jeopardy were it discovered by the authorities in the British Parliamentary Post. It was much safer for a writer to express such sentiments in a patriotic post.

MOSES CLEVELAND.

IN confidence that the example of those public spirited gentlemen, who have subscribed to the proposals for raising the sum of sixty pounds, lawful money, to enable a post to ride weekly between *NORWICH* and *BOSTON*, will influence others to be liberal to an establishment which, it is evident, must be productive of great commercial advantages to both towns and the intermediate country. -- Induced by these considerations, said Cleveland has undertaken (although there is 21 l. 10 s. wanting to complete the above mentioned sum) to set out from the printing-office in *NORWICH* every Thursday, immediately after the publication of the *Norwich News-paper*, for the space of one year from the date hereof. He will proceed through *WINDHAM, POMFRET, MENDON, &c.* and arrive at *BOSTON* on Saturdays, remain there until Monday morning, and return to *Norwich* by the same road he went. He will carry this and other papers, and the *Royal American MAGAZINE*, and deliver them to such gentlemen as are pleased to encourage them, with the utmost regularity. Those who choose to employ him, to carry letters, small bundles, or to do any business for them, may depend upon his care and fidelity.

N. B. Said Cleveland has employed a post to ride every week from *NORWICH* to *HARTFORD*, serve the Customers with News-papers, Magazines, and do such other business as he may be employed to execute.

Fig. 9:

Massachusetts Spy, No. 165, 31 March 1774

"Capt. Gorham arrived here last Sunday wth. 28 Chests Tea, but the Indians (who destroyed the former) on Monday Even 'g boarded the Vessel. & in a few hours set it afloat wth. a brisk gale from the West, weve soon sent it where it will be seen no more."

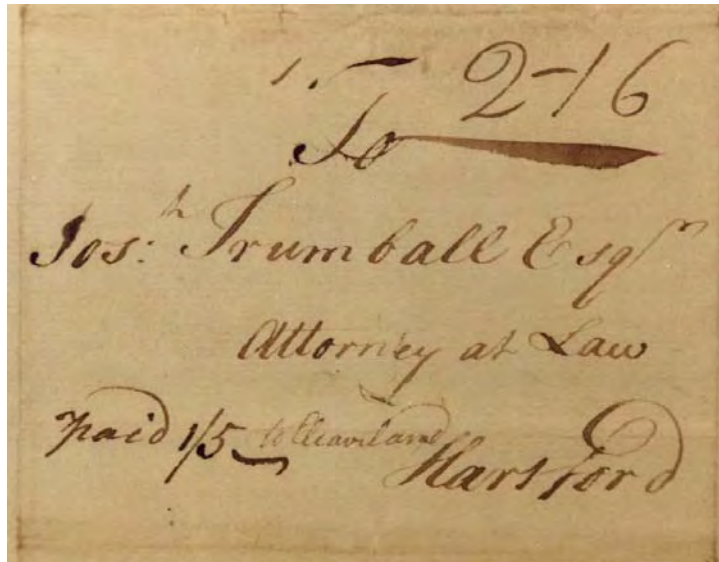


Fig. 10: Letter datelined Boston, 9 March 1774, Henry Hill to Joseph Trumbull at Hartford.
(Connecticut Historical Society)

This cover is minus the usual handstamped British postmark of BOSTON. It is rated 2^{dwt} 16^{gr} troy weight (8^d Sterling) from Boston to Norwich. The Connecticut local currency conversion of 2:16 is 11^d. The Connecticut currency rate of "paid 1/5" (17^d) "to Cleaveland" is from an additional 6^d of postage, for transit to Hartford. Another 1^d is noted for hand delivery to Joseph Trumbull. The notation "to Cleaveland" in the hand of Joseph Trumbull is proof that Moses Cleveland carried this letter via the Norwich Patriotic Subscription Post.

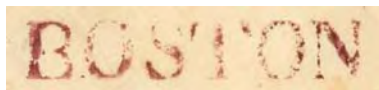


Fig. 11: BOSTON magenta straight-line (43.5x7.5mm).



Fig. 12: British Parliamentary manuscript rate.

A similar cover (Fig. 13) was written at the end of March, 1774. The British BOSTON postmark is missing here also. There is a manuscript rate of 1/Sh sterling on the address leaf. The writer of this letter has acknowledged the carrier on the address leaf pr: Mr. Cleveland. This letter, as the previous one, is a business letter written a full year before the Battle of Lexington and Concord. It ends with a patriotic postscript:

**"I am glad the Spirit of Lib'ty still prevails,
may it continue till all tyrants shall be eternally driven from America."**

--- Henry Hill) 1774 ---

To paid 1/-
 Jos: Trumbull Esq
 Horn Jct Saw
 Cleveland } Norwich

Fig. 13: Letter datelined Boston, 28 March 1774, Henry Hill to Joseph Trumbull at Hartford.
 (Connecticut Historical Society)

Moses Cleveland mentions in his Boston advertisement (Fig. 9) that he has employed a post rider between Norwich and Hartford, but unfortunately the rider is unidentified. In the May 12th issue of the Norwich Packet, however, Leonard Hills placed an ad for this route. (Fig. 14) His ads ran through October 1778. For some unknown reason Moses Cleveland stopped riding in early July, 1774. Jonas Clark appears to have taken over from Cleveland, as he placed an ad for the Norwich-Boston route in the Norwich Packet beginning on 7 July 1774. (Fig. 15) He describes the same riding schedule that Cleveland was carrying out.

LEONARD HILLS,
 OF LEBANON GOSHEN,
 Intimates to the Public, that he intends (if suitably encouraged) to ride Post every Week between the Towns of Norwich and Hartford. He will serve the Subscribers for this Paper with such Regularity that their Approbation of his Conduct must follow of Course--To such as are unacquainted with his Character, or that may be dubious of his Perseverance in his Undertakings, he can exhibit satisfactory Testimonials, authenticated by several respectable Gentlemen in his Neighbourhood--Those who are pleased to entrust him with Letters, small Bundles, &c. may depend on his Care and Fidelity.
 NORWICH, May 12, 1774.

Fig. 14:

Norwich Packet, Vol. I No. 32, 5 May -12 May 1774

JONAS CLARK,
 HAS, after the various Efforts already made, undertaken and will persist to ride every Week between this Town and Boston, for the Space of one Year; reckoning from the 7th Instant, when his Operations, in this Way, commenced. He will depart, every Week, from the PRINTING-OFFICE here, immediately after the Publication of the NORWICH PACKET, and supply ALL THAT BREATHES in his Circuit, with said Paper (provided they will accept of his Service.) Whatever Trust is reposed in him shall be discharged with Care and Fidelity.--- He also promises to return from Boston every Wednesday, during the aforesaid Space, in due Time to take a Meridian Bowl with his Friends in Norwich, unless obstructed by Sickness or bad Roads.
 N.B. Said Clark presumes, that the Example of those public spirited Gentlemen in Norwich, who have countenanced and liberally subscribed to this Undertaking, will be imitated by those in Boston and the intermediate Country, as the Sum judged requisite to enable him to perform his Engagement is not yet subscribed.
 NORWICH, July 21, 1774.

Fig. 15: Norwich Packet, Vol. I No. 32, 5 May -12 May 1774

The next letter from the Trumbull correspondence (Fig. 16) was datelined 14 July 1774, about the time Clark was beginning to ride the Norwich- Boston route. It has the troy weight 2:16 rate and the Connecticut local currency conversion of 11^d plus express fee of 6^d for total of 1/5.



Fig. 16: Letter datelined Boston, 14 July 1774, Henry Hill to Joseph Trumbull at Norwich. (Connecticut Historical Society)

The task of being a post rider was obviously difficult and arduous on a weekly basis. Getting a sufficient number of newspaper subscriptions to make the job profitable was a major concern (Fig. 15). Another Jonas Clark notice of 1 December 1774 (Fig. 17) implies that getting paid by your customers was also problematical.

Jonas Clark,
POST-RIDER, between the Towns of NORWICH
and BOSTON.

BEGS Leave to hint to his Customers, that one Year has elapsed since he began to circulate this PAPER, and that their Assitance, to enable him to settle with the Printers and continue his Operations, is indispenibly necessary. - - From his Knowledge of the Generality of them, he is confident they would disdain to be the Means of involving him in Difficulties, to prevent which he requests them to be prepared next Week, when he returns from Boston, to settle with him. He is grateful for all favours conferred upon him by the Gentlemen and Ladies of Norwich, Boston, and the intermediate Country and means to continue assiduoufly to serve them in his present Vocation, with Fidelity and Alacrity ; for, a consciouness of having their Approbation will always be a considerable Addition to his Happiness.

Norwich, December 1, 1774,

Fig. 17: Norwich Packet, Vol. II No. 61, 24 Nov. -30 Nov. 1774

NORWICH, JANUARY 5
 The Printers hereof, conscious of having made every Exertion in their Power to obtain News, conceive an Apology for the Barrenness of this Day's Paper unnecessary ---- They Yesterday dispatched an Express to meet the Boston and New-York Posts, at New-London, he returned early this Morning, with Intelligence that no Mails were expected there until Saturday next --- To render the Institution of a special Post, to ride alternately between this Town and Boston, beneficial and permanent, they have spared neither Trouble nor Expence; and had the present Rider (whose Remissness has occasioned one of them to perform two Journeys to Boston, in the most inclement Season of the Year) been assiduous to second their Efforts, that Business would have been of public Utility, and advantageous to him. However, if he does not proceed, in future, with more Regularity, he must expect to be superseded.

Jonas Clark,
 WHO circulates the NORWICH PACKET, &c. between this Town and Boston, is necessitated to decline Ceremony, and intimate to his Customers, in plain English, that an immediate Settlement with him is indispensable.
 NORWICH, Feb. 2, 1775.

Fig. 18:

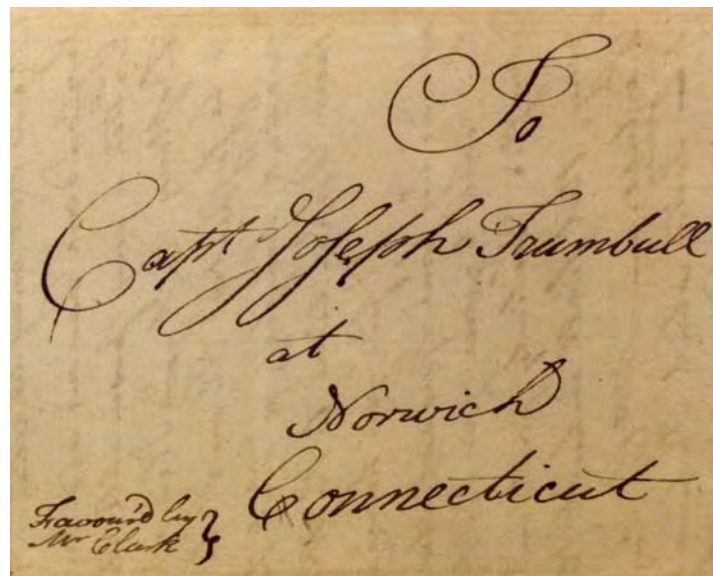
Norwich Packet, Vol. II No. 70, 26 Jan. - 2 Feb. 1775

<-Fig. 19:

Norwich Packet, Vol. II No. 70, 26 Jan. - 2 Feb. 1775

In their issue of 5 Jan. 1775 (Fig. 19) the publishers of the Norwich Packet found themselves apologizing for another thin issue, this time placing the blame directly on Jonas Clark. They were obviously displeased with his reliability. To keep the newspaper competitive they had to rely on the subscription post rider to bring news directly from Boston a day sooner than the Parliamentary Post, which stopped in New London. As you can see, they even threatened to replace Clark. Clark's next ad, clearly in reply, shows that this is not a one-sided story. (Fig. 18) Too many subscribers were in arrears and the stronger wording emphasizes his exasperation at not being able to settle with the publishers.

Providence Parliamentary Postmaster John Carter wrote a 22 January 1775 to Joseph Trumbull. The letter was carried by Jonas Clark, without any rate, with the notation "*Favour'd by Mr Clark*". Four months later John Carter was appointed Rhode Island Assembly Postmaster of Providence.



To
 Capt Joseph Trumbull
 at
 Norwich
 Connecticut
 Favour'd by
 Mr Clark }

Fig. 20: Letter datelined Providence, 22 January 1775, Jno. Carter to Joseph Trumbull in Norwich. (Connecticut Historical Society)

Jonas Clark's post riding days publicly ended with the notice below (Fig. 21) which announced that Wills Clift was succeeding him on the Norwich-Boston subscription route.

* * The Public are hereby informed, that Mr. JONAS CLARK, of Canterbury, has declined his weekly Circuit between this Town and Boston, in Favour of Mr. WILLS CLIFT, of Norwich, who intends to depart every Thursday from the Printing - Office here, and to return on the succeeding Wednesdays. He will, besides circulating the Norwich Packet, and serving such of the Customers as are pleased to employ him, with Boston News Papers, carry small Bundles, Memorandums or Sums of Money, and obey his Instructions with the utmost Care and Fidelity. He can, with the greatest Facility, convince such Gentlemen as are unacquainted with his Character and Circumstances, that any Part of their Property sent by him, either to or from Boston, will be very safe. This Business he would not have entered upon had he not been determined to exert his Abilities to give general Satisfaction.

Fig. 21: Norwich Packet, Vol. II No. 80, 6 April - 13 April 1775

The last letter (Fig.22) I have seen carried by the Patriotic Subscription Post was written by Henry Bromfield to Joseph Trumbull at Norwich is datelined 14 March 1775 and bears the manuscript paid Clift 1/ (1 Shilling sterling).

paid Clift 1/ To
 Joseph Trumbull
 Esq
 at Norwich
 in Connecticut

Fig. 22: Letter datelined Boston, 14 March 1775, Henry Bromfield to Joseph Trumbull at Norwich. (Connecticut Historical Society)

Some of the people involved with The Norwich Patriotic Subscription Post answered the call to arms. Lt. Moses Cleveland (later General) marched for the relief of Boston in the Lexington alarm of April 1775. Wills Clift served as Captain of his Company in Col. Wyllys's Regiment at Fishkill, N.Y. in 1778. He served as a Major in the 3rd Connecticut Regiment in 1780, and as the same in the 1st Connecticut Regiment at West Point in 1781 and 1782.

The Norwich Patriotic Subscription Post ceased to exist soon after the hostilities of the Revolutionary War commenced in April of 1775.