



Significant Signers Metcalf Bowler

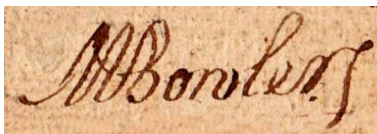
By Jeffrey R. Paunicka

I try to add notes to my inventory that would make a difference to even the best collections. These notes are part of a series I have acquired that contain significant signers of great documents in history and Americana from the birth of our Nation in Colonial times. I am speaking of documents such as the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, Stamp Act Congress and the U. S. Constitution.

My series of articles called "Significant Signers" profiles great patriots that not only signed these important documents but also signed issues of Colonial currency. These notes were actually handled and signed by each patriot. The signatures were not printed by presses,



This edition covers Metcalf Bowler (1726-9/2/1789) He was chosen to represent the Rhode Island colony at the Stamp Act Congress that met in October 1765 to formulate a united statement by the colonies against the British provisions of the Stamp Act. He is also noted for signing currency from Rhode Island. The notes he signed are from: 3/1/1786, 2/28/1767, 5/3/1775, 11/6/1775, 6/1780 and 7/21/1780. The notes he signed are well worth having in a super collection.



Early Life and Family

Metcalf Bowler was born in 1726 in London, England. In the 1740s he came with his father to North America, where he established himself in the Atlantic trade based in Newport, Rhode Island. His success in trade made him one of the Rhode Island colony's wealthiest men. He is frequently credited as being responsible for the introduction of the Rhode Island Greening apple as part of his merchant business and horticultural interests. He was supposedly responsible for its early propagation and distribution from his estate in Portsmouth



Portrait of Bowler's wife Ann by John Singleton Copley, c.1758

In 1750 he married Ann Fairchild, daughter of Major Fairchild, another prominent Newport merchant.

He attended one session of the 1754 Albany Congress, at which the idea of colonial union was discussed. During the French and Indian War at least one ship in which he had an interest, the *Defiance* was commissioned as a privateer. He was chosen to represent the colony at the Stamp Act Congress to formulate a united statement by the colonies against the provisions of the Stamp Act, which was the the first attempt by the British Parliament to tax the colonies directly.



Gaspée Affair

He sat as a judge on the panel that investigated the Gaspée Affair. The Gaspee Affair was a significant event in the lead-up to the American Revolution. HMS Gaspee was a British customs schooner that had been enforcing the Navigation Acts in and around Newport, Rhode Island in 1772. It ran aground in shallow water while chasing the packet ship *Hannah* on June 9 near Gaspee Point in Warwick, Rhode Island. A group of colonist attacked, boarded, and torched the ship. This was one of the earliest acts of rebellion in the colonies, and acted as a catalyst in the revolution. Rhode Island would become the first colony to declare its independence on May 4th, 1776.

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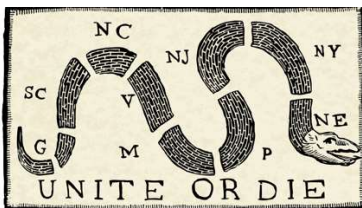


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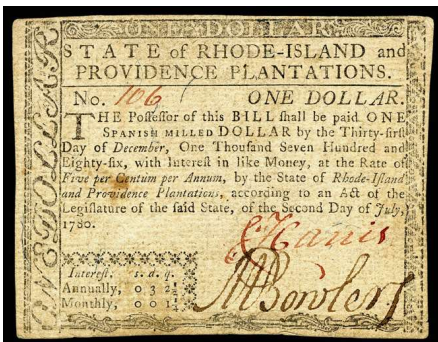


He served for many years in the colonial assembly, and was its speaker from 1767 to 1776. When Rhode Island declared its independence from Great Britain, Bowler was among the signatories. He remained active in state government, serving on its committee of secret correspondence. When the British occupied Newport in December 1776 Bowler was forced from his Portsmouth estate, and fled to Providence. There he operated a dry goods store and later a boarding house. He died in Providence in 1789.



Unmasked as Spy

In the late 1920s, when an extensive cataloging of the papers of General Sir Henry Clinton was undertaken, correspondence was found in which Bowler was revealed to be a paid informer for the British at the same time that he was being hailed as an American Patriot. This change of heart was apparently made in an attempt to prevent the plundering of his properties in and around Newport following the British occupation. It is not known whether he gave the British any useful intelligence.



Rhode Island Colonial Flag



Please do not miss the next installment of the "Significant Signers" series. Ask for a copy at the next show, call me or refer to my web page of articles at <http://www.oldbucks.com/page14.html>.

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About the Author

Jeffrey Paunicka is the President of Insight3, Portage Indiana. He has been actively involved with currency for over 52 years. He is a member of the Professional Currency Dealers Association (PCDA) and provides professional numismatic services. He holds an MBA from the University of Notre Dame. He can be reached at (574)315-0238.

