


1898

# A Rhode Island Patriot

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## A Rhode Island Patriot.

Rhode Island is a state of which we may well be proud. Although small in area, it has been mighty in its influence on the progress of the nation, both politically and religiously. Its prominent men have been known abroad as well as at home and have served the nation as well as the state.

Rhode Island seems to be marked by an individuality which has clung to it throughout its history. Roger Williams, upon being banished from Massachusetts because of his independent thinking, came to Rhode Island and settled Providence in 1636. Here he was free to express his own opinions, and he granted the same privilege to his followers and to later settlers. This right to the individual to freedom of thought was a principle insisted upon from the first by the Rhode Island people and causes them sometimes to seem slow to act. Their tardiness in ratifying the constitution may be attributed to this characteristic; they were not drawn into accepting the constitution simply because other states did so, preferring to consider the matter well before taking any decisive action.

Great patriots are a gradual development from many generations of courageous, earnest, and thoughtful ancestry. In order fully to understand the character of any man we must first know something about his forefathers. In tracing the public life of an individual, there are times when he seems to be silent and passive, then suddenly he comes into prominence again and is as active as before. Accordingly in enumerating the various offices, both political and military, held by Benjamin Bosworth, the subject of this paper, there are found periods when the records mention no participation in colonial and state affairs still he was always engaged in furthering the progress of the town of Bristol.

Before reviewing in detail his life let us rapidly glance at his ancestry. The Bosworths were sturdy Englishmen whose history dated far

back of the Battle of Bosworth Field. They came to Hingham, Massachusetts in 1635. Having obtained a grant of land in Bristol, then a part of Plymouth Colony, Nathaniel Bosworth settled on it in 1680, and from that time his descendents were closely identified with the history of the towns of Bristol and Warren. In 1732 he was made Lieutenant in the troops of George 2nd, and in February 1744 became Captain--Lieutenant. The same month he was given a commission as enlisting officer part of which reads as follows.---

"I do hereby authorize and empower Capt. Nathaniel Bosworth, Bristol, to beat his drums within the Regiment of Militia, whereof Sam. Willis Esq. is Colonel, for the enlisting of volunteers for his Majesty's service, in the intended Expedition against the French of Cape Breton."

He was present at the reduction of Cape Breton and served as Colonel during the French and Indian Wars.

Nathaniel Bosworth, grandson of the Nathaniel Bosworth who came to Rhode Island from Hingham, was chosen as the first representative of Bristol to the General Assembly of Rhode Island at Newport, in January 1747, when Bristol was added to the Rhode Island Colony.

Benjamin Bosworth, son of the preceeding, was born in Bristol, January 9, 1733. His first public service of which there is record was in 1755, when three companies of fifty men each were sent to reinforce Colonel Harris's command, which was pressing against Crown Point, and he went as ensign in one of them. Shirley abandoned the reduction of Crown Point for the winter, and disbanded the greater part of his army but the Rhode Island Assembly voted to retain one hundred and eighty-five men in military service, and a month later, in February, a regiment of five hundred men was formed, which was divided into ten companies and officered. Benjamin Bosworth was made second Lieutehant in Lieutenant-Colonel Christopher Champlin's company.

In March, Shirley was superceeded as commander-in-chief in America

by Lord Loudoun. The first Wednesday in May, 1758, Benjamin Bosworth was admitted as a freeman to the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, that is, he was allowed to vote for the general officers of the town and state.

It is a question whether he may not have taken part in the Boston Tea Party December, 1773; at any rate he contributed largely towards relieving the inhabitants of Boston from their distress at that time. On January 16, 1774, a meeting of the citizens of Bristol was called to give expression to the sentiments of the town respecting the above-mentioned affair. As a result of this meeting, Benjamin Bosworth, and six others were appointed a committee to draw up a series of resolutions to be presented for the approval of the town at a subsequent meeting held February 28, 1774. The committee reported a series of resolutions which were adopted. In these resolutions there were eleven subdivisions, ending thus;--- "Voted that the thanks of this meeting be given to the towns of Boston and Newport and other patriotic towns on the continent for their virtuous and spirited opposition to the measures of administration, and their noble exertions in defence of our invaluable rights and privileges."

The people of Bristol seem to have anticipated the trouble about to come upon them, for they early began to devise measures for defence. On the twenty-fifth of April, six days after the Battle of Lexington and Concord, the town voted that a watch be set, and that all able men, from the age of sixteen years to sixty, should be liable to attend upon it. The first Wednesday in May, 1775 Benjamin Bosworth was made major of the regiment of Militia in the town of Bristol, by the General Assembly, acting in the name of His Majesty, George the Third.

In June 1775, Benjamin Bosworth and twenty eight others were appointed a committee to take account of the ammunition, including private as well as public store, in the several towns of the Colony in which they

respectively dwelt. In pussuance of their duty they were directed to visit the house of every person in the town to take account of the arms and ammunition of its occupants. On the same day Benjamin Bosworth was appointed by the General Assembly as enlisting officer for the town of Bristol. He was also instructed to see that all stock that was fit to be killed, should be removed from Hog Island and Purdence to Bristol.

At a town meeting held September 4, 1775 he and Stephen Wardwell were chosen a committee to purchase fifteen small arms, and he and Deacon Howland were appointed another committee to examine the cartridges already made, and to make as many more as they deemed necessary.

In October of the next year, Wallace bombarded Bristol, doing much damage to public and private buildings. He departed the following day, after having demanded forty sheep and a considerable sum of money. Benjamin Bosworth gave half the sheep and all the money. The generosity of this one man probably saved the town from total destruction.

On November 6, 1775 he was made captain of a company of minute men in the town of Bristol, as his commission, still preserved in the family shows.

On December 12, 1775 it was voted that some intrenchments should be made near the harbor in the town of Bristol, to prevent the enemy from landing. Behjamin Bosworth and six others were appointed a committee to construct these defences. They were built along the shore, extending south from the foot of State Street, near Richmond Wharf, and consisted of a wall five feet high, composed of turf and stones, filled upon the inside with loose earth and small stones.

On May 4, 1776 two months <sup>before</sup> ~~after~~ the Declaration of Independence was voted by the Continental Congress, the Colonial Assembly of Rhode Island formally renounced its allegiance to Great Britain and declared itself an independent State.

At the same time Benjamin Bosworth received the following commission;

By the Honorable *Nicholas Cooke* Esquire,  
 Governor, Captain-General, and Commander in Chief,  
 and over the *English* Colony of *Rhode-Island*, and *Provi-*  
*dence Plantations*, in *New-England*, in *America*.  
 To *Benjamin Bosworth* Esq. Governor

**Y**OU *Benjamin Bosworth* being by the General Assembly of this Colony appointed  
*Major* of the *\_\_\_\_\_* Regiment of Militia in the County of *\_\_\_\_\_* in this  
 Colony, and in the Name of the Government and Council of this said Colony,  
 with full powers, are constituted, to levy, take and execute the Office of *\_\_\_\_\_*  
 of and over the Regiment aforesaid, and to command, guide and conduct the same every  
 Particular: And in the best and most judicious manner, to raise or discharge in *\_\_\_\_\_*  
 your said Regiment and gather together the Regiment under your Command, in such Part thereof as  
 you shall think fit, and therewith, in the utmost of your Skill and ability, you are to equip, equip,  
 drill, and discipline the same, in order to preserve the Interest of the good People in said Parts: You are  
 also to Justice such Instructions, Directions and Orders, as shall from Time to Time, be further proce-  
 ded, either by the General Assembly, the Government and General Council, or other your Superior Offi-  
 cers: And for your doing this Commission shall be your sufficient Warrant and Discharge.

GIVEN under my Hand, and the Seal of the said Colony, this *\_\_\_\_\_* Day of  
*\_\_\_\_\_* in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and *\_\_\_\_\_* Year

By His Honor's Council,  
*Henry Hadeney*

*Nicholas Cooke*

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as you shall deem sufficient, and therewith, to the

By the Honorable Nicholas Cooke Esquire, Governour, Captain-General,  
and Commander in Chief, of and over the English Colony of Rhode-Island,  
and Providence Plantations, in New-England, in America.

To Benjamin Bosworth Esq; Greeting.

You Benjamin Bosworth being by the General Assembly of this  
Colony appointed Major of the Regiment of Militia in the County  
of Bristol in the Colony aforesaid, are hereby, in the Name of the  
Governour and Company of the said Colony, authorized, empowered, and  
commissioned, to have, take and exercise the Office of Major of and  
over the Regiment aforesaid; and to command, guide and conduct the  
same, or any Part thereof: And in Case of an Invasion, or Assault of  
a Common Enemy, to infest or disturb this Plantation, you are to  
alarm and gather together the Regiment under your Command, or such  
Part thereof as you shall deem sufficient, and therewith, to the  
utmost of your Skill and Ability, you are to resist, expel, kill  
and destroy the same, in order to preserve the Interest of the  
good People in these Parts. You are also to follow such Instructions,  
Directions and Orders, as shall, from Time to Time, be further  
given forth, either by the General Assembly, the Governour and General  
Council, or other, your superior Officer. And for your so doing,  
this Commission shall be your sufficient Warrent and Discharge.

GIVEN under my Hand, and the Seal of the said Colony, in  
the Sixth Day of May in the Year of our Lord One Thous-  
and Seven Hundred and Seventy-Six.

Nicholas Cooke.

By His Honor's Command,

Henry Ward, Sectry.

Here unfortunately the record ends It would be interesting, were facts forthcoming, to trace his course during the long years of war which followed, but from his previous career one may surely be permitted to infer that he served his country loyally, whether on the field, in legislative halls, or as a simple citizen in private life.

We know only that he moved from Bristol to Swansea, and that he died in 1810 at the age of seventy-seven.

*Alfred William Beaman.*