Letters (1981): Correspondence 16

G. Brian Sullivan

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November 7, 1980

Senator Robert J. McKenna, Chairman
The Rhode Island Heritage Commission
The Old State House
150 Benefit Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Dear Senator McKenna:

This is a formal letter of appeal asking the consideration of our Rhode Island Heritage Commission in a matter most worthy their concern.

Hereby, Newportan Foundation requests your advisory and financial assistance in our effort to republish and translate the GAZETTE FRANÇOISE. We wish to see reissued this two-hundred-year-old newspaper that issued from the press of the Imprimerie Royale de l'Escadre located at their "Rue de la Pointe, No. 641" address. This is today the Hunter House Museum, operated by the Preservation Society of Newport County (presently the address is 54 Washington Street), what was in 1780 the Headquarters of the French Admiral, Charles-Louis d'Arsae, Chevalier de Ternay.

I have made available to you the xerox copies of Howard Chapin's 1926 facsimile of the Gazette, which is now rare and not in the format Newportan Foundation would choose. We feel that the Rhode Island Bicentennial Edition of GAZETTE FRANÇOISE should be printed at Newport's time-honored Franklin Printing House (established 1727) in the same form it first appeared, made newly available in a portfolio, containing in fine facsimile the collected and complete seven numbers and the supplement to No. 7. There are a total of thirty pages--four pages in each number; two in the supplement. Folded once, the pages measured 34cm x 21.5cm. An estimate of the cost of a suitable republication in lots of two thousand is in preparation by the printer, and I will present it to the Commission as soon as I have it.

I firmly believe in this project's importance and "Newportance", as it will be a lasting souvenir of a work of obvious bibliographical, typographical, and historical value--then as now.
As you know from the significant article by Chapin, I xeroxed for you from ANTIQUES magazine (IX, I (1926), pp. 31-3.), the Gazette has been praised as the "greatest find in the history of American newspaper bibliography." Its pages contain historical insights that will open eyes on both sides of the Atlantic. Students and scholars in France, Canada, and the United States will rediscover the Gazette for the landmark it is as an instrument of political, military, and cultural revolution. The masthead of the Gazette bears the coat d'arms of the Kingdom of France—a unique instance of monarchic influence in behalf of a democratic revolutionary cause.

Also, important to note is that the Gazette is significant in itself as Newport and Rhode Island Literature. It is a literary document in the vocabulary and style of the French aristocracy. And it is typographically interesting for its eighteenth-century typeface, which is charming and beautiful. In its pages many details of Newport history are assembled in the context of a world in turmoil. Particularly, noteworthy is the marine context; Newport becomes the hub, a nautical center and clearing house where events that were changing the world at sea were communicated to French and American land forces through the dispatches published in GAZETTE FRANÇOISE.

One can imagine the impact of one or another of these papers coming into the hands of our soldiers during the long months of November, December and January 1780/1. Whether able to read French or not, the Valley Forge or Rhode Island volunteers, encamped in cold and hardship, would have recognized the import of each issue. The medium was the message: "The French are in Newport! They are with us!"—now as then, let them be with us.

Can you help? Can the Commission co-publish and co-distribute with Newportant Foundation the Rhode Island Bicentennial Facsimile Portfolio Edition of GAZETTE FRANÇOISE? I will personally accept supervisory responsibility, or others' supervision and advice, concerning the editorial, scholarly, and administrative requirements of this worthy undertaking.

This good work will constitute a complement to both ourselves and France in recognition of the need to render Rochambeau a great measure less to be called: "The Forgotten Father of Our Country."
Before concluding this rather long letter, which I regret to have delayed so long in writing, I wish to add that I am forming a Search Committee for Republication Editor. It is to consist of representatives of Salve Regina, Providence College, URI and Brown language departments; the Redwood and John Carter Brown Libraries; the Newport Historical Society, and I hope the Rhode Island Heritage Commission will participate.

Our hope and expectation is to republish GAZETTE FRANCOISE for reissue July 12, 1981, Rochambeau Landing Day--the second observance. This promises again to be an illuminating day for Newport.

I will call for an appointment to speak with you and so that you may meet some members of the Foundation's Search Committee.

Cordially yours,

G. Brian Sullivan, Ph.D.
Executive Director

cc: SRC, PC, URI, BU, RL, JCB, NHS.
Franklin Printing House
Prof. Jacques Godechot, Doyan, University of Toulouse-Le Mirail
Dr. T. Sanderson, R.I. Historic Preservation Commission