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Cambridge Historical Society Completes Digitization and Transcription of Serjeant Family Letters from Revolutionary War Period

Now Available for Scholarly Analysis, Letters Offer Insight into Life of Loyalist family

The Cambridge Historical Society today announced that the Serjeant Family Letters (1769-1840) have recently been professionally digitized and transcribed. This significant collection offers insight into the life of a Loyalist family in the years leading up to and following the Revolutionary War. The letters illuminate the connections between family and religion, and shed light on colonial New England's involvement in slavery. Excerpts from several of the letters can be found below.

This project was made possible through funding from the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati.

To view the letters, visit cambridgehistory.org or click [here to view them on flickr](#). To access the transcription, please visit the [Society's website](#).

Samples of the letters:

Letter to Elizabeth Browne Rogers Roche from Winwood Serjeant (21 May 1774)

I am sorry to find by your last that you are so highly disgusted at the sight of men: I own you have had bad luck with some of our Sex: but my Dear Soul! be not impatient, trust in a kind providence, I hope in God things may have a turn to your better satisfaction & comfort. — I am very sorry for Christian — a most improper name for him — his scandalous behaviour: he has taken lodgings with his dirty Jade in a publick house in Charles town, & frequently passes thro' Cambridge with her in a chaise. She will soon become—poor Creature! a common prostitute in Boston....

Letter to Elizabeth Browne Rogers Roche from Winwood Serjeant (15 June 1774)

I was much concerned to hear that poor Jess was sent away to the West Indies: What distress of mind must the poor creature have felt to throw himself over board! What would our tender-hearted father & mother have thought of us all! A poor, old, faithful slave that had

lived so long in the family! I cannot help thinking that it was hard, cruel, not to say criminal: Your sister was greatly affected at it indeed: & must own, had I known anything of an intention would have done anything for the poor fellow rather than he should have been sent off the Countrey: sure I am your compassionate disposition had no hand in it: God rest his Soul...

Boston is in a terrible situation, & will be much more so if they do not submit to Government before the Fall: the poor will be most miserably distressed, & the Town must be absolutely ruined. I have not room to add a line more except to express our earnest wishes of seeing you soon, & that Heaven wo'd bless you wth all peace & happiness. I am my Dearest yrs most afftly W. Serjeant.

Letter to Elizabeth Browne Rogers Roche from Winwood Serjeant (17 October 1774)

There is no house to be had in Boston for love or money: the troops & the Tories that are daily coming in there for refuge crowd the whole Town. The provincial Congress that met last week at Concord is adjourned to meet at Cambridge this day, between three & four hundred people & will be here for a fortnight or more: their resolves run so high that something dreadful is soon expected at Boston: They insist upon the General's levelling the works on the Neck, otherwise the Country will come in to demolish them. God only knows what may be the event of this rashness if it should take place, which many are strongly apprehensive of, tho' for myself I can hardly believe they would attempt it. — I am sorry you are to lose Mr Pepl this winter, I would not advise you to let him have Pomp for less than 50£ Sterling, he is certainly worth that, I could sell him for you to a Carolinian for 10£ or 20£ pounds more.

Letter to Elizabeth Browne Rogers Roche from Mary Browne Serjeant (30 April 1789)

tho' I have lived in this place near ten Years yet have made very few acquaintances as the people of England are so different in every respect that you would hardly suppose they were of the same species as the Americans, Stiff, Starch, imperious, haughty, suspicious. — uncharitable, Wretches, who ridicule & slander their best friends as soon as their back is turned.

Digital images and transcriptions of the letters are always available at cambridgehistory.org. Scholars and researchers interested in viewing the collection in person, or reproducing the letters, should contact Archivist Maggie Hoffman at archives@cambridgehistory.org or 617-547-4252.

About the Cambridge Historical Society

The Cambridge Historical Society engages with our city to explore how the past influences the present in order to shape a better future.

From the American Revolution to the biotech revolution, the history of Cambridge, Massachusetts is unlike that of any other city. A city this vibrant and vital must preserve its past and learn from it to make the Cambridge of today the best it can be. Founded in 1905, the Cambridge Historical Society is a membership organization that serves our community through inclusive programming and stewardship of its historic collections and the property entrusted to it. We help those who live and work in Cambridge explore and understand how and why we got here and use that perspective to facilitate the exploration and understanding of contemporary issues.

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