Editor's Note

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EDITOR’S NOTE

During the American Revolution not everyone heeded the Patriots’ call for independence from England. In fact, there were a large number of Loyalists, or Tories, in Newport and they have loosely been labelled “The Newport Junto.” For a variety of reasons, the history of Newport’s Tories has not yet been fully written.

The two articles included in this issue of Newport History represent a significant step toward filling this gap. Martin Howard, Jr., and Joseph Wanton, Jr. were two very visible Tories and the objects of considerable scorn and derision. Tracking the course of their careers reveals two very different men and suggests that people in Newport took political positions for many different reasons.

Martin Howard, Jr. was a full fledged ideologue. He had a strong intellectual bent and saw the increasing tensions between colony and mother-country in the theoretical terms of law and politics. Joseph Wanton, Jr., on the other hand, adopted the Loyalist side because of a firm business judgement that rebellion would be an economic disaster and an equally strong belief that it would cause Rhode Island to lose the charter which gave it so much more freedom than other colonies. He also saw that England, with its powerful Navy, was militarily much stronger than the colonies and that negotiation and conciliation rather than revolution were the prudent choices for Rhode Island.

Despite their differences, both men shared a sudden and rather surprising fall from grace as a result of their identification as Tories. Wanton was a successful merchant from a distinguished political family. Howard was an equally successful lawyer and politician who held a number of highly respected offices in town. Howard’s downfall came in 1765, as a result of the Stamp Act crisis of that year, and Wanton’s came a full decade later as the conflict with England intensified. A comparison of their careers shows both the diversity of the Loyalist side as well as the divisions in Newport society which surfaced during the long prelude to Revolution.