

**GOVERNOR WILLIAM
BRADFORD'S
LETTER BOOK**

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Governor William Bradford's Letter Book by William Bradford

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WILLIAM BRADFORD

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MISCELLANEOUS

Governor Bradford's Letter Book \$1.00

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

GOVERNOR BRADFORD'S Letter Book is so little known it has been decided to reprint it in this magazine and make it accessible to all. Unfortunately the fragment of the original manuscript rescued by Mr. Clarke cannot now be found, and the text printed in the "Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society," Volume III (1794), pages 27 to 76 inclusive, has been followed. From the first volume of the "Proceedings" of the same society we also reprint in full the account of the receipt of the manuscript, and notes regarding it.

[Proceedings, Vol. I, pp. 51, 52]

At a meeting of the Historical Society, on Tuesday, the thirtieth day of July, 1793, at Winthrop's or Governor's Island
The following donations were received:—

For the Library:— Fragment of a MS. Letter-book of Governor Bradford, of Plymouth, from 1624 to 1630, found in a grocer's shop in Halifax, Nova Scotia. From James Clarke, Esq., of Halifax.

This fragment of Governor Bradford's Letter-book was printed in Vol. III. of the Collections, making fifty pages. It appears from a note at the beginning of the printed text that the MS. of the part preserved began with "page 339, the preceding pages wanting," and covered the years 1624—1630. This shows that what was recovered was but a small part of what was lost; while it is probable that the collection originally contained also letters of a later date than 1630. Governor Bradford's History closed with the year 1646, and the letters which he had preserved to illustrate that part of the narrative, from 1630 to its conclusion, may have been included in his Letter-book, as well as those used in the earlier portion. The fragment recovered may have been one volume of a series continuously paged. The fortunate recovery of Governor Bradford's History, some sixty years after Mr. James Clarke rescued this fragment from a grocer's shop in Halifax, happily supplies to a certain extent the place of the Letter-book; for, while the author did not copy into his History all these letters, we may well suppose him, judging from the use he made of those preserved, to have used the most valuable part of them.

The finding of this manuscript in Halifax naturally suggests the thought that it left Boston at the time of the "evacuation," in March, 1776; and, it being well known that the British soldiers during the occupation of Boston had free access to the Historical Library of books and manuscripts of the Rev. Thomas Prince, kept in a room in the tower of the Old South

Meeting-house, that it was taken from that collection. This is not improbable. There may be no positive evidence that Prince's Library then contained this Letter-book, yet we know that it was once in Prince's possession. For, besides the manuscripts of Bradford, which he mentions, in the preface to his Chronological History, as having had an "opportunity to search,"—namely, "Bradford's History of Plymouth People and Colony," in folio, and "A Register of Governor Bradford's, in his own hand, recording some of the first deaths, marriages, and punishments at Plymouth, with three other miscellaneous volumes of his," in octavo,—he several times refers, in his notes on the margin of Bradford's manuscript History, to "Governor Bradford's Collection of Letters." See pp. 47, 61, 64, and 71 of the printed volume.*

The following is the letter of Mr. Clarke which accompanied the manuscript:

"Halifax, May 28, 1793.

"Sir,—The enclosed ancient manuscript I found some years ago in a grocer's shop in this town, of whom I obtained it with a view of saving what remained from destruction. I lament extremely that a page has been torn out; and it gives me pleasure that I now have an opportunity of placing it in your hands,—a freedom I am induced to take from your advertisement of the first of November, 1792, and from a persuasion that it may contribute in some measure to the important objects of your Society, and I could wish I might otherwise be serviceable.

"I am, respectfully, Sir, your most obedient humble servant,

"James Clarke.

"The Rev. Jeremy Belknap."

Where the writer speaks of a *page* being torn out, he probably means that one *leaf* had been torn out of the volume. Bradford may have written on one side only of the leaf in copying his letters, as he generally did in writing his History, so that one leaf would represent one page of writing.—Eds.

* Edition of 1856.

GOVERNOR BRADFORD'S LETTER BOOK.

[Page 339 — the preceding pages wanting.]

To our beloved and right well esteemed friend Mr. William Bradford Governour these, but inscribed thus :

To our beloved friends Mr. William Bradford, Mr. Isaac Allerton, Mr. Edward Winslow, and the rest whom they think fit to acquaint therewith.

Two things (beloved friends) we have endeavoured to effect, touching Plymouth plantation, first, that the planters there might live comfortably and contentedly. 2d that some returns might be made hither for the satisfying and encouragement of the adventurers, but to neither of these two can we yet attain. Nay, if it be as some of them report which returned in the Catherine, it is almost impossible to hope for it, since, by their sayings, the slothfulness of one part of you, and the weakness of the other part, is such, that nothing can go well forward. And although we do not wholly credit these reports, yet surely, either the country is not good where you are, for habitation; or else there is something amiss amongst you; and we much fear the willing are too weak and the strong too idle. And because we will not stand upon the number of the objections made by them against you; we have sent them here enclosed, that you may see them and answer them. (*These are those which are inserted and answered before in this book; namely, before Liford's letters, where those letters should also have been placed, but they came not then to hand and I thought better to put them in, than to omit them.*)

As for such as will needs be upon their particulars now that they are gotten over, you must be sure to make such covenants with them, as that first or last the company be satisfied for all their charge. Neither must you proceed to these agreements and consultations with many at once, otherwise how easy might they make a lead in rebellion, which have so long done it in cheating and idleness.

Touching Mr. Weston, his disturbing of you about that £100 taken up for Mr. Brewer, except we conclude with Solomon that oppression maketh a wise man mad, we cannot but