

Final

# HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL COMMISSION

59 SOUTH PROSPECT STREET, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY		Inventory Form #:	0
TownNo:	0	SiteNo:	0
UTM:			
Quad:			
DISTRICT		If NR, Specify	
<input type="checkbox"/> S	<input type="checkbox"/> NR	<input type="checkbox"/> Actual	<input type="checkbox"/> Potential
GIS:			

BuildingName(common)  BuildingName(historic)

Town:  Village:  County:

HouseNumber:  Street:  Map:  Block:  Lot:

Owner:   Public  Private

Use (Present):  Use (Historic):

Accessibility to Public  Yes  No Exterior Visible from Road  Yes  No Interior Accessible  Yes  No If Yes, Explain

Style of Building  Year of Construction

Materials Check All That Apply

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Clapboard	<input type="checkbox"/> Asbestos Side	<input type="checkbox"/> Brick	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Material
<input type="checkbox"/> Wood Shingle	<input type="checkbox"/> Asphalt Side	<input type="checkbox"/> Fieldstone	
<input type="checkbox"/> BoardBatten"	<input type="checkbox"/> Stucco	<input type="checkbox"/> Cobblestone	
<input type="checkbox"/> Aluminum Side	<input type="checkbox"/> Concrete	<input type="checkbox"/> Cut Stone	

Structural System Check All That Apply

<input type="checkbox"/> Wood Frame	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PostBeam	<input type="checkbox"/> Balloon
<input type="checkbox"/> Load Bearing Masonry		<input type="checkbox"/> Structural Iron or Steel
<input type="checkbox"/> Other Structure		

Roof System Check All That Apply

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gable	<input type="checkbox"/> Flat	<input type="checkbox"/> Mansard	<input type="checkbox"/> Monitor	<input type="checkbox"/> Sawtooth
<input type="checkbox"/> Gambrel	<input type="checkbox"/> Shed	<input type="checkbox"/> Hip	<input type="checkbox"/> Round	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Roof

Roof Material

<input type="checkbox"/> Wood Shingle	<input type="checkbox"/> Roll Asphalt	<input type="checkbox"/> Tin	<input type="checkbox"/> Slate
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Asphalt Shingle	<input type="checkbox"/> Built Up	<input type="checkbox"/> Tile	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Roof Material

Stories:  Approximate Dimensions

Condition Structural

Excellent  Good  Fair  Deteriorated

Condition Exterior

Excellent  Good  Fair  Deteriorated

Integrity (Location)

On original site  Moved When:

Alterations Explain:

Yes

Related Outbuildings or Landscape Features

<input type="checkbox"/> Barn	<input type="checkbox"/> Shed	<input type="checkbox"/> Garage	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Landscape Features
<input type="checkbox"/> CarriageHouse	<input type="checkbox"/> Shop	<input type="checkbox"/> Garden	

Surrounding Environment

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open Land	<input type="checkbox"/> Woodland	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Residential	<input type="checkbox"/> Scattered Buildings Visible
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> Rural	<input type="checkbox"/> High Building Density

Interrelationship of Buildings and Surroundings: The Peters House rests upon a slight rise on East Street across from a corn field.

Other Notable Features of Building or Site: Notable Feature Key Words:

(See Site Survey Report: Peters House, John Obed Curtis)

Architect:  Builder: Johnathan Peters

Historical or Architectural Importance: Historic Importance Key Words:

(See Report on Documentary Research: Peters House at 150 East Street, Bruce Clutte, Ph.D. and Samuel Peters: A Yankee Munchausen, The New England Quarterly, 1947)

Sources  
Samuel Peters: A Yankee Munchausen, The New England Quarterly, 1947  
Site Survey Report: Peters House, John Obed Curtis, Antique House & Restoration Consulting, 2  
Report on Documentary Research, Peters House at 150 East Street, Bruce Clutte, Ph.D., 2007

Photographer:  Date:   
View:  Negative on File:

Consultant:  Date:   
Organization:   
Address:

Subsequent Field Evaluations:

Threats to Building Site

<input type="checkbox"/> NoneKnown	<input type="checkbox"/> Highways	<input type="checkbox"/> Vandalism	<input type="checkbox"/> Developers	<input type="checkbox"/> ThreatsOther	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal	<input type="checkbox"/> Private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deterioration	<input type="checkbox"/> Zoning	Explanation:	<input type="text"/>



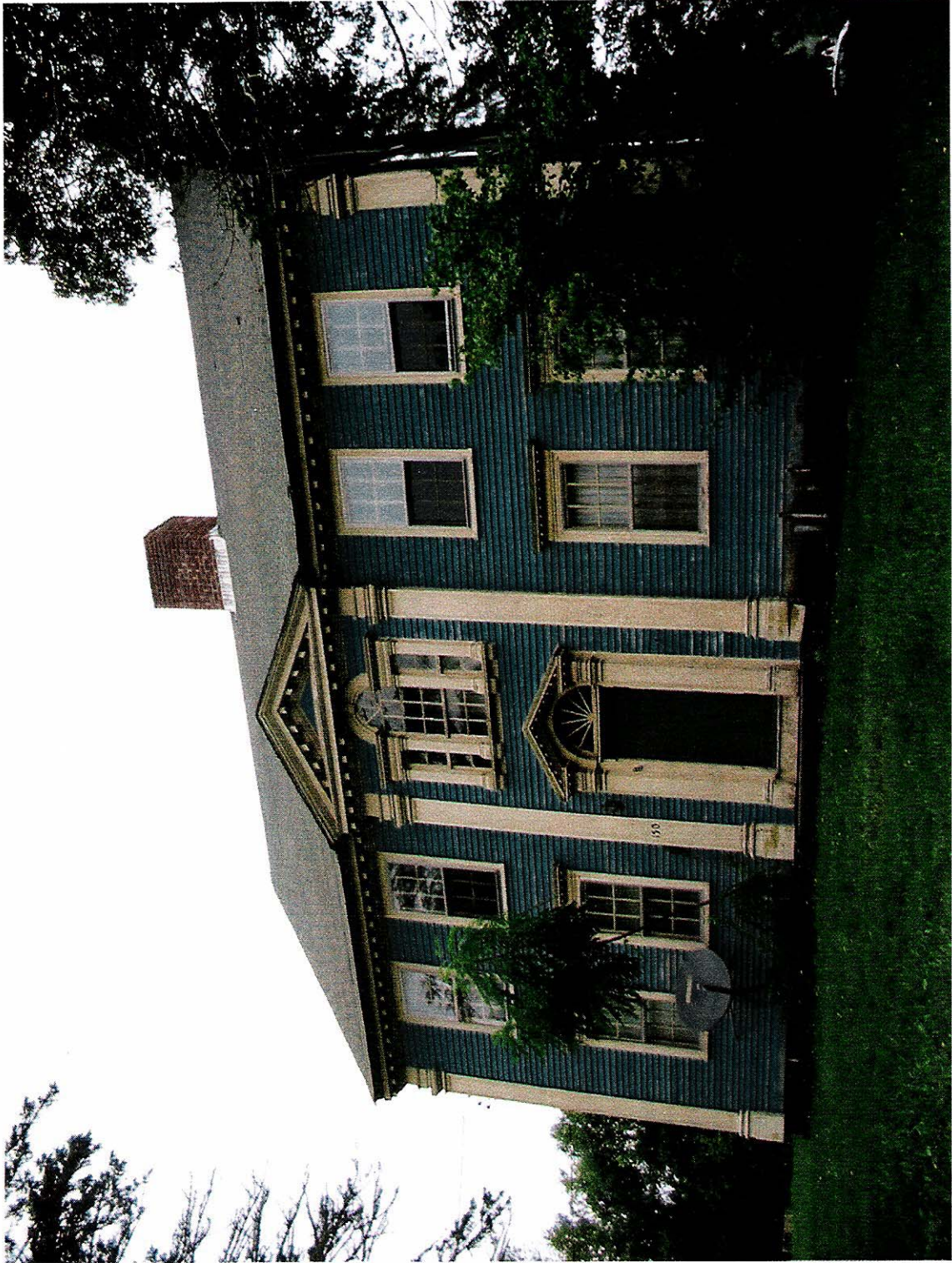
Peters House - 150 East Street – front façade



Peters House - 150 East Street – ell



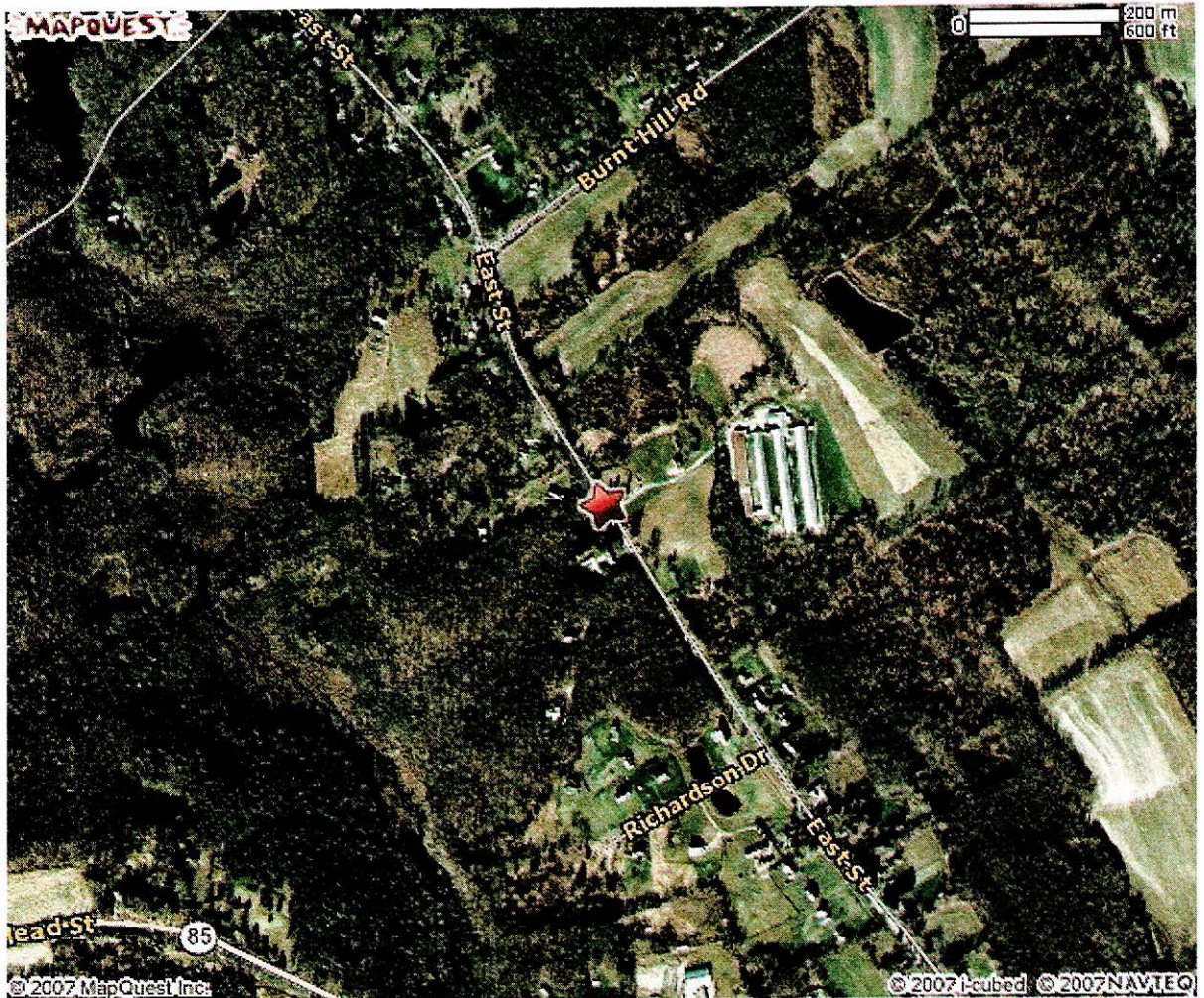
Peters House - 150 East Street – Streetscape



Peters House - 150 East Street



150 East St  
Hebron CT  
06248-1310 US



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HEREIN FOLLOWS THESE DOCUMENTS, IN THEIR ENTIRETY:

(1) John Obed Curtis Report, dated March 2007

(2) Dr. Bruce Clouette Report, dated April 27, 2007

- Summary
- Appendix 1: Figures
- Appendix 2: Chain of Title
- Appendix 3: Census of Old Building Form, CA. 1935

THEN FOLLOWS

The New England Quarterly article, Samuel Peters: A Yankee Munchausen, by Samuel Middlebrook

N.B. There is no documentation after the New England Quarterly article.



# THE NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY

Registered in the United States Patent Office

*A Historical Review of New England Life and Letters*

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## SAMUEL PETERS: A YANKEE MUNCHAUSEN

SAMUEL MIDDLEBROOK

THE historians are wrong. The American Revolution did not begin with the skirmishes of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775. It started with the battle of one Reverend Samuel Peters, of Hebron, Connecticut, against a mob of enraged Sons of Liberty from Windham on August 14 of the previous year.

Or so the defeated party to the engagement said. For the brief encounter was a rout for the clergyman. Threatened with tar and feathers and a ride on a rail to the village green, he executed a masterly retreat to Boston, then to London. During the trifling hostilities of the next few years, he spent his leisure in concocting an extraordinary book that amply avenged him.

This book was a history of his native "province" of Connecticut, one of the most interesting volumes of eighteenth-century America.<sup>1</sup> From it the world has got the famous "blue laws" of New England, which some scholars say Peters invented. He was also the first to use in print the term *bundling*, to describe courtship in bed. And he laced his pages with sundry other malicious gossip that has delighted the irreverent since the publication of the book in 1781.

To pious historians Peters has been an acute pain: another illustration of how the evil that men do lives after them.<sup>2</sup> These same scholars have rarely inquired whether any good was in-

<sup>1</sup> [Samuel Peters], *A General History of Connecticut, . . . By a Gentleman of the Province . . .* (London, 1781). Further references to Peters's *General History* are to the edition prepared by Samuel Jarvis McCormick (New York, 1877).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. "The two greatest dishonors that ever befell Connecticut are the giving birth to Benedict Arnold and the Reverend Samuel Peters . . ." Dr. Horace Bushnell, "Historical Estimate of Connecticut," *The Churchman*, xxxiv, 209 (August, 1876). Also, J. H. Trumbull, *The True Blue-Laws of Connecticut and the False Blue-laws invented by the Rev. Samuel Peters* (Hartford, 1876); W. F. Prince, "An Examination of Peters' 'Blue Laws,'" *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1898* (Washington, D. C., 1899), 97-136; Milo M. Quaife, "Jonathan Carver and the Carver Grant," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, III, 3-25 (June, 1920); Charles Hammond, "Review of Peters' *History of Connecticut*," *Papers and Proceedings, Connecticut Valley Historical Society*, I, 91-114 (Springfield, 1881).

tered with his bones when, in 1826, after ninety-one years of extravaganza he was finally laid to rest. But this neglect of the man is a mistake. His fourfold career as clergyman, propagandist, pseudo-bishop, and land-sharper of genius has a zany madness about it that deserves a nod and smile from the muse of informal history.

## I

Samuel Andrews Peters was born in Hebron in 1735 and was educated at Yale. This institution had been established at the beginning of the century to shield rural Puritans from the sophistications of Harvard and Boston. Yale was rude to the Anglican missionaries who had begun to infiltrate into Connecticut to seduce the Congregationalists back into the Anglican fold. Since Peters belonged to one of the few Anglican families of the colony, it is natural that he later paid his respects to Yale in blunt terms—a rude, feeble school run on Mr. Doolley's sound precept that it doesn't make much difference what you teach a boy so long as he doesn't like it:

Were the corporation less rigid, and more inclined to tolerate some reasonable amusements and polite accomplishments among the youth, they would greatly add to the fame and increase of the College, and the students would not be known by every stranger to have been educated in Connecticut.<sup>3</sup>

He was graduated in 1757, and then proceeded to London for ordination into the Anglican clergy. This trip across the ocean was an ordeal necessitated by the absence of Anglican bishops in the new world. It exposed the candidates to such terrors as smallpox, shipwreck, or capture by hostile French privateers; indeed, each of the three previous aspirants to the missionary Anglican church at Hebron had perished in turn from one of these perils. Peters himself caught smallpox, which had peculiar virulence for colonials in eighteenth-century London, but recovered. He also picked up a frightful case of snobbery, which led him to speak of his Yankee neighbors as peasantry

<sup>3</sup> *General History*, 160-161.

and himself as a member of the *noblesse*. Of this he was never cured.

In the next decade he settled in his home town as a ward of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, the institution that paid the salaries of Anglican missionaries abroad and, quite consciously, sought to tighten the bonds of empire and loyalty to the throne among dissident colonists. During this period he wrote a sequence of lively, bitter letters about his neighbors, who were busily chasing the revenue agents and Stamp Act hirelings of George III through the back hills of Connecticut.<sup>4</sup> Peters had a fanatic loyalty to the Hanoverian bishops of Old England and a blistering contempt for the Cromwellian "sons of Oliver" headed by the Congregational ministers who were his rivals.

In the incessant propaganda against the mother country he saw the start of a revolution and warned his superiors of what was to come. He loaded his reports with his own counter-propaganda and seasoned them with sharp complaints. His Calvinist neighbors delighted to mock the ceremonies of his church, which they accurately diagnosed as an agent of George III. They railed against the hearty English Christmas celebrations as "popery and prelatic tyranny, a destroyer of Consciences." They fined his parishioners for rollicking, in revenge, on a Day of Fasting and Humiliation in Eastertide. Most of all: "Their high & mightinesses our Sovereign Lord, the Mobility preside over the Post Office & Stamp Masters & every other person who will not join hands with them in opposing right of jurisdiction, Right of taxation, in the colonies."<sup>5</sup>

To escape these pests for a while Peters, in 1770, went north to the wilderness of "New Connecticut" (Vermont), baptizing men, women and children and finally—according to a later statement—the entire land itself! He described the ceremony in terms more suited to the launching of a battleship.

<sup>4</sup> Many are reprinted by E. H. Young, "Bishop Peters," *Papers and Records of the Ontario Historical Society* (Toronto, 1930), xxvii, 583-623; a more complete file of transcripts and records of the Society is in the Library of Congress; Peters's own MSS are in seven volumes at the New York Historical Society.

<sup>5</sup> Letter, March 25, 1767.

His party, he said, ascended "a high mountain, then named *Mount Pisgah*, because it provided to the company a clear sight of Lake Champlain at the west, and the Connecticut River at the east. . . . The baptism was performed in the following manner . . . Priest Peters stood at the pinnacle of the rock, where he received a bottle of spirits . . . then haranguing the company, he poured the spirits around him and cast the bottle on Rock Etam. The ceremony being over, the company descended Mount Pisgah, and took refreshment in a big house, . . . where they spent the night with great pleasure."<sup>6</sup>

A classicist by training, Peters baptized the province "*Verdmont*"—"a new name worthy of the Athenians and ancient Sparta." But with his usual luck he had cast a pearl before Puritans. "Since Verdmont became a state in union with the thirteen states of America," he continued in 1807, "its general assembly have seen proper to change the spelling of *Verdmont*, Green Mountain, to that of *Vermont*, Mountain of Maggots. If the former spelling is to give way to the latter, it will prove that the state had rather be considered a *mountain of worms* than an ever green mountain!"<sup>7</sup>

Generous with such tart sentiments on his native heath, Peters lasted four years more at Hebron. His downfall came from his opinions, freely uttered, about the Boston Tea Party and the consequent embargo on the port of Boston. He loathed the hoodlums that abetted this violence; he hailed General Gage and his regiment of British regulars coming to invest the town. He promised his enemies that hanging work would soon be done among them.

The reaction of his countrymen was prompt. They formed a "mob," elected a standing committee to wait upon "the stubborn old Tory," demanded his recantation in eighteen articles. The alternative: a pot of tar, a coat of feathers, a ride to the village green. Someone fired a gun in his house; whether friend or foe it is a disputed question. To Peters it was the shot heard round the world. He temporized, blustered, somehow avoided

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Peters, *History of Hugh Peters*, A.M. (New York, 1807), 94-95.  
<sup>7</sup> *History of Hugh Peters*, 95.

the ignominy of tar and feathers, then fled to an exile of more than a quarter of a century.<sup>8</sup>

## II

From London, Peters watched the developments at home with a jaundiced eye. Convinced, like most sober folk, until the very end that the British army and navy, then the best in the world, would triumph over its ridiculous opposition, he spent his years in dubious labors. He conceived a violent hatred against "Brother Jonathan" Trumbull, sole patriot governor of the rebellious colonies, and he wrote a few squibs against him. He preached irregularly. Later on he sniped at those Royalist clergy, like the Reverend Dr. Inglis, of Trinity Parish, New York, who would be likely to cut him out in any race for clerical favors. But his masterpiece of defamatory propaganda was directed against his fellow colonists at large; it was his *General History of Connecticut . . . [with] New and True Sources of the Present Rebellion*. . . . This volume, unluckily long out of print, makes hilarious reading for all but the first families of the tight little state it libels.

Peters attacked the inhabitants of Connecticut and of all New England as Puritans, republicans, regicides, and smugglers. They had, he said, stolen their lands from Indians and fellow Englishmen. In temper they were morose fanatics, holding among other foul beliefs that all kings "are pestilent usurpers, and enemies of God and man—that all vicars, rectors, deans, priests, and bishops, are of the devil; are wolves, petty popes, and antichristian tyrants. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

His abuse rose to an immortal climax in the account of the "Blue Laws" of the New Haven colony, an alleged sample of which he published in some forty-five articles. These, he averred, were typical of all New England. He named them "*Blue Laws*; i.e. *Bloody Laws*; for they were all sanctified with

<sup>8</sup> Cf. McCormick's appendix to the *General History*, 260-274, for Peters's side of the story; and *American Archives*, IV, Series 1, edited by Peter Force (Washington, D. C., 1837), 711-718, for that of his opponents.

<sup>9</sup> *General History*, 43.

excommunications, confiscation, fines, banishment, whippings, cutting off the ears, burning the tongue, and death. . . . No one but a partial and blind bigot can pretend to say the projectors of them were men of Grace, Justice, and Liberty, when nothing but *murders, plunders, and persecutions* mark their steps."<sup>10</sup>

Included among Peters's samples are such famous denigrations of Puritan custom as the following:

"No one shall run on the Sabbath-day, or walk in his garden or elsewhere, except reverently to and from meeting.

"No woman shall kiss her child on the Sabbath or fasting day.

"No one shall travel, cook victuals, make beds, sweep house, cut hair, or shave on the Sabbath day.

"Whoever brings cards or dice into this Dominion shall pay a fine of five pounds.

"No one shall read Common-Prayer, keep Christmas or Saints-days, make minced pies, dance, play cards, or play on any instrument of music, except the drum, trumpet, and jews-harp.

"Married people must live together or be imprisoned.

"Every male shall have his hair cut round according to a cap."<sup>11</sup>

Though Peters said that these laws "were never suffered to be printed"<sup>12</sup> until he released them to the world, they have since gone round the earth—to the mortification of soberer historians. They were his master-stroke, and the term "blue laws" seems to be of his own coinage.

And along with them has gone round the world another item: his account of *bundling*, or the way of a man with a maid in old Connecticut. Oddly enough, Priest Peters (as he called himself) approved the custom heartily: "I had daughters and speak from forty years experience. Bundling takes place only in cold seasons of the year—the sofa is more dangerous in summer than the bed in winter."<sup>13</sup> He found it a practice "certainly in-

<sup>10</sup> *General History*, 61.

<sup>11</sup> *General History*, 57-61.

<sup>12</sup> *General History*, 57.

<sup>13</sup> Amusingly enough, McCormick silently dropped these sentences from his edition of the *General History*, 225.

nocent, virtuous, and prudent."<sup>14</sup> for the girls of the Nutmeg Province knew their way around. Or, as Peters puts the matter: "If any man, a stranger to the love of virtue, of God, and the christian religion, should bundle with a young lady in New-England, and behave unseemly towards her, he must first melt her into passion, and expel heaven, death, and hell from her mind, or he will undergo the chastisement of negroes turned mad; if he escapes with life, it will be owing to the parents flying from their beds to protect him."<sup>15</sup> His last word on the subject is one of parental approval: "Upon the whole, had I daughters now, I would venture to let them bundle upon the bed, or even on the sofa, after a proper education, sooner than adopt the Spanish mode of forcing young people to prattle only before the lady's mother the chit-chat of artless lovers."<sup>16</sup>

Such items—and there are many more—must have solaced the angry cleric in exile. Could he have read the bitter remarks of later sons of Connecticut, his joy would have been complete. They called his volume "the *Lying History* to distinguish it from all others";<sup>17</sup> "a monstrosity in literature such as literature has no name for";<sup>18</sup> or they did their best to ignore it completely.

While its intent was to provide propaganda against a warring America, the book was not entirely one-sided. As the first of the anti-Puritans in Connecticut, Peters gave a picture in which all the principal facts are askew, but there will always be readers who feel that the root of much truth was in him. The leaders of the commonwealth he made ridiculous; but he salted the people at large with many virtues: chastity, kindness to wayfarers, a thirst for books, along with smuggling and independence. Some people maintain today that, outside the commuting range of New York, these qualities persist in the Nutmeg State.

<sup>14</sup> *General History*, 224.

<sup>15</sup> *General History*, 224.

<sup>16</sup> *General History*, 228.

<sup>17</sup> J. Sabine, *Dictionary of Books Relating to America*, XIV, 501.

<sup>18</sup> Moses C. Tyler, *Literary History of the American Revolution* (New York, 1897), II, 414.

## III

When peace was proclaimed in 1783, Peters spent a decade in wangling for a post as bishop of the Anglican church in the new world. The Episcopal denomination over here was in grave danger of perishing for lack of a college of bishops to carry on the apostolic tradition and ordain a true clergy. But a bishop of the Anglican fold was required by English law to swear fealty to the reigning monarch—who happened still to be George III. The stubborn religious convictions of that former king were notorious: he would not forego an oath of loyalty to please the rebels that had just defeated him. Only through the most delicate negotiations, in which puritan John Adams and free-thinking Ben Franklin had a part, was the law suspended to allow His Grace of Canterbury to create—as he put it—“a sufficient supply of bishops” for America without the wildly impossible pledge of allegiance to a Hanoverian king. In this affair of high clerical politics the Reverend “Dr.” Peters—for he had by now awarded an LL.D degree to himself—saw a few pickings.

At the close of the war, peculiar things occurred in Vermont. Situated at the border of Canada, then teeming with embittered refugees, Vermont took its time about joining the Union. Peters was known in the area; after all, he had baptized the place! He had a host of relatives there. And there was a shadowy legal tangle about land grants to the Church that had attracted speculators. To the horror of some fussy folks, the Anglicans of that area held a rump convention in Manchester in 1794 and jammed through, despite protest, the election of Samuel Peters to be their bishop. They sent an agent to London praying that the Archbishop add his name to the already “sufficient supply” of bishops in the United States.

The results were high comedy. Peters drafted a magnificent pastoral letter of acceptance from London. “The science, zeal, and candour of the churches in Vermont direct your bishop elect to anticipate love, peace, and harmony, attended with rites, innocently different . . . and his moderation and brother-

ly love shall prevent future divisions, and all animosities in the churches, and all discord in the state.”<sup>19</sup>

For the eyes of the Archbishop and the Society he put down something else again. And since Vermont was now a full-fledged member of the Union, his remarks have an odd cast: “The great majority of the People of Vermont are such as *Myself* and persecuted during the American troubles for their Loyalty to the King of Great Britain and their attachment to the Church of England—they have not changed their Sentiments and their situation between Canada and the 13<sup>th</sup> States of America constitutes them to be a *willing* and *able* barrier between them both.”<sup>20</sup> To the Venerable Secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel he forwarded every argument except the spiritual one. He totted up the “souls” in that region and estimated the increase in trade he might induce between Vermont and Britain: “Admitting that each soul takes £4-s. worth of British goods every year, which is a low estimate, they will, (via Montreal), take £1,080,000 worth of goods each year from England.”<sup>21</sup>

Society and Archbishop rejected the plea abruptly. Peters and his agent visited the arch-episcopal palace in a fruitless attempt to reopen the matter. It is too harsh to say they were tossed out, yet the frigid note summarizing the attitude of His Grace toward Peters leaves no doubt of the bluntness of their reception.<sup>22</sup> Peters’s response was a rash promise to remain in exile from America “unless Noah, Daniel & Job come for me.” He scorned his successful rivals. “The plan of the three Bishops in America will in all probability soon destroy Episcopacy in the Five States of New England.” And he washed his hands of the Society, his rod and staff for thirty-five years, in a magnifi-

<sup>19</sup> So in *Hugh Peters*, 103; less polished drafts exist in the Peters Manuscripts, vi, New York Historical Society.

<sup>20</sup> Letter, December 29, 1794.

<sup>21</sup> Letter, December 29, 1794.

<sup>22</sup> “The Correspondence of John A. Graham, With His Grace of Canterbury, When on a Mission as Agent of the Church of Vermont, to the Ecclesiastical Courts of Canterbury and York, for the Consecration of Dr. Peters, Bishop Elect of Vermont, 1794-1795” (New York, 1835).

cent finale: "These Events, Sir, will affect Posterity, not me, and Stigmatize your former Charity as a mere Act of Policy. I will trouble you no more on this distressing subject."<sup>23</sup> To his daughter, however, who had married well in Canada, he remained a bishop and a doctor. She used to address her letters "To the Most Reverend Father in God, the Reverend Samuel Peters, LL.D."<sup>24</sup> The titles were undoubtedly a comfort to the family.

## IV

Plenty of life remained ahead of Samuel Peters, and a final strand of adventure, the most improbable of them all. In 1804, when verging on seventy, he received a letter from one Samuel Harrison, tenuously related to the Carver clan in America. These Carvers had gone slightly mad over an alleged grant of vast territories west of the Great Lakes made to a luckless explorer, Jonathan Carver, of a generation before, the author of an eighteenth-century best-seller, *Travels to the Interior Parts of North America*. The original yarn was this. At St. Anthony's Falls (now Minneapolis) two Indian chiefs had befriended Carver in 1767 and presented him with a simple but graphic and effective deed to a vast parcel of land, one hundred miles square and reaching eastward from the Mississippi River. He had brought this deed to England. There he had died miserably.

Peters—undoubtedly because of his interest in land grants in Vermont—was approached in these shenanigans. He was asked to take over the quest for the "deed," now lost, and perform similar duties. With the receipt of this request "Dr." Peters had found his last vocation. Abruptly he shed his English habiliments, worn for thirty years, and became a true Yankee drummer of fantastic bargains, the Don Quixote of a land-office business, the original Colonel Beriah Sellers.

The Harrison letter stimulated his memory amazingly. Soon he had known Carver, another son of Connecticut, during most

<sup>23</sup> Letter, June 15, 1796.

<sup>24</sup> Young, 583.

of that poor man's unhappy life. He recalled that he had once seen the deed and later described its strange symbols to an astonished Congressional committee. He returned to America in great excitement, after swearing in London a thumping affidavit to a cock-and-bull story of attending a meeting of the King and his Lords in Council. They had granted Carver full rights to the land in question and had ordered him to take possession of it with one hundred and fifty men by sailing up the mouth of the Mississippi!<sup>25</sup>

In January, 1806, his associate Harrison petitioned Congress for the ten thousand square miles of Wisconsin soil. He had assembled ninety-eight interested "heirs." Peters himself wanted to be superintendent over the Indians near the Falls of St. Anthony. He also invented an "emperor of the Mississaga tribes," who had been the overlord of the territory in question. Luck of a sort attended the old man. His appearance before Congress led to a series of examinations before a committee of the Senate. Certainly the committee would have squelched his notions in good time—but a fire broke out and destroyed all record of the proceedings.<sup>26</sup>

By November, 1806, he had "bought" rights from the Carver "heirs," not for cash but in consideration of his influence over Congress and similar lobbyist's collateral. He dreamed of cities on the plain in a future empire of Petersylvania and sought to interest Trinity Church of New York in Christianizing "the Gentiles of the Western territory." His agents began to scour the country for victims.

The War of 1812 intervened to kill national interest in Petersylvania; when it ended, "Dr." Peters reappeared with more startling notions. He now had the wild idea of taking over the "Carver Grant" in person, of visiting the descendants of the friend of his bosom, the lamented Jonathan Carver, and of reinvalidating the "deed." Since the original "heirs" had long

<sup>25</sup> London (April 19, 1805). Copy in New York Public Library. Cf. also Milo M. Quaife, "Jonathan Carver and the Carver Grant," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, III, 3-25 (June, 1920).

<sup>26</sup> *U. S. Public Lands* IV, 82ff.

split away from him and vainly sought to quash his pretensions, they decided to send a rival expedition. The race was on.

An eye-witness account of the expedition remains to us, luckily not by Peters himself but by a twenty-five-year-old Vermonter, one Willard Keyes.<sup>27</sup> On his way West in 1817 to seek his fortune, young Keyes was beguiled by an agent of Peters. He threw in his lot with this man. The ancient clergyman himself, now in his eighty-third year, caught up with the pair in York, Canada. The agent turned back, and Keyes embarked with Peters "in a little Birchbark Canoe, with a frenchman, his squaw, 3 children and several hundred weight of baggage." Northward they paddled along the Holland River to Lake Simcoe, bound for Lake Huron and the Strait of Mackinaw. They camped on open ground before a fire. They were eaten alive by mosquitoes and gnats. The indomitable Peters fell ill of lumbago but never lost courage. They were met by thirty canoes of savages, chanting for bread, whiskey, and tobacco. They fell in with another pioneer, and Peters paused to baptize his two children, born in the wilderness. By August 26, 1817, they reached Prairie du Chien, near the conflux of the Wisconsin and the great Mississippi. "The route I have travelled is about 2000 miles," exclaimed the youth from Vermont.

That was the end of the line, although the "Doctor" refused to face the fact. Around Peters and Keyes lay Indian territory under the (temporary) interdict of Congress, then as now faithful to the Indians in its fashion. With his strange tale of lands beyond the horizon, weary old Samuel Peters pestered the commander of the United States troops in the territory. He got no further. There was still a long pull up the stubborn current, but he was not allowed to try it. He lingered, he wrote letters, he carried on secret, portentous business—but he did not die as he had sworn to do unless he got to the Carver Grant. He chatted with Indians who grunted and nodded over his parchments. They recognized the faded marks of their ancestors. Or

<sup>27</sup> "Diary of Willard Keyes," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, III, 339-363, IV, 443-465 (March, June, 1920).

so he swore before still another Congress later on. In May, 1818, after a melancholy winter in the forest, he turned his face into the rising sun and paddled home. At that, he had bested the other "heirs," who had early retreated from the frightful rigors of such a trip.

Another siege of the powers in Washington—all carefully recorded in *U. S. Public Lands*, those thick folios of governmental printing that conceal so much of the chicanery, folly, grandeur, and farce of the American dream—came at last to naught. The Honorable Member from Ohio presented the report for the House Committee. Mr. Peters had no leg to stand upon. Neither had the Carver "heirs." Neither—but that came later—had the generous Indians.

Returning to Newark, New Jersey, the Reverend Samuel Peters, LL.D., was still convinced he was heir to ten thousand miles of forest, stream, and potential farmland. A miniature dated 1824 shows him in clerical garb, hair puffed out around his ears, and mouth firmly pressed down on the disappointments of a fantastic career. His family sought to care for him. A nephew was by this time governor of Connecticut. Moved by a laudable emotion, the Governor descended upon his uncle, now ninety years of age, and begged him to return to Hebron, where death had long since wiped out old scores.

To all arguments of the chief magistrate of Connecticut he turned a deaf and angry ear. "He rejected every inducement with impatience, and at last with rage, saying: 'I won't go. I'll die first.'" <sup>28</sup> The next year he carried out his threat.

<sup>28</sup> Hammond, 114.