

Portrait of Washington, 1780

THE chief reason for including this anonymous woodcut, or line-cut, portrait of Washington is because it has frequently been ascribed to Revere. The story of the ascription is as follows. On October 26, 1781, Paul Revere wrote a letter to his cousin Mathias Rivoire in France, in which he says: "Before this reaches you, you will have heard of the victory gained over the British Army by the Allied Armies commanded by the brave General Washington. (A small engraving of him, I send enclosed, it is said to be a good likeness and it is my engraving)." Rivoire replied, thanking his cousin for the "engraving of General Washington representing a gallant warrior." (E. H. Goss's *Life of Paul Revere*, Volume 2, page 502).

As it happened, late in 1780 or early in 1781, John D. M'Dougall and Company printed *Weatherwise's Town and Country Almanack for the Year of our Lord 1781*. On the fourth leaf, or unnumbered page 7, was a cut of "His Excellency George Washington, Esq: Commander in Chief of the Armies of the United States of America," followed by a long extract from Murray's *Impartial History of the present War in America*, narrating the entry of Washington into Boston and the defense of the town.

The cut, presumably on type-metal, measured $2\frac{15}{16}$ inches high by $2\frac{1}{2}$ wide. As is seen in Plate number 50, it showed the head and shoulders of Washington, surrounded by a mantling of flags, wreaths, and cannon. It was apparently copied from the John Norman copper-plate in the *Philadelphia Almanack* for 1780, engraved and printed in broadside form by Norman and Bedwell in Philadelphia, measuring $10\frac{1}{4}$ by $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches (reproduced in C. H. Hart's *Catalogue of Engraved Portraits of Washington*, 1904, number 42, opposite page 22).

The cut in the *Weatherwise Almanac* was unsigned, which might account for Revere emphasizing in the letter to his cousin that he engraved it, if he did engrave

it. The portrait certainly did not portray "a gallant warrior," although that might have been Mathias Rivoire's opinion of the General.

The same cut from the same plate was again used in *The New-England Primer Enlarged*, printed at Boston by E. Draper, undated, but probably about 1781. There are two varieties of this Primer, differing in the border around the title-page. The same plate again did duty in a later New England Primer (about 1798, but title-page missing in the American Antiquarian Society copy, the only one located), but in this cut of Washington, the title underneath was "John Adams, President."

In 1904 Charles Henry Hart published his monumental *Catalogue of the Engraved Portraits of Washington*. On page xv of the Introduction, he reproduces the cut of Washington, details the evidence of Revere's letter to his cousin, and of the Weatherwise Almanac, and concludes: "I think therefore, this type-metal portrait of Washington may be accepted as the Revere 'small engraving,' until the ascription is disproved by the production of a copper-plate print bearing his name as engraver."

Mr. Hart's opinion may be correct. The style of engraving in a way is like Revere's work, and the evidence of the letter to his cousin is interesting, if not conclusive. Perhaps some day the problem will be solved.

The American Antiquarian Society has all of the titles mentioned in the above text, except the John Norman sheet Almanac for 1780.