The Merchant & Privateer Nathaniel Tracy

Born. 11 Aug 1751, died. 20 Sep 1796 (aged 45), son of Patrick Tracy and one of the wealthiest merchants of Newburyport and a financier of the Revolutionary War. By the end of the Revolution he was broke. His main business during it was sending out privateers to capture English ships and he fitted out the very first privateer of the Revolution. He owned the Tracy Mansion on State Street that his father had built for him and which is now part of the Library, and the home in Cambridge now known as the Longfellow House where he once hosted the officers of the French Army who came to support us in the war by serving them frog soup.

American Revolutionary Privateer, Merchant, Politician. eldest son of the prominent merchant, Captain Patrick Tracey and Hannah Gookin. In 1760 Nathaniel graduated from the Boston Public Latin School, in 1769 a degree of Bachelor of Arts from Cambridge and in 1772 a Master of Arts from Harvard College. After an additional year at Yale returned to Newburyport to enter his father's mercantile house and then travelled abroad. In 1773, he was given the honorary degree of A.M. by the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University. He was probably a collector of books as an early American bookplate may be attributed to him.. Tracy outfitted the first privateer of the Revolution, Yankee Hero, and subsequently sent out 24 privateering cruisers that captured 120 vessels and 2,225 prisoners. He also sent to sea a fleet of 110 merchant vessels, most of which were destroyed or captured during the war. He loaned $167,000 to the Revolutionary government as well as provided supplies to the army from his personal fortune; at one time he was considered the richest man in the rebellious colonies with a personal worth at the time of $4 million. **At General Washington's request, Tracy provided all the vessels to transport an army under Benedict Arnold from Newburyport to Maine in an assault on Quebec.** A close friend of Thomas Jefferson, after the war he escorted Jefferson and his daughters on board his ship Ceres to France where Jefferson assumed diplomatic duties. Also after the war, Tracy served as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention.

His fortunes dramatically reversed after the war and he spent the last ten years of his life in bankruptcy but was so esteemed that his creditors never pressed for repayment. He was the son of Newburyport merchant captain Patrick Tracy and Hannah Gookin, and the husband of Mary Lee.

He is buried in the Old Hill Burying Ground in Newburyport, Massachusetts.

References:

Find a Grave
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