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## The Vermont-Massachusetts Boundary

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ELBRIDGE GERRY wrote from Philadelphia on September 29, 1779, to John Adams announcing the latter's appointment to negotiate the treaty of peace with Great Britain. The last two paragraphs of Gerry's letter request Adams to give his opinion on the Vermont-Massachusetts boundary question.<sup>1</sup> Adams' reply follows:

Braintree Oct. 17. 1779

Dear Sir

As to the Boundaries of Mass. I have asked Mr A.<sup>2</sup> about them but he did not recollect them. The Council appointed a Committee, within a few days after my arrival, to ascertain them and did me the Honour to put me upon it, altho not a Member of Either House, with Mr Bowdoin<sup>3</sup> and Mr. S. A. but we have never met, and now it would be improper. They will appoint a new one I suppose.

As to the Claims to Vermont, the Gen. Court in 1774 appointed Mr Bowdoin and me a Committee to state their Claim to those Lands. Mr Bowdoin left it to me, and I spent most of the winter in rummaging the Books and Papers, in the Balcony of Dr Sewals<sup>4</sup> Meeting House, where the New England Library of Mr Prince<sup>5</sup>

1. Gerry's letter appears in John Adams, *Works* (Boston, 1854), ix, 495-496.

2. This undoubtedly is Samuel Adams (1722-1803), the Revolutionary statesman.

3. James Bowdoin (1726-1790), a Boston merchant active in Revolutionary affairs.

4. Joseph Sewall (1688-1769), minister of the Old South Church.

5. The library of Thomas Prince (1687-1758), theologian, scholar, and book collector, consisting of over 1,500 books and tracts relating mainly to the civil and religious history of New England, was housed in the tower of the Old South Church during Adams' time. A large part of it survives in the Boston Public Library.

was kept, in the Library of Dr. Mather<sup>6</sup> which came down to him, from his father Grandfather and Great Grandfather, and in Johnny Moffats<sup>7</sup> Collection of Papers and Records, and wrote a lengthy I cannot say an accurate State of the Massachusetts Claim, a particular Examination of the Claim of New York, and a similar Discussion of that of New Hampshire. Mr Bowdoin revised and reported it, a few Days before Governor Gage removed the General Court to Salem.<sup>8</sup> At Salem it was read in both Houses, but they soon chose Delegates to Congress and were dissolved. The Report was left with the Clerk of the House.<sup>9</sup> I have enquired

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of him, and he cannot find it. There is no other Copy, that I know of. the first rough blotted Draught, was left in my Table Drawer, in my office in Boston, when the Regulars shut up the Town. The Table Papers and all, were carried off, when they left the Town. There was a Mr Phelps,<sup>10</sup> an Inhabitant of the Grants, who furnished me with some Minutes, which he would perhaps produce now. Governor Hutchinson, drew a State of the Massachusetts Claim, much shorter than mine, tho it is well done, which is in a Volume of the Journals of the House which I have in 1762, 3, or 4

6. Samuel Mather (1705–1785) was the fourth generation of a family of clergymen authors and book collectors. A portion of the Mather library is now at the American Antiquarian Society.

7. John Moffatt (d. 1777), nephew of the painter John Smibert (1688–1751). Moffatt, with the artist's wife, after Smibert's death, carried on the family business of selling art materials and prints.

8. The last royal governor of Massachusetts was Thomas Gage (1721–1787). The Port Bill of 1774 removed the capital of the province from Boston to Salem, and news of this reached Boston only three days before General Gage himself arrived. The city was "shut up" by the Battle of Bunker Hill, June 17, 1775.

9. Identified as Samuel Adams by John Adams in his *Diary and Autobiography* (Cambridge, 1961), III, 303. The manuscript "State" reappeared a decade later and was useful in the settlement of the claims, though it exists only in fragmentary form at present. Also interesting to note is Adams' sardonic comment that he "never had any thing" for his "Half years service, not even Credit nor Thanks" and that he wished, as he was writing his autobiography, that the State of Massachusetts had given him "a Township of Land" for his pains. *Ibid.*, 304.

10. Charles Phelps (1717–1789), one of the original settlers in 1765 of New Marlborough, now Marlboro, Vermont. For an account of Phelps' life, see John Phelps, *Family memoirs* (Brattleboro, 1886). The Massachusetts Claim and Phelps' memorial to the Council of Massachusetts concerning it are discussed in Vermont, *Records of the Governor and Council*, II, 193–199.

I forget which.<sup>11</sup> But the Examination of the Claims of N.Y. and N.H. is to be found no where. I hope however that Mr Adams will find the Report, it cost me much Labour, and if I dont misremember contained much Information, concerning these Questions. If the Report is not found by Mr Adams, if Phelps is living, it is possible, he may have it, or a Copy of it. I will endeavor to point out Some Things to Some Gentlemen, that might not readily occur to them, before I go.<sup>12</sup>

My Respects to Dr Holten and Mr Partridge.<sup>13</sup> With great Affection,

Adieu

John Adams

Hon. Elbridge Gerry.

[Endorsed:] Braintree Letter

Hon John Adams

Esqr Octr 17, 1779

11. Thomas Hutchinson (1711-1780). His "Brief State of the Title . . ." appears in the Massachusetts House Journal of 1762 and his "The Case of the Province of Massachusetts-Bay and New-York . . ." in that of 1763.

12. Gerry's postscript implies that a mutual acquaintance had recently been politically indiscreet. Adams here indicates that he intends to rectify the matter.

13. Samuel Holten (1738-1816), physician, and George Partridge (1740-1828), educator, both Members of Congress from Massachusetts.

The original manuscript of this letter is in the Wilbur Library, University of Vermont, and permission to publish it is gratefully acknowledged, as is the assistance of Clifford K. Shipton, Director, and Marcus A. McCorison, Librarian, American Antiquarian Society, in establishing several points.