

Appendix #23B: Transcription of the Carleton Commission Report

From the Manuscript of Proceedings of the Board of Enquiry as authorized by General Carleton in 1783
at the New-York Historical Society (New York City: Misc MSS Boxes 12 & 13 1776-1780)

“Board of Enquiry into the Cause of the great Fire in the City of New York in September 1776 New York 18th Oct 1783”

The Board being assembled in pursuance of the warrant of his Excellency the Commander in Chief of this date –

Present Brigadier General Martin
 Major Darby
 Major Beckwith

The Warrant was read and with the approbation of his Excellency the Commander in Chief the Board appointed Ward Chipman Esq.¹ to be their Secretary.

It being suggested that there are persons at Shelburne or Port Roseway who can give information respecting the business by the members of the Board, (*pocited*)² to Benjamin Marston Esq. and others his Majesty’s Justices of the Peace ~~at Shelburne~~ these requesting them to take the examinations of any Witness who can give evidence on the matter and to forward them to the Board with all convenient speed.

The Board adjourned to Monday 11 o’clock.

Monday 20th: Oct. 11 oClock Board met pursuant to their adjournment

~~Present Brig Gen Martin Major Darby Major Beckwith~~

Agreed on the form of the summons to be issued and of the oath to be issued to the witnesses, Directed the Secretary to write to the Police for such papers and documents as they can furnish to throw light upon the business.

Dr. Nooth attended the board and was examined and sworn to his deposition.

Mr. Chew attended the Board and was requested to attend again on Wednesday for examination. The Board adjourned to tomorrow 1 oClock

004 Nooth Deposition 1 20th October 1783

Dr. Mervin Nooth Superintendant General of his Majesty’s Hospitals in North America being duly sworn on the holy Evangelists of Almighty God deposeth and saith, that at the time of the great fire in the month of September 1776, in the City of New York, he was on board the Hospital ship (*?igo?*) then lying at Anchor in the Bay between the City of New York and Staten Island, that between eleven and twelve of the clock in the night as nearly as he can recollect, he was call’d out of bed to see the fire, that he discovered several houses on fire near Whitehall, and soon after plainly discovered with a glass a man upon the top of Trinity Church with a fire -brand or torch in his hand, going backward and forward upon the roof with great rapidity, that he the deponent soon after saw the fire break out in several parts of the roof of the (005) same Church, that he then did and still does believe

¹ Ward Chipman was the Deputy Muster-Master General of the British forces in North America. Harvard graduate.

² When the author (BT) of this transcription cannot read/decode handwritten manuscript, his best guess is in parentheses.

that the Person he so saw set fire to the Church; - that he does not think the fire could have been communicated to the Church from the houses he first saw on fire, as the distance was considerable and the wind blew a different way - . And this Deponent further saith, that sometime after the fore in the month of October then next following as nearly as he can recollect, an official report was made to him, that the Vaux-hall hospital was discovered to have combustibles concealed in one of the chimneys, that upon a fire being made there was an explosion from them which forced the wood off the hearth below, into the Room, with some violence. *signature* D. Mervin Nooth
Seal/annotated Sworn this 20th Day of October 1783. Before the Board *signature* Will: Martin Brig. Gen.

(Page 1) Mackenzie Deposition New York October 21: 1783

The Board met pursuant to adjournment Major Frederick Mackenzie {23rd Btn Welch Fusileers, D. Adjut. Gen. and Sec. to the Com. in Chief attended the Board and} being duly sworn deposeth and saith that in the night between the 19th: and 20th – days of September 1776, he, being then Major of Brigade to Gen. Smith and quarter'd at the house of Mr. Eliot in the Bowery, about one of the clock as nearly as he can recollect, saw a great fire raging in the City of New York, that he soon after rode into the City with General Smith at which time he found Trinity Church on fire, and the houses in the several Streets, where the fire raged all in flames. That after day light in the morning he was sitting at the door of D. Inglis's house opposite St. Paul's Church when his attention was called to a fire which appeared in a house in Chatham Row, four or five houses Eastward of D. Inglis's – that this house was so far distant from the houses before on fire and the direction of the wind was such, that in the Deponent's opinion, the fire was not communicated from them, but this house had every appearance of being purposely set on fire

(Page 2) That some soldiers by their exertions (*and*) throwing off the roof of the house put a stop to the fire, and brought out of the house a man whom they said they had found in the Garret and believe he had been setting fire to the house, that they were much exasperated and if not prevented, would in all probability have put the man to death*

*(that this man was immediately ordered to the Provost). That there were many officers and others then near the Deponent who were unanimously of opinion that this house was purposely set on fire. – Major Mackenzie further produces to the board memorandums made by him the day after the fire, which were collected from facts within his own knowledge and observation, the information of others and prevailing reports at that time.

Major Mackenzie was then asked by the Board if he ever supposed the fire was accidental

– To which he answered that he never did –

If he supposed the City

(Page 3) set on fire by the King's Troops designedly or otherwise?

– He answers that he did not suppose it was – as there were Guards placed for the security of the City, details of which*

*(for the 19th and 20th: Sept.) he produces to the board.

The board, having (*gone/open?*) this the examination of Major Mackenzie directed a letter to be written to the D Judge Advocate for a copy of such part of the proceedings of the General Court Martial which was held in the year 1776 of which Lt. Col. (*Summing*) was President, as relates to the great fire which took place in this City in the month of September of that year.

The Board then directed Baltus Dash to be summoned for examination tomorrow at 11 o'Clock and then adjourned to that hour. –

Wednesday 22nd Oct:

The Board met pursuant to adjournment when the answer of the Judge Advocate to the letter written yesterday was laid before them, when the Board directed him to be summonsed to attend for examination tomorrow.

(Page 4) Mr. Chew Assist. Commissary and Secretary to Indian Affairs attended the board and being duly sworn deposeth and saith that at the time of the great fire in the City of New York in Sept. 1776 he was on board the Ship Earl of Suffolk a transport in government service* -

*then lying at anchor between Whitehall and Governor's Island, but much nearer to Whitehall – At about one of the clock in the night time, as nearly as he can recollect he was called out of bed upon an alarm of fire, at which time he saw a small house upon the dock at Whitehall very much on fire – that he saw no other house on fire at that time – that he immediately prepared to go on shore and got into the boat for that purpose, when a Lieut. Of the Navy came by in a boat and ordered him back to the ship and further ordered the Capt. of the ship to remove her further from the City towards Governor's Island as he conceived her to be in danger from the fire, where she then was –soon after this the Deponent observed a house adjoining to the small house – also on fire; and in a short time

(Page 5) he perceived a light in a very high house in (*Wincoop*) Street upwards of two hundred yards distant from the two houses before mentioned, which disappeared and appeared two or three times, and at length a fire broke out* -

* from the upper chamber (*of the*) place where the light appeared and soon after –

In the roof near the chimney, which had the appearance of purposely done, (*thus*;) Mr. Chew then remarked to the persons on board the ship with him, and he still believes to be true. –

About Day-light the deponent prevailed on the Master of the Ship to be put on shore – were he assisted to extinguish the fire which was then raging furiously. – The Deponent upon his return to the ship some time in the fore noon of the same day, while waiting for a boat at Cruger's wharf, saw a sailor who belonged to the same ship and attended him, pull from under the corner of a store or warehouse two bundles of white cedar

(Page 6) matches, about 18 inches long and one inch square at the largest end which was covered with brimstone and rosin about 6 inches – that one of the bundles contained about 25 the other 30 matches some of which the Deponent took with him on board the ship – The Deponent in a few days after the fire called upon a Cooper in Smith Street to repair a cask, when the Cooper in searching for some materials which he wanted took a parcel of shaving out of a large Barrel, upon which the Deponent discovered the barrel to be close packed with matches made of Walnut about 18 inches long and covered at both ends with brimstone and (*rosin*) – the Deponent immediately enquired of the Cooper, whether the shop was his and how long he had been in it who told him he had (*this*) possession of it given to him the day before, but he did not know to whom it belonged

(Page 7) and that he never till that time seen the matches or knew anything of them – The deponent after the fire saw several matches which had been discovered by different persons in different parts of

the City, as he was informed, and never has had a doubt that the City was purposely set on fire. Mr. Chew was then asked how long it was from the time in which he discovered that most of the house in Wincoop Street where the light appeared to be on fire, till the flame burst out in the roof of the house near the chimney. – He cannot exactly recollect but thinks it was four minutes. Whether Trinity Church was observed to be in flames by any Persons on board the Earl of Suffolk transport previous to there being any fire in that neighborhood and before the Deponent landed from that Ship during the time of the fire? The Deponent remembers

(*Page 8*) that some persons on board the Ship at that time said, - “They are setting fire to Trinity Church”; upon observing it to be in flames, and he thinks one of those persons was at that time some way up the shrouds looking out.-

Q. Whether the Deponent ever supposed that the fire was accidental?

A. He never did. -

Whether he conceived the City was set on fire by the King’s Troops designedly or otherwise?

He never did. –

The Deponent being further interrogated, said that he had often heard from (*many*) credible Persons that many of the Pump-handles in the City had been taken out and the pumps otherwise (*rendered useless*), and the fire Buckets hid away or cut to pieces before the fire.

Mr. **Baltus Dash** Tinman, an Inhabitant of the City of New York

(*Page 9*) was then called in and being duly sworn deposeth and saith that*

*upon the King’s troops taking possession of the city of New York he was appointed by General Robertson to take charge of the Fire-Engines and Lamps in the City and the Light-house at Sandy Hook, which office he still holds, that about three days afterwards on the day of September 1776 in the night time of the same day between one and two of the Clock as nearly as he can recollect, he was alarmed with the cry of fire, which first broke out at Whitehall, whither he immediately repaired with all the Engines being twelve in number, that he was soon afterward informed that a house was on fire near the North River, back of the Rector’s house which was near Trinity Church – that he does not think it possible that the fire could have communicated to this house from the house on fire at Whitehall, the distance being in his opinion – full half mile.- that in a short time he found that the Lutheran Church, Trinity Church and many other buildings at a great distance from the Whitehall were in flames, that the fire raged so furiously that all efforts to prevent its progress by the Engines were in vain – that the Deponent then repaired to St. Paul’s Church (particularly the Deponent being interrogated by the board says?) to attempt to save that which by great exertions was effected. – that

(*Page 10*) the Deponent further (*testified*) that he saw several persons after day light that morning taken into custody for having matches concealed under their clothes in side Pockets, which matches he saw; one of these men who was (*accosted*) in a house with matches about him was dragged out and thrown into the fire by (*the*) Sailors and Soldiers in their rage and resentment, but was rescued by some officers, who ordered him to the Provost – that this circumstance happened in the Broadway near the Oswego Market.

(page 11) From his own long experience and observation at many different fires he does not believe it possible, that the fire could have communicated to different parts of the City when it broke out from the houses first on fire, but verily believes that it was purposely set on fire in different places, that he never supposed the fire accidental. –

Q. Whether he ever supposed the city was set on fire at that time by the King's Troops designedly or otherwise.

A. He never did, - as threats were thrown out by many persons previous to the King's Troops taking possession of the City, that they would set it on fire before they left it. That those who intended to (*remain*) in the city were in general apprehensive of such an event, which the Deponent (*also*) very much feared and in consequence of it the day before the fire he dug a hole in his yard (*and buried*) his most valuable effects. Upon being further interrogated he saith that some of the firemen under his direction reported to him the next day that they had found several of the pumps in the City with the handles broke or otherwise

(page 12) rendered useless and that he himself plainly discovered that the handles of many of the fire buckets had been cut.

The Board directed Capt Law Master of the Port to be summoned for examination tomorrow 12 o'clock. The Board adjourned until tomorrow morning 11 o'clock

Thursday 23 Oct. The Board met pursuant to adjournment - **Major Adye** attending & being sworn deposed & saith that he was in camp about five miles from the City of New York at the time the great fire took place in that City in the month of September 1776 – that within a few days of the fire he was desired by Sir W. Morse to meet General Robertson, Vice Com. of the City & consult upon proper measures for discovering the persons who set fire to the City. That in consequence of this he met General (..&..) Major (*Wemyss*) Aid de Camp to Gen R several times that examinations were taken by the Deponent jointly with

(page 13) & separately from Genl Robertson of several Soldiers of the (Guards) and of other Corps who were present at the fire, the most particular of which are contained in the paper produced to the Board by the Deponent,*

*which paper the Deponent received at that time from General Robertson or Major (*Wemyss*) that among other duties the Deponent had the examination imposed upon him of those who had been confined in the Provost on suspicion of being concerned in setting fire to the City, that in consequence of this he went to the Provost attended by all the Soldiers who had been before examined by him - that upon these Prisoners*

*about forty in number as nearly as the Deponent can now recollect

being paraded in the room he selected from them such as were pointed out by the different Soldiers. & there being among others two who were particularly sworn to - one a grey-headed old Scotch-man - the other apparently a foreigner - The Deponent examined them privately both separately & together and offered to them the King's Pardon if they would disclose to him the combination there was reason to have supposed had been formed for setting fire to the City of New York & those concerned in it – they both declared their

(page 14) own personal innocence as well as ignorance of any such combination being formed.

That upon these circumstances being reported to Sir W. Howe, the persons suspected of setting fire to the City were ordered to be brought to trial before a General Court Martial & that the two persons before alluded to were first brought forward to trial which being finished, the opinion and proceedings of the Court were forwarded in the usual manner to the Commander in Chief – that the

opinion of that Court was never made known to any nor their proceedings returned as is the custom to the Judge Advocate office. That none of the others confined on suspicion of setting fire to the City were ever brought to trial. That in the course of the trial of the two Prisoners before mentioned, that witnesses widely differed with respect to the identity of the Persons of the Prisoners. – that these Prisoners were afterwards released from the Provost – The Deponent further saith that in a conversation with General Robertson some time afterward General Robertson told him that a man of credibility who had come in

(page 15) from the country, had informed him - G Robertson – that General Parsons in the American Service had said in the (hearing) of General Roberston's Informant that it was ridiculous to deny that the City of New York was set on fire by their own people (meaning those opposed to Great Britain) as it was a matter of general notoriety, or word, to that affect.

Major Adye further suggested for this information of the Board, that soon after the fire, Lieutenant (Innes) of the Royal Artillery, knowing that Major Adye was collecting evidence respecting it told him, that a Negro man had accosted him in the Street & said if he would go with him he would show him a man that set fire to the City. That he Lieut. Innes accordingly went with the Negro to the house of one Leary in a Street leading to the North River & after searching the rest of the house found a man whose name was Vandy(*lne*) secreted in a Closet of one of the Bed Chambers*

*which a young lady endeavored to prevent his going into

(page 16) Major Adye informs the board that he recollects to have seen a man of that name in the Provost afterwards among the Prisoners whom he went to examine, whose Person he had before known - Brig Gen Martin recollects that Lieut Innes...?) came into a Room where he Gen M was at that time & related the same circumstances which Major Adye has now done & that he Gen. Martin saw this man Vandy(*lne*) soon after going by to the Provost under Guard

Question to M Adye – Whether it appeared to him from the evidence given to the General Court Martial he refers to that the fire proceeded from accident or design?

Answer – That it appeared to him from the whole course of the testimony that many of the houses were purposely set on fire, as it was proved that the fire broke out in parts of the city very distant from each other nearly at the same time.

Q to Major Adye – Whether it appeared to him from the evidence before that Court that the city was set on fire by the King's Troops either designedly or otherwise?

Answer – So far his recollections of a transaction of seven years standing will carry him

(page 17) there was no appearances in the course of the trial, that the British troops were concerned directly or indirectly in setting fire to the city, nor did it seem probable to him from any observation he could make previous to, during or after the trial that those who were to seek shelter in that city the ensuing winter should be concerned in setting it on fire - that there was a particular scrutiny at that trial to discover whether this event had taken place from motives of plunder on the part of the British troops, but nothing of that kind appeared, from which circumstances his opinion was formed.

Henry Law Captain of the Port of New York was then called in and being sworn deposeth saith – that in the beginning of the Month of May 1776 finding himself in danger from the violence of the people he left the City of New York, that after the arrival of the King's troops, on the 16th day of Sept. 1776 he was appointed by Lord Howe Captain of the Port, that in consequence of the threats which were generally thrown out previous to his leaving the city

(page 18) that the city should be set on fire rather than that the King's troops should get possession of it, and of his observing many stragglers lurking about in the City whom he did not know, he did not think it safe to lodge on shore and therefore kept on board a Schooner called the *Alert* lying at a wharf

near the New Slip. – that in the night between the 19th and 20th Days of the same month, he was alarmed at about 2 oClock with the cry of fire. – that at that time he discovered a small house at Whitehall in flames, upon which he went on shore, but being prevented by a sentry from going on, it being unsafe for him without a uniform, he returned again to the schooner* -

*that he observed from the shrouds of the schooner that the City was on fire in many places distant from each other

That from time afterwards in going towards Cruger's Wharf to order some ships there to haul off, he discovered as he passed Wall-Street that Trinity Ch. was on fire, and after day light he saw a large quantity of Combustibles in the stores on Cruger's Wharf from which he saw several Men and Women dragged out by

(page 19) the Sailors, that two of the women had matches in their arms and were ordered to the Provost.

Q. Whether he ever supposed this fire to be accidental?

A. He never did

Q. Whether he ever supposed the City of New York was set on fire by the King's Troops either designedly or otherwise?

A. He never did –

Q. Whether he knew of any of the Pumps or Engines or the Buckets in the city being rendered useless previous to the fire?

A. That it was generally reported that many of the Pumps and Buckets had been rendered useless, that he saw two Pumps, one of them in Beaver Street from which the (*Spears*) were taken out. That a man named Wright White whom he personally knew, was put to death and hung up by the heels for cutting the handles of the fire buckets as was reported; that Midshipman belonging to the Eagle told the Deponent that he saw White cut some handles of the buckets and a woman's arm in doing it.

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Q. Was the wind violent or otherwise and in which direction did it blow during the time of the fire?

A. The wind was moderate in the beginning of the fire, from south to S.E. – after day light it blew fresh –

(page 21) 24th Oct. 1783

The board met pursuant to adjournment – Mr. Wm Backhouse Merchant being one of the people called Quakers attended and solemnly declares and affirms [here insert his affirmation]

Q. Whether he knows for what reason Lamps were returned, and why the menaces of setting fire to the City ceased

A. He thinks it was owing to a report, that Sir Wm Howe had heard of the intention of burning the City and threatened to retaliate by marching his army into Connecticut and laying the Country waste –

Q. Whether his apprehensions of the town being set on fire in pursuance of the threats that were thrown out induced him to remove his effects from the City?

A. He did remove his effects on that account.

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Q.1 Whether he at anytime supposed the fire was accidental

A. He never did

Q.2 Whether he ever conceived the City of NY was set on fire by the King's Troops either designedly or otherwise

A. He never did

Q.3 Whether he knows anything of the Pumps or fire Buckets or Engines being designedly destroyed or rendered useless the night of the fire or previous to it.

A. He knows nothing, but heard it generally reported that the handles of the fire buckets were cut during the fire,

Q.4 Whether he knows of any matches or combustibles being found in any house in the City at or near the time of the fire

A. Persons were appointed by authority after the fire to make search and he saw a quantity of combustibles in the city-hall which were collected in consequence of that search.

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Mr. Edward Laight Sr being duly sworn deposeth and saith that he came into the City of NYork on Monday morning the day after the King's Troops took possession of it and walking thro' the City discovered Combustibles in many parts of it, which among many other circumstances induced him to believe that the City was purposely set on fire – That upon the fire breaking out at a small Blacksmith's Shop near the Whitehall stairs, about 12 o'clock he went to the place, where he found one of the Engines under the direction of one Alstine and observed that instead of throwing the Water upon the fire, the pipe was twice turned another way, which appeared to him to be done by some person wresting it from Alstine's hands – that it was soon observed by some persons coming up. That it was in vain to attempt to extinguish the fire as it had broken out in two places in Beaver Street, and the Deponent soon after saw many houses on fire in other parts of the City. – that a very credible man opposed to the Government, who is now dead, told the Deponent that from the top of the Deponent's house he saw the fire (*break*) out

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in two or three places at once from the roof of Trinity Church, where he saw no other fire near it, and he supposed the Church was purposely set on fire.

Q1. As above

A. He never did.

Q2. As above

A. He never did.

Q3. As above

A. Within a short time after the fire...upon examining the Pumps he found many of them out of order – the (*spears*) broken and taken out. –

Q4. 5 and 6th nothing

Q7. As above

A. When the fire broke out, the wind blew strong at S.W. and in about in an hour when the fire had made some progress shifted to the S.E. in which direction it continues till about Day break and then came around to the N.W.

8. – nothing

John L. C. Roome Esq. being duly sworn deposeth and saith that at the time of the fire in the City of New York in Sept 1776 he was a prisoner on account of his loyalty in Norwich Goal, that about the latter end of Dec. following being released from Goal on parole he was in Company at Norwich with (*Durkie*) a Lt. Col. in the American Service who told the Deponent

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That he Col. (*Durkie*) was second in command at Paulus hook at the time of that fire that about 8 o'Clock in the Evening of the Night on which the fire took place. A whale-boat was sent from Paulus hook to the City with 8 men one of which was a mullatto, with directions to land behind Trinity Church among the Stink Weeds, with a design as the Deponent understood to set fire to the City, that Col. (*Durkie*) further told the Dept. that they were anxiously awaiting at Paulus hook for the return of the Boat – that they found before the boat returned, which was about ten o'Clock, that the design had been effected as the fire had broke out in several places. – that six of the men only returned in the boat, that the other two one of which was the mulatto it was afterwards found were thrown into the fire and burnt to death, the mulatto into the (*Aimes?*) house in Broad Street*

*that he had frequently heard (*Durkie*) relate these circumstances and upon his return to NYork in March 1777 reported the same to Lord Howe and Gen. Tryon.

Q. N. g.

A- It was frequently threatened by many Persons in NY while the Dept. was in and out of NYork previous to the King's Troops takin possession of the City, - that when the troops should arrive, they would lock up the Goal and set fire to the City and go off

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Francis Panton being duly sworn deposeth and saith that previous to the King's Troops taking possession of the City of New York in the year 1776 – he heard it frequently said by the American Soldiers then in the City that it would be burnt whenever the King's Troops should later possession of it. – that he was not in the City on the night of the fire in the month of Sept. in that year – that in the evening of the day after the fire, he was patrolling in Broad Street with other citizens to watch and protect their houses from being set on fire, that passing by Lord Sterling's house in that Street one of the citizens with him proposed to go in and search that house, which was empty to see if any Villains had concealed themselves there, that one of these citizens accordingly went into the house when a man rush'd out cross'd the Street pass'd by the Deponent and said with an Oath, that "he would do it yet" which the Deponent and other Citizens supposed to mean, that he would set fire to that house – that a Centry

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posted close by the house immediately level'd his piece at the man and snap'd it but the lock breaching, it (*miss'd fire*) and the man escaped, running off violently.

Q.1. – A. He never did.

Q.2. – A. He never did.

Q.3. – A. No

Q.4. & 5. – A. The morning after the fire he met several persons going in to the City hall under Guard with Matches and other Combustibles about them which it was said had been found upon them. – particularly one man with a powder barrel, fill'd with Combustibles under his arm

A letter from the Police was received and read in answer to that written to them by order of the Board... The Board adjourned till tomorrow morning 11 o'Clock

(page 28) October 25th Saturday

The Board met pursuant to adjournment -

Mr. Comfort Sands a member of the Provincial Congress for New York in the year 1776 – being duly sworn was examined by the Board –

Q. Whether he at any time since the fire in New York in Sept. 1776 has heard that the City was set on fire by direction of any authority whatever in the United States or by any officer either in the American Army or at Paulus hook at that time, or by any and what other order or direction?

A. He never heard it was set on fire by any order or authority whatever. And does not believe it was.

–

Q. Whether it was ever proposed to or debated in the Provincial Congress of which he was a Member to burn the City of New York as a measure of policy

A. It never was to his knowledge or belief –

(page 29) part of above

A. He upon the whole thinks it was accidental

.2d. *(ed. refers to question re the Kings Troops)*

A. He never did as it must have been equally against their interest as of the Americans. –

Q. Whether he knew of the fire-buckets being collected or taken from the private families in the City or of the Lamps being taken down at any time previous to the fire

A. He never heard or knew of circumstances of that kind. –

Wm. Waddell Esq. Alderman of the City being duly sworn was examined by the Board. – and saith that he was directed by General Howe immediately after the King's Troops took possession of the City to see the Pumps, fire-buckets and engines repaired and put in order that they might be ready for use in case a fire should happen. - that on the night of the great fire in New York Sept 1776 he was called by a Segt

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from the Main Guard about 12 o'Clock upon the alarm of fire, and exerted himself during the Night to stop its progress.-

Q. Were the Pumps buckets and Engines examined and put in order previous to the fire

A. They were –

Q.1- A- He did and still does

Q.2nd. A. He never did –

Q. 3rd. A- Several buckets were shown to him, the handles of which had been cut during the fire

Q.4. A – Many Matches and other Combustibles were discovered in the Stores on Cruger's Wharf – which he was informed were prepared for the purpose of fitting out fire-ships - and he was informed that matches were found in other parts of the City

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Q.5. A. Some Persons were taken up having matches about them which he supposes they had taken from the stores from mere motives of curiosity without any design of doing any mischief with them,

Q.6. A. He heard the next day it began in a small house in a small house at Whitehall when it was said some Sailors or Soldiers had carelessly left a fire. –

Q.7. A The Wind blew very fresh he thinks from the Eastward of S. during the fire

Q8 A – he never heard of any

Q.9 A – He knew of none

Q. Whether he thinks from his observations during the fire, that the suppression of it was obstructed, by any and what persons and in what manner?

A. There was a large fire ladder made use of at the fire, which was taken away and secreted
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In a narrow Street leading from John Street, by one Samuel Charlotte a Baker a disaffected character, who upon being found in a house in that Street acknowledged to the Deponent that he had taken it away – that this man was committed to the Provost and upon having a reward of 50 Guinea and his Majesty's Pardon offered to him by the Dept. said he would discover what he knew respecting the fire. – but upon the Deponent's going to examine him he said he knew nothing about the matter – declared he carried away the ladder alone, and altho remonstrated with, that the size and weight of the ladder were such as would require 6 or 8 men to lift it he still persisted in this Assertion.

Q. Whether he knows what became of this man Charlotte and whether he was ever brought to trial –

A. He does not know.

Mr. Wm Hervey Merch't was then sworn and examined

Q.4: A – He Was appointed one to (ex)

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(ex)amine the houses in the City soon after the fire, by Gen. Robertson and found in a house on Smith Street, near Pitt's Statue belonging to one (Hauser) a cartridge of powder in the chamber containing about (½ @) with a straw bed laid over it and a loose train of powder leading from it down to the back door in the yard. That he called in Mr. (Ashsick) who lived in the neighborhood to see it before he removed it. –

Mr. Joseph Totten was then sworn and being examined by the Board – saith

Q.1 A. He never did –

Q.2^d. A. He never did

Q.3^d. A. He doth not know

Q.4. A. He saw abundance of matches in Lord Dunmores hands, about Daylight in the morning which Lord D told him he had taken out of a barrel of Combustibles

Q5 A. No –

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Q. Whether he was of the (Persons) appointed to search the houses in the City for Combustibles after the fire

A. He was and with six persons searched all the vacant houses in the Montgomery Ward but found no Combustibles in any of them.

The Board adjourned to Monday 11 oClock

Monday Oct. 27th The Board met pursuant to the adjournment

(Ed. Note: a partial testimony of James Deas Hair Dresser is entered on page 34 and 35 but crossed out.

Nothing substantive in the testimony [he commanded a patrole after fire] and so is not transcribed here...see original for detail)

(page 35) No.3

Mr. Andrew then was sworn and examined and thereupon saith that on the night of the great fire in the City of NY in Sept. 1776 he was alarmed with a cry of fire between 1 and 2 oC looking out saw a house on fire near Whitehall – which soon spread rapidly that he saw Trinity Church take fire from the Sparks that fell on it,

Q. Where was you when you saw Trinity Church taken fire

A. I was on top of Mr Seabury's house in Smith Street.

Q. Which side of the Church first took fire

A. The South side on the roof

Q. What progress had the fire then made from Whitehall towards the Ch:

A. The fire had made its way up Broad St: nearly to Beaver St.

Q. What distance do you suppose is to be from Beaver St. to Trinity Ch:

A. I cannot tell it may exactly be measured.

Q.1. A. I did not

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Q.2nd. A – I did not

Q 3rd. A. No.

Q4.th A. Not to my knowledge

5th. A. I heard there were but do not know it

Q. 7th. A. The wind was fresh at S.W. when the fire began, and afterwards when the fire had nearly reached to Beaver Street shifted to S.

Q9. A. It was currently reported that several applications were made to Gen. Washington by the N. Eng'd. people to have NYork burnt, previous to the King's Troops taking possession of it

Q. Do you know what answer was given to these applications by Gen Washington

A. It was reported that G. Washington said in answer to them that he would severely punish any who attempted to set fire to the City

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Q10:th Many of the fire buckets and bags were taken from the Inhabitants of the City before the American Army evacuated it, but I do not know where they were carried.- The bell was also taken about the same time from Trinity Church and carried off.

Oct 27th

William Shipman Cashier in the (&) Paymaster Gen. office was sworn and examined and thereupon saith that towards sunsetting preceeding the night on which the great fire happened in Sept 1776 he walked by a small house*

*formerly the ferry house kept by one Johnson

upon the dock at Whitehall near the corner and saw there several Sailors women and others whom he supposed to be British some of whom were drunk, and a fire in the Chimney that he went home to bed and about 1o'C was alarmed with a cry of fire, that from what he had seen the preceeding Evening he suspected the fire was in the small house above mentioned and immediately went to it and found it was on fire and that no other house was at that time on fire.- that he then repaired to the Pay-office in the Broad way where Steven livery now

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Stand, where and near to which he remained during the Night – that he saw Trinity Church take fire from the Sparks and flakes of fire which fell upon it. –

Q. How long was it after you saw the small house on fire at Whitehall before you saw Trinity Ch. take fire?

A. It was some time, I think about two hours.

Q. Where was you when you saw the Church take fire

A. In the field behind Stevens Stables –

Q. What progress had the fire made from Whitehall towards Trinity Ch. when the Ch. took fire

A. It had reached up the Broad-way to the Lutheran Church the next building to Trinity Ch to the best of my recollection

Q. Which side of Trinity Ch first take fire

A. The South side in the Roof near the Steeple.-

Q. What materials were the Roof and Spire covered with

A. Shingles –

Q.1. I ever have and still do –

A. I suppose it the effect of accident

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from a small house at Whitehall, where I suppose it accidentally originated

Q 4th:

I saw matches after the fire which it was said were found in different parts of the City, which from the form of them I supposed to have been originally prepared for fire rafts

7th. The wind blew very fresh from the S.E. as I judged from the direction of the flakes, when the fire began and shifted more to the E. about the time Trinity Ch. took fire and continued to blow fresh

Jeronymus Alstine, Blacksmith was sworn and examined

Q. Had you the direction of any of the fire engines on the night of the great fire –

A. I had the direction of one.-

Q. Did any thing particular occur to retard or obstruct the playing of the Engine during the fire

A. The Key was twice put out of its place, which prevent the Engine

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From playing properly, but whether it was purposely done I do not know – there were very few firemen whose business it is to attend to that circumstance and keep the key in its proper place

Q. Did you see Trinity Ch: take fire and in what manner and at what time.

A. I saw it take fire in the roof and steeple on the S.W. Side from flakes of fire which fell upon them at what hour I do not recollect.

Q. What progress had the fire made when Trinity Ch. took fire

A. I think it had reached the Lutheran Ch. in the Broad Way and had passed Beaver Street in Broad Street.

Q.1. A. I can't form an opinion how it began*

* It might have been set on fire by the Americans as they burnt the barns and grain as they retreated on Long Island

But imagine it spread from the violence of the wind.

2nd. A. I never did

3. – No, but I have heard that the handles of the fire buckets were cut during the fire

4 – After the fire I with others appointed found several matches in Mr. (*Hallett's*) yard in Water Street, lying carelessly about, which

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We threw over the dock. –

6 – When I first saw the fire, it had reached from Whitehall nearly to the bridge in Dock St.

7 – The wind blew very fresh at S.E. in the beginning of the fire and about day light shifted to the W.

11 – Most of the bells were taken away and carried into the Country before the King's troops took possession of the City

The Board adjourned till (*II*) 1 o'Clock to morrow

Tuesday. 28th October The Board met pursuant to adjournment

A Duplicate of the letter written on the (then): 18th. (imF.) to Benjⁿ Marston and others of Shelburne at Port Roseway was written and forwarded

Alex^r. Bridges was sworn and examined.

Q.1. A. I always did

Q.2nd. I never did

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3. A. No

4. – A – I was in a house the day after the fire when I saw several Matches; - in this house on Cruger's Wharf formerly occupied by a Sail maker - the Americans were fitting Combustibles for fire-Ships some of which I supposed (*these*) matches to be.

Q. Were there any fire Ships or Vessels to your knowledge fitted out from this or any other wharf

A. I knew that that there were fire Vessels fitted out and I think from that Wharf upon this Wharf Centries were posted.

Q.5. A. I saw a man the morning after the fire, coming from Cruger's Wharf in custody, having a small Cask under his arm which it was said had powder in it and he had matches also under his arm.

–

6. A. The Corner of Whitehall

7. A. The wind blew fresh in the Night I think from the S.

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9. A. In the month of August I think the 30th: - the windows in the house where I lodged were broken by apples purposely thrown at them, upon enquiring the cause those who broke them answered – it did not signify any thing as they meant to burn the City; this my landlord told me: -

The Board adjourned to 11o'Clock to morrow

Wednesday 29th: Oct. The Board met pursuant to adjournment.

The Rev^d Charles Inglis D.D was sworn and examined and thereupon saith [via Narrative]

Q.1. I never did -

2. I never did

3. Nothing more than I have before related – I heard frequently that the Pumps were out of order

4. My information repeatedly

5. I heard there were some

6. – not more particularly than I have already done

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7. It blew fresh between S. and E. in the progress of the fire shifted more W.

8. No-

11. They were taken away and carried into the Country.

Q. Did you learn from Capt. Deveraux how the men who were left to burn the City escaped from it

A. I did not I never asked him

Q. Was there a battalion of Seamen in the American Service

A. I always understood there was a Battalion raised in the towns of Boston, Salem, and Mhd consisting principally of Seamen, a Battalion so described I frequently saw in the City

Q. Do you know anything of any order given to burn the Barns or Grain in Long Island

A - A few days before the British Troops landed on Long Island, I was at Flat Bush and saw Mr. (Wm) Duer Mr.(Sloss Nobart)and Mr. Cli De Witt, who said they were a Committee from the Provl Convention to go to Long Island and see the order of the Convention executed to burn the boats of the Inhab^{mt}. Along the shore and the Barns and Grain upon the Island – I heard Mr. Nobart reproving A m. Vanderbilt for not being more punctual in seeing this order executed

X

Ked? Mr. Benjamin Moore was then sworn and examined.- and thereupon saith that on the night of the great fire in NY. in Sept. 1776, he was alarmed with the cry of fire about 1 o’C that he immediately went upon the (*loja*) of the Rector’s house near Trinity Church, where he

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remained two hours. – that saw flakes of fire fall upon the Roof of Trinity Church and the building take fire from them, upon which he found it would be impossible to save the Rector’s house and quitted it, and went up the steeple of Trinity Church to endeavor to save his books which had been deposited there upon the Episcopal Clergy quitting the City upon the Declaration of Independence

Q. Were the Church doors open at that time or locked

A. I went in at the back Door under the Steeple, which I found unlock’d and open

Q. Was it usual to leave any of the Doors of the Ch. open

A. It was not –

Q. Who kept the Keys of the Ch and Belfry

A. The Sexton usually –

* Who was then Sexton of this Ch. and what was his character?

A – his name was Whaley he is since dead – his private character was very good – but he was generally supposed to be disaffected to the British government

Q. Did you find any person within the Ch. or Belfry or on the roof –

A. I did not.

Q. Did Trinity Ch. take fire before the Lutheran Ch.

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A. I did not see any fire on the Lutheran Ch. when Trinity Ch. took fire, but it might have taken fire on the South Side which I could not see, but there it could not have risen to any considerable height

Q.1. - - I did not

2. I never did

3. I do not

4. – I do not, but have heard various Reports of that kind

5. I saw a man about 9 o’C the next morn’g brought up the Broad Way a Prisoner, with a tub in his hand which it was said had combustibles in it – this man was rescued from the Violence of the Soldiers by an Officer and sent to the Provost. – There was at that time handed about a bundle of Matches which I had in my hand and it was said it was taken out of the tub

6 – No

7 – The wind in the beginning of the fire was about at S.E. moderate, but increased as the fire spread. And shifted to the S.W.

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8. No

9. No

10. No

11. Most of the Bells were removed to the Country.

12. It had reached as far as M Wm. Smith's house in the Broad way, which was near the Ch.-

Q. Did you see Sexton Whaley the Night of the fire or do you know where he was and how employed

A. I did not see him during the Night nor know where he was or how employed

Q. Was the Sexton suspected of having set fire to the Ch. or any other part of the City

A. He was not – he was apprehended the next morn'g upon being pointed out as a disaffected person, but released from his general good character. –

Mr. McIntyre Surgeon was then sworn and examined. And thereupon saith he was Surgeon of the 43rd Regt. At the time of the great

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Fire in New York in Sept. 1776 and came to the City on this night of the fire soon after that - regiment which was ordered in to assist in extinguishing the fire

Q.1. – I never did.-

2. – I never did.-

3. I do not

4. I do not – tho' it was generally reported so

5. On the night of the fire I saw a man made a Prisoner for having Matches concealed under his clothes, who was bro't to me – I saw the Matches about him, he was rescued from the violence of the Soldiers by an Officer and sent to the Provost.

6 – No –

7. – nothing

8. no

In the course of the Night I saw a man in New Street who struck an officer upon being ordered by him to assist in handing water to extinguish the fire, upon which I knock'd the man down, he then said If I would not (*unclaim ill*) he would shew me where

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there was a Rebel Officer, upon this I committed him to the charge of a guard, but I never heard anything further about him

Capt Cunningham Provost Marshall was the sworn and examined and thereupon saith that on the Night of the great fire in NY in Sept. 1776 he slept in the Provost was alarmed with a cry of fire at what hour he does not recollect that he immediately went to the loft of the house, and then saw a fire in five different places two near each other at Whitehall – one near New Street – and two back of General Robertson's house in the Broad way – before 12 o'Clock the next day above 200 Prisoners were sent to the Provost on suspicion being concerned in setting fire to the City.

Q Of what description were the Prisoners and were any of them dress'd like Seamen

A. They were of various descriptions and many of them dress'd like Seamen

Did any of these Seamen prove to belong to the British Men of War or transports

No. vid. post the 9(cnt) – Questions X

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1. No.
2. No
3. No – I heard so – and Prisoners were sent to the Provost charged with cutting the handles of fire buckets. –
4. No – It was so generally reported
5. No – Matches and other Combustibles were sent to the Provost with many of the Prisoners wh were said to have been found upon them, which they did not deny, but said they were removing them from the places where they lived
6. No
7. Don't know
- 8 – No
9. No.
10. No
11. Don't know
- 12 Don't know.

X Q. Did any of the Prisoners sent to the Provost confess that they were concerned with setting fire to the City

A. They all denied their being any way concerned in it

Q. Were any (*Crimes*) sent with these prisoners

A. No. I received an order from head quarters to receive all Prisoners that should be sent during the fire

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Q. Were any of the Prisoners (*bict*) to trial

A. There was an examination of the Prisoners soon after the fire, Gen. Robertson and others in the Provost, upon which all but a few not more than 6 were dismiss'd – I do not know whether any of them were brought to trial, as I was ordered out to the head qu Appendix Supplement to Part One:ers of this army

Q. Can you furnish this board with a list of these Prisoners

A. I cannot as all my papers were lost on my passage to Charlestown in the ship Swan in the year 1780

The Board adjourned till 11 oClock to morrow

(page 52) Thursday 30th Oct. 1783

The Board met pursuant to Adjournment.

Mr. Isaac Stoutenburgh a member of the Provincial Congress for New York in 1776 was examined

Q. Was it ever proposed to or debated in the Provincial Congress of which you was a member, to burn or destroy the City of New York as a measure of policy or expediency?

A. It never was to my knowledge, I was not present from the Month of July 1776 to the Month of March 1777 exclusive, but perused most of the Journal of their transactions during that period and found nothing of the kind referred to in the Question

Q. Do you know the object of the late M. Gen Lee's March thro' Connecticut to this City in the Spring of the Year 1776.

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A. I suppose it to have been to fortify the City

Q. Was any letter or message sent him from the Congress of which you was a member to General Lee on that occasion either to hasten or retard his March

A. I was not a member of the Provincial Congress, till after General Lee's arrival in the City, but I never heard of any such letter or message

Q. Was there a Committee sent from the Continental Congress to the Provincial Congress of New York about that time

A. I do not recollect any with certainty.

Q. Was it ever reported during Gen. Lee's March to this City from New England, that he was coming to burn or destroy New York.

A. It never was to my knowledge

Q. Do you think the Provincial Congress for New York was acquainted with General Lee's
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orders or intentions on that occasion

A. I believe not; - as on many occasions the Prov. Congress was under the necessity of applying to him to know his intentions in particular instances and very rarely had the satisfaction of obtaining the information they wished.

General Lee was not a welcome character at New York at that time as there was some reason to expect a reconciliation with Great Britain, to which the military preparations he was making were by no means favorable.

Q. Have you ever heard at any time since the fire in NY in Sept 1776 heard that the City was at that time set on fire by direction of any authority whatever in the United States or of any officer in the American army or at Paulus hook at that time or by any and what other order or direction?

A. I never heard that the City of NYork was
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set on fire at that time by any order or direction whatever

Q.1. I always did. -

2. Do you know of the fire buckets collected from private families in the City of New York or of the Lamps being taken down at any time previous to the fire

A. The fire buckets were collected previous to the American troops leaving the City, and deposited in City Hall as I have been since informed, for the purpose of being ready in case of fire. I know nothing of the Lamps being taken down

Q. Did the Inhabitants of the City of New York remove their families and effects from the City by order from Gen Lee or the Prov. Congress?

A. They did not, but of their own accord;

Q. Did they remove them from apprehension of the City being to be burnt or plundered by any and what persons?

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A. Not from particular apprehensions of that kind, but from the fear of the General Calamities of war, as they expected the City would be invested and bombarded.

John Alstyn was then sworn and examined and thereupon saith that he was not in the City of NY. at the time of the great fire but at the Wallebaught on Long Island, that all he know, of its being accidental or designed he collected from Intelligence he received previous to the fire. - that a day or two before the British troops first cross'd from Staten island in that year, he was at the house of one (*Remsan and Cripple bush*) on Long Island that while he was there Theodore Polhemus a member of the Provincial Congress then sitting at Haerlem on York Island came and among other things said, that it had been just then

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resolved in the Prov'l Congress from which he had just come that as soon as the British Troops (pd.) land on Long Island the Americans were to lay everything waste and retreat to the City, that if British

took possession of the City that was also to be laid waste; the Deponent further saith that he believes the burning which took place on Long Island from the Narrows to Brooklyn upon the landing of the Brit Troops and the burning the City of NY in Sept. following was in pursuance of that Resolution of the Prov. Congress – that he is confirmed in the idea from having seen this Mr. Polhemus in NYork a short time before the fire a Prisoner on parole on Long Island, who then said to the Deponent, “he hoped the City would not be burn’d now.” which (*apprehension*) the Deponent supposed was occasioned by his fear of the former conversation operating to his disadvantage being a prisoner, and replied to him “No thanks to you.”

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Q. What became of Mr. Polhemus

A. He is since dead.

John Burns was then sworn and examined

Q.6. The fire broke out at a small house at Whitehall, formerly the ferry house kept by one Johnson, this house I saw on fire and no other house at that time, from this house the fire soon spread rapidly –

Q7. The wind blew very fresh when the fire was at its height afterwards a small rain came on – I do not know in what direction the wind blew

Q1. I never did – but that it was designed. –

For what reason

A. Because it was generally said before the King’s Troops took possession of the City, that it would be set on fire – many people of property in the City said they had rather see their homes burned than the king’s troops in possession of them. – And because I saw many persons lurking about Soldiers Sailors and others

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this City before and at the time of the fire who belonged to the American Army – Many of them taken up and confined immediately upon the British Troops taking possession of the City. – I particularly remember that one Ab. Vandyke a Captain of the Grenadiers in the American Service was found on the Morning of the fire hid in Leary’s stables in a Street leading to the North River of the Same Name, I saw him taken out of those Stables, when I was assisting in pulling them down to stop the progress of the fire. – I also observed that the fire broke out in many different places distant from each other at the same time

Q. 2nd. I never did. –

3rd. I had the command of a fire engine during the fire and found most of the pumps much out of order, the handles and spears broke and taken out. The (*pionisks*) supply of water was from the East River and private Wells and Cisterns.

4. I saw them in great quantities in many parts of the City before the fire – particularly Dock Street New Street and Broad Street concealed in different parts of the houses which I searched being one of the Persons appointed for that purpose, all that we found were sent to City hall.

5. No –

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Q.8. Nothing

Q.10. Nothing

Q. What progress had the fire made when Trinity Ch. took fire

A. It had reach’d as far a Steven’ house in the Broad Way

Q. Which was on fire first the Lutheran or Trinity Ch.

A. Trinity Ch.

The Board adjourned to 11 o’Clock to Morrow Friday 31st – Oct

The Board met pursuant to Adjournment

Capt. George Tripp Commanding his Majesty's Ship the Dolphin was sworn and being examined saith – that on the Night of the great fire in the City of NYork in Sept 1776, he being then a midshipman on board his Majesty's Ship the Eagle, had the Watch upon Deck, that between the hours of 8 and 12 about 10 as near as he can recollect

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He saw the fire break out suddenly in two or three places distant from each other nearly at the same time that it did not appear to him that the fire could have been communicated from one to the other, but that they broke out independent of each other – that he very soon afterwards saw Trinity Church on fire

Q. Where did the Eagle lay

A. Abreast of Governor's Island between that and Oyster Island

Q. Did the Admiral at that time permit any Seamen or Marines belonging to the fleet to go on Shore by day or night upon leave.

A. Not to my knowledge*

*The Marines of the fleet were ordered on Shore as soon as it was found that the Rebel Troops had quitted the City to prevent any plunder or depredation till the Army should march in.

Q. Were not all the Boats belonging to his Majesty's Ships ordered from the Shore before Sunset at that time.

A. It was a general order – excepting only particular service

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Q 2nd. No I always understood that the city was designedly set on fire by the Americans.

Brig. Genl. Clarke was sworn and examined (--) saith that on the day the British troops took possession of the City of NYork in the month of Sept 1776 he came into the City with the 54th Regt. that in going this the City in order to point out proper places for Guards and Centries to be posted for the security of the City, he heard cry of fire in a small Street leading from Water Street to the East River near the Fly Market, which was immediately extinguished that there was every appearance of the house being purposely set on fire, as he discovered the marks of a train powder as he thought; which by being set fire to, had fired the house, that at that time he had no doubt this house was designedly set on fire, that this house was a small Wooden

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building in a narrow street with many other wooden buildings about it. – that he was in Camp near the City on the night of the great fire and upon the alarm came immediately into the City where he remained for the greatest part of the fire, that from all the observations he could make he was convinced that the City was designedly set on fire

Q. Do you think Trinity Ch was set on fire or took fire accidentally

A. I think by accident from observing the Roof take fire in two or three places where I saw flakes of fire fall.

The Board adjourned to Monday 11 o'Clock

Monday. 3rd. Nov. The Board met pursuant to adjournment.-

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Samuel Bayard Sen. Was sworn and examined. –

That for some time about three weeks before the King's Troops possession of the City of New York in the month of Sept. 1776. – It was generally and publicly threatened by the People in the City that it should be burned whenever the King's Troops took possession of it, that about ten days before they took possession of it one Joseph Smith an inhabitant of the City and intimate acquaintance of the

Deponent, said to the Deponent, that rather than the King's Troops get possession of the City, he Smith would himself set fire to the Deponent's house – that on the day the King's Troops landed at Kipp's Bay on Long Island one Capt. (*Bowman*) a Capt. Of Artillery in the American Service passing by the Deponent with his Company marching out

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of the City, said to the Deponent – take care of yourself the City will certainly be set on fire and further said that one or two of the houses on Pearl street had the night before been set on fire, that he Bowman had put it out and with a great part of his Company were under the (*necessity*) of being up the greatest part of the night to prevent one Capt. Forster's Company from setting the City on fire who intended to have effected it that night. That on the night of the great fire in this City in the month of Sept. that year the Deponent was up on top of his own house in Broad way, upon which the Sparks were falling from the houses on fire the wind being in that direction – the nearest house then on fire being about 100 yards dist^t. That he did not conceive his house to be in great danger from the Sparks falling on it – that the house next to the Deponent's belonging to one Brookman who had left the City was a wooden building the side of which was about ten inches (*of*) distant

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from the Deponent's house, that both their houses were three stories high and that between them the sides of Gutters so near that nothing could pass between the two houses unless below the roof, that the Deponent went below, when opening the door of a middle room in his own house on the ground floor between the front and back parlor he saw (*thru/there*) a window, the house next to him on fire in the lower part of it there being no fire then in the upper part of either of these houses, that he doth not think that the fire was accidental as he doth not believe that any Sparks could have fallen between the two houses to set fire to the lower part of them. – that the Deponent's house was in a very short time in flames below when no fire had yet caught the top of it – that a Company of American Artillery had been quartered in Brookma(*is*) house as a Barrack, that it had

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been very common for them Soldiers of (*fastin*) Company to have quantities (*jrost*) fires as the Deponent was informed and the Deponent imagines the house next to him...that the house next to him had remained empty and open from the time the Brit. Troops took possession of the City to the time of the fire...must have been designedly set fire to in the manner before mentioned by some of these (*Port*) fires or in some such way

New list of Questions

1. The fire began at Whitehall
2. The wind was very violent I believe at S.E.
3. I do not
4. I never did
5. I never did
6. The American Soldiers made use of the (*fire*) here (*but*) for their common purposes before the King's troops took possession of the City and left them carelessly about in such a way that many of them must have been destroyed.
7. A short time after the fire upon searching some houses with Col. Wm. Bayard I saw a number of matches deposited under a flight of wooden steps leading into a house in little Dock Street.

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8. No.
9. No.
10. Yes they were taken away
11. No.
12. No

13. Already answered

14. I saw two or three return to the City who were prevented from getting off by the landing of the British Troops – An officer named Van Dyke was said to have returned and I believe on the same account.

The Board adjourned to Wednesday 11 o’Clock

Wednesday 5th Oct.

William Ellsworth was sworn and examined and thereupon saith that about ten days before the fire in NY in Sept 1776 he retired from the City into the Country with his Effects

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That he had been for several years before this time employed as a fireman to attend and manage the fire engines in the City that in the course of the Summer of 1776 he with two or three others were directed by a Committee which he believes was approved by order of the Prov. Congress, to open and search of the houses as had been vacated by Inhabitants leaving the City, and collect from these houses all the fire buckets that could be found, that he with others accordingly pick’d the locks on the Doors of such of the houses as they found vacated and (*loclin*) up and took from them all the fire buckets they could find and collected and hung them up in City hall, that they might be come at in case a fire should happen in the City. – that in many of these houses they found the fire buckets secreted in different places.

Q. Did these buckets remain hung up in the City hall at the time you left the City

A. To the best of my knowledge they did

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Q.3. – Answer – I never did, except that several individuals said they would sooner set fire to their own houses than leave them for the use of B. Troops

Q. Were any of these individuals in the City at the time of the fire

A. I believe not.

Q. Were any fire buckets collected by you or the others employed in that Service with you, from any houses in which any Inhabitants remained.

A. There were not. – (*sk*)

Peter (*Biliter*) was then sworn and examined

1. I cannot

2. I don’t recollect

3. I don’t know

4. – I always supposed the City was designedly set on fire

5. I do not

6. No

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7. I was up late on the night of the fire working in my father’s house in the Fly Market – in the Evening and heard a man walking upon the Shop (*board*) outside the Window and saw his Eyes looking thro the holes made in the Window Shutter outside the Window – I immediately went to the Door, but the man had gone off. – in the morning I found some bundles of matches under the same window, which I then thought had been put there by the Man I saw looking thro’ the Window Shutter, with design to set fire to the house

Q. Did you observe any marks of fire outside the Window or any appearance of the Matches having been set fir to.

A. I did not

The Board adjourned to Friday . 7th . 12 oClock

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Friday, 7th. Nov. The Board met pursuant to adjournment

Mr. James Wells was sworn and examined That he lives in his own house in little Dock Street in the City of New York. In Sept 1776. That he was alarmed by his Dog who was a very watchful Animal, endeavouring to pull him out of his bed between 11 and 12 o’C on the night of the fire as nearly as he can recollect – that convinced something extraordinary was the matter he immediately got up and went out and ran towards White-hall, where he got within 60 yards of which heard a noise to which he directed his Course and soon after perceived a small store-house next to the Corner house, to be on fire on the inside, the fire having just then taken the boards which formed one of the sides of the house, that the fire was then small that with a little assistance he could have extinguished it, that it very soon spread so rapidly that all efforts to put it out were in vain.

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Q. Had this fire the appearance of being designed or accidental and were there any matches or combustibles in the house. –

Answer – It appeared to me to be accidental, The Day after the fire I saw a woman named Lynch who informed me that in the Evening preceeding the fire,*

*upon her arrival in the City from Staten Island

she found in her house, which was three doors from the house first on fire an old man and two women whom she supposed to have been left behind belonging to the American Army they appeared to be drinking and would not quit her house upon which she applied to Gen. Robertson who sent down an orderly man that turned them out, That they remained drinking between two piles of board near her house till about 9 o’Clock when they went into this small house with a candle. from this information I suppose that this house caught fire by this man and the two women being drunk carelessly burning the candle I saw no matches or Combustibles in the house, there was a barrel with bottles in it burnt almost to the bottom

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Q. _ Was this small house the first that was on fire and was then no other house or place on fire when you first saw that on fire

A. I perceived no other house or place on fire at that time I saw the fire communicated from the house to the adjoining building

2nd. The wind blew about S. and was very light in the beginning of the fire, soon after which it shifted to S.E. and blew fresh and rained

3rd. It had reached about one third part of the way from Whitehall as mainly I could judge

4th. I always did

5. I never did

6. I do not

7th: Within two or three days after the fire I was directed by Gen. Robertson to take with me some other persons and search the houses in the City for Combustibles. We found in the Chamber in the second story in a house in on the east side of broad Street between Princes Street and Garden Street a bundle of matches weighing 60 (#D) – a woman in the house said they were made for privateering use and that they had sold about 100 (#D)- We left these matches wound them and reported the circumstances to Gen. Robertson.

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During the fire I saw a man shabbily dressed with a barrel of Powder lashed on his shoulder in the custody of some Sailors – the Sailors said that they had lashed it on him because they had found him in a cellar with it – I rescued this man from them and delivered him to Col. (Shirrest).

Q. What became of this man

A. I don’t know but suppose Col. (Shirrest) ordered him to be confined

9. _ I had been absent from the City 8 months and returned 3 Days before the fire, when I found my own buckets at home in their proper place – I know nothing about any others. A Captain of the American Army had been in possession of my house as a barracks with a number of soldiers and took great care of it.

10 I do not know

11 – no

12 – no –

13 - It had been frequently threatened by the lower class of people before I quitted the City.

14 I do not

Q. In what part of little Dock St. did you then live

A. Near Coenties Dock

Q. How far was this from the house wh first caught fire?

A. About 160 yards

Q. Did you hear a cry of fire when you first went out on the night of the fire

A. I do not remember any

Q. How came you to direct your course towards Whitehall

A. There possibly might be a voice calling out fire, but I do not recollect it – or whther it was not altogether accidental.

Q. Did you perceive any persons endeavoring to extinguish the fire within side the small house when you first entered it.

A. I did not

Q. Were any persons in the house

A. There were none

Q. Did you find any person at that time there that mentioned how the fire originated

A. I did not, - all the information I rec'd about it was from the woman I have mentioned

Q. Were there any persons near the small house on fire when you first arrived at it

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A. There were several about the house

Q. Could not these persons have extinguished the fire at that time had they exerted themselves

A. Undoubtedly they could

Q. Were they disinclined to it

A. – I don't know who they were I went in at the back door wh. Was open – these persons were in front of the house and the door between shut

Q. Was any person in the house on fire with you

A. Nobody but Cap. T. W. (*Moore*) who entered soon after (*and*) the same door.

Q. Was the small house on fire adjoining to the Ferry House

A. The house on fire was rather a shed communicating with the ferry house on one side and (*Hilyard's*) tavern on the other both of which were wooden buildings

Q. Which side of the house did you first see on fire

A. The East side next to (*Hilyard's*) tavern.

Q. From your observation during the fire do you think it was increased or the extinguishing it obstructed by the behavior

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of any persons then in the City

A. I do not

Q. To what cause do you suppose it owing that so great a part of the City was burnt

A. – Because most of the firemen were absent from the City – the People present at the fire mostly strangers unacquainted with the business, and the rapidity of the flames very great.

Q. Do you mean to remain in the City after the British Forces leave it

A. I do –

The Board adjourned to Monday 12 o’Clock

Monday 10th Nov: The Board met pursuant to adjournment

Lee Ashton a Private Soldier in the 43rd Regt. was sworn and examined. And saith that on the night of the fire he was in the encampment with his Regt. near (*Lispenard’s*) brewery about a mile from the City

(On the left side of page 78, normally left blank except for annotations and side notes, is a testimony dated 10th. Nov. by a Mrs. Lynch. It appears as though it is ‘regular’ testimony recorded in the same hand and in the same style as all of the other pages. However, the entire testimony has several large marks extended through the page as though to cross out or otherwise disregard it. Since the testimony is still as legible as other testimony here it is transcribed below. However, on the left side of page 79 there is a long recapitulation by the Board that explains why they have chosen to disregard the testimony of Mrs. Lynch. So here is Mrs. Lynch and the recapitulation that follows.)

10th. Nov. (*page 78 left hand side crossed out*)

Mrs. Lynch the woman refer’d to in Mr. Well’s testimony, now Mrs. McDonald, was sworn and examined and saith the she arrived from Staten Island about 3 o’Clock in the afternoon preceeding the fire that she found in her house (*at*) was next door to Hilyard’s Tavern two men and two women, who would not quit the house that she applied immediately to Gen Robertson to get them turned out, that Gen. Robertson sent down an orderly Sargeant immediately who turn’d these two men and two women out of her house that she does not know what became of them, nor who they were –

Q. Did these men appear to be soldiers and how were they dressed- and who did you suppose them to be -

A. They appeared to be Soldiers had no coats on and had Bayonets round their waists –

Q. Had they white Belts

A. I don’t recollect

Q. Had these men and women or either of them anything with them to drink and were either of them drinking. –

A. Neither of them were drinking or had anything to drink and all of them appeared to be sober

Q. At what hour did they leave your house?

A. About half after two to the best of my recollection

(left hand side of page 79...the recapitulation)

Mrs Lynch the Woman refer’d to in Mr. Well’s testimony being summoned attended and was sworn, And thereupon denied that she had ever had the conversation which Mr. Well’s referred to, upon a strict examination of more than two hours, it appeared to the board she was an ignorant forgetful incoherent woman in her account of the transactions at the time of the fire – Mr. Wells was again sent for and confronted with the woman, he appeared to be perfect in his recollection of the conversation he had with her at the time refer’d to in his testimony, and further saith that at that time she appeared to him to give an accurate relation of the circumstances mentioned in his testimony, which appeared to him (*as*) natural and true from all the observations he made himself at the time

(page 79 right hand side...the continuation of Ashton’s testimony)

That he came into the City upon an alarm of fire with the Reg. which was ordered in to assist I extinguishing the fire

1. I don't know

2. The wind was very high

3. The Ch. was on fire when we got into the City

4. I did not

5. I did not

6. I saw a man in a short brown jacket just by the Oswego market in the broad way, standing in the (*pnack*) that was formed for handing the buckets – I saw this man with a knife in his hand cut the handles of the buckets as they were handed to him when returned empty I stood opposite to him handing the full buckets upon seeing this I took the knife from the man and informed an officer of the circumstance who ordered the man to the Provost

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8 – I saw a man who appeared to be advanced in years of short stature near the Oswego market in the broad way, who had a bundle of matches slung upon his back secreted under a large brown outer Coat. – I seized this man and with another person who had blue facings push'd him into the flames whether he was burnt to death or escaped I do not know. –

The Board adjourned to Wednesday 12th: 11 oClock

Wednesday 12th. Nov. The Board met pursuant to adjournment

John (*Grundy*) a Private in the 43rd Reg. (vid appendix p.19.) was sworn and examined and thereupon saith that at the time the time the fire broke out in NY in Sept. 1776 between 12 and 1 oClock as nearly as he can recollect

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He was Centry at the City hall, that he saw the fire break out near the Exchange to the right, that after he was relieved, between two and thrice o'C to the best of his recollection, he was sent with a man whom he took to be an Inhab't of the City to observe and detect any persons they might find setting fire to any part of the City*

*that he with an (*Sheridan?*) of the same Regt. and this person whom he supposed to be an inhabitant went accordingly and he heard a cry of Soldiers, Soldiers there is a man setting fire to the town, seize him, that upon this he rushed ~~thro the Crowd~~

that near the Exchange he saw a man with a burning torch in his hand holding it up against the Roof of a shed that he immediately pressed forward to seize him when he fled towards the fly market, that the Deponent pursued him and found him near the fly market in a boat offering 2 Dollars for an Oar that he immediately seized him and found he had a wallett made of canvas in his hand with pewter in it as he supposes by the noise it made and (*backing*) the outside of the Wallett, that he immediately carried this man to the main Guard

(*page 82*)

That about a fortnight afterwards he was ordered to go to the Provost and see if he could find this man there, that he accordingly went and saw the same whom he recollected perfectly That he attended several days at a General Court martial then sitting but was never called upon to give any evidence to the Court respecting him

Q. Are you positive that you saw the man in the very act of setting fire to the Shed

A. I am.

Q. Where did you apprehend this man

A. Below the fly market in a dock by the side of a Wharf

Q. Did you pursue this man closely?

A. Yes pretty close

Q. Why was he not sooner taken

A – I don't know.

Q. Are you certain the man you took in the

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boat was the same setting fire to the shed.

A. I knew him to be the same by a white Cap which he had on

6 – I saw many buckets a day or two after the fire in the Guard house cut to pieces –

7. – Many combustibles were brought to the Guard house after the fire. –

Q. Did you yourself seize the man

A. I did,

Q. Did you hear the man offering money for an Oar

A. No – the crowd about the place, cried out that he was offering two Dollars for an Oar

Q. Was the pewter in a Wallett (*Haversack*) or a (*blanket*)

A. It was in a canvas Wallett

John Cochran Private 43rd Reg. was sworn and ex.^d

8 – I saw a man with a bunch

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Of matches under his arm during the fire near Gen. Robertson's house in the broad way. I was sent by Cap. McLean to seize him which with other soldiers I did and carried him to the Provost

Q. Can you describe this man

A. He was a short old man with a brown (*Justirit*) Coat and a round hat and was a (*Nirte Baiton*)

Q. Did he attempt to escape

A – He did.

George Kerr a private in the 43rd was sworn and examined

7. I saw a house in back of St Paul's Church five men and a woman – and in a cupboard in the same room a Kegg holding about 5 Gall with the (*'reccd*) on full of gun powder and a bundle of matches near it, I seized the men, when the woman cried and offered me money to let them

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go, I took the money and (*carr*) the 5 men the Powder and matches to the Provost

Q. Was there a fire or Candle in the same room

A – There were both fire and candl

Q. Did you make any enquiry about the Powder and Matches and what account was given of them

A. I did and was told it had been usual to have them there before the war.

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Serjt. Norton (*Scy*). 43rd.

11. I saw a small house in Chatham Row on fire in the Shingles upon the Roof after day light – I with others went into the house and into the Garret when I saw some matches – there was no appearance of fire inside the roof – the fire upon the outside was soon extinguished

The Board adjourned to 11 OClock to morrow

