

WILLIAM COOPER

William Cooper, Rev. Samuel Cooper's older brother, apparently was more a man of action than a man of education. He early chose to go into trade rather than continue at Boston Latin and prepare for Harvard. His main "claim to fame" was his service as Boston town clerk from 1761 until his death in 1809. William Cooper also served as editor and compiler of the Journal of the Times, based on material published in the New York Journal starting in the fall of 1768, but with a distinct Boston slant when it appeared in the Evening Post. William became a member of the House of Representatives in the Massachusetts provisional government in 1775, and even was chosen speaker pro tempore.

Cooper married Katherine Wendell, daughter of a prosperous, powerful Boston merchant, in 1745, and they had seventeen children. Although records are scarce, it appears that William was close to his more famous brother. His brother was his pastor; Samuel baptized all his children, including two Samuels. It is not surprising that Esther Forbes has Samuel Cooper deliver the message to his brother about the meeting of the Boston Observers in Johnny Tremain. Both brothers were close to John Hancock, who attended the same church and went to many of the same political meetings they did, as part of the town and provincial government, as well as the Committee of Correspondence, and, of course, the Long Room Club. William supported John Hancock when Hancock and Sam Adams had a "falling out" in 1781.

Sources that were actually written by William Cooper are rare indeed. His signature, however, always appears on documents for the Town of Boston, as well as the Committee of Correspondence.

William Cooper, Diary, 1764-1765 [excerpts]

[The following are three selections from William Cooper's diary. The first selection, from September 8, 1765, addresses the fact that Cooper is too involved in public affairs, and needs to think more on heavenly things. The second is a reflection on his 43rd birthday.

The third selection is a New Year's reflection for 1765, which happens to also fall on a Sabbath.]

October 12th. [1764] I am this Day 43 years of Age and would in sincerity of soul bless my good & gracious God for the Mercys of another year; at the same time lamenting the sins and follys I have been guilty of in the course of it — I fly to the rich atonement of my Saviors Blood, and would lay my guilty Soul at his Feet, adopting the prayer of the Publican, O that I could make it in his Spirit — God be merciful to me a Sinner.— I bless God for what I enjoy in Life, and would not overlook any of his kind dealings — from the comfortable Experience of his goodness the past and former years; not withstanding

he has at times been chastening of me, & some difficulty of a temporal nature still remain, I must say; It is good to pray to him; good to resign ourselves & all our affairs into his Hand, I desire still to in the way of duty, to hope in his Mercy [. . .]

1765

January 6th. Upon this first Sabbath of a new Year I have had health of Body to attend the publick Worship, and the privilege of setting down at the Table of the Lord — Numbers even at our Church have had their Days numbered & finished in the past year, and are now no more seen to come and go from the place of the holy here below; but are gone down to the silent Grave; their time of tryal is ended, ad they are now fixed in an Eternal State; O my Soul as it has happened to them so it might have happened or been ordered out to me, but the day of life is yet lengthed out may it also be a Day of Grace to me, that so I may know & experience on this my day the Signs of my peace, that they may not at last be hidden from my Eyes — I have again avouched the Lord to be my God, my God is covenant and sealed my engagements to be his at the holy Table. I would distrust my own strength to perform my part of the conditions of it, and earnestly look to the dear Jesus for strength to enable me to be faithful and sincere to my Engagements, as well as for such Righteousness to cover my defects and render me amicable in his sight [. . .]

September 8 [1765] The Face of publick affairs is such as occasions much axiety to the true Friend of Liberty [*illegible*] & Religious — the last Evening & this morning I have the right and talk too much upon this. O that I would raise my thoughts from Earth to Heaven and that my hopes & fears were exercised about spiritual & Eternal Things, rather than more of Time and Sense — It is a difficult thing to keep the Line of duty at such a seaon as the present, — to discus a good cause thus: fear & a love of ease softly betrays a meanness and leariness of mind, to support it in ways not Justifiable by reason and Religion, is wrong & productive of individuals & the publick — Lord send out thy Light & thy truth to lead & conduct thy Israel in the way wherein they ought at this Day to go, and to teach the what they ought to do. And as thou were the God of our Fathers, & often appeared for them; Be thus their Childrens God & grant deliverance to us in every Time of trouble & difficulty — Mr. Elliot Delivered a various good discourse in the Morning from those words “Be ye filled with the Spirit” — Brother preach’d a very good Sermon in the afternoon from those words, “For great is your reward in Heaven.” [. . .]

William Cooper, Diary, 12 October 1764, 6 January 1765, 8 September 1765, William Cooper diary, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Broadside, *The Committee of Correspondence of the Town of Boston . . .*, 22 June 1773

As Town Clerk, William Cooper prepared many documents at the instruction of the Town of Boston. This selection is a letter written on behalf of the Boston Committee of Correspondence to be distributed to committees or selectmen in other towns throughout Massachusetts.

Boston, June 22nd, 1773

Sir,

The Committee of Correspondence of the Town of Boston, conformable to that Duty which they have hitherto endeavoured to discharge with Fidelity, again address you with a very fortunate Important Discovery; and cannot but express their grateful Sentiments in having obtained the Approbation of so large a Majority of the Towns in this Colony, for their past Attention to the general Interest.

A more extraordinary Occurrence possibly never yet took Place in America; the Providential Care of that gracious Being who conducted the early Settlers of this Country to establish a safe Retreat from Tyranny for themselves and their Posterity in America, has again wonderfully interposed to bring to Light the Plot that had been laid for us by our malicious and insidious Enemies.

Our present Governor has been exerting himself (as the honorable House of Assembly have expressed themselves in their late Resolves) “by his secret confidential Correspondence, to introduce Measures destructive of our constitutional Liberty, while he has practiced every method among the People of this Province, to fix in their Minds an exalted Opinion of his warmest Affection for them, and his unremitting Endeavours to promote their best Interest at the Court of Great Britain.” This will abundantly appear by the Letters and Resolves which we herewith transmit to you; the serious Perusal of which will shew you your present most dangerous Situation. This Period calls for the strictest Concurrence in Sentiment and Action of every individual of this Province, and we may add, of THIS CONTINENT; all private Views should be annihilated, and the Good of the Whole should be the single Object of our Pursuit— “By uniting we stand,” and shall be able to defeat the Invaders and Violaters of our Rights.

We are,

Your Friends and Humble Servants,

Signed by Direction of the Committee for Correspondence in Boston,

[signed] William Cooper, Town-Clerk.

To the Town Clerk of _____, to be immediately
Delivered to the Committee of Correspondence for your Town,
if such a Committee is chosen, otherwise to the Gentlemen the
Selectmen, to be communicated to the Town.

Boston Committee of Correspondence, “Sir, the Committee of correspondence of the town of Boston . . . “ (Boston, 1773).

Letter from Thomas Cushing to William Cooper, 23 October 1775

Philadelphia Oct. 23, 1775

Dear Sir

I received yours of the 24th September on the 21st Instant & not before, what has delayed its passage here I cannot say— I wrote you the beginning of this month but have not as yet been favoured with an answer— Wish our Freinds would write us more frequently— I am obliged to you for the Enquiry you made at Dedham for a House for me, should be glad to govern my self by the opinion of the county as to the place of Holding the Probate, provided at this difficult time I can be accommodated with such a place as will be agreeable to them— If I had been so happy as to have seen you before I left Watertown, I doubt whether it would have been proper for me to have signed any blank Letters of Administration or Letters of Guardianship Bonds, before I had my Commission and more than a month before by law I could have entered upon the discharge of the office I was appointed to, for, if you will recollect, you will find, that, by the law that was made by the General Court upon this occasion, none of the new appointments were to take place till after the 20 of September last, this matter I considered before I left Watertown or else should certainly have seen you previous to my departure and have signed the Papers you mention, which I am sensible, could it have been done with any Propriety, would have been for the ease of the County—

I am much surprised that any Persons among us should just now think of dividing the County, especially at this very critical time when we have so many other matters of the greatest magnitude to engage our attention; such a thing was never attempted in any other County without first notifying every Town in the County of such an Intention, can the Inhabitants of the Bostons (the Shire Town & whose Interest it so nearly affects) in their present distressed dispersed state attend to a Question of such Moment[?], certainly not, & will the Inhabitants of the other Towns in the County take the advantage of this their distress? & if they would, will the General Court attend to them at such a time? Certainly not.

Whenever a Bill for determining what offices are incomptable with each other shall be brought into the House, I hope it will be considered with great attention and due deliberation, There are many difficulties attending such a measure which at first Veiw may not be thought of— I hope we shall not run from one Extream to another— I sincerely wish the Court may be directed to such a Conduct as may tend Effectually to Strengthen our happy Constitution & be for the lasting benefit of the Government—

I am Glad to find General Washington is fitting out some Vessells of War, this is a necessary measure as our Enemies are dayly pirating our Vessells. I have frequently urged it here, as to the Establishment of Courts of Admiralty, that will come on of Course, but it will not do to urge it here at present.

I cannot as yet form any judgment when I shall be able to return, many Interesting and important matters demand my attention & presence here, as therefore I shall be necessarily detained here for some time, I have no objection that, during my absence, you should take Guardian and Administration Bonds, in particular cases where you may find it necessary, and I doubt not you will take special care & caution that in all such cases the Bondsmen are good & sufficient— Let me know whether it is necessary for me to return

home immediately: Our Late President Mr. Randolph dyed yesterday of the Palsy, he is to be buried tomorrow, he was a worthy Character, he was sensible, a Gentleman of an even Temper and of sound Judgement; he dyed engaged in a good Cause— My Friend, Let us follow his example, Let us persevere in ~~it~~ supporting this good Cause, Let us act with Zeal not Rashness, let no attachment of Persons, Parties or of actions lead us from the Path of Duty. but let us be Calm, firm, steady & unwearied in our Endeavors to serve our Country, in this way Heaven will smile upon our exertions & I doubt not the Good Lord will Send us glorious Deliverance—

I congratulate you upon your late promotion as Speaker, [*torn*] my Friend is honoured & meets with the approbation of his Countrym[en] I partake of the pleasure & am always highly gratified

I conclude D[ea]r Sir with the greatest Esteem & [*torn*]

Y[ou]r Freind and serv[an]t,

Tho[mas] Cushing

Thomas Cushing to William Cooper, 23 October 1775, Miscellaneous Bound Manuscripts, Massachusetts Historical Society.

