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Testimony of Aaron Briggs, 1772

Aaron Briggs, an indentured servant living on Prudence Island, was about 16 years old when the Gaspee attack took place. In early July, Aaron left his master and came aboard a British ship called the Beaver. There, under threat of hanging, he gave an account of the event that named several suspects. This account was given to Governor Wanton who was encouraged to arrest the men Aaron named.

Aaron, a negro man, has declared that he rowed from Prudence, the evening his Majesty's schooner Gaspee was burnt, towards Warren, where he met a man called Potter, of Bristol, in a rowing boat, with eight men, armed with pistols, guns, and clubs; the said Potter desired him to go with him. In consequence of Potter's desire, I rowed by his boat until I came within a quarter of a mile of the King's schooner, that was on shore on a spit of sand. I then got into Potter's boat by his desire; he told me with others, that he was to join other boats that was coming down from Providence, in order to burn the King's schooner that lay on shore. In about half an hour after, we joined seventeen boats from Providence, commanded, as they informed me, by John Brown. Immediately after the boats joined company, we rowed towards the schooner; before we came close to the schooner, they hailed the boats, and forbid them coming on board; but notwithstanding the officer of the schooner forbidding the boats to come on board, we had orders to row up to the schooner, which we did immediately, and boarded her. I saw Brown fire a musket when in the boat under the bows; the captain of the schooner immediately fell from the place he was standing on; the surgeon that was ordered to dress the captain was a tall, thin man, called Weeks, of Warwick; very soon after we got on board the schooner, the men's hands belonging to the schooner was tied behind their backs, and put in boats and put on shore. I rowed the bow oar in the boat that the captain came on shore in; I think there was five people belonging to the schooner in the boat. The captain lay abaft all the oars; Potter, of Bristol, was in the boat, and John Brown, of Providence; Brown steered the boat on shore; I had on a red and white spotted handkerchief tied on my head, and two frocks on my body. A list of five men's names, that was concerned in destroying his Majesty's schooner Gaspee:

John Brown and Joseph Brown, principal men of the town of Providence; Simeon Potter of Bristol; Doctor Weeks, of Warwick; Richmond, of Providence.

This primary source comes from the Rhode Island State Archives, C#0554 – Gaspee Papers 1772-1773.

This transcript is intended to capture the substance of the document.

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