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## Preface

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# Maine Historical Society Quarterly

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Had Ralph Waldo Emerson never written:

“Here once the embattled farmers stood  
And fired the shot heard round the world.”

and had Henry Wadsworth Longfellow omitted:

“Listen, my children, and you shall hear  
of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,”

from his *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, one wonders what notion school children (young and old) would have about the beginnings of the American Revolution. So graphic and quotable are these two poetic accounts of that memorable day at Lexington and Concord in April '75 that popular memory is anesthetized, incapable of recalling vividly anything else about 1775; unless, perchance, the battle of Bunker Hill.

What we have here (albeit unintentional) is a remarkable example of poetic public relations! The myopia is resented in many quarters, certainly in Maine where woods and shores crackled with revolutionary activity throughout 1775. After all, the first naval engagement of the Revolution off Machias, the skirmish at Harpswell, Benedict Arnold's long march across Maine to Quebec and the destruction of Falmouth (now Portland)—all of these highly dramatic episodes unrolled in Maine exactly two hundred years ago. We take pleasure in devoting the entire contents of this issue of the *Quarterly* to one of those historic events.

Naturally, such a traumatic happening as the bombardment and burning of one of the principal cities on the east coast has been written about many times. Until Donald A. Yerxa's manuscript was brought forward, we

were tempted to reprint one of the older accounts for the *Quarterly*. Yerxa's study of the burning of Falmouth on October 18, 1775, merits publication on at least two counts. First, by considering the event in a much broader framework than earlier writers were either willing or able to do, Yerxa has convincingly adjusted the simplistic notion (held, no doubt, by many of Mowat's contemporaries) that Henry Mowat destroyed Falmouth solely out of personal pique. Secondly, the author has placed the event (at last!) in perspective with the American Revolution as a whole. By carefully studying the reactions in Europe and America (neglected by earlier authors) Yerxa found that the burning of Falmouth was not an inert, local episode, rather, it galvanized the entire eastern seaboard into frantic defensive preparations. Of course, the subject was ripe for renewed historical analysis in light of recent, less parochial, published sources. Yerxa seems to have left very little unexamined, old or new; and readers who wish to look further into the subject will profit by a careful examination of the extensive footnote citations at the end of this study.

Donald A. Yerxa was born in Portland in 1950 and received his early education in South Portland. Upon graduating from Eastern Nazarene College with a B.A. in history in 1972, he entered the graduate school at the University of Maine at Orono where he is presently pursuing his Ph.D. The article published here was abridged from Yerxa's master's thesis, entitled, "Admiral Samuel Graves and the Falmouth Affair: A Case Study in British Imperial Pacification, 1775," completed in the spring of 1974. We wish to express our thanks to the author for his kindness in allowing us to trim and edit his study to fit the space limitations of the *Quarterly*, and we urge all interested readers to enjoy the full scope of the original on file at Orono and the Society.

Gerald E. Morris