

Oliver Wiswell

KENNETH ROBERTS



GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK

Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc.

1945

Oliver Wiswell

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

<i>First published</i>	<i>Nov. 22, 1940</i>
<i>Reprinted twice before publication</i>	
<i>Reprinted</i>	<i>Dec. 12, 1940</i>
<i>Reprinted</i>	<i>Dec. 20, 1940</i>
<i>Published Australia (Angus & Robertson)</i>	<i>Jan. 25, 1941</i>
<i>Published Sweden (Albert Bonnier)</i>	<i>Feb. 4, 1941</i>
<i>Published Switzerland (Humanitas)</i>	<i>Apr. 3, 1941</i>
<i>Published Brazil (Companhia Editora Nacional)</i>	<i>July 23, 1941</i>
<i>Published England (Collins)</i>	<i>Aug. 1, 1943</i>
<i>Published in embossed type, National Library for the Blind, London</i>	<i>Nov. 28, 1943</i>
<i>Reprinted</i>	<i>Nov. 13, 1945</i>

To
BOOTH TARKINGTON

A COMPLETE BIBLIOGRAPHY of source material consulted during the writing of *Oliver Wiswell* is published in the limited edition of this novel. For all practical purposes, the following books admirably present the Loyalist side: Henry Belcher, *First American Civil War*, Macmillan, London, 1911; Moses Coit Tyler, *Literary History of the American Revolution*, Putnam, 1897; Lorenzo Sabine, *Loyalists of the American Revolution*, Boston, 1864; Egerton Ryerson, *Loyalists of America*, Toronto, 1880; James H. Stark, *Loyalists of Massachusetts*, Boston, 1910; Sidney George Fisher, *True History of the American Revolution*, Lippincott, 1902, and *Struggle for American Independence*, Lippincott, 1908; Alexander Flick, *Loyalism in New York*, Columbia University Press, 1901; *Journal and Letters of Samuel Curwen*, Boston, 1864; Arthur Johnston, *Myths and Facts of the American Revolution*, Toronto, 1908; Lewis Einstein, *Divided Loyalties*, Houghton Mifflin, 1933; *Journal of Nicholas Cresswell*, New York, 1928; Claude H. Van Tyne, *Loyalists in the American Revolution*, New York, 1929; Charles Francis Adams, *Studies Military and Diplomatic*, Macmillan, 1911; Thomas Anburey, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America, 1776-1781*, Houghton Mifflin, 1923; Edward McCrady, *History of South Carolina*, Vol. 3, Macmillan, 1902.

The author gratefully acknowledges the generous assistance of

Booth Tarkington, *Kennebunkport, Maine*
Major A. Hamilton Gibbs, *Middleboro, Mass.*
Ben Ames Williams, *Chestnut Hill, Mass.*
Clara Claassen, *New York City*
Thomas B. Costain, *Bethayres, Pa.*
Marjorie Mosser, *Kennebunkport, Maine*
R. W. G. Vail, Director, *New York State Library, Albany, N.Y.*
Dorothy C. Barck, *New York Historical Society, New York City*
Ray Palmer Baker, *Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, N.Y.*
Stanley Pargellis, *Yale University, New Haven, Conn.*
C. S. Brigham, Director, *American Antiquarian Society*
Loring McMillen, *Staten Island Historical Society, Richmond, S.I.*
Nelson Doubleday, *Oyster Bay, N.Y.*
John Spargo, *Old Bennington, Vt.*
Mary G. Nye, *Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier, Vt.*
Malcolm Johnson, *New York City*
Colonel Lawrence Martin, *Library of Congress*
Victor Hugo Paltsits, *New York Public Library*
Wilmer R. Leech, *New York Public Library*
Gerald D. McDonald, *New York Public Library*
Charles Knowles Bolton, *Shirley, Mass.*
Gustav Lanctot, *Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa*
Rupert Hughes, *Los Angeles, California*
Clifford K. Shipton, Librarian, *American Antiquarian Society*
Helen McIntyre, *Boston, Mass.*
Lillian F. Robins, *Freeport, N.Y.*
Randolph G. Adams, *William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor*
David C. Mearns, *Library of Congress*
John S. Taylor, *Greenville, S.C.*
R. L. Meriwether, *University of South Carolina, Columbia*
Elizabeth Hyde, *Charleston, S.C., Free Library*
Harold G. Rugg & Paul Allen, *Baker Library, Hanover, N.H.*
Dorothy M. Vaughan, *Portsmouth, N.H., Public Library*

PRINTED AT THE *Country Life Press*, GARDEN CITY, N. Y., U. S. A.

CL

COPYRIGHT, 1940
BY KENNETH ROBERTS
AND ANNA M. ROBERTS
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Contents

I

BOSTON 3

II

NEW YORK 167

III

PARIS 415

IV

THE WILDERNESS TRAIL 545

V

NINETY SIX 655

VI

LAND OF LIBERTY 761

BOOK I



Boston

CHAPTER I

MY FATHER, Seaton Wiswell of Milton and Boston, was an attorney. Daniel Dulaney, greatest of American lawyers, once wrote that he was as richly endowed with foresight as were the majority of his generation with hindsight.

He was one of the foremost men of his time, a colleague and intimate of those great Americans, Daniel Dulaney, Governor Hutchinson and Samuel Seabury, all of whom had to hear themselves reviled as traitors by lesser Americans.

To my father's foresight I owe the most satisfying thing I have had in life—the desire to write history truthfully. Not only did he persuade our great and good neighbor, Thomas Hutchinson, historian and governor, to take an interest in me; but when, in 1772, John Trumbull of Yale attacked his own and other American colleges for deriding polite literature and English grammar, my father at once sent me to Yale to study under Trumbull.

It was while I was at Yale in April, 1775, that I received word of my father's illness; and in spite of all that happened as a result, I shall always be thankful that I instantly set out for Milton to be with him.

That was how I came to be in the shadow of Great Blue Hill between Dedham and Milton in the dusk of April 17th, 1775, and how I happened to encounter a Boston mob in action.

Except for that I never would have seen the destruction of Henry Wade's barn or the mutilation of his cattle, nor would I have rescued Thomas Buell.

Lacking that warning of the lengths to which a Boston mob would go, my days on this earth might have been considerably shorter, and

in all likelihood I would have escaped a deal of trouble; but almost any sort of trouble, I have found, is preferable to a suddenly abbreviated life.

One of the beauties of the country about Milton is the rolling nature of the land. On all sides are small patches of level ground, but nowhere is there a plain. Gentle elevations sink to undulating green meadows and rise again to higher hills that flow from the base of those five smoothly rounded blue knobs that seem, to residents of Milton, to stand like a sheltering rampart between them and the turmoil of the outer world.

I was skirting one of the shoulders of Great Blue Hill, expecting each moment to see spread before me the distant twinkling lights on Brush Hill and Milton Hill, and beyond them the rising triple wave of golden pin points that meant Boston, when my mare threw up her head and shied; and in the same moment I saw, at the foot of the slope before me, a sliver of orange flame licking at the corner of a barn.

When I raked the mare's belly with my spurs and went down the hill on the run, trusting to luck that she wouldn't step on a rolling stone, the sliver of flame opened out at the top into a billowing cloud of glowing smoke, and above the rattle of the mare's hoofs I heard a singular wailing chorus like the clamor of far-off sea gulls.

The blazing barn was set far back from the road, at the end of a long double row of sugar maples; and as I galloped between the trees, their bare branches, in the light of the flame toward which I rode, became a skeleton funnel—a giant spider's web of a funnel. Queerly, I had that thought, and without reason—so far as I knew then—the feeling that I was like a fly caught in that web: caught, and not to escape. Presciences like these do come to us sometimes, even when we're lighthearted boys on the way home from school, and though most of them don't come true, now and then one of them does—as this did.

The wailing chorus, as I neared it, turned into a malignant clamor that swirled into my ears like an icy breeze and raised goose flesh between my shoulders.

At the end of the alley of sugar maples I found myself before a two-storied house whose white front, in the dusk, was rosy in the light from the blazing barn; and silhouetted upon that warm-colored background were shadows of men who ran from the open front

door, dropped burdens and returned again within the house. All the while, as they hurried in and out, they maintained a kind of howling: threatening, exultant, wolfish.

Whether the mare stopped of her own accord, or whether I pulled her to her haunches at the sight of all those yammering, scurrying figures, I cannot say. I only know she ceased suddenly to go forward, backed into the shadows of the maples and stood twitching and trembling beneath me; while I, who had vaguely thought to be of help in the quenching of a fire, sat open-mouthed and staring.

There was no doubt in my mind as to who these men were. Ten years before, when I was a child of twelve, a Boston mob, in a frenzy over the Stamp Tax, had made an assault upon the house of my father's dearest friend, Thomas Hutchinson, chief justice and governor of Massachusetts, enraged against him for no reason except that he held office under the Crown. Like my father and every other man of sense in the Colonies, Hutchinson had done everything in his power to prevent the Stamp Tax. He was a native of Boston, a lover of his country, an able historian, a man of taste and penetration—but the mob, idiotically conceiving him to be an enemy, destroyed his furniture and all his belongings, hacked his pictures to shreds, burned his precious manuscripts, notes and books; then broke into his cellar and drank itself into insensibility.

Selfishly I might have been grateful to that mob, because Hutchinson, after installing himself in his summer home on Milton Hill, had told my father that later, when I was older and a better scholar, I should have employment in collecting historical material to replace that which had been burned—a prospect warmly to my liking.

I hadn't myself seen the mob that destroyed the governor's house; but from his own lips I knew what a raging mob was like, and I knew I was seeing such a one now by the light of the flaming barn. I knew, too, I was seeing something ferocious and dangerous, something crazier than any wild beast.

The eyes of the men who made up this mob were insane; their yelling mouths contorted to senseless shapes. These creatures, all in violent action and gesture, were unkempt; pale and dirty they had come out of cellars and out of the gutter, but now in the rosy light they were pink and ragged grotesques, wholly unrestrained and apparently incapable of ever becoming human again.

My impulse was to back the mare deeper into the obscurity of the maples, wheel her about and set off for Milton Hill as fast as she could

gallop; but I didn't. Instead I sat fascinated. As for the mare, she seemed in like case and stood trembling, pricking her ears at those scuttling creatures as they flurried in and out of the house, bringing forth pictures, furniture, silver, bed linen, mirrors, garments of every description from the doorway and tossing them helter-skelter upon the muddy lawn.

There's something about a rioting mob that seems to paralyze at least a part of the brain of the spectator. I only half realized what was happening when four dark figures dragged a black mare from the other side of the blazing barn and howled to draw the attention of those who were in the house. Behind the black mare ran a gangling, week-old colt.

At a shouted order from one of those that held the mare, two of the mob leaped at the awkward, long-legged colt and threw it to the ground. When its mother kicked and plunged, one of the four dark figures struck her behind the eye. Another kicked her in the belly with the sound a flail makes when it strikes a padded threshing floor. Black demons, shouting, wrenched the mare's head until she fell to the ground beside the colt. Others caught her legs. One of those who had thrown her down whipped a knife from his pocket. Another pried open her jaws; and the man with the knife seized her tongue and cut it off.

From the tongueless mouth came that dreadful and unbearable sound—a horse's scream.

The man with the knife capered triumphantly, threw the bleeding tongue on the ground, and went for the colt.

For a moment there was such confusion of dark figures that I couldn't see what was happening, but from somewhere within the tumultuous cluster that seemed to center upon the colt I heard an enraged bellowing.

Then I saw the colt running away, and upon the spot where it had lain there stood a terrible figure. It was like a strange enormous bird—a gigantic pallid-feathered bird that had shed a part of its feathers to reveal here and there a skin of repulsively shining black. Except for its feathers, this black-lacquered figure was as naked as an antique statue; and, like a statue, it stood poised, its hands hooked like talons, vainly threatening that tumultuous mob.

Never before had I seen a man who had been tarred and feathered; but I didn't need to be told that I was looking at one now. There may be sights that make a spectator feel more degraded for belong-

ing to the race that creates them; but if there are, I've never seen any of them.

What the agony of humiliation is to the victim, no other than a victim may compute; yet that man stood there, furiously tense and raging, while those about him howled and struck at him with sticks until little feathers, pink in the glare from the burning barn, whirled upward from his back and went drifting down the wind.

I said that there is something paralyzing about the behavior of a mob, for in no other way can I account for my failure to be surprised when the attackers of this horrible black figure thrust a fence rail between his legs, lifted him off his feet and raised him shoulder high. Others poked at him continually with long sticks, hilariously maintaining him astride the rail, the ends of which were upheld by companions as rabidly mirthful.

There rose a chorus, half laughter, half snarl, "Ride, Tory, ride! Ride, Tory, ride!" and the dreadful cortege, joggling and staggering, began to trot toward the avenue of maples.

They came near me, and passed, unaware of me; but I saw the feathered, hunched-over figure trying to hold himself from being cut by the rail, and I knew from the agonized jerking of his head and shoulders that he wasn't succeeding.

Then I was freed of the spell that had held and weakened me. Strength came back into my knees; the saddle leather creaked as my legs took a fresh grip on the mare. No longer was there a cold breeze blowing on my backbone: instead a hot prickling stirred the hair behind my ears and ran along my spine.

The men with the fence rail, whooping, were lumbering on into the darkness between the trees, when I heard, over all their noise, the unwilling grunted cry of physical anguish from the man they carried.

Without knowing how it happened, I found myself alongside that rail; found the forward rail-carriers close beneath my mare's straining head. I caught the flash of white eyes rolling up at me, swung the mare sharply to the right and into that trotting, yelling cluster of men.

I saw them go down in a tangle; they rolled indistinguishably in the darkness of the road; but the pale feathers upon their victim made him discernible, though he was upon his knees. I reached down, caught him by the arm and dragged him to his feet. I think it was the smell of him that frightened the mare, so that she lashed out, kicking at the cursing men behind us.

"Get up behind me," I said. "Be quick about it!"

"Can't!" His groan held more exasperation than pain. "Can't! Split open! Can't sit a horse!"

"Then lie across the front of the saddle," I said.

He climbed feebly; I hauled; and there somehow he was, like a sack before me—a strange-smelling sack, for he carried the odor of an old, old attic—a musty, dusty scent of unaired feather beds and pine boards baked by the sun; and above that, he smelled like the freshly tarred rigging of a ship. I've often wondered if my nose be not the greater part of me, since at such a time—with sons of hell cursing all about me, and the wild mare prancing among some that were prostrate—I found that poor man's smell so poignant.

A thrown rock struck my shoulder numbingly. I raked both spurs into the mare's belly, and with that miserable wretch across my saddle went clattering out from that hideous dark avenue of maples, swung to the right on the main road, and set off hell-bent for the civilization of Milton and the sanctuary of my father's home.

CHAPTER II

I KNEW Milton Hill as well as I knew my own bedroom, so I brought the mare to our back door through byways and across fields without questioning or hindrance from any of the self-appointed committees at that time pestering every traveler upon the road.

"You're safe now," I told the tarred and feathered man. I'd put my greatcoat about him as we rode; and now, having dismounted and helped him down as gently as I could, I picked the garment up from the ground where it had fallen and wrapped it about him again.

He leaned against the fence that separated our property from the fields of Anthony Gulliver, and, breathing heavily, gave me as acknowledgment no more than a grunt, for which I couldn't blame him.

I tied the mare to a post, went to the back door of our house and tried the latch. The door was locked. When I rapped upon it, I heard faint movements but got no answer. I rapped again more loudly, and this time the voice of Andrew Carter, my father's English servant, asked who was there.

"It's Oliver," I said. "Open up."

I heard bolts shot back. The door opened three inches and was held there by a chain, and in the lighted entryway I saw Andrew with a fowling piece in his hand.

"For God's sake," I said, "what are you looking for? Indians?"

Andrew put down the gun and unhooked the chain. As the door swung open, his faded blue eyes moved downward from my face to stare at the front of my coat. When I looked down myself I saw that the gray cloth was daubed with tar and dappled with bits of feathers.