

Lewis H. Bridgham (1808–1883) oversaw the moulding and casting operations in Boston Bewick's stereotype foundry. He had a long career in job printing, beginning around 1828 in Providence, RI. He first appears in Boston city directories in 1835 identified as a stereotype founder and then drops out of sight after the company closed down in 1836. He reappears in the 1840s as a printer, for a while successful enough to obtain a steam power press and exercise the right to display his name in Boston imprints. In the 1850s he moved to Brooklyn and made his living as a reporter in the office of the Associated Press. After just over ten years in journalism, he resumed the printing business, taking on small jobs at various New York addresses until he died in 1883. An obituary indicates that he had been more than a mere journeyman and was "well-known" for his printing work in Boston. He was prominent enough to have taken out the copyright for one of Boston Bewick's stereotype ventures. Among other achievements he published an engraved miniature facsimile of the Declaration very popular in its day. It reached a wide public in Boston and New York—and may have even gone as far as England. I believe it to be the source of the Sussex Declaration.<sup>9</sup>

### III

Dated 1836, the copyright statement in Bridgham's facsimile contains his name, but otherwise it is difficult to determine what role he took in its design and production. Perhaps he had the idea to make a miniature facsimile, a tour de force of lettering and engraving printed on coated paper, all the better to display the precision craftsmanship of the artists he employed. He probably knew about previous attempts to sell Declaration novelties in unusual formats such as prints on silk or satin and, most notably, a commemorative handkerchief priced at a dollar in 1826. Other types of pocket curiosities had already found a ready market in America—portrait miniatures, miniature silver toys, and thumb Bibles, just to mention a few examples. By catering to this fashion, he started a trend soon to be taken to an extreme by the Philadelphia bank note engraver Charles Toppan, who downsized the Declaration to fit inside a 2 by 3 inch card on coated stock, a promotional keepsake first issued in 1840.<sup>10</sup>

9. [Providence] *Rhode-Island American* (20 June 1828), 4; *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* 1, no. 4 (December 1834), advertisements; [Boston] *Daily Evening Transcript* (29 July 1847), 2; Richard A. Schwarzlose, *The Nation's Newsbrokers, Volume 1: The Formative Years, from Pretelegraph to 1865* (1989), p. 178; *New-York Tribune* (30 October 1883), 2. Perhaps acting on his own account, Bridgham obtained the copyright for *Worship God and Keep His Commandments* (1835), an illustrated broadside "stereotyped and printed by the Boston Bewick Company."

10. *In Congress, July 4th. 1776. The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America*, Boston: L. H. Bridgham, 1836. Copies in this state are common and can be found in the American Antiquarian Society, the New York Public Library, the Library Company of Philadelphia, and other libraries. They frequently come up for sale at modest prices, viz. Swann Auction Galleries sales 21 June 2016, lot 132 (\$344), and 26 September 2019, lot 94 (\$219). The commemorative handkerchief was advertised in the *Georgetown Gazette* (14 July 1826), 1; copies are described in Herbert Ridgeway Collins, *Threads of History: Americana Recorded on Cloth 1775 to the Present* (1979), nos. 23 and 58. For the fame of the Toppan facsimile, "the Smallest Engraving in the world," see *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* (21 September 1871), 4; (23 September 1871), 1.