

Thomas Greenough

Contemporary with James Halsy II was Thomas Greenough (1710–1785), who was born in Boston in 1710, the son of John and Elizabeth (Gross) Greenough. His father was a shipwright in the North End of Boston, and one of Thomas's brothers, Newman Greenough, became a sailmaker. Thomas also had a sister named Jerusha, who later figured in his real estate negotiations.

The earliest known record relating to Greenough is of his marriage in 1734 to Martha Clarke, daughter of William and Sarah Clarke of Boston. Nine children resulted from this marriage over the course of the next 16 years; four of these were sons. On January 27 of the year of his marriage he purchased a house on the northwest side of North Street, between Mill Creek and Union Street, from John White and Nathaniel Roberts. On August 1, 1736, Greenough purchased the house and land of his father-in-law, William Clarke, on the south side of Portland Street. On

⁹⁰ Description courtesy of Mr. M. V. Brewington, Peabody Museum, Salem, Mass.

October 28 he mortgaged to his mother his house on Ann Street (which appears to have been the house he had purchased on North Street), and at the same time he deeded to his brother Newman all his right and title in his father's estate at the North End. Greenough was only 24 at the time of his marriage, and he apparently became involved in real estate, by choice or by necessity, to a considerable degree.

Greenough, in 1744, was a member of a militia company in Boston,⁹¹ and three years later, in 1747, he was listed as third sergeant. He was a firm patriot, held a town office, and was a founder and deacon of the New Brick Church in Boston.

Greenough had a substantial interest in the holdings of his late father-in-law. For example, on August 11, 1744, he and his wife deeded to a merchant named James Pitts the seawall, or new wharf, "before the Town of Boston in the front and rear lying to the northward of King Street Pier, North Wharf and flats of James Bowdoin," all of which was part of the estate of his deceased father-in-law that apparently had been inherited by his wife. In the following year, on November 1, 1745, he purchased a house and land on Portland Street from his widowed mother-in-law and then on March 31, 1746, he and his wife deeded the same house and land to a merchant named Stephen Hall. Numerous other negotiations of the same nature are on record.

At some time between 1748 and 1750 Greenough's first wife, Martha, died, and in 1750 he married Sarah Stoddard. Three more children, all sons, resulted from this second marriage. His real estate negotiations continued full pace during the second marriage as during the first.⁹²

Greenough's second wife preceded him in death, and Greenough died in 1785 at the age of 75. His will, probated on August 23, 1785, had been made on May 21, 1782;⁹³ it contained some interesting bequests:

Executors: my two sons, David S. and William Greenough. Legatees: to the children of my son Thomas, deceased, Rachel, Ann, and Sally Greenough, £13.6.8 each. To their sister Betty £5. To the children of my son John deceased, 200 acres of land. I also give his eldest son John my silver can, fellow to the one I gave his father. To his sons Wm. and David, and to his

⁹¹ Called the "r r Co.," which has not been further identified but is believed to have been one of the many militia companies that were formed in Boston during this period.

⁹² "Thomas Greenough," in Thwing Catalogue, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁹³ M.S. identified as Folio 495, Massachusetts Historical Society.

daughters, Sarah, Abigail, and Mehitable £5 each and the house they live in. My daughter, Sarah Edwards, £10 and a silver chafing dish. My daughter Martha Stone all my lands in the County of York, Cape Porpoise, and Wells, and my silver salver, and her son Thomas £5 and a silver porringer. My daughter Elizabeth Brooks £10 and a silver tea pot. My daughter Mary Savage £40 and to her son Thomas one silver porringer. To the children of my daughter Jerusha, deceased, Martha Clark Lepar and Sally Lepar each of them, £50, and a pair of salt shovels, and a pepper box, silver. All the rest of my estate to my two sons, David Stoddard Greenough, and Wm. Greenough. The late Shute Shrimpton Yeoman, Esq., left an estate to my late spouse Sarah, and to her children, in the Island of Antigua. In case my son David should have a legal possession of same, and Wm. no part, in that case I give my son David £100 and sundry pieces as per schedule amount to £63.11.3. All the rest of my estate to my son, William Greenough.

Of particular interest with relation to Greenough's business in instruments is the following advertisement that appeared on May 11, 1742, in *The Boston Gazette*:

To be sold by Capt. Cyprian Southack at his House near the Orange Tree and at Mr. Tho. Greenough's Mathematical Instrument Maker near the Draw Bridge, said Southack's Char[t]s of the Coast from Sandy Point of New York to Canso.

Invaluable for this study are Thomas Greenough's manuscript accounts that have survived in the collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society. The following itemized entries are selected from Greenough's business accounts over a period of two decades to provide data on the prices current in the second half of the 18th century for new instruments and for repairing others:

In Account with Thomas James Gruchy:

| | | |
|-----------------|--|----------|
| 1754, April 27: | 1 Compass for the Schooner <i>Sea Flour</i> | £0.8.0. |
| 1758, Nov. 28: | 1 Spyglass..... | £1.13.8. |
| 1759, Jan. 25: | Mending 3 Compasses for the Schooner <i>Susanna</i> | £0.6.0. |

In Account with Nathaniel Bethune:

| | | |
|---------------|--------------------------|---------|
| 1760, August: | A gauging rod..... | £0.6.0. |
| | Mending a telescope..... | £0.3.0. |

In Account with Captain McAndrew Mirick of Nantucket:

| | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|----------|
| 1772, March 21: | For 2 compasses, 1 leaded..... | £0.16.8. |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|----------|

In Account with Captain Roberson Crockett:

| | | |
|--------------|------------------------------------|---------|
| 1773, April: | For mending 2 Compasses..... | £0.6.2. |
| | For mending 1 Hanging Compass..... | £0.3.2. |

In Account with Captain Reworth of the Brig *Fortune*:

| | | |
|-----------------|--|---------|
| 1774, March 30: | For mending 2 compasses & Glasses..... | £0.7.0. |
|-----------------|--|---------|

In Account with Captain Thomas Godfrey:

1774, April 7: For 1 Telescope £0.8.0.

Other documents in the same collection indicate that Greenough's business interests were substantial and not limited merely to the construction of instruments. On July 31, 1769, Greenough's name appeared on the Boston Citizens' Non-Importation Agreement. Subsequently, on December 14, 1774, there is Greenough's signed receipt, with the amount left blank, stating that he had "REC'D. of Capt. Thomas Godfrey the Sum of— in full for my Negro man Cuffes Shair in the Whaling Voige —."

Greenough apparently was succeeded in business by his son William Greenough. Mr. Lawrence B. Romaine of Middleboro, Massachusetts, in 1939 described a wooden surveying compass with its own hand-whittled tripod made of oak which bore a compass card inscribed "Made by William Greenough, Boston,

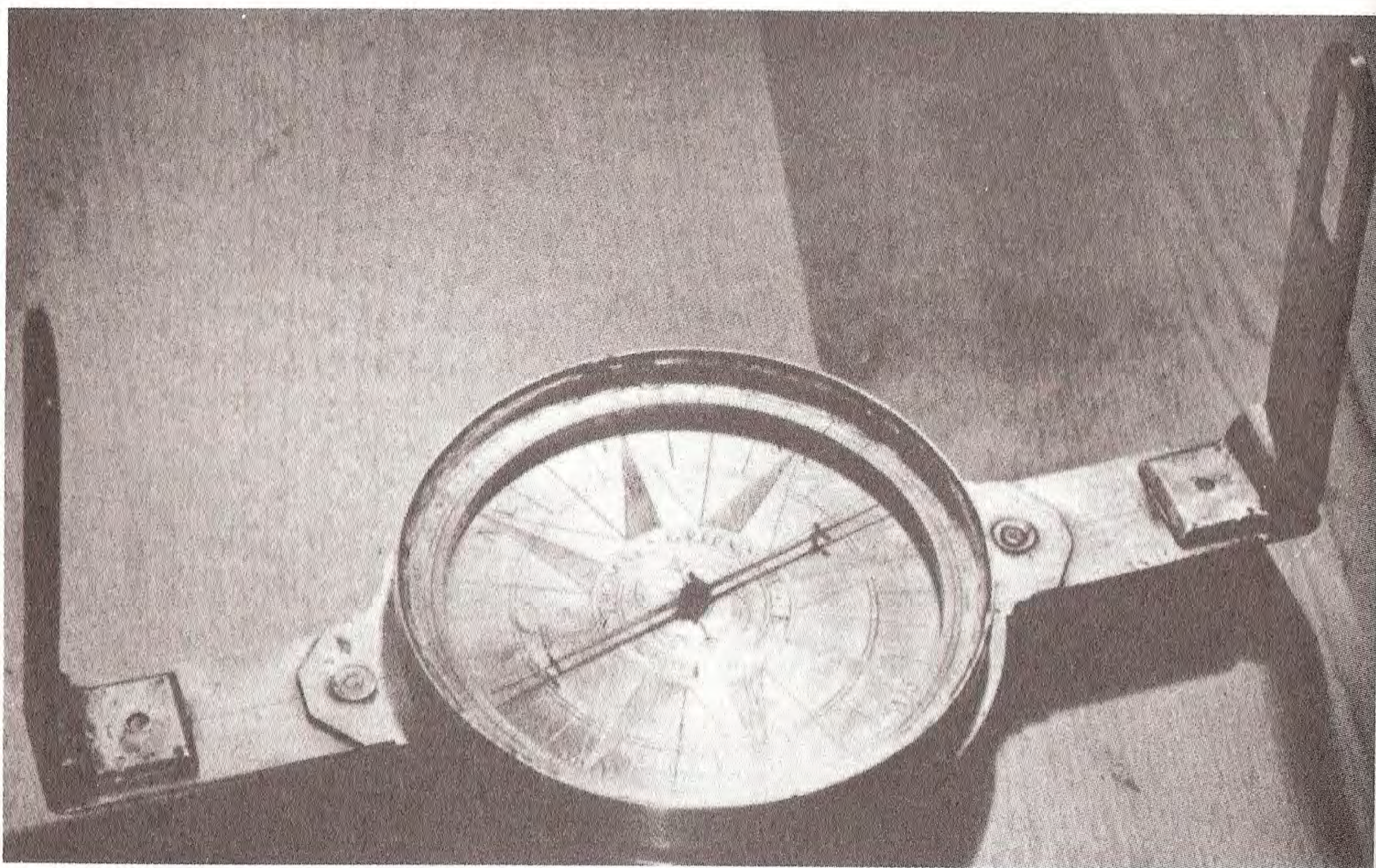


Figure 42.—Brass surveying compass made by Thomas Greenough (1710–1785) of Boston. Compass face is mounted on main blade with two copper rivets. Screws for vanes and tripod mounting are hand cut, with wing nut ends. Sighting bars are $\frac{1}{16}$ in. wide and $5\frac{1}{4}$ in. high; over-all length is $11\frac{7}{8}$ in. and diameter is $5\frac{1}{4}$ in. Owned by Greenough family of Boston. Photo courtesy of Dr. Thomas Greenough.



Figure 43.—Wooden surveying compass, made and sold by Thomas Greenough. The instrument is made of gumwood and has a paper compass card; it is $13\frac{1}{4}$ in. long and has a diameter of $5\frac{3}{4}$ in. In collection of Franklin Institute, Philadelphia.

N.E.”⁹⁴ The compass was protected by a pine cover that fitted closely between the sights. The present location of this instrument is not known, but it appears to be the only known example by William Greenough made of wood.⁹⁵

In the Greenough family at the present time is a brass surveying compass (fig. 42) of fine quality and of the period before or during the American Revolution. The dial is finely engraved with a Tudor rose at its center, and around it is the inscription “THOMAS GREENOUGH BOSTON Fecit.” The compass face is mounted to the main blade with two copper rivets. The holding screws for the vane and tripod mounting are rather crudely hand cut with wing-nut ends.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ *The Chronicle* (Early American Industries Association), December 1939, vol. 2, no. 12, p. 96.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Description courtesy of Dr. Thomas Greenough, Cooperstown, N. Y.

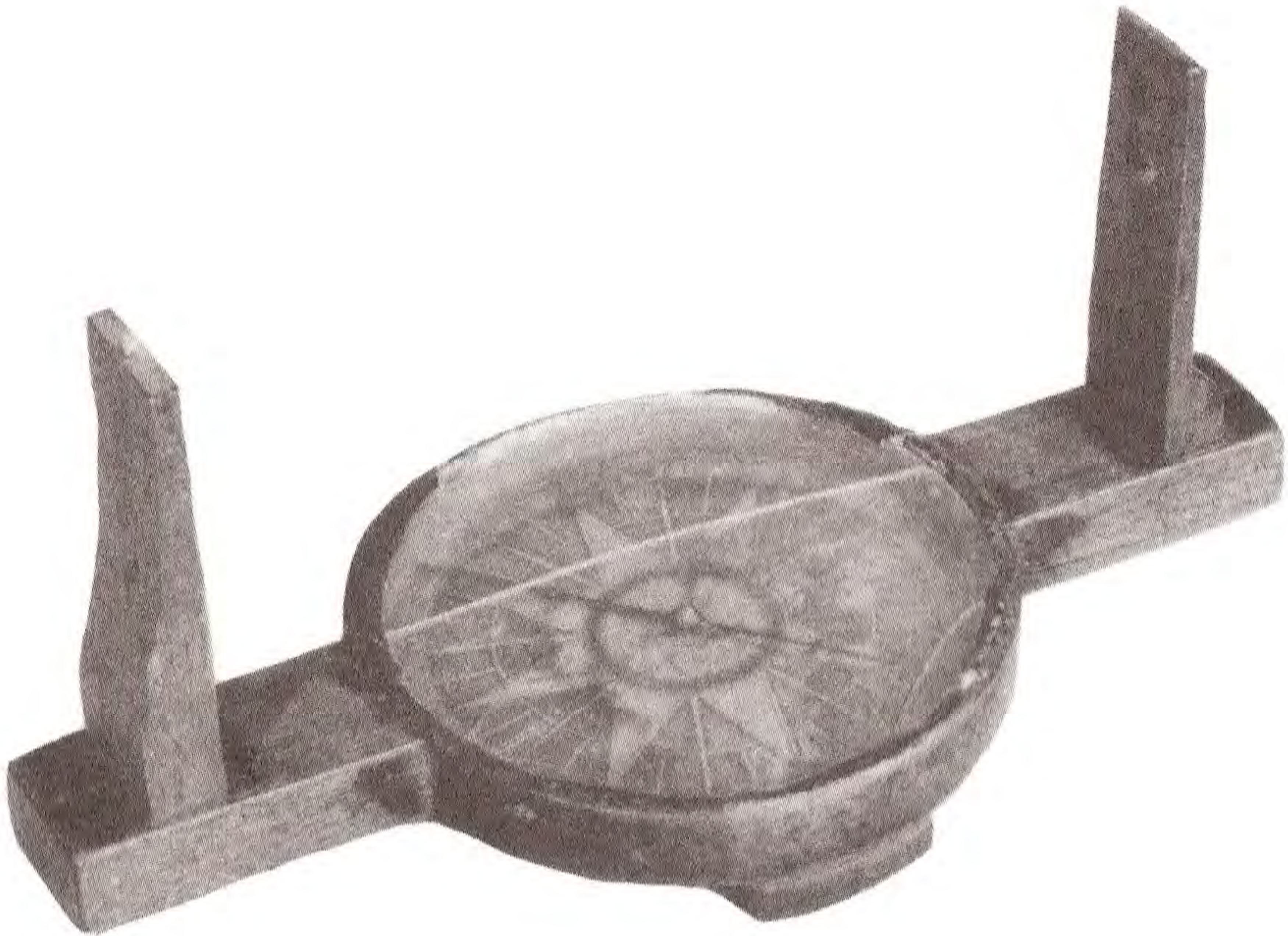


Figure 44.—Wooden surveying compass made and sold by Thomas Greenough. Made of hickory, it is 11 in. long and has a diameter of $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. Compass card is of paper. Allegedly, this compass was used by Joseph Frye for surveying his land grant in what is now Fryeburg, Maine, in 1762. Loaned to the U.S. National Museum by Laurits C. Eichner of Clifton, New Jersey. USNM 315001.

Five other surveying compasses made by Thomas Greenough are known, and all are made of wood: the one in the Franklin Institute is made of gum (fig. 43), one in Old Sturbridge is made of maple, one in the Bucks County Historical collection at the Mercer Museum is made of cherry, one owned by this writer is made of basswood, and one on loan to the U.S. National Museum from Mr. Laurits C. Eichner is made of hickory (fig. 44).

The compass at the Mercer Museum forms part of the surveyor's gear used to lay out the town of Weymouth, Massachusetts. The example in hickory on loan to the U.S. National Museum, as is usually the case with the compass cards of the Thomas Greenough instruments, has the central ring printed in gilt, and the inscription has turned black, making the inscription almost illegible. This specimen was owned by Joseph Frye, who was given a land grant in what is now Fryeburg, Maine, in 1762. He allegedly used this compass for surveying that land. In 1783 he assembled a manu-

script book of tables (see fig. 45) for use in surveying for his son Joseph Frye, Jr. This manuscript also is part of the loan to the U.S. National Museum.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ ROBERT P. MULTHAUF, "Early Instruments in the History of Surveying: Their Use and Invention," *Surveying and Mapping* (October-December 1958), pp. 401, 403.

Copy of the late Professor Winthrop's Table showing the variation of the Compaſs. Copied August 1784 — NB Obſt stands for obſervation

| Variation at | | | | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|----------|----------|-------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| years | Boston | Falmouth | Penobſet | years | Boston | Falmouth | Penobſet |
| 1673 | 11° - 15' | 12° - 0' | 12° - 8' | 1745 | 7° - 56' | 8° - 41' | 8° - 40' |
| 1678 | 11 - 0 | 11 - 45 | 11 - 53 | 1750 | 7 - 42 | 8 - 27 | 8 - 35 |
| 1689 | 10 - 30 | 11 - 15 | 11 - 23 | 1757 | 7 - 20 Obſt | 8 - 5 | 8 - 13 |
| 1700 | 10 - 0 Obſt | 10 - 45 | 10 - 53 | 1761 | 7 - 7 | 7 - 52 | 8 - 0 Obſt |
| 1705 | 9 - 46 | 10 - 31 | 10 - 39 | 1763 | 7 - 0 Obſt | 7 - 45 Obſt | 7 - 53 |
| 1710 | 9 - 32 | 10 - 17 | 10 - 25 | 1770 | 6 - 46 | 7 - 31 | 7 - 39 |
| 1715 | 9 - 18 | 10 - 3 | 10 - 11 | 1775 | 6 - 32 | 7 - 17 | 7 - 25 |
| 1720 | 9 - 5 | 9 - 50 | 9 - 58 | 1780 | 6 - 18 | 7 - 3 | 7 - 11 |
| 1725 | 8 - 51 | 9 - 36 | 9 - 44 | 1785 | 6 - 4 | 6 - 49 | 6 - 57 |
| 1730 | 8 - 37 | 9 - 22 | 9 - 30 | 1790 | 5 - 50 | 6 - 35 | 6 - 43 |
| 1735 | 8 - 23 | 9 - 8 | 9 - 16 | 1795 | 5 - 36 | 6 - 21 | 6 - 29 |
| 1742 | 8 - 0 Obſt | 8 - 45 | 8 - 53 | 1800 | 5 - 22 | 6 - 7 | 6 - 15 |

| | | | | | |
|---------|----|-------|-------|----|-------|
| 1 Rod | 15 | 6 | 1 Rod | 6 | 3/10 |
| 1/2 Rod | 5 | 11 | 1 Rod | 3 | 7/10 |
| 1/3 Rod | 3 | 4 1/2 | 1 Rod | 9 | 8/10 |
| 1/4 Rod | 2 | 4 1/2 | 1 Rod | 13 | 10/10 |
| 1/5 Rod | 1 | 12 | 1 Rod | 13 | 4/10 |
| 1/6 Rod | 1 | 12 | 1 Rod | 13 | 2/10 |

Figure 45.—Pages from a booklet of "Tables Useful in Surveying Land, Made and presented by Joseph Frye to his son, Joseph Frye, Jr., November 18, A.D. 1783." Loaned to the U.S. National Museum by Laurits C. Eichner of Clifton, N.J. USNM 315062.

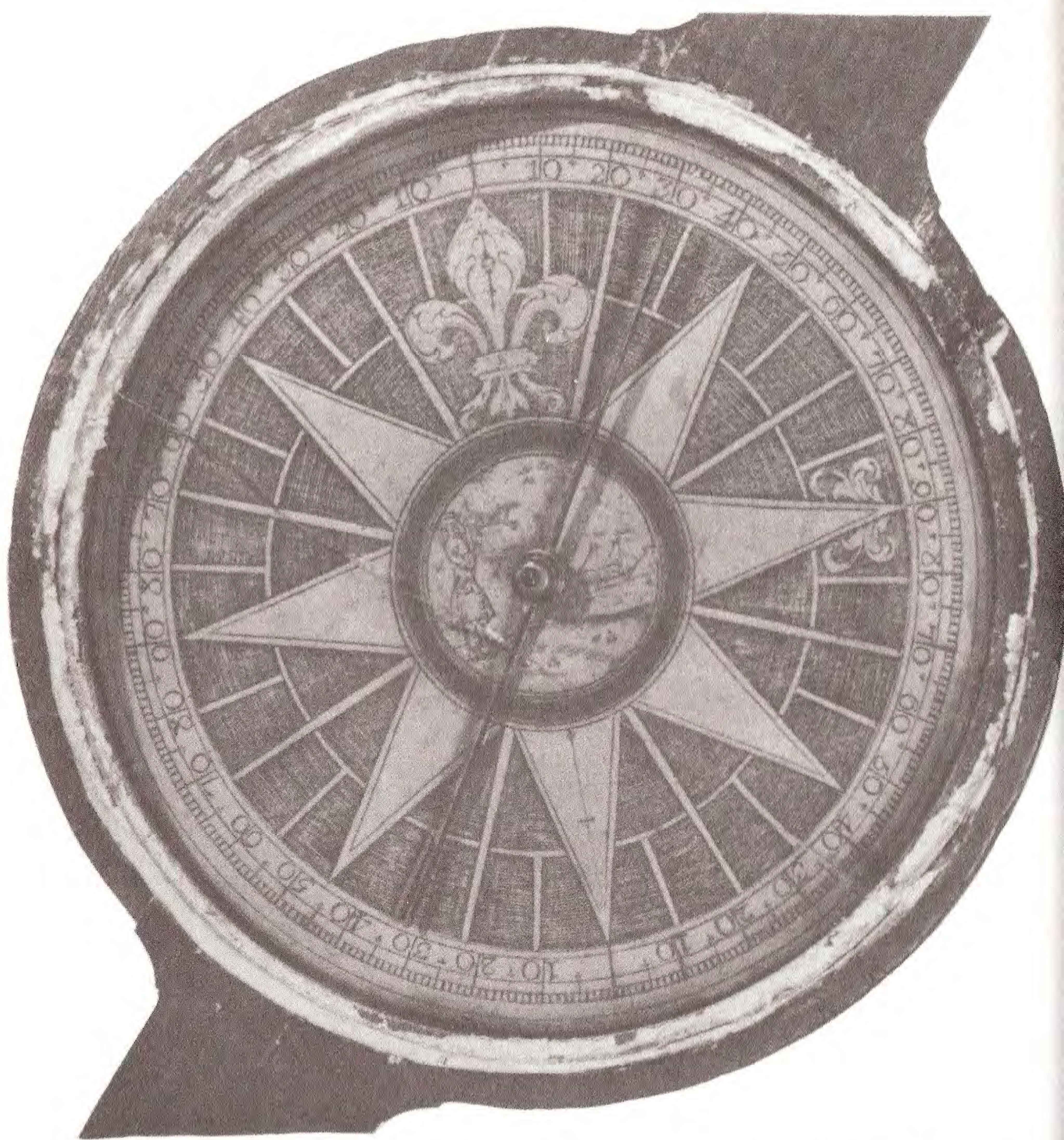


Figure 46.—Compass card from a wooden surveying compass “Made by Thomas Greenough, Boston, New England.” In collection of the writer.

The compass card in each of these five instruments is identical, designed for use in the mariner's compass (see fig. 46). A gentleman in the dress of about 1740 stands on the shore using a Davis quadrant. Offshore in the harbor is a schooner of the 1750 period. Minor features of the scene are touched up in red, presumably printed, since they are consistent in all of the cards.

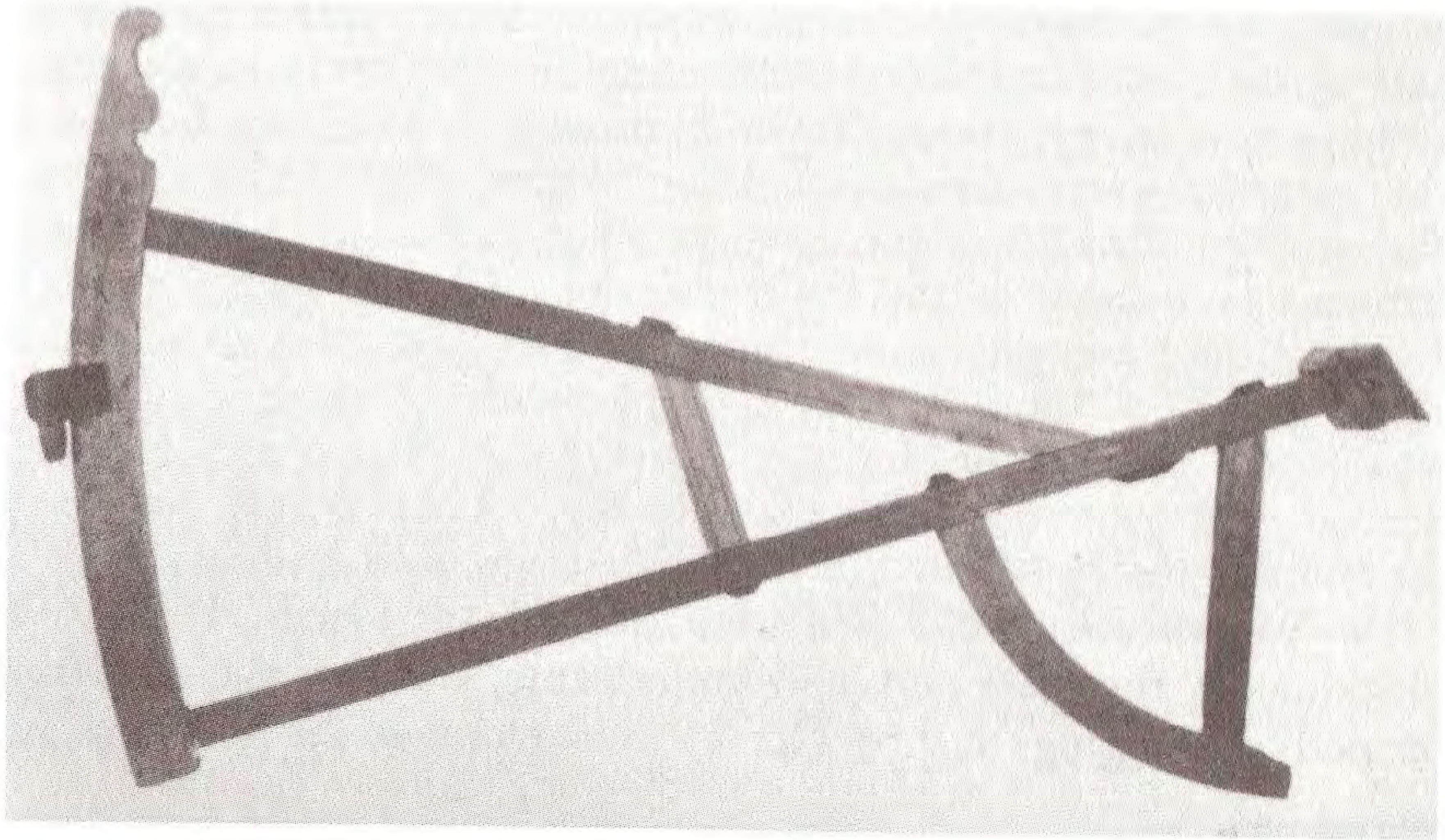


Figure 47.—Quadrant, showing signature of Thomas Greenough. Photo courtesy Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford.