Late–18th Century Contractions, American Usage

checked against [Founders Online](#) (Filter: "Washington Presidency"), [Online Etymology Dictionary](#), and [Shakespeare Search](#)
for the Molly Chase series, which opens in 1793

Characterization notes:

Molly – minimal contractions; uses them more frequently when emotional or during private conversation with Josiah
Josiah – more contractions when speaking to peers, less when speaking "up"; some contractions in close POV narrative
Prudence – minimal contractions
Mrs. Robb and Mrs. Warren – no contractions
- Mrs. Robb – proper, sparse, direct
- Mrs. Warren – proper but affected

Non-native speakers (Filippo, Laurent, Genêt, Peter Van der Veen) – no contractions or slang - "studied" English
Characters with consistent contraction usage:
- younger characters (Deb, Charles, the Rascals)
- silly characters (Tabitha),
- working class characters (the Lewises, Custom House employees)
- boorish characters (Daniel Warren)
- upwardly mobile characters (the Findleys, James, Eliza)
- male characters use more contractions than female characters, particularly with each other (jocular speech, "shop talk")

Contractions with 't ('tis, 'twas, etc.) – elderly characters only, if at all (when in doubt, give preference to contemporary idiom)

Used Frequently in Founding Documents (more than twenty times)	Used Sparingly (under twenty times)	Existed but Do Not Occur in Founding Documents
can't (1706)	ain't (1706)	aren't (1709)
don't (1630)	couldn't (1670)	doesn't (1690)
I'm	didn't*** (1775)	hadn't (1705)
I've (1742)	haven't	hasn't
it's*	he'll	I'd
'tis (mid–15th)**	he's	i'nt / i'n't /in't
'twas**	he'd	mustn't (mid–18th)
you'll	I'll	needn't
	shan't (1660)	she'd (though "he'd" appears in documents)
	she'll	shouldn't
	she's	they'd
	that's	
	there's	
	they'll	
	they're	
	'twill**	
	'twould**	
	us'd (used)	
	we'll	
	we're	
	we've****	
	won't (1660)	
	wouldn't	
	you'd	
	you're	
	you've	

*used interchangeably with 'tis   **on the wane   ***late in century   ****not the same as our usage