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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
A STUDY IN FAILURE — HON. SAMUEL SNOW . . . . .	1
by Jacques M. Downs	
NEGRO CHURCHES IN RHODE ISLAND BEFORE 1860 . . . . .	9
by Robert Glenn Sherer, Jr.	
EARLY YEARS OF THE HOPE COTTON MANUFACTURING COMPANY . . . . .	25
by Herbert T. Leyland	
NEW MEMBERS . . . . .	Back Cover

FRONT COVER

*Carriage House of Snow-Messer Mansion*

The mansion built by Samuel Snow, probably in 1799 or 1800, stood facing Cranston Street between what are now Wendell and Superior streets, Providence. The property at one time contained some thirty acres, purchased between 1799 and 1807. When Snow went bankrupt in 1807, the house passed to John Innes Clark. At the time when Sarah Whitman visited in the house, it was being leased by Colonel Edward Dexter. Later it was bought by Asa Messer, president of Brown University, 1804-26. *The Providence Directory* of 1828 first lists him as living on Cranston Street; he lived there until his death in 1836 and his widow continued to occupy the mansion until 1862.

In 1894, when the house was torn down, *The Providence Journal* of April 12 carried an article stating:

Those who remember the old house over half a century ago say it was a fine old place. On either side stood four towering pillars, with their bases resting on a broad spacious veranda, and reaching some thirty feet up . . . The interior of the structure, where the ravages of time are today everywhere apparent, is finely laid out. From the front entrance there is a large hallway extending the entire length of the house and about 10 feet wide. On each side are doors leading into what were once a library on the left and a reception room on the right. Midway of the hall was the main stairway leading into a similar hall on the floor above.

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## A STUDY IN FAILURE — HON. SAMUEL SNOW

by JACQUES M. DOWNS

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MOST MEN live out their lives in anonymity, leaving few traces even on the most ordinary records of their time. History tends to emphasize success and obscure failure. At least temporarily, the men who become subjects of biography are generally dramatic achievers in some field. However, such men are far rarer than those who fail. The historical bias is understandable, since the successful man scatters evidence behind him, while all but the most spectacular failures fade quickly from memory. However, there is much to be learned from members of that gray mass of forgotten men. Many were once important people with bright careers and significant places in their society. Often only luck, timing or some minor accident kept these men from becoming major figures in our history.

Rhode Island's past, perhaps more than that of any other state in New England, is littered with such forlorn ruins. Early in the last century the Snow family of Providence produced two especially pathetic examples in a few short years. The senior, Samuel Snow, was particularly noteworthy. He served in the Revolution, took two degrees from Brown, became the second United States consul in China, built the American Hong at Canton, became one of the foremost merchants of the state and a pioneer in the American China trade which later provided the basis for several major American fortunes. Most notably, perhaps, he was the first American to set up an agency at either terminus of the China trade. Since he was not able to maintain his early prosperity, he has largely disappeared from the record and such evidence as remains is exceedingly fragmentary. Piecing these shards together into a meaningful mosaic is a job for a sleuth and a lover of puzzles, but then, this is a rough description of

an historian.

Samuel Snow was born in Providence, August 10, 1758, into the family of a leading minister of the town, Reverend Joseph Snow and his wife, the former Rebecca Grant.<sup>1</sup> At the time of the Battle of Lexington, Snow was a student at Brown (then Rhode Island College). He received a commission as third lieutenant of artillery, Rhode Island troops, in December 1776. He was transferred about and promoted rather speedily until July 1780 when he obtained the rank of captain, First Rhode Island Regiment, Continental Infantry.<sup>2</sup>

In September of the same year, Snow was mustered out, whereupon he returned to complete his work at Brown. He took his A.B. and A.M. in 1782.<sup>3</sup> While in his senior year of college, Snow married Frances Wanton,<sup>4</sup> daughter of Captain Peter and Elizabeth (Gardiner) Wanton. Her maternal grandfather was John Gardiner, who served as chief justice of Rhode Island for five years and as deputy governor for nine years.

With this rather auspicious background, Snow entered business with his brother in the firm of Benjamin and Samuel Snow, which merged with another to form Hoppin & Snow,<sup>5</sup> auctioneers and commission merchants, located opposite the Market House in Providence. This organization seems to have lasted only till 1793. During its existence, the firm advertised tea, piece goods, ginger, paper and glass for sale<sup>6</sup> and also let it be known that it was in the

<sup>1</sup>James N. Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island, 1636-1850* (Providence, 1892), II: 174, 246. See also Edwin H. Snow, *The William Snow Family* (Providence, 1908), 24.

<sup>2</sup>*The Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, October 8, 1791, quoted in *Rhode Island Historical Society Collections* XXXIV: 4 (Oct., 1941), 124-5, footnote. Cf. Joseph Jenks Smith, comp., *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island* (Providence, 1900), I: 342, 355, 357, 371 and 395.

After his discharge, Snow became a charter member of the R.I. Society of the Cincinnati, and in 1812 served as its secretary. He was the first captain-general of the St. John's Commandery.

<sup>3</sup>*Historical Catalogue of Brown University, 1764-1906* (Providence, 1905), 72. At that time, "... the principal degree was that of Master of Arts, the degree of Bachelor of Arts being of secondary importance, and ... [the college] ignored the time element in conferring degrees, which were granted solely on the basis of attainments in certain groups of subjects"; Walter C. Bronson, *The History of Brown University, 1764-1914* (Providence, 1914), 273.

<sup>4</sup>*Providence Gazette* ... May 19, 1781.

<sup>5</sup>*Providence Gazette* ... October 8, 1791. (*R.I.H.S. Collections, loc. cit.*)

<sup>6</sup>*U.S. Chronicle* (Providence), August 26, 1790.

market for bank script.<sup>7</sup> Precisely what Snow's connection with Brown & Ives was during the lifetime of Hoppin & Snow is unclear, but in 1791 Snow was in New York buying securities and selling merchandise for the famous Providence company.

The relationship with Brown & Ives bore further fruit for Snow three years later, when he was named supercargo of the newly launched ship *John Jay*, 460 tons, which had been built for the firm by Benjamin Tallman, the noted Providence shipbuilder. On December 28, 1794, the *Jay* sailed for the East Indies with Daniel Olney as master.<sup>8</sup> By the following December 10 the ship was in Canton. The trip apparently opened new opportunities for Snow, for soon after his return home he joined his sister Rebecca's husband, Captain James Munro, and the latter's brother Benjamin in the firm of Munro, Snow and Munro. At this time, Snow was one of a very few Rhode Islanders who had been to China and must have been a valuable human asset to a Providence firm. Apparently, Snow was to manage the Canton end of the business while the other partners ran things in America, for on July 10, 1798, Snow sailed for Canton aboard "the new and elegant coppered ship *Ann and Hope* of 550 tons,"<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Page, master. Through his connections with (Federalist) Rep. Dwight Foster, Snow had become American Consul for Canton in May,<sup>10</sup> the first to hold that post since the famous Major Samuel Shaw had died four years earlier.<sup>11</sup>

Reportedly, Snow and Page disagreed on the outward voyage "about the proper cooking [caulking?] of a hoghead," a minor difficulty which developed, like many such shipboard arguments, into a complete break between the two men by the time the vessel reached

<sup>7</sup>*Providence Gazette* ... October 8, 1791. (*R.I.H.S. Collections, loc. cit.*)

<sup>8</sup>*Providence Gazette* ... January 3, 1795.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, July 14, 1798.

<sup>10</sup>Samuel Snow, Providence, to Hon. Dwight Foster, Philadelphia, May 10, 1798 (Dwight Foster Papers, Mass. Historical Society). Commission dated May 17, 1798, in possession of Mr. Frank Mauran of Providence, quoted in Vincent P. Carosso and Lawrence H. Leder, "The Samuel Snow-Sullivan Dorr Correspondence," *Rhode Island History* XV: 3 (July 1956), 73-4.

<sup>11</sup>In truth, the office of American consul in the Far East was not what it has since become until well after the Opium War. The Chinese Government refused to have dealings with any foreigners except on its own terms, to which the United States could never have agreed. See John King Fairbank, and S. Y. Teng, "On the Ch'ing Tributary System," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 6:2 (June 1941), 135-246.

China. The captain wrote:

I wrote you by the *Ontario* and *Swift* of N.Y. which sailed the 19th . . . can only add that she [the *Ann & Hope*] is completely ready to take cargo, but I fear that the magnitude of our consulship will detain us here some time longer than I wrote you in my last; although it has never been nor ever will be recognized,<sup>11</sup> and is a source of ridicule to the English and our own countrymen, to tell you my feeling I am mortified to death to think that I am the carrier of such a-s.<sup>12</sup>

Snow remained in Canton to become the first truly resident American official in China. While there, he built the American Hong,<sup>13</sup> which consisted of five connected buildings housing merchants, their servants and goods. He also conducted a rather vigorous and ultimately successful campaign aimed at getting the Portuguese to allow him to rent a house at Macao during the summer, when Canton was disease-ridden and suffocatingly hot. He apparently planned to stay in China until 1802, when his friend and partner in the American Hong, William F. Megee, was to relieve him.<sup>14</sup> However, Snow may have found the tedium and celibacy of a Canton merchant's life too great a sacrifice, despite the compensations, for he sailed from Canton on the *John Jay* in February 1801 shortly after the completion of the factories.<sup>15</sup> Before leaving, he placed his business in the hands of James Oliver, a Philadelphia merchant, and Sullivan Dorr, an energetic but discontented young Bostonian who

<sup>12</sup>Benjamin Page, Canton, to Brown & Ives, December 25, 1798, quoted in the notes of Professor Robert Kenny of Brown University. Mr. Kenny was kind enough to permit the present writer to use the notes he had prepared for two articles published in the *American Neptune*. See especially "The Maiden Voyage of the *Ann and Hope*," in that journal, XVIII: 2 (April 1958), 133-4, for a short sketch of Samuel Snow.

<sup>13</sup>There are a number of references to this construction in the Nightingale-Jenckes Papers at The Rhode Island Historical Society.

<sup>14</sup>William F. Megee of Providence agreed to finance the construction of one third of the American Factory (Megee, Providence, to Snow, Canton, December 8, 1800; Nightingale-Jenckes Papers). Megee seems to have been somewhat late in remitting the money, but he subsequently purchased one third of the complex (Snow, Providence, to Sullivan Dorr, Canton, May 10, 1802, quoted in Carosso and Leder, 82).

<sup>15</sup>Precisely when the work was completed is not known, however Peter Auber states that the stars and stripes were first hoisted over the American Hong on January 2, 1801, a date which appears to be about right; Peter Auber, *China* (London, 1834). The terms *hong* and *factory* were used interchangeably.

eventually was to settle in Providence. Snow made Dorr vice consul to serve in his absence.

Megee went to China as he had agreed in the spring of 1802,<sup>16</sup> but returned almost immediately, having placed his affairs in the hands of Edward Carrington,<sup>17</sup> a young friend of his who had lived with the Snows in Providence some years earlier. When Dorr and Oliver left China, Carrington also received charge of Snow's affairs and the consulate, so that when Snow returned on the *Patterson*, Captain Jonathan Aborn, which arrived January 17, 1804, he found Carrington handling the Canton business of nearly all the Rhode Island traders with China except Brown & Ives.<sup>18</sup> Snow had taken his son, Peter Wanton, to Canton, possibly to groom him to manage his Canton business. Young Snow remained in Canton in partnership with Carrington and under the latter's tutelage. In exchange, Carrington and Snow were to receive all the business of the elder Snow with China.

Snow returned to Providence and to deep trouble. His firm, Munro, Snow and Munro, at one time a rather substantial concern,<sup>19</sup> went bankrupt even before Jefferson's embargo went into effect in December 1807. In the wreckage, Snow's fortune evaporated, a calamity from which he never really recovered.<sup>20</sup> He appears as a public notary and justice of the peace for Providence from 1811 to 1815,<sup>21</sup> but for the rest of his life, Snow was relatively poor. He sold

<sup>16</sup>An article dealing with Captain Megee will appear in a subsequent issue of this publication.

<sup>17</sup>See my article "The Edward Carrington Collection," *Rhode Island History* XXII: 1 (January 1963), 16-21.

<sup>18</sup>Seth Wheaton, Benjamin Hoppin, Samuel Butler, William F. Megee and others.

<sup>19</sup>*Ship Registers and Enrollments of Providence, Rhode Island* (Providence: The National Archives Project, 1941) lists nine vessels belonging to the firm at one time or another, six wholly and three in connection with others, viz. the ships *Mary* #2216, *Mercury* #2326, *Patterson* #2634, and *Zenobia* #3674, the brigs *Hope* #1577 and *Industry* #1670, and the schooners *Matilda* #2295, *Olive Branch* #2560 and *Venelia* #3642. It should perhaps be noted that all of these were smaller craft; only one, the *Patterson*, exceeded 400 tons, and the company shared her with other owners.

<sup>20</sup>Carrington's chief Providence correspondent, Benjamin Hoppin, wrote on February 28, 1810, that Snow's "unfeeling and relentless creditors are determined to persecute him to his grave." Hoppin regretted that he was "at last compel'd to surrender [*sic*] him to the Officer but shall endeavour to save him from prison" (Carrington Collection).

<sup>21</sup>Smith, II: 157, 170-71, 186, 201-2, 219-20.



Snow-Messer Mansion, Cranston Street, Providence

*Originals of the photographs used as illustrations are owned by Mrs. Sydney M. Williams of Wellesley, Massachusetts, whose husband was a Messer descendant.*

Best Parlor, Snow-Messer House, on left of front door



his share of the American Factory to Brown & Ives in 1809 although the rental from the five hongs was considerable.<sup>22</sup> In 1812, Edward Carrington, having returned to Providence a rich man, agreed to lend his former benefactor \$1000 to buy a lot (on the corner of Westminster and Snow streets in Providence) on which to build a house. At that time, Carrington was careful to insure himself against loss by asking legal advice to assure himself that "I can hold against *all and every description of* claim improvements and building, *put on my land*, whether those who *made the same* is paid by Snow or not."<sup>23</sup>

On January 4, 1816, Snow and another Rhode Islander, Captain John Bowers, established a commission business in Charleston, South Carolina,<sup>24</sup> but it seems to have been a dismal failure from the start. Only nine months after its formation, Carrington received a tragic note from Snow admitting his inability to pay the back rent and suggesting that Carrington sell his furniture, although he confessed that he did not believe the amount realized would cover his debt. Snow was on the point of leaving for South Carolina to rejoin Bowers, but he stated that he must leave Mrs. Snow in Providence, where he was "in hope that Mrs. Snow may find some place of shelter to which she may go by that time."<sup>25</sup> In 1819 Edward Carrington & Co. wrote another Charleston merchant,

The check of Snow & Bowers for 170 Dols we return to you, these Gentlemen are so very poor and low it is impossible to get anything from them. . . . Mr. S. is . . . miserably poor, dependent on his friends without any prospect of his ever getting into business again. Mr. C [arrington] lent them 1000 Ds when in Charleston with no other view than a friendly act to help them at a time when he had use for all his money which if they would pay 100 Ds or even 50 Ds he would give up the note . . .<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Providence Deed Book #33:9 (March 24, 1809; recorded April 24, 1809). The American Factory was a valuable property. When all the hongs were rented, it returned an income of nearly \$3000 a year — a substantial sum at this period (Snow, "Ship John Jay in sight of Linting" [sic], to James Oliver & Sullivan Dorr, Canton, February 2, 1801, quoted in Carosso and Leder, 77 and 78, footnote #14).

<sup>23</sup>Carrington, Providence, to Benjamin Hoppin, Providence, July 26, 1812 (Carrington Collection).

<sup>24</sup>Circular in Carrington Collection.

<sup>25</sup>Snow, Providence, to Carrington, October 1, 1816 (Carrington Collection).

<sup>26</sup>Edward Carrington & Co., Providence, to Philip Robinson [Charleston], August 16, 1819 (Letterbook C: 117; Carrington Collection).

Thereafter, little is known about Snow except that he returned to Providence and poverty. From 1824 to 1826 and again from 1828 to 1832, he was again a notary,<sup>27</sup> and in 1826 he was also listed as Brazilian vice consul. He died May 17, 1838 in Providence, leaving almost nothing. It was probably fortunate that his wife had died earlier, as part of the estate had to be sold to pay expenses.<sup>28</sup> Snow was buried in the family plot and rested there undisturbed for thirty-odd years, when some of the graves were moved to make room for the widening of a street. At that time a Providence newspaper took notice of the event and commented nostalgically on the fate of several forgotten families. The article prompted a long and sensitive letter from Sara Helen Whitman who had spent a portion of her childhood in the former Snow mansion. Her remarks included the following rather dreamy reminiscence:

Toward the close of the last century, the great Canton merchants [the Snows], then at the height of their prosperity, bought fifty acres of land in Cranston, on which they erected two houses for summer residences, the Munro house . . . and the great Snow house, now generally known as the "Messer place," built by Capt. Samuel Snow. It seems to have been the crowning effort of his architectural ambition, and was built in a style of magnificence almost unknown at the period. The great height of the rooms, the broad piazzas, with pillars rising to the roof, gave it an air of solitary grandeur as it stood there, apart and lonely in the midst of its broad and barren acres. . . . After the bankruptcy of the firm, when the house had passed into other hands . . .

The great desolate house . . . the great deserted gardens, the box-rimmed flower-beds, laid out in octagons, squares and circles, in which no flowers ever seemed to grow; the decaying summer-houses choked with dead leaves; the great empty carriage-houses and stables . . .

The lofty rooms and echoing halls were papered with costly India hangings, gorgeous with tropical birds and flowers. Many relics of the original owners were scattered here and there about the house, tall vases and urns of rare china, gilded tea-caddies and gilded cabinets, and card-boxes with their mother-of-pearl counters, the delight of my childhood, exhaling the rare and indefinable perfume of Indian woods . . .

Everywhere, within and without, were vestiges, of lavish expenditure and defeated purpose; everywhere a sense of elaborate preparation for a future that was never to arrive.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Smith, II: 352, 367, 383, 413, 428, 443 and 457.

<sup>28</sup>Estate No. A-5835, Probate Records, Providence Probate Office.

<sup>29</sup>*Manufacturers' and Farmers' Journal*, July 29, 1872.

## NEGRO CHURCHES IN RHODE ISLAND BEFORE 1860

by ROBERT GLENN SHERER, JR.

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### PREFACE

THE PRIMARY PURPOSE of this paper was to gather and to reproduce a record of the Negro churches in Providence before 1860, and to make sufficient discoveries to modify basically and/or develop Rammelkamp's and Bartlett's presentations in some way.\* It gradually became apparent, however, that these men had covered all the main points about most of the Negro churches in Rhode Island. The task of amplifying and correcting a few errors of omission and commission in these men's works by a compilation and statement of all pertinent, available† facts about every Negro church in Rhode Island prior to 1860 was accordingly undertaken.

\* \* \*

THE FIRST NON-WHITE CHURCH in Rhode Island in which Negroes worshiped was the Indian Church, or Narragansett (Niantic) Indian Meeting Church in Newport, as a result of New Light activity among the Indians during 1741. By 1750 the Indians had constructed a wooden meetinghouse "Built without any regard for beauty, warmth, or convenience."<sup>1</sup> Sunday services were frequently conducted by ministers of various denominations, and although some Negroes attended the church from its very beginning, it was primarily an Indian church.<sup>2</sup> The *Inventory of the Church Archives of Rhode Island: Baptist*, is the only source which mentions that Negroes worshiped in this church or that Negroes in this church split off to form the First Colored Baptist Society in South Kingstown and the Pleasant Street Baptist church in Westerly. The main event of the year was the annual "Indian Meeting" when Indians from most of southern New England gathered for tribal dances and ceremonies as

\*Irving Henry Bartlett, *From Slave to Citizen: The Story of the Negro in Rhode Island*. Providence, 1954.

Julian Rammelkamp, "The Providence Negro Community, 1820-1842," *Rhode Island History*, v. VII (January, 1948), no. 1.

†This refers to those materials which are available in the John Hay Library, the Providence Public Library, and the library of The Rhode Island Historical Society.

<sup>1</sup>William Frank Tucker, *Historical Sketch of the Town of Charlestown, R.I., 1636-1876*. Westerly, 1877, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>*Inventory of the Church Archives of Rhode Island: Baptist* (Historical Records Survey). Providence, 1941. p. 186.

well as church meetings.<sup>3</sup>

The question of which Negro church in Rhode Island was first has been contested for some time because the only two ways of ascertaining the age of a church were either by the construction of its first church building, or when the first society was organized. The first church building for Negroes in Rhode Island was the African Union Meeting and School House (this building will be referred to in the rest of the paper as the Union Meeting House) which held its first services in 1820. Since this was a union church, however, computation of the age of churches in Rhode Island was often based on available church records to show organizational unity back to a religious society even though these societies often did not have a building for several years after their organization. By this method of computation, the first Negro church in Rhode Island developed from the African Union Society in Newport.

In 1780 a group of Negroes in Newport formed the African Union Society for the physical and moral welfare of the Negroes in that town, but because of the poverty of most of its members, its influence was primarily moral.<sup>4</sup> In 1783, however, the members of this society gathered at Newport Gardner's house, the "Bella 'Bouse' (or Bours) house on High street, Newport,"<sup>5</sup> when it assumed a religious nature and began holding services in the homes of its members. This benevolent and religious society remained a "small, feeble body," for many years.<sup>6</sup>

"In the early days of Newport there were colored members more or less in all the white churches of the city, but segregation in all churches was the rule."<sup>7</sup> Many Negroes, especially the more intelligent ones, came to resent this discrimination, and by 1824, possibly inspired by the example of the Union Meeting House in Providence, the Negroes of Newport began working for a separate Negro church. On January 6, 1824 twelve members of the African Benevolent (or Union) Society met at Newport Gardner's house. They decided to hold another

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>4</sup>Irving Henry Bartlett, *From Slave to Citizen: The Story of the Negro in Rhode Island*. Providence, 1954, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup>"These Providence Plantations," *Providence Evening Bulletin* (February 1, 1935), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup>Charles A. Battle, *Negroes on the Island of Rhode Island* [1932], p. 21.

meeting at which time they would seek the aid of the white pastors of Newport in establishing a purely religious society for Negroes. On January 23, a second meeting was held, with such white ministers present as Samuel Austin, William Patten, Michael Eddy, and Daniel Webb, when it was decided to set up a Negro church with a Negro pastor. The Negroes felt this would "tend in many ways to our edification and to promote the good of our children and the people of color in general in this town."<sup>8</sup> At a third meeting held February 24, 1824 in the Fourth Baptist Church, the Colored Union Church and Society was established and a constitution drawn up. Newport Gardner and Shadrach Hawkins were elected deacons, Reverend Mr. Patten (the white pastor of the Second Congregational Church), treasurer; Ahama Gardner, clerk; and Isaac Rice, Turnbridge Hammond, and Ishmael Fayerweather were selected as a committee to locate a site. The lot selected by the committee measured one hundred by sixty feet and was located at the corner of Church and Division streets, and dedicated June 23, 1824 as the first Negro church in the southern part of Rhode Island. One of the Negroes' best friends among the white clergy, Reverend Mr. Patten delivered the sermon, while Newport Gardner directed the singing of the first hymn, *All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name*. To insure that this church remained a union church, section five of the Constitution stated:

No particular religious sect or denomination shall ever be required as a qualification for a minister or any other officer in this Union church, but he who may be judged qualified and disposed to preach faithfully the existing gospel and all the distinguishing truths and doctrines of God's word, may be employed here.<sup>9</sup>

The first settled pastor was Reverend Jacob C. Perry of Narragansett, who came to the church in 1826. In January of 1835 this church bought the Fourth Baptist Church, called the "Old Salt Box" because of its architecture. *Providence Evening Bulletin*, February 1, 1835, lists the date as 1824. In 1845, the same year the church became incorporated, Reverend Luke Waldon [*sic*] became its pastor and led the church in a revival. Thus, becoming translated and incorporated in the same year. Reverend Mr. Waldon [*sic*] left in 1852 to become pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Reverend

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

Charles W. Gardner took over the Union Church, where he was outstanding in his work with the Sunday School. In 1858 he was followed by Benjamin Lynch during whose pastorate (1859) the church became the Union Congregational Church and Society. Among the outstanding Negroes to speak in this church were Henry Highland Garner, J. W. C. Pennington, and Frederick Douglass.<sup>10</sup>

The major event in the development of Negro churches in Rhode Island was the establishment of the African Union Meeting and School House in 1819. It is from 1820 when the first meeting was held in this building that both Rammelkamp and Bartlett date the beginning of the emergence of the Negro community in Providence. Prior to this time all Negroes in Rhode Island (except those who met with Newport Gardner or those who went to the Indian Church) had to go to segregated white churches, and because of this restriction, it kept many from attending. The principal churches which Negroes attended in Providence were Reverend James Wilson's Congregational Church, the Methodist Church, Dr. Crocker's Episcopal Church, Reverend Mr. Cady's Unitarian Church, and the First Baptist Church (Dr. Gano, pastor). William Brown described Negro church members before 1819:

The largest numbers . . . were Baptists and belonged to the First Baptist Church, but many attended no church at all because they said they were opposed to going to churches and sitting in pigeon holes, as all the churches at that time had some obscure place for the colored people to sit in.<sup>11</sup>

Brown's description of the situation was backed up by Reverend V. R. Osborn (pastor of a Methodist church in Providence and preacher in charge of the first Methodist Quarterly Conference in Providence), "They (Negroes) were . . . in a deplorable situation. They had no place of worship, nor was there a congregation in town which desired their attendance."<sup>12</sup> Osborn, himself, was interested in the Negroes and taught them two nights a week and "preached to them another," all without charge.<sup>13</sup> The implication of McDonald's remarks was that Negroes weren't welcome even in Osborn's church except

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 22-27.

<sup>11</sup>William J. Brown, *The Life of William J. Brown of Providence*. Providence, 1833, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup>W. McDonald, *History of Methodism in Providence, Rhode Island*. Boston, 1868, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 54.

at night.

Ostensibly from a humanitarian feeling for the ignorance of Negroes of Providence (but actually, Rammelkamp feels, from a desire to get Negroes out of white churches),<sup>14</sup> a group of white philanthropists on March 19, 1819 called a meeting of many leading Negroes to discuss establishing a Negro church. If correct, this interpretation appears a little too strong, because the history of the Union Meeting House seems to indicate more initiative on the part of the Negroes. As interested as Moses Brown was in the Negroes he would surely have been among such an initiating group, yet William Brown said that after the Negroes organized they had to go and solicit money from Moses Brown (his reply was: "Now go and select you out a lot, suitable for your purpose, and I will pay for it").<sup>15</sup> Bartlett stressed the role of the Negroes, themselves, more than did Rammelkamp, but regardless of initiative, the project would never have gone through without the support of white philanthropists.

A committee of twelve Negro men was appointed to "solicit interest and funds from the colored population," according to Rammelkamp. Actually its first task was to solicit white churches for aid.<sup>16</sup> The ministers of St. John's, First Baptist, Pacific Congregational, Second Baptist, Second Congregational, and Methodist churches responded with the following recommendation:

The active zeal evinced by many of the people of colour, in the town of Providence, to provide a place for the education of their children, and the public worship of GOD, is, in our opinion, exceedingly laudable, and worthy of the *liberal* encouragement of all good people.<sup>17</sup>

The Society of Friends responded generously and Moses Brown, personally, donated a lot worth two hundred dollars. The Negroes in Providence, as poor as they were, raised five hundred dollars under the leadership of Reverend Henry Jackson, and Nathaniel Paul, the agent in charge of collecting subscriptions, visited several New England cities seeking financial aid. Contributions amounting to

<sup>14</sup>Julian Rammelkamp, "The Providence Negro Community, 1820-1842," *Rhode Island History*, v. VII (January, 1948), no. 1, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup>Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>16</sup>*Short History of the African Union Meeting and School House: Erected in Providence (R.I.): In the years 1819, '20, '21; With Rules for its Future Government*, Providence, 1821, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4.



approximately three hundred dollars were received from Negro communities in Boston, Hartford, Baltimore and New Haven,<sup>18</sup> while the general public donated six hundred dollars.<sup>19</sup>

On April 17, 1819 (deed corrected and signed May 14, 1819) Moses Brown bought a lot for two hundred dollars from George M'Carty and, on the same day, willed it to the colored people of Providence. In the deed to the church Moses Brown appointed his son, Obadiah Brown, and his (Moses's) friends, George Benson and Henry Jackson, as feoffees in trust. Brown had some very definite ideas of what the purpose and procedure should be in this new institution. The building was to be

for the purpose and use of erecting thereon, a suitable building for a School-House, on the Lancaster plan of education, and also for a Meeting-House for Divine Worship, for the people of colour, that now are, or hereafter may be in this town, and for no other use, but for the said people of colour forever.

This provision could not be met because there were no Lancastrian teachers available.<sup>20</sup>

Brown clearly intended for this church to be a Union church, "[it] is to be open and free for all Christian professors, and not confined to any one profession of the Christian religion."<sup>21</sup> If two preachers ever wished to use the Meeting House at the same time, the elder would have precedence.<sup>22</sup> Brown's passing remark that he was sorry Providence had done nothing to educate the Negroes before construction of the Meeting House (1819) demonstrated the city's complete lack of concern toward them and their dire need for a Negro school.<sup>23</sup>

In April 1819, after an address and prayer by Reverend Stephen Gano, the Negroes began work on their church, and within two weeks the foundation had been laid. The hillside was slate, necessitating excavation to a depth of six feet before the rear foundation of the church could be laid. The front foundation wall was nine feet high; the walls one foot, eight inches thick; and the foundation three feet thick. After the foundations were completed work was stopped until

<sup>18</sup>Bartlett, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>19</sup>*Short History of the African Union Meeting and School House*, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

fall by "discouraging circumstances," probably financial problems, but by December the first floor room which measured fifty feet by forty feet, and thirty feet high was raised and covered. This room served as vestry and schoolroom until the second floor was finished. The schoolroom faced west with "no communication between" the schoolroom and the Meeting House. In May 1820 work began again (having stopped in December 1819) and continued until the roof and the schoolroom were finished. Finally, on the first Sunday in June 1820 the first worship service was held in the Union Meeting House, and Mr. Henry Jackson based his sermon on Proverbs ix, 10-12, "Wisdom has built her house . . .," while the Negro choir furnished the music under the direction of Mr. Benjamin C. Wade. Church meetings, usually conducted by various clergymen from neighboring towns, were held in the basement schoolroom until the second floor was finished and dedicated in 1821. Despite all their laudable efforts as abolitionists and philanthropists, the Society of Friends wasn't very interested in Negroes as members of their meetings:

The Society of Friends have held *only one meeting* in the house.

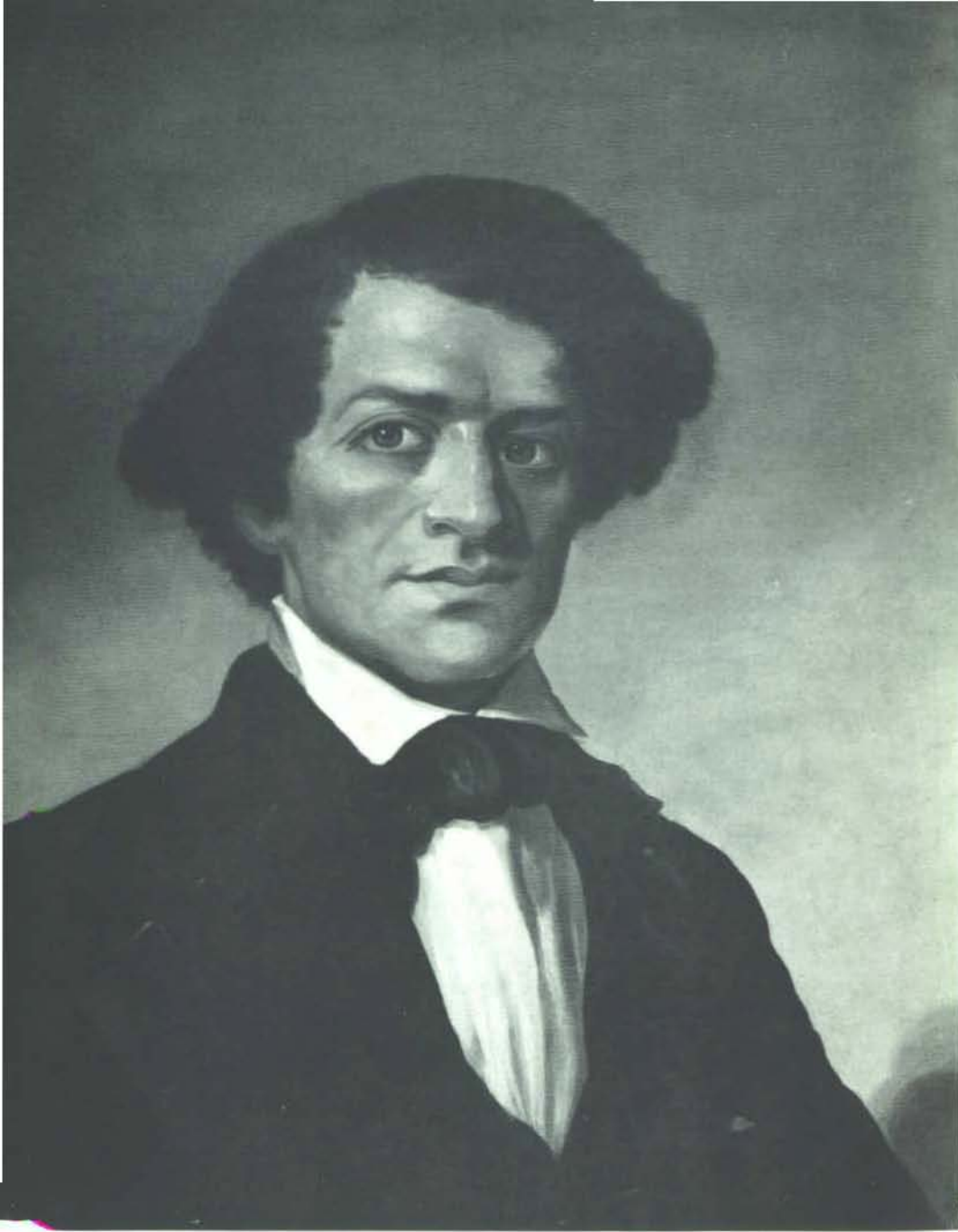
This is deeply regretted. It is sincerely wished that they will often make it convenient to favor the people of colour with their advice and instruction.<sup>24</sup>

The school offered sacred music, taught twice a week by Mr. Wade, the choir director, and a day school taught by Reverend John Ormsbee, who soon had "nearly 100" pupils, ranging in age from four through seventy years. Ormsbee was a brutal disciplinarian (see William Brown, *The Life of William Brown*, especially for the story of the pit where naughty children were confined for misbehavior) and he either left or was fired after teaching six months.<sup>25</sup>

In June 1821 the clapboarding and exterior were finished, while the white people of Providence furnished paint and pews for the completed interior. Friday, August 31, 1821 the African Union Meeting and School House was formally dedicated, and was the occasion of a gala celebration for the entire Negro community of Providence. The Negroes and their white friends paraded through the streets, led by a Negro military society, the African Greys, which

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7.



Estate of Alphonso R. Janes, 1902

Oil in R.H.S.

Frederick Douglass 1817?-1895

stopped at the Friends' Meeting House where many of the Friends had planned to march along with them. But the Friends refused to be in the parade when they saw "they had a band of music and a military company to escort them."<sup>26</sup> The procession must have been quite a show with the African Greys in full dress uniform including weapons, and the various African Societies dressed in their "regalias."

[The] President of the societies . . . was dressed to represent an African chief, having on a red pointed cap, and carried an elephant's tusk in his hand, each end was tipped with gilt. The other officers carrying emblems, decked with lemons and oranges, representing the fruits of Africa, and other emblems.<sup>27</sup>

A sour note was struck in the festivities when some white bystanders tried to halt the parade with a practical joke, but quick thinking by one of the officers of the African Greys foiled the jokester and the parade continued.<sup>28</sup> This prank was typical of the annoyances Negroes had to endure on the streets in certain parts of town, especially near "Scamp's Corner." To please Moses Brown, the African Greys stacked their guns outside the Meeting House before entering.<sup>29</sup> Rammelkamp states that the Quakers forced the African Greys to leave their weapons outside.

Mr. Henry Jackson began the dedicatory service in the Meeting House by reading from the Scriptures, leading in prayer, and preaching a sermon based on I Kings viii, 27, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? . . ." Reverend Mr. Gano led in the concluding prayer; Reverend Mr. Hunt of Chepachet gave the benediction. The music was directed by Mr. Wade. That same evening Reverend Mr. Wilson delivered a lecture from I Samuel ii, 30,

Therefore the Lord God of Israel declares: 'I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me for ever'; but now the Lord declares: 'Far be it from me; for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed.'

Although Moses Brown had stipulated in the deed of the land that the church was to be free, building costs necessitated the sale of pews

<sup>26</sup>Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>27</sup>Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>28</sup>Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>29</sup>Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

(they were to be redeemed as soon as the society had enough money).<sup>30</sup> On September 1, at four o'clock the pews were sold, and although the pews were appraised at twenty dollars, the first choice went to the highest bidder. Only Negroes were allowed to own pews, but if a Negro sold or gave a pew to a white person, or if a pewholder died without legal heirs, the pew automatically became the property of the church. The church contained 48 pews and 150 free seats; pew 24 was designated for strangers or ladies and gentlemen of town (*i.e.*, white people); pew 28 was for the minister and schoolmaster, and pews 11-14 and 35-38 were to be free unless it became absolutely necessary to sell them for expenses. Only pewholders could vote on the minister (hired annually), and all business of the society in fact, was transacted by the pewholders in quarterly meetings held at three o'clock on the first Wednesday in May, August, November, and February.<sup>31</sup> Once a regular minister was obtained, Brown's rule of precedence by age was modified to allow precedence to the resident minister. Since the school and Meeting House were in the same building, no meetings were allowed during school hours. Repairs were paid for by taxes on the pews, levied by a majority of the pewholders present, and while each owner of a pew had one vote, no one could ever have more than one vote. Since the pews held four people, some people only bought a seat or two instead of the whole pew, so that each had the same fraction of a vote as the fraction of the pew he owned. The only restrictions in the school could be on age and number. For some reason the founders of this church felt that the prohibition of a regular singing school was of sufficient importance to be inserted into their basic church law. Although some of the above rules altered Moses Brown's original plans for the society, in 1821 he assented to them.<sup>32</sup>

The three main non-white seminal churches in Rhode Island (the Indian Church in Newport, the Colored Union Church and Society in Newport, and the African Union Meeting and School House in Providence) were founded as non-denominational churches. The founders of the two latter churches stated explicitly their intentions that the churches remain open to any Christian, but such hopes were ultimately blasted, for the Providence church fell apart in the 1830s;

<sup>30</sup>*Short History of the African Union Meeting and School House*, p. 27.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 31.

some of the Negroes in the Indian Church split off in 1840; and the Colored Union Church and Society became a Congregational church in 1859.

Until the dissolution of the Union Meeting House most sources were, basically, accurate and in agreement. Once the several churches began even Rammelkamp and Bartlett committed errors and omitted churches. The most glaring error was Bartlett's statement, "In 1835 the Fourth Baptist Meeting House in Newport was organized by Negroes." Actually, as has been stated above, in 1835 the Colored Union Church and Society bought the Fourth Baptist Church building as their church building and began meeting there.<sup>33</sup> Bartlett's "new church" was only the transfer of one church into a different church building, and he omitted any mention of Christ Church; while both men ignored the Meeting Street Baptist Church. The churches which Bartlett did mention were only listed, but Rammelkamp was a little better in this respect. He gave a reason for the proliferation of Negro churches in Providence, *i.e.*, the revivals conducted by Reverend J. W. Lewis, and listed all churches in Providence (except the Meeting Street Baptist), and their dates of establishment.

The first denominational buildings in Providence for Negroes were Methodist. In 1837 the national African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church established a church in Providence. This A.M.E.Z. (denomination) church was organized as a society within the Union Meeting House and continued to meet there for one year. In 1838 the Zion A.M.E. Church separated from the Union Meeting House and became incorporated, and by 1840 had forty members. It more than doubled its membership within the next two years bringing its total to one hundred in 1842. Between 1840 and 1844 Jehial C. Beman, William Serrington, Nathan Blount, and Levin Smith served as pastors; Daniel Vandevere was pastor from 1844 to 1849; Joseph Hicks served from 1849 until 1857, followed by Peter Ross from 1857 through 1861, and in 1861 Joseph Hicks returned and stayed until 1863. This church met on Back Street from its incorporation in 1838 until 1858 when it moved to Gaspee Street.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup>Battle, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>34</sup>Richard M. Bayles, *History of Newport County, Rhode Island*, v. I, New York, 1888, p. 473; and Joseph O. Johnson, "Historical Sketch of Congdon Street Baptist Church, Providence, Rhode Island," *Minutes of the Rhode Island Baptist Anniversaries*, Providence, 1894, p. 56.

The Zion A.M.E. Church was in separate existence only one year before it split.<sup>35</sup> In 1838 the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (or the Meeting Street African Methodist Episcopal Church) was organized, and the following year (1839) it became incorporated.<sup>36</sup> It was sometimes referred to as the Second A.M.E. Church,<sup>37</sup> which was inappropriate since the first Negro Methodist church in Providence was a member of the A.M.E.Z. denomination, founded in New York in 1821, whereas the Bethel A.M.E. Church was a member of the A.M.E. denomination, founded in Philadelphia by Richard Allen in 1816.<sup>38</sup> The reason given for founding the Bethel A.M.E. Church indicated that there might have been some friction between them and their mother church, "In order to worship God in peace, we have associated ourselves together in a religious body for that purpose."<sup>39</sup> In September 1838, fifteen Negroes, led by Daniel N. Morse and Ichabod Northrup, met and organized the Bethel A.M.E. Church, and later that year built a log cabin church (thirty-five by twenty-five feet) on Meeting Street, west of Prospect Street (193 Meeting Street).<sup>40</sup> Preachers were appointed by the annual conference of the A.M.E. church, with N. C. W. Cannon (1841) as its first settled preacher, followed by Jabez P. Campbell. Prior to the Civil War Eli N. Hall, 1844; Henry Johnson, 1848; James D. Hall, 1853; and Lewis, 1858, served as ministers. By 1842 the original fifteen members had increased to eighty. One unusual provision in its constitution was that two thirds of the male members of the society would decide money matters; whereas, all other business was decided by a vote of all members.<sup>41</sup>

In 1830 the Abyssinian Free Baptist Church was formed, meeting in the Union Meeting House. Reverend John W. Lewis, the fiery Negro evangelist, came to Providence in 1835 and held a series of revivals in the Union Meeting House, which resulted in the Abyssinian Free Baptist Church joining the Rhode Island Free Will Baptist

<sup>35</sup>Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>36</sup>*An Act to Incorporate the African Union Church, in the City of Providence* [1860].

<sup>37</sup>Bayles, *op. cit.*, Providence, p. 473.

<sup>38</sup>Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro in Our History*. Washington, D.C., 1947, pp. 147-150.

<sup>39</sup>*An Act to Incorporate the African Union Church, in the City of Providence*.

<sup>40</sup>*Providence Journal* (9-18-61), p. 19.

<sup>41</sup>*Providence Evening Bulletin* (10-16-51), p. 13, and *An Act to Incorporate...*

Church's quarterly meeting as the Abyssinian Free Will Baptist Church (also known at this time as the Ebenezer Free Will Baptist Church).<sup>42</sup> This church was the only Negro Free Will Baptist Church in New England until at least 1880, and the only one in Rhode Island until 1894.<sup>43</sup> Its fifty members continued meeting at the Union Meeting House until 1840, when it moved into a hall on Middle Street.<sup>44</sup> This alters Rammelkamp's thesis that the revivals conducted by Lewis were directly responsible for the split in Negro churches in Providence. According to Rammelkamp, those who wanted "stronger religion" withdrew (from the Union Meeting House) and formed a Free Will Baptist Church. While such a church was formed, it didn't withdraw, but continued meeting in the Union Meeting House until 1840. Lewis probably did contribute to division indirectly by converting many to his beliefs, thus pushing some of the more conservative into the Methodist churches which were formed in 1837 and 1838. Thus the first churches to separate physically from the Union Meeting House were Methodist and not Baptist, as Rammelkamp implied. The independent church movement of the national Negro community, then, was more influential than Rammelkamp indicated. In 1841 a "small wooden structure" (thirty feet by forty feet) was built on the corner of Pond and Angle streets. The *Manual of the Pond Street Baptist Church* mentions that the church was located on Chapel Street before moving to Pond Street and that the lot was purchased in 1842 (*i.e.*, one year *after* the church was built). There is no other mention of these details which conflict with the account given above, so it must be assumed that they were errors. In January of 1841 the General Assembly gave the church a charter of incorporation as the Second Free Will Baptist Church in Providence.<sup>45</sup> The church occupied its new building on Pond Street in 1841. Having founded and established a new church, in 1843 Reverend Mr. Lewis decided to leave, and was followed by Luke Waldron [*sic*] who remained until

<sup>42</sup>*Inventory of the Church Archives of Rhode Island: Baptist*, p. 166, and *Manual of the Pond St. Free Baptist Church, Cor. of Pond and Angle Streets, Providence, R. I.*, Providence, 1890, pp. 15-16.

<sup>43</sup>J. M. Brewster, "The Free Baptists of Rhode Island and Vicinity," *Centennial Minutes of the Rhode Island Association of Free Baptist Churches*, Dover, N.H., 1880, p. 36.

<sup>44</sup>*Inventory, op. cit.*, p. 166, and Bayles, *op. cit.*, Providence, p. 472.

<sup>45</sup>*Manual, op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

1850 when Edward Scott succeeded him. He remained pastor of this the largest Negro church in the city until 1863.<sup>46</sup>

On December 8, 1840, Jeremiah Asher, a young "licentiate" from Hartford, was ordained in the Union Meeting House. (At the same time the Meeting Street Baptist Church was formed.) Asher had come to Providence to study under some private tutors and was about to go to Newport to finish studying for the ministry when he was persuaded to accept the pastorate of what became the Meeting Street Baptist Church. When ordained, his "church" consisted of seven men and two women, which was all that was left of the Union Meeting House with the two Methodist churches and the Abyssinian Free Will Baptist Church planning to leave. With the other Baptist group out of the way, Asher was able to build the congregation up to fifty and the membership to thirty-three by 1843. Converts were baptized in the Providence River, regardless of the season of the year, and although Asher was a bit anxious about baptizing his partially invalid wife in the middle of the winter, he records that she started to get better as soon as she was baptized.<sup>47</sup> Asher's salary was three hundred dollars a year. One half of the amount was given by the Rhode Island State Convention (so the church must have been considered a mission at first) and one half was collected in quarterly subscriptions by sisters appointed by the church. In 1842 Asher collected five hundred seventy-five dollars from several people in Providence, and supervised extensive repairs and painting of the church,<sup>48</sup> but in 1848, for no apparent reason (judging from his autobiography) he left for Shiloe Church in Philadelphia.<sup>49</sup> Reverend Mr. Schuman took over the pastorate, but for only one year. From November 1, 1849 until his death in 1853, Reverend William B. Serrington was pastor, followed by Reverend Chauncy Leonard from 1853 until 1855. In the Civil War Reverend Mr. Leonard was the first Negro chaplain appointed by President Lincoln.<sup>50</sup> From 1855 to 1857 the church was without a pastor. Reverend William Thompson (1857-1859) and Reverend Thomas Henson (1860-1862) were the last two pastors.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup>Bayles, *op. cit.*, *Providence*, p. 473.

<sup>47</sup>Jeremiah Asher, *An Autobiography*, Philadelphia, 1862, p. 69.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>50</sup>*Inventory, op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>51</sup>Bayles, *op. cit.*, *Providence*, p. 468.

The only other Negro church founded in Providence before the Civil War was Christ Church, an Episcopal church, the only Providence Negro church founded before 1860 which didn't split off from the Union Meeting House (or one of its offshoots). Christ Church was organized from meetings and worship which were held in a schoolhouse on Washington Street in 1839, and incorporated March of 1842 in a wooden building (thirty-eight feet by fifty-two feet). S. G. Degrasse was the rector in the summer and autumn of 1840. It has been remembered largely because of the famous Alexander Crummell who served as lay-reader from 1840-1844, and who later received a B.A. degree from Queen's College, Cambridge University. He went to Africa as a missionary, returning to the United States to teach in Washington, D. C., where he founded the American Negro Academy.<sup>52</sup> Soon after Crummell left, Christ Church declined and dissolved.

In addition to the churches of Providence, there were only five other Negro churches in Rhode Island before 1860, all but one in Newport. The Union Congregational Church and the Indian Church have already been discussed. The other Negro church in Newport was the Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church, organized in 1845 and incorporated in 1849, and (rather symbolically) was begun in a carpenter's shop. From there it went to Gran Lane and then to Johnson Court. Reverend Luke Walden [*sic*] who came from the Colored Union Church and Society, became their pastor in 1852.<sup>53</sup>

In 1840 those members of the Indian Church who lived in South Kingstown formed a church, Brown Chapel or the First Colored Baptist Society in South Kingstown, at Curtis Corners. A church building was completed in the same year. In 1842 the name First Colored Baptist Society was adopted, but the congregation was not strictly Baptist, it was primarily "a community church on racial lines."<sup>54</sup> Pastors of many denominations preached at various times in this church, and occasionally members held prayer meetings at Mooresfield, but "probably no separate congregation was formed there."<sup>55</sup> This was not exactly true. The group which compiled the

<sup>52</sup>Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church*, Washington, D. C., 1921, p. 177. See W. E. B. DuBois, "Of Alexander Crummell," *Souls of Black Folk*, Greenwich, Conn., 1961, pp. 157-166.

<sup>53</sup>Bayles, *op. cit.*, *Newport*, p. 23.

<sup>54</sup>*Inventory, op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>55</sup>*Inventory, op. cit.*, p. 186.

*Inventory of the Church Archives of Rhode Island: Baptist*, along with the authors of all state, local, and ecclesiastical histories consulted for this paper, somehow overlooked the Colored Baptist Church at Mooresfield. Only a brief note added to an article about a farm in South Kingstown preserved the memory of this church:

Mr. Daniel Rodman gave the land and help (*sic*) to build the church: in fact, he was called the Church and Society both. This church was used by them for a number of years. Of late years there has been nothing more than an occasional service, and Sunday School during the summer months.<sup>56</sup>

Since every Negro church (except the Mount Zion A.M.E. Church in Newport) founded in Rhode Island before 1860, was founded in the period covered by Rammelkamp (1840-1842), he has already described the social, economic, and political background out of which these churches sprang, but a few remarks could be made, however, about his interpretations and the relation of Providence to the national Negro community.

The Providence Negro community was atypical of the Negro community in the North, and Richard Bardolph, in *The Negro Vanguard*, says that from 1800-1830 most outstanding Negroes in America were preachers; whereas, from 1830-1860 most outstanding Negroes were reformers, especially abolitionists. In Rhode Island these two periods were compressed into one, beginning in the late 1830s. The three major leaders in the struggle of Providence Negroes for political and social reform, J. W. Lewis, Jeremiah Asher, and Alexander Crummell, were all clergymen and leaders in the Providence Negro independent church movement. Lewis was something of a universal reformer; he organized and taught an academy, organized and led a church, fought for political reform for Negroes, and made Providence prominent in the New England temperance campaign. Providence was unusual in that all these men, while in Rhode Island, and the Negro community as a whole were primarily concerned with local reform and only secondarily concerned with problems such as abolition.

Rammelkamp gave 1820 as the most significant date in the development of a Negro community in Providence. The years from 1835-

<sup>56</sup>Joseph Peace Hazard, "The Colored Baptist Church at Mooresfield," *The Narragansett Historical Register*, v. II (October, 1883), no. 2, p. 136.

1848 roughly, seemed, to this author, to be Providence's "crucial decade." During this period the Negroes in Providence were blessed by having three strong Negro leaders working for reform at the same time. Rammelkamp made no note of this, but it seemed in writing this paper that a major factor responsible for the formation of a sense of community among Providence Negroes was the power of strong Negro leadership to weld the Negroes together. The social, political, and economic forces described by Rammelkamp were crucial. The purpose of this observance was only to point out that what this author considers to be an important factor, Rammelkamp overlooked. Finally, it must be stated that Bartlett's account of the Negroes in the period 1820-1842 seemed superior to Rammelkamp's because Rammelkamp's tendency was to minimize the important part played by Negroes in the formation of a community by overemphasizing the role of white philanthropists.

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## EARLY YEARS OF THE HOPE COTTON MANUFACTURING COMPANY

by HERBERT T. LEYLAND\*

IN ITS FORMATIVE YEARS, the textile mill which was formerly located at Hope was known as the Hope Cotton Manufacturing Company. The history of the early years of the company is typical of that of the Pawtuxet River Valley cotton spinning ventures. Some nine or ten of the companies were established between 1805 and 1808. All of them were family-type mills which earned good profits for their shareholders until the close of the War of 1812, when most of the firms failed or came close to doing so.

The Hope mill was located at the site of the well-known Hope Furnace, which played an important part in supplying cannon for the Continental forces during the American Revolution. When the ore beds of nearby Cranston were exhausted, the Furnace was closed down. An old building called the "Boaring Mill" and some twenty-one acres of land remained. In July, 1806, six Providence men, namely

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Sylvanus (Silvanus) Hopkins, Peter Wanton Snow, Christopher C. Olney, Nathaniel G. Olney, Nehemiah Hawkins and Ebenezer S. Thomas, acquired the property at an auction sale, for the purpose of erecting a cotton mill.<sup>1</sup> The purchasers decided to follow the pattern of other Pawtuxet Valley cotton mills and so divided the capital of the firm into sixteen shares. Sylvanus Hopkins had owned an undivided one-sixteenth part of the Furnace property. He transferred that interest to the partnership in exchange for a one-sixteenth share in the firm and also bought another sixteenth interest in the venture. The six men raised seven thousand dollars to pay for the fifteen-sixteenths interest in the property.<sup>2</sup> The partners, however, took only thirteen shares for themselves and reserved three shares in common to be sold to other persons at a later date.<sup>3</sup> One of the three was sold to John Innes Clark and the remaining two were acquired by the medical firm of Pardon Bowen and John M. Eddy.<sup>4</sup> Several of the initial thirteen changed hands between July 1806 and November 1807, so that when the company began operations in the late fall of 1807, or early in 1808, eleven Providence business and professional men constituted the partnership.<sup>5</sup>

Following the purchase of the land, the company erected a number of new buildings on the property. A spinning mill was the central feature of the plant. The structure measured eighty-four feet in width and thirty-seven in depth, "three stories high in front and four in rear . . . the Building has a Projection in front about twelve feet square & One in the rear of about five feet square."<sup>6</sup> The first two

<sup>1</sup>Scituate Town Records, MS Deed Book 9, pp. 664-667.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, MS Deed Book 9, pp. 678, 667.

<sup>5</sup>Providence Mutual Fire Insurance Company, MS Fire Records, Vol. 2, p. 515. The eleven men were: John Innes Clark, William Bowen, Ephraim Bowen, Jr., Pardon Bowen, John Carlile, Samuel Carlile, John M. Eddy, Christopher C. Olney, Sylvanus Hopkins, Alexander Jones and Thomas S. Webb.

Christopher C. Olney (1745-1809) was a colonel in the Revolutionary army. In 1766 he married Jemima Porter, and by her had three sons and four daughters. Early in the nineteenth century he became a manufacturer and had several plants at Olneyville, which was named for him. One son, Nathaniel G., was associated with his father in business and after his father's death, the son carried on the manufacturing operations. Henry W. Rugg, *History of Freemasonry in Rhode Island* (Providence, 1891), p. 275.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

stories were of stone and the others of wood. In addition to the machinery, the building housed a company store where yarn was sold at retail and where the employees obtained their food, clothing and other necessities. The equipment of the mill consisted of about six hundred spindles together with the carding and roving machines and other apparatus necessary for spinning cotton yarn. A water wheel attached to the main shaft furnished power for the equipment. The wheel was located inside the mill to prevent the freezing of the water supply from interfering with operations.

In addition to the mill building there also was a workshop which contained triphammers, forges, furnaces and lathes. Built of wood, two stories high, forty feet by twenty-nine, the equipment in the shop was used to make and repair the mill machinery. The old "Boaring Mill" structure, ninety feet in width and twenty feet deep, was divided into a weaving house, grist mill and dwellings.<sup>7</sup> The presence of a "weaving house" as part of the plant seems to indicate a belief among the partners that the weaving of certain types of cloth might be done better at the factory rather than in the homes of the "put-out" weavers. Three small frame houses, each thirty-two by twenty-five feet in dimensions, a one-story cottage and one larger residence completed the firm's physical plant. Fire insurance policies covering the buildings and equipment indicate an expenditure of about twenty-three thousand dollars for buildings and machinery; thus the cost of the land, buildings and equipment totaled about thirty thousand dollars.<sup>8</sup>

The capitalization of the company about the first part of 1808 appears to have been about thirty-two thousand dollars. Since nearly all the money had been expended in the purchase of the land, buildings and machinery, the firm had almost no liquid assets with which to operate the business. This was the case with many, if not all, of the Pawtuxet Valley mills and resulted in a system of barter in order to do business. Yarn spun by the mill, as well as the cloth made from the yarn, were traded for raw cotton and mill supplies, as well as for food and other necessities for the mill families. Accounts with the workers were struck quarterly or semiannually, and each employee was given a due bill payable in merchandise at the company store. The bill also

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 516, 517, 518.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

was used to pay the rent for the company-owned house in which the mill family lived. This system was extended, also, to the persons who, in their homes, as independent operators, wove the firm's yarn into cloth. The weaver was given a supply of yarn which was charged to his account. He was credited with the number of pounds of yarn returned by him in the form of cloth. Representatives of the company, both at Providence and at the mill, also received their compensation in due bills or goods from the company store, or in yarn or cloth. "In this way," wrote Ware, "business was conducted with great irregularity, with the minimum of exchange, no ready money and no regular system of credit."<sup>9</sup>

When it began business, the Hope Company established an office in Providence and appointed its largest shareholder, Thomas Smith Webb, as agent in the town. He doubtless had his office in his commodious, three-story, yellow-brick home at the southeast corner of Westminster and Pleasant (now Eddy) streets. Webb resigned his agency in 1811 and was succeeded by Alexander Adie who, in turn, resigned in 1813 and was succeeded by John Johnson. During the latter part of the early years the mill was managed by Nathan J. Sweatland, who was the resident agent at the plant.

Early in 1808 changes in the ownership of the firm's shares required the dissolution of the old partnership and the establishment of a new concern. Notice of the formation of the new company was given in the Providence papers. The names of the eleven partners who composed the new concern were listed in the notice.<sup>10</sup> Webb was

<sup>9</sup>Caroline F. Ware, *The Early New England Cotton Manufacture* (Boston, 1931), p. 166.

<sup>10</sup>Providence *Columbian Phenix*, May 21, 1808. The partners in the new firm were: John Innes Clark, William Bowen, Ephraim Bowen, Jr., Pardon Bowen, John M. Eddy, John Carlile, Samuel Carlile, Alexander Jones, Cornelius Soule, James Harrison and Thomas S. Webb.

John Innes Clark was a well-to-do merchant of the post-Revolutionary era. He owned a distill house on Distill Lane (now Page Street) and was associated with Col. Joseph Nightingale in the shipping business. Clark built a home at the northeast corner of John and Benefit streets and lived in it for a number of years. Some years after his death the house burned down. See John H. Cady, *Civic and Architectural Development of Providence* (Providence, 1957), pp. 57, 59, 62, 63, 73.

Pardon Bowen and John M. Eddy were Providence physicians in the early years of the nineteenth century.

John Carlile (1762-1832) was a cabinetmaker. His shop was located at 113 South Main Street, and his home, for several years, was at 16 George Street.

reappointed as the Providence agent.

The company doubled the number of spindles in its plant early in 1809. To do so, it was necessary to secure additional funds; consequently a loan of fourteen thousand dollars was obtained from the New York firm of Henry and John Coster. A first mortgage on the land, buildings and equipment was given to secure the loan which was to be repaid one-half in 1811 and the balance in 1812.<sup>11</sup>

It appears that the largest part of the loan was used to purchase the new equipment, which consisted of, "Six Throstle Frames of One Hundred & eight Spindles each — two mules of one Hundred & ninety each — two Stretches of Ninety each, one Twister of Seventy-two, in all twelve hundred and sixty spindles."<sup>12</sup> After the installation of the additional equipment, the firm was able to produce, each week, enough yarn to make about three thousand yards of cloth.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Scituate Town Records, MS Deed Book 10, p. 216.

<sup>12</sup>Providence Mutual Fire Insurance Company, MS Fire Records, Vol. 2, p. 789.

<sup>13</sup>Perry Walton, *Story of Textiles* (Boston, 1912), p. 185.

He married Nancy Dana and by her had thirteen children. He was active in several civic affairs and served on several of the committees appointed by the Town Council. Interested in the Providence Independent Artillery Company, he served as colonel of the unit for several years. In politics he was a Federalist. He was a member of St. John's Episcopal Church and served as one of the wardens. For twenty-three years he was a director of the Providence Mutual Fire Insurance Company. See Rugg, *History of Freemasonry*, p. 293.

Samuel Carlile, John's brother, was a partner with John in the lumber business which also occupied the space at 113 South Main Street.

Little has been found concerning Alexander Jones. He is known to have been a cotton broker, i.e., he bought, at public auction, raw cotton for the Providence area mills. He owned a one-sixteenth interest in the Hope Company, which he brought early in 1807 from Christopher C. Olney. Jones had a daughter named Harriet, who was one of the early members of the Psallonian Society. Though not a member of the group, Jones accompanied his daughter to the meetings of the Society.

James Harrison (1767-1812) was a resident of Boston most of his life. He appears to have been a successful merchant of the post-Revolutionary era. His shop, from 1800 to 1812, was at 80 Middle Street in Boston. For the first seven years of the century he was a partner in the firm of Harrison and Hall. During the last five years, Francis Wilby was Harrison's partner. In addition to his business, Harrison was active in fraternal affairs in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island. He died at Charleston on Monday, January 20, 1812. See Boston City Directories 1798-1810 inclusive.

Ephraim Bowen, Jr. (1753-1843) was a Revolutionary War patriot. On June 10, 1772, he took part in the burning of the British armed schooner, *Gaspee*. The vessel had been stationed in Narragansett Bay to watch for smugglers. The captain and other officers of the schooner had been arrogant in their exercise of authority



Although the Embargo of 1807 did not ruin the New England cotton mills, it did force them to look to the West for new customers. New York, Baltimore and Philadelphia became centers for the wholesale distribution of yarn and cloth. Enterprising businessmen in those towns established "domestic warehouses" to which the mills shipped their output. The wholesaler loaned the mill fifty per cent of the value of the goods stored in the warehouse, charged the legal rate of interest on the loan, and received, also, a five per cent commission on all sales made west of the Appalachians.<sup>14</sup> It was this switch from retail to wholesale that enabled the Hope firm to expand their plant. A notice of July 7, 1810 is evidence of the firm's need at that time for more employees to operate the additional equipment:

#### FAMILIES WANTED

Three or four families with Children will meet with constant employment and good wages at the HOPE COTTON FACTORY in Scituate. Also wanted, a good MULE SPINNER, or a young man to learn to spin upon a Mule. Apply at the said Factory, or to the Subscriber, in Providence.

July 7, 1810 THOMAS S. WEBB, Agent.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Ware, *Cotton Manufacture*, pp. 168-169.

<sup>15</sup>*Providence Gazette*, July 14, 1810.

and thus incurred the hatred of Providence patriots. When the vessel attempted to pursue a Providence packet-boat, the schooner ran aground a few miles below Providence. Patriots then determined to set the schooner on fire and did so. Bowen was a native of Providence and became a well-to-do and respected citizen of the community. He was active in the fraternal life of the city and state for over fifty years. See Rugg, *History of Freemasonry*, pp. 277-278.

Thomas Smith Webb (1771-1819) today is perhaps the best known of the Hope group. Born in Boston, Webb learned the bookbinder's trade but shortly abandoned it to become a manufacturer of wallpaper at Albany and Providence. In 1807 he became interested in the Hope Company and became its Providence agent. In 1813 he built his own mill at Walpole, Massachusetts. From there he migrated to Worthington, Ohio and invested heavily in the Worthington Manufacturing Company. In 1797 he married Martha Hopkins of Boston, by whom he had five children. On his wife's death he married her sister, Mehitabel Hopkins, who bore him four children. His son, Dr. Thomas Hopkins Webb, M.D., was the best known of all the children, though his daughter Emily married Jonathan Preston, a prominent New England architect.

Active in civic and fraternal affairs in Providence, Webb became colonel of the

As part of its program of expansion the partnership constructed a new workshop early in 1810.<sup>16</sup> Built of wood, the shop was two stories high, thirty feet wide and forty feet deep. It contained a water wheel, powering lathes, drums and a triphammer. The old shop probably was needed for other purposes, since it is unlikely that the firm required two workshops.

Another development in the industry in 1810 appeared when dye houses were established. Undoubtedly the Hope firm co-operated with a dye house. It undertook to dye yarn and cloth, accepting yarn in payment for the service. The dye house then sought weavers to use the colored yarn.

Further expansion of the Hope Company's mill occurred in 1812 following the declaration of war in June of that year. Again the firm needed additional capital. It was obtained through a loan from Silas Talbot of New York, who advanced the firm twenty thousand dollars upon the security of a first mortgage on all of the partnership property. Due in three years after date, the note was made by Samuel Carlile, and payable to William Bowen at the Merchants Bank in New York. It was endorsed by all the other partners and given to Talbot.<sup>17</sup>

The company undoubtedly enjoyed a lively business during the war years making goods for domestic consumption. Because the records of the firm were burned in a fire which destroyed the mill in 1844, it is not known if the mill sold cloth to the Federal Government or to contractors furnishing war materials to the United States. When news of the Treaty of Ghent (which ended the War of 1812) was brought to Providence in February 1815, the firm's business suffered an almost fatal blow. The concern, however, managed to survive, but

<sup>16</sup>Providence Mutual Fire Insurance Company, MS Fire Records, Vol. 3, Policy #1141.

<sup>17</sup>Scituate Town Records, MS Deed Book 10, p. 44.

Second Regiment of Providence Militia, a member of several committees of the Town Council, and a member of the First Congregation and later of St. John's Episcopal churches. He was one of the founders of the Psallonian choral group. In the Providence Mutual Fire Insurance Company, he served for several years as treasurer and a trustee of the Company. On his removal to Boston in 1814, Webb became active in the civic and musical life of that city. He is remembered today as the first president and first conductor of the Handel and Haydn Society.

In 1819 Webb started on a trip from Boston to Worthington. He died suddenly at Cleveland on July 6, 1819. See Herbert T. Leyland, *Thomas Smith Webb* (Dayton, Ohio, 1965), *passim*.

lost all but eight thousand dollars of the eighty-five thousand dollars that constituted its capital in 1814.

During the years from 1807 to 1814, the ownership of the company's shares had changed. What had begun in 1807 as a Providence venture owned exclusively by Providence men had slowly become an interstate concern. By 1814, New York and Boston capital had been invested in the partnership, although it is almost impossible to ascertain how much money was contributed by people outside Providence. At least six of the sixteen shares appear in the names of persons living in other cities or towns.<sup>18</sup> For one reason or another, John Innes Clark, Thomas S. Webb, Christopher C. Olney and Sylvanus Hopkins had retired from the firm. The partnership of John & Samuel Carlile had sold one of its shares, although it retained the second share. The Carlile brothers, together with William Bowen, Alexander Jones, Ebenezer Macumber and the firm of Bowen & Eddy, appear to be the only Providence citizens interested in the company when the war ended.

From 1814 to 1821 the shares in the firm were purchased for various sums. Generally the shares sold for very low, sometimes nominal, prices. One share was sold on execution by the sheriff of Providence County. The shares were apparently all acquired by John Whipple and Ephraim Talbot, both of Providence. When the Tariff of 1816 became effective and the power loom was put into use, the firm again enjoyed successful operations and earned a profit for the partners. The changes in the ownership of the company and the revival of its business may be said to have produced the second stage in the history of the Hope Company.

<sup>18</sup>The "outside" shares were held by Cornelius Seabury of Tiverton, R. I., Oliver Kain of New York, Thomas W. Summer and the Estate of James Harrison, both of Boston, and Ephraim Bowen, Jr., of Warwick, R. I. Kain owned a two-sixteenths interest; the others each held a sixteenth.



## NEW MEMBERS (continued from back cover)

October 1, 1965 to December 31, 1965

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|--|--|
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| Mrs. Paul F. Kalat                                   | Mrs. Hal C. Neubauer                                   |
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| Miss Mary E. Kelley<br>Pawtucket, R. I.              | Mr. Walter Ward Parks                                  |
| Miss Lysbeth Wilson Kelley<br>North Kingstown, R. I. | Miss Lorraine E. Paziienza<br>Cranston, R. I.          |
| Miss Marion L. Kesselring                            | Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Knight Peet<br>Cranston, R. I.     |
| The Ven. Canon William L. Kite                       | Mrs. Knight Peet                                       |
| Mrs. A. David Kossoff                                | Mr. Francis P. Quilliam<br>East Providence, R. I.      |
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| Rev. and Mrs. R. Vernon Lawson<br>Peace Dale, R. I.  | Harry A. Schwartz Family Found.<br>Cumberland, R. I.   |
| Mrs. Milton Leand                                    | Francis H. Scola, M.D.<br>Cranston, R. I.              |
| Mr. J. Irving McDowell                               | Mrs. David C. Scott, Jr.                               |
| Mrs. G. L. Millard<br>Bristol, R. I.                 | Miss Louise B. Smith<br>East Providence, R. I.         |
| Mr. George J. Lough, Jr.<br>Cumberland, R. I.        | Mr. and Mrs. Edwin S. Soforenko                        |
| Mr. and Mrs. Robert B. Lynch<br>Cranston, R. I.      | Mr. Raymond N. Storin<br>Pawtucket, R. I.              |
| Mrs. Richard E. Macdonald                            | Mrs. Robert J. Tefft, Jr.<br>Rumford, R. I.            |
| Mrs. Richard H. MacGuyer<br>Rumford, R. I.           | Miss Sally Thibodeau<br>North Providence, R. I.        |
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| Mrs. William Maker                                   | Mr. and Mrs. Harold Whitaker<br>West Barrington, R. I. |
| Mrs. Anthony B. Manera                               | Mr. Ernest C. Wilks<br>Woonsocket, R. I.               |
| Mrs. Albert P. Marcello                              | Mrs. W. Irving Wolf<br>Pawtucket, R. I.                |
| Mrs. Earl R. Marsh, Jr.<br>North Providence, R. I.   | Mrs. Myron W. Zimmerman<br>Rumford, R. I.              |
| Mrs. Winifred G. Martin                              |  |
| Mr. Edmund M. Mauro                                  |  |
| Mrs. Leo Patrick McGowan<br>Barrington, R. I.        |  |
| Mr. Peter J. McGuire, Jr.<br>Greenville, R. I.       |  |
| Mr. William F. Micarelli                             |  |

# THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## NEW MEMBERS

*October 1, 1965 to December 31, 1965*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
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|   | Mrs. Albert Hutnak<br>Pascoag, R. I.                  |
|   | Mrs. Richard Jackson<br>Barrington, R. I.             |

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