

R H O D E
I S L A N D
H I S T O R Y

SPRING 1969

The world is full of loving
As any one can prove
But the love a mother gives you
Is a special kind of love

It holds you and it folds you,
It's different from all others,
Oh, we say it very truly,
There's no one just like mother

16
113
King
7/2
17

I pledge all praise to my
flag, the emblem of
temperance, self control,
pure thoughts, clean
habits, the white flag that
surrenders to nothing but
purity and truth and to
none but God whose
temples we are.



R H O D E I S L A N D H I S T O R Y

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VOLUME 28 NUMBER 2 MAY 1969

David Benedict was an exemplary "pious" young man of his day. He was graduated from Brown University in 1806 to become pastor of the Pawtucket Baptist Church which had been "gathered" through his efforts while he was still a student. His church was one of the eleven that founded the Rhode Island Baptist State Convention in 1825.



Engraving by F. Halpin from a painting by E. Hunt for A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America by David Benedict (New York, 1848).

National revivalist Charles Grandison Finney added his talents to those of local Baptist leaders to fire the religious enthusiasm of the 1830s.



Portrait from the Dictionary of American Portraits (Dover Publications, Inc., 1967).

Rhode Island Baptists 1825-1931

Most observers of the American religious tradition are aware that Roger Williams founded the First Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1639. What became of the Baptists of this state after the initial impetus of this staunch defender of religious liberty is a story considerably less familiar. The purpose of this article is to trace the development of the Baptists of Rhode Island, including their social influences and theological attitudes from 1825 to 1931.¹ The first of these dates marks the founding of the Rhode Island Baptist State Convention, the initial organization to represent the fellowship of "regular" Baptists.² The second date is marked by what Norman F. Furniss calls the cessation of fundamentalism as a primary influence in American religious life.³ To carry this study beyond 1931 would make difficult a genuine historical perspective and would further crowd the limitations of space.

Prior to 1825, the numerical growth of the Baptists in Rhode Island was slow, although important institutions were established during this formative period. These included Rhode Island College, later to be called Brown University; the Warren Association, which led the fight on behalf of the Baptists for full religious liberty in Massachusetts; and the first Sunday School in New England, founded at Pawtucket by Samuel Slater in 1796 or 1797. Even so, the Baptists of the state in 1825 numbered only twenty-one congregations with little cooperation existing among them. It was in that year that the Rhode Island Baptist State Convention was founded "for missionary and other purposes" by eleven churches, eight from Rhode Island and three from neighboring Massachusetts.⁴ The remaining con-

gregations in Rhode Island declined to join, fearful that such a "super-organization" would deprive them of their autonomy.⁵

By 1827 the work of the convention was defined to embrace three objectives: the support of foreign and domestic missions, the education of "pious" young men for the ministry, and the publication of a religious newspaper.⁶ The missionary goal proved to be the heart of the convention's life as the member churches sought the unconverted within their own state and throughout the world. In the early years it was easier to raise funds for work in Burma than it was for labor in Burrillville.⁷ Part-time agents, however, canvassed the state, preached the gospel, held conferences, circulated books and periodicals, and attended monthly meetings of tract, Sunday School, and temperance societies. Largely through such efforts, nine new churches were founded between 1830 and 1840. The educational goal of the convention was achieved in part through the Rhode Island Baptist Education Society, which assisted young men preparing for the ministry, and through Brown University, where a majority of these individuals received their actual training.⁸ The printing of the *Religious Messenger* achieved the third goal, although the publication survived only three years before passing to the cemetery of defunct periodicals. Later journals eventually succeeded it.

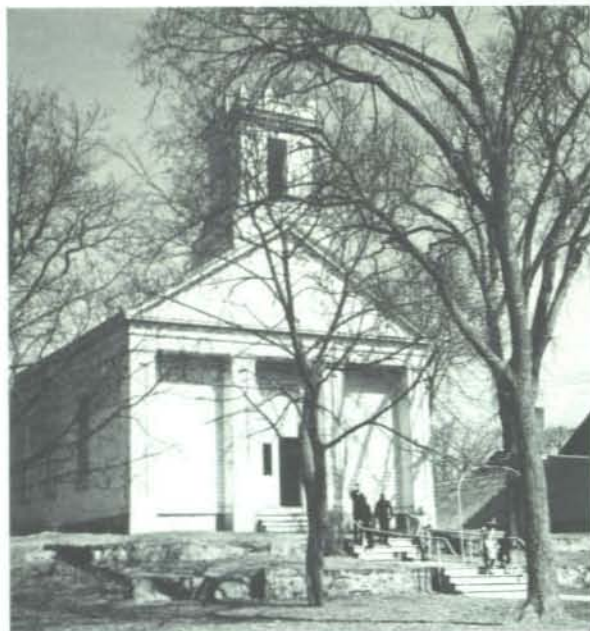
Waves of religious enthusiasm swept over the Baptists of the state in the 1830s and the 1840s. Leading the revivalists was no less a national religious leader than Charles Grandison Finney, who twice brought his "new measures" to Providence. Following a protracted

*Dr. Russell is Associate Professor, Department of Religion, College of Liberal Arts, Boston University.

- 1 The principal primary sources for this study have been the annual minutes of the Rhode Island Baptist State Convention; the yearbooks of the Warren, Providence, Narragansett, and Roger Williams Associations; and the minutes of seven representative Baptist churches in the state (the First Baptist Church and the Calvary Baptist Church, Providence; the First Baptist, John Clarke Memorial Church and the Second Baptist Church, Newport; the First Baptist Church, Woonsocket; the Oak Lawn Community Baptist Church, Cranston; and the Central Baptist Church, Jamestown). State, city, and town histories have also been consulted as well as Rhode Island newspapers and contemporary Baptist magazines and journals. Secondary sources have included the main denominational histories and standard surveys and monographs in the field of the American church.
- 2 The Seventh Day Baptists, the Six Principle Baptists, and the Free Will Baptists are not included in this article,

although brief mention is made of the latter group.

- 3 Norman F. Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918-1931* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1954), 178.
- 4 Convention Minutes, 1829, 4. The constituent churches were the First and Second churches of Providence; the second church, Newport; the Baptist churches of Warren, Bristol, Tiverton, Pawtucket, and Pawtuxet, Rhode Island, and the Baptist churches of West Wrentham, Attleborough, and New Bedford in Massachusetts.
- 5 Rev. Frank Rector, "Centennial Retrospect," *Convention Minutes*, 1925, 53.
- 6 *Convention Minutes*, 1827, 5.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 1829, 7. The growing number of people in manufacturing villages, the spiritual destitution of whole towns, the successes of the past, the example of Jesus as the first great domestic missionary, the peace and orderliness of the community, the honor of the Redeemer, the salvation of the perishing, and the good of the churches were among the appeals cited to overcome the inadequacy of funds.



Photograph by Alfred J. Viera

meeting of three weeks in the fall of 1831, he proclaimed that "there was a great shaking among the dry bones in the different churches."⁹ Hundreds were added to the church rolls, "backsliders" were reclaimed, missions received renewed attention, and temperance societies were established. The Dorr War and the Millerite movement temporarily limited the numerical and spiritual progress of Rhode Island Baptists, although the formation of the Providence Baptist Association in 1843 and the constantly evolving leadership of the state convention reflected signs of development in the midst of struggle. Such struggle was

When this building was erected in 1816, it housed a mission church of what is now the First Baptist Church of North Kingstown. This mission church became Wickford's First Baptist Church organized in 1834 and was one of the twenty congregations that formed the Narragansett Association in 1860.

occasioned primarily by an ever-increasing flood of immigrants to the state, usually Roman Catholic in religious origin, which steadily reduced the proportionate strength of the Baptists, although by 1854 they had come to number one-third of the Protestants in the state.¹⁰

The famous Revival of 1858, characterized by its lay leadership, its emphasis upon prayer, and the activity of the Sunday Schools, added over 1,500 new members to the Baptist churches of the state, the largest influx in a single year in the history of the denomination in Rhode Island.¹¹ A marked numerical and spiritual de-

8 Brown University and the Baptists of the state experienced a three-fold relationship at this early time. [1] Administrative leaders, faculty members, and many students frequently joined the First Baptist Church of Providence. This was notably true of Francis Wayland who began a twenty-eight year term as President in 1827. Dr. Wayland joined the old First Church in April, 1828, and continued his membership there until his death in 1865. [2] A goodly number of professors and students supplied Baptist pulpits in the state during their years at Brown and gave of their financial resources to the convention. [3] Several churches, in turn, contributed financially to the support of the school.

9 Charles G. Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney*, (New York, A. S. Barnes and Company, 1876), 343.

10 In 1854 nine of the Baptist churches counted over 250 members while the average attendance at the Sunday worship services was higher than the membership. These churches were as follows: First, Providence (474); Third, Providence (458); First, Newport (325); Second, Providence (307); First, Westerly (279); the Lippit and Phenix Church, Warwick (270); First, South Kingstown (269); Warren (258); and Second, Hopkinton (257). Henry Jackson, *An Account of the Churches in Rhode Island* (Providence, George H. Whitney, 1854), 103.

cline, however, followed the enthusiasm of 1858, accounted for in part by the absorption of religious interests into the issues of the Civil War. While the problem of slavery was drawing the attention of the state and nation, twenty congregations of the southern section of Rhode Island quietly formed their own Narragansett Association in 1860 for the purpose of a closer spiritual fellowship and a greater development of "dormant talent, property, and piety."¹² With the exception of the Newport congregations, the churches comprising the new organization were located in rural communities, primarily on the west side of the Narragansett Bay and south of East Greenwich. The membership of the churches in the Association reached a peak of 4,116 in 1895 after which a noticeable decline occurred until 1919, caused chiefly by a shift of population from rural to urban areas.

During the last third of the nineteenth century, Baptist work in Rhode Island was challenged by the continued heavy influx of foreign-born people largely Italian and French in nationality; a shift in population from country to city; and a serious financial recession. As a result of the immigration, drawn in part by the lure of adventure and the industrial opportunities in the mills of Rhode Island, the foreign-born in the state by 1900 comprised over 30% of the population. Since most of these newcomers were Roman Catholic by religious affiliation, there probably was no section of the United States where the Roman Church made greater progress during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early portion of the twentieth than in the state of Rhode Island.¹³ The urban movement weakened the country churches, although many Baptists kept their membership in these congregations, thereby creating a non-resident membership which proved to be of little financial or spiritual assistance to the churches of either the country or the city. Further-

more, in many instances the rural congregations, unable financially to support a full-time minister, found themselves without the stimulus of a trained leadership. The nationwide panic of 1873 to 1878 also limited the resources of the churches and plunged the state convention into debt.

The vigorous counter-attack of Rhode Island Baptists against these conditions was centered in a trained ministry to reach the foreign population, an area in which the Baptists were pioneers in the state; the continuation of a domestic missionary program; the conduct of mass revival services, this time under Moody and Sankey; and the development of organizational trends in the various parishes, foreshadowing the institutional church. The work among the immigrants brought modest dividends at best, the most noticeable results of which were the birth of new churches among the French and Swedes. Despite the thoroughness of the counter-attack, however, Rhode Island Baptists, near the end of the nineteenth century, experienced years when their work either halted or declined. Some of their leaders, impatient with the lag in growth and service, suggested traditional remedies. Others, unable to change the social patterns which encompassed them, suggested fresh approaches for a new day of opportunity.

The most significant approach took place at the Calvary Baptist Church in Providence in 1898 where, under the direction of Dr. Edward Holyoke, a full-scale institutional program to meet the social needs of the entire community was introduced.¹⁴ The purpose of the "Calvary Baptist Institute," as it was called, was "to promote the physical, mental, social and moral interests of all its members and patrons."¹⁵ A gymnasium and a swimming pool provided recreational facilities. A library, a reading room, and an evening school afforded intellectual stimulation. Courses were offered

11 Timothy Smith believes the mid-century revivals brought to a climax four fundamental changes in the inner life of American Protestantism: lay participation and control became superior to the leadership of the clergy, the spirit of interdenominational brotherhood came to maturity, ethical concerns replaced dogmatic zeal in evangelical preaching and writing, and Arminian views crowded out Calvinism in much of the dogma which remained. Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America*, (New York, Abingdon Press, 1957), 80.

12 George B. Peck, "Historical Sketch of the Narragansett

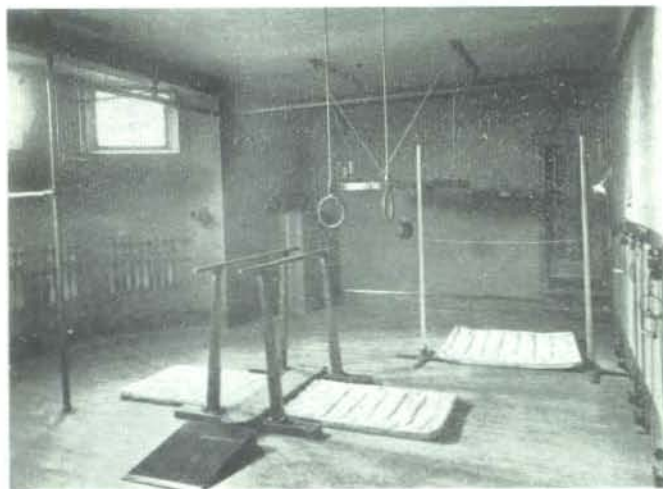
Baptist Association, 1860-1864." *Narragansett Association Minutes*, 1884, 9.

13 Thomas Williams Bicknell, *The History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, II (New York, The American Historical Society, 1920), 617.

14 This was the first Institutional Church in Rhode Island. A few churches in the country pre-dated this emphasis, notably Russell Conwell's Baptist Temple in Philadelphia in 1891.

15 *Calvary Baptist Church, Providence, Rhode Island, One Hundredth Anniversary, 1854-1954*, 10.

This photograph of its gymnasium appeared in the Prospectus of Calvary Baptist Institute, 1898, described as "equipped with a variety of apparatus for both light and heavy work, and with commodious dressing rooms, lockers and shower baths."



including music, public speaking, languages, and subjects of a vocational nature such as stenography, dress-making, millinery, and printing and drawing. Culturally, there were clubs for young men and women as well as a concert and lecture series for the entire membership of the Institute. Devotionally, Bible-study groups were conducted and chapel services were held regularly.¹⁶ The significance of the Institute at Calvary Church lay in the pioneering service which it performed in endeavoring to meet the total needs of people as well as ministering to those beyond the immediate membership of the congregation.¹⁷ Once this example was set, other congregations, including old First Church in Providence, followed the trend away from a strictly "spiritual" ministry, normally employing the revivalistic technique, to a broadened concept of the church, relying heavily upon the education of the entire man.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁷ The Calvary Baptist Institute continued until 1917 when many of its services were caught up by the YMCA. In that year the church, recognizing that the primary function of the institute had been performed, reorganized the social work of the parish through the appointment of a Community Service Committee which was to guide the program of meeting the continuing needs of the parish and its neighborhood. Minutes of the Calvary Baptist Church, 1891-1919, 524.

¹⁸ While the institutional features stimulated the growth at Calvary Church until it reached a maximum

The reading room was "open to the general public without condition, every week-day, from 2 until 9 p.m., and Sundays from 2 until 5 o'clock."



Contemporaneous with the work of the institutional church, a new kind of evangelism was taking hold in the state, characterized by pastoral guidance, church school decision days, and the holding of conferences for the purpose of determining church strategy. Such an approach did much to minimize the emotional element in religious commitment and supplemented new concepts of the church at work in a changing society.

The Baptists of Rhode Island through their convention entered into a voluntary relationship with the newly created Northern Baptist Convention in 1907 and participated in an important church union with the Free Will Baptist Association in 1912. The churches of the former Free Will denomination in the state formed a fourth association in 1914, taking the name "The Roger Williams Association." The convention was now presented with the anomaly of an association whose churches were not confined to a particular geo-

membership of 1,818 in 1930, the application of the gospel on a wider scale could not reverse a numerical decline at the old First meetinghouse. From 716 in 1905 the congregation's membership dropped to 504 in 1930 and continued to decrease for nearly two decades. A changing environment was in large measure responsible for this trend. *Convention Minutes*, 1905, 88.

¹⁹ The peak year of the foreign-born whites in Rhode Island was 1910 when 178,025 comprised the population. By 1930, the total had dropped to 137,784. A radical change ensued for the Roman Catholic Church with

graphical area but were grouped according to a former denominational affiliation. Augmented by the 3,332 Free Will Baptists, the convention had grown to a total of over 16,000 members, with its numerical strength centered in Providence, Pawtucket, and Westerly. Its leaders, however, were somewhat sobered by the fact that whereas Baptists in Rhode Island in 1842 had been as one to sixteen in the population of the state, in 1915 they were but one to thirty-seven.¹⁹

During World War I the Baptists enthusiastically supported the cause of the allies and with other major denominations shared in the post-war disillusionment which was reflected in their decreased giving to foreign missions. Mass evangelism, rapidly losing its appeal, manifested itself through the Billy Sunday campaign of 1918, which was largely attended but brought inconsequential results. The clerk of the Phenix Baptist Church commented graphically in 1919: "Like other churches of the state, we have been affected by war, the Billy Sunday campaign, and the influenza."²⁰ In addition to the campaign of 1918, Sunday returned to Rhode Island in 1931 for a single service at the Calvary Baptist Church in Providence. The flamboyant evangelist preached for two hours before an overflow congregation of 2,500 people. He dealt with the frivolities of modern pretense, the vanity of unrestrained ambition, and the vicissitudes of greed for money and human adulation. "In Noah's time," Sunday shouted, "God took his vengeance. He warned Noah ahead of time to get into the ark and said 'I'm going to turn the hose on those other guys.'"²¹ All this made for a show, but it was far from a dependable evangelism. The future lay with Christian education rather than the old-style revivalism, as such education brought a wider personnel and a paid leadership to the Sunday Schools, an expansion of the concept of the teaching ministry to the churches, and a new program of educational evangelism to the state convention. At the same time, the persistent endeavor to convert the immigrants continued, with two new churches growing out of the denomination's investment among the Italians in 1919,

while new missions were started for the Russians and the Portuguese.²²

Both fundamentalist and liberal theological influences reached the churches in the nineteen twenties. The former emanated in general from the fundamentalist tendencies of the early twentieth century, and in particular from two Bible schools in Massachusetts, the Gordon School of Theology and Missions and the Dudley Bible Institute.²³ Although these institutions provided a number of the rural churches in Rhode Island with pastoral leadership often hostile to the churches' connection with the Northern Baptist Convention, no congregations were lost to the denomination, as happened in other states. The reason was probably the already conservative nature of a majority of the churches. In the urban congregations liberal tendencies manifested themselves, frequently under the leadership of pastors trained at the Newton Theological Institution or Rochester Theological Seminary. These influences were reflected not only in sermon content but in forms of worship and patterns of membership as well. The mid-week prayer meeting gave way to a lecture at the First Church in Providence, while the Sunday evening service was omitted entirely, and "non-religious" conferences dealing with subjects of a secular nature were held in the afternoon.²⁴ Furthermore, an associate membership plan, which provided for the acceptance of members from other Protestant churches who had not been baptized by immersion, was adopted by both old First Church and the Central Baptist Church in Providence.²⁵ The words of the Rev. Charles Lyon Seasholes at the Baptist Minister's Conference at Rhode Island in 1926, seemed to reflect the fact that many of the churches at this time were on the verge of a new approach in religion:

Youth cannot be reached by dogmatic authority, superficial attractions, or by mere opportunity for confession of sin. This generation has fallen heir to the analytic method in science and religion and it must give proper valuation in what is found.²⁶

the passage by Congress in May, 1921, of the first of a series of immigration restriction laws which gradually closed off the greatest source of numerical increase among American Catholics. John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism* (Garden City, New York, Image Books, 1965), 122.

20 *Warren Association Minutes, 1919*, 164.

21 *The Providence Journal*, March 2, 1931.

22 The new Italian congregations, the outgrowth of the Marietta and Dean Street missions, respectively, were called the First Italian Baptist Church and the Federal

Hill Italian Baptist Church.

23 The Dudley Bible Institute, originally of Spencer and later located in Dudley, Massachusetts, from whence it took its name, moved to Providence in 1929 and was called the Providence Bible Institute. More recently it has become the Providence-Barrington Bible College, and currently, simply Barrington College.

24 *Minutes of the First Baptist Church, Providence, 1919-1932*. April 19, 1923.

25 *Ibid.*, Also, *Warren Association Minutes, 1919*, 164.

26 *Convention Minutes, 1926*, 101.

By the time this watershed had been reached, the Baptists of Rhode Island had grown to be the largest Protestant denomination in the state.²⁷ From eight churches and 1,500 members in 1825 they numbered 109 churches and 21,014 members in 1931. Their stronghold was in the small towns and rural areas where they counted more churches than all the other denominations combined. In fact, in twenty-nine communities no other church provided religious leadership of any kind.²⁸ Because of this rural concentration, most of their congregations were relatively small, numbering on the average between one hundred and two hundred members. At the same time, however, the Baptists were represented in the urban centers with five churches counting over 700 members, ranging from the First Church in Westerly (739) to the Calvary Church in Providence (1,801). The nature of the convention itself had also changed. The churches which comprised the original state group in 1825 were few in number and limited in influence. In 1931, however, a staff of fifteen served the interests of the convention in a variety of areas including evangelism, religious education, and stewardship. Where the churches once had feared the power of a centralized authority, now every "regular" Baptist church in the state comprised its membership and sought its leadership.

The position of the Baptists as the largest Protestant denomination in Rhode Island appears to have been the result of diligent and persistent home missionary endeavor, under the guidance of the state convention, rather than the result of priority in the state. This included evangelistic and social work among the immigrants where they inaugurated such activity in Rhode Island. The Baptist churches of Rhode Island are also to be remembered for the extent of their voluntary cooperation with their state convention. In most states the shift of organizational emphasis from the local churches and the associations to state and national agencies did not take place until the twentieth century. In Rhode Island, however, as early as 1840 the convention had enlisted the interest and cooperation of all the "regular" Baptist churches. Several factors seem to have accounted for this early united fellowship. Initially, in a small state the opportunities for cooperation were greater than in a large state where congre-

gations might be isolated by geographical distance. Secondly, the convention which was responsible for the founding of many of the churches, naturally linked them to state leadership from the time of their origins. Thirdly, the relatively uniform theological pattern encouraged a united rather than a divided expression. Fourthly, the challenges created by the dominant Roman Catholic population undoubtedly had a tendency to draw the churches together against what was interpreted to be a common foe. This intentional union into a convention of churches furnishes an early illustration that a cooperative Christianity may achieve numerical strength and a forceful image without noticeably interfering with the democratic privileges of the local congregation. If there were a danger in this kind of arrangement, it lay in the possibility of the churches relinquishing their own duties, such as ministering religiously and socially to the needy in their own geographical areas, and passing off these responsibilities on the state convention. In such cases, more difficult to trace historically, the convention may have become a convenient scapegoat for those who wished to shirk their immediate calling.

Rhode Island Baptists reflected a marked sensitivity to the social issues of their day, thereby disproving the false concept that they were a religious group devoted exclusively to pietistic and other-worldly matters. While they gave attention to a broad range of social problems and humanitarian enterprises, it would appear from a modern perspective that they gave a disproportionate amount of time and energy to the causes of temperance and Sabbatarianism. This should not, however, blind the historian to other interests where they manifested judgments of a more progressive nature.

Their convictions about the Civil War were particularly significant because this was an area where they believed the answer to a besetting evil lay not in personal reform but in a change in the nature of society itself. For many years prior to the Civil War, Baptists of the state had manifested anti-slavery attitudes which ranged from the barring of slaveholders from membership in the churches and the advocacy of abolition, to a position of moderation which, while opposing slavery, pled for a sympathetic understanding of the

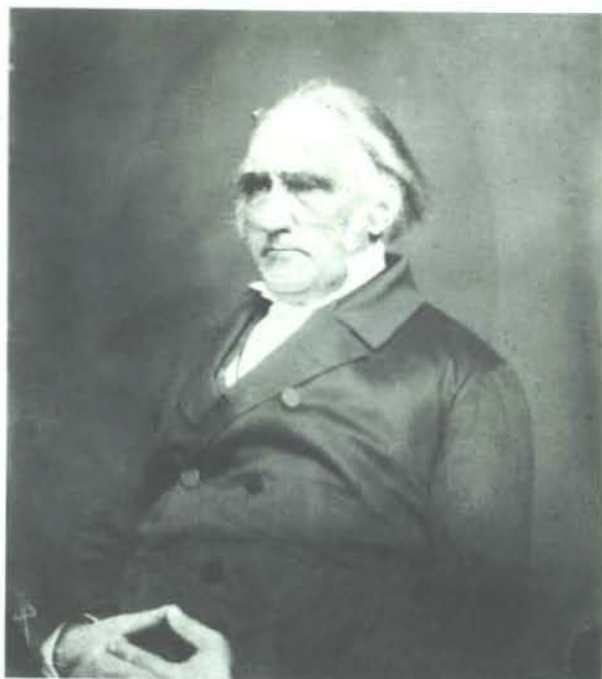
27 The Episcopalians who did not consider themselves Protestants recorded 24,344 communicants in 1931 while the Congregationalists totaled 11,152 and the Methodists 7,544. The largest Baptist churches were the Calvary (1,801), Roger Williams Cranston Street (1,142), Broadway (621), and Central (555) congregations of

Providence and the First Church of Westerly (739). *Convention Minutes, 1931*, 90.

28 *Convention Minutes, 1930*, 38.

29 Cyrus Pitt Grosvenor, *A Review of the Correspondence of Messrs. Fuller and Wayland on the Subject of American Slavery* [Utica, New York, H. H. Curtis, Printer, 1847], 133.

Francis Wayland, fourth president of Brown University and an early director of the Rhode Island State Convention, was said to have irritated fiery Baptist abolitionists with his description of slavery as a "moral evil" instead of the "sin" they believed it to be.



southern position. In general, the firmer attitude prevailed. An important exception was Francis Wayland, president of Brown, who also served as president of the Triennial Baptist Convention at its historic meeting in Philadelphia in 1844. Believing that the spirit of the abolitionists was not the spirit of Christ, he bore testimony to what he felt was the general courtesy, the Christian urbanity, and the calmness under provocation which characterized the conduct of the South.²⁹ Wayland's "soft" description of slavery as a "moral evil" irritated the impatient abolitionists who wished him rather to employ the word "sin," from a Biblical context. As the slavery issue crystallized, however, and the Civil War became a reality, even Wayland's earlier attitude of moderation was replaced by one of increasing firmness, both against the institution and the people of the South. Of the latter he wrote in the midst of the conflict:

The temper of the South in this war has been as bad as it can be, and in the professors of religion worse

of all. If they were hungry, I would feed them; if thirsty, I would give them drink; if sick or in prison, I would visit them; but beyond this I eschew them. Selah.³⁰

On the subjects to which the Baptists gave themselves most vigorously, temperance and Sabbatarianism, they advocated both a personal and a social answer. The individual, they felt, should abstain from alcoholic beverages, which were viewed as detrimental to the development of character, injurious to the body, and harmful to the life of the community. In addition to proposing a spiritual experience as the surest way to solve the problem of drinking, the Baptists stressed personal and church discipline, individual instruction, cooperation with temperance societies, and, importantly, legislative action.³¹ While winning a number of victories along the way, the Baptists accepted philosophically the defeat of their efforts to outlaw the sale of intoxicating beverages, since they recognized the vast number of Europeans in their state who drank

imbibing. To show the extent to which some congregations went in advocating temperance, raisin water was substituted for "the juice of the grape" in the communion service at Jamestown and elsewhere. Minutes of the Central Baptist Church, Jamestown, Rhode Island, 1865-1900. February 3, 1875.

³⁰ Francis Wayland and H. L. Wayland, *A Memoir of the Life and Labors of Francis Wayland, D. D., LL. D., II* (New York, Sheldon and Company, 1868), 267.

³¹ In church discipline there was no respecting of persons! At West Wrentham [Sheldonville] in 1933 the pastor forfeited his position of leadership as the result of

A corner of the Sunday School room in the Plainfield Street Free Baptist Church, Olneyville, of an earlier day, holds the temperance flag with the temperance pledge on the nearby blackboard.

From the same source comes a decorated motto from Proverbs 20.



Wine is a Worker
Strong Drink is raging

socially. At the same time, however, they vowed to train their children in the way of temperance, believing that prohibition at its worst was better than license at its best.³²

The story about defending the observance of Sunday was much the same. Until well into the twentieth century the Baptists of Rhode Island interpreted Sunday as the Christian Sabbath. They kept the day in puritan strictness in response to what they believed to be a divine command, convinced that such an observance was also vital to the civil, social, and religious welfare of the community. Manual labor and popular pleasures were forbidden, while rest, worship, and meditation were enjoined. Again there were temporary triumphs, but the Baptists were rowing against the tide. The legislative attempt in 1926 to guard Sunday from commercial amusements failed decisively owing to the popularity of commercialized sports, the introduction of the "continental" Sabbath by the throngs of immigrants, the demand for recreation in a state known for its resort areas, and the minority status of the Baptists and those who campaigned with them. Individuals might observe the day as they pleased, but the larger society would not buy the Baptist interpretation.

Certain amusements were also frowned upon in the nineteenth century. Gambling, especially, drew the displeasure of the descendants of Roger Williams. There had been an evolution of judgment concerning this practice. A lottery raised funds for the erection of the initial building occupied by the people of the First Church at Bristol in 1811, and the Congregational and Episcopal churches frequently replenished their treasuries by the same means.³³ As the century progressed, however, Baptists who believed the custom to be an ally of the "saloon," deplored the low moral sentiment which permitted its existence, supported the crusade of one of the governors of the state against the practice, suggested that their members boycott the state fair where it was especially prominent, and urged the ministers to preach against the evil until the public conscience was awakened.³⁴ The teaching of the Baptists helped to raise several generations within their own denomination who refrained from gambling, but

again their legislative efforts failed to prevent the practice.

Violation of the seventh commandment and other norms of a traditional code of sexual morality brought stern discipline from the churches. Opposition was likewise expressed to movies, literature, and dress that were considered indecent, and to the alarming increase in the number of divorces in the country. One gains the impression from the records of the churches in the nineteenth century, that the Baptists were long on discipline and short on forgiveness. In the twentieth century, however, more positive, but still personal, methods were advocated as answers to a changing moral climate, such as instruction of the young people by their parents and teachers in "the sacred laws of health and purity," the exaltation of successful marriages and ideal homes, and teaching from the pulpit about the sacredness of human personality.³⁵

On a wider and seemingly more progressive scale, prison reform attracted the interest of the Baptists, a result of the high value they placed upon human life and a reflection of their desire to convert the individual on every social level. One year after the election of Francis Wayland in 1851 as chairman of the Board of Inspectors of the State Prison and the Providence County Jail, capital punishment was abolished in Rhode Island. Other reforms during his tenure of office included the enlargement of the state prison to more comfortably house the inmates, the addition of a library and chapel to provide extra facilities for recreation and worship, and the modernization of the hospital to better serve the medicinal needs of the prisoners.³⁶ Innovations of a devotional nature paralleled the social reform, as services of worship were conducted and a Sunday School was established with the venerable president of Brown acting as superintendent and a teacher of one of the classes.³⁷ All of these changes were predicated upon Wayland's conviction that "the convicts although they have done wrong, are men and women entitled to the privileges of humanity. They have a right to a comfortable abode, pure air, and the opportunity of moral improvement."³⁸ If this were the humane

32 *Narragansett Association Minutes, 1919, 98.*

33 Rev. S. D. Moxley, "History of the First Baptist Church, Bristol, Rhode Island," *Warren Association Minutes, 1896, III.*

34 *Narragansett Association Minutes, 1915, 93; Warren Association Minutes, 1894, 42; Convention Minutes, 1912, 93.*

35 *Convention Minutes, 1908, 136.*

36 Wayland and Wayland, II, 342-343.

37 *Ibid.*, 346-347.

38 *Ibid.*, 342.

response to a day when prisoners were treated harshly, other Rhode Island Baptists in other days called for justice when judges apparently misused their pardoning powers and seemed overly swayed by sympathy and sentiment.³⁹

In their attitude toward people of other races and religions, the Baptists were noticeably tolerant, although this should not lead the reader to assume that full-fledged integration with the Negro became a reality or that attempts to proselytize Roman Catholics were abandoned. There were instances where Negroes were members of white congregations, but the number was few because the Negro population was small, and most of them chose to remain within the fellowship of their own groups, such as the Shiloh and Congdon Street churches of Newport and Providence. These congregations were granted full privileges in the Narragansett and Warren Associations, so that "integration" took place more noticeably on the Association level than at the level of the local church. Nevertheless the door to membership was open in local congregations, as evidenced by the constitution and by-laws of the church at Jamestown which specified in 1900 that "membership shall be composed of persons of both sexes and any nationality or race who have given good evidence of conversion."⁴⁰

Although heavily outnumbered by them in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Baptists desired for the Roman Catholics the benefit of religious liberty, a principle upon which the state had been founded by their spiritual forefathers. Consistent with this position, they deplored the entrance of a religious question into the national election of 1928 when Alfred Smith was campaigning for the presidency. The Roger Williams Association went on record as disapproving any attempt to defeat a candidate merely on the basis of a differing religious creed.⁴¹ At the same time the day of real dialogue had not yet arrived. Rather, the Baptists viewed religious liberty as providing an opportunity for Catholics to become Protestants in response to the zealous efforts of their own missionaries. These missionaries be-

lieved they were simply offering to share their religious "treasure" with those who, in their judgment, had little vital experience of faith and were inadequately ministered to by their own leaders.⁴²

In no field did the Baptists of Rhode Island make a more salient contribution to their own cause in the state and the Christian cause in general, than in the field of education. Their Education Society, established in 1791, was the first in the denomination and led the way in stressing the need for a trained ministry. It was felt that such a ministry would make more effective the work of the local church, meet the "threat" of Roman Catholicism, and provide the necessary leadership for the mission fields. By the twentieth century, the convention, working in close cooperation with the Education Society, required a minimum standard for all candidates whose ordinations were to be recognized by the denomination. This requirement in 1922 was defined as a two-year course or its equivalent in the study of English grammar, the Bible, Biblical theology, Baptist history, homiletics, missions, and religious education.⁴³ Such a program was a progressive step for a denomination whose churches were governed by an autonomous polity. It was also the result of Baptist efforts that Brown University came into existence and, under denominational control from 1764 to 1945, guided the academic training of thousands of young men preparing for various professional careers.⁴⁴ The most prominent of the Baptist leaders at Brown and the foremost educator of his generation was undoubtedly Francis Wayland, the fourth president of the institution, who served from 1827 to 1855. Progressive in his educational philosophy, although frustratingly conservative in religious outlook, he conducted a major reorganization of the university, the central feature of which was the introduction of the elective system, permitting the student to choose courses which he felt would be of maximum worth in later years. This proposal, tried earlier on a major scale only at the University of Virginia, was part of the equalitarian trend of the times and gave to the individual a feeling of opportunity and freedom of

39 Rev. Warren Randolph, "Annual Sermon of the Narragansett Baptist Association," *Narragansett Association Minutes*, 1884, 33.

40 Minutes of the Central Baptist Church, Jamestown, Rhode Island, 1867-1900. April 2, 1900.

41 *Roger Williams Association Minutes*, 1922, 153.

42 *Convention Minutes*, 1931, 44.

43 *Ibid.*, 1922, 45.

44 In reality, Baptist control of Brown University had been relinquished by the late 1930's; however, it was not until 1945 at the time of an amended charter that it was officially declared that "neither trustee, fellow, president, professor, tutor, nor the holder of any other office" should be the member of a particular denomination. *Brown University Charter with Amendments and Notes*, 1945 [Providence, Brown University, 1945].

choice so important to the independent citizen of the United States.⁴⁵ While appraised favorably by later generations of educators, the plan proved too revolutionary for Wayland's time and the drag of inertia and conservatism defeated it.⁴⁶ Although unsuccessful in the immediate context of the experiment, Wayland's democratic proposals established a prior claim in nearly the whole field of education.

In the pursuit of peace and in the area dealing with the relationships between capital and labor, the Baptists made important declarations. While not doctrinaire pacifists, they strongly championed the cause of peace, believing war to be contradictory to the spirit of Christ, adverse to the best interests of the human race, a financial burden to the people of the world, and a futile method of settling international differences. Although twice they supported military conflict in the defense of principles they believed to be at stake (liberty for all and the worth of democracy at the time of the Civil War and World War I), when the hostilities ceased they continued to stress arbitration, disarmament, and peace conferences as the most successful ways of achieving a warless world.⁴⁷

On the question of capital and labor the social views of Rhode Island Baptists appeared moderately liberal, although it is disappointing that more was not said on this subject, since most of the men in the Baptist churches represented the laboring element. They regretted industrial unrest, advocated equal justice for all classes, and felt this could best be achieved by "practicing the principles of cooperation and brotherhood as revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ."⁴⁸ The latter approach included the support of legislation and cooperation with other groups designed to bring alleviation in areas where injustice was at work. At the same time the Baptists deplored the radical action of labor because of the encouragement it gave to "Bolshevistic doctrines." Nevertheless, the responsibility of the church and industry to the worker was maintained at least in theory. President Faunce of Brown University made this point clear when addressing the Northern Baptist Convention at Denver in 1927:

The church must affirm that all honest enterprise is a partnership in which all men should work with common purpose, common responsibility, and common share in the result . . . We must Christianize the process as well as the product of industry. We must give fuller, freer, finer life to all who work beside us, on which ever side of the glass door they sit. We must give that fuller life, not out of benevolence, but out of justice, not as "welfare work," but as one of the costs of production. We must lift up the standards of housing, schooling, living. We must prevent the depletion of health, the exhaustion of energy, the strain and tension of fear and must make the health and happiness of the workers the first charge upon all productive industry.⁴⁹

Various methods were employed by the proponents of these social issues in their effort to see them realized and to establish the Kingdom of God upon earth. The stress of the Baptists in most instances was the change of the individual through conversion, pastoral teaching, and church discipline. On several occasions, however, legislation, boycott, and direct protest were employed. Near the end of our period of study, leaders of the convention had come to the conviction that something more was needed than the traditional spiritual approach to solve social ills. When the Baptists of Rhode Island gathered for their annual conclave in 1926 they passed a resolution which reflected this belief:

Resolved, that while fully emphasizing the mission of the local Church to evangelize and to spiritualize the individual life and society, we should also recognize the close, influential and responsible relation of the church to the well-being of society in general, and therefore, we should study earnestly to apply the Master's teaching to the social and industrial problems of the times and thus further His great conception of the setting up of the Kingdom of God on earth.⁵⁰

Here was a guideline for the future that would endeavor, in the spirit of Walter Rauschenbusch, to

Russia; they approved Wilson's support of the League of Nations and Harding's proposal in 1923 that the United States enter the permanent Court of International Justice; and, they commended the leaders of the London Conference of 1930 for their part in bringing about a reduction of naval armaments.

45 Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* (New York, Harper and Bros., 1951), 362.

46 W. G. Roelker, *Francis Wayland, a Neglected Pioneer of Higher Education* (Worcester, American Antiquarian Society, 1944), 51.

47 Because of this position the Baptists of Rhode Island greeted enthusiastically the results of the Portsmouth Peace Conference of 1905 which ended an eighteen months' conflict in the Far East between Japan and

48 *Convention Minutes, 1919, 55.*

49 *The Rhode Island Baptist, June, 1927*

50 *Convention Minutes, 1926, 54.*

Christianize the very structure of society without ceasing in efforts to convert the individual.

In retrospect it may be said that the social declarations of the Baptists covered wide areas, stimulated much thought and reflected a concern for this world. In some instances they expressed conservative and traditional judgments; in other areas they were among the progressive forerunners of their times. For example, they strengthened the forces which successfully attacked Negro slavery, they set an example for a more humane penology, they consistently emphasized the importance of the educated leader, and they joined with others in questing for a warless world.

If a critical judgment remains, it is reflected in the wish that, proportionately, more of their energy might have been devoted to the really crucial issues. One also suspects that the Baptists may have been strong on resolutions, sermons, and other declarations, and correspondingly weak on the "how" of solving the ills of the world. This, however, was not exclusively a problem of the Baptists!

In broad terms, the Baptists of Rhode Island, like those of the larger denomination, believed in religious liberty, regenerate membership, believers' baptism, the authority of the Bible, and the autonomy of the local church. They applied these convictions to a number of specific situations in their own state.

In keeping faith with Roger Williams, as well as espousing a conviction which they believed to be Biblical in origin, they championed the doctrine of soul-liberty, and its corollary, the separation of church and state. This meant, in practical terms, the granting of freedom to the Roman Catholic majority to worship according to their own traditions. When accused, however, of proselyting members of the Roman Catholic faith through their preaching, the Baptists appealed to the same doctrine, convinced that every person has the right to choose his own belief, including Catholics who wished to become Protestants. To deny such freedom, in the cradle of religious liberty, Rhode Island Baptists felt would be the supreme irony.⁵¹

Conversion, whether the result of revivalistic or educational techniques, was viewed as a prerequisite to membership in local churches, and was expected to produce tangible qualities of Christian character.⁵² To safeguard these requirements, individuals professing conversion were examined when joining the churches and thereafter were subject to their discipline. In Rhode Island during the nineteenth century, causes which brought about censure by the church, usually exclusion, included unbrotherly attitudes, "worldliness," breaches of the moral code, theological deviation, and indifference to religious responsibilities. By the turn into the twentieth century, however, formal discipline by the churches had virtually disappeared due to the difficulty of exercising punitive action in small fellowships, a deeper understanding of the gospel, and the recognition of human fallibility in exercising moral judgments. The belief in the necessity of conversion, however, remained.

Although Rhode Island Baptists were convinced that baptism by immersion should be restricted to believers, they were divided as to whether or not this ordinance should be a prerequisite to the observance of communion. The most serious controversy over this issue took place at Newport in the 1860s, where the advocates of closed communion won a temporary victory.⁵³ The ultimate triumph, however, belonged to the more liberal forces who argued their cause from the absence of uniformity in the observance of communion among autonomous churches, the example of eminent Baptist clergymen who taught and practiced unrestricted communion, the lack of specific scriptural teaching in this matter, and the belief in religious liberty whereby each self-governing congregation might make its own decision.⁵⁴ The Central Baptist Church of Jamestown in 1872 appears to have been the first church to admit all Christians to the ordinance.⁵⁵ By 1918 open communion was practiced throughout the state, owing in large measure to the pioneering clergymen and churches, the liberalizing tendencies of the twentieth century, and the impact of the Free Will Baptists, one of whose main convictions was a belief in open communion.

51 *Ibid.*, 1911, 132.

52 In 1918 an editorial in *The Rhode Island Baptist* stated that making New Year's resolutions is fussing with the hands of the watch, while regeneration is putting in new works! February, 1918, 2.

53 The First Church at Newport in 1866 declined to grant one of its members a letter of dismission to join the Second Church because of the open communion views of the minister of the latter congregation.

54 Letter from Rev. C. H. Malcolm to Rev. Henry E. Robbins, dated November 6, 1866, incorporated in the Minutes of the Second Baptist Church, Newport, Rhode Island, 1864-1906.

55 Minutes of the Central Baptist Church, Jamestown, Rhode Island, 1867-1897, 21.

The key word was "Conquest" and the emphasis was on missionary work and education when the Baptist Young People's Union of America held its twelfth international



convention in Providence. Infantry Hall on South Main Street held this attentive crowd on Saturday evening, July 12, 1902.



The Bible was viewed as the supreme authority for man in matters of faith and practice. It was inevitable, however, that interpretations of the Scriptures should be made. As one traces these interpretations, a perceptible, if not a radical change becomes evident. The Calvinism of the early years is modified and becomes the firm orthodoxy of the nineteenth century. This conservatism of belief was illustrated by the adoption of the New Hampshire Declaration of Faith by a majority of the congregations in the last half of the century. In the twentieth century, most of the churches located in small towns and rural areas reflected a traditional, orthodox theology. They were conservative without being fundamentalist. Liberalizing influences, however, made their way into the urban churches, especially the congregations in Providence such as Calvary Baptist, Central Baptist, and old First Church. Here, a "dominant minority"

exercised forceful leadership and influenced the convention out of all proportion to their numbers.⁵⁶

Rhode Island Baptists were quick to affirm their belief in the autonomy of the local church, although they differed in their understanding of this autonomy. Francis Wayland, progressive in educational philosophy, but consistently conservative in religious outlook, viewed the church as a completely independent unit, with no representation accorded by it to a larger denomination through state conventions.⁵⁷ Organization of any nature he viewed as denominational "machinery," complicated, cumbrous, and frequently soul-destroying.⁵⁸ While rejecting representation of the churches by a convention, Wayland favored the support of missionaries by societies composed of people whose voluntary financial contributions entitled them, as members, to direct the activities of these organizations.⁵⁹ He was careful to

56 Robert Handy uses the expression "dominant minority" when referring to the liberal influence on the American scene in the first two decades of the twentieth century. See Bishop Stephen Neill, ed., *Twentieth Century Christianity* (Garden City, New York, Dolphin Books, 1963), 183.

57 Francis Wayland, *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches* (Boston, Gould and Lincoln, 1857). For a critique of Wayland's position see Winthrop S. Hudson, "Stumbling into Disorder," *Foundations*, April, 1958.

58 Wayland, 182.

59 Wayland, 190.

make a distinction between such benevolent societies, formed and sustained by individual Baptists, and a convention which supposedly represented all the churches. The majority of Baptists, however, recognized the dangers of an excessive independency and successfully pled for a spirit of unity and cooperation. They fellowshipped with Christians of other denominations, united with the Free Will Baptists, and applied their strength to a denominational plan which became a reality in 1907 through the formation of the Northern Baptist Convention.

In retrospect it would seem that while the Baptists of Rhode Island affirmed broad principles of belief they were more activistically inclined than theologically precise. The program of most of the churches was characterized by evangelism, hortatory preaching, the development and nourishing of Christian virtues, and social fellowship, rather than a steady and precise diet of doctrinal teaching. It would also appear that although Rhode Island Baptists contributed no prominent theologian to the American religious scene, they did provide a number of leaders in the academic and pastoral fields whose influence extended beyond the state in which they served. Francis Wayland's broadening of the traditional curriculum and his introduction of the elective system at Brown set a pattern for American education, while his "Society" principle stimulated the development of greater centralization in Baptist denominational life by those who opposed him. Some of the pastors of the state rendered not only a faithful and persistent service where Protestants were a distinct religious minority, but also extended their influence to wider areas of responsibility. These included David Benedict, Chauncey Leonard, Benjamin T. Livingston, and E. H. Johnson. Benedict became an early Baptist historian; Leonard, of the Congdon Street Church, Providence, was the first Negro chaplain to serve in the United States Army at the time of the Civil War; Livingston acted as executive secretary of the state convention and concluded his career with a professor-

ship at Eastern Seminary; and Johnson moved from the Union Baptist Church in Providence to a professorship in Christian Theology at Crozer Seminary.

The Baptists in Rhode Island from 1825 to 1931 are to be remembered for the extent of their cooperation with the state convention; an evangelistic fervor which pioneered a Protestant ministry among the immigrants in the state, a marked social sensitivity symbolized in the leading layman of the period, Francis Wayland, the most prominent congregation in the state (Calvary Baptist of Providence), and the Social Service Commission of the State Convention; and a firm loyalty to Baptist principles including freedom of belief and separation of church and state. Through these and other contributions they had a share in creating the social and religious environment of a growing America. While they could not make perfect the state in which they lived, to say nothing of the larger country of which they were a part, in both state and nation, they left a positive beneficial influence which continued to be an integral part of the American dream.

The history of Rhode Island Baptists also raises some thought-provoking questions for the contemporary church. For example, does a stress upon religious liberty tend to reduce evangelistic fervor or is it possible for these two emphases to live together compatibly? Furthermore, in light of the few conversions made among the immigrants in Rhode Island, should Protestants seek to convert non-Protestants or should they expend their energies in the endeavor to find common religious ground? Also despite the unusual degree of cooperation among the churches through the state convention, does there still remain an excessive autonomy in many Baptist congregations? Finally, while the answers of the Baptists to social problems contributed to the atmosphere of change, what can be done by the larger church to get beyond resolutions and sermons to develop a specific program of renewal on the matters of greatest worth?

More Notes on Rhode Island Cabinetmakers and Their Work

by Joseph K. Ott*

Further recent research among the manuscripts, account books, and deed books of the Rhode Island Historical Society has brought to light information on new workers and other matters discussed in an earlier article.¹ Ten men, previously unlisted, bring the total number of cabinet- and chairmakers added to the rosters to 44. Workers in Bristol and Kingston, as well as in Providence and Newport, were also found.

One of the surprising discoveries has been the prevalence of men in Providence who made furniture, particularly before the Revolution. Perhaps this should have been expected, as every household needed chairs and tables, and the population was not that small. The Cabinetmakers' Agreement in 1756,² the first known to exist in the colonies, is significant as it indicates that competition in Providence must have reached the point where it was advisable to regulate prices. Helpful also is the richness of the Society's collections, which brings to light records in depth in many fields.

It has been partly the fashion in manuscript collections to disregard invoices and other dull reminders of early trade in favor of documents that illustrate the course of events, history, or the lives of people. But these little slips of paper that acknowledge receipt of money for chairs, desks, and other items, serve important purposes as well.

One of these bills has presented a major mystery about one of our most famous cabinetmakers. It is an invoice of "Robert Stevens, deceased" to the "Estate of John Goddard, deceased" and covers the sale of leather, fabrics, pins, etc., and the following two items: "1776 to covering chair 14-0-0" and "Jan. 1768 to chairs that you received the money for Sun (? may be 'but' or 'some') not carried out 61-6-0."³ A Robert Stevens did upholstery work for Isaac Senter in the 1780s and 1790s, and it is likely that his father, with the same name, did similar work for Goddard. But which Goddard? The first recognized cabinetmaker named John Goddard died in 1785, so could not be "deceased" in 1768. The inference is then that

Stevens did the work for another John Goddard in a different trade, but the nature of the entries for cloth and chair covering leads one to the feeling that Stevens was supplying a furniture maker. Is this a curious coincidence or is there another John Goddard making furniture in this period of whom we are unaware? Time, and a great deal more work, will tell. It should be stated that this bill could be a recapitulation to settle the estate's debts, but there is no indication this is the case (and there normally is in similar documents), no formal receipting of the amounts, and in any event the time period between the last sale recorded in 1770 and Goddard's death in 1785 seems quite long.

Other bills help solve mysteries. In "Recent Discoveries . . ." the term "three back chair" was discussed with possible reference to the upholstered arm chairs illustrated there. It appears now that the term applies to a type of bannister back, slat back, or windsor settee of simple nature. The inventory of "goods and things" that John Baker of Rehoboth gave his daughter "Rebekah Talbut" in 1760 and later, in 1766, his daughter "Bathsheba Slatere," includes "six three backs Black chairs 0-18-0" and "2 two backs white chairs 0-4-0."⁴ Bannister backs and windsors would usually be painted, and this explains the nature of the term. Incidentally, the vast numbers of chairs and other items sometimes found in estate inventories might not necessarily indicate that all these were in one house; often a man willed furniture to his children that was located at the time in their own houses (usually if they were married), and the inference would be that the parent had been helping young couples furnish new homes.

The ledger book of William Proud,⁵ kept after his death in 1779 by his sons Samuel and Daniel in Providence, has many references to three back chairs, usually in sets of 6 (although there is one entry to Samuel Aborn for 18 such pieces at a total of 3-18-0 in 1785). As the Prouds were primarily turners and made many bannister back chairs, this supports the

* Mr. Ott is the author of *The John Brown House Loan Exhibition of Rhode Island Furniture* (Providence, 1965).

1 Joseph K. Ott, "Recent Discoveries among Rhode Island Cabinetmakers and Their Work," *Rhode Island History*, v. 28, no. 1, Winter 1969 [hereafter cited "Recent Discoveries . . ."].

2 Joseph K. Ott, *The John Brown House Loan Exhibition of Rhode Island Furniture* (Providence, The Rhode Island Historical Society, 1965), 174-175.

3 Channing-Ellery Papers, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

4 Deed Book 4B, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

5 William Proud, Ledger Book 1773-1835, MS, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

theory about the term. It is curious these were sold in sets; perhaps their use was in meeting houses, churches, or places where many people congregated.

To return to John Baker of Rehoboth, we might recall a "high-boy" in the eighteenth century in Rhode Island was called a "high case of drawers." What then is Mr. Baker's additional bequest of a "highlow case of drawers 1-16-0" to his daughter? It is still probably a highboy, and Mr. Baker's terminology a little quaint.

We were also concerned with the term "great chair" in "Recent Discoveries . . ." and not able to convince ourselves it meant an easy chair ("wing chair" today). Samuel and Daniel Proud billed Peyton Dana for a "grate chair with rockers" in 1792, and others for the same item in 1808 and 1819. The prices ran from 0-10-6 to \$2.80.⁶ Previously, in 1781, they had sold a "low grate chair" and a "low chair with arms grate" to Jonathon Coy.⁷ Either a "great chair" meant different things to different people or it certainly wasn't an easy chair.

The account books and bills of wood turners like the Prouds are extremely interesting and form a sort of parallel relationship with those of nineteenth-century blacksmiths, in that they touched on practically all facets of life—furniture, handles for farm and craftsmen's tools, backgammon cups, mending of all sorts, bowls, and parts for nearly everything.

Terminology in the eighteenth century perhaps reaches its most arcane instance in the analysis of the inventory of the estate of Matthew Robinson of South Kingstown (who had moved there from Newport), taken Dec. 15, 1795.⁸ Among the many impressive paintings, books, and items of plate and furniture, are listed

- 6 leather back and leather bottom chairs \$5.
- 5 compass back great chairs \$3.
- 6 Flag bottom fiddle back chairs \$4.
- 6 leather bottom can (?) back ditto \$6.
- 3 leather bottom fiddle back ditto \$2.50
- 2 Easy ditto \$2.
- 1 slate table \$1.

The low valuations seem strange, although they may reflect that the furniture was old and out of style. The real mystery is in trying to picture

each of the forms listed.

A puzzle of a different sort is represented in an auction sale of the effects of the insolvent William Antram of Providence, held to satisfy creditors on Sept. 4, 5, 6, 1765.⁹ A desk and bookcase ("secretary") was sold to Oliver Arnold for 237-0-0. The highest priced items of Newport work to my knowledge in this period of inflated currency were the desk made for Nicholas Anderrese by Job and Edmund Townsend for 330-0-0 in 1767 and a bookcase made for Aaron Lopez (one of the richest merchants in New England) by Edmund Townsend for 340-0-0 in 1771.¹⁰ Unless the auction bidding got completely out of hand, and this seems unlikely in that day and age, Oliver Arnold bought an item that, if new, would have been perhaps twice the price, or over 400-0-0. What did it look like? Was it a great Rhode Island piece or perhaps the latest and highest London fashion? The sale of Antram's impressive estate must have been the source of conversation for days in Providence.

New cabinetmakers and additional notes on existing ones have also been discovered lately in the Society's collections. In the list that follows, as in the earlier article, chairmakers are listed with cabinetmakers for the sake of convenience. It should be noted that the term "joiner" was used frequently in the eighteenth century for "cabinetmaker," as he "joined" wooden parts together; it is, in fact, the earlier term. While there are some references to tax records and deed books, these sources have not been systematically culled; much work still needs to be done in the research of our heritage. Much to my surprise, examination of numerous South County records has failed to turn up many workers in the Kingston area; there must exist records somewhere of the men who served the local needs. An asterisk before a name indicates a worker previously unlisted.

**Babcock, Joseph*. On Nov. 5, 1791, billed estate of Elisha Reynolds for a coffin 1-10-0.¹¹ Probably South Kingstown. While carpenters also made coffins, this price would indicate a higher order of workmanship.

**Backr (or Bacter), Amos*. In September 1785 billed Nathan Gardner for mending chairs 1-1-0; "to paying William Lunt for painting chairs 0-2-6"; and for a wooden wheel, etc. South Kingstown.¹²

6 Proud.

7 Proud.

8 Elisha Potter Collection, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

9 William Antram's Bankruptcy, 1768, MS, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

10 Ethel Hall Bjerko, *Cabinetmakers of America* (New York, 1957).

11 Potter.

12 Potter.

- **Bacon, David*. Listed in a deed as "chairmaker,"¹³ and probably part of the firm entered as "Messieurs Bacon (Chairmakers)" who patronized John Carter, the printer, for almanacks, blank deeds, etc., in 1769, 1770, and 1773.¹⁴ Providence. The other member of the firm was probably Henry Bacon.
- Bacon, Henry*. Billed by John Carter as "chairmaker" in November 1768.¹⁵ Received money from Mingo Bently for general merchandise in 1780.¹⁶ Providence. Extends date in "Recent Discoveries . . ."
- **Ballou, Jonathon*. Described as "shopjoiner" in an agreement with Jonathon Olney (yeoman), John Waterhouse (merchant), and William Carter (printer), to set up a paper mill, dated March 28, 1764.¹⁷ Ballou died Oct. 2, 1770.¹⁸ Providence.
- Cahoone, John*. Described as "shop joiner" in debt recorded on June 10, 1786.¹⁹ Newport. Already listed in various sources.
- **Carpenter, John*. Billed by John Carter as "joiner" on various dates from 1770-1774.²⁰ Providence.
- **Dennis, Nathan*. Described as a "cabinet maker" in a deed signed by Joseph Childs and dated April 11, 1836.²¹ Portsmouth.
- **Drown, Jonathon*. Described as "cabinet maker" in a release of indebtedness for services rendered signed by Drown and his wife Sarah on Feb. 11, 1732/33 [dates were often given two ways depending on method of calculation in this period and earlier].²² Bristol.
- Howard, G. A.* Billed J. B. M. Potter for "1 Patent refrigerator \$13." in June 1845.²³ Providence. A furniture dealer, not a maker, but intriguing for his machine.
- **Jacobs, William*. Billed by John Carter as "Joiner" in 1774-1775. Providence.²⁴
- **Martin, David (also appears as Daniel)*. Buying sets of legs for tables and chairs and other parts from the turner William Proud in 1774-1775.²⁵ Providence. Would seem to be a maker in this period at least.
- Niles, Robert H.* Billed Elisha R. Potter on June 11, 1831, for 2 bureaus \$24, 1 table \$3.50, and 1 buffalo robe \$3. Pawtuxet.²⁶ May be a merchant.
- Proud, Joseph*. Born Yorkshire, England, 1711. Working in Newport by 1737. Died *circa* 1769.²⁷ Extends dates in Garrett.²⁸
- Proud, Robert*. Billed Capt. Phillip Moss on Jan. 18, 1778, for "cleaning a watch made by Josephson N 7508 and mending mainspring and repairing teeth crown wheel 0-5-8 sterling (31 paper dollars)."²⁹ Newport. This is the watchmaker relative of the cabinetmakers and turners.
- **Sanford, Ezbon*. Billed Nathan Gardner on Dec. 16, 1794, "to balance on your father's coffin 0-1-6," and "for mending 8 chairs 0-9-6." Also billed estate of the "Widdon Potter" for a "cherrytree coffin for his self \$6" on April 15, 1806. North Kingstown.³⁰
- Sanford, Joseph*. Listed in Newport Tax Records in 1775 as "joiner." Newport. Extends dates in Garrett.
- Taylor, James*. Listed in Newport Tax Records in 1775 as "Joiner." Newport. Either extends dates in Garrett or is new worker.
- Taylor, Thomas S.* Billed Elisha R. Potter on Nov. 20, 1838, for "16³/₄ [?] Rus [?] fire board @ 1/6—\$4.19." Kingston.³¹ May not be a worker, but interesting for method of pricing this item apparently by the square foot. 16³/₄ square feet @ 0-1-6 equals \$4.19 when converted, and represents a board covering an opening about 3¹/₂' by 5'. Extends date in "Recent Discoveries . . ."
- Whaley, Jeremiah*. Billed the estate of Nathan Gardner in October 1784 for a coffin 0-4-0 and in June 1786 for a cradle 0-9-0. Receipted in December 1793. South Kingstown.³² May be more of a carpenter than a maker.
- **Dexter, James*. Described in a deed as a "joyner" who sold land to William Crawford on August 31, 1719.³³ Providence. As a "joiner" in this early period (and later for that matter) might be one who made furniture as well as "joined" houses and their parts, it is quite possible that Dexter is the earliest known maker in Rhode Island. The total number of new workers added to the rosters would then be 45.

13 Deed Book 18, City Hall, Providence, R. I., 211.

14 John Carter, Ledger No. 1, 1768-1776, MS., 18, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

15 Carter, 17.

16 Deed Book 2, 135, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

17 Channing-Ellery, 27.

18 James N. Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island 1636-1850* (Providence, 1895).

19 Channing-Ellery.

20 Carter, 148.

21 Collection of N. David Scotti, Providence, R. I.

22 Cary Papers, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

23 Potter.

24 Carter, 55.

25 Proud.

26 Potter.

27 N. David Scotti, "Joseph Proud," *Antiques*, May 1965, 572.28 Wendell G. Garrett, "The Newport cabinetmakers: a corrected check list," *Antiques*, June 1958, 559 [hereafter cited Garrett].

29 Deed Book 4B.

30 Potter.

31 Potter.

32 Potter.

33 Crawford Papers, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

The Integrity of Nathanael Greene

The wealthy planters of South Carolina faced a perplexing problem in 1778 when General Augustine Prevost entered the state with the British force that had been garrisoning East Florida. Pressure was building up on the South Carolinian planters to declare their loyalties.

Up to this time most of the fighting had taken place north of the Mason-Dixon Line, with the quantitative honors resting on the points of the British 21-inch bayonets. These weapons assured them possession of the main population centers, and the British navy gave them control of the coastal waters, Long Island Sound, the Hudson River and Delaware Bay. They had suffered a serious setback at Saratoga when Burgoyne surrendered his army and France joined the North American struggle in the hope of balancing her poor combat record against the British. There was profit to the British hopes, however, even after this disaster. English cities rallied behind the Government and recruited additional regiments at their own expense, and the Scots were raising battalions, but at the British expense. The almost total breakdown of the services of supply at Valley Forge during the succeeding winter was being interpreted by some as an indication of a fatal weakness in the American will to win.

South Carolina, almost cut off from Washington's Headquarters in New York by the British fleet and the long unimproved land routes from the Hudson to the Santee, was fighting what was actually a separate war. They had already thrown back an amphibious attempt to take Charleston, but they knew that Sir Henry Clinton had superseded Howe as the top British commander, and that he was under orders to let the northern war lie quiet while he reconquered Georgia and the Carolinas. Late in 1778 he sent a fleet to Savannah and ordered General Prevost to march north from St. Augustine and cooperate in taking the city. The effort succeeded and Georgia resumed her place as a British colony. Prevost now led his troops across the Savannah River and moved up to Charleston Neck, where he drove back an

by Francis F. McKinney*

American sally and laid his plans for taking the city, but Benjamin Lincoln, with a superior American force, was moving toward him by forced marches. Prevost fell back across Johns Island and fortified Stono Ferry on the mainland, which he intended to hold as a continuing threat against Charleston.

Here he stationed a Hessian garrison. When a superior American force attempted to take it, the Hessians broke down their attack with heavy losses. Many of the survivors turned their coats inside out and joined the British army.

Edward Fenwick, Jr., a 26-year-old Johns Island planter, watched the skirmishing taking place on his baronial doorstep and speculated about his future.¹ Like many opulent planters he was British oriented. He had seen Prevost's men march and countermarch and was favorably impressed with their looks and discipline. When the outnumbered Stono garrison defeated the rowdy, ununiformed Americans, he reached his decision. He sent his movable assets, including 100 slaves, to Georgia, where they would be safe, put the rest of his affairs in order, verified the fact that the British welcomed American adherents and promised to protect them and their property against American retaliation, and, in 1779, joined the British army as a commissioned officer.

He watched what followed with a good deal of satisfaction. In quick succession an American-French force failed in its effort to retake Savannah. Charleston surrendered to Sir Henry Clinton and the American army under Benjamin Lincoln went into the prison stockades. Under the leadership of Charles Earl Cornwallis the British took control of all South Carolina from the fall line to the Atlantic shore. Governor John Rutledge, with nearly total dictatorial power and carrying what was left of the executive departments of South Carolina's civil government in his pocket, was being hounded out of the state. Then in mid-summer of 1780 Cornwallis smashed Horatio Gates' American army in the Battle of Camden and drove its pitiful fragments into dissolution. Fenwick's exuberance took over. The man who had defeated

* Mr. McKinney is a retired Detroit advertising man who lives in McMillan, Michigan. He has written a study of Francis Marion which is in the process of being published.

¹ The basic facts of this episode are available in Fairfax Harrison's *The Johns Island Stud* (Richmond, 1931), pp. 40-46, and in *Documents AA 2345 Edward Fenwick*, South Carolina Archives Department, Columbia, South Carolina. References to George III and Sir Guy Carleton came from *Lord George Germain* (Oxford, 1962), by Alan Valentine.



Portrait courtesy Brown University.

This recently rediscovered portrait of Nathanael Greene seems less formal than most of the likenesses known.

Burgoyne had been destroyed by Cornwallis. Except for a few bands of Georgia and Carolina militia hiding in the swamps, the South Carolina heartland was under firm British control. Fenwick signed the Address of Congratulation to Cornwallis, thereby assuming the highest credential of South Carolina Toryism. In the summer of 1780 he was sure that his accurate foresight guaranteed him an affluent future.

Then, just as quickly, everything began to go wrong. Nathanael Greene was sent to South Carolina to retrieve, with battle-broken tools, a situation that seemed hopeless. He shouldered the responsibilities for his choice of difficult options in December 1780. Some 90 days later, after the Battle of Guilford Court House, N. C., the breakdown of the British supply system forced Cornwallis northward to eventual humiliation at Yorktown. In quick succession Greene drove one British garrison after another out of their strongholds and harried them toward their Charleston bastion. He invited John Rutledge to return to the state and reestablish South Carolina's civil government. After the Battle of Eutaw Springs, in September 1781, Greene confined the British army to Charleston

and the watery limits of Johns Island. Except for this force and a small one at Savannah, snug in their seaport defenses, no British commands remained in the South. During this short campaign Greene never relished the satisfaction of military victory, but by the brilliance of his strategy, which was almost continental in extent, he held three of the Thirteen Original States safe for the Continental Congress. Meantime Governor Rutledge had returned and was exerting his unusual abilities and considerable energy to rebuilding his state's shattered governmental machinery. The foundation for this was to be the legislation passed by a regularly elected Assembly—the first to sit since the fall of Charleston. It met at Jacksonborough and took its name from the place. Just before rising in January 1782 it listed 118 Tory estates to be considered for confiscation. Since the signers of the Address of Congratulation to Cornwallis were some of the most bitterly resented Tories, Fenwick could not have missed the implication.

At the end of October 1781 Cornwallis surrendered his army by capitulation, the Tenth Article of which read, "Natives or inhabitants of different parts of this

country, at present in York or Gloucester, are not to be punished on account of having joined this army." This was the British promise to protect, from American retaliation, the Tories who had taken up arms in their support. Washington struck it out with black strokes of his heavy-nibbed quill.

When the French fleet turned the Capes of the Chesapeake in August 1781, both contending armies in South Carolina were isolated from their military headquarters in New York State. Their movements were stalemated when Cornwallis surrendered. When the news reached London in November 1781, the Opposition seized control of the Government from the King's Party. George III, with his abdication message on his desk ready for delivery to Parliament, kept the Royal Yacht at its dock, ready to take him to Germany on short notice. A Resolution of Censure failed by two votes in Commons but passed five days later by 19 votes. The People's attack was aimed at the Government's failure rather than at the military failure. They wanted the American War liquidated. Orders to this effect left London in March 1782, but it was late April or early May before General Alexander Leslie, now commanding the British troops in South Carolina, received official notification.

Rumor, as usual, ran ahead of fact. Greene heard it in one of his camps along the Edisto near Jacksonborough and he wanted more information. Captain William Wilmot, one of his aides, volunteered a suggestion which Greene accepted. Later Wilmot put his plan in writing. It was undated.

"To all it may concern—Copy of an agreement between Col. Edward Fenwick of the British Army and Captain Wilmot of the American Army—

"Capt. Wilmot proposed to Col. Fenwick to furnish intelligence who agreed to engage in the business provided General Greene would agree to use his influence with Government to have him restored to his estate and be admitted as a Citizen with the rank of a Colonel to keep him from doing Militia duty and he on those terms will go with the British Army until the war is over or leave them just as General Greene shall think most proper. It is not expected that General Greene is further bound than

his influence will extend. And the substance of the agreement between me and Col. Fenwick is as above—W Wilmot Capt."

Since this paper and others forming the contract between Greene and Fenwick were intended for transmission to the South Carolina Assembly, Greene added an attestation:

"The above a true copy from the original papers on file Nath. Greene."

The fact that Wilmot apparently approached Fenwick would indicate that he had received some hint that Fenwick was willing. Compulsory militia service for all males in South Carolina was a statutory obligation from which only officers with rank of colonel or above were excused. The provision that Greene was not to be bound further than "his influence will extend" was seemingly an attempt to protect him from civil liability.

Sometime after this Greene acknowledged his responsibility in writing.

"Copy of a Certificate given to Col Fenwick with the British Army—

"This may certify that Colonel Fenwick in the British Army has agreed to send me intelligence from time to time of all the Military operations of the Enemy which they may concert to the Prejudice of the United States or any part thereof, and that he agrees to run every risque necessary to give the earliest intelligence for saving the States harmless. I do further certify that he has been in this employ for some months past and that on all occasions has served with fidelity and ability. He the said Fenwick is to keep with the British Army until the close of the war and give intelligence from time to time as aforesaid. Upon performing this duty faithfully I do promise to use all my influence with the State of South Carolina to restore him to all his fortunes and the rights and prevelidges of a Citizen. And if the State of South Carolina should refuse to restore him, for whose [South Carolina's] particular benefit he engaged in this service, I do promise and engage to recommend his case to Congress for such compensation as they may think

his services claim. Given at Head Quarters August 14th 1782—Nath Greene

A true copy from the original files of the papers in my possession Nath Greene"

Greene's pledge to take the matter of restitution up with the Continental Congress might have made Fenwick feel more secure, although, in retrospect, it seems highly doubtful that they would have done what South Carolina refused to do.

The phrase "some months past" gives an indefinite clue to the time Wilmot and Fenwick closed their negotiations. It would seem almost certain that Fenwick's disquiet arose from the action of the Jacksonborough Assembly in its final hours. Any of the military crises which took place between January and August 1782 might have caused Greene to feel the necessity for more timely and explicit detail about the British plans.

In February 1782 Light Horse Harry Lee had left the army after a bitter accusation that his military contributions had not been appreciated. His Legion, which was one of Greene's most dependable offensive units, fell apart when its officers sent in their mass resignations.

In April General Leslie had raised an objection to the confiscation of Tory property. When Greene refused all responsibility, because this was a civil matter, Leslie sent out troops to seize all slaves belonging to the Rebels. These were movable assets of high value to the British officer claiming title by capture.

Meanwhile Greene's Continentals were threatening to mutiny, make Greene their prisoner and turn him over to Leslie in exchange for the supplies they lacked. Greene was fearful that Leslie might attack before he could bring the situation under control.

In May 1782 Leslie wanted to negotiate an agreement whereby he would trade rum, cloth, shoes and hats, which he could buy with sterling from the West Indian traders, for beef, rice and forage still available on unravaged South Carolina plantations. This food was not only needed for his army and its livestock, but also to discharge his obligation to feed the several thousand Tories and their slaves seeking security under the muzzles of the Charleston batteries. When Greene refused, Leslie replied that the refusal left him no alternative but to send out raiding parties to take

what he needed. Greene had to know ahead of time whether these movements were foraging parties or reconnaissances moving ahead of a heavy attack on his lines.

Rumors that the British fleet had smashed the French warships, which had closed the trap on Cornwallis at Yorktown, put Greene on notice that Leslie soon might be heavily reinforced.

Whatever may have been the particular incident that moved Greene to strengthen his spy ring inside the British works remains unknown, but he had acknowledged in writing that Fenwick's work up to August 14, 1782, had been completely satisfactory.

The war at this time was actually more of a stalemate than Greene may have known. After the Yorktown debacle Sir Guy Carleton had relieved Clinton of his command. Carleton was "more patient as a statesman than he had been as a soldier." Now he was seeking "to maintain with dignity his defeated army in the enemy's country and avoid inflammatory incidents while arranging the infinitely difficult business of a military withdrawal."

In Europe the infinitely difficult business of negotiating a peace treaty was going on, and the rival armies were constrained to keep pace with the peacemakers. These things account for the listless military operations in South Carolina during the year 1783.

It was while the Jacksonborough Assembly was sitting that the Preliminary Peace Treaty had been signed by the four belligerents. In September of that year the Definitive Treaty was signed. At the end of the year Leslie's garrison, and all the Tories under their protection, evacuated Charleston. The Treaty was ratified by the Americans in January 1784.

Two months later, probably as soon as official notice was received, Greene informed Governor Guerard, and through him the Assembly, of his contract with Fenwick, by forwarding a copy of Wilmot's memorandum and his own certificate to Fenwick, dated August 14, 1782, which he amplified by the following:

"And I do further Certify that Col Fenwick continued to give intelligence until the British Army left Charleston since which I have not heard from him. And from the services he rendered to the army I beg leave to recommend him to the Legislature agreeable to promise as highly deserving their for-

Fenwick Hall was a house divided by the American Revolution. Edward's brother Thomas held a military commission under the Crown but the marriage in 1783 of their sister Charlotte to a former aide de camp to General Greene indicates that her sympathies were with the revolutionists.

Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston, courtesy of the Carolina Art Association.



giveness and entitled to their consideration.—Col Fenwicks case would have been recommended to the Legislature at an earlier day but he being with the British Army I thought he might fall a sacrifice in consequence of it. Given at Newport March 30th 1784. Nath Greene."

This is endorsed: "Gen. Greenes letter relative to Col—Fenwick dated 1784 but seemingly not communicated by Gov. G. untill 1785"

Governor Guerard apparently saw no reason to inform the Assembly about Greene's obligation until Fenwick asked for the restoration of his estates and citizenship.

Although Great Britain had ratified the Treaty in April 1784 Greene had heard nothing from Fenwick. When he did, he wrote:

"Charleston Sept. 19th 1784

"Sir—I addressed your Excellency and the Legislature of this State last Spring [March 30] in behalf of Colo Edward Fenwick of the british army in

consequence of a contract made with him by Capt Wilmot and confirmed by me for obtaining intelligence of the motions and intentions of the british forces while they were in possession of Charleston. The conditions of the contract were set forth in the papers inclosed in that letter, and to which was added my recommendation on the subject.

"Since my arrival at this place I received the inclosed letter from the Colonel [not in the Fenwick file] and altho he has since arrived here himself and explained away that paragraph which seemed to cancel all his claim upon the contract as having acted with the knowledge and consent of the british commander, yet I think myself bound to lay the letter before the Legislature that they may judge for themselves from all the circumstances of the merit of his conduct. The Colonel says the british commander advised him to make his peace with his Country; but that he [British Commander] never had the most distant hint of the mode he [Fenwick]

adopted to effect it, either at the time or since. It is unnecessary to add on the subject the Colonel is here and subject to such interrogations as your Excellency or the Legislature may think necessary for the discovery of truth or to do him justice.

"I have the honor to be with respect Your Excellency's Most Obedient humble Ser Nath Greene

"His Excellency Governor Guerard"

This letter bears the endorsement: "Gen Greenes letter 1784 relative to Col. Fenwick but semingly not communicated untill 1785."

With the scaffolding for the repatriation of a Tory, finally erected by his co-conspirator, and apparently with the Governor's silent assent, Fenwick made his plea:

"To The Honble John Faucheraud Grimke, Speaker, and the rest of the Honorable Members of the House of Representatives

*"The Petition of Edwd. Fenwick Humbly Herewith
"That during the late contest between these United States and Great Britain, your Petitioner unhappily engaged in the service of the latter; in consequence of which he acknowledges that the Resentment of his Countrymen hath been justly shown against him.*

"That however while he continued in the British service he endeavored to lessen the horrors of war by every office of Humanity and attention towards the Persons and property of those who fell within his Power.

"That being now extremely desirous of becoming a Citizen of this State and of endeavoring by his future Services to eradicate the Memory of his ever having opposed his Countrymen he throws himself upon their mercy hopes for their Pardon and requests that he once more may be received as a Son of America

"And Your Petitioner as in Duty Bound shall ever pray etc—Edwd. Fenwick, Charleston January 25th 1785"

The petition bears two endorsements: "Petition of Col Fenwick transmitted with message by Gov Guerard"

*"26 Jany 1785 Petition of Edwd. Fenwicke
Comm[itt]ee Mr. Bee, Genl Pinckney & Mr. Manigault"*

What happened to the Fenwick case between January 25 and February 5, 1785, is not known but the evidence hints that his rehabilitation suddenly met with an obstacle. Greene wrote:

"Charleston Feb. 5th 1785.

"Sir—Mr Fenwicks extreme anxiety for his fate from his peculiar situation solicits this letter of address. I hope the occasion and the agency I had in the business will apoligize for the liberty I take in the matter. I meant not to urge anything prejudicial either to the honor or the interest of this State; but subjects of this sort are of an extreme delicate nature and claim tenderness and indulgence. In Parliamentary debates in Great Britain matters of intelligence are held sacred and where public faith is pledged national honor stands responsible. Objects of this kind in the hours of tranquillity lose much of their force but they are not unimportant. Not to have an eye to future evils would be wide of the mark of a just policy. Intelligence to an army is like the soul to the body it directs all its motions. To obtain this with the greatest certainty and to have an opportunity of comparing different accounts created a necessity for employing a number of persons in this service among whom Mr Fenwick's intelligence was accurate and seasonable. We had timely information from him to counteract several British detachments. All the Country can witness from their continual alarms how necessary this was for their safety, and when I consider how much men are disposed for war, and how many political intrigues are employed to effect it, I cannot help apprehending that this may be our situation at some future day. Should we wound public confidence from too nice an examination into the motives and conduct of people employed for such purposes many evils may attend this Country which might be avoided. Mr Fenwicks claims will no doubt have a just consideration.— and to forgive those we have in our power discovers greatness of soul and generosity of temper. Under the influence of this opinion I am persuaded I shall never have to reproach myself of having betrayed a man into a situation fatal to himself and ruinous to his family.

"I have the honor to be with due respect your Excel-

lencys most obedient humble servant Nath Greene
"His Excellency Governor Guerard"

To this letter Greene attached attested copies of all the papers in the case setting forth the terms of his contract and his appraisal of its value.

There was an election of a governor and a legislature in South Carolina in 1785. Under such a stress bristled feelings run high. Toryism must have been one of the important issues, and the fact of Fenwick's betrayal was being accented, perhaps, more than his services. Greene warns the Governor, and through him the Legislature, from "too nice an examination into the motives and conduct of people employed for such purposes."

Greene points out, in this same letter, his problem of reconciling conflicting intelligence. Such reconciliation may have been his most time-consuming occupation. The daily mass of information flowing across the desk of any army commander has to be sifted with a discerning eye. If Greene's proven reporters were in near agreement he probably accepted the accord and made his plans on that basis. If these reliable sources differed Greene had to determine which was correct.

When Greene had confined the British behind their Charleston barricades, his military problem became purely defensive. He threw a cordon of troops from the coastline north of the city to the coastline south of it, and held his main body at some safe spot from which it could meet a threatened attack at any point on this perimeter with the least loss of time. His big problem arose from the fact that the seaward half of his perimeter was controlled after Yorktown by patrolling frigates of the British navy. He knew that Leslie's military survival depended upon his ability to get rice and beef for his men and the Tory families they were protecting, and grain and forage for his horses from the area behind Greene's defense line. There were two large coastal openings which would permit an amphibious force from Charleston to reach enough unravaged plantations to supply his needs. The one to the north was Winyah Bay and the closely adjacent mouths of the Santee River. The one to the south was the watery intricacy between St. Helena Sound and Port Royal Sound.

Greene always had ample notice of the reading of

these amphibious expeditions but he never knew their purpose or destination. Nor did he know whether they would be directed simultaneously north and south or whether one was to be the raiding fleet and the other a decoy.

These secrets were carefully guarded in Leslie's headquarters. Possibly not more than four officers besides himself were privy to them. If Fenwick were the spy who solved this recurring problem, he well merited Greene's efforts to effect his rehabilitation.

On January 6, 1786, the South Carolina House of Representatives had resolved not to receive any more petitions from any persons banished from South Carolina or any of her sister states, and ordered that the said resolution be printed in all the Gazettes. Meantime the South Carolina Senate had taken the resolution under advisement.

Greene apparently heard of this action while looking after affairs on the estate deeded to him by Georgia after the end of the war. He wrote:

"Savannah February 12th 1786—

"Sir, From my peculiar situation and from the nature of my engagements, I am reduced to the disagreeable alternative of forfeiting my promise or of addressing your Excellency once more upon the affairs of Mr. Fenwick—Hard is my fate & cruel is the necessity— My feelings revolt at the business when I consider the light in which it may be taken— It is true I am not responsible for consequences, but private honor & public faith compel me to speak when I would wish to be silent— If my forward zeal in the hour of public calamity for the common safety of this Country has led me into measures in this & other matters which the sober season of tranquility cannot approve— I can only say that they cannot be more inconvenient to the public than they have been painful & distressing to me— The nature of my engagements in this business & the incidents attending the affair have all been stated in my former letters on this subject— To repeat them again I cannot think necessary upon this occasion.

Mr. Fenwicks application at this moment originated in a resolution of the honourable the Senate of the 8th of this Instant relative to Banished persons— It is difficult for me to suppose him included in

that resolution after the steps which have been taken in his favor— To grant him his property & not the right of enjoying it would be too personal to comport with the dignity of a Legislature— Nor can I consider his residence a matter of such importance— However he may have offended, his attempt to restore himself having placed him in a peculiar situation, give him some claim to your pity & consideration— His losses & sufferings in England in matters of fortune since this business took air, will no doubt have some weight in deciding upon the question. I shall say no more than necessity obliges me & leave the event to the justice of humanity of the Legislature— If Mr. Fenwick should be included in that resolve of the 8th— which I am persuaded he is not, I must beg your Excellency to lay this matter before that honourable Body & solicit their reconsideration of the matter—

"I have the honor to be with the most perfect respect Your Excellencys Most Obedient Hble servant Nath: Greene

"His Excellency Governor Moultrie."

The following memorandum was attached to this letter:

"The Committee to whom the Governor's Message of the 23d, Inst. was referred accompanied with a letter from Major General Greene report

"Having maturely considered the Subject of General Greene's letter of the 12th. Inst, laid before this house by his Excellency the Governor, Yr. Committee are of opinion, that due attention ought to be paid to the matter therein contained, & as it appears to them that the General in his Official Capacity, entered into a solemn engagement to procure relief to a person, who has been of service to this Country in the hour of public Calamity. Yr. Committee recommend in order to support the public faith and the private honor of the Commander of your Troops, that the request set forth in this letter be granted—"

This was endorsed: "Report of the Committee on the Govs. Message of the 23rd Feby 1786, accompanied with a letter from Genl Greene respecting Edward Fenwick, 27 Feb. 86 To be considered to

morrow 3d March—Agreed to & a Bill ordered to be brought in"

Up to this final appeal Greene had presented Fenwick's case on the ground that his services as a spy had been more valuable to South Carolina than his disservices as a Tory had damaged the state. His efforts had failed.

In his final plea he reluctantly threw his private honor onto the scales in favor of Fenwick. He succeeded.

His reluctance grew out of the fact that his private honor had been blemished by baseless charges current throughout the nation that he had used public funds to his own pecuniary benefit in purchasing army supplies. The blemish was never entirely erased until after his death.

Fenwick had been a double traitor—once to South Carolina, and, when convinced of his error, to Great Britain. Never once did Greene hint at this fact. Neither he nor Wilmot used the word "spy" or "spying" in connection with their contract for Fenwick's employment. Fenwick was handled with kid gloves. Greene in his letter of February 5 called the subject one of "an extreme delicate nature." He emphasized Fenwick's positive talents by playing down his negative ones. The "whole business," as Greene terms it, is understood without being explicitly mentioned. It was this sensitivity which caused the anguished embarrassment that comes so clearly through his words after the lapse of nearly two centuries. It would have been easy for Greene to have dismissed Fenwick's importunities by saying that he had gone as far as his influence with the State of South Carolina extended, and then gone through the motions of referring the case to the Continental Congress. Greene honored his contract with Fenwick at a personal cost he never could have contemplated.

General Pinckney, Messrs. Bee and Manigault, Governor Moultrie and the members of the South Carolina Legislature were well aware of this background. Their conception of private honor was just as clear as that of the New England Quaker. They knew from three years of daily association that Greene's rock-ribbed integrity was unassailable. It would seem today that this intangible overrode their distaste for receiving back into their society a man who had proved to be an utter stranger to such sentiments.

A Message from the President

It is with the greatest regret that I must inform the membership that John T. Kirk, who has served so brilliantly, has submitted his resignation as director of the Society, to take effect on January 1, 1970, and it has been accepted reluctantly by the Society's Board of Trustees.

In his letter of resignation Mr. Kirk explained that he was resigning "not so as to take another position, but so that I might work with and write about the objects of history and art on a free-lance basis rather than as an administrator." He added that he wished to express his gratitude to the Board of Trustees "for its support during my directorship and for what it has done to make living in Providence so enjoyable."

Mr. Kirk informed me that he planned to continue to reside in Providence. His charming wife, an assistant professor in the English department at Brown University, and he intended to keep their home at 10 Arnold Street. This is particularly pleasing to me not only because they have been good neighbors but also because it will mean that the Society can call upon John Kirk for consultative services in regard to our furniture collections should the need for such services arise.

Since coming to Providence, Mr. Kirk has greatly enhanced the reputation of the Society by making his expertise in the field of American Colonial furniture available in so many different parts of the country and in so many different ways. Shortly after he came to us,

the scholarly *Connecticut Furniture, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Hartford, 1967), catalogue of an exhibition organized by the Wadsworth Atheneum for its one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary, was published; the expert descriptions in that volume were the work of John Kirk. He has continued to work on a catalogue, now in preparation, of the famous Francis P. Garvan collection of American furniture and furnishings at Yale. He is busy with two other books on American furniture, and it is his desire to devote all his time to such projects that motivated him in submitting his resignation.

John Kirk has made many valuable contributions as director of the Rhode Island Historical Society during a period of service which has been all too short, but the most valuable of these contributions has been to make us realize that no compromise should ever be made in our standards and goals as one of the potentially great historical societies of this country. His determination to settle for nothing but the best—in our collections and in our services—has set the Society on its true course.

Last, his thoughtfulness in giving us nearly a year to seek a successor means that we can proceed carefully with that task, and it assures a smooth transition in the leadership and direction of all the Society's programs.

BRADFORD F. SWAN

Shield back arm and side chairs (part of a set of two arm and four side chairs) Newport, 1790-1810; mahogany (secondary woods maple, chestnut and cherry).



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Director's Newsletter

This is the second issue of the Society's quarterly in its present format and the reaction to its new appearance has been overwhelmingly favorable. It provides an opportunity for us to print nearly twice as much material in a far more interesting manner. The index for 1957-1967 has now been completed and will be available in the fall. It is Mr. Klyberg's hope that from now on we can publish an index annually so that the important information in the quarterly will be more readily available.

The Board of Trustees has appointed a long-range planning committee to evaluate the Society's present programs and possible future activities. The committee consists of the president, the two vice-presidents, and the chairmen of the library and museum committees. The committee has solicited individual reports from many of the standing committees, asking them to report on what they feel to be of value in their present activities, areas in which they would like to grow or change, and facets of their programs that they wish to curtail. It is hoped that the final report from the planning committee will correctly assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Society and determine where the Society should put its main energy, for this Society has an important role. Its duty has grown over the years so that it is now responsible for the entire panorama of Rhode Island's past at all social levels and all times up to the present. To achieve this it is preserving both written and object history; its objects include paintings, furniture, china, silver, glass, other decorative arts, and memorabilia. As with written and printed material, these items record special events and people, patterns of ways of life, and attitudes of a past time; they show something about how persons were thinking about their surroundings, their own past or future.

This broad sweep of history means collecting and preserving all these materials. In addition, the Society has the responsibility to make its collections available to those who are already interested members, students, and scholars, and also to interest those who at present scarcely think of anything but the present.

The fall course on American furniture was well attended and it culminated in a trip to the Yale University Art Gallery to see the Mabel Brady Garvan collection.

It is planned that such courses and trips will be part of the future programs of the Society and the lecture committee is now planning for next winter.

A recent important gift to the Society includes two arm chairs and four side chairs (Figures 1 and 2) given by Mrs. Charles D. L. Pepys. The chairs belonged to Nicholas Brown (1769-1841), descended to John Carter Brown and then to his widow, Sophia Augusta, who left them to her daughter, Sophia Augusta, who took them to Newport. The latter Sophia Augusta was the grandmother of the donor. The back is a particular shield design that is usually associated with New York, with original inspiration coming from England, but in these undoubtedly Newport-made chairs the basic design has been compressed into a narrower shield with a more pointed base than is common in New York; the ribs in the shield are carved below to reeds and above to a multiple coin design. The seats are basically a shield shape, having a serpentine front and sides that curve back to the rear posts. The New York version usually has reeded front legs above spade feet; these Newport chairs have simple plain legs with spade feet and, in addition, use chestnut for some of their interior or secondary wood, a wood associated with Rhode Island and eastern Connecticut. The coming to light of Newport use of a New York pattern is particularly important at this time because three chairs were recently discovered that use a basic New York pattern in the same lean, tight manner; they are labeled "John Townsend." Our new chairs and the labeled ones give new insight into what was made in Newport about 1800. Beyond the importance of these chairs, it is wonderful that they have returned to a house which is very much like their original setting. Undoubtedly they once resided in the Nightingale House, 357 Benefit Street, just across from John Brown House, after it was purchased in 1814 by Nicholas Brown, nephew of John. The chairs will be appropriately upholstered and perhaps used in the room now being restored on the northwest corner of the second floor or in John Brown's dining room.

Another important addition to the collections is a nineteenth-century wool and burlap hearth rug or floor covering (Figure 3), made to cover only the fireplace

Floor carpet; New England! Wool and burlap, 1810-1830!



3

side of a room. The piece is shaped to go around the hearth and a corner has a small cut-out to go around an exposed corner post. Extremely attractive with its use of red and black leaf design on wool squares of varied shades of blue, gray, and tan check, this is a very rare document. Little is known about what was used on floors in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Very seldom were imported Oriental or European carpets available except for grander homes, and most of the other floor coverings were of a fragile nature and have disappeared.

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of John H. Wells. Not only was he a valued member of this Society and of its Board of Trustees but also he gave

his time unstintingly as a volunteer in the library. Over the years he indexed countless books, making these volumes far more valuable and accessible to genealogists, students, and scholars. He always brought with him a cheery attitude toward life; he will be very much missed. Many of his friends have sent contributions in his name and the Rhode Island Foundation wrote, "The Rhode Island Foundation's first secretary was John Wells. He shepherded the organization through its early years. In memory of him and his contribution to the Foundation we enclose this check." The combined contributions will be used to continue Mr. Wells' work in the Society's library.

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