

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

FALL 1972



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

Published by

THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
52 POWER STREET, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

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Issued Quarterly at Providence, Rhode Island, February, May, August, and November. Second class postage paid at Providence, Rhode Island.

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In 1890 when Franco-Americans made up the largest single ethnic group in Woonsocket (page 117) they celebrated June 24 feast of St. John, patron saint of French Canadians, with a gala parade.

"... as happy a success as could be desired," reported the Woonsocket Patriot of the city's "greatest celebration." A reminder of Rochambeau's 1780 arrival was his portrait on the arch over Main Street.

On Cumberland another decorated arch welcomed marchers and carriages, illustrating the fact that French was then the dominant language of Woonsocket.

If the Convention should reject the Constitution or adjourn
without adopting it, Congress will probably find it ne-
cessary to treat them as they are, as *Foreigners*, and
extend all the Laws to them as such. This will be dis-
agreeable to them, & it will involve the
of



RIHS Library.

Vice President John Adams, in a letter February 28, 1790,
to Providence merchants John Brown and John Francis,
threatened Rhode Islanders with the status of "Foreigners."
(Page 113)

Rhode Island in Disunion, 1787-1790

Surprisingly, Rhode Island's initial response to a plan for permanent central government was cordial. Such a proposal was advanced by the ad hoc Continental Congress in 1777 and embodied in the Articles of Confederation drafted, debated by Congress, and placed before the rebellious states in late 1777. Delegate Henry Marchant bore this first national constitution to Rhode Island and urged its acceptance at a special session of the General Assembly in December. The question of adoption was deferred to the February 1778 session. At that conclave Rhode Island gave its assent unanimously. Three amendments were suggested but these were merely recommendations, not prerequisites for ratification.

Rhode Island was so uncharacteristically obliging because several of its towns were under British occupation, and because it had incurred enormous military expenditures which might be partially absorbed by the new central government. Rhode Island instructed its delegates to ratify if eight other states should do so and, in the event that any alterations in the Articles were advanced, these delegates were empowered to accept whatever changes were approved by nine of the states. Rhode Island further promised that it would be bound by any alterations agreed to in this manner. No changes were made and the state's representatives unhesitatingly signed the ratification in Philadelphia on July 9, 1778, hailing the document as "the Grand Corner Stone" of the new nation.¹

In the succeeding twelve years Rhode Island would seldom act with such compliance but exhibited a

by Patrick T. Conley*

recalcitrance in national councils which proved exasperating to many of its sister states. Its initial contrariness consisted in flat rejection of the proposed continental impost of 1781, despite efforts of Thomas Paine and other prominent figures to enlist the state's support.² Its most blatant demonstration of defiance was repeated refusal to ratify the Federal Constitution of 1787.

Acquaintance with the political setting in which Rhode Island's contest for adoption took place is essential to understanding the ratification controversy. The principal political fact of life was the dominance in state affairs of the so-called Country Party. This faction, led mainly by legislators from rural and agrarian towns, had swept into power in the spring election of 1786 on a paper money platform. Their victory constituted somewhat of a political revolution, because it transformed the legislature from a merchant-dominated body to one in which the interests of the farmer took precedence.³

The Country Party made good its campaign pledge and immediately authorized issuance of \$100,000 in paper money. Historians now realize that the primary purpose of the paper emission was to alleviate the tax burden which weighed heavily on owners of real property, and that payment of private debts in paper was merely an incidental by-product of the program,⁴ but contemporary creditors and many members of the mercantile community were not so well informed. Paper money — a chief source of controversy in local politics from 1786 through 1791 — engendered the

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1 Merrill Jensen, *Articles of Confederation* (Madison, Wis., 1963) 190-95. John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England* (Providence, 1856-65) 8:341, 362, 364-67. Worthington C. Ford et al., eds., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (Washington, 1904-37) 11:638-39, 663. Edmund Cody Burnett, *Continental Congress* (New York, 1941) 341-44.

2 Frank Greene Bates, *Rhode Island and the Formation of the Union* (New York, 1898) 72-99 is still the best treatment of impost proposals. Allan Nevins, *American States during and after the Revolution, 1775-1789* (New York, 1924) 630-37. Irwin Polishook, *Rhode Island and the Union, 1774-1795* (Evanston, Ill., 1969) 53-80. Hillman Metcalf Bishop, *Why Rhode Island Opposed the Federal Constitution* (Providence, 1950 reprint of four articles in *Rhode Island History* v. 8, 1949) 5-14.

3 Bates, 107-148. Polishook, 103-29.

4 Intricacies and principal intent of the paper emission have been fathomed by Bishop, 15-25 — Polishook, 131-162 — and Forrest McDonald, *We The People: Economic Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago, 1958) 326-38.

dispute which precipitated the landmark case of *Trevett v. Weeden*⁵ and served as cement and bond of union for the dominant Country Party which opposed ratification of the Constitution.

That Rhode Island was the last of the original thirteen states to ratify the Federal Constitution is well known. The state was recalcitrant from the outset of the constitutional movement, with the exception of its response to the Annapolis convention. Just prior to that Maryland gathering, Rhode Island had expressed a desire to secure uniform and centralized regulation of commerce to protect its re-export trade from the tariffs of neighboring states.⁶ Because that important but limited action was the only topic on the proposed agenda, Rhode Island — its government then under mercantile control — dispatched two delegates to Annapolis. Commissioners Jabez Bowen and Samuel Ward had journeyed as far as Philadelphia when they received news that the abortive conclave had adjourned.⁷

In the following year, when a call was issued for a more broadly empowered convention to discuss all matters necessary "to render the constitution of the Federal Government adequate to the exigencies of the Union," the Country Party had seized power. Consequently the state failed to vote on the February 1787 resolution of the confederation Congress to hold the Philadelphia convention and, when that momentous assembly convened, Rhode Island was the only state to boycott its proceedings. Three times an attempt to dispatch delegates was rejected by the suspicious General Assembly. Rhode Island's absence was pro-

tested by deputies from Providence and Newport and also by James M. Varnum and Peleg Arnold, delegates in Congress, but to no avail.⁸

On September 15, 1787, just prior to the completion of the federal convention, Governor John Collins offered to the president of the confederation Congress Rhode Island's feeble excuse for non-attendance at the Philadelphia sessions. Collins declared that since the freemen at large had the power of electing delegates to represent them in Congress, the legislature could not consistently appoint delegates to a convention which might be the means of dissolving that Congress. In view of the broad power which the Assembly was accustomed to exercise, Collins's remarks seemed evasive indeed. A spirited rejoinder signed by Newport and Providence deputies reminded the governor that the Assembly had dispatched delegates to the Continental Congress, ratified the Declaration of Independence, and accepted the Articles of Confederation without a popular referendum. Their arguments, though sound, were fruitless.⁹

When the federal convention completed its labors on September 17, 1787, it transmitted the Constitution to Congress with the recommendation that the document be submitted to the states for ratification by popularly elected conventions. Congress (with Rhode Island absent) complied and gave the states official notice. The Assembly took the new Constitution under advisement at its October 1787 session. Thereupon, it voted for distribution of a thousand copies of the proposed document to allow the freemen "an opportunity of forming their sentiments" upon it.¹⁰

5 Patrick T. Conley, "Rhode Island's Paper Money Issue and *Trevett v. Weeden* (1786)," *Rhode Island History* 30:3 [August 1971] 95-107.

6 Bartlett 10:180. Bates, 99-105.

7 Committee Reports to General Assembly 4:111, Rhode Island State Archives (SA hereafter). William R. Staples, *Rhode Island in the Continental Congress, with the Journal of the Convention That Adopted the Constitution, 1765-1790* (Providence, 1870) 561-62, hereafter cited Staples, *RICC*.

8 Varnum and Arnold to John Collins, April 24, 1787, Bartlett 10:246-47. Staples, *RICC*, 576-78. Varnum to Collins, April 4, 1787, *ibid.*, 578-79. Varnum to the

President of the Federal Convention, June 18, 1787, Updike Papers (RIHS Library). The Country Party seemed somewhat divided, hesitant, and uncertain regarding Rhode Island's attendance at the Philadelphia convention. In May 1787 deputies in the lower house of the General Assembly approved a resolution to dispatch delegates by a narrow two-vote margin only to have the measure killed by assistants in the upper house. Then in June the assistants reconsidered and reversed themselves, but their resolution was rejected by the deputies by a solid margin of seventeen votes. Journal of the House, Journal of the Senate, May and June sessions, 1787 [SA].

9 Documents relating to Rhode Island's reaction to the federal convention are in Staples, *RICC*, 569-585. Rhode Island's abstention was protested by a group of the state's

With most of the freemen thus apprised of the federal charter's contents, the February 1788 session assembled. Then, to the consternation of federalists within the state and without, the Assembly authorized a popular referendum on the Constitution and scheduled it for the fourth Monday in March. This ratification procedure was highly irregular and contrary to the recommendations of the Philadelphia delegates, but the legislature was not deterred. This February session specifically rejected a motion to call a ratifying convention. Over the course of the next twenty-three months a total of eleven such efforts would be spurned.¹¹

The popular election on the Constitution was held according to schedule. The result was predictable — 237 for and 2,708 against — but the margin of defeat is deceptive. The federal port towns of Providence and Newport boycotted the referendum; one vote was cast in the former and only eleven registered in Newport. These ballots, with one exception (in Newport) were cast by antifederalists. The only towns in the federalist column were the Bay settlements of Bristol [26-23] and Little Compton [63-57]. Critics of the Constitution registered lopsided victories in many rural communities: Glocester [228-9], Coventry [180-0], Foster [177-0] and Scituate [156-0].¹²

Total vote in this referendum was 2,945, as compared with 4,287 who had voted in the well-contested gubernatorial election of 1787. Newport and Providence accounted for most of the abstainers, for together these towns had between 825 and 900 freemen in 1788, according to fairly reliable estimates. Yet it is

obvious that even if these communities turned out *en masse* for the Constitution, it would have been rejected by an impressive plurality.¹³ Eight weeks after this resounding repudiation New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify the federal document but, despite rejoicing over this event in Providence, chances that Rhode Island would follow the lead of her more amenable brethren seemed extremely remote.

Crucial states of Virginia and New York soon fell in line, but Rhode Island was unrelenting. In March 1789, as the new federal government prepared to convene, the Assembly for a fifth time rejected a motion to call a ratifying convention. In May the issue was sidestepped, and in June and October sessions it was again rejected.¹⁴ The only other holdout at this late date was North Carolina which, like Rhode Island, was settled by outcasts and noted for its individualist and separatist tendencies. On November 21, 1789 the Carolinians capitulated and left Rhode Island alone beyond the pale.¹⁵

As 1790 dawned, pressures on antifederalists increased, and prospects for at least a convention grew brighter. Opponents of the Constitution had shown signs of wavering in the October session when they voted to print and distribute among the towns 150 copies of the twelve amendments to the Constitution which had been recommended by the new Congress of the United States.¹⁶

In January's session the federalist minority was further encouraged when the legislature after two unsuccessful efforts narrowly passed a bill introduced by Henry Marchant, authorizing a ratification conven-

merchants. Their memorial is in Max Farrand, ed., *Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (New Haven, 1937) 3:18-19. Original Collins letter and dissent of merchants are in Letters from the Governor of Rhode Island 4 (1780-1800) 74-75 (SA).

10 Records of the R. I. General Assembly 13:429, hereafter cited GA Records (SA). Staples, *RICC*, 584-85.

11 GA Records 13:446-48. Most historians contend that the Assembly rejected motions to call a ratifying convention seven times — e.g. McDonald, 322 and Bishop, 33. Polishook has listed eleven such attempts in an unpublished doctoral dissertation (Northwestern University, 1961) 280.

12 Papers Relating to the Constitution of the United States, 17-36, hereafter cited PAC (SA). Staples, *RICC*, 589-606. For a petition from Providence protesting referendum see RIHS MSS. 3:119-21.

13 Staples, *RICC*, 606.

14 Staples, *RICC*, 608-626. As late as May 1789 the Browns observed that "about two thirds of the Freemen of this state are opposed to the new Constitution — our general assembly are by the same majority against it." Nicholas and John Brown to Richard Henry Lee, May 1, 1789, John Brown Papers (RIHS Library).

15 Jackson Turner Main, *Antifederalists: Critics of the Constitution, 1781-1788* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1961) 242-48.

16 GA Records 13:667. Bartlett 10:358.

tion to meet March 1, 1790 at South Kingstown. Four-term governor John Collins, always cool toward antifederalism, courageously incurred the wrath of his Country Party when he cast the deciding vote on Marchant's measure and broke a four-four Senate deadlock. He was not renominated by his political associates.¹⁷

Election of delegates for this convention went unfavorably in the view of Marchant, a Newport federalist. Two weeks before the session he prophesied its outcome: "The Antie's are about ten majority. I have hopes however they will not totally reject the Constitution, but I think they may adjourn it over our Genl. Election."¹⁸

Marchant's intuition was correct. The convention considered both the Constitution and the twelve amendments thereto proposed by Congress. In addition it adopted a "declaration of rights" and advanced eighteen other amendments to the federal document. These were sent to the freemen for consideration.

Major points of discussion during the six-day March session were allocation of representatives, direct taxation, slave-trade, method of adopting future amendments, ratification of the congressionally proposed Bill of Rights, and the power of the convention to adopt the Constitution. Although some antifederalists had mellowed, a majority were resolved to resist to the bitter end. Merchant-prince John Innes Clark, one of four federalist delegates from Providence, observed that "we have as determined a set of men to oppose it as ever were combined together." On Saturday March 6, over protests of federalists, the gathering adjourned until May 24 by a vote of 41-28, a margin which was a

South Kingstown court house, scene of the March 1890 constitutional convention, still stands, now occupied by Kingston Free Library.



Detail from Map of the Town of South Kingstown, Washington County, Rhode Island, Henry F. Walling (Philadelphia, 1857).

fairly accurate indication of relative strength of anti- and pro-Constitution factions.¹⁹

Between sessions spring elections were conducted and the Country Party (minus Governor Collins) scored its fifth consecutive victory. Head of their ticket was Arthur Fenner of the distinguished Providence clan — so formidable and prominent, and so potent his

17 GA Records 13:723-24. *Newport Herald*, *U.S. Chronicle* January 21, 1790. *Providence Gazette* January 16, 23, 1790. On his conversion to federalism see Collins to George Washington, May 24, 1790 in Gaillard Hunt, "Office Seeking in Washington's Administration," *American Historical Review* 1 (Jan. 1896) 279-80.

18 Henry to William Marchant, February 15, 1790, in Robert C. Cotner, ed., *Theodore Foster's Minutes of the Convention Held at South Kingstown, Rhode Island in March, 1790 Which Failed to Adopt the Constitution of the United States* [Providence, 1929] 20. Cotner's introduction contains a good summary of events of 1790, 19-27. "Genl. Election" to which Henry referred was held annually on third Wednesday in April.

19 John Innes Clark to Lydia Clark, Feb. [March] 5, 1790 [Clark misdated the letter] John Innes Clark Collection [RIHS Library]. Cotner, *passim*. For partisan maneuvering over adjournment and reconvening, Cotner, 81-90. Official minutes of the South Kingstown convention, kept by Secretary Daniel Updike, are useful but fragmented and incomplete. Original, in PAC, p. 1-2, is

printed in Staples, *RICC*, 644-49. PAC, p. 8 also contains a draft of 18-article declaration of rights adopted by the March convention. William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington, March 8, 1790, Ellery-Huntington Correspondence [SA].

20 Ellery to Huntington, March 28 and April 5, 1790. With Fenner at the top of their prox, federalists hoped to secure victory for a few of their at-large candidates for the upper house. They did not succeed. Federalists had originally sought a coalition ticket with Fenner at the head and some of their men in assistants' spots, but they were in a poor bargaining position and Fenner declined. *Providence Gazette* March 27, April 3, 1790 and *U.S. Chronicle* April 1, 1790 for coalition proposal and Fenner's reply.

21 Staples, *RICC*, 659-673. Hull and Sands voted with antifederalists for adjournment of the March session. Durfee disregarded specific instructions of his town by his March vote for adjournment. Quite possibly he absented himself on May 29 rather than again defy written instructions by the freemen of Portsmouth.

party, that federalists endorsed him rather than arouse the ire of the country majority on the eve of the ratification convention.²⁰ Despite this success and the antifederal majority of approximately a dozen in the seventy-member convention, several critics of the Constitution were beginning to find their position no longer tenable in the face of increasing pressure from within and without the state.

When the ratifying body reconvened, the Constitution's adherents — led by Marchant, Benjamin Bourne of Providence, and William Bradford from the port town of Bristol — pushed vigorously for acceptance. Finally, after five days of political jousting Mr. Bourne, in the phrase of convention secretary Daniel Updike, "moved for the grand question of adopting or rejecting the federal government." At 5:20 p.m. on Saturday May 29, the motion squeaked through by a vote of 34-32.

So close was the contest that a full convention might have reversed the decision. Three absent delegates — Edward Hull and Ray Sands representing remote New Shoreham (Block Island) and Job Durfee of Portsmouth — appear to have been antifederal, while Country Party chieftain Daniel Owen of Glocester was prevented from voting, except to break a tie, as convention chairman.²¹

Recalcitrant Rhode Island's margin of acceptance was narrower than that of any other state, and she was one of only three states in which delegates voting for ratification represented fewer people than those voting against the federal charter. But an inch was as good as a mile.²² Soon after this momentous action, the formal bill ratifying and adopting the Constitution was

approved by the convention. This measure also gave assent to eleven of the twelve amendments proposed by Congress and offered twenty-one additional amendments to the federal document.²³

At the June session the General Assembly gave its necessary approval to the Bill of Rights, established procedures for the election of federal senators and representatives, and chose Theodore Foster, moderate Providence federalist, and Joseph Stanton, Jr., antifederal deputy from Charlestown, as Rhode Island's first United States senators. Foster was the brother-in-law of Governor Fenner, a fact which helped him gain approbation of the Country Party. When Benjamin Bourne, a champion of the Constitution, won the August contest for the state's lone seat in the House of Representatives, Rhode Island at last became a full participant in the new federal Union.²⁴

* * *

Although principal events of this turbulent period are fairly discernible, the motives behind Rhode Island's long-term opposition and then grudging acceptance of the Constitution are multiple and complex.

Certainly the paper money controversy contributed to the state's rejection of the new federal instrument. The Country Party came to power on a pro-paper platform in 1786 and this agrarian faction — led by Jonathan Hazard, Joseph Stanton, Jr., John Collins, Job Comstock, and Daniel Owen — firmly held political power from May 1786 until well after reluctant ratification of the national document in mid-1790. Although not monolithic, the party was dominant and cohesive, and major opposition to the Constitution

Cotner, 60, Staples, *RICC*, 593, 595, 659, 670-73.

RIHS MSS. 3:130 is a list of delegates with their votes on ratification [probably in Theodore Foster's hand]. Alleged irregularities either in the vote or in recording it are discussed in Sidney S. Rider, "History of the Hazard Family in Rhode Island," *Book Notes* 13 (1896) 182-183.

22 Charles W. Roll, Jr., "We, Some of the People: Apportionment in the Thirteen State Conventions Ratifying the Constitution," *Journal of American History* 56:1 (June 1969) 33-34, contends that those 48.6 per cent of delegates voting for ratification represented 44.1 per cent of Rhode Island's population; that those 45.7 per cent voting against ratification represented 51.4 per cent of the people; and that the 5.4 per cent not voting represented 4.5 per cent of population. My figures on the percentages represented are 44.2, 53.6 and 2.2 respectively, but my adjustments do not alter the validity of Roll's findings. Rhode Island's convention was the third most equally districted of the thirteen with a ratio of 1:6.2 from the smallest to the largest district. Roll, 22.

23 Staples, *RICC*, 668-69, 672, 653-55. Of the twelve amendments proposed by Congress, those numbered 3 through 12 were eventually ratified by the requisite number of states and became the Bill of Rights. Numbers 1 and 2 failed to secure adoption. The Rhode Island convention and Assembly session following gave approval to every proposed amendment except 2, which dealt with compensation of members of Congress. Rhode Island's twenty-one amendments consisted of those drafted by the March convention except for #18 dealing with the manner of ratifying the federal Bill of Rights, and four additional amendments drafted in the May convention session. Sixteen of the twenty-one amendments finally advanced by Rhode Island were also put forward by at least one other state, while five were unique to Rhode Island. Good discussion of these is in Bates, 201-16. Polishook, 218-21, errs in stating that the March convention approved twenty-one amendments. PAC, p. 6.

24 GA Records 13:753-55. Bartlett 10:380-88.

emanated from its ranks. In Rhode Island it served as an effective and organized vehicle of antifederalism.²⁵

When the ratification process began, Rhode Island was too deeply enmeshed in the paper program to back out, and Article I, Section 10 of the federal document would have forced her to do so. The financial chaos that would have resulted from abandonment²⁶ of the paper program before it had run its course would have made the existing financial situation seem peaceful and orderly by comparison.²⁷

William Ellery, continental loan officer in Newport, speculating on possibilities of ratification, several times expressed the view that the Country Party would "wait till they shall have completely extinguished the State debt" before accepting the Constitution. It was Ellery's contention that ratification would not take place before the "accursed paper money system" had run its course.²⁸

There is a definite correlation between pro-paper towns and those which espoused antifederalism. Jackson Turner Main, after analyzing the ratification struggle on a nationwide basis, made the following conclusion: "That paper money sentiment was in some degree a factor in the existence of Antifederalism is scarcely to be doubted — the Antifederalists drew more heavily by far than their opponents from the ranks of paper money advocates; however the correlation is by no means complete."²⁹ Applied to Rhode Island, this is valid.

Here antifederalism and advocacy of paper money — though closely related — were not synonymous. Such

an equation admits of too many exceptions and incongruities: (1) In numerous local articles on the Constitution no one urged defeat of the document on the specific ground that it would put a stop to paper money. (2) Substantial modification of legal tender features of the paper money act in October 1789 did not dramatically diminish opposition to the Constitution.³⁰ (3) Of the delegates to the ratifying convention of May 1790, 62 per cent of those supporting the Constitution borrowed paper in 1786 — although at least one of these, merchant John Innes Clark, did so to manipulate and depreciate it — while 63 per cent of those delegates who voted to reject participated in the emission of '86. (4) Only one of thirty-two antifederal delegates had taken advantage of provisions of the currency act to force settlement of a private debt with paper.³¹ (5) Although the same towns and individuals who favored paper money also opposed the Constitution, a comparison of the vote on the Constitutional referendum with votes for Country Paper candidates in 1786 and 1787 "seems to indicate that the sentiment against the Constitution was noticeably greater than the normal strength of the Country Party."³²

In light of these considerations we must identify other factors in addition to the currency controversy to understand adequately the intensity of Rhode Island's antifederalism. Additional economic motives for the state's resistance are strongly in evidence. Most important of these was fear that exorbitant taxes on land and polls would be levied by the new national government to pay public debt and "high" salaries of

25 Main believes "superior organization" of the Constitution's proponents played an important role in their victory, while antifederalists' failure to unite was a significant factor in their defeat (252-53). Gordon S. Wood, *Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969) 485-86. Although Main's observation is generally valid, the Country Party made Rhode Island the exception to the rule.

26 Abandonment would have been necessitated by the federal provision which forbade states to emit bills of credit or to make anything but gold and silver coin a tender in payment of debts. The third amendment offered by the Rhode Island ratifying convention sought to bar Congress and the federal judiciary from interfering "in the redemption of paper money already emitted, and not in circulation, or in liquidating or discharging the public securities of any one state." Staples, *RICC*, 678.

27 McDonald, 338.

28 Ellery to Huntington, March 10, 1787, June 15, July 13, 1789. Ellery to Ebenezer Hazard, October 16, 1787, William Ellery Letters (Newport Historical Society). James Madison observed of antifederalists in general

that "the real object of their zeal" was to maintain "the supremacy of State Legislatures" in order to engage in printing paper money and violate contracts under cover of law. Robert A. Rutland, *Ordeal of the Constitution: Antifederalists and the Ratification Struggle of 1787-1788* (Norman, Okla., 1966) 172.

29 Main, 269-70. Conversely, McDonald asserts that those towns constituting the bloc opposed to paper money or, more precisely, leaders who induced their communities to reject the paper scheme, formed the hard core of the group which endorsed the Constitution (338). Charles Carroll asserts that "the alignment in Rhode Island . . . was . . . town-specie-federalist vs. country-paper-antifederalist." *Rhode Island: Three Centuries of Democracy* (New York, 1932) 1:397.

30 Bishop, 26-28.

31 Bishop, 33. McDonald, 343-44. Bishop compares lodge money notices in the press with names of those who voted in the constitutional referendum of March 1788. His analysis reveals that "only 70 or approximately 3% of the 2,236 freemen voting against the Constitution had discharged even one debt in paper money, while 21 or 1% of the opponents of the Constitution were victims of the same paper money tenders." The number 2,236 is

federal officials. Unprecedented and burdensome state taxes on land were in large measure responsible for the paper money emission, and landholders' dread of similar federal taxes was to a considerable extent responsible for Rhode Island's opposition to the new federal union.

This apprehension was evidenced by the serious attention the question of direct taxes on land and polls received in the March 1790 convention. It is further exhibited in three amendments (7, 8, and 9) proposed and approved by that convention. In suggested Amendment 7, Rhode Island joined New York in urging that "no capitation or poll tax shall ever be laid by Congress;" in Amendment 8 she joined six sister states by requesting a prohibition on the laying of direct taxes except after failure of a federal requisition upon the states; and in proposed Amendment 9 (one of five unique to Rhode Island) the state — as an insurance measure — recommended that "Congress shall lay no direct taxes, without the assent of the legislatures of three-fourths of the states in the Union."³³

Professor Bishop concludes that of the economic reasons for Rhode Island's reluctance to adopt the Constitution "it would appear that a fear of heavy taxes on land and polls probably influenced more voters than any other single economic factor."³⁴ This contention seems accurate.

Perhaps Jabez Bowen, a leading federalist, former deputy governor, summed up the situation as well as any contemporary in the following letter to George Washington:

Jabez Bowen, a leading federalist.



From a copy in RIHS Library.

The Towns of Newport, Providence, Bristol etc. with the whole Mercantile interest in the other Towns in the State are Federal, while the Farmers in general are against it. Their opposition arises principally from their being much in Debt, from the Insinuations of wicked and designing Men that they will loose their Liberty in adopting it; that the Sallerys of the National Officers are so very high that it will take the whole of the Money Collected by the Impost to pay them, that the

based upon the vote in 24 of the 30 towns; in the other six communities the names of the voters were not recorded. Staples, *RICC*, 591.

32 Bishop, 29-32.

33 Staples, *RICC*, 679. Bates (204) erroneously states that required assent for amendment 9 was two-thirds. Aversion of Rhode Island antifederalists to direct taxation was well-known to contemporaries. On the eve of the March 1790 convention Massachusetts Senator Fisher Ames urged Welcome Arnold to assure the "Anti's" that they had no cause "to fear direct assessments by the U.S. for it cannot be expected that the landed interest, which predominates in Congress, will abuse this source of taxation." Ames to Arnold, Feb. 20, 1790, W. Easton Louttit Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University.

34 Bishop, 35-36. McDonald (339) asserts that "economic possibilities of independent status were enormous. The most important of such potentials was smuggling to circumvent payment of United States import duties." McDonald cites an article by "Charlestonensis"—*Newport Herald* November 20, 1788 — which suggested that an independent Rhode Island might become another St. Eustatius [Dutch island in the West Indies that

served as a base for smuggling into British and French West Indies). Although Rhode Islanders were not above such a practice and certain national leaders feared this development, this consideration played a minor role at best in Rhode Island's antifederalism. One finds it difficult to imagine that residents of non-mercantile, agrarian Charlestown or any other country town would have become genuinely enthused over the state's potential for smuggling. Those who would reap the greatest benefits from this practice were port towns which supported ratification. Further, these seaports indicated in numerous public declarations their fear of being treated commercially as a foreign nation. Providence Town Meeting Records 7 (1783-1804) 140-43, 146-48, 158-60 (City Clerk's Office). Country Party leader Jonathan Hazard predicted that the state would benefit economically from independent status. Polishook summarizes Hazard's contentions — "Free from the yoke of inhibiting tariffs, Rhode Island would sell foreign articles 'for a song' and become the entrepot of commerce in North America. If the United States attempted to interdict this trade . . . Rhode Islanders were adept at the ancient art of smuggling" (193-94). Hazard's arguments seem far-fetched and probably had little impact.

*Interest & principle of the General Debt must be raised by Dry Taxation on Real Estates, etc.*³⁵

There were ingredients in Rhode Island's antifederalism in addition to those of an economic nature. Bowen spoke of the loss of "liberty," which seemed to many a necessary consequence of ratification. Consideration of this pervasive belief brings us into the sphere of what might be termed political, philosophic, or ideological motivations for Rhode Island's estrangement from the proposed federal union, and these motives were of great and perhaps transcendent importance.

Rhode Island had a long tradition of individualism, separatism, democracy, and liberty both civil and religious; it possessed a long-standing distrust of government too far removed from the people. Its cherished political values were allegedly threatened by the new Constitution. Ironically its concern for those values had been awakened, invigorated, and heightened by the recent, mercantile-inspired campaign against the impost. The specter of an omnipotent national government raised by the merchants in the early 80s to defeat the impost bill still haunted the imagination of many freemen.³⁶

Rhode Island had an attachment to popular control of government and to what one historian has termed "democratic localism."³⁷ These principles were not endangered by the Articles of Confederation to which the state readily assented. The articles gave the people of a state — or more precisely their legislature — close control over delegates to Congress. Under confederation members of Congress were annually appointed in a manner prescribed by state legislatures, were subject to recall, and were paid by their respective states. Under the articles, as in Rhode Island, the executive was weak and the legislature supreme. The articles, of course, exalted state sovereignty. In all important

civil matters Congress was dependent upon voluntary compliance of state legislatures to carry out its recommendations, and approval of all states was necessary to amend our inflexible first frame of government.

This system was rejected by the Constitution in ways too familiar to enumerate, and Rhode Island disapproved of the change. Some of her specific objections were contained in twenty-one amendments offered by the state's ratifying convention. They revealed a deep suspicion of the new central establishment — a suspicion that had been increased by the failure of the proposed constitution to contain a bill of rights.

Rhode Island's first suggested amendment requested a guarantee to each state of its sovereignty and of every power not expressly delegated to the United States by the Constitution; amendment 2 attempted to limit federal interference in a state's conduct of congressional elections; amendment 12 prohibited as "dangerous to liberty" standing armies in time of peace; amendments 13 and 14 called for a two-thirds vote of those present in each house to borrow money on the credit of the United States or to declare war, while amendment 18 subjected senators to recall and replacement by their state legislatures.

So fearful was Rhode Island that the newly-created federal system would develop beyond control that it offered a unique amendment 4 which would have required all changes in the Constitution after 1793 to receive consent of eleven of the thirteen original states. Rhode Island, of course, supported those Congressional amendments which eventually became the Bill of Rights.³⁸

The General Assembly in an official communication to Congress on September 19, 1789 quite adequately and accurately expressed the ideological basis of the state's antifederalism:

Appeals to democracy, liberty, and states rightism invoked against the impost would never have been uttered if the majority of Rhode Islanders did not cherish these ideals, nor would such arguments have been so warmly embraced or enduring in their impact.

37 Polishook, 27-28.

38 Staples, *RICC*, 678-80. Amendment 1 was proposed by five other states; Amendment 2 by six; Amendment 4 by Rhode Island alone; Amendment 12 by four additional states; Amendments 13, 14, and 18 by one other, New York. Bates, 202-03. Two proposed amendments were defeated in the March convention. One would have prohibited the central government from choosing any officials formerly appointed by the state; the other called for use of wealth rather than population as a base for direct taxation. *Providence Gazette*, March 13, 1790.

39 Letters from the Governor of Rhode Island 4:77. Staples, *RICC*, 621-23.

35 December 15, 1789, *Documentary History of the Constitution of the United States* (Washington, D. C., 1894-1905) 5:226, hereafter cited *DHC*.

36 A by-product of the merchant-led campaign (1781-85) was persistence of public opinion hostile to or at least suspicious of every attempt to increase powers of central government. Professor Bishop has called this feeling — variously described as states' rightism, individualism, separatism and democracy — "the chief result of the extensive propaganda campaign against the impost." He contends that "voters who had been led to believe that the small increase in the powers of Congress contemplated by the Continental Impost was a threat to democracy and liberty were certain to reject the Federal Constitution" (p. 10). It should be emphasized, however, that merchants' propaganda merely intensified and invigorated political sentiments of Rhode Islanders, especially those in agricultural towns.

The people of this State from its first settlement have been accustomed and strongly attached to a democratic form of government. They have viewed in the new Constitution an approach, though perhaps but small, toward that form of government from which we have lately dissolved our connection at so much hazard and expense of life and treasure. . . . We are sensible of the extremes to which democratic governments are sometimes liable, something of which we have lately experienced, but we esteem them temporary and partial evils compared with the loss of liberty and the rights of a free people.³⁹

This was not mere rhetoric. Just as Rhode Islanders were quick to protest alleged abridgement by England of their individual and collective freedom, so did they resist anticipated curtailment of their "liberty" and autonomy by the founding fathers. Self-determination in late eighteenth-century Rhode Island was a way of life, and no portion of it would be easily surrendered, as the contest over ratification dramatically revealed.

Another formidable factor contributing to the strength of the state's antifederalism was the strong hostility which pervaded the state toward slavery. Intense among Rhode Island's sizable Quaker community, this attitude was shared by others as well, perhaps to atone for past sins.

Anti-slaveryites realized that the Philadelphia convention had compromised on slavery, and they were aware that the Constitution thrice gave implied assent to the institution through clauses on representation, fugitives, and the slave trade. In particular, the twenty-year prohibition on federal legislation banning foreign slave traffic was a concession too great for many Rhode Islanders to accept.

Only five weeks following adjournment of the Philadelphia conclave, the Assembly passed an act —

initiated by influential and irrepressible Quakers — prohibiting any Rhode Island citizen from engaging in the slave trade. In vigorous language this statute termed the nefarious traffic "inconsistent with justice, and the principles of humanity, as well as the laws of nature, and that more enlightened and civilized sense of freedom which has of late prevailed."⁴⁰ A constitution which gave temporary protection to this trade was not an instrument to be warmly embraced.

Thus, the state's anti-slave contingent took refuge in antifederalism and, during critical 1790, this connection nearly thwarted ratification. Fortunately some abolitionist leaders began to see the difficulties inherent in Rhode Island's continued rejection of the Constitution. Despite some initial misgivings, influential Quaker Moses Brown of the famous mercantile family embraced the federalist cause. Early in 1790 he toured the state talking with Friends at various monthly meetings in an attempt to overcome their opposition. His campaign seems to have met with limited success, but anti-slave objections to the Constitution — enunciated by such zealots as Samuel Hopkins of Newport — were by no means dispelled when the March session of the convention assembled.⁴¹

At this South Kingstown meeting slavery engendered much discussion and debate. The slave trade provision of the Constitution provoked such opposition that an amendment 17 was specifically proposed and approved which exhorted Congress to ban the traffic immediately. Rhode Island was the only state to suggest such an amendment during the ratification struggle.⁴²

Some local opponents of slavery doggedly maintained their antifederalism until the end. When the Providence Abolition Society — founded in February 1789 — received its charter from the state in June 1790, the list of incorporators revealed that ten of its signers

40 GA Records 13:419-21. Bartlett 10:262. Elizabeth Donnan, "Agitation against Slave Trade in Rhode Island, 1784-1790," *Persecution and Liberty: Essays in Honor of George Lincoln Burr* (New York, 1931). *Providence Gazette* Oct. 6, 13 and Nov. 24, 1787.

41 Mack Thompson, *Moses Brown: Reluctant Reformer* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1962) 239-43. Moses Brown to Isaac Lawton, Jacob Mott, Sampson Sherman or any other Friends to whom they may think proper to communicate, February 4, 1790, Moses Brown Papers, Box 12 Austin Collection, RIHS Library. A reaction to the Constitution perhaps typical of local Quaker sentiment was expressed by William Rotch of Nantucket to Moses Brown, November 8, 1787: "Thou queries how friends can be active in establishing the new form of government which so much favors slavery . . . as to my own part, my heart has been often pained since the publication of the doings of the Convention; and much disappointed I am, as I had entertained some hope that

so many wise men would have formed some system of government founded on equity and justice. . . . whatever high encomiums are given to it [the Constitution], it is evident to me that it is founded on slavery and that is on blood." *ibid.*, Box 3. Samuel Hopkins to Moses Brown, Oct. 22, 1787, Moses Brown Papers [RIHS Library]. Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (Washington, D.C., 1930-35) 3:335-52. Samuel Hopkins, *Works*, ed. E. A. Park (Philadelphia, 1853) 1:119-127. Two recent studies which reveal the vehement anti-slave sentiments of this outspoken Congregationalist clergyman are David S. Lovejoy, "Samuel Hopkins: Religion, Slavery, and the Revolution," *New England Quarterly* 40:2 (June 1967) 227-43 and David E. Swift, "Samuel Hopkins: Calvinist Social Concern in Eighteenth Century New England," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 47:1 (March 1969) 31-54.

42 Cotner, 73-76. Staples, *RICC*, 645-48.

were members of the May ratifying convention. Antislaveryites included president Daniel Owen and antifederal floor leaders Joseph Stanton, Jr., and Job Comstock. Only three of these ten abolitionist delegates voted to accept the federal document on May 29.⁴³

Finally, Rhode Island's hostility toward the Union was conditioned in part by the Union's hostility to Rhode Island. Since the days of Roger Williams — when Rhode Island was dubbed a moral sewer by her haughty Puritan neighbors — the state had been subjected to abuse of outraged foreigners. In the 1780s attacks from without reached unprecedented proportions. Beginning with Rhode Island's initial rejection of the impost and continuing through the paper money era, the state and its citizens were subjected to an endless stream of invective. Rhode Island newspapers of the day were replete with verbal barbs reprinted from distant presses. Harsh actions and words of condescending foreign critics were most distressing to Rhode Islanders.

The confederation Congress attempted to unseat Rhode Island delegate David Howell for his strenuous opposition to the impost. After the paper money issue the state was caricatured as the "quintessence of villainy" and the Trevett-Weeden affair brought further opprobrium.

During the constitution-making process federalists took Rhode Island to task. From the outset — when the *Massachusetts Sentinel* described Rhode Island's absence from the Grand Convention as a "joyous rather than a grievous" circumstance — to the end of the ratification struggle — when some proposed her dismemberment and absorption by surrounding states — Rhode Island endured repeated insult. Even

temperate James Madison exclaimed in exasperation, "Nothing can exceed the wickedness and folly which continue to rule there. All sense of character as well as of right have been obliterated."

Most eloquent censure of all came from Connecticut, from the pens of a foursome who later joined a group of literati known as the "Connecticut Wits." Their contribution to Rhode Island's litany of shame was a long poetical satire entitled "Anarchiad, 1786-1787."

*Hail! realm of rogues, renown'd for fraud and guile,
All hail; ye knav'ries of yon little isle.
There prowls the rascal, cloth'd with legal pow'r,
To snare the orphan, and the poor devour;
The crafty knave his creditor besets,
And advertising paper pays his debts;
Bankrupts their creditors with rage pursue,
No stop, no mercy from the debtor crew.
Arm'd with new tests, the licens'd villain bold,
Presents his bills, and robs them of their gold;
Their ears, though rogues and counterfeiters lose,
No legal robber fears the gallows noose.*

.....
*Each weekly print new lists of cheats proclaims,
Proud to enroll their knav'ries and their names;
The wiser race, the snares of law to shun,
Like Lot from Sodom, from Rhode Island run.⁴⁴*

Such derisive epithets caused anger and resentment. They produced a banding together of citizenry, especially in the country towns, against outside agitators. Federalists won few friends in Rhode Island with their abusive tirades.⁴⁵

43 GA Records 13:755-61. Bartlett 10:382-85. Cotner [50] and McDonald [345] incorrectly say eight convention delegates were charter members of the Providence Abolition Society. Actually delegates Daniel Owen, James Sheldon, Joseph Stanton, Jr., John Sayles, John Williams, Noah Mathewson, Job Comstock, John S. Dexter, Levi Ballou, and Benjamin Arnold signed the charter. Only the last three, however, voted to accept the Constitution. A recent work which emphasizes the importance of slavery in the Constitution-making process is Staughton Lynd, *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution* [Indianapolis, 1967] 153-213. James F. Reilly, "Providence Abolition Society," *Rhode Island History* 21:2 [April 1962] 33-48.

44 For the controversy surrounding the attempt to expel Howell, Staples, *RICC*, 375-428. On Rhode Island's reaction to New York editor Francis Child's article, "Quintessence of Villainy," Staples, *RICC*, 579-82, especially James M. Varnum and Peleg Arnold to Governor George Clinton, April 7, 1787. *Massachusetts Sentinel's* remarks are in Clinton Rossiter, *1787: The Grand Convention* (New York 1966) 88-9. Madison's statement from a letter of April 2, 1787 appears in Clarence S. Brigham, *History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations* (Providence, 1902) 261. On "Anarchiad," Abe C. Ravitz, "Anarch in Rhode Island," *Rhode Island History* 11:4 (October 1952) 117-24.



Printer's ornament from Rhode Island paper money, 1786

Rhode Island's opposition to the Constitution stemmed primarily from adherence to the paper money program, aversion to direct taxation, attachment to "liberty" and principles of direct democracy, detestation of slavery, and adverse reaction to "foreign" criticism. For a time these obstacles seemed insuperable. Countervailing forces eventually and fortuitously produced a tenuous triumph for the cause of federalism.

Several of these forces were operative from the inception of the controversy, others developed gradually as tides of change left Rhode Island high and dry outside the Union. From the outset, existence within the state of continental loan office certificates in the face amount of \$524,000 provided an important source of support for the new, prospectively more stable and fiscally responsible government. Major repositories for these securities and for federalism were Providence and Newport.⁴⁶

Ratification would benefit not only those private creditors of the national government who held these certificates, but a number of coastal towns as well. Exposed communities such as Newport, Middletown, Portsmouth, Jamestown, Tiverton, Little Compton, Bristol and Warren held substantial claims against the United States for war damages. Newport, Middletown and Portsmouth had audited claims amounting to \$719,280 out of a state total of \$899,100. Establishment of a government with effective taxing power would enhance their chances for compensation, but it appears from the slow conversion of these communities —

Newport and Bristol excepted — that the claims were a peripheral rather than decisive consideration.⁴⁷

The mercantile community had also come to realize the importance of unified national control over interstate and foreign commerce. Proliferation of interstate tariffs and failure of confederation diplomats to secure commercial treaties with such important nations as England and Spain because of the "imbecility" of the Articles in the area of commercial regulation would be remedied by the new Constitution. Effective central direction and encouragement of commerce, merchants felt, would enhance the state's economy and their personal fortunes as well.⁴⁸

Finally, ratification presented the prospect of a protective tariff to the small but growing and influential class of mechanics and incipient industrialists who were concentrated mainly in Providence. In spring 1789 the newly-created Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers appointed a committee of correspondence to dispatch circular letters to similar groups in other states lamenting Rhode Island's obstructionism and expressing an "anxious desire and fervent prayer that this State may speedily take measures to be reunited under the Federal Head and thereby enjoy the benefits of that Government."⁴⁹ The principal "benefit" which they sought was a protective tariff to encourage the state's infant industries.

As of March 1788 — these economic factors notwithstanding — the only federalist communities were Providence, Newport, and Bristol, principal seaports, plus the coastal town of Little Compton.⁵⁰ Certain developments in 1789 and 1790 gradually swung the Bay towns of Portsmouth, Middletown, Tiverton, Jamestown, Warren, and Barrington into the

45 McDonald (338) also believes that outside criticism strengthened Rhode Island's antifederalism. A similar reaction to "foreign" agitators occurred in the antebellum South.

46 McDonald, 326. E. James Ferguson, *Power of the Purse: History of American Public Finance, 1776-1790* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1961) 280-82. Seventy-one per cent of the total federal debt held in Rhode Island was owned by citizens in these two communities.

47 McDonald, 326, 337-38. In an Assembly-authorized town referendum in October 1789, the Bay communities of Portsmouth, Middletown and Jamestown were still opposed to calling a ratifying convention. Jamestown's freemen voted "against choosing a Convention for adopting the new federal government." Book of Town Records 3 (1744-1796) 333 [Town Clerk's Office].

48 On the importance to federalists of uniform regulation of commerce see May 1789 petition to General Assembly signed by over 500 Providence residents, Staples, *RICC*, 618-20.

49 Records of Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers 1 (1789-1794) 21-32 [RIHS Library]. For a similar stance taken by New York City's mechanics see Lynd, 121-32.

50 Bristol and Little Compton supported the Constitution in the March 1788 referendum, the former by 26 to 23 and the latter by 63 to 57, Staples, *RICC*, 590. See also Little Compton's instructions to her deputies in January 1788, PAC, p. 56. Nicholas and John Brown correctly observed that "the seaport towns are truly desirous of joining the General Government" to Richard Henry Lee, May 1, 1789, John Brown Papers.

Advocate of ratification was John Carter, publisher of the Providence Gazette.



Idealized portrait, RIHS.

federal camp. They were joined by Westerly, minor port and shipbuilding town on the southwestern coast.

Surprisingly, Hopkinton, Westerly's adjacent but interior neighbor to the north, made a last-minute switch to federalism as did inland but shipbuilding Cumberland in the state's northeastern corner.⁵¹ Warwick, a four-vote town on the upper Bay had its delegation evenly split on ratification in the May 1790 convention.⁵²

Among factors accounting for slow attrition in anti-federal ranks could be listed the following:

(1) Incessant labors of the federalist press dramatized the need for union. Notable propagandists were Bennett Wheeler's *United States Chronicle* (Providence), John Carter's *Providence Gazette*, and Peter Edes' *Newport Herald*.⁵³

(2) Rhode Island felt increasingly isolated as the inexorable ratification movement toppled opposition in state after state. George Washington's snub of Rhode Island during his triumphal New England tour in the fall of 1789 emphasized its ostracism. Isolation was further accentuated — and Rhode Island wavered markedly — after North Carolina capitulated in November 1789.⁵⁴

(3) Proposal by Congress of a Bill of Rights coupled with the state's submission of its own amendments gave the federalist cause a perceptible lift and deprived the "Antis" of formidable objection.⁵⁵

(4) The prestige and integrity of new federal officials, especially President Washington, lessened fears and

51 Cumberland's important shipbuilding was inaugurated in early 1790. Earlier the town had produced naval stores, especially pitch. Richard M. Bayles, ed., *History of Providence County, Rhode Island* (New York, 1891) 2:236, 242. Sidney S. Rider, "Development of Constitutional Government in Rhode Island," MS., 16:2, 64, 14 (RIHS Library), has contended that convention delegate John Brown of Hopkinton was a relative of the prominent Providence merchants. Rider is also of the belief that the division in Rhode Island was between "maritime" and "agricultural" towns. Hopkinton and Cumberland town meeting records give no indication why these communities defected to the federalist camp. On Westerly see Frederic Denison, *Westerly and its Witnesses* (Providence, 1878) 141, 180.

52 Staples, *RICC*, 672-73. Besides Warwick, the only split delegation was Portsmouth whose vote was two for adoption, one for rejection, one absent. Portsmouth's position is perplexing. In the 1788 referendum anti-federalists had a margin of 60 to 12. The town contained a relatively large number of Quakers whose anti-slave sentiment perhaps explains the Constitution's slow headway there, despite the town's \$136,530 claim for war damages. In 1790 Moses Brown concentrated his pro-Constitution campaign there and he seems to have had some success, because the town meeting instructed the four-man Portsmouth delegation to ratify. Despite instructions Job Durfee declined to attend and Giles Slocum cast a negative vote. Staples, *RICC*, 590, 670-72.

Thompson, 241-43. McDonald, 337, 343. In divided Warwick 97 freemen had voted against calling the convention and 108 had supported its convening. Warwick Town Meeting Records (1776-1795) January 9 and 12, 1790 (RIHS Library).

53 These journals, although biased, are the fullest source for the ratification struggle.

54 John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Diaries of George Washington, 1748-1799* (New York, 1925) 4:20-51. Ellery to Huntington, December 12, 1789, mentions the impact of North Carolina's ratification as does Peter Edes in the *Newport Herald*, Jan. 21, 1790, and Jabez Bowen, *DHC* 5:226.

55 Ellery to Huntington, May 10, June 15, July 13 and September 8, 1789. *Newport Mercury*, January 28, 1788. Linda Grant De Pauw, "Anticlimax of Antifederalism: Abortive Second Convention Movement, 1788-89," *Prologue* 2:2 (Fall, 1970) 105-06.

56 Thompson, 242. Washington's election did much to quiet Rhode Island's fears. Conversely, his by-pass of the state was a source of embarrassment. On Washington's influence see also John Brown et al. to George Washington, June 10, 1790, Olney Papers 1:43 (RIHS Library).

57 Providence Town Meeting Records 7 (1783-1804) 169-70. This move had been in the making for some time. Ellery to Huntington, April 25, May 14, 1789; March 8, April

suspensions harbored toward the new governmental system. Moses Brown persuasively argued that the nature of government would depend more upon the caliber of men sent to administer it than on the Constitution itself.⁵⁶

(5) A severe jolt was delivered to antifederalists when Providence threatened to secede unless Rhode Island joined the Union. This drastic but well-considered step—proposed on May 24—was embodied in instructions to that town's convention delegates. If the Constitution was rejected or a decision unduly delayed, Providence delegates were empowered to meet with those from Newport and other interested towns to discuss means by which pro-Constitution communities could apply to Congress "for the same privileges and protection which are afforded to the towns under their jurisdiction."⁵⁷

(6) Proposed assumption of state debts apparently induced a few Rhode Islanders to advocate adoption. Some citizens could and did benefit from such a federal program. It was argued by several shrewd Rhode Islanders that assumption would enable them to receive payment for their state securities a second time. This could be accomplished if the Assembly would enact a law setting up a scale of depreciation on the paper money, declaring that because of this depreciation only a part of the debt had been paid, and returning the "unredeemed" portion of the state

certificates to those who had originally submitted them. A consolidation statute to implement this scheme was actually passed in June 1791, making it possible for a number of state creditors to receive a modest second payment, this time from the government of the United States. Those hard money merchants who had withheld their state securities, and had chosen to forfeit payment rather than submit them to the state for redemption in paper, were also included under the assumption plan by the act of 1791.

Enticing as this scheme appears, the assumption program was not an important factor influencing Rhode Island's ratification, Forrest McDonald's assertion notwithstanding.⁵⁸ In mid-1790, the mercantile community was leery of assumption because its costs might necessitate an exorbitant impost; many farmers rejected it because they sensed the power and influence such a plan would bestow upon the central government. Existing evidence clearly shows that both Country Party and merchants were cool to the assumption project.⁵⁹ The fact that Rhode Island itself would likely prove to be a creditor of the central government may have strengthened the federalist cause.⁶⁰

(7) The principal proximate cause for Rhode Island ratification was economic coercion. Within weeks after the first Congress set to work, William Ellery of Newport began his campaign to persuade the national legislature to lower the economic boom upon Rhode

17, May 3, May 11, 1790; and Huntington to Ellery, May 8, 1790. On April 17 Ellery asked Huntington if any seceding towns would be protected and admitted to the Union; Huntington replied that "I have no doubt" that Congress would aid them. Benjamin Bourne to Silas Talbot, Jan. 9, 1790, Peck Collection 8:31 (RIHS Library). Jabez Bowen to George Washington, Dec. 15, 1789, DHC 5:226. McDonald (323, 345) erroneously asserts that Providence had actually seceded.

58 McDonald (345-46) feels that this ingenious plan was one of "two principal economic reasons" which caused a shift in antifederal votes between March and May conventions and made ratification possible. He erroneously asserts that the depreciation law was passed during the interim between conventions. It was not passed until June 1791, over a year after Rhode Island had entered the Union and nearly eleven months after assumption had been enacted over opposition of Rhode Island's senators. Bartlett 10:447-50. Stanton and Foster voted against inclusion of assumption with a funding bill and, unsuccessful, voted against the funding bill.

59 *Annals of the Congress of the United States, 1789-1824*, eds. J. Gales and W. W. Seaton (Washington, 1834-56), 1 Cong., 2 Sess., 1012, 1016, hereafter cited *Annals*. Ellery to Huntington, February 2, March 8, June 12, 1790. Arthur Fenner to Theodore Foster, July 17, July 31, 1790 and Ebenezer Thompson to Foster, July 26, 1790, Foster Papers 1 [RIHS Library]. [J. Franklin Jameson, ed.],

"Adjustment of Rhode Island into the Union in 1790," *Publications of the Rhode Island Historical Society* 8:2 (July 1900) 104-135. Rhode Island was awarded a paltry \$200,000 out of a total of \$21,500,000 assumed. A very interesting analysis of the state's June 1791 depreciation act and the complexities of its implementation is John W. Richmond, *Rhode Island Repudiation, or the History of the Revolutionary Debt of Rhode Island*, 2nd ed. (Providence, 1855). Richmond believed that the measure was "wise and eminently just," because it repealed forfeiture provisions of acts of 1787-89 and because it allowed those who had received depreciated paper from the state for their securities to get "just compensation" (1-33). An informative up-to-date analysis is in Polishook, 235-41.

60 As Fisher Ames observed: "The plan of the Secretary [Hamilton] affords an argument more upon a level with their [antifederalist] views. The scheme of adjusting accounts between the U.S. and individual states presents to your people a solid and very alluring advantage. It is equally beneficial to creditor states who will now get their due and to debtor states who will get their debts paid for them by the U.S. Rhode Island I suppose will prove a creditor, and may expect that this will provide an annual sum from the public treasury sufficient to pay the expenses of civil government." Ames to Welcome Arnold, Feb. 20, 1790, W. Easton Louttit Collection.

Connecticut's Oliver Ellsworth headed a Senate committee whose recommendations might have posed the threat of federal military force against Rhode Island.



Engraving from *New England Magazine*, March, 1890.

Island. Ellery — signer of the Declaration of Independence, commissioner of the loan office, staunch federalist — was in frequent contact with Connecticut congressman Benjamin Huntington and Connecticut senator Oliver Ellsworth, urging them to abandon “a policy of leniency” toward Rhode Island. Repeatedly he advised them that antifederalists “must be made to feel before they will ever consent to call a convention,” and they

can be made “to feel . . . by subjecting the goods, wares, and manufactures of this state” to the same duties “as foreign States not in alliance with the United States.”⁶¹

Although such duties would hurt federalists in port towns, the result would be worth the sacrifice, claimed Ellery. As time went on he suggested ways to hit antifederalists more directly. Place duties on the produce of country folk, he advised, stop their “lime, flaxseed, and barley” from entering neighboring states duty free, and “the Antis will . . . be compelled by a sense of interest to adopt the Constitution.” Further, “Congress should require an immediate payment of a sum of money from the State with an assurance that if not collected an equivalent will be distrained.”⁶² The sum to which Ellery referred was Rhode Island’s share of the Revolutionary debt. Call for immediate payment would necessitate re-institution of high taxes on land.

Prodded by Ellery’s shrewd observations, Congress began to move. In July 1789 it enacted a tariff program which subjected “all goods, wares, and merchandise” which Rhode Island exported to other states to foreign duties if such merchandise were not of Rhode Island “growth or manufacture.” The state immediately petitioned for suspension of these duties and Congress, to Ellery’s dismay, relented. In mid-September an act was passed holding discriminatory levies in abeyance until January 15, 1790.⁶³

Just as this period of grace expired, the Assembly approved, not by coincidence, the act calling a ratifying convention. Immediately Governor Collins informed the President and Congress and requested a further suspension. The patient Congress again complied. On February 8, Rhode Island’s privilege was extended “until the first day of April next, and no longer.”⁶⁴

At this juncture, Vice President John Adams, the Senate’s presiding officer, began to show signs of

61 To Huntington, May 14, June 15, 1789.

62 To Huntington, December 12, 1789 and March 28, 1790.

63 *Annals* 1 Cong., 1 Sess., 78-9, 887, 889-90, 892, 2132, 2133-58, 2178-79.

64 *Annals* 1 Cong., 2 Sess., 941-43, 1106, 2202.

65 Adams to Brown and Francis, February 28, 1790 [RIHS Library].

66 *Annals* 1 Cong., 2 Sess., 966-67. To Huntington, April 17, May 3, 1790.

67 *Annals* 1 Cong., 2 Sess., 972-76. Senate Journal, 1 Cong., 2 Sess., 63, 75-76. Edgar S. Maclay, ed., *Journal of William Maclay* (New York, 1965) 257, 260. Ellery’s specific recommendation was not enacted, but the Senate bill was even more far-reaching.

68 *Maclay’s Journal*, 260. On Feb. 29, 1790 Senator Strong wrote to Theodore Foster that “if the Convention adjourns without acceptance” which is “only a delicate mode of rejection, the Government then will be justified even to the discerning People in Rhode Island in pursuing measures that in other circumstances might be thought severe.” Foster Papers 1:23. Soon after ratification, Strong congratulated Foster and expressed hope

exasperation. Just prior to the South Kingstown convention he confided to Providence merchants John Brown and John Francis that he was "really much affected at the obstinate infatuation of so great a part of the People of Rhode Island." Then he admonished, "if the Convention should reject the Constitution or adjourn without adopting it, Congress will probably find it necessary to treat them as they are, as Foreigners, and extend all the laws to them as such. . . . If the lime, the barley and other articles, whether of foreign or domestic growth or manufacture, should be subjected to a Duty, it would soon show your People that their interests are in the power of their neighbors."⁶⁵

When the March convention adjourned without issue and the Country Party swept the April elections, more drastic pressures, such as those of which Adams warned, appeared necessary. On April 28, 1790 a five-man Senate committee was created "to consider what provisions will be proper for Congress to make in the present session, respecting the State of Rhode Island." Among the membership of this group were Ellsworth and Caleb Strong of Massachusetts. At this juncture Ellery reiterated his bold plans to coerce the antifederal majority. He urged prompt action. "It is my opinion," he stated, "that the Convention will adjourn again unless you do something which will touch the interest of the Antis before the Convention meets."⁶⁶

The committee, with Senator Ellsworth in the lead, heeded Ellery's admonition. On May 11 it reported a two-point program imposing a prohibition on all commercial intercourse between the United States and Rhode Island, effective July 1, and demanding an immediate payment, eventually set at \$25,000, on the state's Revolutionary debt. A bill encompassing those recommendations was drawn. On May 18 — after long debate — it passed 13 to 8.⁶⁷ Noncompliance with the

requisition could, perhaps, offer sufficient pretext for resort to military force by the United States.

According to Senator William Maclay of Pennsylvania, vigorous opponent of the measure, some were induced to support it "to get two Senators more into the House on whose votes they can reckon on the question of residence." He was referring, of course, to the current controversy over permanent location of the national capital. This consideration, however, was of secondary importance. Maclay observed, as the bill headed for the House, "It was meant to be used in the same way that a robber does a dagger or a highwayman a pistol, and to obtain the end desired by putting the party in fear."⁶⁸

Merchant John Francis reported from Philadelphia that the bill would "put an entire stoppage to all connection whatever by land or water. This very severe remedy," he said with mixed emotions, "will sorely operate on the Feds, who must bear it with fortitude as the only remaining means [to secure Rhode Island's ratification]."⁶⁹

Rumors regarding the measure appeared in the Providence press just prior to the convention. This community had long been apprehensive that the federal duty act would become operative for Rhode Island. Now, in view of the Senate's even more drastic action, Providence decided to employ that long-contemplated resort — secession — if ratification were not forthcoming.⁷⁰

Unquestionably some of the reluctant Bay towns, such as Portsmouth, were also moved by the sustained politico-economic pressure of the federal government. No doubt it was a decisive factor in ratification on May 29.⁷¹ Ellery, animated by a not uncommon blend of principle and patronage, was later rewarded by the new central government with the prized appointment of collector of customs for Newport.

that Rhode Island would soon be represented in the Senate so that her solons could vote on the upcoming bill providing for permanent location of the capital. Foster Papers 1:24. Ellsworth's leadership is indicated by: "Rhode Island is at length brought into the Union, and by a pretty bold measure in Congress, which would have exposed me to some censure had it not produced the effect which I expected it would." Ellsworth to "a friend," June 7, 1790, William Garrott Brown, *Life of Oliver Ellsworth* (New York, 1905) 200.

69 To James Brown, May 10, 1790, James Brown Papers (RIHS Library).

70 *U.S. Chronicle*, May 20, 27, 1790. *Providence Gazette*, May 15, 22, 27, 29, 1790. Town Meeting Records 7 (1783-1804) 140-43, 146-48, 169-70, and Staples, *Annals of the Town of Providence* . . . [Providence, 1843], 341-42.

71 At ratification the bill was pending in the House, where it had drawn sharp criticism from Congressman John Page of Virginia. *Annals* 1 Cong., 2 Sess., 1616-19. On Portsmouth's reaction see Staples, *RICC*, 636-39, 670-72. Bates (170-79, 185-93) ascribes considerable importance to the coercion, Bishop and Polishook slight it, while McDonald ignores it. For a contemporary view of its effect see Edwin M. Stone, ed., *Life and Recollections of John Howland* (Providence, 1857) 160-64.

*Long-held theories which utilize notions of class struggle, debtor-creditor antagonism, and real versus personal property interests, to explain the division over ratification are too simplistic, too cut and dried, for the variegated Rhode Island experience.*⁷²

One recent theory which seems to have greater validity for Rhode Island — though it also admits of exceptions — is advanced by Jackson Turner Main who contends that in all parts of the country “the commercial interest with its ramifications, including those who depended primarily and directly upon commerce, were Federal, and the ‘non-navigating’ folk were Antifederal.”

Main cautions that commercial interest was not just urban. Commercial centers were supported by nearby rural areas which depended upon towns as markets and as agencies through which their produce was exported overseas. Commercial interest embraced large numbers of farmers, and the influence of each town radiated, perhaps in a degree relative to its size or commercial significance. There was a difference between exporting agricultural sections and more isolated and self-sufficient farming areas.

Rhode Island does no violence to this thesis. The significant and only intelligible generic division in this recalcitrant state was that of commercial interest versus agrarian; “the Federal tide in Rhode Island rose slowly from Providence and Newport to engulf the other bay towns.”⁷³

Unfortunately, Professor Main does not list reasons for this cleavage. He could have mentioned greater

fervor for paper money in the interior towns and the farmer’s stronger fear of direct taxes on land. Additional considerations included the relatively large amount of continental securities held in mercantile towns, war damage claims of the Bay communities, and the commercial coercion of Congress.

A final factor, attitudinal in nature, was the more provincial, localistic, democratic, and politically radical beliefs which prevailed among denizens of those isolated country towns. This outlook rendered them slow in grasping or accepting the full significance of momentous events transpiring on the national stage. Most of the inhabitants of these communities were — to use Lee Benson’s concept — “agrarian-minded.” Their remote environment and often inferior social status had shaped their ideology, and that ideology predisposed them to distrust the power of government, especially one far removed from local and popular supervision and control. They were pessimistic, parochial men of little faith.⁷⁴

Mercantile interests were more cosmopolitan and politically sophisticated. Their mode of life brought them into contact with people of other states, making them less suspicious, broader in outlook, more inclined to realize the necessity of change, and less disposed to fear it. Their ideology, which Benson calls “commercialism,” was positive and optimistic. “Commercial-minded” federalists believed that government must be strong and centralized if it were to function creatively, advance the general welfare, and dispense justice. Moreover they felt it must have both

72 Theories associated with Charles Beard, *Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York, 1913). In fairness to Beard, he briefly treats Rhode Island, uses Bates as reference, and correctly emphasizes federal economic coercion and Providence’s threatened secession as factors forcing ratification. Robert E. Brown, *Charles Beard and the Constitution* (Princeton, N.J., 1956) casts grave doubts on Beard’s general hypothesis but sheds little light on Rhode Island ratification. McDonald’s analysis of delegates to the ratifying convention shows that neither party could reasonably be described as “agrarian” or a “debtors’ faction.” Delegates, regardless of their stand, “held approximately the same amounts of the same kinds of securities, and it would appear that there was no line of cleavage between public creditors and non creditors.” Nearly equal percentages of both parties borrowed paper in 1786. McDonald, 339-44. McDonald analyzed economic interests of delegates only, but I feel that much sharper differences would be apparent if rank and file of both factions were compared. While a simple class interpretation cannot be sustained, most merchants, professional men, mechanics, artisans, and other urban dwellers supported the Constitution, and

most farmers in remote rural towns opposed it. James Varnum’s observation that “the wealth and resources of this state are chiefly in the possession of the well-affected” (federalists) was not far from the mark. Wilkins Updike, *Memoirs of the Rhode Island Bar* (Boston, 1842) 301.

73 Main, 213, 248, 256, 270-72, 274, 280.

74 Lee Benson, *Turner and Beard: American Historical Writing Reconsidered* (New York, 1960) 215-17. Cecelia M. Kenyon, ed., *Antifederalists* (Indianapolis, 1966) xxi-cxvi and “Men of Little Faith: Anti-Federalists on the Nature of Representative Government,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 12:1 (Jan. 1955) 3-46. Alpheus Thomas Mason, *States Rights Debate: Antifederalism and the Constitution* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1964) 66-97. Wood, 519-21.

75 Agrarian-minded and commercial-minded types are derived from the imaginative “social interpretation” of the Constitution developed by Benson [214-228] whose thesis is adaptable to the Rhode Island experience.

A useful concept which appears to reinforce a “social interpretation” of the Constitution is the *Gemeinschaft*

Under this heading John Carter's broadside proclaimed ratification of the Constitution. In Providence, he reported, the event was announced by "Ringing of Bells and firing two federal Salutes..." with promise of "further Demonstrations of Joy..."

A-1203
1790

RHODE - ISLAND and PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS united to the Great *AMERICAN FAMILY*.

PROVIDENCE, *Monday, May 31, 1790.*

positive powers to enlarge opportunities and coercive powers to prevent groups or sections from indulging their own interests, passions, and errors at the expense of the commonwealth. Theirs was the idea of "nationalism" which found ever-increasing expression under the Constitution of 1787.⁷⁵

When members of the community of merchants, bankers, artisans, mechanics, and exporting farmers saw their enterprises deprived of the protection of the United States and shorn of the benefits of her commercial treaties, and when their commerce was faced with heavy duties laid upon it not only by Europe but by the

United States as well, they grew more determined in their federalism.

Federalists — men like William Ellery, John, Nicholas, and Moses Brown, Henry Marchant, Jabez Bowen, and Benjamin Bourne — worked both for private gain and public good. They regarded their advancement and endeavors as essential to their nation's prosperity and growth. Time and even fate were on their side. Thanks to their exertions Rhode Island rejoined the Union which had left it behind and embarked upon a new era of political and economic development.

vs. *Gesellschaft* hypothesis of German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies. Applying this theory to Rhode Island of 1790, it could be maintained that the area in which antifederalism predominated was essentially a *Gemeinschaft* or community-oriented society — one which maintained rural outlook, possessed homogeneous structure and values, functioned through traditional status arrangements, and was characterized by low mobility, attachment to the soil, unity, close personal relationships, and a home or household economy; whereas federalist commercial towns constituted a predominately *Gesellschaft* or association-oriented society — one with a cosmopolitan or urban attitude; one exhibiting preference for ordering social and economic relations through contract; and one characterized by higher mobility, greater heterogeneity, impersonal relationships, and advanced forms of economic organization and activity. These fundamental societal differences were reflected in the antithetical attitudes of these sections toward the proposed basic law. *Community and Society* (*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, trans. and ed. Charles P. Loomis [East Lansing, Mich., 1957] 1-3, 33-35, 64-67, 248-59, 268-69.

Other recent works which also view the Constitution as at least a partial consequence of opposing ideologies rooted in differing social circumstances are Rutland, *passim*, and Wood, 471-564. Professor Wood in his brilliant tour de force on the development of American constitutionalism suggests that "both the proponents and opponents of the Constitution focused throughout the debates on an essential point of political sociology that ultimately must be used to distinguish a Federalist from an Antifederalist. The quarrel was fundamentally one between aristocracy and democracy." This particular ideological dichotomy does not stand in sharp relief in atypical Rhode Island, least aristocratic of the original thirteen states. Wood generalizes, perhaps correctly, that federalists were usually aristocratic proponents of deferential politics who devised the Constitution as a check upon democratic elements from lower socioeconomic strata who had seized control of state legislatures in the wake of Revolutionary upheaval, but there is no compelling evidence in local literature of the times to prove that Rhode Island's federalists were primarily animated by such political elitism.



Napoleon Lajoie, "The Big Frenchman." (Page 120)

Sports and Franco-Americans in Woonsocket, 1870-1930

by Richard S. Sorrell*

Recently there has been an increased interest in viewing sports as a reflector of American values, both positive and negative. A spate of muckraking volumes has been published by disenchanted athletes in baseball and football, criticizing both the excessive violence and exploitative nature of professional sports.¹ Scholars in such disciplines as history, economics and sociology have begun to examine relationships between sports and American society as a whole.² Publications concerning American sports are no longer solely trivial, anecdotal or adulatory.

There is still a lack of historical studies dealing with sports in American life at various periods of our past. Lacunae are especially noticeable in studies of specific communities.³ Historians concerned with immigration and ethnicity have devoted little space to the role of recreation — specifically sports — in adaptation of immigrant groups to American society.

This brief study concentrates on the importance of sports in the lives of French Canadian immigrants and their descendants (Franco-Americans) in a New England textile mill town — Woonsocket, Rhode Island — during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In many ways Woonsocket was a typical New England textile town, relying mainly upon

the attraction of first cotton and then woolen textile mills to increase its population from 11,527 in 1870 to 49,376 in 1930.⁴ During the period after the Civil War vacancies in textile mills were increasingly filled by French Canadian immigrants driven from Quebec by poor agricultural conditions and lack of urban-industrial opportunities, and lured by the chance of higher wages in industrial New England.

Woonsocket's uniqueness derives from the numerical dominance of Franco-Americans. By 1875 they were the largest single ethnic group, and people of French Canadian origin or descent formed sixty per cent of the total population by 1900, about seventy per cent by the 1920s.⁵ It was truly the Franco-American capital of the United States by then, and it is doubtful if any other American city of the period had a higher percentage of population composed of one immigrant group.

The great majority of Woonsocket's Franco-Americans worked in manual jobs at textile mills and lived in densely packed wooden tenement sections. The most heavily French Canadian area was the "Social" district in East Woonsocket, but there were concentrations of Franco-Americans in practically all areas by the 1920s. Their strength of numbers meant that a full

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1 Baseball — Jim Brosnan, *The Long Season* (N.Y., 1960). Jim Bouton, *Ball Four and I'm Glad You Didn't Take It Personally* (N.Y., 1970 and 1971).

Football — Dave Meggysey, *Out of Their League* (N.Y., 1970). Chip Oliver, *High for the Game* (N.Y., 1971). Bernie Parrish, *They Call It a Game* (N.Y., 1971). Larry Merchant, *And Every Day You Take Another Bite* (Garden City, 1971). Johnny Sample, *Confessions of a Dirty Ballplayer* (N.Y., 1970).

2 Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years and Baseball: The Golden Age* (N.Y., 1960 and 1971). Second volume lists other scholarly studies in "Bibliographical Note," 465-471.

3 A notable exception is Dale Somer, *Rise of Sports in New Orleans, 1850-1900* (Baton Rouge, 1972).

4 Rhode Island Bureau of Industrial Statistics, *Advance Sheets of the 1905 Rhode Island State Census: Part Four of the Annual Report for 1906* (Providence, 1907) 18-20. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Abstract of the Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930* (Washington, 1931) 112.

5 Bessie Bloom Wessel, *Ethnic Survey of Woonsocket, Rhode Island* (N.Y., 1970, reprint of 1931 edition) 225. Ralph D. Vicero, "Immigration of French Canadians to New England, 1840-1900: A Geographical Analysis," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (University of Wisconsin, 1968) 343. Robert Rumilly, *Histoire des Franco-Américains* (Montreal, 1958) 462.

panoply of ethnic institutions was created, including French-speaking parish churches, parish schools, mutual aid organizations and native language newspapers. The Franco-American elite of Woonsocket provided a sufficient number of professionals and businessmen to service their ethnic working class brethren. It is commonly acknowledged that, from the late nineteenth century until the 1930s, French was the dominant language of Woonsocket, providing little incentive for older French Canadians to learn English.⁶ No wonder Woonsocket was often considered "*la ville la plus française d'Amérique.*"

What role did sports play in either aiding or hindering acculturation of this mass of Franco-Americans to their new urban Woonsocket environment during the 1870-1930 era? The sport which probably enlisted the most participation on the part of Woonsocket's Franco-Americans was baseball. This is not surprising, considering that during the early twentieth century baseball held a paramount position among American males as a spectator and participant sport.⁷ Major leagues of professional baseball were at their height of popularity during this period, especially in the 1920s. Countless millions of youngsters and adults participated in their own semi-professional, amateur and sandlot games. Although other sports (especially football) and other forms of recreation (particularly movies, radio and the automobile) were beginning to compete with baseball in the 1920s, it still reigned supreme during a time when all American sports and recreation were becoming increasingly democratized.

Baseball's greatest popularity coincided with the large influx of immigrants to the United States, primarily from southern and eastern Europe. Representatives of most immigrant groups played in the major leagues. Until the 1920s Irish and Germans were the most numerous, but by that time more southern and eastern Europeans were finding niches on major league rosters. Obviously the percentage of members of these immigrant groups who could hope to play in the majors remained small. However the glamorous "hero worship" appeal of professional baseball, coupled with

the identification of many immigrants and their children with the American "Horatio Alger" dream of "making it," meant that professional baseball served as a means of upward mobility (both imaginary and real) for America's white ethnic groups.

Harold Seymour has indicated that baseball may have served an acculturative function for many immigrant youths. Children of various nationalities played together on baseball teams and therefore diminished inter-ethnic hatreds. The simple act of playing mixed-nationality baseball on municipal fields often helped to draw immigrant children out of their ethnic ghettos. Seymour also shows that baseball could strengthen ethnic identity and nationality rivalries since frequently each city immigrant group would have its own baseball team. Thus sports contests could become a forum for venting ethnic hatreds.

This darker side of baseball's social role was also exemplified by anti-Semitism and racism practiced in the major leagues in the early twentieth century. Discrimination was not confined to Jews and non-whites. Many members of immigrant groups, particularly those from southern and eastern Europe, were subjected to various forms of nativistic abuse.

There can be little doubt that those of French Canadian descent in the major leagues suffered from the same nativism, particularly since French Canadian immigrants were frequently put in the "new" immigrant category with southern and eastern Europeans, and were consequently seen as culturally inferior to the earlier arriving northern and western Europeans.⁸ Nevertheless a large contingent of Franco-Americans played professional baseball in the 1900-1930 era. A *Sporting News* article in 1913 stated that Franco-Americans in professional baseball outnumbered either Irish or Germans, usually considered the two leading groups. Apparently those of French Canadian descent numbered over one hundred in the minors, as well as five who were playing in the two major leagues.⁹

The interest of French Canadian immigrants in baseball is amply demonstrated by their recreation patterns in Woonsocket from 1870 to 1930. There is no

6 Personal interviews by author with various Franco-Americans and others who lived in Woonsocket prior to 1930, 11-21 March 1971.

7 Seymour, *Baseball: The Golden Age*, passim.

8 Barbara M. Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition* (Cambridge, 1956) 160-163.

9 Cited in *La Tribune* (Woonsocket), 20 novembre 1913.

10 *Woonsocket Call*, "Fiftieth Anniversary Edition," 1 June 1942.

11 Personal interviews. *La Tribune*, 5 juillet and 5 septembre 1899, 5 juillet 1905, 5 juillet 1924.

12 *La Tribune*, 5 juin 1905. *Woonsocket Evening Call*, 7 May 1907.

13 *La Tribune*, 4 juin 1897, 9 juin 1908, 11 août 1924.

doubt that this was the dominant sport in Woonsocket throughout the entire sixty year period. As early as the 1880s, local games drew crowds in excess of 1,000 and the popularity of local baseball as measured by attendance increased until the 1920s. At this time baseball began to decline in relative local popularity with new recreational patterns introduced after World War I by mass usage of movies, radio and automobiles.¹⁰

The growing Franco-American community in Woonsocket rapidly adopted baseball as its favorite sport, in spite of the fact that first generation immigrants must have had little prior contact with the sport in their rural Quebec parishes. By the 1890s many Franco-Americans were enthusiastically playing baseball. Games on Sundays and holidays soon became regular activities in French Canadian districts. Their national parishes organized church teams and parish picnics displayed a baseball game as a regular feature.¹¹ There were at least four amateur and semi-professional baseball teams in Woonsocket in 1905, three of which were entirely composed of Franco-Americans. Workers from local mills formed a mill League in 1907, and numbers of Franco-Americans on individual teams ranged from one-sixth to three-fourths.¹²

Curly Valois held the fielder's glove, Alphonse Gauvin displayed catcher's mask and a Ravenelle youth presented the baseball when the Perseverance Club posed in Woonsocket's Cold Spring Park one day in 1900. Wilkes, Rose, Reeds and Wades kept the group on a multi-ethnic plane.

Editors of *La Tribune* — local French language newspaper of the Franco-American community from 1895 until the 1930s — quickly realized they would have to report baseball news if they wished to compete with Woonsocket's English language newspapers. Consequently they sporadically offered a column listing professional major and minor league baseball scores as early as 1897. By 1908 *La Tribune* featured a daily sports page listing both local and national baseball scores, and in the 1920s the paper was devoting to national baseball coverage almost equal to that of the local English language journal. This is an indication of how immigrant newspapers adapted to the urban American environment in an attempt to retain the reading loyalty of their acculturating subscribers.¹³

Increasing Franco-American acculturation in Woonsocket to native American folkways was probably hastened by baseball and other sports. Many local residents, who grew up in Woonsocket before 1930, testified to this writer that Franco-American youths mixed freely with other ethnic groups and native Americans while playing sports. This mixing encouraged children of French Canadian descent to learn English in a city where Franco-American numerical

RHHS Library Photograph Collection.



dominance meant that there was often little need to speak English within the confines of the family, the church, the school, and even in stores or in the mills.¹⁴

The reverse linguistic tendency also occurred. In the heavily French Canadian Social district, it was not unusual to observe baseball and football games before 1930 in which all conversation and signals were carried on in French, possible because all the young members of both teams used French as their primary language. Therefore sports could retard, as well as advance, the rate at which a youngster replaced French with English.¹⁵

The most evident index (although not the most accurate) of the esteem French Canadians attached to baseball was that this city of less than 50,000 people produced three Franco-American players in the professional major leagues during the 1870-1930 period. It is doubtful if any other city of comparable size produced as many major leaguers, let alone from one ethnic group.¹⁶

One of the greatest baseball men was Napoleon Lajoie—"The Big Frenchman"—born in Woonsocket in 1875, son of French Canadian immigrants, established major league star, and idol to Franco-American youth. His baseball accomplishments made him a center of national sports attention for twenty years.

Lajoie began playing for a local team, the Woonsocket, in the early 1890s. His professional career started in 1896 when he signed with a Fall River minor league team and in the same year was promoted to the majors. Immediately he became a star, compiling a .339 lifetime batting average while playing second base for three major league teams over twenty years. Elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in its second year of existence, 1937, he was preceded only by Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Honus Wagner, Christy Mathewson and Walter Johnson. He led his league in batting three times, his .422 average of 1901 being the second highest in modern major league history. Excellent fielder and

swift runner, Lajoie proved his managerial ability as player-manager of the Cleveland Indians 1905-1909.¹⁷

Napoleon's national fame was a constant source of pride for all Woonsocket but especially for the French Canadian community of the city. *La Tribune* carried almost daily articles reporting his feats of the previous day. Sports fans from Woonsocket traveled to Boston to see Lajoie play whenever his team was opposing the Boston teams.¹⁸

"The Big Frenchman" also made occasional trips home to be feted at local banquets, to play exhibition ball games before large crowds of local fans, and to visit his mother and other relatives who continued to reside in Woonsocket. There is some evidence that, upon these returns, he was treated more as a local hero than as a Franco-American. Newspaper reports of his 1900 and 1901 banquets indicate that most of the local dignitaries in attendance were not Franco-Americans, and that almost all the proceedings and entertainment were conducted in English.¹⁹

How much of his French Canadian heritage could Lajoie retain in the major leagues? He was living far from any centers of Franco-American life in New England while playing for Cleveland and the two Philadelphia teams. Therefore almost all of his friends and acquaintances would have been English speaking. It is possible that he remained French Canadian in name only. However he did insist on the French pronunciation of his name throughout his career.²⁰ He displayed the ideal French Canadian virtues of thrift and devotion to parents by saving over \$100,000 and using some of these savings to buy his mother a new home in Woonsocket.²¹

Interestingly, Napoleon seemed to combine the French Canadian virtues of thrift and filial devotion with the American Horatio Alger dream of a poor boy "making it." Lajoie quit school at an early age in Woonsocket to work as a wagon driver for \$1.50 a day. He rose from these humble origins to a salary of \$6,000

14 Personal interviews.

15 Personal interviews. T. Curtis Forbes, "French Declines in Woonsocket: Switch Toward English," *Providence Journal*, 11 January 1965.

16 Woonsocket was also the birthplace of Gabby Hartnett (not a Franco-American), Hall of Fame catcher for the Chicago Cubs from 1922 until 1940. Joe Reichler, *Ronald Encyclopedia of Baseball* (N.Y., 1964), Sec. 12:47.

The most recent Woonsocket Franco-American to play major league baseball is Clem Labine, Brooklyn Dodger relief pitcher of the 1950s, who says that he

spoke only French in Woonsocket until age seven. In later years he spoke French less and developed a form of self-hatred due partially to teasing by Italian-American adolescent friends. However Labine showed the typical French Canadian love of birthplace and lack of geographical mobility as he returned to Woonsocket after baseball retirement. He presently works in public relations for the same textile mill in which his French Canadian father worked as a weaver. Roger Kahn, *The Boys of Summer* (N.Y., 1972) 209-233.

17 Rosaire Dion-Lévesque includes a short biography of Lajoie in his collection of adulatory biographies of

Henri Rondeau remained popular with Woonsocket baseball fans in spite of mediocre showing in the majors.



Woonsocket Call, June 1, 1942.

to \$7,000 annually with Cleveland by 1910. This was an enormous amount when the average American worker's salary was \$525, when a major league rookie earned about \$1,500 and an established regular around \$3,000. Only a few major leaguers earned over \$5,000.

prominent Franco-Americans, *Silhouettes Franco-Américains* (Manchester, 1957) 460-465. *Woonsocket Evening Call*, 5 July 1894 and 24 June 1895. *La Tribune*, 10 février 1896. Reichler, sec. 2:115-116, sec. 9:3 and sec. 12:63.

18 *La Tribune*, 23 juin 1898, 28 avril 1899, 9 mai 1901, 23 mai 1905.

19 Lajoie returned home for banquets in 1900 and 1901, to play exhibitions in 1901 and 1922, and to show off his new wife to his mother and relatives in 1907. *La Tribune*, 28 and 30 septembre 1901, 11 septembre 1922. *Woonsocket Evening Call*, 13 November 1900, 30 September and 1 October 1901, 10 June 1907.

Lajoie apparently always knew the value of a dollar. When he originally signed with Fall River he held out for an additional \$25 a month. He jumped from the Philadelphia Nationals to the Athletics during a trade war between National and American Leagues in 1901, securing a much higher salary. A biography in *La Tribune* in 1913 took great pride in stressing salary figures and life-long savings. Its editors were pleased with Lajoie's apparent ability to follow the Horatio Alger path without succumbing to those great American dangers which Franco-American priests never tired of warning against — hedonism and love of luxury.²²

Two other Franco-Americans who made the major leagues were Louis Lepine and Henri Rondeau.

Lepine was a first generation immigrant (born in Montreal in 1876) whose parents moved to Woonsocket.

Rondeau was born in Danielson, Connecticut in 1887 and soon moved to Woonsocket with his family.

Neither had much success in the majors. Lepine was asked to report to the Pittsburgh Pirates spring training camp in 1899 but apparently played in minor leagues from that time until 1907; his major league career consisted of one brief trial with Detroit in the American League (1902) during which he batted only .202. Rondeau played three years in the majors (1913, 1915-1916) but his average was a measly .203.²³

Nevertheless both men were popular among Franco-Americans. *La Tribune* devoted considerable space to Lepine's career during 1901-1902, and in 1904 and 1905 reported proudly that Lepine turned down a Rochester, New York minor league contract because he preferred living and playing ball in Woonsocket. Its editors suggested that an attempt be made to have him play with a local team, since he was so popular with local fans.²⁴

Nativistic abuse was sometimes directed against members of immigrant groups who played in baseball's major leagues. One source indicated that Lepine's brief stay in the majors gave evidence of such nativism.

20 Curt Gowdy on NBC TV Baseball Game of the Week, summer 1970.

21 *La Tribune*, 15 juillet 1913.

22 Seymour, *Baseball: The Golden Age*, 156, 172.

23 *La Tribune*, 28 février 1899. *Woonsocket Evening Call*, 16 September 1907. *Woonsocket Call*, "Fiftieth Anniversary Edition," 1 June 1942. Reichler, sec. 12:65, 95.

24 *La Tribune*, passim summers 1901 and 1902, 31 décembre 1904 and 22 février 1905.

Apparently his Detroit teammates labeled him a "foreigner" since he was born in French Canada and consequently both verbally and physically abused him during team practices. These malignings may have prevented him from demonstrating his true ability during his major league trial.²⁵

Franco-American love of baseball became intertwined with a major *cause célèbre*, the *Sentinelle* crisis of the 1920s, which achieved a certain national notoriety.²⁶ A group of Franco-Americans in Woonsocket were militantly in favor of *survivance*.²⁷ They felt that the Catholic Church's Irish hierarchy in their diocese of Providence was endeavoring to reduce the financial autonomy of Franco-American parishes and force Franco-American youths to attend English-speaking Catholic high schools. These self-named *Sentinelles* saw this as part of a long-standing policy on the part of the hierarchy to eliminate all vestiges of "national" parishes from American Catholicism.²⁸

Many Franco-Americans had long felt animosity toward the Irish because of Irish dominance in the hierarchy of the Church in the United States and their supposed desire to "Americanize" all later immigrant groups. *Sentinelles*, led by Elphège Daignault, became increasingly militant in their opposition in the 1920s. They refused to contribute to diocesan fund drives, especially for the new Catholic high school in Woonsocket, Mount St. Charles, which they claimed would be an instrument of the Anglicizers. They insisted that the French language have at least equal footing with English in all Woonsocket parochial

Sentinelles urged their followers to attend the Woonsocket game September 23 and counteract popularity of the

schools. Furthermore, they petitioned the Pope in an attempt to stop the accepted practice of each diocese taking a percentage of its local parishes' funds.

When the Pope supported the Bishop of Providence, *Sentinelles* instituted a civil suit and began a boycott against all contributions to the Church, including pew rent. After a series of acrimonious local disputes, including much name-calling and several incidents of near violence, *Sentinelle* leaders were excommunicated. The cause then slowly died, all of the leaders eventually repented and excommunications were lifted.

The most intriguing aspect of this five year controversy (1924-1929) is that it split Woonsocket's Franco-American community. Almost all local Franco-American priests and most of the moderate leaders of the community opposed *Sentinelle* tactics. Moderates insisted that loyalty to the Church overrode ethnic concerns. The most violent disputes took place between two groups of Franco-Americans, not between Franco-Americans and Irish. At one time *Sentinelles* may have had the sympathies of a significant minority, but eventually almost all left the cause.

During the height of the affair, *Sentinelles* formed a baseball team, the *Franco-Américains*, which played benefit games on Sunday afternoons throughout summer and fall 1928, charging thirty-five cents admission to raise money "pour la cause." The *Franco-Américains* played many of their games on the field of St. Louis parish, which had a priest who was sympathetic to the cause. For a while this team drew considerable support, until one local French Canadian priest refused to allow

Providence Holy Name Society parade scheduled for the same day.

From La Vérité [successor to La Sentinelle] September 19, 1928.

© CARILLON, JE TE REVOIS ENCORE!

Principes!

BASEBALL

Principes!

DIMANCHE, 23 SEPT., A 3 HURES AU TERRAIN ST-LOUIS

NOTRE DAME : vs ; - FRANCO-AMERICAINS

Le club de M. Brouillette, vicaire-sportman, ne jouera pas au Parc Ste-Anne dimanche prochain. Il ne faut pas nuire à la parade Holy Name Society à Providence. Mais ce jour-là l'équipe du Cercle Notre-Dame de Central Falls que le "docteur" Normand Meunier ne peut contrôler, viendra rencontrer le club Franco-Américain. Les Canadiens Patriotes qui portent la Feuille d'Érable, n'iront certainement pas suivre les fessiers dans la Holy Name parade. Compatriotes! Protestons d'une manière pratique! Montrons aux Irlandais que nous ne sommes pas des moutons. Pour chaque fessier qui sera dans la Holy Name Parade, il faut dix patriotes dans les estrades du Terrain St-Louis. C'est là une belle manière de protester. MM. Daignault, Hémond, Lemoyne, Lussier, Prince, Dr Falcon, etc seront parmi les spectateurs les plus intéressés. Renouvelons les jours du dernier Grand Concours. Nous attendons des délégations de Providence, W. Warwick, Manville, Worcester, etc., outre le Cercle Notre-Dame de Central Falls qui accompagnera l'équipe.

A Woonsocket dimanche prochain, et NON à Providence. Les Dames et Demoiselles sont cordialement invitées.

Des autos conduiront les personnes gratuitement sur le terrain de 1.00 à 3.00 hrs, et passeront à toutes les 15 minutes aux endroits suivants: Depot Square—près chez McCarthy—, Station de Feu no 5, coin Elm et Social, Bernon Worsted, Park Ave. Remise des chars électriques, Social & Diamond Hill Road, Coin Cumberland et Cam.

LE RENDEZ-VOUS DES PATRIOTES! LA RENCONTRE DES BRAVES!

C'est pour la cause! - - Entrée: 35c, Enfants, 15c - - Aidez en vous amusant!

his parish team to play against it because of its ideological nature. *Sentinelle* leaders complained in their newspaper that it was acceptable for Franco-Americans to play against Irish teams, but not against other Franco-Americans. Support for the *Franco-Américains* soon collapsed when most Franco-American priests and secular leaders in Woonsocket opposed the team's founders and goals.²⁹ The fratricidal nature of the dispute was so great that even baseball was drawn into the issue. The irony is that *Sentinelles*, militantly in favor of French Canadian *survivance* and opposed to any inroads of assimilation due to American ambience, resorted to the archetypal American game in defense of their cause.

One might assume that French Canadian immigrants immediately imported their national sport of hockey when they immigrated to New England. This was not the case in Woonsocket, although winters were cold enough to play the game. During the early twentieth century Franco-American youths apparently skated and may have played informal pick-up games of hockey, but it was not until the 1920s that the first organized hockey games were played.³⁰ Many factors seem to have spurred this interest. In 1926, a new Canadian-American professional league was formed, with a team in Providence. Its roster was mostly French Canadian and therefore aroused much interest among Woonsocket's Franco-Americans. In the same year the Montreal Canadiens of the National Hockey League (major league of professional hockey) made their first appearance in Providence, playing the Boston Bruins. *La Tribune* began to follow closely the exploits of these Montreal "Flying Frenchmen" and the Providence "Reds" club.³¹

Consequently, the city government of Woonsocket built a skating rink in 1926 and formed the first organized amateur hockey league in the history of the

city. This coincided with formation of hockey as a school sport at the newly built Catholic high school, Mount St. Charles. The majority of the students were Franco-Americans, so hockey soon became a major sport. The 1927 school team was totally Franco-American, and by the 1930s Mount St. Charles had its own team of "Flying Frenchmen" noted throughout New England for its hockey skill.³²

It is evident that the first waves of French Canadian immigrants into Woonsocket after the Civil War had neither time nor inclination to play hockey. The sport did not flourish until the 1920s, when the bulk of Franco-American adolescents were no longer working in mills and had sufficient leisure and school time to devote to hockey. Also by this time younger Franco-Americans were increasingly acculturated to American ways. If they were no longer as sensitive to the jibes of "native" Americans, they may have been more willing to import their native sport to their new homeland. Finally, the great surge of enthusiasm for organized sports in the United States in the 1920s undoubtedly contributed to the rise of organized hockey in Woonsocket during these years.

The founding of Mount St. Charles in 1924 certainly stimulated participation of Woonsocket's Franco-American youth in scholastic sports. Although the high school was designed to serve Catholic students from all over Rhode Island, its student body was primarily drawn from Woonsocket's Franco-American population. Until this time few Franco-Americans who aspired to a higher education remained in Woonsocket. Most went to the *collèges* of Quebec rather than to Woonsocket's public high school, predominantly Protestant and Irish Catholic. Creation of Mount St. Charles meant that more Franco-American student elite were staying in Woonsocket past grade eight. Like most "preparatory" boys' schools, Mount St. Charles

25 *Woonsocket Call*, "Fiftieth Anniversary Edition," 1 June 1942.

26 For a detailed description of the *Sentinelle* crisis, see Rumilly, 364-459. Hélène Forget, "L'Agitation Sentinelliste au Rhode Island [1924-1929]," unpublished M.A. thesis (Université de Montréal, 1952). Elphège J. Daignault, *Le Vrai Mouvement Sentinelliste en Nouvelle Angleterre, 1923-1929* (Montreal, 1936). J. Albert Foisy, *The Sentinellist Agitation in New England, 1925-1928* (Providence, 1930).

27 Although it is impossible to give an exact translation of this word, it roughly means the preservation of the French Canadian native language and customs.

28 A system whereby each nationality had its own priests and native language in its parishes.

29 *La Sentinelle* (Woonsocket), 26 juillet and 30 août 1928.

30 Personal interviews.

31 *La Tribune*, 22 mars, 3 and 16 décembre 1926.

32 *La Tribune*, 23 décembre 1926. Mount St. Charles Archives, "Sports Scrapbook, 1921-1931," 35. *Woonsocket Call*, "Fiftieth Anniversary Edition," 1 June 1942.

Founding of Mount St. Charles Academy stimulated participation of Franco-American youth in schoolboy sports,

particularly with emergence of its hockey team of "Flying Frenchmen" noted throughout New England.



Photograph by Bro. Robert Gagné, courtesy Mount St. Charles Academy.

put much emphasis on sports as a relief from academic studies. Football, basketball, baseball, hockey and bowling were all major sports there in the late 1920s, and almost all of the athletes were Franco-Americans. Thus the 1920s saw a larger number of Woonsocket's Franco-American teenagers playing school sports.³³

Other sports which seemed to interest Woonsocket's Franco-Americans were boxing, wrestling and weight-lifting. The French Canadian tradition of idolizing a

real or legendary strongman, à la Joe Montferrand or Louis Cyr, was carried by immigrants to New England. Montferrand was a legendary lumberman, equivalent of Paul Bunyan, who supposedly lived in Quebec and New England. The sagas even mention that he lived at one time in Woonsocket. Although a Franco-American of such heroic strength probably never lived in Woonsocket or anywhere in New England, his mythical memory was often used by Quebec and Franco-

33 *Excelsior* (Mount St. Charles student magazine) 5:1 [Christmas 1929] 21. Mount St. Charles Archives, "Sports Scrapbook, 1921-1931," 8, 12, 17, 35, 47, 63.

34 George Monteiro, "Histoire de Montferrand: L'Athlete Canadien and Joe Muffraw," *Journal of American Folklore* 73:287 (Jan.-March 1960) 24-34. Federal Writers' Project, *Rhode Island: A Guide to the Smallest State* (Boston, 1937) 101. Jacques Ducharme, *Shadows of the Trees: Story of the French Canadians in New England* (N.Y., 1943) 165. The last two sources apparently accept the legend but Monteiro insists it is only mythical.

American storytellers who wished to establish him as an ethnic hero vanquishing hated Irish foes.³⁴

Although Montferrand was only a legend, Franco-Americans had many real strongmen to idolize. Boxing and wrestling were major sports in Woonsocket by 1910. Wrestling declined in popularity after 1915 as there were movements to outlaw it, but boxing maintained its local appeal throughout the early 1920s. As many as 7,000 people attended boxing matches during the summer of 1920. Boxing and wrestling had a definite nationality appeal to Franco-Americans, as many of the bouts involved Quebec French Canadians or New England Franco-Americans. *La Tribune* and local Franco-Americans strongly supported these "idols." The matches often took on the appearance of inter-ethnic struggles, as Franco-Americans cheered for the victory of their men over a Swede or Irishman. *La Tribune* frequently included photographs of boxing and wrestling heroes stripped to the waist ready for action, pictures which contrasted strangely with the usual chaste and religious moralistic bent of the newspaper.³⁵

The closest analogue to Montferrand which this author found was "*le Samson Canadien*," a French Canadian weightlifter who came to Woonsocket for an exhibition in 1916. *La Tribune* waxed rhapsodic over his prowess and asked all Franco-Americans to attend and pay homage to his strength and to the race which was long famed for strong men.³⁶

The tie between religion and sports extended beyond sponsoring baseball games by various national parishes. Each Franco-American parish tried to provide as full a program of sports activities as possible. The goal was to keep the church as the center of social activities for youths and to prevent them from mixing inordinately with Irish Catholic and Protestant children at other recreation areas. Although a complete realization of this goal was obviously impossible, St. Ann's parish had considerable success with its *Gymnase* — built in the early 1890s — a large gymnasium with a variety of

French wrestler Raymond Cazeau ready to meet a German rival.



La Tribune, November 20, 1911.

exercise equipment and areas for indoor sports. By 1895 the gym was getting heavy use, with about 250 males using the athletic equipment each night.³⁷

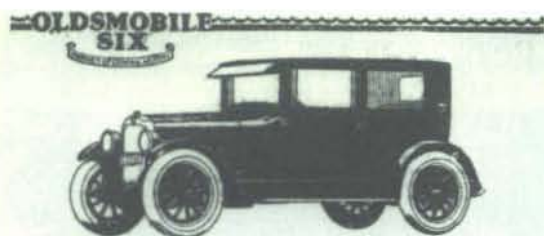
A number of tentative conclusions can be drawn from this brief study. Sports obviously played a large role for many of Woonsocket's male Franco-Americans during this period. Baseball attracted the greatest number of participants and observers, but boxing, wrestling and hockey began to offer some competition by 1910. The importance of sports probably loomed largest for male teenagers, supporting the impressionistic evidence which novelist Jack Kerouac offered in *Maggie Cassidy*, describing the vital part which sports had in the lives of teenage ethnic gangs (largely French Canadian) — in Lowell, Massachusetts — during the 1930s.³⁸ In an era before the dominance of many forms

35 *La Tribune*, 7 novembre and 28 décembre 1911, 30 and 31 décembre 1912, 3 novembre 1913, 9 mars 1915, 24 février 1917, 7 septembre 1920.

36 *La Tribune*, 8 and 11 mai 1916.

37 Charles R. Daoust and Eugene Brault, *Histoire des Canadiens-Français du Rhode Island* (Woonsocket, 1895) 101-102. *Woonsocket Evening Call*, 23 February 1895.

38 Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy* (N.Y., 1959) passim. Kerouac was a second generation Franco-American, born in Lowell, who did not learn to speak English until he was seven.



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La Tribune, July 9, 1925.

of mass media and the ubiquitous presence of the automobile, sports remained one of the most important forms of participant-observer recreation. It is ironic that importance of sports for Franco-Americans seemed to reach its highest level in the 1920s, when the growth of movies, radio and the automobile was already foreshadowing its decline.³⁹

The observant reader will note that nothing has been written in this article about Woonsocket's Franco-American females. In the French Canadian conception of family — highly conservative and traditional — the female's place was in the home, bearing and raising children. Young girls were supposed to center their lives around home and church.⁴⁰ Consequently the camaraderie of sports was almost entirely reserved for males.

Sports played a dual and often conflicting role in the ethnic lives of Woonsocket's male Franco-Americans. On the one hand they fostered acculturation to American ways of life by the mixing of nationality groups which inevitably took place in sports.⁴¹ On the other they helped to preserve some ethnic and religious identity by carrying over to the United States the traditional French Canadian interest in hockey and weightlifting and by the ethnic hero worship of leading sports figures such as Napoleon Lajoie. In addition, Franco-American parishes used sports as a recreational means of centering the lives of their parishioners around the church. Finally, the dominance of Franco-Americans in Woonsocket was so great that often their contests contained no outsiders and so became a tool of language maintenance. This numerical dominance also meant that there was probably less ethnic conflict between Woonsocket's Franco-Americans and other nationalities in sports than elsewhere in the United States.

In the long run, the acculturative function of sports among Woonsocket's Franco-Americans may have been as great as the preservation of ethnic identity. In any case, this acculturation came faster as movies, radio and automobiles began to supplant sports as forms of recreation in the 1920s and 1930s.

³⁹ Both *La Tribune* and the *Woonsocket Call* gave evidence of this increasing importance of movies, radio and the automobile in the 1920s. Advertisements and articles about local showings of movies, local buying and driving of automobiles, and the availability of radio programs increased greatly during the decade.

⁴⁰ *La Tribune* continually voiced this traditional and conservative view of women in its editorial pages, 18 février 1913, 11 janvier 1918, 25 avril 1925.

⁴¹ Irwin Child's excellent social psychological study of male Italians in New Haven during the 1930s points out that while first generation Italian-Americans seldom played American sports, their second generation children often enjoyed such recreation. *Italian or American? Second Generation in Conflict* (New Haven, 1943) ch. 2.

Clarkson A. Collins 3rd (1911-1972) A Bibliography

Mr. Collins' contribution to interpretation of Rhode Island history extends beyond his own works. Many publications on the subject acknowledge his assistance.

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by Noel P. Conlon*

Historian Clarkson Abel Collins 3rd. Research Associate 1948-1953. Librarian 1953-1967.



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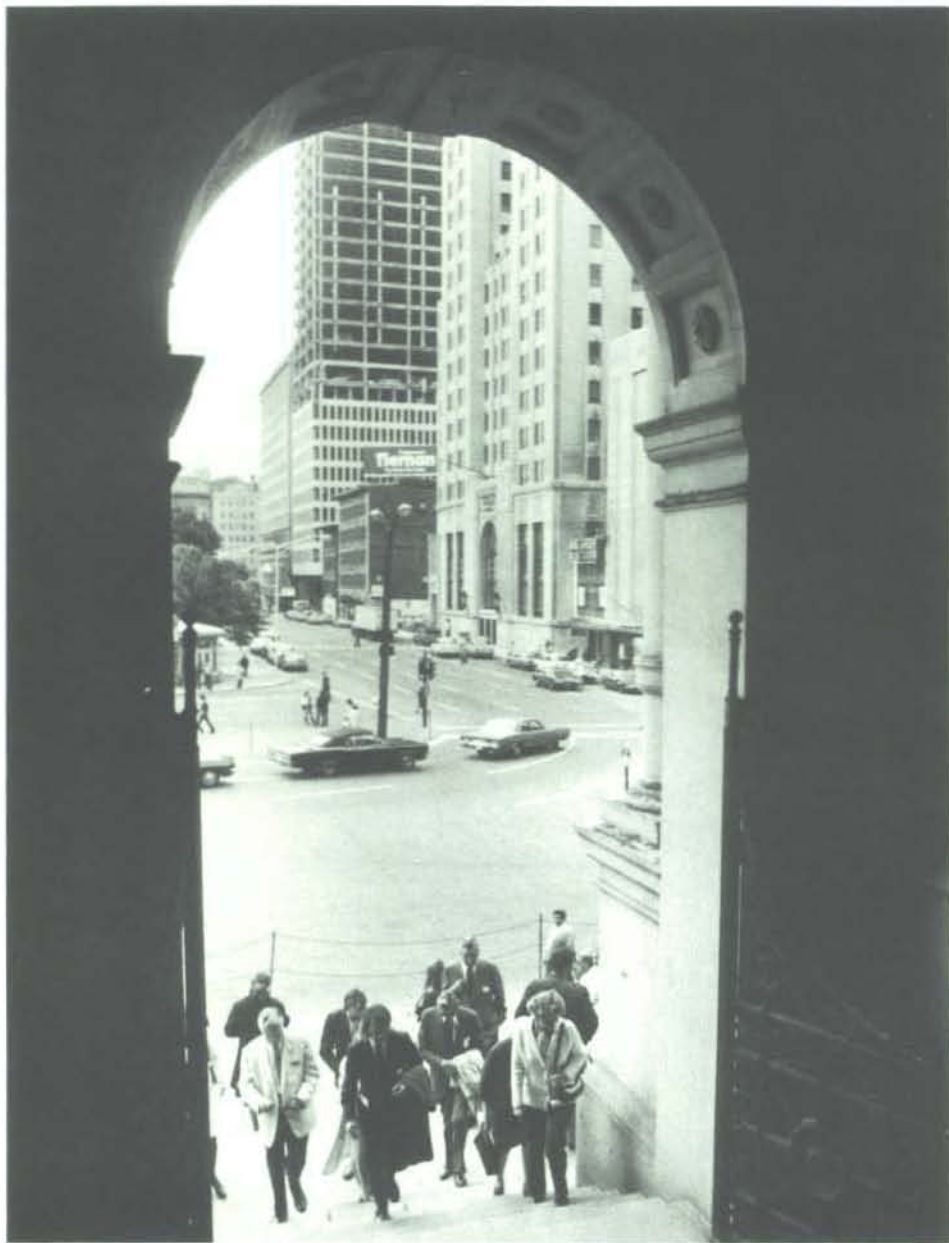
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*Mr. Conlon is Editor, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

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Delegates to the 32nd annual convention of the American Association for State and Local History, September 19 to 23, visited Providence City Hall on one of several tours through 19th-century buildings in the city's central area. Events included a study of Pawtucket's Old Slater Mill, an all-day

visit to Newport and a banquet at Rocky Point in Warwick. Appropriately, The Rhode Island Historical Society, celebrating its 150th anniversary, was host to the hundreds of association representatives from the United States and Canada.



Courtesy Providence Journal.

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Type set by Typesetting Service Co.
Printed by Port City Press, Inc.*