

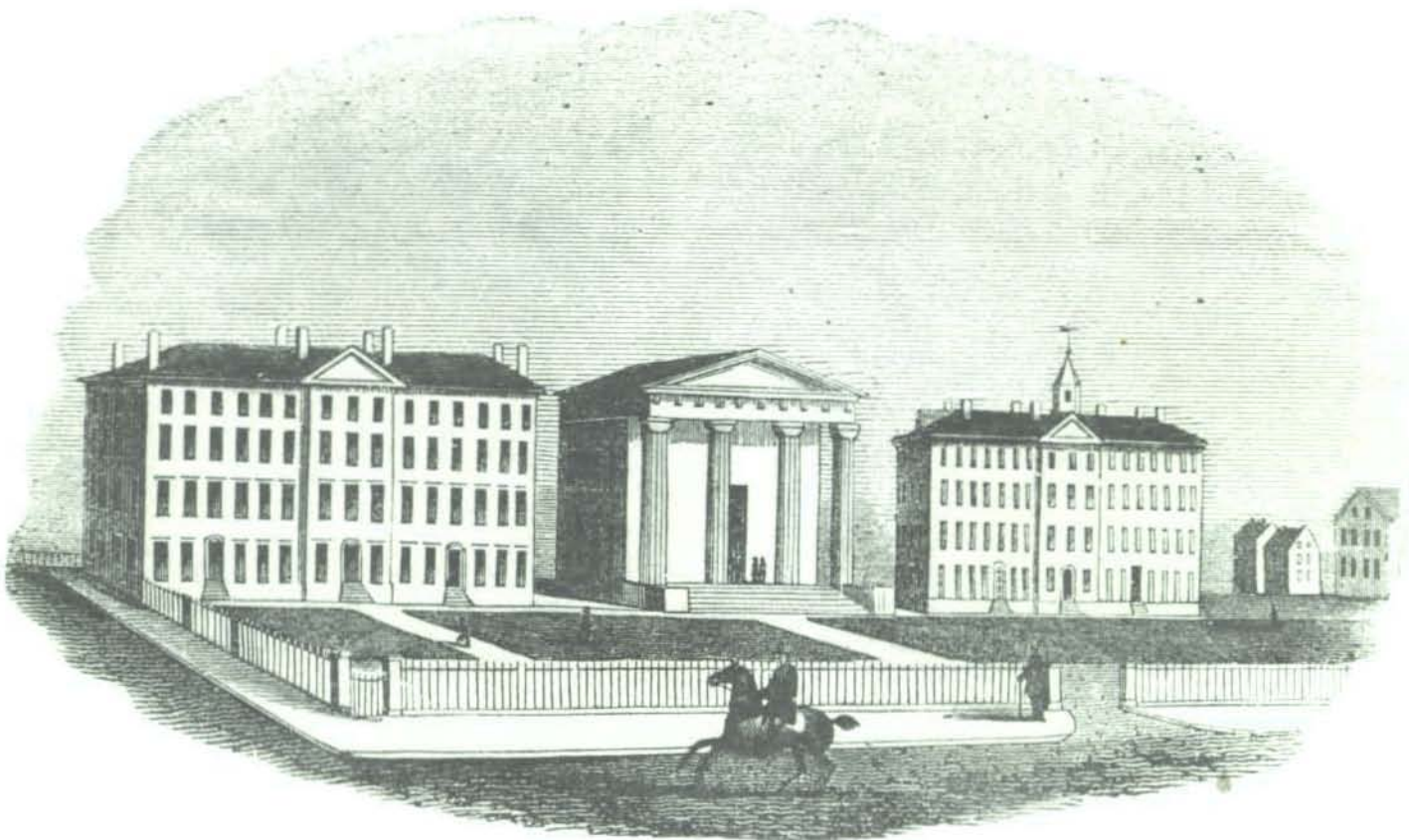
RHODE ISLAND HISTORY



VOLUME 34:2 MAY 1975

Brown University campus in 1835 — when most of the graduating class struck, respectfully, against the competitive custom of "honors" awards for "Scholarship." (Page 43)

Courtesy Brown University Archives



Hope College

Manning Hall

University Hall

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

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Table of Contents

Language of Colonial Rhode Island
by Celia M. Millward 35

Respectful Student Rebels
by Godfrey T. Anderson 43

Italian Immigrants
and the Catholic Church in Providence
1890-1930
by Peter W. Bardaglio 47

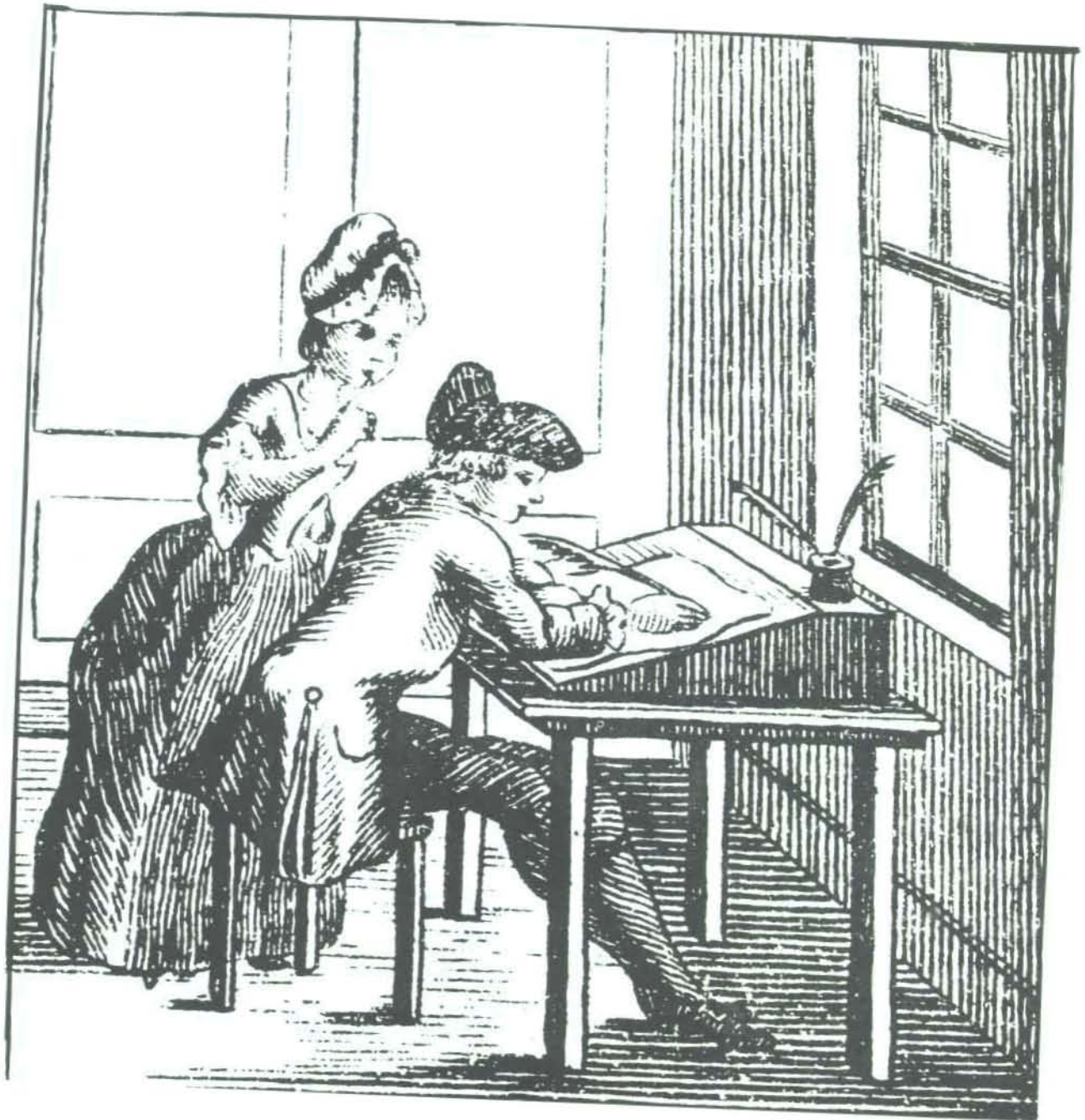
Plans and Prospects 1975-1976
by Albert T. Klyberg 58

153rd Annual Meeting 60

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Rhode Island colonists often wrote "by ear" and their misspellings provide clues to the sound of early local language.



Language of Colonial Rhode Island

To Americans from other areas of the United States, the speech of Rhode Islanders today is distinctive and indeed sometimes even the object of consternation or amusement. The midwesterner is struck by the Rhode Islander's "r-dropping" and strange vowel sounds in such words as pocket or frog. Or, on the level of vocabulary, even neighboring New Yorkers may be puzzled by such local terms as cabinet for an ice-cream confection or tonic for a soft drink. One might reasonably ask whether the earliest settlers brought these speech patterns with them, whether Rhode Islanders today talk like colonists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

We have no direct evidence of the speech of our colonials because of course there are no surviving speakers of this dialect and no phonograph records or tape recordings of their speech. We are fortunate in having from the colonial period extensive written records which — properly used — can provide a great deal of information about the language of our forefathers.¹

Pronunciation

By the seventeenth century, the spelling of educated English had become relatively fixed. The principle of one spelling only for a given word was accepted by most educated people. Further, the spelling of English was for all practical purposes identical to its spelling today. We can learn little about English pronunciation in the seventeenth century from the writings of highly educated individuals — no matter how differently they may have pronounced words, they spelled them the same way. Consider the various modern pronunciations of words such as half, bird, idea, farther; yet we all spell these words alike. The most valuable source of information about colonial pronunciation is not the educated "good speller" but the semi-literate individ-

by Celia M. Millward*

ual who — when he wanted to write a word with whose conventional spelling he was not familiar — had to resort to spelling it as it sounded to him or, loosely speaking, to "phonetic" spelling. In other words, misspellings are more informative than correct spellings.

Not every misspelling is significant. Some errors are just errors; the writer was tired, or wool-gathering, or looking at one word while writing another, and he simply made a mistake. Such misspellings are usually one-of-a-kind and random, forming no discernible pattern, and can normally be ignored by the dialect researcher. Other misspellings may be fairly regular and may look quite bizarre, but again be of relatively little interest because they reflect only a possible alternative spelling of a word, a spelling that happened not to be the conventional one. Among such spellings in colonial records are *kash*, *Road lland*, *akers*. Despite the strange appearance of these words, we recognize them immediately if we pronounce them; as evidence, they suggest only that the writers pronounced these items the way we enunciate them today.

If a particular letter is systematically substituted for another, correct letter, or if a letter is systematically dropped from or added to words — either in the spelling of one particular word or, especially, in a number of different words — then we probably have an indication of actual pronunciation. We very frequently find such spellings as *tacklin*, *accordin*, *shilin*, *stockens*, *chaffin (dish)*, and *touchin*, instead of the expected *tackling*, *according*, *shilling*, *stockings*, *chafing (dish)*, and *touching*. From this evidence we can be fairly sure that early settlers indulged in "g-dropping" — a speech characteristic still common in both Britain and the United States, but considered substandard or rustic in the United States.

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1 Most of the evidence and all of the specific examples cited are from *Early Records of the Town of Providence*, 21v. (Providence, 1892-1915), although the writers or authors frequently lived elsewhere in the colony.

Colonists dropped more than final *g*. Such common spellings as *par*, *nex*, *Harford*, *adjornmen*, *contened*, and *Benedick* — for *part*, *next*, *Hartford*, *adjournment*, *contented*, and *Benedict* — show us that they often failed to pronounce *t* after another consonant. Similarly *lan*, *pon*, *Arnol*, *Rhode Islan*, *remainer*, *moles* (for *molds*), and *eastwarly* illustrate the loss of *d* after a consonant. Before you smile condescendingly at the ignorance of your forebears, consider carefully how you pronounce *husband* in casual speech.

Frequently the scribe must have been aware that such words had more letters when written than when spoken, but he was not always sure which one of the three (*g*, *t*, or *d*) was correct. Thus we find *assistand*, *behing*, *New Englang*, *Eastwart* for *assistant*, *behind*, *New England*, and *eastward*. And sometimes just to be on the safe side the scribe would add one of these letters to words in which it was etymologically inappropriate; this explains forms like *nuld*, *ruing*, *halft*, *sudent*, *remainding*, and *woodend* for *null*, *ruin*, *half*, *sudden*, *remaining*, and *wooden*.

The "r-lessness" for which New Englanders are famous today was certainly also a feature of colonial speech, but perhaps more limited in its distribution then. All examples are either in very lightly stressed syllables or after the so-called back vowels *a* and *o*; we give only a few of many. Loss of *r* in lightly stressed syllables at the end of words can be illustrated by *brothe*, *therefo*, *Arthu*, *administe*, *furthe*, *Octobe*, *fow*, *a* for *brother*, *therefore*, *Arthur*, *administer*, *further*, *October*, *four*, and *or*. Loss of *r* after back vowels appears in words like *Osbon*, *orchad*, *Edwad*, *quater*, *Mach*, *fofeitures*, *capetts*, and *Sanphod* for *Osborn*, *orchard*, *Edward*, *quarter*, *March*, *forfeiture*, *carpets*, and *Sanford*. Just as *r*-droppers today occasionally add an unetymological *r* to words (*idear*, *sawr*), so our ancestors wrote *alliern*, *imbercillity*, *piller*, *Marthere*, and *curtlass* for *alien*, *imbecility*, *pillow*, *Martha*, and *cutlass*.

The sound of the letter *l* also tended to weaken and even drop out entirely before another consonant. Re-

vealing this are spellings of the type *Water*, *himsefe*, *widernes*, and *Onye* for *Walter*, *himself*, *wilderness*, and *Olney*.

In the speech of many but not all Americans today, the initial sound of most words spelled with *wh-* is identical with that of words with *w-*. For these speakers, *whale* and *which* are homonyms of *wail* and *witch*, respectively. Although the evidence is not so clear for these sounds as for those discussed above, apparently many early settlers also pronounced *wh-* and *w-* alike. We find *wite*, *wich*, *wat*, *wilst*, and *warfe* for *white*, *which*, *what*, *whilst*, and *wharf*. And again we find reverse spellings like *whith*, *whas*, and *whithin* for *with*, *was*, and *within*.

During the seventeenth century, English speakers everywhere were in the process of interchanging *d*, *t*, and *th* sounds in some words. In the early records are spellings like *Nue Plymout*, *with*, *furder*, *burthen-some*, *lengt*, and *lanthorne* for *New Plymouth*, *wit*, *further*, *burdensome*, *length*, and *lantern*. Sometimes at the end of a syllable the *th* sound would be lost altogether — *norwesterne* and *bread* for *north-western* and *breadth*.

In a few instances, apparently only individual words of a particular class had deviant pronunciations. Today standard English speech has three words spelled with *s*, but pronounced as *sh* — *sugar*, *sure* (and its derivatives such as *surety*), and *sumac*. For colonial times the spellings *shuch*, *shuits*, and *plush* are so common that they must reflect at least a frequent alternative pronunciation of *such*, *suits*, and *plus*. Similarly the very frequent spellings *fles* and *fres* for *flesh* and *fresh* probably indicate a substitution of the *s* sound for the *sh* sound in the speech of the writers. For at least two words, early Rhode Islanders must have sounded more British than American — the regular spellings *leiftenant* and *shedule* for *lieutenant* and *schedule* clearly indicate that current American pronunciation of these words was a later development here.

English has never had enough vowel symbols to represent all its different vowel sounds. Consider the different sounds represented by the letter *a* in *sat*,

Slightly more than seventeen inches high, a volume of manuscript Providence records outweighs its printed equivalent. Sources for this study of language — twenty-one convenient little volumes of Early Records of the Town of Providence — were printed 1892 to 1915 as deciphered from seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century handwriting.

father, mate, sofa, many, chalk. Note that one vowel sound can be represented by many different letters or combinations of letters: son, flood, judge, gorgeous, promise, Dulles, etc. It is more difficult to draw conclusions about colonial pronunciation of vowels from the extant spellings than it is to draw parallel conclusions about pronunciation of consonants. For many words traditional spelling always has one letter and one sound today, but we find another letter regularly replacing the expected one in colonial spelling. In these instances we can be fairly confident that a real pronunciation difference is being represented. Perhaps the most common of such substitutions is that of *i* for *e* (or, more properly, so-called "short *i*" for "short *e*"). Out of scores of examples, a few will suffice — *sillar*, *Nigro*, *twinty*, *divell*, *kittle*, *chist*, *niuer*, *pritty* for cellar, Negro, twenty, devil, kettle, chest, never, pretty. Get is almost universally spelled *git*. Conversely, we occasionally find *e* where *i* would be expected — *emediately*, *reuer*, *moveng*, *skellett*, *wedth* for immediately, river, moving, skillet, width. Such pronunciations are still heard in the United States but are of course usually associated with archaic or rustic speech.

A similar phenomenon is the alternation of *e* and *a* (or "short *e*" and "short *a*") before *r*, also associated today almost exclusively with rustic speech. Examples include *parfect*, *marcy*, *larnin*, *sarge*, *vardict*, *starling*, *sarvice*, *clark*, and *marchant* for perfect, mercy, learning, serge, verdict, sterling, service, clerk, and merchant. Predictably we also find *e* where *a* might be expected — *merked*, *percell*, *pertners*, *bergaine* for marked, parcel, partners, bargain. Possibly one speaker might have used both *e* and *a* in such words at this time; even today, we spell sergeant but say *sargeant*; the British spell clerk, but pronounce it *clark*; and we have such doublets as uni-

versity vs. varsity and vermin vs. varmint, in which the second of each pair has the same origin as the first.

Another vowel pronunciation, probably fairly common in colonial times but considered definitely regional or substandard today, involves that heard in the second syllable of employ. Spellings like *jice*, *imply*, and *appynted* for joist, employ, and appointed indicate that these were probably pronounced with a vowel sound similar to that of buy.

Just as many speakers today drop a vowel completely in rapid speech, so there is spelling evidence that early colonists were not averse to eliding vowels — *bisness*, *mistry*, *intrest*, *tolration*, *Elnor*, *intring* for business, mystery, interest, toleration, Eleanor, entering. They also often added unetymological vowels, especially before *r* or *l*. Typical examples are *Henery*, *fowerth*, *asembelly*, *buckerrum*, *Aparill*, *moneth* for Henry, fourth, assembly, buckram, April, month. Unetymological consonants occur fairly often in such spellings as *gimblett* for gimlet; compare the frequently heard pronunciation of chimney as *chimbley*.

In summary, deviant spellings in colonial records suggest that — if we could hear the speech of the early settlers — we would find it comprehensible but very rustic-sounding, perhaps somewhat like what we normally consider "hillbilly" speech. Pronunciation of a few words would sound more British than American, and the *r*-dropping for which Rhode Islanders are noted today would sound very familiar indeed.

Grammar

Within a given language, there is usually less dialectal variety in grammar than in pronunciation, and grammar tends to change more slowly over time than does pronunciation. Thus it is not surprising that evidence for grammatical differences between colonial



speech and modern English is not always as striking as is the evidence for pronunciation differences. Nevertheless some features of the grammar of early settlers would seem at best quite archaic and, at worst, downright illiterate to us.

One apparent difference in grammar, the use of *-eth* instead of *-s* as an ending for third-person singular present verbs (*followeth* instead of *follows*) can be discounted. Even though we find both *-eth* and *-s* endings in records throughout the entire colonial period, we know from contemporary writers on the subject that people said *-s* even though they very often wrote the older ending *-eth*.² It is possible that *doth* and *hath* lasted longer in speech than other *-th* endings, but the frequent spellings of *does* and *has* in colonial records at least suggest that — by the time of the first English settlements in America — most English speakers pronounced these verbs approximately the way we do.

Strong or irregular verbs of English have been a torment to schoolchildren for generations and sometimes to adults as well — what is the past tense of *swing*? Our ancestors were not always sure of themselves here, either. For today's accepted past participles of *chosen*, *shown*, and *forgotten*, we find such variety as *chos choosed chosen*; *shewde shewne*; and *forgat forgot*. Town clerks — usually relatively well-educated and careful writers — regularly used such past participles as *gave*, *drank*, *drove*, *bore*, *keped*, *broake*, *holpen*, *swornd*, and *sot* instead of accepted modern equivalents of *given*, *drunk*, *driven*, *borne*, *kept*, *broken*, *helped*, *sworn*, and *set* or *sat*. To judge from its consistent appearance *drownded* instead of *drowned*, so strongly condemned today, seems to have been completely acceptable in colonial times. *Mought*, an archaic form of *might*, appears occasionally, as do such other past tenses as *brake*, *run*, *spake*, and *oughte* for *broke*, *ran*, *spoke*, and *owed*. That our colloquial form *wrastle*, as a variant of *wrestle*, has a long history is evidenced by its appearance in seventeenth-century records.

Our idiom "used to" — meaning "to have been accustomed to" — had not quite reached its present stage during the seventeenth century, and the modern reader may have to pause a moment over *the*

U and V were used interchangeably in colonial times as the famous New-England Primer illustrates.



Young T I M O T H Y
Learnt fin to fly.

V A S T H I for Pride,
Was fet afide.

medo he useth to mow — "the meadow he is accustomed to mowing" — or *where a haystack doe use to stand* — "where a haystack usually stands."

Subject-verb agreement is another grammatical area in which colonial differed from accepted modern usage. In *the Towne have made* or *the Council have to them Granted Administration*, we see the still current British practice of using a plural verb with collective nouns, especially nouns referring to government or governing bodies. But particularly with forms of the verb "to be," colonial scribes very frequently used a singular where a plural would be the rule today. Examples include *where my sd father & mother is Buried*, *These returnes of Land was granted*, *Twelve Acors of it is Layd out in a Valley*, and *what two of the three agrees vpon*. Less frequently we find a plural verb with a singular subject — *Amety Harris who ware found dead*.

A singular noun after a number is still occasionally heard in expressions of quantity but considered poor usage. The construction was almost the rule in the seventeenth century — *Tenn paire of sheets*, *two share of vpland*, *seven Pound of Currant Silver money*, *sixteene loade of hay*.

Modern English forms negative sentences, if there is no other auxiliary verb present, by using *do + not + verb*. Our seventeenth-century predecessors were familiar with this practice — *his name I doe not know* — but good usage still allowed them to omit *do* and place *not* after the verb. So we find *she & her Child belongeth not to Our townes Care*, *the Executrix appeared not*, and *the Towne denies them not*

² English essayist Joseph Addison (1672-1719) makes this clear in "Spectator 135," reprinted in W. F. Bolton, ed., *The English Language* (Cambridge: University Press, 1966) 104.

what appears to be their due. The double negative was also at least marginally acceptable as late as the colonial period — *they are not bound to stand to no detirmination*.

Rules for pronouns have changed little over the centuries but — just as we do — our ancestors now and then lost track of the function of the pronoun and used incorrect forms. Three of the more entertaining examples — *after the decease of we the said Steven & Bridgett; I Resigne my soule unto his hands whome Gave me a being here; and gaue notis that him self and Edward ffenner had Taken vp a stray horse*.

Today we feel strongly that almost every adverb should be marked as such by the ending *-ly*. Earlier speakers and writers did not observe the distinction between adjectives and adverbs as closely as we do — *Exeeding much worse, to be Absolute dead, and pretty near square* are typical of many “plain” adverbs that occur. Another adverbial difference to be observed is that seventeenth-century English used “something” as an adverb, where modern English demands “somewhat” — *aged & some thing Crasey of Body, shee is supposed to be sumthing old, seems to be sumthing Intermixt*.

Prepositional use differed from present-day usage, but the modern reader seldom has difficulty in understanding the meaning of earlier prepositional phrases. “Without” was the regular preposition in situations where we would use “outside (of)” — *lieing without the line*. The preposition “of” often appeared where modern English would have “from” — *stood a pretty way of of ye Child; I had on Exchange of Andrew Harris*. Upon and unto are becoming obsolete today but were still widely employed in the seventeenth century — *pitching upon a day to meet; have given unto them*. Modern speakers and writers know “betwixt” only as an archaism, but colonists used it as a frequent alternative to “between.” “Against” in the meaning of “adjacent to” has gone from our language but was common in the colony — *on ye high way against John Whipplles house*.

Prepositional phrases and pronoun objects often preceded their verbs in the colonial period, a word order unacceptable today. Two examples of each —

and was by them examined, which he behind him left; as the law should them direct, as Cleare as Ever it mine were.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of a grammatical difference between seventeenth- and twentieth-century writing is in formation of possessive nouns. We form the possessive by adding an apostrophe and an *s* or by “of” plus the noun. This device was also often employed by colonials, though the apostrophe was normally omitted — *ye townes part; 8 yeares rent; our Sovereigne Lady the Queenes Majestys behalfe*. At least equally as common was the full possessive pronoun after the noun, familiar today only on bookplates — *John Brown His Book* — a construction sometimes very cumbersome and difficult to disentangle. *Edward Manton his hedge, Richard Browne & Joseph Browne their land, Elizabeth Pray her heirs, the said Daniell Williams my heirs* are all relatively easy to understand. But the records also have *his Brother Thomas Barnes who is deceased his son, the one halfe of each one his part, and James Dexter & Stephen Harden on their the sd Persons behalfe*. Still a third way was to use no marker at all, restricted to neuter or inanimate nouns — *one day work a year, for peace sake, to the World End*.

Although there are other minor differences between the grammar of early and present-day Rhode Islanders, we shall mention only one more — the particle “a” before a verbal noun — *their goeing a hunting or who went a shelling* — a formula familiar from old folk songs.

To summarize, there are a number of grammatical differences between the language of colonial and twentieth-century Rhode Island, some of which do not survive in any American dialect. They cause little difficulty in comprehension because the modern reader has encountered most of them in older literature.

Vocabulary

The vocabulary of a language can change in various ways and for various reasons over time. New words may be added and old ones lost, or existing words may undergo a change in meaning. Obviously, if a community is invaded by speakers of

another language or if it pays obeisance to the superior culture of another community, the second language will contribute at least some new words to the vocabulary of the first. Technological change, arising either from within or outside the community will lead to obsolescence of some terms and introduction of others. For some changes no explanation can be offered other than that it is the nature of language to be continually changing.

On first consideration, one might think that the chief difference between the vocabulary of the early settlers and that of today's Rhode Islanders would be that modern language has a much larger vocabulary because of vast technological development since the seventeenth century. This is indeed true. We have also lost many words familiar to our ancestors because the referents for these words no longer exist. The majority of the loss is attributable to our change from a rural, agricultural, animal-powered society to a predominantly urban, industrialized, machine-powered society. Few of us today are familiar with farm animals and their equipment. Technology has provided us with replacements for older wooden, iron, and earthenware household implements. Synthetic fibers and new fashions substitute for many older varieties of natural fibers. As we have lost the objects themselves, we have lost the terms used to designate them.

Among the pieces of equipment or tools to be found on a colonial homestead might be a *snath* (scythe handle), *hatchel* (for combing flax), *wimble-stocks* (for a gimlet), *ginnet* (a kind of adz), *gambrell* (a piece of iron on which to hang carcasses of animals), *beetle* (for driving wedges or pegs), *froe* (for making barrel staves and shingles), and *truss-hoops* (clasp hoops for masts or spars). Older rural residents may still recognize *swingletree* as the name for the cross-bar to which the traces of a plough or cart are fastened. *Pillion* and *panel* may be known today to some as terms for kinds of saddles, but *tug locks* as part of a harness or *hame* for a horse collar are probably familiar to very few.³

Cow kind and *cow kine* appear frequently, and most modern readers probably will understand the terms. The original meaning of *kine* — an old plural

of cow — had apparently been lost by colonial times; otherwise clerks would not have employed the tautology *cow kine*. Cattle were also frequently referred to as *neat cattle*, a use known to modern speakers only in the phrase "neat's foot oil." A cow could have a *brockle face* (variegated black and white), and its age might be described as *three yeare and vantage*, where *vantage* means "somewhat over" three years old. There might be *ridgling horses* (improperly castrated) or *stone horses* (stallions). If ailing, they might be suffering from *pole evil*, an ulcerous sore on the neck.

Included in household goods listed in inventories are *truckell beds* and *pillowberes*, both at least marginally familiar today, even though the alternative terms *trundle beds* and *pillowcases* are far more common. Less familiar is *flock bed*, one stuffed with coarse tufts of wool or cotton refuse. Kitchen equipment no longer in use would include the *trammel*, a series of rings or links to bear a crook at different heights over the fire, and the *fire slice*, a fire shovel. Balances are still used, but are normally not called *steelyards*. The *latten tunnel* has been replaced by the plastic funnel (*latten* is a brass-like alloy and a *tunnel* is a funnel). Packaged table salt has eliminated the need for a *kern-mill*, in which one ground his own salt. Stainless steel has made *occamy* — a metallic composition resembling silver — obsolete as the raw material of which spoons are made.

Among many different kinds of containers used were the *runlet*, a general term for pot, cask, or other vessel; *keeler* was used to cool liquids; and a *posnet*, metal pot with handle and three feet, was used for boiling. The *firkin* was a small cask, *piggin* a small wooden pail, and *pipkin* a small earthenware pot. Larger containers included the *anker* — for wine or spirits — holding 8 1/3 imperial gallons. *Gallipot* was an earthenware glazed pot and one might find in it either *diachylon* (ointment) or *mithridate* (medicine of many ingredients).

Women of a colonial household would be conversant about such woolen fabrics as *shalloon* (for linings), *carsey* (coarse ribbed cloth), *manchester* (either wool or cotton cloth), *drugget* (wool or wool mixed with silk or linen), and *pinions* (refuse wool).

3 In this discussion of vocabulary items, the spelling is as cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Spellings in the historical records are often rather difficult to decipher — *kersey* sometimes appears as *cassey*, *diachylon* is spelled *diacloom*, and *osnaburg* is spelled *ozen-brigs*.

Mrs. Thomas Smart of Providence wore a "tiffany whisk" when she sat for her portrait in the early 1780s.



John Brown House

Linen fabrics included *dowlas* and *osnaburg* (both coarse linen) and *kenting* (fine linen). The seamstress would also have *ferret* (floss silk or tape) and *galloon* (ribbon or braid). The fashionable woman would wear, rather than a corset or stays, a *pair of bodies*. Her *tiffany whisk* would be, not a silver broom, but a neckerchief of transparent lawn or linen. Her husband would surely have *spatterdashes*, long gaiters to keep his trousers from being spattered when he was riding. Overgarments might be *stiffen-coated*, the body of the garment stiffened with whalebone.

The man's *jack coat* was not what we would call a jacket today, but rather part of his armor, a sleeveless tunic of quilted leather and plated with iron. His gun might be called a *carbine*, though it would bear little resemblance to the carbine of today. His musket could have a *bell muzzle* and a *baggonet* (bayonet).

A small piece of real estate might be described as a *slang*, *sprang*, *slip*, *nook*, or *gore* of land. Important for access from one area to another were *drift ways*, along which cattle or horses could go to pasture or market, and *cassys* or *cassy ways* (causeways). A sudden sharp decline in the altitude of a stream was called a *fall*, rather than the modern American term "falls."

One could pass property on to his descendants as *Gavel-kind land*, a type of land tenure whereby property was divided equally among sons. One could claim ownership of land *by turf and twig*, whereby a sod cut from the turf of an estate served as a symbol of possession. Goods were sometimes sold *by the inch of the candle*, a kind of auction in which bids were received as long as a small piece of candle burned and the last bid before the candle went out secured the article.

In many instances, words used in the seventeenth century are still familiar to us today, but their meanings or usages have changed to some degree. *Ancient* or *anciently* today implies great age and is often reserved for reference to events of the distant past, perhaps prior to the fall of the Roman Empire. In colonial times, *ancient* meant simply "old," and elderly people were often termed *ancient*. Or the adverb *anciently* could refer to a period of time only a score or so years previous to the time of writing.

In modern English *great* signifies something or someone remarkable or especially important, but is less often used to refer to physical size. We distinguish between a *great man* (an important man) and a *big man* (physically large). In the seventeenth century, *great* was still the most common adjective to describe outstanding size. Place-names given during this earlier period still preserve this usage (Great Salt Pond) but, by the nineteenth century, *big* had usually replaced *great* in place-names — Great Bend in Pennsylvania, settled early in our history, but Big Bend in California, North Dakota, and Texas, all settled later.

The Written Language

If we examine a document written during the colonial period, we notice many differences from conventional modern writing. The handwriting itself

is perhaps the first difference — formation of many letters differs from that taught in schools today, although perhaps only the “long s” creates real confusion for the modern reader. English spelling was already pretty much fixed by the seventeenth century, but we nevertheless spot far more variety in the spelling of educated individuals than would be acceptable today. Especially noticeable is use of an additional e at the end of words (yeare) and fluctuation between double and single consonants (*begining* and *beginning*). Capitalization was certainly more haphazard — sentences nearly always began with a capital, but proper names were by no means always capitalized; common nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs were frequently but inconsistently capitalized for no obvious reason. Punctuation marks used were the familiar ones, but the general tendency was toward far “heavier” punctuation than that used today — colons and semicolons appeared where we would use a comma.

With respect to stylistics, two characteristics are noteworthy. First is the use by many writers of what we would consider an ornate, overblown style —

I take myselfe bound so far as I see my Name, Credit, & Estate impeached, to vindecate myselfe in truth & faithfullnesse, in Laying open such falliesies to ye vew of rashonall and impershall minds, or to anny whose thoughts may bee forestalled by a ffalce alarum of strang & prepostrouse corses of purpose to hide theire oune iniquity [with Addam] by Laying gilt vpon annother, wch by a ffalce & accusing

*writing is sent about ye Countrie, by reson of wch I shall in as breefe ann Aration declare how proseedeing haue beene, & ye truth of them, with some grounes & resons of the same.*⁴

Second stylistic feature is the rambling, disorganized structure of the writing of less well-educated individuals —

*my tender and lvfin wif derlo thou hast thou pay for mee with wipin jes and sarofvl harts wich god abof do know wee thare war forst to part at that dolsum plas abof riton but it my prayers for the and my sweet bab vpon my benddid nies and to the Lord mosthi I shall eaver pray and my sweet bab also the Lord prasarf yov both Crist kip yov all so pray for me swet lvf for my protexon and safarifel kip well my lvf in stor and til sich times it shall plas god to bringe us to gather again if plas god as that j hap he is I do in tend as sven as j Cum at that land and dissposed of I do in tend to send for thee . . .*⁵

Seemingly dry and often uninteresting records kept by colonial Rhode Islanders can be the source of a great deal of information about their language, revealing both differences from and similarities to the language of the present. Some differences represent fundamental changes in the language itself, others merely reflect changes in culture and customs of the two periods. A comparison of the language of early and modern Rhode Island illustrates that English must be continuously changing in order to adapt itself to whatever uses its speakers wish to put it.



4 John Warner, letter to “Loueing ffrriends & Neighbors,” c. 1651, *Early Records* 15: 41.

5 Thomas Waters, letter “from the prison in boston may 27 1687” to his wife Anne in Providence, *Early Records* 17: 88-89.

Respectful Student Rebels

by Godfrey T. Anderson*

Student unrest and campus turmoil did not originate with youthful activists of the past decade. Rioting, violence, and destruction had a way of recurring on American college and university campuses almost from their very beginnings. Harvard had barely opened its doors when students protested against the quality of food being served. Reverend Nathaniel Eaton, master at that time, put his wife in charge of feeding the students who complained in 1639 that she served "thin beer and hard crusts, hasting pudding containing goats' dung and mackerel with their guts in them." When this college was only thirty years old it went through a "butter rebellion" recorded by students in biblical fashion —

Behold! Bad and unwholesome butter is served unto us daily; now therefore let us depute Asa the Scribe, to go unto our Rulers and seek redress. Then arose Asa, the Scribe, and went unto Belcher, the Ruler and said Behold, our butter stinketh, and we cannot eat thereof; now give us we pray, butter that stinketh not. And Belcher the Ruler, said, trouble me not, but begone unto thine own place, but Asa obeyed him not.¹

Early in the nineteenth century "rotten cabbage riots" at Harvard were staged by students who had found too many maggots in their fare. Before many more years passed students were battling there for a greater voice in university affairs — the faculty expelled over half of one senior class shortly before its commencement. Near the middle of the century Harvard's president resigned, weary of "fighting wild beasts." In classes professors were pelted with chestnuts by students. The torch was applied to campus buildings. At one period every outhouse, shed, workshop, and wooden fence near the Yard was marked for destruction.

Harvard was not alone in this student torment of the time. Yale's faculty in 1830 banished half the sophomore class after a student rebellion. One distinguished science professor never ventured forth for a time without two loaded pistols. A dozen years later a tutor — trying to restrain a window-breaking student — was fatally stabbed by the culprit. Similar episodes took place at Princeton, Virginia, Georgia, and on many other campuses. Princeton experienced six serious student rebellions between 1800 and 1830. Even in the conservative East the violent and lawless spirit later associated with the Far West seemed to sweep through institutions of higher learning periodically. Lack of a recreational program or extracurricular activities of any kind probably contributed in some degree to regular outbreaks of violence in those early days.²

The violent and lawless character of many of these episodes makes more remarkable a student protest which came to a climax at Brown University in 1835. Francis Wayland — a precocious young man who served for twenty-eight years as president of Brown — possessed many talents, one of which was described in a campus publication as the ability to "snuff a candle with tobacco juice at a distance of five paces."³ It may have been however the encouragement he gave to creative and original thinking which sparked student activism in Providence in 1835.

At that time emphasis was given by the university to encouraging students to work for "honors," and these were distributed at commencement as "parts" to the seniors. Two years before their time for graduation, the class of 1835 felt that honors were an unworthy spur to achievement and a tawdry goal toward which to strive. As early as their sophomore year, this class set about to put an end to the practice

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1 Ernest Earnest, *Academic Procession, An Informal History of the American College, 1636-1953* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953) 20, 36.

2 Morris Bishop, "Lower Depths of Higher Education," *American Heritage* 21:1 (December 1969) 27.

3 Bishop, 58.

of singling out certain students for this special recognition at commencement time.

As their graduation drew near, this class — with the exception of only three members — sought to open the question for discussion with president and faculty, but were rebuffed. After expressing “filial respect for the honorable faculty,” their petition expressed the opinion that the current system of honors on that campus constituted an appeal to “the unworthy passions of the heart.” Politely but firmly they made it clear they would not be influenced in their studies by any consideration of college honors. They felt that stressing this motive of competition was deleterious to their moral character, and “to cultivate a spirit of competition, distinction, and rivalry, the effect must be pernicious.” They closed by spelling out their convictions in six resolutions, carrying the names of twenty-eight in the class, one of which was subsequently crossed out.

First — that in the prosecution of our studies we will not be influenced by a consideration of college honors.

Secondly — That we will use our respectful endeavors to persuade the honorable Authorities of B. U. to omit in our case the giving out of parts founded on a consideration of scholarship — but that, should we fail to persuade the honorable authorities, we will, respectfully refuse to accept those parts.

Thirdly — That we feel bound by the duty we owe to Him who gave us mind and by the duty we owe to ourselves, to our teachers, and the age in which we live, to make all possible efforts for high attainments in the studies pursued in this University. And that to this end we will stimulate, and encourage each other onward in the common pursuit.

Fourthly — That as the object of Education is to make men useful to themselves and others, so in our judgment, this is the proper motive to urge upon students as an incentive to effort.

Fifthly — we acknowledge with unmingled gratitude to Him who has thus far preserved us in peace and in health, the peaceful progress we have been able to make in our studies; and pledge to each other that henceforth, we will seek to cultivate friendship,

One of two respectful rebels receiving their degrees three years late, Joshua Bicknell Chapin remained in Providence to follow a varied professional and business career, including appointment as commissioner of the state's public schools and editor, Rhode Island Schoolmaster.



Brown University Archives

to establish character, and promote peace.

Sixth — Resolved that the sentiments contained in the foregoing resolutions shall be binding on none of the Class but those who subscribe their names to them, and that they now be requested to subscribe to them.

Despite this courteous and carefully worded petition, the adamant president denied the request of the class to petition the faculty on this subject. So things went along quietly until September, date for commencement at that time. The Board of Fellows met to confirm the list of seniors to receive degrees and — to the embarrassment of the president — there were only three to present. Notwithstanding his discomfiture, Wayland gave a clear, unprejudiced statement of the resolution the class had drawn up earlier and of their request to petition the faculty, which had

been denied "for the reason that the Faculty believed the subject beyond their jurisdiction." Accepting the situation, the board made the graceful gesture of awarding to the President his perquisite of four dollars for each senior who would have graduated but chose to withdraw from this honor. Thus he received eighty-four dollars for twenty-one seniors who transferred to a "partial course," forfeiting their rights to be considered candidates for degrees.⁴

The records do not tell us what efforts by parents and friends were put forth to get these twenty-one conscientious seniors to change their minds. A crowd of the usual size came out for commencement, and the press wrote up the proceedings, mentioning only casually that twenty-one of the class had "forfeited their degrees." Two days later a correspondent of the *Providence Journal* — presumably one of the non-graduating seniors — sent in an unsigned letter lamenting that no explanation had been given at commencement by the faculty regarding the twenty-one. "This lack led to some very wild inferences," and to clear up matters he asked the paper to publish what was essentially a repetition of the resolutions which the class had adopted earlier. He stressed two motives of these absentee seniors. The first was "the hope that such sacrifice of personal interest might in some way contribute to the alteration or modification of the offensive system, namely the distribution of parts and competition in study." The second motive was a desire to avoid disobedience to rightfully constituted authority. Rebellion was something they would "eschew and abhor." The letter ended with an assertion of faith in the university and love for its professors, "with whom connexion is now rather unpleasantly dissolved."

Over the next few years thirteen of the twenty-one received their degrees, but the finale to this unique episode was written forty years later in 1875. At that time the Board of Fellows voted to include in future editions of the university catalogue of graduates the names of those who had not previously accepted graduation. So closed, just a century ago, an unusual chapter in the history of graduating classes at Brown.

On the basis of performance in later years these respectful student rebels became accomplished and

Charles Coffin Jewett accepted his degree in 1838. He became librarian of Brown, later assistant secretary and librarian of the Smithsonian Institution.



Brown University Archives

worthy citizens. One served in Chile as president of the Chamber of Deputies, minister of interior and foreign affairs, and senator in that distant country. He and a classmate — Episcopal bishop of Colorado — received honorary degrees from Brown soon after the mid-century. Another became librarian of Brown and later assistant secretary and librarian of the Smithsonian Institution. One — a surgeon in the United States Army during the Civil War — retired with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. Another — an associate justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court — became a trustee of Brown. One was teacher, minister, hymnwriter and author; another a pioneer missionary to China; and yet another a president of what is now Bucknell University. So most, if not all, rendered important and distinguished service in later years.⁵

In the light of so many violent uprisings through the years, this gentle student revolution at Brown in 1835 must be considered anomalous — these rebels acted peacefully for conscience' sake. Whether we endorse their action or not, we can admire their courage and tenacity in standing for what they firmly believed to be right. May their tribe increase.

4 Papers relating to the refusal of all but three of the class of 1835 to receive degrees because of the method of distribution of parts at Commencement, Providence,

1833-1836 — letters to the president by the class, resolutions of the class, president's report, copy of corporation records. MS., Brown University archives.

5 *Providence Sunday Journal* June 16, 1935, sec. 6.

In 1906, members of Societa Di Mutuo Soccorso Maria Del Carmine, a mutual aid society of Holy Ghost Church, carried their banner proudly — pride that later led to dissension between parishioners and priest (page 47.).



Italian Immigrants and the Catholic Church in Providence 1890-1930

by Peter W. Bardaglio*

In United States historiography the conventional view of the Catholic Church has assumed that it was highly successful in retaining the loyalties of Catholic immigrants. According to this interpretation the Church was an essential vehicle for the Americanization of foreigners.

Not until Vecoli's recent study of Italian immigrant experience has the widely held belief in the Church's assimilative capacity been effectively challenged. Emphasizing ethnic diversity as fundamental to shaping American Catholicism, Vecoli focuses attention on the clash between different Catholic traditions. He asserts that between new Italian immigrants and the predominantly Irish church hierarchy were deep-seated conflicts which for the most part remained unresolved. Vecoli concludes that

rather than serving as a primary agency for integrating the immigrants into American society, it is evident that the American Church, in part because of its own definite ethnic character, had a limited capacity to absorb the Italians who came from a very different cultural background.¹

In short, the Church did not act as "melting pot" but instead exacerbated ethnic differences, hindering its ability to attract and keep Italian immigrants within the fold.

Despite Vecoli's persuasive argument that the Church did not retain immigrant loyalties to the extent previously assumed, Humbert Nelli accepts the traditional interpretation with some modifications. Taking into account Vecoli's observations on conflict between Irish-American hierarchy and newly arrived Italian immigrants, Nelli does note that "Italians found the Church in America to be a cold and puritanical organization, controlled and often operated by the hated Irish, even in Italian neighborhoods."

Unlike Vecoli, Nelli insists that creation of national parishes "served either by Italians or by Irish-Americans who spoke Italian" eased tensions and brought Italians into the Church within a relatively short period of time. According to Nelli, establishment of national parishes was "the most significant manifestation" of the Church's successful attempts "to provide effectively for the religious needs of the Italian-Americans."²

The case of Italians in Providence raises serious questions about the adequacy of Nelli's position for understanding the complex nature of Italian ethnic conflict and the relationship between immigrants and the Church. On evidence concerning Providence's two major Italian parishes — Holy Ghost Church and St. Ann's Church — Nelli's model appears to overestimate the capacity of the national parish to ease ethnic tensions. Although early establishment of national parishes in Providence dampened clashes between Irish-Americans and Italians, these tended to aggravate differences among Italians themselves. Eruption of regional differences among Italians created a difficult and sensitive situation in the diocese from early years through the 1920s, severely hampering the ability of these parishes to retain Italian loyalties and thereby facilitate the assimilation process.

Except for Vecoli, historians have largely overlooked cultural tensions which promoted conflict and disorganization among Italian immigrants. The Providence experience underscores the importance of these internal tensions in determining the success of national parishes in the Italian community.

The first Italian parish in Providence was established under the sponsorship of Bishop Matthew Harkins, who had lived in Italy during two years pre-

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1 John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) 102-3. Rudolph J. Vecoli, "Prelates and Peasants," *Journal of Social History* (Spring 1969) 217-68.

2 Humbert S. Nelli, *Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) 181-89.

ceding the Vatican Council of 1870 and who had firsthand knowledge of Italian religious attitudes and practices. Reverend Luigi Paroli — a Scalabrini father from northern Italy — was appointed pastor of Holy Ghost parish and its first mass was celebrated on September 22, 1889 in a small chapel on Brayton Avenue. A remarkable accomplishment — that an Italian parish was instituted in Providence at such an early date — and Bishop Harkins' active role in its formation certainly the determining factor.³

The attitude of the American hierarchy was of decisive influence in determining the response of the Church to the immigrants from Italy . . . With a number of notable exceptions, these prelates seemed to feel that little could or ought to be done for the Italians. The problem was one for the Italian hierarchy or the Congregation of the Propaganda. As late as the 1920s there were large cities and entire dioceses with significant numbers of Italians which did not have a single Italian priest. In certain dioceses it was reported that not only was no effort made to secure Italian clergymen, but that they were actually excluded.

John T. McNicholas, Bishop of Duluth and former pastor of an Italian church, asserted in 1908 that Italian priests were not equipped to care for their countrymen in the United States. He believed American priests with some knowledge of Italian language and customs were best suited to perform the dual roles of preaching to and Americanizing Italian immigrants. In Trenton, the refusal of its bishop to appoint an Italian priest for the Church of St. Joachim led a large number of Italians to join a Protestant mission that had an Italian minister. The dissenters returned only after a new bishop met their demands.⁴

Bishop Harkins' willingness to establish an Italian parish as early as 1889 in Providence was a significant exception to the general pattern that prevailed elsewhere in the United States. Where the hierarchy in other parts of the country saw the lack of Italian priests as the responsibility of the Church in Italy or resisted the recruitment of Italian clergy, Harkins played a leading role in setting up a national parish for Italians. As a result of his action, most of the

potential for direct conflict in the diocese between Irish-Americans and Italian immigrants was successfully avoided.

Before 1890 Holy Ghost parish consisted mostly of northern Italians. Reflecting the national trend, the majority of Italians who arrived in Rhode Island during these years were from northern provinces. Coming in small and isolated groups, they settled mostly in the Federal Hill section and on Charles Street in Providence, with others appearing in Eagle Park, Thornton. The federal census of 1880 showed only 313 Italians out of a total population of 276,531 in Rhode Island, and by 1890 this figure had grown to about 2,500.⁵

The primary problem facing Holy Ghost Church in the earliest years of its development was lack of financial support, and limited funding continued to plague the parish throughout its first four decades. The poverty of the immigrants and the fact that Italians had no tradition of voluntary support — because government stipends financed churches and clergy in Italy — were major reasons for the inability of the parish to stay out of debt. As late as 1939, the observation was made that Italians "cannot conceive of a priesthood who are continually asking for money and that they are always imposing tasks of collecting funds on those who wish to assist at the divine offices." The difficulty of raising money was illustrated when a new parish rectory was built on Atwells Avenue in 1897, after the church had moved to the corner of Knight Street and Atwells. The pastor, Reverend Paul Novati, "had to perform herculean labors to collect the sum of \$554.43 which was absolutely essential to pay for the new property," and even his "skill as a collector of coin added to the zealous efforts of several good faithful parishioners" could not raise the total beyond these limits.⁶

Beginning in 1890 and reaching its peak in the first decade of the twentieth century, Italian immigration shifted from the northern to the Neapolitan provinces, from which southern Italians flocked to the state in ever-increasing numbers. Foreign-born Italians rose from about 2,500 in 1890 to almost 9,000 in 1900 and during the next decade their numbers soared to 27,287. Rhode Islanders born in Italy in-

3 Ubaldo U. M. Pesaturo, *Italo-Americans of Rhode Island* (Providence: Visitor Publishing Co., 1936) 37. Father Paroli had been preaching to Italians since the beginning of August in the basement of the Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul. *Providence Visitor* July 2, 1936. Diocesan Archives.

4 Vecoli, 260. Luciano J. Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, *Italian-Americans* (New York: Twayne, 1971) 182.

5 Pesaturo (1940 ed.) 10. Daniel C. Brewster, *Conquest of New England by the Immigrant* (New York: Putnam's, 1926) 146. Charles Carroll, *Rhode Island: Three Centuries of Democracy*, v. 2 (New York: Lewis, 1932) 1154.

creased to 32,585 by 1920, and together with those born in America of Italian parents they totaled 70,665, making Italians the third largest ethnic group in the state after Irish and French Canadians. By 1920, one Rhode Islander out of every nine was of Italian extraction.⁷

This huge influx around the turn of the century led to an increasing amount of tension and disorganization in Italian parishes for several reasons, most important of which was the immigrants' provincialism. In his study of a southern Italian village, sociologist Edward Banfield points out that a major cultural element contributing to Italians' parochialism was their overriding loyalty to family. He defines this ethos of "amoral familism" as one in which the demand of family for loyalty of its members precludes allegiance to other social institutions such as the Church. Finding that peasants whom he studied were unable to act "for any end transcending the immediate, material interest of the nuclear family," Banfield concludes that in a society of amoral familists "no one will further the interest of the group or community, except as it is to his private advantage to do so."⁸

Implications of the southern Italians' intense particularistic loyalties to family and village — a crucial component of their cultural baggage — were profound. Carried overseas and transplanted into a complex, interdependent urban society, Italian parochialism created tensions which inevitably led to conflict, both within the Italian community and with other ethnic groups. In short, the "marked capacity of the South Italians for organizational activity was itself a result of the divisive attitudes which they had brought with them to America."⁹

Besides the insusceptibility of southern Italians to community-wide demands on their loyalties, other cultural influences reinforced their disdain of the Church. Unlike the Irish, they did not closely identify Catholicism with their national identity. In particular, southern Italians were aggressively anticlerical because the Church had traditionally sided with major landowners against peasants.¹⁰

More important, southern Italian Catholicism was a folk religion — a fusion of Christian and pagan

Bishop Matthew Harkins sponsored the first Italian parish in Providence.



History of the Catholic Church in the New England States, v. 1, by Very Rev. Win. Byrne, D.D. et al. (Boston, 1899)

elements — and each village venerated its own assortment of madonnas and saints, patrons of great significance to peasants: "God, like the King, was a distant, unapproachable figure, but the local saints and madonnas, like the landlords, were real personages whose favor was of vital importance." The feast day of the patron was one of the chief social occasions of the year for villagers, and its celebration often continued for several days with offerings, processions, music, and fireworks. In addition, southern Italians recognized in their folk religion spirits which the Church did not countenance. Black magic — particularly the "evil eye" — amulets, potions, and magic rituals protected villagers from witches and evil spells that could bring sickness, death, or financial disaster.

Southern Italians closely identified themselves with their folk religion, but not with the Church. Attendance at mass was usually left to the women,

6 Diocesan Archives. Pesaturo (1936 ed.), 38.

7 Carroll, 1154-57.

8 Edward C. Banfield, *Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1958) 10, 85.

9 Vecoli, "Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of *The Uprooted*," *Journal of American History* 51 (December, 1964) 412.

10 Vecoli, "Prelates and Peasants," 222. Herbert J. Gans, *Urban Villagers* (New York: Free Press, 1965) 111.

children, and elderly. Adult males did not make a regular practice of attending church, except on special occasions and feast days, and they had little respect for priests, often scorning them for indulging in politics, personal vices, and immorality. American Catholics — particularly the Irish — came to regard Italian immigrants as sacrilegious and pagan. Unwilling or unable to understand, Americans viewed their practices and attitudes “as little short of heretical.”¹¹ Cultural attitudes and religious practices which southern Italians brought with them to Providence combined in such a way to make it extremely difficult for the Church to ease ethnic tensions and retain Italian loyalties, even with the creation of national parishes.

One of the earliest signs that national parishes would not necessarily solve the “Italian problem” occurred shortly after the turn of the century in St. Ann’s Church, second Italian parish organized in the city. Bishop Harkins had established St. Ann’s in September 1895 as a mission of the Holy Ghost Church to meet the religious needs of Italians who had spread out from Federal Hill to the north end of Providence. In December 1901, Reverend Anthony Bove was brought from Thornton to take charge of the mission, in serious financial trouble with a debt of \$10,000. Because Bove was from northern Italy, differences arose almost immediately between the newly arrived priest and his predominantly southern Italian flock. Viewed by the immigrants as an outsider, Bove “met with a cool if not hostile reception.” As Vecoli observes — “Between such priests and the people there was a gulf of cultural and linguistic differences . . . The clergymen from *alta Italia* tended to look down upon the southern Italians, while the latter regarded the priests as foreigners.” Resistance to Bove made it necessary to bring in a more experienced clergyman “to protect the young priest” until he could establish himself.¹²

Dissatisfaction with Father Bove had grown so great by 1903 that the Apostolic Delegate — representative of the Pope in the United States — asked Bishop Harkins to investigate, commenting that

“Italians of Providence do not cease to make complaints against the Rev. Bove.” In 1905, partly as an outgrowth of hostility toward Bove, the trustees of St. Ann’s were discharged at a meeting attended by a majority of north end Italians. In a letter to the Bishop the immigrants claimed that the dismissed trustees were illiterate, that members of St. Ann’s had not been informed of the church accounts for about three years, and that Father Bove’s “behavior is very scandalous.”¹³

As a result of the unsettled condition of St. Ann’s, Bishop Harkins did not declare the parish independent of Holy Ghost Church until January 1907, when Father Bove was appointed its first pastor. Only seven months later, antagonism against Bove culminated in a demonstration of 3,000, when the pastor prohibited an Italian not a member of the parish from collecting funds in the church’s name for the fireworks celebration in an upcoming feast. Outraged by Bove’s action, “practically the entire Italian section” turned out in an attempt to overrule his decision “by closing up the church forcibly and by driving away the priest.” Bove’s lack of empathy with immigrants’ attitudes toward feasts was readily apparent in his comments to the press — “At all these celebrations money is collected in the name of the church and used for fireworks and other useless things. I want them to give the money to good institutions, either the church or the hospitals, or some such enterprise.”

Although Bove saw little value in the feasts, they were the social and religious highlights of the year for most Italians in Providence. Sponsored by local mutual aid societies, the celebrations always attracted large numbers. During the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in 1911, “thousands thronged the street in true Mardi gras spirit” in a three-day celebration of a favorite patron.¹⁴

To counteract internal tensions and overcome southern Italian disorganizational tendencies, Father Bove began building up an institutional network which included a parochial school, nursery, Sunday school, evening classes for adults, as well as social

11 Vecoli, “Prelates and Peasants,” 228. Phyllis H. Williams, *Southern Italian Folkways in Europe and America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938) 138-46. Gans, 111-13. Lawrence F. Pisani, *The Italian in America: A Social Study and History* (New York: Exposition Press, 1957) 167.

12 Pesaturo (1936 ed.) 39. Rev. Vincent F. Kienberger, *Historical Sketch of St. Ann’s Italian Parish* (Providence, 1925) 13-14. *Providence Visitor*, May 23, 1935, p. 5. Diocesan Archives. Vecoli, “Prelates and Peasants,” 239.

13 Diocesan Archives.

14 *Providence Journal* August 26, 1907; July 16, 1911.

15 Kienberger, 6-8, 21. *Providence Visitor* May 23, 1935. Diocesan Archives.

16 *Providence Journal* December 4, 10, 1918.

clubs and lay societies. A contemporary observed that parish organizations "were soon established for each sex and for every age — Holy Name societies for the men and boys, sodalities for the women and girls; and the membership grew rapidly." Bove established the second council of Italian Knights of Columbus in America and a "flourishing" St. Vincent de Paul Society that ministered to the needy. He also found time to write a column on Italian events in the diocesan newspaper — *The Providence Visitor* — and to assist in publishing *La Sentinella*, a local Italian newspaper.¹⁵

After the fireworks controversy, the next major incident in which Bove antagonized his parishioners occurred in 1918 when he attacked the Sons of Italy — most influential Italian fraternal order in the United States — as anti-Catholic. In a widely distributed pamphlet officially approved by Bishop Harkins, he charged that "the characters of the officers at the head of the order are such as to stamp the organization as an enemy of the church." Officials of the order denied the priest's accusations and contended that Bove opposed it because two Italian societies in the north end had joined despite the pastor's objections. A spokesman for the order

suggested that the pastor "realizes that he is losing his control of the organizations in his parish and is rather irritated."

Bove continued his assault on the Sons of Italy, releasing to the press a statement that in some lodges members were permitted "to abuse Catholic priests, Catholic practices, religious societies and use language offensive to Catholic conscience and constituted authority." Pointing out that the Apostolic Delegate supported his denunciation, Bove also insisted that "the general feeling of the Italian priests in this country" was consonant with his own beliefs. In the end Bove's attacks proved ineffective in preventing other societies in the parish from joining; within a week after launching his criticism, three societies from St. Ann's had already applied for acceptance into the organization.¹⁶

In general, Bove had an acute awareness of the difficulties he faced in his attempts to secure the loyalties of the immigrants and to firmly establish St. Ann's in the north end community. In a report to the Vatican in 1929, the pastor observed —

Although the general conditions of the Italian parishes in the United States have greatly improved lately . . . still with few exceptions these conditions



Priest's progress — 1. Don Antonio Bove, newly ordained; 2. Father Bove, 1919; 3. Monsignor Bove, 1925.

Historical Sketch of St. Ann's Italian Parish by Very Rev. John F. Sullivan, D.D. and Rev. Vincent F. Kienberger, O.P. (n.p., n.d.)

St. Ann's Church today, much as it appeared at the time of Msgr. Bove's death when it was "one of the greatest Italian churches of New England."



Courtesy Archives Diocese of Providence

cannot compare with those of the American parishes. The latter are rich in cultural and charitable works, they are all well-endowed, and you can say they live in luxury. The former, with few means of support, lack in cultural promotion and charitable works, and are loaded with debts. With no adequate religious instruction, poor organization for the conservation of faith and the development of a truly Christian life makes it easy for the propaganda organized by the Protestants with enormous means at their disposal.

There is little evidence that Protestant efforts to convert Italians were successful, but many of the city's immigrants remained only nominally attached to Catholicism. Bove noted that as late as 1929, only ten per cent received the sacraments in a year, and

eighty per cent of this number were women. Parishes where members received communion regularly were "just oases in the desert."¹⁷

Despite these difficulties, it is clear that Father Bove was one of the major architects of the Italian community. In his attempts to establish St. Ann's, this pastor's impact reached beyond the parish, and his contributions to the organization of Italians in their efforts to adjust to the urban-industrial setting of Providence were significant. After Bove's death in 1931, Reverend Charles Sasso viewed the situation in the north end around the turn of the century —

A little colony of Italian immigrants, a few hundred, had settled there, in tiny cottages scattered in the barren hillsides. They were no better Catholics

than all the other Italian immigrants. Many of them were illiterates; most of them possessed with that liberal-masonic mentality, which was born of the revolution for Italian independence and was implicitly anticlerical and antireligious. They had the invincible tendency of organizing themselves into innumerable little associations, dispersing, by so doing, their potential possibilities. They had a seemingly inborn reluctance to support financially their priest and their church, while they were always ready to throw thousands of dollars into luminaries, fireworks and noisy musicales.

To organize such a crowd into a parochial community, Msgr. Bove had to literally fight his way to success, through untold difficulties of all kinds. He had to overcome their ignorance and their strange prejudices; he had to struggle against their narrow conception of religious and social life; he had to instruct them and build their spiritual life from the very beginning; he had to impose upon them his leadership, being at times their father, their protector, their counsellor or their chastiser; he had to beg of them every single brick for his constructions; he had to travel the vast area of his parish in a continuous exhausting canvassing; besides, like the other Italian missionary priests he had to share the derisive contempt of the American Catholics for his people, who, although coming from the 'Country of the Pope,' could hardly be qualified as 'Catholics.' But thirty years afterwards, at the time of Msgr. Bove's death, a glorious transformation had taken place. The little St. Ann's Mission had become one of the greatest Italian churches of New England. The same progress had extended also to civic matters: the once notorious 'North-End' was now recognized as one of the most lively, active, progressive and law-abiding sections of the city of Providence.¹⁷

Bove's campaign not only to establish St. Ann's as a church, but to build organizations and implement social services beyond its purely spiritual function was an important factor in securing the loyalty of many Italian immigrants. Yet it is also evident that his lack of empathy with immigrants' attitudes

St. Ann's chapel, 1900.



Historical Sketch of St. Ann's

toward feasts and secular groups such as the Sons of Italy hindered development of full rapport between pastor and flock.

To the Italian immigrant, Vecoli contends, "the Church in the United States was more American and Irish than Catholic." On the whole, this is an accurate portrayal of the Italian encounter with the Catholic Church in America. In Providence, however, early establishment of Italian parishes and other parochial institutions led to a significantly different experience for both immigrants and Church in the diocese. As a result of Bishop Harkins' progressive views on the "Italian problem," there was very little lag between the first great influx of Italians and the beginning of national parishes for immigrants. The rapidity with which the bishop acted cut off most possibilities for conflict between Irish-American hierarchy and Italian immigrants because a

17 Diocesan Archives.

18 Pesaturo (1936 ed.) 42-43.

large majority of Italians had their own priests, churches, schools, and other related institutions within the diocese.

But the "Italian problem" consisted of more than just lack of Italian priests. The unique background of southern Italians — particularly their tendency towards disorganizational behavior in activity beyond the family — played a major role in contributing to tension which frequently erupted in Italian parishes. Immigrant anticlericalism remained an inherent source of conflict and the fact that most Italian priests in Providence had been sent from northern Italy's Scalabrini order — while the mass of immigrants came from Neapolitan provinces — exacerbated regional feelings.

With a priest so determined as Father Bove to overcome divisive elements, a fair measure of success in retaining Italian loyalties was possible. But as the fireworks controversy of 1907 and Bove's attacks on the Sons of Italy in 1918 demonstrate, the situation was extremely inflammable and potentially destructive. All it took to spark a demonstration or to set off a series of charges and countercharges was a lack of sensitivity to southern Italians' cultural peculiarities. The burden for avoiding conflict weighed on the shoulders of the Italian pastor. In a position of responsibility, he had to act sensibly, or else he could trigger a confrontation that would rupture the parish and even involve the hierarchy which — because of its Irish-American character — would only add fuel to the fire.

Although Father Bove managed in large part to avoid such disastrous conflict, Reverend Domenico Belliotti, pastor of Holy Ghost Church, was not so fortunate. Unlike Bove, Belliotti could not prevail over the divisive forces which plagued his parish. A year and a half after he arrived, members of the *Societa Di Mutuo Soccorso Maria SS. Del Carmine*, a mutual aid society, voted unanimously to "prefer charges of conduct unbecoming a priest" against Belliotti. In a letter to Bishop Harkins dated September 23, 1906, the group explained that in July they had made arrangements with Belliotti to have special

seats reserved in the church on the day of their patron saint, "but when the day came, despite our prior arrangements the members were compelled to stand up and be scattered all over the church." Moreover, when the society brought into the church an "Image of the Blessed Virgin," Belliotti "became irritated and cursed Her name and also the day that he donned the priestly garments. When the members heard this, they asked him to explain and he replied in substance that we did not control him and that if we said another word, he would not let us enter the church and that furthermore he saw no difference between the Blessed Virgin and St. Rocco or any other saints which were in the Church."

The members declared to the bishop that they were "firm in our belief that the welfare of our Church demands a change in its administration," and that "a change therein will be appreciated by nearly the entire Italian population of the parish of the Holy Ghost."

The next serious incident concerning Belliotti occurred in 1920, when officials from twelve mutual aid societies sent a letter to Coadjutor Bishop William A. Hickey demanding that Belliotti "be immediately removed from this Church." The spokesmen observed ominously that it "would not be decent for us to evoke this man's past and to make you aware of what shocks us, so we shall forbear it. His Eminence should do whatever he can so that we may remain Catholics, and we beg him to put he who deserves it in his place, despite the fact he belongs to the Scalabrini."

Another petition signed by 1,175 women in Holy Ghost parish requested the Bishop to replace Belliotti. A letter from a parish member in June 1920 also asked Bishop Hickey to remove the pastor, "because he is a priest of the meanest disposition. He has been parish pastor for over seventeen years and during those years has turned many people from the house of God. We cannot stand it any longer."

The writer noted that Belliotti's assistant, Reverend Vincenzo Vicari, was "everybody's friend and also a friend of the poor," and that the people of the

parish "wish that you will make him the parish priest because he deserves it."

Simmering controversy boiled over in July when an anonymous letter to Bishop Hickey accused Belliotti of not performing baptism unless paid a fixed fee, of charging varied rates for privileged seats in the church, and of denying funeral services to those who could not afford his price. The letter further charged Belliotti with borrowing money from the church coffers on his own account and running up an enormous debt. Outraged by the accusations, Bishop Hickey decided that Father Vicari was behind the movement to oust Belliotti and he transferred the popular assistant, an action which threw the community into an uproar. A plea to the bishop "in the name of eighteen Catholic societies" declared —

"The people have not remained satisfied with the results obtained, since it was the Rev. Belliotti whom they wished to remove, and not the Rev. Vicari whom they heartily love and wish to keep as their consoler and father. The only thing which will calm us, and which will put the whole parish on its feet in religious matters, is the return of this only person able to save the situation, the Rev. Vicari."

The petition pointed out that "one half of the parishioners do not attend Church at all, and have sworn not to enter any Church until the Rev. Vicari returns here, since they blame the authorities for his removal." By this time, it was clear that the Holy Ghost pastor had outlived his usefulness, and "to restore domestic tranquility Father Belliotti was given another vineyard in which to labor."¹⁹

Reverend Angelo Strazzoni was chosen to replace Belliotti in August 1920, but because the hierarchy had been dragged into the conflict and the new pastor — like Belliotti — was a Scalabrini father, it was unlikely that differences between various factions of the parish would heal over quickly. Rumors of conspiracy between Irish-American prelates and Scalabrini fathers began to take root and only five weeks after Strazzoni took over, a mass meeting of parishioners occurred "for the purpose of considering the present condition in the Church of the Holy Ghost."

Providence police were summoned to head off a planned demonstration "by a faction in the parish working to have the temporary pastor, Rev. Angelo Strazzoni, removed from the church," but the march failed to crystallize. Although seventeen societies represented at the meeting took no final action, their opposition was quite clear. Strazzoni denied that he knew "of any organization of any members in his parish that might be involved in any attempt to make a disturbance" and added that "there was every evidence of good feeling in his congregation." By ignoring dissenting parishioners, Strazzoni possibly might have believed that the problem would dissipate, but divisions had grown too deep to be shrugged off and they demanded recognition.

The extent of the dissidents' resistance revealed itself in November when four women and three men were arrested for "interrupting a religious service" at Holy Ghost Church. According to reports, seven Italians — "in common with other parishioners" — broke up mass on Sunday morning with shouted demands that Strazzoni resign. The protestors proclaimed to the press that "they desire to end administration of the church by priests of the St. Borromeo Society (the Scalabrini fathers)."

Not only had opposition to Strazzoni hardened as a result of the incident, but the immigrants directly attacked the bishop for the first time in public. A committee representing parishioners issued a statement criticizing Hickey "for alleged failure to act on the situation," and the committee members asserted that the diocesan head had ignored all of their requests to remove Strazzoni. State Representative-elect Joseph Venezia, counsel for the arrested and dissenting parishioners, announced that the protesters "had despaired of obtaining action by Coadjutor Bishop Hickey in the matter and were prepared to appeal to the Pope for the removal of Fr. Strazzoni." Faced with this latest expression of opposition, the Holy Ghost pastor again attempted to sidestep the issue, declaring that "there was no cause for the disturbance" and that the entire controversy was "due to a few troublemakers." "I have had only

expressions of sympathy since I have been here," he claimed, adding that "I have visited many Italian colonies in the United States and this is one of the best I have come in contact with, and it is a pity that a few should be allowed to disgrace the entire colony." Bishop Hickey took a similar tack, saying that he "deplored the trouble caused by some of the parishioners," but because he was "positively sure of the respectability and capability of the priests at Holy Ghost Church he would not take any action."²⁰

Embittered by the hierarchy's lack of response to their grievances, 626 parishioners petitioned Bishop Hickey in January 1921, requesting permission to leave their parish for St. John's, an Irish parish. The letter underscored the fact that they opposed Father Strazzoni almost solely because he was a Scalabrini father. The petitioners claimed that parish controversy was the result of "discriminations perpetrated against" Father Vicari — a secular priest — in favor of a religious order that "did perfectly nothing for our moral betterment and in the light of the history of our Italian Colony, proved to be only a negative element in the economy of our religious life . . . We cannot, absolutely, go back to the Holy Ghost Church in these actual conditions, for since the deplorable disturbances occurred in July and later on, everybody can see the system of resentment, retaliation and hatred that . . . has been adopted by the Scalabrinian Fathers."

Revealing their deep sense of persecution at the hands of the hierarchy and the Scalabrinians, the petitioners exclaimed: "We have been minimized, insulted, beaten, arrested, denounced to the civil authority as a flock of primitives and criminals, and after so much, after such a disgrace to our name, to our dignity, to our best sentiments, we are told to be compelled to our executioners."

The result of the entire conflict, from their point of view, was that "the majority of our families have deserted the Church; almost two hundred of our new-

born children are barred from being christened; a regrettable sentiment of apathy and religious indifference is, gradually, permeating our families; in one expression, everything hints to the downfall of our best part, of our religious conscience, of our Religion."

Not receiving any response from Bishop Hickey to their pleas, a committee representing the dissenters wrote in February to the chancellor of the diocese, Reverend P. A. Foley. The committee angrily noted that Hickey had "judged not to lower Himself to the misery of poor and neglected workingmen" and that "we will not ask any longer your Paternity or His Excellency how to regulate ourselves." The letter indicated the resignation of the parishioners to their situation and their frustration at being unable to have any decision-making power in the parish. Yet it is almost certain that Father Strazzoni's early departure in February 1922, after only a year and a half as pastor, was due in large part to widespread opposition to his tenure.

Although the successor, Reverend Flaminio Parenti, was also a Scalabrini father, he managed to secure and hold a greater degree of loyalty from Holy Ghost parishioners than either Belliotti or Strazzoni. Parenti restored harmony to the parish "like the dove bearing the olive branch of peace upon the troubled waters." One indication of success only four months after arrival was his ability to raise \$4,000 among parish families to refurbish the church interior. In the next several years, Parenti made many necessary improvements and additions to the church's physical plant, at the same time reorganizing existing parish societies and founding new ones. By 1936, Holy Ghost's pastor was able to declare that "Italian Catholics in the Federal Hill colony are second to none in their religious duties."²¹ Clearly, Father Parenti commanded the respect of most of his parishioners, for he continued to serve as pastor until he retired in 1964. It appears that acceptance of Parenti was large-

20 *Providence Journal* October 14, 1920.

21 Diocesan Archives. Pesaturo (1940 ed.) 16; (1936 ed.) 41.

ly the result of an increase by the mid-1920s of second-generation Italians, less dominated by particularistic loyalties of their parents. As the second generation increased in numbers and gained maturity, nationally-oriented Italian parishes grew in popularity and influence.

The case of Italians in Providence throws new light on the problem of ethnic confrontation in the American Church. In contrast to other cities such as Chicago, the primary conflict was not between Irish-American hierarchy and Italian immigrants. Bishop Harkins' active role in organizing twelve Italian parishes in Rhode Island during his administration — three of them in Providence — was the major factor in restraining clashes between the two groups. Yet the establishment of national parishes did not "provide effectively for the religious needs of Italian-Americans," as Nelli claims for Chicago. Conflict in

both Holy Ghost and St. Ann's parishes between the Scalabrini fathers and southern Italians underlines the inadequacy of Nelli's model for the Providence experience. Rather than easing ethnic tension within the Church, establishment of Italian parishes tended to exacerbate regional differences between northern and southern Italians. Insensitivity of pastors from the Scalabrini order to the southern Italians' cultural traditions — combined with the immigrants' anti-clericalism and propensity for disorganizational behavior — created a difficult and sometimes destructive situation in the diocese. Nelli's model puts too much emphasis on the healing capacity of national parishes. Clearly the Church faced an uphill battle in attempts to capture southern Italian loyalties. In the end, rather than Italian assimilation in national parishes, the immigrants held on to their customs and practices in spite of them.

Today the cheerful religious festa has been revived as a Federal Hill community celebration. Father John Bocciarelli, pastor of Holy Ghost, and — partially visible at his left — Monsignor Galliano Cavallaro of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel participate in

the commemoration of St. Joseph's Day honoring that patron saint of Italo-Americans.

Photograph by Tony Vicario



Plans and Prospects 1975-1976

Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes — our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking around. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*.

Those thoughts have been recurring over and over this year past as we were required to think and plan in rather broad terms about our Society's purpose and how its functions could be served by substantial opportunities offered in the Aldrich House and gardens gift to us.

Obviously one cannot help but be confronted by tradition in an organization like a historical society — tradition goes to the core of our being. A society so old as ours has history and traditions of its own. What are our traditions — obligations? — statements of purpose? — goals? — or a collection of fuzzy, sentimental and contradictory ramblings? Who knows for sure? Where did we come from? What are we? Where are we going?

Fortunately, our Society has no dearth of records. While some periods of record keeping are better than others, the old published proceedings and reports are pretty clear. From the first our purpose has been to rescue, preserve, and interpret relics and records of Rhode Island's past and to transmit that past to each new generation in our community. Our Society is not a private club celebrating first families in a kind of narcissistic nostalgia, fortunately never has been, though we might have been so accused by those who didn't understand us. From their beginning our members have cared deeply about preserving original physical remains of their state's heritage, both in symbol and in substance. To that tradition our library and our museum attest. Our Society has been singular in fidelity to publishing the story of its state in books, magazines, and lectures stretching back unbroken to 1835. Keepers and givers of Rhode Island's story — those are our traditions.

Very central to advancement of those traditions are opportunities offered by Aldrich House and gardens. Since 1969 your director has been operating

by Albert T. Klyberg*

under guidelines of a long-range plan developed by committees of the trustees and then approved by the board itself. Perhaps I have been taking that plan too seriously, but nonetheless it has been my guide. As of this year we had nearly fulfilled all its major elements. Our library has been developed into several distinct departments and a staff of professionals recruited to conduct the care and use of an extremely valuable collection in a building improved and equipped with modern devices to assist in preservation of materials and to facilitate their use. Our house museum has gone through various interior and exterior restorations and repairs and museum collections, having received very thorough attention, are also in very good condition. Our publications have increased and are highly regarded. Nearly all goals of that plan were accomplished save one — new activity space for a more varied lecture and meeting program and for changing exhibits and interpretive activities.

Proposals to install a museum wing and lecture hall at John Brown House had floundered not only because of enormous costs, but also by reason of difficulties in attaching anything of size to house or property without diminishing architectural features or spatial grandeur of setting. To redesign John Brown House for changing shows and museum activities was out of the question — expensive period room settings were and are too good to change. There's no place to store things — elaborate interior detail does not lend itself to being anonymous gallery space. The house has problems handling large groups — maximum capacity of its largest room is about fifty seated, one hundred standing. Parking has been a problem. We had painted ourselves into a rather elaborate eighteenth-century corner which we rather liked anyway, and our answers had to lie elsewhere.

The munificent bequest of Aldrich House and gardens certainly provides beginning answers — magnificent setting — lots of land — large, structurally sound building in top condition — large rooms — simpler detail — centrally air-conditioned — security systems in place — good kitchen — ballroom for

*RIHS director since 1969, Mr. Klyberg addressed the above remarks to the Society's one hundred fifty-third annual meeting on January 26, 1975.

meetings, lectures, and shows — a center for the interpretation and instruction of Rhode Island history.

At this early stage plans are of course still tentative. Respective committees of the Society have months of discussion ahead. Some general conclusions can be offered as trends.

Preliminary feelings are that although a specific area will be a family memorial, Aldrich House should not be a companion house museum to John Brown House, simply featuring later eras in fixed installations of period rooms. Rather the concept of changing displays on a broad scale of topics hopefully will be employed. Rhode Island has enough restored house museums. What we need is more activity and interaction in our interpretation.

Since what we are talking about doesn't yet exist, it's somewhat difficult to describe. Perhaps some similar situations may clarify concepts for you. The museum of art at Rhode Island School of Design celebrates the creativity and aesthetic forms of our civilization's artists. It is also interested in the history of the forms and the people who created them. The central focus of the museum's energy is always the object as an entity. An art museum builds a collection and then tells a story — a historical museum has a story to tell and then goes out to build a collection to tell it.

We too have objects — many of them the highest artistic expression of a particular form. Without diminishing their value or nature as art we are going to use them to tell the story of our state. Our central purpose is not celebration of forms and objects — our job is to tell a story and to use these physical remnants to help do the job. Our kinship is closer to Children's Museum in Boston or to the new educational center at Old Sturbridge Village. In activities using objects for instruction, we may well rely on three-dimensional reproductions or graphic reproductions, slides, and photographs to do the job.

We shall seek out things for our collections which would never be considered for an art museum. Some of them will not be aesthetically interesting, but they will be things which made history here — inventions,

objects to illustrate significant developments in business and industry, social and religious life, politics, the military, transportation, communications, home life, recreation, community organizations, government; cultural, literary, and artistic developments.

Our job is to teach, our job is to tell the story, our job is to see that each new generation of Rhode Islanders has the opportunity to learn about their past and our state's traditions. If tradition is the democracy of the dead, it is also the birthright of the living and of generations to come, to insure to both not only an opportunity to enjoy benefits and progress created by previous generations, but also a chance to avoid errors and agonies of that past's mistakes. Ours is the responsibility to preserve and to present this body of shared experience we call Rhode Island history.

Courtesy Providence Journal



"Don't Stop Now." At Aldrich House gate, president Duncan H. Mauran prepares to mount a high bike, symbol of the campaign to help materialize "Plans and Prospects." Cheering section, left to right: Mrs. Mauran, Kim Merriman with pint-sized bike, Margaret Mauran; RIHS personnel — Jonathan O'Brien, Clifford Cone (behind Mr. Mauran) and Pam Fox; center front: "Tooke."

The Rhode Island Historical Society

One Hundred Fifty-third Annual Meeting

The one hundred fifty-third annual meeting — in the Society's Library, 121 Hope Street, Providence on January 26, 1975 — was called to order at 3:35 p.m. by president Duncan Hunter Mauran.

Minutes of the 1974 annual meeting were approved as printed in *Rhode Island History* 33:2 (May 1974).

The nominating committee's report was submitted by its chairman — H. Cushman Anthony — and upon motion duly made and seconded it was voted to authorize the secretary to cast one ballot for the slate of officers as presented.

The report of the treasurer was deferred. Mr. Mauran explained that its audit had not been completed.

Members stood in silence while the president read the names of members who had died during the preceding year.

The president, librarian, and director gave their reports. The business session concluded with a slide presentation by Mr. Klyberg of the newly acquired properties — Aldrich House and Gaspee House.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
BRADFORD F. SWAN
Secretary

Annual Report of the President

May I first welcome all of you to this annual meeting, at which your presence indicates interest in and care for this Society.

Also I want to pay tribute to our dedicated director and staff who have more than pulled their oars as the Society has expanded with no increase in personnel, and to our board and committee members who have contributed advice and time unselfishly. In particular I wish to thank John W. Wall and Townes M. Harris Jr. who are leaving the trustees.

Since its latest annual meeting, the Society has become the recipient of two major gifts — Aldrich House and the Gaspee House. Aldrich House is going to have a major impact on the Society in that, more than being a memorial to this distinguished Rhode Island family, it will provide much needed space to display many items concerning the state's history after the eighteenth century.

Although we expect some additional outside help with the conversion of Aldrich House and believe we can develop the Gaspee House to produce rental income, we are by no means out of the woods financially and will have to call on our members to continue and increase their support.

"Why do all this now? Times are bad." May I say your board of trustees and I think that when an opportunity arises which complements our operation, we should be willing to take on these challenges. Many of the foundations of our better institutions were started when times were less than perfect.

DUNCAN HUNTER MAURAN



Annual Report of the Librarian

Continuing the trend of the last three years, the number of library users increased, although not so dramatically as in 1973. Most noticeable — according to Nancy F. Chudacoff, reference librarian and chief statistics keeper — was the shift in type of library users. While in previous years close to fifty per cent of new library users were genealogists, in 1974 students from colleges and universities made up forty-three per cent of first-time users, followed by the general public with thirty per cent, and genealogists with twenty per cent. This expanded use by students is the result of growing interest in local history by both students and teachers, and an increasing awareness of the rich collections here. The approaching bicentennial celebration has rekindled interest in local history in the general public as well. The demand on our collection of city and town histories has increased accordingly.

Happily, this increased research activity has produced several excellent studies. Historian Carl Bridenbaugh published two books, *Silas Downer: Forgotten Patriot, His Life and Writings* (Providence: Rhode Island Bicentennial Foundation, 1974) and *Fat Mutton and Liberty of Conscience, Society in Rhode Island, 1636-1690* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1974). Historian Sidney James completed the manuscript for his *Colonial Rhode Island*, to be published in 1975.

Numerous studies by undergraduate students were contributed to the library, including several honors theses on such topics as the 1922 textile strike in Rhode Island, Italians in Providence between 1900 and 1930, and Rhode Island labor, 1870 to 1920.

Two Ph.D. dissertations on colonial Newport were completed. Dissertations included two on Rhode Island workers, one on nineteenth-century elites in Rhode Island, one on the social history of Providence schools 1800-1925, and one on the women's culture club movement 1868-1914. Research was begun for masters' theses on Blacks in Rhode Island in the nineteenth century and on socialism in Rhode Island.

Nathaniel N. Shipton, curator of manuscripts, reported that the library acquired eighteen collections and fifty-one separate items. Gifts continued to be our main source of new manuscripts. For the second time in three years the library received a collection of Revolutionary War papers — Asa Waterman's records as military commissary for Rhode Island. It is unlikely that the Society could have raised enough money to buy these in today's market. A second collection, Richard A. Robertson's diary and letterbooks, is of particular interest to students of nineteenth-century business history. During his remarkable career, Robertson filled such important positions as engineer of the Pawtucket Water Works, treasurer of the Builders Iron Foundry, and officer of the Industrial Trust Company.

Among single items donated this year were a charter of the North Kingstown Rangers (1792), a commission authorizing

Benjamin Stelle to negotiate prisoner exchanges (1776) and a letter from James Manning to President Washington, dated 1790.

Exceptionally important family papers have been deposited from time to time. Henry A. L. Brown deposited more Brown and Francis family manuscripts, and Henry Hart deposited the Comstock family papers. Because Captain Jesse Comstock and his sons officered some of the best nineteenth-century ocean-going steamships, like the *S. S. Baltic*, their letters, diaries, and charts provide an important link between the ages of sail and oil-fired shipping.

Shipping and sea figured strongly in our buying as well. William Earle and Company's account books had been on our shelves for ten years, while the remainder of the papers of this chandler and mercantile firm eluded us. Given a second chance this year, the Society obtained these important papers. Purchases of single manuscripts included Hopkins Carpenter's journal of a voyage on the ship *Cicero* to Denmark in 1800, a record book of the Portsmouth Asylum from 1849 to 1882, and a volume of minutes of the Second Freewill Baptist Church of Foster, 1849-1882.

Mr. Shipton cataloged thirty collections, twelve of which were from the backlog that greeted him upon arrival in 1969. He also assisted on the Greene Papers project one day a week, and organized an exhibit of Nathanael Greene letters.

Marsha Peters, graphics curator, reported seventy-seven new accessions. Among those of note were three volumes of photographs of the architectural firms of Stone, Carpenter & Wilson, and Stone, Carpenter & Sheldon; an album of Rhode Island views purchased at auction; several hundred photographs of Bacon and Hazard families; a panoramic photograph of delivery trucks and drivers from Shepard's department store, circa 1920, and albums, scrapbooks, and photographs of the Cady family.

Miss Peters arranged two exhibitions. "Portraits in Copper, Engravings of William Hamlin" opened in January at Slater Mill with a demonstration of printing by copperplate, using Hamlin's own press and copperplate of a three-dollar bank note he designed. After closing at Slater Mill, it moved to John Brown House. "Saylesville, 1918-1928, 1974" was put together by Joseph Brin, senior photography student at Rhode Island School of Design. Mr. Brin used photographs from the Society's Saylesville Finishing Company collection and his own photographs of Saylesville in 1974 for the second exhibition held at John Brown House in May.

Deborah D. Richardson, film curator, reported that the Society received 443,000 feet of film this year, 328,000 of which was TV news. Important individual collections included home movies of early Rhode Island scenes from the estate of Walter G. Cady, movies of the Rhode Island National Guard about 1935, and a large collection of silent films made early in

this century — a gift of Harold Gordon, it is the largest known collection of feature films before 1920.

In order to keep abreast of changing technology in our respective fields, the curators attended several conferences this year. Miss Peters spent two weeks in Rochester, New York, at the Visual Studies Workshop, studying new methods for conservation of photographs and negatives and, in consequence, instituting a new program of conservation for our graphics collection.

Mrs. Chudacoff attended a two-week seminar on archival methods sponsored by the Ohio Historical Society, and Mr. Shipton attended two one-day workshops of the New England Archivists. Miss Peters and Miss Peace attended the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists where Miss Peters chaired two sessions on the preservation of photographs and Miss Peace chaired a session on the bibliographic control of ephemeral material. Miss Peace also attended the annual meeting of the American Library Association in connection with her effort to develop a better state documents program.

While much was accomplished this year, there were some setbacks and frustrations. A malfunction in our humidification system resulted in a flood which heavily damaged materials on first and second floors. I am pleased to report that nothing was lost, but about two hundred volumes needed extensive repairs. Special thanks go to George D. Cunha of the New England Documents Conservation Center for his quick response to our call for help.

Recataloging has not proceeded so quickly as we had hoped, because the librarian has had to spend most of her time on other matters. A full-time book cataloger is desperately needed to insure a well organized and accessible book collection.

Insufficient space has also become an acute problem. If this library is to maintain the high quality of its collections, we must continue to collect new material as it becomes available. Unfortunately, we have nearly filled every inch of available space. Unless we are able to add a fourth floor this year, we will have to sharply curtail our collecting activities.

That the library staff has been able to accomplish so much, given our limited resources, is due in part to the very fine volunteers who have assisted us this year. Irene Eddy began her fourth year of dismounting manuscripts and placing them in acid-free folders. In her second year as a volunteer, Gail Dolan sorted the Sessions family papers and reported them to the Library of Congress for inclusion in the *National Union Catalog of Manuscripts*. Joseph K. Ott continued to sort Providence Customs House papers and to assist patrons in Mr. Shipton's absence. Frank Crowther began making a shelf list of one of our postal collections, and Tracy G. Thurber organized and cataloged our currency collection. Marion Ricketson, a cataloger at the Providence Public Library for twelve years, began cataloging the collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century music, while Prof. Arlan Coolidge of Brown Uni-

versity has been working on the eighteenth-century music. We have been extremely fortunate in finding so many volunteers with expertise in fields related to our collections.

The librarian wishes to express particular thanks to the members of the library committee: Catherine Morris Wright, Albert E. Lownes, N. David Scotti, Matthew J. Smith, and chairman Franklin S. Coyle. Their guidance and support during the past year have been greatly appreciated.

NANCY E. PEACE

NECROLOGY 1974

Mrs. DeForest W. Abel
 Mr. Winthrop W. Aldrich
 Mrs. Edward S. Brackett
 Mr. Edward W. Bradford
 Prof. Charles W. Brown
 Mr. Walter G. Cady
 Mr. Walter A. Connolly
 Mr. Arthur J. DeBlois
 Miss Ruth Ely
 Miss Louise L. Emerson
 Mr. Robert M. Goodrich
 Mrs. Erik E. B. Hall
 Mr. Clifford D. Heathcote
 Mr. Arnold W. Jones
 Mr. George W. Jones
 Mr. Harold A. Kirby
 Mr. Bernhard Knollenberg
 Mrs. John Lavalie
 Mrs. Robert H. Lawson
 Mrs. Hugh F. MacColl
 Miss Janet S. McLeod
 Mrs. Frank Mauran
 Mr. John C. Nash
 Mrs. Alfred K. Potter
 Mr. J. Russell Price
 Mrs. William G. Roelker
 Mrs. Allan T. Schumacher
 Mr. Francis R. Sears
 Mr. Philip Munroe Shires
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Annual Report of the Director

Nineteen hundred seventy-four was a year of accomplishments — chief among them the successful outcome of proposals to utilize Aldrich House and gardens for museum purposes on behalf of our state's history. Thanks to the leadership of our former president — Joseph K. Ott — and to that of our current president — Duncan Hunter Mauran — the Society now has one of its best opportunities in decades to enlarge its programs of displays and interpretation. Acquisition of the Gaspee House property provides some different opportunities to be outlined later.

With appreciation for the efforts of Robert H. Goff and John W. Wall, our annual giving campaign surpassed 1973's level and raised over \$28,000. Special dollar gifts to the film archive and increase of the Society's annual State appropriation to underwrite the basic cost of that enterprise were extremely gratifying. A new grant from the State Council on the Arts to support the John Brown House museum program was also a welcome addition. Annual State grants for various programs now amount to \$55,000 — more than one quarter of our total annual budget.

A major phase in the restoration of John Brown House — restoration and repair of stone and brick and painting of wood trim and fence — marked the conclusion of long awaited repairs. Visitors to the House included Rhode Island school groups, out-of-state and Rhode Island tourists, and various organizations, to a total over 3,000. The spring schoolchildren's program was radically curtailed by lack of funds for transportation in some school departments; considering that the program was a totally volunteer operation with the exception of our paid guide — William Pacheo — we are delighted with the results. In addition to school docents led by Isabel Goff and Bonnie Lisle, our own volunteers included Daniel Turner, Carol Blanck, Mrs. Bowden, Mrs. Woolman, Mrs. McQuade, Kathy Hendry, Mrs. Showman, and Mrs. Place.

Last year we attempted to increase our shows and exhibits, with center ring held by the show of paintings from our collections, staged at Bell Gallery, List Art Building, Brown University. Nearly four years in preparation, beginning with Frank H. Goodyear's cataloging the Society's paintings and his preparation of a printed catalog, this exhibition was a great success. Never have our paintings looked better nor been better appreciated as a collection. Credit is due to the scholarship of Mr. Goodyear, to Cathleen McGuigan who copy-edited *American Paintings in the Rhode Island Historical Society* and supervised entire production of the show, to Mildred C. Tilley who worked on the catalog's illustration, to Diane Rogers who indexed it, to the platoon of conservation craftsmen like George M. Cunha, Christa Gaehde, Morton Bradley, and John Washeba, who worked their alchemy to

rescue our important images and views. Over four hundred members and guests attended the show's opening and over a thousand visitors saw the collection during its stay at Brown.

A cooperative show of copperplate engravings by William Hamlin of Providence was exhibited at Slater Mill Historic Site and John Brown House. Marsha Peters — our graphics curator — and Paul Rivard — director of Slater Mill — mounted the show, highlighted by printing of three-dollar bank notes on Hamlin's original press and plates — the press given to the Society by Richard LeBaron Bowen, Jr. and preparation of the plates by courtesy of E. Andrew Mowbray.

Other exhibits included a photographic display of views of Saylesville, Rhode Island, in its heyday as a bustling mill village. For Christmas we showed a set of Chinese export porcelain — gift of Mrs. Henry D. Sharpe in memory of Mrs. Jesse H. Metcalf. Our library has also started modest exhibits of materials featuring Sarah Goddard — Providence printer; Caroline Hazard — author and educator; and a selection of letters of Nathanael Greene. You're invited to view the current exhibit of Rhode Island bank notes, culled from our collection by Tracy Thurber.

Lectures played a large part of our effort in 1974; our stated series included talks on Samuel Slater — Nathanael Greene — Providence, Immigrant City — a special program for genealogists presented by representatives of the Mormon Church — and a bicentennial workshop on the writing of local history. Members of the staff have addressed groups on behalf of the Society and the director has made monthly presentations recently on Channel 12's "Front and Center," broadcast on Saturday afternoons.

Our publications continue apace — *Rhode Island History* — *Rhode Island Historical Society Newsletter* — and *American Paintings in the Rhode Island Historical Society*. The first volume of *Papers of General Nathanael Greene* is nearly ready to go to the University of North Carolina Press. Richard K. Showman, editor; Margaret E. Cobb, Robert E. McCarthy, assistant editors; and Joyce A. E. Boulind, transcriber, have been joined three days a week by Noel P. Conlon as we get ready to handle two volumes, one in press and volume two in preparation. The project has moved from John Brown House to Aldrich House, where its staff volunteered to scrub and paint their own quarters.

Notable acquisitions which have come to the museum committee this past year have been recorded in successive issues of the newsletter. Since July — when Susan Ferguson left to conduct the archaeological dig at the Old State House and Cathleen McGuigan's project with painting show and catalog came to a close — we have had no curatorial staff at John Brown House. The slack has been helpfully taken up by volunteers

like Katherine Goddard and interns such as Lisa Krop from Brown University. We've managed almost to keep pace with incoming materials and maintain control over existing collections. Of enormous comfort in this reduced staff situation — amidst demanding current programs and plans for expanded new ones — has been the support derived from our workers at John Brown House: Virginia C. Catton, my secretary; Patricia Harris, membership secretary and bookkeeper; Jonathan O'Brien, our new custodian; and William Pacheo, tour guide.

As we look forward to new responsibilities we are glad to have been able to secure since the first of the year the services of Clifford Cone — who has managed the Aldrich House and gardens for the last eight years — and also happy to announce that Mrs. Charles Reynolds of Newport will coordinate our museum education programs. Known best to most of us as "Mame," she has been executive secretary of Oldport Association where she developed a number of highly imaginative tour programs, slide shows, and directed the interpretation program of Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House. Although with us only part-time for the present, she has already helped to make the current historical forums a smoothly running success.

This year as in the past a number of organizations have turned to us for assistance. Again we have provided work space and meeting space to both the Historical Preservation Commission and Bicentennial Commission. Shortly the Preservation Commission will move from John Brown House to join the Bicentennial Commission in occupying Old State House, formerly Sixth District Court. Restoration of that building and current publications from the Bicentennial Commission are the direct result of hundreds of hours of work and consultation under our auspices.

Recently another organization has turned to us for help, the Gaspee Chapter of the Rhode Island D.A.R. The Gaspee House at 207-209 Williams Street was so named because in the 1890s the Talbot family, who lived there, rescued a portion of Sabin's Tavern at the corner of South Main and Planet Streets and had it moved up the hill and attached to their home. Rescued in this effort were a large quantity of eighteenth-century panelling, several mantels and overmantels. In 1928 the house was sold to the Gaspee Chapter of the D.A.R. which has used it as a meeting place until this year. The chapter has been reduced in membership and feels it can no longer manage the property. In offering it to the Society in exchange for a place to meet and a home for its records, the chapter has come full circle. Its earliest meetings took place in our cabinet building on Waterman Street in the 1890s.

In accepting the property our trustees decided we could accomplish several objects. We could preserve an important

building in our immediate neighborhood; we could enjoy rental income from apartments to be developed there; we could see that objects of historical value received appropriate care and were displayed to effect, and we could assist an organization which has done much to preserve a tradition.

We are currently exploring the possibility that panelling from the original Sabin Tavern and some other details might be installed as part of the Roger Williams Spring National Park Site on North Main Street, where they would be preserved and seen by many people. You will be informed of continuing developments.

Utilizing rental income as part of the financial sources for the Society has become a possibility as the year developed. In addition to the four or five units at the Gaspee House, the Society already had the prospects of inheriting rentals from two properties next to our library when our agreement with the previous owner concludes in about two years. One of the parcels in the Aldrich gift is a three-unit apartment house at the corner of Governor and George Streets. Finally, it appears we shall find it necessary to rent the garden guesthouse at Aldrich House.

Whether or not we shall establish a realty holding company is a question before the board. It is pretty much a consensus that the Society's tax exemption will not be used for these properties and that they will pay their fair share of the community's responsibilities.

In reflecting on the Society's financial picture I would report that though our endowment has suffered during the current market slump and though our costs have risen, our income from the State has made substantial improvement and relative picture is strong provided our membership continues its support through annual dues and annual giving. Unfortunately, none of the profit and loss statements adequately reflect real or relative growth in the Society's assets as represented in our collections. Nor do they show the value of goods and services as a product of our staff and volunteer efforts. In many ways the real strengths of this Society go uncalculated and unaudited.

Another intangible dividend this year, but a very real one has been the growth of a warm bond between staff and trustees as we have worked on our several responsibilities and planned for major developments. More and more as we have regarded ourselves less as individual curators, librarians, administrators, and trustees but rather as a company of historians — both amateur and professional — our plans and projects have gone forward smoothly in a time otherwise marked by gloom, rancor, and uncertainty. I guess perspective does indeed provide some small comforts.

ALBERT T. KLYBERG

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until the Annual Meeting in 1976

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