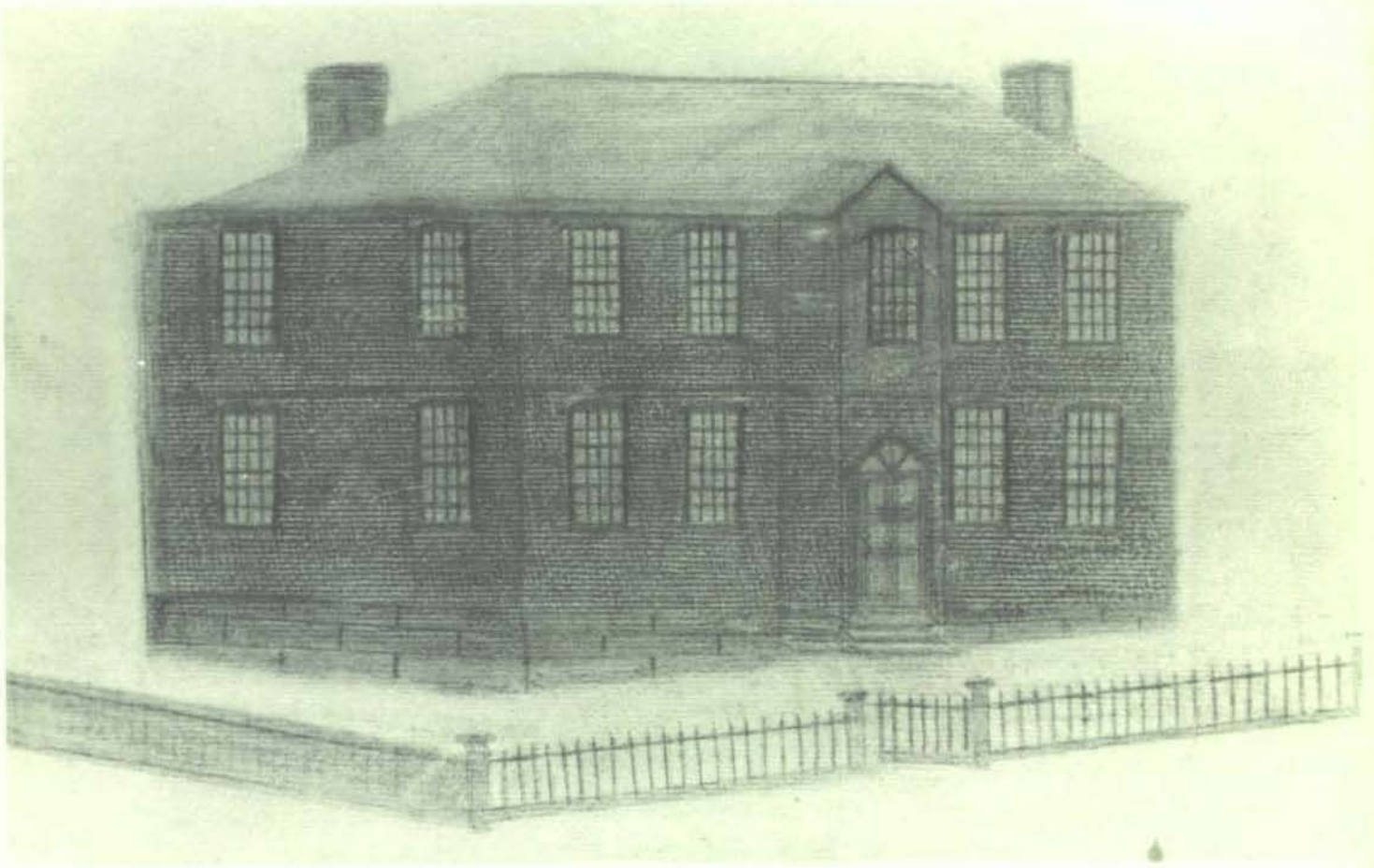


RHODE ISLAND HISTORY



VOLUME 35: 3 AUGUST 1976



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The Brick Schoolhouse on Meeting Street in Providence was appropriated during the Revolutionary War by the American Army for use as a munitions factory. Crayon and pencil drawing by Francis Read, (1810-1896).

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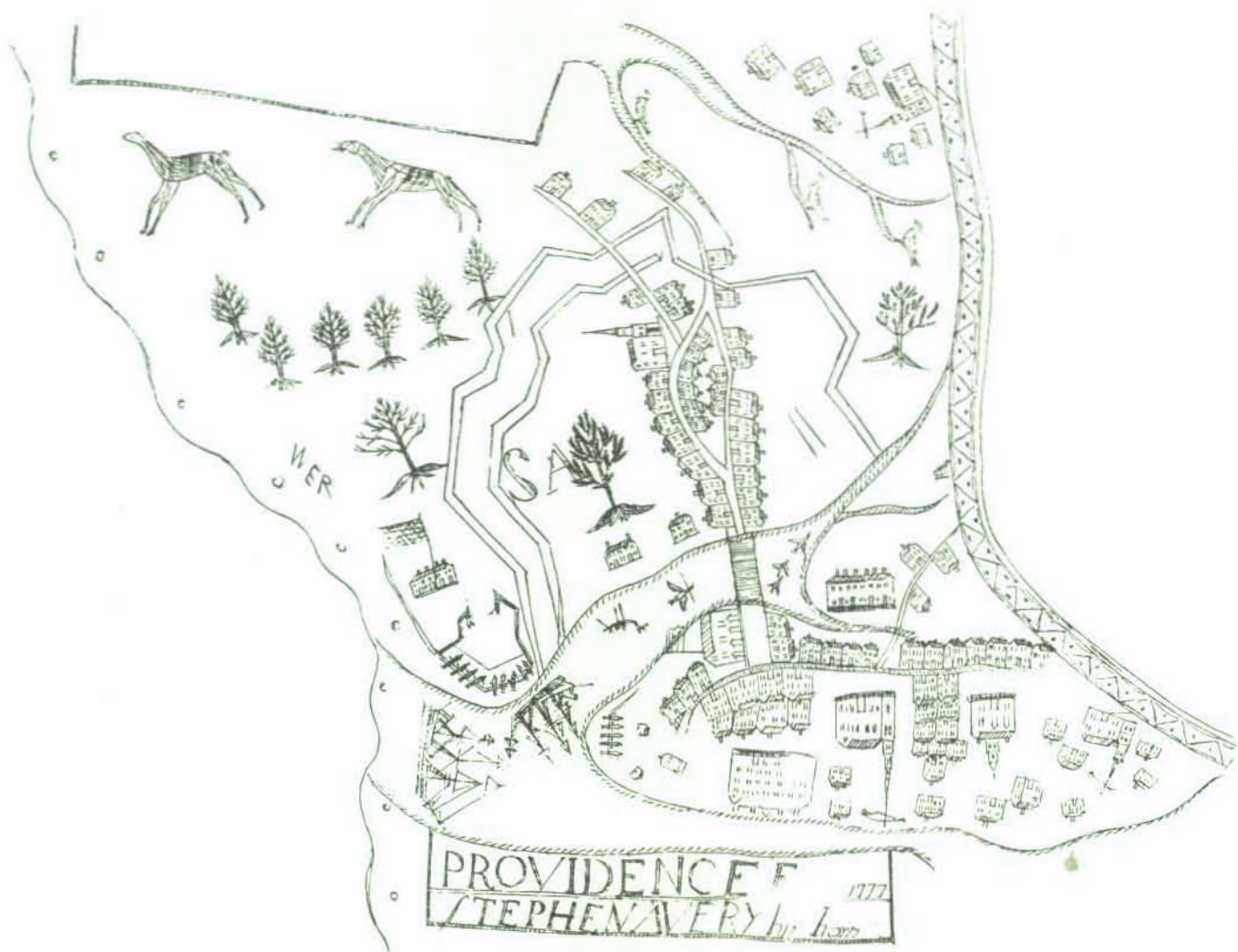
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War and revolution had come to Providence. In a symbolic view of the city depicted in this copy of a 1777 powder horn map, birds, deer, buildings piled on top of each other, coexist with a fort bristling with cannon and warships in the harbor. War was ever present but life went on.



From a copy in RIHS Library

The Revolution and the Town: Providence 1775 -1783

by Nancy Fisher Chudacoff*

For two hundred years historians of the American Revolution have focused on political events, military affairs, economic aspects and social structure, but few have attempted to assess the war's effect on urban areas and institutions. Most general histories of individual cities and even studies of urban America conclude one chapter with 1776 and begin the next with 1783, completely ignoring the intervening years when war between Great Britain and the United States severely disrupted urban life.

Using contemporary diaries, correspondence, newspapers, military, educational, church, commercial, town and state records along with secondary accounts, I have attempted to reconstruct life in Providence from 1775 to 1783. The analysis suggests that while the war disturbed normal activities and created new problems or enlarged old ones, it had virtually no lasting impact. The war probably had similar effects upon other urban areas which, like Providence, suffered no enemy occupation or wartime damage.

At the outbreak of war, the town extended north and south about a mile and a half along both sides of the Providence River, then east to the Seekonk River and west to what is now Johnston. A 1774 census enumerated 4,321 inhabitants in Providence and 655 families. A list of buildings made in 1779 indicates about 370 houses in the town. Since virtually no new building was undertaken during the war years, the figure was probably about the same in 1775. The 1779 list also shows 278 shops and stores,

some of which contained living quarters. Although a few brick mansions had been built, most of the houses and shops were of wood.¹

Shops and stores along both sides of the Providence River contained a variety of businesses which made the town a diversified commercial area, challenging Newport by 1775 as the commercial center of Rhode Island. Its location at the head of Narragansett Bay made it a logical distribution point for a growing hinterland. Sociologist Max Weber's phrase "consumer city" could describe Providence in 1775, one in which "the purchasing power of its larger consumers rests on the retail for profit of foreign products on the local market . . . the foreign sale for profit of local products or goods obtained from native producers . . . or the purchase of foreign products and their sale . . . outside."²

Most of those eighteenth-century merchants who helped make Providence a "consumer city" were well established in business by 1775. Nicholas Brown and Company, Joseph and William Russell, and Clark and Nightingale were the biggest firms selling, both wholesale and retail, native and imported merchandise. In addition to these big three there were at least 115 other firms large and small.³

Although the textile industry had not yet brought fame and fortune to Rhode Island, Providence was already a burgeoning industrial center. Within its boundaries were six distilleries and two spermaceti candle works supplying both local and foreign markets. Two tanneries, two sugar houses, two chocolate houses, two grist-

*Librarian of the Rhode Island Historical Society, Mrs. Chudacoff is also editor of this journal.

mills, a slaughter house, a potash works and a paper mill with clothier and fulling facilities serviced local needs. An iron works, the Browns' Hope Furnace, was located just outside the town.⁴

Some two hundred tradespeople and artisans representing over thirty-five different trades operated local industries and supplied goods and services for Providence and surrounding areas. Among them were housewrights and carpenters, chaise and shay makers, coopers, shipwrights, blacksmiths, butchers, tailors, hatters, barbers, pewterers, silversmiths and watch and clock makers.⁵

Providence was flourishing as 1775 began. Looking back in 1778 after three years of wartime deprivations, citizens recalled the prewar town:

*Its trade was open to almost all parts of the world, its navigation extensive and prosperous, its shops and warehouses crowded with all sorts of merchandise, its streets thronged with foreigners who came hither to advance their fortunes by trade and commerce. Shipwrights, housewrights, masons and all sorts of mechanics and laboring men, pressed with useful and profitable business and employment, and its extensive foreign trade which is the very being and life of a seaport, furnished business and support for all its numerous dependents and invigorated every class of people in town.*⁶

Patriotic fervor had been growing for several years. Local citizens in 1772 had planned and executed burning the British ship *Gaspee*. Early in 1775 many of the residents burned tea in Market Square to show support for the Congressional boycott of tea. So the town was ready for action when news from Lexington and Concord arrived on April 19, 1775. John Howland, a Revolutionary War veteran, recalled the day. He was working on the wharves when a messenger arrived: "We all followed and saw the officers of the companies and many others on the parade before Governor Bowen's seeking intelligence. The drums of the four independent companies beat and the men paraded as soon as possible." Providence men joined the Rhode Island Army of Observation which marched toward Boston several days later. In the seven years following they would fight at Princeton and Trenton, Long Island and Harlem Heights, Quebec, Delaware River forts, Springfield, Yorktown, Monmouth,

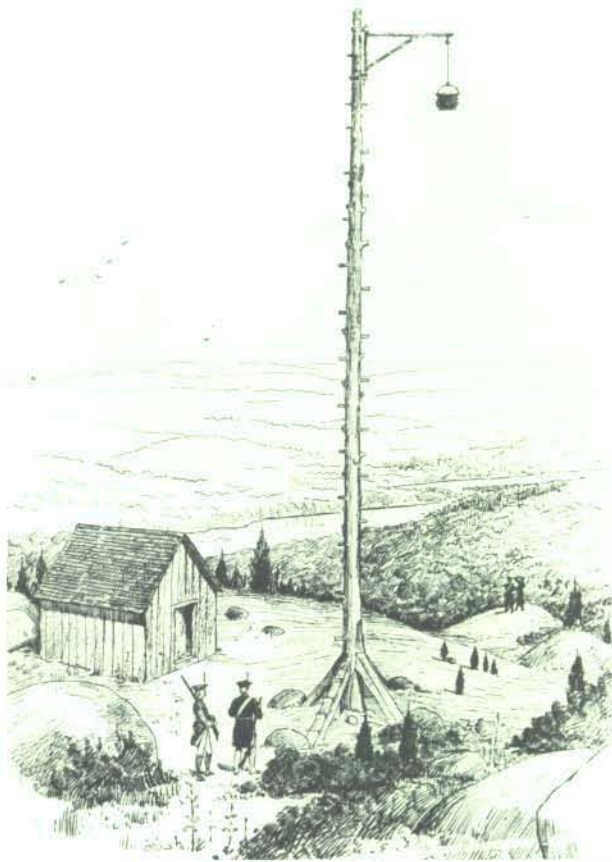
and in the battle of Rhode Island.⁷

Soon after Lexington and Concord the town meeting took steps to prepare for defense. On May 10 six men were appointed to make a survey of available men and arms, noting those who could not afford arms and ammunition. Statistics are not recorded from the 1775 count but a similar survey in 1776 showed 726 men capable of bearing arms and 497 weapons. On May 15 the meeting requested an inventory of gunpowder and lead and ordered cartridges made at the town's expense.⁸

Next, preparation began for fortifications and a warning system. On July 10 the meeting approved erection of a beacon on the "hill to the Eastward of the Town to warn the country in case of an Enemy's approach." The beacon stood at the highest point on Prospect Hill near the present intersection of Prospect and Meeting Streets. When it was completed on August 17, printed notices were distributed in the town and surrounding countryside to inform people what signals would be used. One account noted that persons in Newport, New London, Norwich, Pomfret and Cambridge spotted light from a trial firing on the night of August 17.⁹

In July the meeting also voted to build entrenchments and breastworks at Field's Point and Sassafrass Point. Fortifications were specified for Foxes Hill on Fox Point in the vicinity of what is now Brook, Thompson streets and George M. Cohan Boulevard, to contain six cannon, each an eighteen-pounder. The meeting asked the deputy governor to request the Continental Congress to reimburse the town for "erecting those temporary though necessary Works of Defense." Later, in May 1777, upon request of the town to General Joseph Spencer, commander of troops in Rhode Island, fortifications were constructed around the beacon on Prospect Hill.¹⁰

Late in 1775 a number of Newport residents, fearing British attacks, fled to Providence. British troops occupied Newport from December 8, 1776 until October 25, 1779. During this period British controlled Narragansett Bay and Providence residents were in a constant state of apprehension. On July 19, 1777 the *Providence Gazette* informed its readers that the enemy was carrying on a "War of Plunder, Rapine and Robbery and may have designs upon Providence and nearby towns . . .



Revolutionary Defences in Rhode Island by Edward Field

Providence beacon erected in 1775 at what presently is the corner of Meeting and Prospect Streets on College Hill.

upon appearance of the Enemy the Beacon will be lighted and three distinct cannon fired as an Alarm at the Approach of the Enemy when all Persons capable of bearing Arms are requested immediately to rendezvous at their several Alarm posts in order to repel those Sons of Rapine."

Such newspaper stories with reports of ill treatment of patriots by British in Newport and elsewhere kept people in Providence constantly on edge in spite of the large number of American troops stationed in town. Several observers recorded the anxiety of the times. Theodore Foster, town clerk, noted in his diary for June 7, 1778: "Expected an attack upon the town from the Enemy at Rhode Island many people set up the

great part of the night." About the same time Sarah Drowne wrote to her sister-in-law in Boston:

Solomon [Sarah's brother Dr. Solomon Drowne] arrived on Wednesday Just Before Dinner. But seeing him without the horse and Chaise a good deal lessened the Joy we should otherwise have felt on his return for we have Been in almost constant alarm this week and at Such times You know a horse and Chaise is very Necessary. But through Mercy we have not Been obliged to flee yet. But dont know how soon we shall. There were some deserters who came off Newport at the Generals this Evening who say the Enemy are Coming to Night. But how true it is Cant say. There has Been four or five forts Built this week for their Reception But that they may be frustrated in their wicked attempts to Destroy this Town is my incessant prayer.¹¹

Fortunately the British never attacked Providence. The town also escaped their raiding parties that harassed residents of North and South Kingstown, East Greenwich and Warwick. Good fortifications at Providence proved an effective deterrent. Although the town did not suffer enemy occupation, large numbers of Americans and later French soldiers were quartered here for much of the war. William R. Staples estimated 2000 men under arms in Providence County early in April 1775. In his diary Theodore Foster recorded 2000 to 3000 men quartered in town on April 3, 1776. On December 20 of the same year, General Francois L. de Malmedy, the Army's chief engineer, wrote General Charles Lee that there were 1000 to 1100 troops.¹²

The number of troops in Providence on any given day varied. The largest number were quartered there while the British occupied Newport. Some of the 2000 to 3000 men Theodore Foster observed on April 3, 1776 were only gathering before marching on to other camps. Troops massed in town in October 1777 and August 1778 in preparation for attacks on Rhode Island.

French troops moved in and out of Providence from June 1780 to May 1782. The only French remaining in town for an extended period were sick soldiers housed at a French army hospital on the Brown University campus and also in the work house. Claude Blanchard, chief French commissary officer, noted 340 Frenchmen in the Uni-

versity Hall hospital on September 12, 1780.¹³

From the various accounts and from references in military orderly books it is my impression that there were some 1000 soldiers in Providence from December 1776 to October 1779, the period during which the British occupied Newport. Since the civilian population of 1776 was slightly over 4000, these soldiers represented an increase of twenty-five percent in the town's inhabitants. Such a large number of troops had a noticeable impact on town life.

Most of the soldiers were housed in University Hall and other temporary buildings erected on College Hill. The work house was also utilized for troops and some soldiers were placed in private homes rented by the army. Officers, both French and American, on brief visits were often guests in private homes.¹⁴

Early in the war residents seem to have welcomed the troops. Theodore Foster wrote: "The people in General being very willing to make things as convenient and agreeable as possible." Townspeople turned out to watch the troops parade. Foster took his wife and friends to watch the activity. He also quartered several men in his home: "We very willingly opened our Doors to receive our fellow Countrymen and made the best Provision we were able — We Kindled a Fire in the kitchen put on the Pot and got them the best Victuals we could."¹⁵ As war dragged on, the inhabitants' enthusiasm over the soldiers appears to have waned. Food, clothing and wood were in short supply and troops competed with residents for what little was available. Both town and military records give evidence of problems that arose.

In August 1779 the town council sent a memorial to Major General Horatio Gates, commanding officer of troops in Rhode Island, stating that "complaints daily arise on Account of the Trespases, Destruction and Waste made in their gardens and cornfields by some of the troops quartered here." The memorial stated further that although the council realized the necessity of supplying troops with food, they thought it unfair for soldiers to destroy crops of individuals who had worked hard in their gardens and fields. All persons, military and civilian, should bear burdens of war equally. Therefore, Gates was asked to see that soldiers were supplied through regular channels and that citizens were compen-

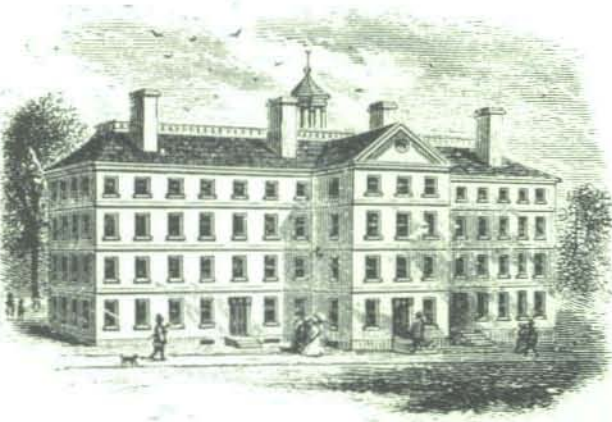
sated for anything taken from them.¹⁶

Orderly books of General John Sullivan, Gates' predecessor in Rhode Island, reveal that Sullivan was particularly sensitive to problems of a garrison town. In his general orders for March 17, 1779 he entreated soldiers "to exert themselves in preventing unnecessary Destruction of their [citizens'] fences, wood and other property." He requested his men "to give the suffering inhabitants every protection and assistance in their Power — should any be so inhumane and barbarous as to add to their distress, by wantonly destroying their Property, they may depend on being punished with that severity such inhumane conduct will justly merit."¹⁷

Besides damaged and stolen property the inhabitants had other complaints. Sullivan's general orders for December 10, 1778 noted that "Frequent Complaints having been made by the Quakers that their Worship is disturbed by the Parading of the Troops on Sundays and Thursdays. The Commander in Chief directs that the Guards are not Paraded at their usual Place of Parade on them days." Earlier, in June 1778 Sullivan had severely reprimanded soldiers for entering a Friends' meeting with fixed bayonets while searching for new enlistees who had failed to attend roll call.

Another problem was needless firing of guns which not only disturbed the peace of the town, but also wasted precious ammunition. Soldiers discharging guns without permission were to be "whipped fifty lashes upon the Spot without even the tryal of a Court Martial."¹⁸ On two different occasions in 1780 the town council expressed concern about the large quantity of powder and shells stored at several points throughout the town. The chief fear over the powder and shells was fire "as the Houses in Town are mostly of Wood and Should a Fire break out near said Magazines the Terror of an Explosion from the Powder and Shells would tend to prevent the Fire being extinguished and the Town would thereby be in Eminent Danger of entire Destruction."¹⁹

By 1780 most American troops had left Providence, but peace was still three years away and the town was now called upon to house sick and wounded soldiers from the French Army. According to records and observations, residents did not welcome the French with open arms.



RIHS Library

Classrooms of University Hall became hospital rooms for several years during the Revolutionary War.

At the end of 1779, in response to a petition from the corporation of Rhode-Island College (Brown University), the Council of War, acting in the absence of the General Assembly, voted to discontinue use of the college edifice as a barracks and hospital. Brown's president, James Manning, advertised in the *Providence Gazette* on April 29, 1780 that classes, suspended since December 1776, would resume on May 10th. Before classes could resume, the French requested use of University Hall for a hospital. Manning secured a petition from the town meeting to the General Assembly which stated that "Nothing but the utmost necessity can justify introducing a Large number of Sick into a Populous Town — We apprehend that no such necessity exists in the present case." Even though the building had recently housed sick American soldiers, the town was now weary of bearing what it felt was more than its share of the burden of quartering troops, French or American.²⁰ On June 19 the General Assembly agreed to hospitalize French soldiers in Bristol instead, but while the assembly was adjourned the council of war reappropriated University Hall. The French used the building as a hospital from June 26, 1780 to May 27, 1782.²¹

In October 1780 plans were made to house 120 French troops in the work house and others in

private homes. The French also requested permission to store baggage in the Market House. General Rochambeau, believing that Providence inhabitants charged too much for forage, decided to quarter troops in Connecticut instead.²²

Some French soldiers did stay in Providence for a short time enroute to Connecticut in November 1780. Claude Blanchard commented on problems of quartering French troops: "All these details elsewhere very easy, nevertheless, met with many difficulties among the Americans who dislike to lodge troops and who as I have already mentioned are slow and mistrustful."²³

Not everyone in Providence disliked having the French in town. Prominent citizens such as Joseph, Nicholas and John Brown hosted French officers on several occasions. John Brown wrote to his son James on November 11, 1782 that "Our House, wharf, stable and Lott is Jock full of French men, Horse, Waggins etc. etc. Every Gentleman in town takes the same officers as they did on their March westward last summer."²⁴

While citizens frequently voiced complaints about troops, soldiers often had grievances of their own. Food and clothing were usually in short supply, pay was inadequate and often delayed. Two mutinies occurred in Providence in winter 1778/1779 because of inadequate pay and another in spring 1779 when supplies of flour were exhausted.²⁵

Morale was low throughout the army after 1776 and troops here must have been no different from those elsewhere. Called away from families and homes to protect the town, enduring privations and severe weather, they cannot be blamed if their tempers sometimes flared. Court martial proceedings for June 1778 recorded the case of "Eleazer Hathaway, try'd for wishing the town of Providence on fire — Pleads Guilty Says it was Spoken in a Passion in Consequence of abuse Received from sum of the inhabitants."²⁶

Quick to chastise his soldiers for disturbing residents' peace and property, General Sullivan did not hesitate to exercise his authority when civilians interfered with orderly operations of his troops —

The irregular and disorderly behavior of some inconsiderate and riotous Persons Inhabitants or residents of this town who make it a Constant Practice to revel in the Night, Patrol the Streets,

*insult Sentries; brake open and search Houses under pretence of Authority, raise tumults in the Streets and Commit Outrages: which disgrace Human Nature and of course destroy that Tranquility of mind which every peacable inhabitant in a Garrison Town has the right to expect has occasioned the General to give out a Countersign which is to be demanded from every person passing after eleven o'Clock at Night.*²⁷

Officers attempted to keep soldiers busy to prevent boredom which contributed to low morale. Keeping troops occupied was not easy since only once was a battle fought on Rhode Island soil. Orderly books and diaries provide insights about soldiers' daily lives. Reveille sounded at one half hour before sunrise and drums beat a tattoo to end the day at ten p.m. Troops paraded four hours daily, once beginning at ten a.m. for two hours and another two hours at four p.m. Parading was one of the few means of exercise for troops not marching from place to place or engaged in battle.²⁸

Strict rules regulated behavior and dress. Few aspects of soldiers' routine were overlooked, not even bathing habits. One orderly book recorded that "neither officers nor soldiers in this regiment go into the water to wash themselves more than twice a week and that they do not stay in the water more than eight minutes at one time."²⁹ Evidently the general soon reconsidered the twice a week rule, for a short time later this order was recorded: "The General has been informed that the Soldiers enger their health by going into the water too frequently and Remaining in too long; he therefore Desires the officers will Recommend to their Soldiers not to go into the water, only Night and Morning and then not to stay in but a little while."³⁰

Extant diaries indicate that much of the average day of a soldier here was spent gathering provisions or standing guard. Private Nahum Parker of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, stationed in Providence from October 7 to December 25, 1779, gives several examples: October 19, 1779 — "I came of Gard Dull Doings I had a letter from Home." November 9, 1779 — "I was on gard Last Night and Stood Eight hours and a Toof Spell we had of It. We was Relieved Drawd Provisions." November 10, 1779 — "Hemenway and we went after wood I had a write good dinner today and it is the first good Diner I have had this good while

and must go and mend my shoe Now for I must go on gard tomorrow."³¹

Drinking alcoholic beverages seems to have been a primary leisure time activity for soldiers. On June 4, 1778 adjutant to the general William Peck wrote to Arthur Fenner, president of the town council: "Sir — I am directed by General Sullivan to request that you'll move in the Town Council for some method to be taken to suppress the progress of the many Tipling Houses and Grogg Shops in Town which are so fatal, not only to many of the inhabitants but to the Soldiery in general — you may depend on any assistance you shall request from the General to reduce their growing number."³²

Obviously some residents were making money by providing soldiers with their daily drams. Lists of tavern licenses granted by the town council show that from 1770 through 1775 there were an average of fourteen licenses granted each year with a high of nineteen in 1773. By 1776 the number had jumped to twenty-seven. From 1776 through 1781 the average number of persons licensed each year was thirty-six with a high of fifty in 1778. In 1782, after most troops had left, the number dropped to seventeen. So in 1778 there was one tavern or inn dispensing alcoholic beverages for every 100 persons — man, woman, child and soldier — in town. Army officers had just cause for complaint.

The town council apparently took no action on Sullivan's initial request, for in September adjutant Peck wrote again to Fenner.³³ By October the council's only response was a threat to prosecute those who attempted to sell liquor without a license. The council's warning did not satisfy Sullivan's successor, Major General Gates, who asserted his military authority by ordering his adjutant to "forthwith visit all such persons as Comes within the description of sutters, dram sutters or keeping of Tipling Houses to Seize the liquors abolish the traffick if necessary to confine the persons who are to be tried and punished at the Discretion of a Brigade Court Martial." If this order were carried out, it would have been one of the few times, except for setting curfews or requisitioning supplies, that military officers usurped the town government's authority. No references to enforcement of the order appear in town records.³⁴

Except for the few instances noted above, the military seems to have interfered seldom in Providence's government. However the military had authority over the town in defense matters such as positioning of fortifications and posting of guards. Military control in these matters actually relieved a burden the town had assumed in 1775 and 1776. Town records indicate no clashes between local government and military authorities.

Military occupation caused little change in the structure of local government. The town meeting and council governed as usual with advice and consent of the freemen. Elections were held regularly although the number of proxies voted dropped from a high of 226 in 1776 to a low of eighty-five in 1778. Not until 1782 did the number again reach over 200. Low figures from 1777 through 1781 probably reflect freemen absent serving in the militia or army or those residing elsewhere for the duration of the war. There must have been difficulties filling many appointive and elective town offices.

While the structure of town government was not altered, some normal concerns were subordinated while others were enlarged and new responsibilities added. Road building and repair which usually absorbed much of the town's attention virtually ceased from 1775 to 1782 except when necessary for access to fortifications. The town council continued to devote itself to administrative matters such as appointing guardians and executors and issuing licenses, but problems of poor relief, increased by the war, absorbed much of its time. Both council and meeting convened much more frequently to handle war related matters such as raising troops, paying bounties, meeting quotas of food and clothing for the army, and handling complaints about high taxes, inflation, and food shortages.

Demands throughout the states for solutions to problems of rising prices moved up from freemen through town meetings to state legislatures and on to the Continental Congress. When representatives from the four New England states met, at Rhode Island's behest, in Providence on December 27, 1776 to discuss rising cost of commodities and services, imported goods were selling wholesale at five to six hundred percent above the prime cost and retailing at forty to fifty percent above wholesale. The Providence conference recommended that

each state establish a schedule fixing wages and prices. Price fixing was nothing new to Americans for it had been used since the early seventeenth century. Rhode Island's General Assembly enacted controls in January 1777, but these soon fell into disuse. Two more conferences in 1778 continued to recommend controls, but price fixing never became an effective method of limiting inflation since merchants ignored regulations or held goods off the markets until prices rose.³⁵

Shortages and high prices which occurred here and elsewhere early in the war were both real and artificial. Providence had never purchased all its food supplies in Rhode Island, relying on products from Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York. But at the beginning of war these states placed embargoes on out of state food shipments causing critical shortages in Providence. Rhode Island governors wrote repeatedly to the other states and to the Continental Congress urging that embargoes be ended. Finally in spring 1779 Connecticut agreed to sell grain to Rhode Island.³⁶

Bread shortages were especially severe. In August 1778 Paul Allen, son-in-law of former governor Nicholas Cooke, wrote to Deputy Governor Jabez Bowen: "The universal cry for bread is very alarming in our streets. I believe I speak within bounds when I tell you that there are a hundred families in the Town who have not a mouthful of bread in their houses, nor can they get it with their money. Whenever a bushel of corn is brought in from the country, the owner extorts from the poor purchaser eight dollars — and were he to ask twenty he would get it."³⁷

Winter 1778/1779 was particularly hard. The Bay froze over for six weeks. By January 1779 the grain situation had become so distressing that the town council ordered an inventory of available bread supplies which revealed 275 families wholly destitute of grain and 177 more with less than one bushel. Not until early spring when grain was obtained from Connecticut was the shortage alleviated.³⁸

Withholding goods from the market to wait for higher prices created artificial shortages. Professor James B. Hedges indicates that Nicholas Brown held flour in storage in New Bedford while shortages existed in Providence and elsewhere. No doubt other merchants throughout the states did

State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations.

In COUNCIL of WAR, October 2, 1779.

RESOLVED, That there be three thousand pair of good yarn stockings collected from the towns in this State, to be proportioned according to the apportionment made in September 1778, and is as follows, viz.

	Pair.		Pair.
Providence - - - -	408	Exeter - - - -	96
Warwick - - - -	180	Bristol - - - -	84
Westerly - - - -	108	Tiverton - - - -	132
North-Kingstown - - - -	168	Little-Compton - - - -	120
South-Kingstown - - - -	324	Warren - - - -	36
East-Greenwich - - - -	96	Cumberland - - - -	84
Smithfield - - - -	192	Richmond - - - -	72
Scituate - - - -	144	Cranston - - - -	132
Gloucester - - - -	120	Hopkinton - - - -	96
Charlestown - - - -	84	Johannston - - - -	60
West-Greenwich - - - -	72	North-Providence - - - -	60
Coventry - - - -	84	Barrington - - - -	48
			3,000

RHIS Library

Rhode Island's citizens supported the war effort in many ways. This portion of a broadside announcing a stocking levy indicates how pressing was the need for even the most ordinary items. Tax collectors purchased the stockings for not more than three pounds (lawful money) per pair.

likewise. People who purchased large quantities of goods to retail at higher prices caused another problem. On September 6, 1777 forty-two freemen signed a petition protesting "the Exhorbitant Prices of many of the Necessary Articles of Life . . . in a great Measure occasioned by the Ingenious tho perhaps not Designing Conduct of a number of persons of this Town — These persons by giving greater Prices than the Inhabitants in General will submit to engross the greatest part of the Clothes, Butter, Cheese, Cider, Fruit brought to this market." Complaints such as this one about engrossing and forestalling were common throughout the states during the Revolution and were indicative of long standing animosity toward business interests. The town meeting responded to that petition by ordering all goods sold on the open market and stipulating that no one purchase a greater quantity of goods than judged necessary by overseers of the poor.³⁹

Not only did residents have to contend with

high prices caused by engrossing and forestalling, but they were forced to compete with the army for limited supplies of food and fuel. Commissary officers were empowered to requisition supplies when necessary but commanding officers tried to see that citizens were treated fairly. The need to supply the army sometimes meant that inhabitants had to do without. In a letter of August 1, 1778 to his uncle Elisha Brown, Moses Brown wrote that the people "say they have no bread nor cant buy any to the Bakers by reason of their being Otherwise engaged . . . Perhaps tomorrow the Bakers maybe allowed to Sell Bread again as I conclude they are taken up to Supply the Soldiers." Competition over food exacerbated tensions between soldiers and civilians.⁴⁰

Some people kept gardens as a 1779 list of houses in Providence shows. Theodore Foster's diaries contain several references to working in his garden. Gardens might have alleviated food shortages for some families but could not provide

staples such as flour, sugar and salt. Necessity did spark ingenuity. An enterprising citizen placed the following advertisement in the *Providence Gazette* on August 30, 1777: "Mr Carter: Please to insert the following for the benefit of your Readers. The juice of Corn-Stalks when well ground, strained and boiled is almost equal to Cane-Juice for the Purpose of making good Melasses. Plenty of good sugar may likewise be produced from it." Unfortunately with corn in such short supply, corn stalks must not have been plentiful.

Providence was not the only town to suffer shortages during the war. Newport also endured extreme hardships as did many towns in all thirteen states. Although local records and correspondence portray the distress food shortages caused, none of the documents indicates if people died or were diseased because of lack of food.⁴¹

Care of the poor, which in ordinary times took much of any eighteenth-century town's budget, became an even greater burden during the war. To the usual component of Providence's poor were added refugees from Aquidneck Island — Newport, Portsmouth, Middletown — made destitute by inflation. Soldiers' families unable to support themselves while husbands and fathers were in service also required aid. Although it is impossible to calculate exact figures from town records, scattered evidence of expenditures indicates a sizeable increase in the number of poor cared for at the town's expense.⁴²

During war years the state of Rhode Island suspended its usual practice of leaving poor relief entirely in the hands of the towns by agreeing to reimburse Providence and other towns for care of Newport's poor. But the town still had to provide the immediate funds. Money for poor relief was usually raised by taxation but an already overburdened citizenry could not bear continual tax levies. In 1778 the town council resorted to requesting public donations to care for over 300 needy Newporters. Local churches also helped. The First Baptist Church took a biweekly collection and Rhode Island Friends aided local Quakers in need.⁴³

Finding housing to accommodate those in need became a problem. The traditional system of caring for the poor was outdoor relief — direct grants to individuals or families to maintain themselves in their own homes. Others, because of

age or illness, were boarded in homes of relatives or neighbors at the town's expense. The work house also housed the poor but during war years troops were barracked there in spite of town meeting protests that the space was needed for the homeless. Shortage of places for all those who needed to be boarded out forced overseers of the poor to place an advertisement in the *Providence Gazette* asking persons in the country to take in some of the town's poor.⁴⁴

While seventeenth- and eighteenth-century American towns willingly assumed responsibility for caring for their own residents who were in need, they also attempted to exclude from residence non-residents who might require financial assistance. Periodically the town council examined undesirable and "warned" them out of town. However, the council warned out fewer persons than in the years immediately preceding and following the war. Records indicate a substantial decline in the number of persons warned out or denied settlement rights. In 1774 the council had interviewed thirty-four people and rejected each one. By 1777 the number warned out dwindled to two. Between 1777 and 1782 no more than three were warned out. In 1783 the number rose to seven, to twelve in 1784 and to twenty-two in 1785.

No evidence exists to explain the smaller number of warnings out from 1775 to 1783. Perhaps the town was too busy with other matters or was moved by a sense of sympathy for those displaced by the war. On the other hand, it is also possible that the number of warnings out declined because no one desired to come to Providence while there was danger from the British and while food was in short supply. Even residents of the town fled elsewhere.

Next to poor relief, expenditures relating to care and prevention of smallpox absorbed most of the town's treasury. While everyone throughout America feared smallpox, Rhode Islanders' fears often verged on hysteria as wartime precautions indicate.⁴⁵

Movement of large numbers of troops and other persons into and through Providence prompted officials to take every step possible to prevent an epidemic of the dread disease. In June 1776 when the General Assembly passed a law permitting inoculation hospitals in each county, the town began searching for a suitable site. By August the

Colony of Rhode-Island, &c.

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, June Session, 1776.

An ACT permitting INOCULATION for the SMALL-POX to be practised in this Colony.

WHEREAS the Small-Pox hath made the most dreadful Ravages in the Army lately before *Quebec*, which was a principal Cause of raising the Blockade of that City; and there is great Danger that the Inhabitants of the United Colonies may, by the Prevalence of that dreadful Distemper, be rendered incapable of Defence, at a Time when their Safety may depend upon the most vigorous Exertions: And whereas that Disorder, taken by Inoculation, is so easy and light, and the Method of Treatment so beneficial, that any Number of Persons inoculated would be more likely to live than the same Number of Persons not inoculated; and as by introducing the Practice of Inoculation with Prudence and Caution, the greater Part of the male Inhabitants of the Colonies may soon get over that terrible Disease, by which Means the fatal Consequences to be apprehended, from our Armies being infected with it, will be averted:

RIHS Library

Portion of a broadside announcing measures to prevent the spread of small pox. The act provided for establishing a hospital in each county of the state and a system of penalties to guard against spreading the disease from the hospital to surrounding areas.

hospital was operating at Tockwotton and 100 patients had been inoculated. Early in 1777 when the military judged the Tockwotton site to be of strategic importance, the hospital was closed and later moved to North Providence. In order to encourage as many residents as possible to undergo inoculation, the town assumed payment for those who could not afford the expense. Judging from bills in the town papers, a substantial number of inhabitants elected to undergo inoculation either at their own or the town's expense.⁴⁶

While encouraging its own residents to be inoculated, Providence attempted to prevent entrance to persons from diseased areas. If a ship arriving in harbor was suspected of coming from an area infected by smallpox or if anyone on board had the disease, the infected person had to be removed to the pest house and the ship washed and smoked before any sailors or passengers could disembark. The town hired a doctor to issue certificates such as this one that a ship was free of disease: "This may certify the Town Council that the sloop Enterprise James Wescott Last Master is well washed and Smoked out So that it appears to me She is virtually Clean from any infection of the Small pox, from your humble servant Ephraim Carpenter." Not only did ships have to

be certifiably free of smallpox, but also the certifying doctor was required to change and wash his clothes immediately after coming off ship.⁴⁷

When news of a smallpox outbreak in Boston reached Providence in July 1776, the town meeting took elaborate precautions. It requested the ferry operator not to transport anyone coming from a town where the disease was known to be prevalent. A pest house was provided to "smoke and cleanse persons who have come out of the Town of Boston or other infected places." Then Theodore Foster, town clerk, wrote to Smithfield and North Providence requesting that guards be placed at the Pawtucket and Cumberland bridges to prevent infected persons from entering Rhode Island. Next the town meeting chose several men to visit Boston to request army commanders there that troops be detoured around Providence on their march from Boston to New York.⁴⁸

The town's efforts were not completely successful, for town papers contain many notices of people infected with smallpox who were required to be moved to the pest house. Expenses for caring for poor people infected with the disease and for those who died also appear. Although other cities such as Boston and Philadelphia were hard hit, Providence escaped a major epidemic during the

war.

While the town government was facing additional problems, war was also affecting normal commercial activities. Contemporary commentators and recent historians have painted differing pictures of the extent to which war impaired business enterprises. In correspondence with government officials and business associates, Providence businessmen emphasized hardships and shortages during the war years. In contrast, using business records of several firms, two recent historians found evidence to contradict contemporary accounts.

A petition from town meeting to the General Assembly protesting the town's share of a state tax levy typifies the contemporary public version of the state of business affairs:

Our port has been blockaded for more than twelve months, our stores and shops are almost empty, our navigation demolished, our ship building at an end, our houses already built, many of them standing empty and going to decay by slow degrees, or more suddenly and wantonly ruined and destroyed by barracking troops in them, many foreigners resident among us as well as others our most wealthy inhabitants who made the principal figure in our trade have packed up their fortunes and removed to places of greater security. The common sort of people who are left behind are mostly out of employment, and the poor are yet among us to be supported by the remaining persons of property.

Since this petition was intended to support the town's argument for a reduced share of the state tax, its propaganda value must be recognized.⁴⁹

There was some truth in that 1778 description. The "List of Houses in Providence in 1779" recorded many buildings standing vacant or in disrepair. A number of inhabitants moved for the war's duration into interior areas in northwestern Rhode Island, eastern Connecticut or central Massachusetts. Prominent merchants sent wives and children out of town, but remained behind to conduct business, visiting their families when possible.⁵⁰

Outward movement of property holders caused some concern among those remaining who feared having to assume a greater share of the town's tax burden. On February 6, 1776, the town meeting expressed an opinion that "at this critical period

it is absolutely essential for our safety that the inhabitants on this town should not desert the same by Removing into the Country." The meeting appointed a committee to draw up regulations concerning removal but subsequent records do not indicate if any action was taken. A 1777 report stated that 130 ratable polls had left, causing real estate value to sink twenty-five percent. Not only did the war halt population growth in Providence, but by 1782 the number of inhabitants (4310) had dropped below the 1774 figure (4321).⁵¹

The war's economic impact was not constant from 1775 to 1783. From the beginning of 1775 until British occupation of Newport in December 1776, Providence merchants, unfettered by British trade restrictions, seem to have profited. Colonial import duties were removed and Newport's custom house monopoly was eliminated. John Howland later recalled, "The year 1776 was mostly employed in privateering and many whom I had left in poor circumstances were now rich men. The wharves were crowded with large ships from Jamaica and other Islands loaded with Rich products." Ezra Stiles, former pastor of the Second Congregational Church in Newport and later president of Yale, wrote in November 1776 that Providence entrepreneurs accumulated "near Three Hundred Thousand Sterling which is double the Property of the whole Town two years ago."⁵²

After the British occupied Newport the situation changed, for although some boats managed to sneak through the blockade of Narragansett Bay, merchants had to find new ways of bringing goods into Providence. Rather than risk cargoes and lives by attempting to run the blockade, the Browns, Welcome Arnold and others brought their ships into neighboring ports such as New Bedford or New London. Goods were then carted overland to Providence or to warehouses in North Providence and Smithfield out of reach of British guns or raiding parties.⁵³

Although merchants complained about shortages, historian Franklin Coyle indicates "a given shortage was rapidly corrected when the right price was obtained in the market place." The war created a sellers' market for Providence merchants. No longer did they take their goods to country markets since the countryside came to them.

While the number of different retailers advertising in the *Providence Gazette* diminished during the war, larger concerns stocked a wide variety of merchandise for those who had money. In February 1778 Joseph and William Russell advertised "a few Brass Kettles, Warming Pans, Pewter dishes and plates, knives and Forks, Brass handles and Escutcheons, Desk locks." John Brown on November 22, 1777 had "for cash only Good bohea, Congo and best green tea; a few hogsheads of St Croix rum, a few bolts of Russia duck and genbrigs, 6 or 700 Yards of shirting linen or Britanias . . . sugar . . . a few cases of geneva, two bags of cotton wool and a quantity of logwood and mahogany." If food and firewood were in short supply, consumer goods did not seem to be.⁵⁴

To be Sold by
Joseph and William Russell,

B roadcloths, Kerseys, Rattees, Serges, Baizē, Coatings, Checks, Shaloons, Calimanco, Velvet, Fustians;	Jeans, Dimothy, Corderoy, German Cord, Handkerchiefs, Morocco Leather, A Variety of Hard Ware, Madeira and Foyal Wine.
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Providence Gazette and Country Journal December 26, 1778

Business historian Robert East asserted in 1938 that Providence merchants profited by the war. East's contention may never be definitely proven since most business records have not survived. Intensive studies of two Providence firms by Coyle and James B. Hedges generally support East's view. Coyle's research into Welcome Arnold's business records indicates that Arnold profited during the war and was one of the few merchants during war years to rise into front ranks of the town's commercial elite. About the Brown brothers, Hedges writes that the war "did not greatly change their position in the scale of business prominence. At its beginning they belonged to the somewhat select group of long established successful businessmen. At its end they were still

in that category. In the interval they neither suffered catastrophic reverses nor achieved astonishing successes." Since none of the large merchant firms went out of business, it appears that financially the business community or at least its upper stratum remained relatively stable during the war.⁵⁵

Coyle contends that composition of the merchant class remained substantially the same throughout the war, and in contrast to claims of such historians as Richard Hildreth, Charles and Mary Beard, J. Franklin Jameson and others, he maintains that the Revolution did not upset the existing class structure by creating a newly rich group while older elites declined. Using tax records, census lists, newspaper advertisements, town and state archives and business records, Coyle found 118 merchant firms active before the war. Seventy-one were still in business at war's end while nineteen merchants had died and fifty new companies had been established. He asserts that many of the fifty new firms were merely regroupings of older businessmen and did not represent a new monied class. Although Coyle's figures indicate a remarkable persistence among the town's merchants, his conclusion does not of course apply to other towns such as Newport or New York which had large numbers of Loyalist merchants who left during the war. Providence had virtually no Tories.⁵⁶

Coyle has also compiled informative statistics for the town's tradespeople and artisans. Of 217 active and occupying shops in 1774, only forty-two were left at the end of the war. Only sixteen had died while 100 new tradespeople established themselves in Providence from fall 1779 to war's end. Disappearance of so many is difficult to explain. Using evidence from the Regimental Book in the state's archives, Coyle found that most enlistees were tradesmen. Death or injury from war service then might account for a portion of those who disappeared. Some may have moved to Norwich or New Bedford which Providence merchants were using as depots or may have followed merchant families to interior towns. With less stake here these tradespeople might have remained where they were or moved on rather than return when war was over. Some may have moved inland and turned to farming to feed themselves and their families. Similarity of English names

and lack of other identifying data make tracing individuals in censuses and tax lists difficult. If adequate methods of record linkage were available, it would be possible to see if Providence tradespeople moved to other towns or nearby areas of Massachusetts and Connecticut.⁵⁷

While certain trades such as house and ship building were in less demand during the war, need for others should have remained relatively constant. Tailors and seamstresses were kept busy supplying clothes for the army. Distilleries must have been in full production making rum for soldiers and the town's many taverns as well as for export. Advertisements requested tailors to make clothes for the army and sought apprentices in printing, paper making and other businesses. But if skilled labor were in such short supply, why did so many skilled workers leave town?⁵⁸

Of one hundred new tradespeople who came during the war, some transferred businesses from Newport. One related his story in the *Providence Gazette* on February 7, 1778 — "John Ewen, Stay-maker, Late from Newport Takes this method to acquaint the ladies that he carries on his trade at Mr. Whitman's on the west side of the great bridge; and as he was drove from the above place, by the distress of the present day, hopes they will favor him with their custom." Despite one hundred new tradespeople there was a net decline of fifty-nine at the end of the war. There is simply not enough evidence now to explain the low persistence rate of tradespeople and artisans in comparison to merchants — its significance may be that war hit the skilled worker and small trader harder than it did the large businessman.

An analysis of property valuation lists from

WANTED to be made up, a great Quantity of woollen Cloathing, for the Continental Army. All Taylors who are desirous of Employ, are requested to call on Colonel Daniel Tillinghast, or Nicholas and John Brown, and take the Materials as soon as possible, as the Cloaths are much wanted in the Army.

1777 to 1784 reveals no change in distribution of wealth in Providence. In 1784, as in 1776, a handful of families controlled the major part of the town's property while the bulk of the population divided the remaining fraction (*see appendix*).

There was no discernible change in women's economic roles. Some women, perhaps, took over businesses while men were in service. One who tried to fill in during her brother's absence was Sarah Drowne, sister of Solomon Drowne, physician and apothecary, to whom she wrote on August 17, 1778:

Dadda says if he should find himself able he may go to Boston but dont expect it tho he is a little Better for I am turned Apotocary Since your Absence. But Dont impute his Being Better to that I have made him some pills off Cherry tree and Barbary Bark.

It is a good Deal Sickly in town which makes Customers for you and puzzells us a good Deal to find out your [] — and we have had a hunt over the shop to find your Magnesia But could not so Send me word and how you sell the Large voials the Small ones are a shilling.⁵⁹

Aside from this letter I have found no other direct evidence of women taking over businesses while men were at war. Since it was common for colonial women to assume businesses upon the absence or death of male relatives, Providence's women probably did the same if need arose.

One measure of wartime disruptions may be a comparison of criminal records before, during, and after the war. Unfortunately, Providence records for the period are currently unavailable. The only index of extent of criminal activities is advertisements for stolen property. Such notices and accounts of breaking and entering increased substantially from 1776 to 1782. As orderly books indicate, some thieves were probably soldiers; however, with food, fuel and clothing in short supply, many, both soldiers and civilians, must have been driven to desperation.

At least one minister was concerned about the war's effect on morality. Two letters by James Manning to a fellow English clergyman, one early in the war and one at the end, give insight into the town's religious state. The first describes a great religious revival here in late 1774 and early 1775 during which Manning baptised over 100 persons in six months. Then Lexington and

Concord came "like an Electric Stroke, filled every mind with Horror and Confusion, and Strange to tell, everyone would have thought it would have promoted Seriousness among us, operated the very Reverse, for since that fatal Day [April 19, 1775], Languor and Abatement of Zeal for God, seem greatly to have obtained: and the Instances of Conversion and Addition to the Church, but rare." Records of Providence's First Baptist Church support Manning's description. Its register of members listed 114 new names in 1775, thirteen in 1776, four in 1777. Lists 1778-1783 appear incomplete.⁶⁰

In 1783 a war weary Manning resumed correspondence with his British friend, movingly summarizing some of the war's effects —

*The calamities of the War fell heavily upon us. First a Dispersion of our Church and Congregation upon the coming of the King's army to Rhode Island. . . . This was immediately followed with the evils attendant on a garrison as we became a frontier. The dreadful Effects of this upon the morals of the Inhabitants which remained I need not mention. But what of all things was to me the most distressing was the Lukewarming of almost all and the total Apostacy of many of the Profession. The contagion became general — The Places of Worship almost abandoned — alarms upon alarms threatened us with that desolating Devastation which spread with such rapidity along our Coasts — The College quite broken up and the Edifice occupied by a rude and wasting Soldiery, first for Barracks, then for a Hospital, till they threatened its almost total Demolition. Best Languages would fail to paint in proper colours, the Horrors of these Days.*⁶¹

Whether war affected all Providence denominations as it did Baptists is questionable. William R. Staples asserts that it disrupted the First Congregational or Presbyterian church. The Anglican or Episcopal church, St. John's was torn by divided loyalties. Its rector insisted on reading the usual prayers for the king, but its almost totally patriot congregation refused to hear and the church closed for most of the war.⁶²

The town's Friends were probably least affected by the war. As conscientious objectors, many did not serve in the army or militia. Monthly meeting records show few references to the war except for the Meeting for Sufferings, responsible for poor

relief. Providence Quakers, including Moses Brown, were subject to some public criticism for their pacifist stance.⁶³

As Manning noted in his 1783 letter, war also disrupted educational pursuits in Providence. Two days after the British occupied Newport in December 1776, American troops appropriated University Hall, the main college building. Classes were suspended, hopefully to reopen in the spring, but in May students learned that "in the present State of Public affairs, the Prosecution of Studies here is utterly impracticable, especially while this continues a garrisoned Town." American troops remained in University Hall until April 20, 1780. Manning, also the college's president, immediately attempted to resume classes, but by June the French were demanding use of the building for a hospital. Despite Manning's attempts to have the hospital located elsewhere, French troops occupied the college from June until May 12, 1782.⁶⁴

American and French occupation of University Hall and two other school buildings also interrupted secondary education. A grammar school and a writing school in University Hall also suspended classes for the duration of the war. Whipple Hall or the North School house at Benefit and Halsey, and the Brick School house, still standing on Meeting Street, housed semi-public or free schools. The American army appropriated both for manufacturing ammunition. Like University Hall the two school buildings sustained heavy damages.⁶⁵

Notices for several private schools appeared in 1778 and 1779, but I found no evidence indicating that any actually commenced classes. Newspaper advertisements for spelling books and primers may indicate that schooling continued in private homes. Even so Providence's educational institutions seemed to have suffered most heavily during the war by an almost absolute cessation of activity for at least five years.⁶⁶

Although the war years were generally dreary for the town's residents, there were moments of respite during public celebrations or private parties. Some tried to forget the war for a short while at one of many local taverns. Much social entertainment was provided by or for the military. Arrival of George Washington or other eminent American and French officers usually occasioned



Skittles or ninepins depicted in an 18th-century English catchpenny print.

Catchpenny Prints Dover Publications, Inc.

parades, dinners, and balls. Theodore Foster described Washington's arrival on August 5, 1776 en route from Boston to New York: "There was a Great concourse of People Many having come a Number of Miles to have a Sight of His Excellency the Houses through the Street were full of Women the Eminences covered with Men." The next night prominent gentlemen entertained Washington and several other officers at Hackers Hall. Providence celebrated Washington's second visit March 11, 1781 in the following manner: "In the Evening the Town, the Shipping in the Harbour, were beautifully illuminated. On Wednesday an elegant Entertainment was provided at the State-House, at which were present his Excellency, the military gentlemen who attended him here, a Number of the Inhabitants etc. After dinner Thirteen Toasts were drank under discharges of Cannon; and the Evening concluded with a splendid Ball which was honored by the Presences of his Excellency General Washington, Gen. Howe, etc. etc." Count de Rochambeau stayed at least five times in 1780, 1781 and 1782. He was usually entertained in private homes, but repaid the town's hospitality with a ball on November 18, 1782.⁶⁷

While dinner parties in private homes were usual forms of entertainment, Providence's elite sometimes journeyed outside town for social gatherings. Claude Blanchard, French commissary general, recorded two such occasions. In August 1780 General James M. Varnum took him "two miles from the city to a sort of garden where different persons had met and were playing ninepins." In September Blanchard attended another

country party, "a sort of pic-nic given by a score of men to a company of ladies. The purpose of this party was to eat a turtle weighing three or four hundred pounds." Carl Bridenbaugh notes that "turtle frolics" were a popular form of entertainment for colonial aristocrats.⁶⁸

Anniversaries of the signing of the Declaration of Independence provided opportunities for celebration in which all social classes could participate in one way or another. Troops stationed in Providence also joined in festivities. On July 4, 1778 soldiers and civilians staged a mock attack on the town's redoubts. Thirteen cannon were fired from forts at Fox, Fields and Kettle points and from the ship *Defense*. General Sullivan, with a party of ladies and gentlemen, observed activities from the ship while "the vast Concourse of People that covered the Hills and the road and repeated Acclamations of Joy, greatly contributed to the Grandeur of the Scene."⁶⁹

Other than Fourth of July celebrations, private parties, occasional parades and balls, the town had no formal public entertainment. Its first theatrical performance in 1762 was followed almost immediately by a General Assembly ban on plays which lasted until 1794. Residents could not turn to the stage to take their minds off the war as did New Yorkers and others. No notices of public entertainment appeared in the *Providence Gazette* from the beginning of 1776 until February 10, 1781 when readers learned that on "Monday, the 12th and Wednesday following Mr. Templeton of Virginia will perform Various Equilibriums on the Slack Wire at the State House. He balances, turns and swings on the wire to Admiration. He

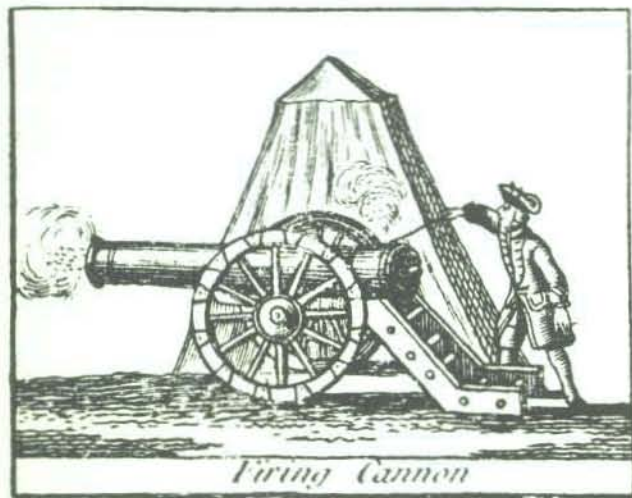
beats the drum on the Wire in full Swing. He plays with several Balls on the Wire, with great Dexterity. He balances a Sword on the Brim of a Wine Glass. . . . Tickets for the performance are sixty dollars each." The *Gazette* did not publish a review of the performance.⁷⁰

If opportunities for fun had been few during war years, on April 25, 1783 everyone in town had a chance to celebrate Congress's April 11 proclamation with the following festivities:

At the moment of sun-rising Thirteen heavy Cannon were discharged from the Beacon Battery, the Bells of the several Places of Worship were rang, and the Flag of the United States, with that of France, displayed at the State House, and on Liberty-Pole. The Continental Frigate Alliance, lying in the River, and the Shipping in the Harbour, displayed their Colours, and fired salutes in Honor of the Day. At Ten o'clock his Excellency, the Governor, his Honor the Deputy Governor, with several other Gentlemen of the Legislature, and others of this and the neighboring Towns, and also some respectable Strangers (about 200 in the Whole) escorted by the Independent Company of the Train of Artillery . . . went in Procession . . . to the Baptist Meeting House, where an excellent sermon was preached . . . An elegant and well-adapted Oration was then pronounced. . . . The Procession having afterwards moved to the State-House, at Twelve o'Clock the Proclamation of Congress for a Cessation of Arms was read from the Balcony to a vast Concourse of Spectators, followed by repeated Acclamations of Joy, and a Discharge of Thirteen Cannon from the State-House Parade, and a like Number from the Beacon Battery. The Proclamation was then read in two other public parts of the Town, and the Procession returned at Two o'Clock to the State-House where a grand Entertainment had been provided. After Dinner [thirteen] toasts were drank, each under a Discharge of Thirteen Cannon [list of toasts followed.]

A Hogshead of Punch was given to the Populace on this Occasion. As the Shades of the Evening came on, the State-House and Market-House were beautifully illuminated and a most elegant Display of Fireworks on the State-House Parade (at the Expence of a Gentleman of this town) closed the Celebration. The Whole was conducted with great Propriety and Decorum.⁷¹

After eight long years war ended. In 1777



Catchpenny Prints: Dover Publications, Inc.

Cannon, an instrument of war, was also used as a celebrant of peace. This 18th-century English catchpenny print instructs how it is fired — the same for peace and war.

Joseph Russell had written to his wife, "May our Enemy Return from whence they Came and that we May all soon sett under our Vines and Fig trees and there may be None to Make us a-fraid."⁷² Russell's wish had come true, but his fellow residents did not merely sit under their vines and fig trees. Although war debts for bounties and damages lingered, by 1781 references to war faded from records as townspeople returned to more normal concerns. The town meeting considered and approved numerous proposals for road building and repairs. Public school at North School house had reopened in 1781 and college classes resumed in 1782. The First Congregational Church obtained the services of a new pastor, Enos Hitchcock. Reverend James Manning observed that "Worship with us at Providence, of late has inspired me with Hopes of better times."⁷³

Economic recovery proved more difficult. Although the town's merchants once again could purchase goods directly from England, Americans no longer received special treatment as before the war. Trade with the British West Indies was restricted. English merchandise flooded American markets as merchants overpurchased British goods and also attempted to unload high priced commodities purchased during the war. By 1785 deflation replaced inflation.⁷⁴

But by 1790 the town had recovered. In 1787 ships from its port helped initiate American trade with China. Population, only 4310 in 1782, a decline of eleven from 1774, had risen to 6380. Aided in part by Newport's wartime devastation, Providence emerged as Rhode Island's leading town.

The Revolution had little permanent impact in Providence. Wartime disruptions and their aftermath were largely corrected by 1790. The war effected no lasting changes in the town's institutions — religious, educational, governmental — or in social and economic structure. Until rapid industrialization and population growth brought significant alterations in mid-nineteenth century, the structure of Providence institutions remained much the same as in the preceding 100 years.



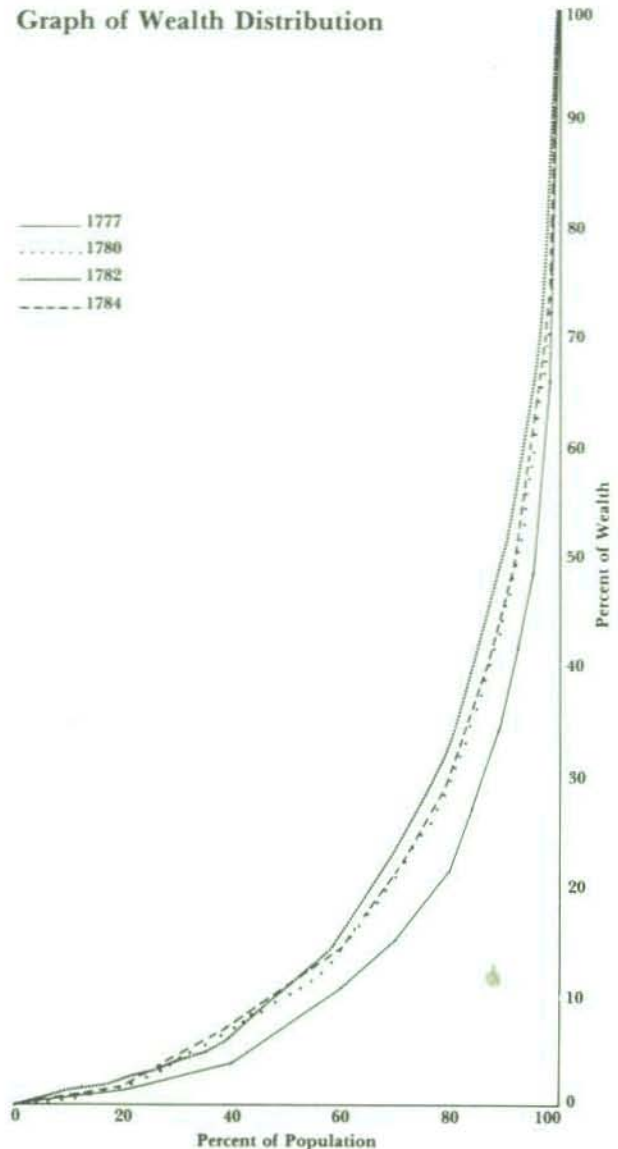
Appendix

Distribution of Wealth in Providence 1777-1784^a

% of the population	% of wealth owned		
	1777	1780	1784
lowest 23%	1.0	1.8	1.2
middle 54%	19.9	23.7	27.1
upper 22%	79.1	74.5	71.7
highest 10%	67.1	55.3	51.9
highest 5%	52.1	43.8	39.8
highest 2%	34.8	28.3	30.9

^aSource: Providence Valuation Lists, November 1777, March 1780, February 1784, RIHS Library.

Graph of Wealth Distribution



- 1 Henry R. Chace, "Descriptive List of All Houses in the Compact Part of the Town of Providence, R.I., 1779," typescript, RIHS Library. Edwin M. Stone, *Life and Recollections of John Howland* (Providence, 1857) 97.
- 2 Max Weber, *The City*, quoted in Allan Kulikoff, "Progress of Inequality in Revolutionary Boston," *William and Mary Quarterly* 28: 3 (July 1971) 376.
- 3 Franklin S. Coyle, "Survival of Providence Business Enterprise in the American Revolutionary Era (1770-1785)," unpublished master's thesis, department of history, Brown University 1960, 16. I am indebted to Professor Coyle for the enormous amount of data on Providence businesses collected in his thesis and Ph.D. dissertation cited later.
- 4 Coyle, 10.
- 5 Coyle, 56-60.
- 6 Providence Town Meeting Records, 29 January 1778, vol. 6, microfilm, Providence Public Library.
- 7 Stone, 39. William R. Staples, *Annals of the Town of Providence* (Providence, 1843) 250.
- 8 Providence Town Papers, 20 June 1776, 68-1059 and 69-1060 (page and item numbers), RIHS Library.
- 9 Staples, 250.
- 10 Town Meeting Records, 31 July 1775. Edward Field, *Revolutionary Defenses of Rhode Island* (Providence, 1896) 48, 72. John Hutchins Cady, *Civic and Architectural Development of Providence 1636-1950* (Providence, 1957) 52-53.
- 11 Sarah Drowne to Elizabeth Drowne, Providence, 13 June 1778, Drowne Papers, box 4, John Hay Library, Brown University.
- 12 Staples, 249. John R. Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island*, 10v. (Providence, 1856-1865) 8: 164.
- 13 Howard Willis Preston, *Rochambeau and the French Troops in Providence in 1780-81-82* (Providence, 1924) *Journal of Claude Blanchard*, Thomas Balch, trans. (Albany, 1876) 64.
- 14 Staples, 254. See also bills in Town Papers submitted after 1780 for repair of buildings occupied by troops.
- 15 Foster, Diary 2-3 April 1776, RIHS Library.
- 16 Providence Town Council Records, 3 August 1779, microfilm, Providence Public Library.
- 17 General orders from October 25, 1778 to March 28, 1779, Sullivan Papers, RIHS Library.
- 18 Col. Sylvanus Reed, Orderly book 1778, MS. copied from original, RIHS Library.
- 19 Town Council Records, 24 April 1780.
- 20 Petitions to General Assembly, vol. 17, 120, MSS., Rhode Island State Archives. Preston, *Rochambeau*, 2. Town Meeting Records, 13 June 1780.
- 21 Preston, *Rochambeau*, 3-5.
- 22 Preston, *Rochambeau*, 6.
- 23 Blanchard, 75.
- 24 Typescript, John Brown Papers, RIHS Library.
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To the PRINTER of the PROVIDENCE GAZETTE.

Herewith you will receive the two Proxes that are to be proposed to the Freemen for their Approbation, at the ensuing Town-Meetings.—The ANTIFEDERAL PROX was formed by Deputy-Governor OWEN, and such Friends of the present Administration as it was thought necessary to consult.—The FEDERAL PROX was formed by a very respectable Number of Freemen, from a Majority of Towns in the State, which met the present Week at East-Greenwich.—Your publishing them in your Paper will oblige

THE COMMITTEE.

Providence, April 9, 1790.

Majority, of Antifederal Prox.

His Excellency ARTHUR FENNER, Esq;
GOVERNOR.

The Honourable SAMUEL J. POTTER, Esq;
DEPUTY-GOVERNOR.

ASSISTANTS.

1. THOMAS G. HAZARD, Esq;.
 2. SYLVANUS SAYLES, Esq;
 3. JAMES ARNOLD, Esq;
 4. CALEB GARDNER, Esq;
 5. JAMES CONGDON, Esq;
 6. JOHN COOKE, Esq;
 7. THOMAS HOXSIE, Esq;
 8. THOMAS HOLDEN, Esq;
 9. JOB WATSON, Esq;
 10. JOHN HARRIS, Esq;
- HENRY WARD, Esq; Secretary.
DANIEL UPDIKE, Esq; Attorney-General.
JOSEPH CLARKE, Esq; General-Treasurer.

Coalition, or Federal Prox.

His Excellency ARTHUR FENNER, Esq;
GOVERNOR.

The Honourable SAMUEL J. POTTER, Esq;
DEPUTY-GOVERNOR.

ASSISTANTS.

1. HENRY BLISS, Esq;
 2. RUFUS SMITH, Esq; (of Gloucester)
 3. JAMES ARNOLD, Esq; (of Cranston)
 4. JOHN DORRANCE, Esq;
 5. JAMES CONGDON, Esq; (of N. Kingstown)
 6. JOHN COOKE, Esq;
 7. SAMUEL BABCOCK, Esq; (of Hopkinton)
 8. JOHN WATERMAN, Esq; (of Warwick)
 9. JOB WATSON, Esq; (of Jamestown)
 10. ELISHA BARTLET, Esq; (of Smithfield)
- HENRY WARD, Esq; Secretary.
DAVID HOWELL, Esq; Attorney-General.
JOSEPH CLARKE, Esq; General-Treasurer.

Providence Gazette and Country Journal April 10, 1790

Election proxes of the Antifederalist and Federalist parties. Arthur Fenner, a partisan of the Antifederalist position, agreed to head a coalition prox proposed by the Federalists and thus appears as the standard-bearer of both parties. Either way he could not lose. As it turned out, the Antifederal prox was voted into office.

Political Sacrifice and Demise — John Collins and Jonathan J. Hazard 1786-1790

by John P. Kaminski*

During confederation 1783-1789 struggles over paper money and the Federal Constitution dominated Rhode Island politics. Two political coalitions — the country and mercantile parties — solidified and battled over these issues. A major political revolution took place in April 1786 when the country party, advocating relief to the distressed through issuance of state paper money, won overwhelming control of the legislature. A month later the general assembly authorized a loan-office funded with £100,000 in paper money. Next year the legislature, predominantly antifederal in philosophy, refused to appoint delegates to the Federal convention in Philadelphia. After Congress submitted its constitution to state legislatures in September 1787, recommending that conventions be called to consider it, Rhode Island's assembly — on seven separate occasions between 3 November 1787 and 29 October 1789 — deliberated and then decided against calling a convention. On 24 March 1788, voters in town meetings specially summoned to consider the Constitution, rejected it by 2,708 to 237. Not until 29 May 1790, fifteen months after the new government began operations, did Rhode Island ratify the Constitution. Ratification struggles, intertwined with continuing controversy over paper money, dominated state politics for over three years.¹

By the end of June 1789 many Antifederal leaders realized that Rhode Island would have to ratify the Constitution. Prolonged delay in adoption

might result in congressional military or economic intervention.² In either case, the state's economy would suffer, and Federalists would certainly place the blame on Antifederal shoulders. Even so, Antifederal leaders could not simply and suddenly reverse a two-year old stance. To do so risked political suicide — freemen would not stand for such bald inconsistency. The mercantile party had done such an about-face in 1783-1786 over the continental impost, and their switch contributed to political revolution in 1786. Antifederalists did not want to make the same mistake. Their problem, then, was to allow the Constitution to be ratified while making it appear that they were not responsible for ratification and simultaneously preventing Federalists from receiving undeserved credit. This was a difficult task since the Antifederal majority controlled both houses of the legislature as well as the state's executive offices.³ The means they chose was to sacrifice two of their most prominent leaders.

In 1786, when the country party first obtained power, it possessed a distinct leadership hierarchy. Of their five to ten most prominent leaders, two stood out above all the rest. Assemblyman Jonathan J. Hazard, "Machiavel of Charleston," actually controlled the party while John Collins, although elected chief executive by an overwhelming majority, was merely a figurehead. Not until 1789, when the Federal Constitution was first seriously considered here, did these two begin to lose popularity and influence.⁴

*Ph.D., University of Wisconsin, 1972. Mr. Kaminski is associate editor of the Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution, sponsored by the National Historical Publications Commission and the University of Wisconsin.

Political dictator Hazard, "Beau Jonathan" — so called because of his fondness for courtly manners and dress — was born in 1744. First employed as an itinerant tailor, because of his whiggish sentiments he became involved in the independence movement and began studying history and law on his own. He served in the general assembly almost continuously after 1776, and from 1787 to 1789 as a delegate to Congress. "A natural orator, with a ready command of language, subtle and ingenious in debate," as a politician able to move people, he had no match in the state.⁵ Hazard painstakingly blamed mercantile avarice for the distressing times of 1784-1786, while the minority accused him of being the "leading man in the measures which have make us stink in the nostrils of the other States." Although not a member of the bar, he often represented debtor yeomen in cases of bankruptcy and foreclosures, and his oratorical abilities usually won for his clients. When the Federal Constitution was presented in September 1787, he became a fiery opponent of ratifications.⁶ Only after the new federal government went into effect and Rhode Island was isolated did he soften his opposition. This softening led to Hazard's ultimate downfall.

John Collins, lifelong resident of Newport, won election as governor in April 1786 at age sixty-nine. Originally apprenticed to a blacksmith, he ran away to sea and soon became captain of a small trading vessel. An ardent patriot during the Revolution, he was elected an assistant for Newport County and later a delegate to Congress.⁷ He was "looked upon as an honest well meaning Man — but he has been led away by a Set of designing People who have made him their Tool."⁸ A French observer reported that "Mr. Collins governs his tiny republic as a ship without masts, he allows it to float at the mercy of the wind and the waves, while he amuses himself fishing."⁹ These seemingly undesirable attributes appealed to country party leaders because the new governor was easily managed. Collins also ingratiated himself with the country party because of his sincere distrust of merchants. He believed that the state's well-being depended upon honest yeomen, while merchants were not to be trusted because "their Religion is trade and their God is gain and they that Expect men to sacrifice their God and their Religion for the Publick will Certainly

be disappointed."¹⁰

On one issue, however, Collins and his party fundamentally disagreed. Whereas the country party was basically antifederal in philosophy, the governor believed that the new nation needed strong central government to cement the union together. He wrote to James Bowdoin, governor of Massachusetts: "I have not been without my fears for the Whole Union. A Great body without a head, an Extensive union without any Executive Power Cannot possibly Exist long."¹¹ He also wrote that

I have for Several years past wished for a General Convention to mend the Confederation and form Some General Bond of Union.

I could not find any Bond that bound the United States but the Fear of Great Britton — And from the day the Peace took place, that bond was desolved and the United States have been passing fast to a State of Annarchoy, a State which every well wisher to his Country must dread.¹²

The antifederal country party so dominated the legislature that Collins had little influence promoting federal measures. Despite his efforts to the contrary, the general assembly refused to send delegates to the Federal Convention in 1787.¹³ The governor reportedly even offered to go to Philadelphia at his own expense rather than allow the state to be unrepresented.¹⁴ This overture, if made, was not accepted. Not until the January 1790 session of the legislature did Collins' federalism threaten his position within the country party; his downfall started on 15 January 1790 with a motion in the assembly that a convention be called to consider the Constitution. After a lengthy debate the motion passed by a majority of five (34 to 29), and the bill then went to the assistants for concurrence.

The upper house, its twelve members almost all Antifederalists, debated the merits of the convention bill and on 16 January defeated it by 5 to 4.¹⁵ The assistants sent their non-concurrence and a message to the assembly for a conference. The assembly accepted the conference invitation but no agreement was reached. The assistants then resolved that the convention question be submitted to town meetings. The assembly defeated this resolve by a majority of fourteen, then passed another bill calling for a convention and submitted it to the assistants who rejected the second bill

and adjourned to the next day. Submission of the Constitution to the people at this time was highly unlikely but it was good politics for the assistants to go on record as favoring this "democratic measure." The second convention bill, passed 32 to 11, differed from the previous bill only in that the convention and election of delegates were a week later.¹⁶

On Sunday 17 January the assembly passed — by 32 to 11 — a third convention bill, differing from the other two only in the date the convention was to assemble. At the same time, the assistants passed another resolution for submitting the question to the people — a measure again defeated by a large majority.¹⁷ Assistants then took up the third assembly bill; one of them, John Williams of Foster, had withdrawn late the previous evening, so when they voted at noon, a tie occurred. Governor Collins then cast the deciding vote in favor of the convention.¹⁸ According to Federalists, Collins' vote reflected "Immortal Honor" upon him,¹⁹ but in actuality the vote spelled his political death. As Collins himself put it, "all public confidence was withdrawn from me, and [I] was deprived of every public trust and emolument."²⁰

During the first week of March 1790, Rhode Island's convention met at South Kingstown and adjourned to 24 May 1790 without ratifying the Constitution. Throughout that March week Antifederalists met in "nocturnal conventions" to plan their strategy. Daniel Owen, deputy governor and president of the convention, admitted privately to Federalist William Ellery that adjournment was necessary to insure Antifederal victory in April state elections. In addition to the decision to adjourn, several other important matters were discussed in Antifederal caucuses. On 6 March, after adjournment, Antifederalists met to select a prox (slate of candidates) for state executive offices and assistants. Governor Collins was dropped from the prox and replaced by Owen, a switch in leadership that, although publicly unexplained, was in reality a carefully planned strategem. Antifederalists, even though they controlled both houses of the legislature in January 1790, maneuvered the voting so that attention and opprobrium focused on Governor Collins' convention vote. The governor, because of his federalism, was expendable. Consequently Antifederalists dropped him

South Kingstown court house, scene of the March 1790 constitutional convention, still stands, now occupied by Kingston Free Library.



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

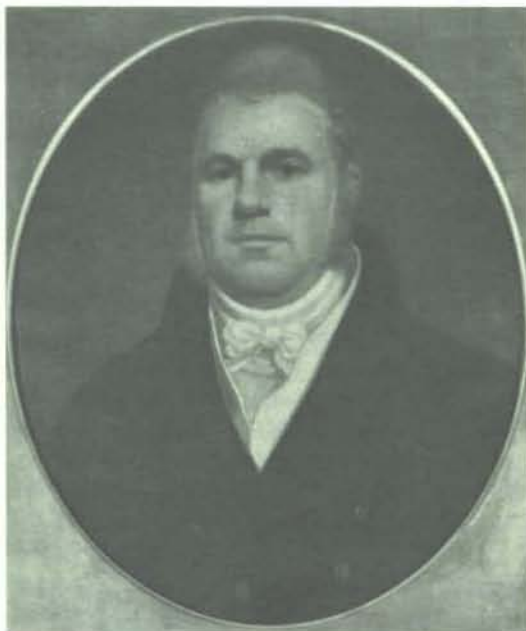
from their slate and accused him personally of calling the convention, thus allowing the legislative majority to avoid collective responsibility. Since the governor had been the motivating force, Federalists could not assume glory for calling the convention (if perchance glory attended it). Indeed, a member of the country party actually cast the deciding ballot. Thus, the majority accomplished what a year before seemed almost impossible; they had called a convention and yet Antifederalists could run for office as opponents of both convention and Constitution. John Collins had served well, if unwillingly, as a sacrificial lamb.²¹

Daniel Owen — whom Federalist Henry Marchant described as a man of "Subtility, a profound Hypocrite" — did not really want to run for governor. Elderly and ill, he lived in Glocester, an out-of-the-way town, and he was hated by Federalists almost as much as Jonathan J. Hazard. Owen therefore recommended that his close friend Arthur Fenner, wealthy Providence merchant and "secret Counsellor and Director General for the Northern Department" of Anti-

federalists, be substituted in his place. Although Fenner did not actually hold elective or appointive office, his influence was such that he reportedly considered himself "as fifth representative, for the town of Providence [in the assembly], knowing myself to be an over balance to the other four; and that a self approbating smile will command the affirmative, and a stern staring look obtain the negative from our majority [Antifederalists]."²² While Hazard controlled the state, Fenner bossed northern Rhode Island. Hazard probably wanted Owen nominated for governor because he believed that Owen could be controlled and manipulated just as Collins had been. Hazard also probably realized his leadership in the country party was endangered by Fenner's nomination because Fenner would not be the pawn that Collins had been. Fenner at first declined, but during the next two weeks, Owen and other party leaders convinced him that he should accept the nomination. At a convention on 18 March 1790 the prox was officially altered, and Fenner became the new champion of Antifederalism, while Samuel J. Potter of South Kingstown was nominated for deputy governor.²³

After the Antifederal prox was announced, Federalists were in an unenviable position. If they refused to offer an opposing slate, they would automatically surrender state offices to their opponents. If they put up a prox of their own, it would surely be defeated and would probably antagonize enough freemen to cost the Federalists several seats in the assembly. The minority therefore decided upon a middle course. A compromise prox was proposed with Fenner as governor and Potter deputy-governor. In this way Federalists hoped to elect one or two assistants but not antagonize freemen and lose votes for the assembly. This plan was devised secretly by a group of influential Providence Federalists joined later by several Newport gentlemen. On 24 March 1790 the committee of Providence and Newport federalists wrote Arthur Fenner asking him to head their coalition prox. The day after Fenner received the letter, it was printed in the state's newspapers, and the public was notified that Fenner was expected to reply within a week. Federalists also proposed a state convention at East Greenwich on 6 April to complete the compromise prox.²⁴

Arthur Fenner, prominent leader of the Antifederalist cause and governor of Rhode Island, 1790-1805.



Portrait, property of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, and under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of State's Office. It is located in the State Capitol Building.

Antifederalists led by Fenner rejected every offer of conciliation and compromise. Fenner questioned the sincerity of Federalists' proposals, especially after newspapers printed what he thought to be a confidential letter. Fenner furthermore stated that "By the Publication of the proposal in the Newspapers, The Business was taken from my Hands, and thrown into the proper Channel, and the Freemen now have it before them for Consideration." Antifederalists then completely frustrated their opponents' efforts by boycotting the 6 April convention, while they continued to promote their original Antifederal prox.²⁵ Elections were held on 21 April, and two weeks later the new legislature met; the Antifederal prox had been elected, and the country party had won a majority of five in the lower house and ten in the upper house.

Some adamant Antifederalists spoke of circumventing the ratification convention which had adjourned to Newport by resubmitting the Constitution directly to the people. Enough Antifederalists who wanted the Constitution ratified sided with Federalists to discourage such thoughts. Newport

Federalist William Ellery reported "that the Antis, in private conversation with the Feds, have talked more favorably respecting an accession to" the Constitution. A resubmission to the people was almost tantamount to rejection; such a proposal frightened some Antifederalists such as Hazard almost as much as it alarmed Federalists.²⁶

The convention resumed on 24 May 1790 in Newport, the state's most federal town. For the most part, delegates from the previous session also attended the second session. For several days little of real importance occurred; Antifederalists put up only token opposition to ratification. Finally on 29 May, the grand question was moved and a tense roll call taken. Ratification passed by a majority of two, 34 to 32.²⁷ Federalists were overjoyed, Antifederalists for the most part relieved.²⁸ Little opprobrium was cast either on those Antifederalists who voted in favor of ratification or the three absent from the vote. Antifederalists offered for their failure to defeat the Constitution only the justification that they succumbed to Newport's federal influence. Later, in order to continue control over state politics, Antifederalists attempted to place the blame for ratification on their leader Jonathan J. Hazard.²⁹

Attention now turned to the legislature, called to meet on 7 June 1790 for the important business of electing two senators and drafting a law providing for election of a representative to Congress. With Antifederal majorities in both houses and in executive offices, Federalists had little hope that they could get one of their kindred elected.³⁰ The legislature assembled but accomplished little until the session's last day.³¹ By 12 June candidates for the senate had been reduced from twenty-eight to four. Henry Marchant wrote "The Candidates for Senators were at first numerous, but like the weaker Blossoms they fell off at length to four": Jonathan J. Hazard and Joseph Stanton, Jr., both Antifederalists; Theodore Foster and Jabez Bowen, both Federalists.³² Legislators expected that two Antifederal candidates would be elected, but some Antifederalists had lost confidence in their leader. Hazard had been the "prime conductor of the paper money system, and until a few months ago," a powerful opponent of the new Constitution. But when ratification neared, he softened his opposition in hope of gaining Federalist support for his senate candidacy. William Ellery explained

that Hazard, "finding that the Constitution must be adopted sooner or later, and desirous of being a Senator he became a trimmer. He thought he was sure, in consequence of his long and faithful services, of the Antis, and hoped by a moderate conduct to gain the Feds over to his interest, and the Feds were not strong enough to give him any effectual aid if they were disposed to do it."³³

It seems likely that Hazard might have been approached by some Federalists who offered support for his senate bid if he mollified his opposition to the Constitution. Alexander Hamilton wrote to Jeremiah Olney, a leading Providence Federalist: "Can nothing be done to win or soften the opposition? It seems to me that Mr. Hazard if properly dealt with would not be inexorable."³⁴ Once the Constitution was ratified, Federalists had no need to appease Hazard; consequently they refused to support him. Hazard could do nothing about Federalists' treachery. Any public statement by him would have alienated members of his own party. Hazard's duplicity became known and angered many Antifederalists who grew ever more suspicious of their leader. Joseph Stanton Jr., "a full blooded Anti," loyal to the antifederal cause to the end, stayed in the good graces of his party.³⁵

Although both Federalists, the other two candidates were viewed differently by their opponents. Jabez Bowen, arch-Federalist, particularly repulsive to Antifederalists because of his strong opposition to debtor-relief policies as deputy governor in 1785, had written President Washington and asked if Congress would protect Providence and Newport if they seceded from the state to join the Union.³⁶ Theodore Foster was a milder Federalist, a popular Revolutionary War figure, and the governor's brother-in-law — a relationship that indicated he might be under the governor's influence. Unlike Bowen, Foster had no enemies.³⁷

As time approached for election, the candidates were paired in two separate contests. Two Antifederalists opposed each other, while two Federalists vied between themselves, assuring that one senator from each pair would be elected.³⁸ The legislature, in joint session, then elected Stanton and Foster — two men whom Antifederalists believed they could trust to represent the views of the state.³⁹ Hazard, the Antifederalists' leader for four years, was deposed.



From a copy in RIHS Library

Jabez Bowen, a leading Federalist.

There was more to Hazard's demise than his "trimming" on the Constitution; another factor lay in Arthur Fenner's meteoric rise. No room existed for two country party leaders — one had to go. Fenner had more grandiose political ambitions: he saw the opportunity to mold a new state coalition of Antifederalists and mild Federalists by moderating the heat of party politics. To accomplish this goal, Fenner secretly made exertions "with great Industry" to get the Constitution adopted.⁴⁰ Concomitantly, Fenner probably did all he could to destroy Hazard's political fortunes, while he backed the career of his brother-in-law Theodore Foster. By supporting Foster for the senate instead of some other Antifederal candidate, Fenner also improved his rapport with Federalists. All agreed that Foster's election strengthened Fenner's political power immensely — a power that the governor continued to exercise until his death in 1803.

Just as John Collins ended as scapegoat for the state's convention, Hazard suffered defeat as scapegoat for ratification. Even though a large majority, as high as seventeen, of the convention was Antifederal, and even though several signifi-

cant Antifederal leaders including Governor Fenner favored ratification, Hazard received the opprobrium for it. The decision to abandon Hazard and cast the blame of ratification upon him was probably consummated at a secret meeting of Antifederal leaders on or about 12 June 1790, the day the legislature voted for senators. When it served the interest of the country party or the interest of a select group within that party, they sacrificed their leaders on altars of political expediency.

A peaceful political coup d'etat had occurred. Hazard wrote

let it only be in the power of these very men that you have served most, to sacrifice you to their own advantage, and you will find there is not one in a thousand but would embrace the opportunity. I speak from experience. The people that I have taken the most pains to serve have sacrificed me, as far as lay in their power ... I have been ... sacrificed ... in the year 1790 ... and although the authors have no thought that I am possessed of the means and instruments [used by them], I have them. I have not only the men's names, but the rooms in the houses where it was agreed upon ... Notwithstanding I have ever been the slave of my friends, I find when they think there is a prospect of selling an old friend for a new one, they embrace the opportunity.⁴¹





- 1 Irwin H. Polishook, *Rhode Island and the Union, 1774-1795* (Evanston, Ill., 1969). John P. Kaminski, "Paper Politics: Northern State Loan-Offices during Confederation, 1783-1790," unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin 1972. The country party was also referred to as "The Majority" after May 1786 and the Antifederal party after September 1787. The mercantile party was referred to as "The Minority" after May 1786 and as the Federal party after September 1787. For the most part, all members stayed in the same party despite the change in nomenclature.
- 2 "Extract of a letter of a late Date from a Member of Congress to a Gentleman in this Town," *Providence Gazette* 22 May 1790. Abraham Baldwin, a congressman from Georgia, wrote: "It will never do to let them [Rhode Island] remain in this situation . . . self preservation requires us to *modify* them . . . let them bounce, it would give us little trouble." To ?, New York, 24 May 1790, Yale University Library.
- 3 William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington, Newport, 21 May 1789, Ellery Letters, R.I. State Archives. Theodore Foster to William Channing, Providence, 24 May 1790, Channing collection, RIHS Library. William Ellery to William Duer, Newport, 21 May 1789, Ellery Letterbook, Newport Historical Society.
- 4 "Rhodiensis," *Newport Herald* 23 October 1788. Henry Marchant wrote that John Collins was a "weak Tool." To John Adams, Newport, 7 March 1790, Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS).
- 5 Wilkins Updike, *History of the Episcopal Church in Narragansett, Rhode Island* (New York, 1847), 328-29. According to "Charlestoniensis," Hazard possessed "a genius of the first lustre and magnitude." *Newport Herald* 20 November 1788.
- 6 To Henry Knox, Providence, 6 November 1788, Shepley collection, RIHS Library. William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington, Newport, 22 April 1788, Thomas C. Bright Papers, Jervis Library Association, Rome, New York.
- 7 The Hartford Wits described Collins —
 Call'd from the deck, with pop'lar votes elates,
 The mighty jacktar guides the helm of state:
 Nurs'd on the waves, in blust'ring tempests bred,
 His heart of marble and his brains of lead.
 Abe C. Ravitz, "Anarch in Rhode Island," *Rhode Island History* 11: 4 (October 1952) 117-24.
- 8 Woodorf Journal of a Trip, American Philosophical Society. Ellery characterized Collins as "a silly whiffing governor." To Benjamin Huntington, Newport, 8 September 1789, Ellery Letters. Collins was also described as "a poor, conceited, ignorant old man." "Extract of a letter from Rhode-Island, dated the 6th instant," Lansingburg, New York *Federal Herald* 2 November 1789.
- 9 French, Rough Draft, Correspondence Politique, Etats-Unis, Supplement, Vol. 26 (or 2nd series, XV), ff. 314-351, Archives du Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres, Paris.
- 10 Collins to Samuel Ward, Newport, 17 July 1774, Gratz collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
- 11 Newport, 15 February 1787, J.S.H. Fogg autograph collection, v. 17, Maine Historical Society. Collins wrote the same sentiments to George Washington, Newport, 24 May 1790, Washington Papers, Library of Congress.
- 12 To ?, Newport, 17 January 1787, Gratz collection.
- 13 Collins to President of Congress [Arthur St. Clair], Newport, 4 September 1787, Library of Congress, stated that "the idea of a Report from twelve States Onely appears extream disagreeable, I Shall Spare no pains to prevent it."
- 14 "Extract of a letter from a gentleman in Rhode-Island, to his friend in this city [Philadelphia], dated June 12, 1787" *Carlisle Gazette*, 27 June 1787.
- 15 *Newport Herald* 21 January 1790. *Providence Gazette* 16 January 1790.
- 16 *Newport Herald* 21 January 1790. *Providence Gazette* 23 January 1790.
- 17 William R. Staples, *Rhode Island in the Continental Congress, 1765-1790* (Providence, 1870), 629.
- 18 *Newport Herald* 21, 28 January 1790. *Providence Gazette* 23 January 1790. Jabez Bowen to George Washington (with enclosures), Providence, 17 January 1790, RG 59, Misc. Letters, Dept. of State Records, National Archives. Jeremiah Olney to Henry Knox, Providence, 17 January 1790; Henry Sherburne to Henry Knox, Newport, 18 January 1790, Knox Papers, MHS. Theodore Foster to Dwight Foster, Providence, 21 January 1790, Dwight Foster Papers, MHS.
- 19 Henry Sherburne to Henry Knox, Newport, 18 January 1790, Knox Papers. Philadelphia *Federal Gazette*, 30 January 1790.

- 20 To George Washington, Newport, 24 May 1790, Washington Papers.
- 21 William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington, Newport, 28 March, 5 April 1790, Ellery Letters. Henry Marchant to John Adams, Newport, 7 March 1790, Adams Papers. *Boston Massachusetts Centinel*, 14 April 1790. Stockbridge, Massachusetts *Western Star*, 11 May 1790.
- 22 *Newport Herald* 27 November 1788. Henry Marchant to John Adams, Newport, 7 March 1790, Adams Papers. William Ellery described Fenner as "a violent Anti." To Benjamin Huntington, Newport, 28 March 1790, Ellery Letters.
- 23 Daniel Owen, "Circular Letter," *Providence Gazette* 3 April 1790. "Observer," *Newport Herald* 24 July 1788.
- 24 William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington, Newport, 28 March, 5 April 1790, Ellery Letters. Arthur Fenner to the electioneering committee, Providence, 29 March 1790, MSS. 14: 143, RIHS Library. *Providence Gazette* 27 March, 3 April 1790. East Greenwich was chosen because it was near the center of the state and "surrounded by inhabitants of all descriptions." Archibald Cray to George Washington, New York, 29 June 1790, Washington Papers.
- 25 Both proxies were printed in the *Providence Gazette* 10 April 1790; both agreed on the same men for governor, deputy governor, secretary, treasurer, and four of the ten assistants.
- 26 William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington, Newport, 11 May 1790, Ellery Letters, Ellery to John Adams, Newport, 13 May 1790, Adams Papers. *Providence Gazette* 8 May 1790.
- 27 Papers Relating to Adoption of the Constitution, R.I. State Archives.
- 28 Jeremiah Olney to Philip Schuyler, Newport, 29 May 1790, Shepley collection. Solomon Drowne to Joseph Gilman, Providence, 10 June 1790, John Hay Library, Brown University. Henry Marchant to John Adams, Newport, 29 May 1790, Adams Papers.
- 29 Papers relating to Adoption of the Constitution. Antifederalists themselves voted to reconvene in Newport rather than in South Kingstown or some other Antifederal town.
- 30 Henry Sherburne to Henry Knox, Newport, 31 May 1790, Knox Papers. Jeremiah Olney to Alexander Hamilton, Providence, 7 June 1790, Shepley collection.
- 31 Governor [Arthur Fenner] to Legislature, Providence, [7-9] June 1790, Moses Brown Papers Misc., RIHS Library. William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington, Newport, 7 June 1790, Ellery Letters.
- 32 *New York Gazette of the United States*, 23 June 1790. *Boston Columbian Centinel*, 30 June 1790. Henry Marchant to John Adams, Newport, 12 June 1790, Adams Papers.
- 33 To Benjamin Huntington, Newport, 12 June 1790, Ellery Letters. William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington, Newport, 25 August 1788, Bright Papers.
- 34 New York, 6 October 1788, Shepley collection. Ellery to Benjamin Huntington, Newport, 13 July 1789, Ellery Letters. Ellery to Huntington, Newport, 21 July 1789, Bright Papers.
- 35 Jabez Bowen to John Adams, Providence, 14 June 1790, Adams Papers. William Ellery described Stanton as "a Violent paper-money man, and . . . an obstinate Anti to the last." To Benjamin Huntington, Newport, 12 June 1790, Ellery Letters. Henry Marchant wrote that Stanton was "Antie up to the Brain — without one Quality to balance it." To John Adams, Newport, 12 June 1790, Adams Papers.
- 36 Providence, 15 December 1789, RG 360, PCC, 78, Vol. X, 613, National Archives. Washington tactfully never replied directly to this query, but stated that he hoped Rhode Island would call a convention and ratify the Constitution soon. To Bowen, New York, 27 December 1789, Emmet Collection, New York Public Library.
- 37 Ellery to Huntington, Newport, 12 June 1790, Ellery Letters. Henry Marchant to John Adams, Newport, 12 June 1790, Adams Papers. Marchant to Elbridge Gerry, Newport, 12 June 1790, Gerry Papers, MHS.
- 38 No records have been located that explain the strange matching process of electing senators in Rhode Island, but it appears that this method offered the best chance to defeat Hazard.
- 39 Ellery to Benjamin Huntington, Newport, 12 June 1790, Ellery Letters. Journal House of Magistrates, 12 June 1790, R.I. State Archives.
- 40 William Channing to Theodore Foster, Newport, 18 May 1790, Foster Papers; Theodore Foster to William Channing, Providence, 24 May 1790, Channing-Ellery Papers, RIHS Library.
- 41 To Thomas B. Hazard, Jamestown, 25 June 1801, *Narragansett Historical Register* 1 (1882-83) : 255-56.

From the Collections

It is fitting to end this issue on a lighthearted note. Exigencies of politics and winning a revolution left little opportunity for frivolity. According to the evidence of newspapers and lack of extant advertisements, public entertainments in Rhode Island were rare. However, by the end of the 1780s, as the new nation pursued its destiny, promoters of exotic and wondrous entertainments also pursued their own enterprises. They advertised through the medium of the broadside printed with detailed descriptions and sometimes with illustrative woodcuts. The broadsides presented here show the amusements citizens of Providence frequented before the circus would come to replace such singular exhibitions later in the nineteenth century.

Mr. POOL,

The First *AMERICAN* that ever exhibited
the following

EQUESTRIAN FEATS O F *HORSEMANSHIP*

On the Continent, intends *PERFORMING* on *Saturday* Afternoon next, near the *POWDER-HOUSE*. The Performance to begin at Half past Four o'Clock in the Afternoon (if the Weather will permit, if not, the First fair Day after *Sunday*). Tickets to be had at Mr. *Gordon's* Tavern, Price *Two Shillings* each. There will be Seats provided for the Ladies and Gentlemen.

A *CLOWN* will entertain the *LADIES* and *GENTLEMEN* between the Feats.

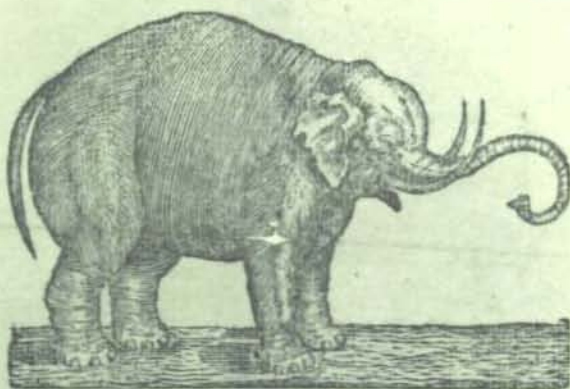
1. *MOUNTS* a single Horse in full Speed, standing on the Top of the Saddle, and in that Position carries a Glass of Wine in his Hand, drinks it off, and falls in his Seat on the Saddle.
 2. *MOVES* a single Horse in Half Speed, standing on the Saddle, throws up an Orange, and catches it on the Point of a Fork.
 3. *MOVES* a single Horse in full Speed, with his right Foot in the near Stirrup, and his left Leg extended at a very considerable Distance from the Horse, and in that Position leaps a Bar.
 4. *MOVES* two Horses in full Speed, with a Foot in the Stirrup of each Saddle, and in that Position leaps a Bar, and from thence to the Tops of the Saddles at the same Speed.
 5. *MOVES* two Horses in full Speed, standing on the Saddles, and in that Position leaps a Bar.
 6. *MOVES* a single Horse in full Speed, fires a Pistol, and falls backward with his Head to the Ground, hanging by his right Leg; and while hanging, fires another Pistol under the Horse's Belly, and rises again to his Seat on the Saddle, without the Use of his Hands.
 7. *MOVES* three Horses in full Speed, standing on the Saddles, vaulting from one to the other.
- After which Mr. *POOL* will introduce two Horses, who will lay themselves down, as if dead: One will groan, apparently through extreme Sickness and Pain; afterwards rise and make his Manners to the Ladies and Gentlemen's Another having laid down for a considerable Time, will rise, and sit up like a Lady's Lap-Dog.
- The Entertainment will conclude with the most droll Scene, The *Taylor riding to Breakfast*.
- Mr. *POOL* informs the Ladies and Gentlemen, that he can only stay to perform once in this Place.
- He desires the Ladies and Gentlemen, who honour him with their Presence, to bring two Dogs with them to the Place of Performance.
- Providence, *April* 23, 1786.

PROVIDENCE: Printed by *JOHN CARTER*.



EXHIBITIONS,
Comic and Experimental.
 At Mr. JOHN THURBER'S Tavern, West Side of the Bridge.
 This Evening, for the first Time,
A Chinese Automaton Figure
 Will perform several Feats on the Rope.
To-Morrow, for the last Time,

Mr. CRESSIN will begin his Performance at 3 o'Clock, P. M. and finish by Sunset.
 As there are four different Chambers which communicate with his Place of Performance, by which Means Ladies or select Companies will be less incommoded, he will take Care to have a Fire in each of those Chambers, for the Convenience of the Spectators.
 A civil Officer will attend, to keep good Order.
 Tickets for Sale at the Place of Performance, and at Mr. Todd's Book-Store. Price, a ²Guinea of a Dollar, Children Half Price.
 Providence, November 18, 1796.



T H E ELEPHANT,

ACCORDING to the Account of the celebrated *BURROW*, is the most respectable Animal in the World. In Size he surpasses all other terrestrial Creatures; and, by his Intelligence, he makes as near an Approach to Man, as Matter can approach Spirit. A sufficient Proof that there is not too much said of the Knowledge of this Animal is, that the Proprietor having been absent for ten Weeks, the Moment he arrived at the Door of his Apartment, and spoke to the Keeper, the Animal's Knowledge was beyond any Doubt confirmed by the Cries he uttered forth, till his Friend came within Reach of his Trunk, with which he caressed him, to the Astonishment of all those who saw him. This most curious and surprizing Animal is just arrived from *Philadelphia*, on his Way to *Boston*.—He will just stay to give the Citizens of *Providence* an Opportunity to see him. He is only four Years old, and weighs about 3000 Weight, but will not have come to his full Growth till he shall be between 30 and 40 Years old. He measures from the End of his Trunk to the Tip of his Tail 15 Feet 8 Inches, round the Body 10 Feet 6 Inches, round his Head 7 Feet 2 Inches, round his Leg, above the Knee, 3 Feet 3 Inches; round his Ankle 2 Feet 2 Inches. He eats 150 Weight a Day, and drinks all Kinds of Spirituous Liquors; some Days he has drank 30 Bottles of Porter, drawing the Corks with his Trunk. He is so tame that he travels loose, and has never attempted to hurt any one. He appeared on the Stage, at the new Theatre in *Philadelphia*, to the great Satisfaction of a respectable Audience.

✂ The Elephant having destroyed many Papers of Consequence, it is recommended to Visitors not to come near him with such Papers.

* * A Place is fitted up for him (suitable to receive genteel Company) in a Store back of the Coffee-House; where he will remain till the 8th of *July* only, as he is to be at *Cambridge* at the approaching Commencement.

Admittance, One Quarter of a Dollar—Children, One Eighth of a Dollar.

Providence, June 27, 1797.

Printed by GARTER and WILKINSON.