

# RHODE ISLAND HISTORY



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# GOVERNOR DORR



CIGARS

† **EXTRA** \* **FINE** †

RIHS Library

*Thomas Wilson Dorr and the Dorr Rebellion have a place both in our history and popular culture, as this cigar box lid attests.*

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

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*Abraham Hermon Stillwell had his bookshop in the old Coffee House, Market Square. This 20th-century drawing depicts the building as it appeared before its demolition in the 1850s.*

## A Man Who Dared to Stand Alone — A Sidelight on the Dorr Rebellion 1842-1844

by Margaret Bingham Stillwell\*

During the Dorr Rebellion, which came to a head in the 1840s, emotions ran high. A handful of men among the property-owning class who saw justice in the rebel effort to secure the right of citizenship for the disfranchised men of Rhode Island, were ostracised, vilified, and denounced as traitors to their class. Among them was my grandfather Abraham Hermon Stillwell, who from 1831 to 1867 owned a bookstore on Market Square in old Providence, at the foot of College Hill.

In a strategic position to know what went on — and outraged by the shenanigans and chicanery of the minority group in power that fought to prevent nearly two-thirds of the men in the state from having the status of citizens — he published a blow-by-blow account of events, determined that the truth should be known to posterity. That book — *Might and Right* — now quite rare, I endeavor to describe, supplying as background only a brief survey of the situations that occasioned its writing and publication.

The Dorr War, as it is locally called, was not a shooting war but one of words, ideology, and a tangled mass of falsehoods, double-dealing and despotic action. By one means or another Rhode Island's legislature strove to keep itself in power and a minority group of wealthy landowners in autocratic control of the state. Eventually the matter centered upon constitutional law, but at first upon the unrest caused by the fact that, although taxed and subject to military service,

nearly two-thirds of the male citizens were denied citizenship. In the presidential election of 1840 approximately 1,600 of 2,400 men in Rhode Island were deprived of a vote. This brought to a head the sense of injustice that had been smoldering for nearly fifty years.

Grandfather Stillwell found this injustice infuriating, especially the network of lies by which politicians strove to down the suffragists who sought reform. His method of coping with the situation, one might say, was like the old adage — he laughs best who laughs last. He would bide his time, but he was determined that posterity should one day know the truth. Circumstances, however, led him to publish *Might and Right* in 1844, earlier than he had planned.

The situation was further aggravated by the fact that instead of having a state constitution, the Rhode Island legislature continued to use as its governmental instrument the provisions in the charter which — through the efforts of Roger Williams and John Clarke — had been obtained from King Charles II in 1663, unique in that it had granted colonial landowners the right of self-government and did not restrict religious freedom. Since practically all early colonists were landowners, the charter was well attuned to the colony at that time.

But in the passing of time, pioneer and rural living gave way to the growth of towns. These in turn — under the pressure of coastwise trade,

\*First woman appointed to a full professorship on the Brown University faculty, librarian of the Annmary Brown Memorial from 1917 to her retirement in 1953. Miss Stillwell is the author of nine major works of reference and twenty-one other publications on topics of personal interest, with three books published in the past six years.



commercialism, and then of industrialism — developed into cities of considerable size. Men hired to work on sheep-raising plantations flanking Newport or on stud farms of South County, or to build wharves and sloops for transporting livestock, lacked the means for acquiring property as the necessary qualification for citizenship. As also did tradesmen, small merchants, artisans incident to city life, mill-operatives and underpaid foreigners who in the 1820s found work in the textile mills of Blackstone Valley, north of Providence.

In 1663 Newport — a center of coastwise trade — was far larger than Providence and had therefore been allotted more representatives in the General Assembly. Landowners of Newport and South County could outvote legislators representing the northern and eventually more populous area of the state. Re-apportionment was therefore needed but violently opposed by the southern contingent.

Grandfather's boyhood friend, Thomas Wilson Dorr, by birth a member of the elite, brought up in the beautiful Dorr mansion on Benefit Street, was a quiet unassuming young man whom everyone liked. Having studied law in New York, he returned to practice in Providence and served in the legislature from 1834 to 1838. There he observed the inequalities of Rhode Island's system and worked for re-districting the state. With a sturdy belief in the democratic principles of our nation and in the sovereign rights of the people, Thomas Dorr espoused the cause of the disfranchised and became the leader of the suffrage movement.

Grandfather Stillwell also belonged to the ruling class. Ever since the days of Roger Williams — through Pardon Tillinghast, the Arnolds and the Sheldons — his family and kinsmen had held a wide tract of land "at the south of the town." As one of the original plantations, it stretched from Pardon Tillinghast's long-wharf and warehouse on the Great Salt River at the foot of Transit Street up to Benefit Street, over the hill to Hope Street and on toward the Seekonk River, while from north to south it extended from John Street to Wickenden close to Fox Point at the head of Narragansett Bay. Grandfather's interest in disfranchised citizens was therefore academic, purely a matter of principle. Like Thomas Wil-



*Author's Collection*

*Abraham Hermon Stillwell (1802-1881). Painting by Eugene Salisbury Field, 1844.*

son Dorr, he had no personal axe to grind. But he had his own penalty to pay.

When it became known that he stood for Dorr and the suffrage cause, Abraham Hermon Stillwell was systematically ostracised. With one exception, when his cousins met him they gave him the cold stare and cut him dead. Merchants with whom he had always traded, who catered to the land-owning class, refused to honor his orders. Members of the church he attended, where he had long served as treasurer, not only voted him out of office but unanimously voted him out of the church. His former patrons avoided the bookshop as if he had the plague. Consequently his clerks were dismissed and he sat alone. He reacted philosophically. Family tradition has it that he placed a comfortable chair in a good light and proceeded to read his way around his shelves. He had absolute faith that the political hostility would eventually blow over, and that right would



prevail in the end.

Due to its rarity, *Might and Right* is seldom cited by writers on the Dorr Rebellion. Yet it has much of importance to offer. It breathes the atmosphere of its time. And, incidentally, it has a story of its own. Among the bookstore's customers was an omnivorous reader and sometimes writer, a woman thoroughly incensed by the acts of the politicians in power. The story is that one day she remarked that someone should write a book giving a truthful account of events. Grandfather was quick to see the point. If she would write the book, he would publish it, so that some day posterity would know the truth.

My friend, the late Mr. Sidney S. Rider, in his *Bibliographical Memoirs of Three Rhode Island Authors, R.I. Historical Tracts* II (1880), listed *Might and Right* among Frances H. (Whipple) McDougall's writings. Unfortunately he gave no reason, merely stating that she was interested in temperance reform, abolition, and "a very violent partisan of Mr. Dorr." Mr. Rider recorded, however, that on July 1, 1842 she was married at Lowell, Massachusetts, to Charles C. Greene, "an artist residing that time at Springfield," and that in 1847 she became divorced and subsequently moved to California, where she married William C. McDougall. In view of the fact that on the date of her earlier marriage, the Dorr war was warming up to a crisis — and that the book describes events after that date — it would seem that her claim to being the observer and writer is open to question.

Family tradition has it that a Miss Kendall, daughter of a family friend, suggested to Grandfather that a truthful, contemporary record should be kept for posterity. She is believed to have started the book but to have been forced to abandon it because of ill health. Grandfather, it is thought, wrote the book for her, signing his name as publisher according to the original pact, but keeping the text anonymous.

The first chapter's opening would seem to bear this out. Although rather blind in its statement, it calls attention to a noticeable change in style, due to the fact that "the Work has been penned by another hand than expected. Ill health and domestic engagements have combined to prevent that person from performing the task . . . She has, however, with much courtesy, delegated to

another the office of delineating the character of Society in Rhode Island, prior to, and at the time of the great political contest she is commemorating." Oddly enough, this first chapter is signed "W" which may indicate that Mrs. McDougall [nee Whipple] had at least a part in the project.

*Might and Right* has a preface written seemingly by a more fluid hand. This appeals to other states to support Mr. Dorr's effort "until from the children of the distant prairies shall come a widely echoing response; and no free Wind shall return to us with our call unanswered." Since the style suggests that of a female writer of the period, it is possible that this is the section which Miss Kendall contributed.

The book itself is a small octavo of 324 pages including three appendices, the first a testimonial to the suffrage women of Rhode Island honoring their support. Addition of "A Sketch of the Life and Character of Thomas Wilson Dorr" to the so-called second edition brought the pagination of the latter to 345. In the center of its title page is a quotation from Milton — "None can love Freedom heartily, but good men; the rest love not Freedom but license, which never hath more scope, or more indulgence, than under Tyrants." Its text frequently quotes documents at full length, or analyses and discusses them point by point for pages at a time. For persons whose knowledge of history rests upon predigested accounts of historians, *Might and Right* makes for difficult reading. It is history in the raw.

In addition to recounting the activities of the charter and suffrage parties, it describes the fiasco of their two confrontations and their appeals to Washington for military or Congressional aid. It quotes from civic and political leaders of the state. It mingles statements by the press with opinions of prominent judges, decisions of courts, denunciations by clergy, and addresses by Thomas Dorr in answering opponents or explaining the justice of the suffrage cause. It describes trickery, fake situations devised by politicians, distortion of events presented by a charter-controlled press, and the callousness of those in power. Added to this are the writer's own questionings and keen-eyed perception. Constant discussion of idealism and ideology stands in marked contrast to the chicanery and sinister strategy of the politicians, which



the text reveals.

Although written in the rather stilted style of the period, the text has a certain courtliness — often the author's personality breaks through. Underlying the recording of events are a stalwart belief in man's right to freedom and a demand for truth. At times the quiet exposition becomes forceful in its insistence upon holding to our national constitution and the ideals of the Declaration of Independence. When relating the machinations of the politicians and their powerful bosses, their calculated lies and distortions, the pages of *Might and Right* fairly bulge with indignation and anger. Its closing paragraph of the main text might have been written for today:

*How falsehood can be less dishonorable in diplomats than in other men, I cannot see; yet the most efficient weapons of our political warfare are barbed with falsehood — and that, often of the most malignant character. We can never become a truly great Nation, until the time arrives when, by our oath of office, we shall not be bound to sustain a party, by all supposed necessary violation of truth and right — when politicians may speak the truth and act the truth — nay, when, to preserve their character pure, they must do so — when an official liar will be just as mean as a domestic, or social liar — when what is false will be just as bad in one place, as another. But there is a great deal of selfishness, and a great deal of wickedness, to be purged out of us, before that day arrives; and the sooner we set about it, every man of us, the better will it be for us, and for our country; nay, our salvation of our country depends on this; for what can a people be, who have lost all honorable regard for truth; and what can a nation be, whose chief springs of action are moved by Falsehood? Let us, then, strive to hasten the day, when party rancor may be melted down, and refined away, until only the pure gold is left — when selfishness shall be subdued by true patriotism — when the representatives of all parties shall leave these miserable wranglings for place and spoil, to the lower animals, and come up together, like MEN, to the broad platform of RIGHT, and there labor together, with but one object — our COUNTRY'S GOOD? Is this also, visionary? Then let us begin to make it truth; for it is quite time!*

Meanwhile, for Grandfather Stillwell days

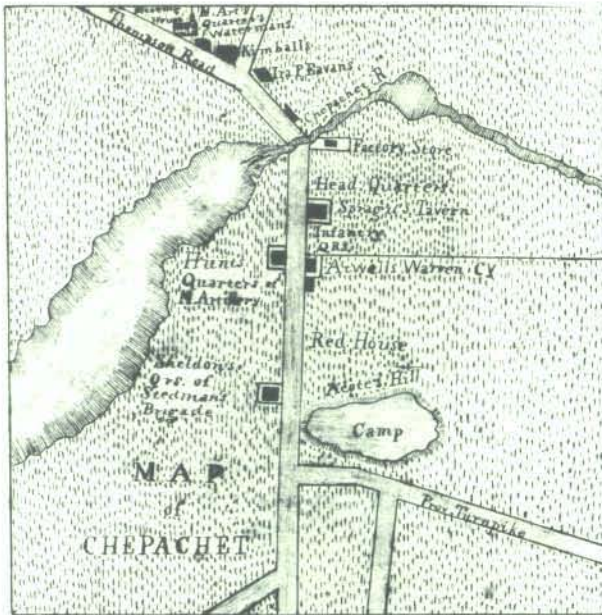
passed quickly. There was excitement in the air. Like a great tidal wave, reaction from a law enforcing military service and unrest occasioned by the presidential election in 1840 caused the suffrage movement to grow in strength and organization. Unknown to the charter politicians, but with plenty of grist for its mill, the swift-running events were chronicled in *Might and Right*.

And the pace quickened, as charter and suffrage parties sparred with one another — the latter winning a statewide vote ratifying the so-called people's constitution that broadened the franchise, while on the other hand the legislature bolstered its position by passing on April 2, 1842 "An Act in relation to offences against the Sovereign Power of the State" which among other penalties decreed that holding office under the people's constitution was a treasonable offense punishable by imprisonment for life.

But the suffragists were not to be deterred. In an open statewide vote for election of a governor, Thomas Dorr won by 1300 votes over Samuel King, the incumbent. In view of the fact that Governor King refused to step down and denied the use of public buildings to suffragists, each day became more exciting and ominous than the last. Thomas Dorr was inaugurated on May 3 in a Providence warehouse; Governor King in the Newport State House on May 4. A month later Governor King declared martial law and began a veritable reign of terror. Men were arrested off-hand, without trial. Housewives found themselves without money, without food for their children. The turmoil became so great that fearing a general uprising, it seemed expedient to repeal martial law on July 5. It had served its purpose, however. The suffrage movement in Providence, its stronghold, had broken under the siege, although as another result suffragists in outlying districts — Smithfield and Glocester in particular — became more militant.

One of the most colorful sections in *Might and Right* relates to the charterists' surprise attack on Chepachet. Between three and four hundred suffragists had taken over Acote's Hill at the south of the village as an encampment and training ground. Governor King sent four thousand state troops to rout them out. Pouring in from three directions simultaneously, they outnumbered the suffragists eleven to one. The majority of suffra-





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Map drawn in 1843 showing militia headquarters in Chepachet and position of suffragist forces on Acote's Hill.

gists escaped after their leader had ordered them to disband to save them from slaughter. About a hundred and thirty suffragists were captured. "Governor" Dorr safely crossed the state line, continued north and found refuge in the home of his friend, the governor of New Hampshire.

Under heavy guard, prisoners were thrust into a large empty barn, while in the course of the next two days state troops cleaned out a large wine-cellar at the local tavern, appropriated 11,500 cigars, commandeered all the food in the village, destroyed tons of hay, grain, and corn, and in the course of their drunken orgy looted the homes of Chepachet and the surrounding countryside. When their revelry was over, they assembled their prisoners, pinioned their arms behind them, tied them tightly in groups of eight, and marched them at bayonet point to the Providence jail. They herded them — weak from lack of food and water and from the broiling heat of the mid-summer day — a dozen or more at a time — into cells 7 by 9 feet, with only an open rectangle 4 by 7 inches for ventilation. Despite opposition from

Governor King and his council, the surgeon general had the prisoners moved out into the open court. Otherwise, so states *Might and Right*, "the morning would have found dead as many of the sufferers, in proportion, as were found in the Black Hole in Calcutta."

That Thomas Wilson Dorr and his followers, believing as they did in the sovereignty of the people, overlooked the fact that in the American governmental system the people's only power is to elect representatives, is indeed odd. Once candidates are elected and in office, the people have no legal power to initiate change or governmental reform, no power to draft laws or to repeal them. In only twenty of our states today do the people have power of recall, and no redress except by electing other representatives in the next election. Consequently, the constitution drawn up under Dorr's guidance and ratified by a majority vote, and his election as governor were legally invalid. The acts had not been initiated by legislators. His failure to understand this was his apparently unseen stumbling block. Believing that the President or Congress would rectify the situation and take the part of the people if the matter were brought home to them, he decided that some dramatic act was needed to awaken them to action. At a public meeting in August 1843, he announced that he would return to Rhode Island to face trial for treason.

Dorr appeared in Providence in late October, registered at the City Hotel and went out to dinner, leaving his address at the desk. In less than an hour he was arrested and jailed. His trial was held in Newport in spring 1844 before a deliberately packed jury and a malicious judge, who instructed the jury to consider only the question whether the defendant had intended to perform the acts he had committed. At the closing session, when called upon by the clerk of the court to give reason why he should not be convicted, Mr. Dorr gave a concise account of the injustices done to him during the trial and to disfranchised citizens whose cause he had upheld. This fell upon deaf ears as all of the jury were his enemies, and he was sentenced to life imprisonment in solitary confinement.

On the night he was returned to the Providence jail, charterist politicians put on a great display of fireworks near the prison. The suffrage party



was dead. The man who had threatened their power was vanquished forever. The world was all theirs.

On the contrary, their own death knell had begun to toll. The dismay that had caused twenty-five members of the legislature early in the year to call upon Congress for an investigation, now burst forth in an emotional upsurge among the landed proprietors of Providence. They had known Thomas Dorr in his boyhood and youth. They had liked him. He had stood for what he believed to be right. What manner of men were these, who rejoiced so blatantly at having condemned an honest opponent to a living death?

Then Grandfather Stillwell took action and entered upon his second venture as publisher. Securing a copy of Dorr's pre-sentencing speech, he measured the windows in the bookshop and had handbills printed to fit the windowpanes. He had three editions printed: paper copies for general distribution, in black ink; one in gold lettering on dark blue paper, to catch the eye of the elite; and another on heavy white silk, that the text might surely survive to tell posterity of the voluntary martyrdom of Thomas Dorr and of the appalling corruption in Rhode Island politics. In each, the text was surrounded by a handsome dentelle border, with a decorative rectangle at the top enclosing the date 1776 and, at the base, the imprint — A.H. Stillwell, No. 1 Market Square, Providence.

Standing near an outlook, Grandfather watched to see what would happen. According to family tradition he was well satisfied; his scheme had worked well. Businessmen walking down College Hill to their offices were startled to see that the southern facade of the bookshop had been turned into a bulletin board. They hurried to see what it meant. At times they stood almost shoulder to shoulder as they read the handbills pasted on the windowpanes. Grandfather studied their faces, as for the first time they read a statement by Thomas Dorr that had not been distorted or deliberately garbled by the charter-controlled press. He had forced leading citizens to face the facts. Their faces showed surprise and consternation. For the first time, they saw the self-named Law and Order party for what it was. They had long been hoodwinked into believing in a situation far from the truth. That Grandfather was not

arrested may well have been due to his timing. The politicians, realizing that the tide of public opinion was turning against them, were no doubt lying low.

Next in Grandfather Stillwell's one-man campaign came the so-called second edition of *Might and Right*. There were two type-settings of the text, the first apparently in two issues. That is, to the original edition of 324 pages was added the sketch of Thomas Dorr's life, thus creating two issues of the original format, although that with the added matter is erroneously designated as a second edition. Presumably this was stop-gap issue intended to circulate while the new type-setting was on the press. The first edition in both of its issues is typographically a simple affair. The later version is replete with a frontispiece-portrait of Thomas Wilson Dorr, a dedication to him and, on the verso of the titlepage, a copy-right notice and the imprint — B.F. Moore, Printer, Providence.

In 1880, Mr. Sidney S. Rider wrote in referring to the so-called second edition that "its present price would astonish its author." This would be even more true of the first issue of the first edition. Whoever may have a copy of *Might and Right* in original covers and ending at page 324, has a rare book indeed. So far as I know no copy of the first issue of the first edition came through in the family inheritance, although two copies each of the so-called second edition and of the handbill on silk have survived.

Grandfather Stillwell did not rest there. He had talking to do, important people to awaken and convince of the need of securing Thomas Dorr's release from solitary confinement and from prison itself. This activity is said to have been against the wishes of Mr. Dorr, who felt that if he were released the issue would be closed. But to some of his friends, the political issue was not so important as their revulsion at the thought of the personal suffering to which he was subjected.

During this period Grandfather sat for his portrait. Its artist — Eugene Salisbury Field — had difficulty portraying him in an interesting way until he discovered that if mention were made of the Dorr War his subject's blood pressure went up, his face suffused with color, a new look of determination came into his eyes. Noticing this personality change, Field kept him discussing politics all



through the sittings, with the result that in the portrait he appears as rosy and rugged as an English country squire. But when I was a child the accusing look in Grandfather's eyes troubled me greatly. In expounding the case to Mr. Field, he fought the war from its start to Thomas Dorr's imprisonment. To him the battle between might and right, which he had witnessed, was an intense and personal thing.

The "Sketch of the Life and Character of Thomas Wilson Dorr" appended to *Might and Right* is cleverly conceived. It tells of his quiet boyhood and youth, his kindliness, his interests and compassion, his high principles and his efforts to secure justice — all of which the landed proprietors of Providence knew to be true. Describing the mock trial in Newport, the hotbed of his adversaries, it depicts a man surrounded solely by enemies, yet courageous enough to speak his mind and to plead, not for himself, but for the rights of humble men. It describes the unspeakably foul conditions at the Providence jail in which Dorr had been imprisoned for life, the horrors of prolonged solitary confinement, and the inevitable damage to health and mind. *Might and Right* ends with this stirring appeal for Thomas Wilson Dorr's release:

*To render him justice is now impossible, for that has been done which can never be cancelled. But some atonement is still in our power . . . While there is life, let us act. Let not the damning sin of his murder rest upon us . . . Rhode Islanders, Americans! Have you thought of this? Are you prepared for this? Will you permit this? I appeal to you, in the name of a heart-bleeding father! — in the name of a heart-broken mother! — in the name of a crushed and suffering people! — in the name of him who surrendered his liberty that others might be free! — in the name of Justice! — in the name of God! — Pause not, faint not, rest not, until right is established. Undo the work of darkness. Break the bonds of Tyranny. Open the prison doors. You may do this without other than the force of Truth, without other than the force of Right, Without other than the force of Law! — If we cannot do this, we are SLAVES.*

Although for more than fifty years Rhode Island's General Assembly had refused to heed the voice of the people and to instigate reform,

certain concessions were eventually made. In a conciliatory Constitution, as a qualification for citizenship, a poll-tax was made acceptable as an alternate to property ownership, and the franchise was extended to resident males, black as well as white. These concessions were due both to a change in the political atmosphere and to the politicians' efforts to attract new supporters by broadening the franchise and to retain their own power by regaining those among their former constituents who had been outraged by the sentencing of Thomas Dorr to life imprisonment in solitary confinement.

Consequently, he and a host of political prisoners were released on June 27, 1845 through the passing of "An Act to pardon certain offences against the sovereign power of the State, and to quiet the minds of the good people thereof." Civil and political rights were restored to him when Democrats came into power in 1851 and conviction of treason was annulled in 1854, shortly before his death. Even though the people as such lacked legal power to initiate the reform which Mr. Dorr sought, it may be said that it was his voluntary martyrdom that forced the General Assembly to take the initiative, as a matter of political expediency.

Thomas Dorr's experience in resting his faith upon the people's sovereignty reveals to us the startling fact that our national governmental system still provides no legal means for the people to take the initiative in protecting themselves, other than voting for other representative and official leaders at election time. According to Daniel Webster's dictum, once candidates are in office, it seems that our only hold over them is that those seeking re-election are prone to heed (or to give lip-service to) the voice of their constituents. But much may occur in the period before the next election. We have ample time in which to lose our freedom, if evil persons are in office — willing or eager to overstep their legitimate power or to reap a harvest of kickbacks for themselves, in return for which they enact laws to our disadvantage or our detriment. The Dorr Rebellion is an important factor in Rhode Island's history. It also points up the inherent danger of a weak spot in our governmental system.



Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, gift of Mr. Robert Winthrop

Ninigret, Sachem of the Niantics, 18th-century oil painting by unidentified artist, one of only four portraits of Indians painted in this country before the American Revolution.



## Ninigret's Tactics of Accommodation — Indian Diplomacy in New England 1637-1675

by Timothy J. Sehr\*

Older histories of Indian-white relations in colonial New England read as if written by Julius Caesar. Whites came, they saw, they conquered. Most historians have been concerned with formulation of policies by whites to deal with the Indian "problem"; too often they have ignored the actions of Indians who had to adopt strategies to deal with the white "problem." Indians tried a variety of tactics to accommodate whites within a traditional cultural framework or, failing that, to fit themselves into the new order whites had imposed.<sup>1</sup>

Although Ninigret of the eastern Niantics in present-day Rhode Island was not the most powerful sachem in seventeenth-century New England, he did respond creatively to difficulties caused by arrival of the English. In continual contact with Puritans for over forty years, he knew and resented constraints they put on his actions. At various times he used defiance, isolation, personal diplomacy, and appeals to the Crown to maintain his autonomy. He succeeded in avoiding genocidal war with the English but not in keeping his freedom of action. Slowly, painfully, he adjusted his activities to fit them within limitations set by Englishmen.<sup>2</sup>

In his initial encounter Ninigret defied Puritans who presumed a right to direct Indian-Indian relations. During the Pequot War in 1637 a Puritan army under John Mason passed

through Niantic country. Niantics "carried very proudly towards" the English and refused any admission to their fort. Mason, "fearing lest they might discover us to the Enemy, especially they having many times some of their near Relations among their greatest Foes," surrounded the fort to keep the Indians from leaving. The next day after some of Miantonomo's Narragansetts had arrived, the Niantics came out of their village and joined the English expedition. They made "solemn Protestations how gallantly they would demean themselves, and how many Men they would Kill." This posturing left a negative impression with Mason, especially after the Niantics and Narragansetts largely deserted him during the Mystic battle.<sup>3</sup>

Mason's reactions to the Niantics established the pattern for future English responses. What Mason first emphasized was the insolent pride of Niantics who refused Puritans proper respect by denying them entry into the fort and by proclaiming their own bravery while mocking that of the whites. Such pride was troublesome because it indicated not only nonacceptance of the English as the pre-eminent power in the area but also a preference for traditional ways. Pride made Niantics troublesome; kinship ties made them dangerous. Mason feared that the Niantics would warn the Pequots because of assumed blood relation. Later the Niantics were almost always feared for

\*A member of the department of history at Indiana University, Bloomington, Mr. Sehr owes thanks to Professor Robert G. Gunderson and members of his graduate seminar in American studies whose comments helped make this essay readable.



the same reason. They were not deemed dangerous by themselves but rather because of their relationships with stronger tribes, particularly the Narragansetts and Mohawks.<sup>4</sup>

Ninigret appeared to defy the English further by attacking the Montauk Indians of Long Island and by allegedly harboring fugitive Pequots. Intertribal rivalries antedating the Puritan arrival prompted the attack on the Montauks in June 1638. Montauks were tributaries and allies of the Pequots and so were enemies of the Narragansetts and Niantics. Destruction of the Pequots by the English made it appear safe for Ninigret to assault Long Island's Indians. More important, the demise of the Pequots seemed to open the possibility of establishing Niantic overlordship, thus gaining the tribute Montauks had paid the Pequots. Ninigret's interest was in the tribute — he demanded immediate payment of wampum and warned the Montauks he would return later for more.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately for Ninigret, there was no power vacuum to fill on Long Island. Connecticut and Massachusetts authorities had already laid claim to the Montauk tribute. Once Ninigret left the island, its Indians appealed to Connecticut's government for protection. They reminded the Englishmen that no Indian would trust them if they did not keep their agreements. Connecticut responded by dispatching Mason with seven men to Ninigret to demand satisfaction and to threaten war. John Winthrop wrote Roger Williams urging him to work with Miantonomo, the Narragansett sachem, to effect a peaceful solution. Under these pressures Ninigret went to Hartford and made full restitution.

The incident did not end there because it undoubtedly made an impact on both sides. Ninigret's conduct reinforced the English conviction that his pride made him a character to watch closely. Montauks reported that Ninigret had said Connecticut would do nothing to him and that the Massachusetts governor was a friend who would sell the Montauks for half of the tribute. He also allegedly called the English liars who promise Indians protection only to obtain wampum. Puritans were not likely to overlook such boasting; indeed, they were more likely to take it as a threat to their safety. Probably what appeared as anti-English in Ninigret's actions and rhetoric

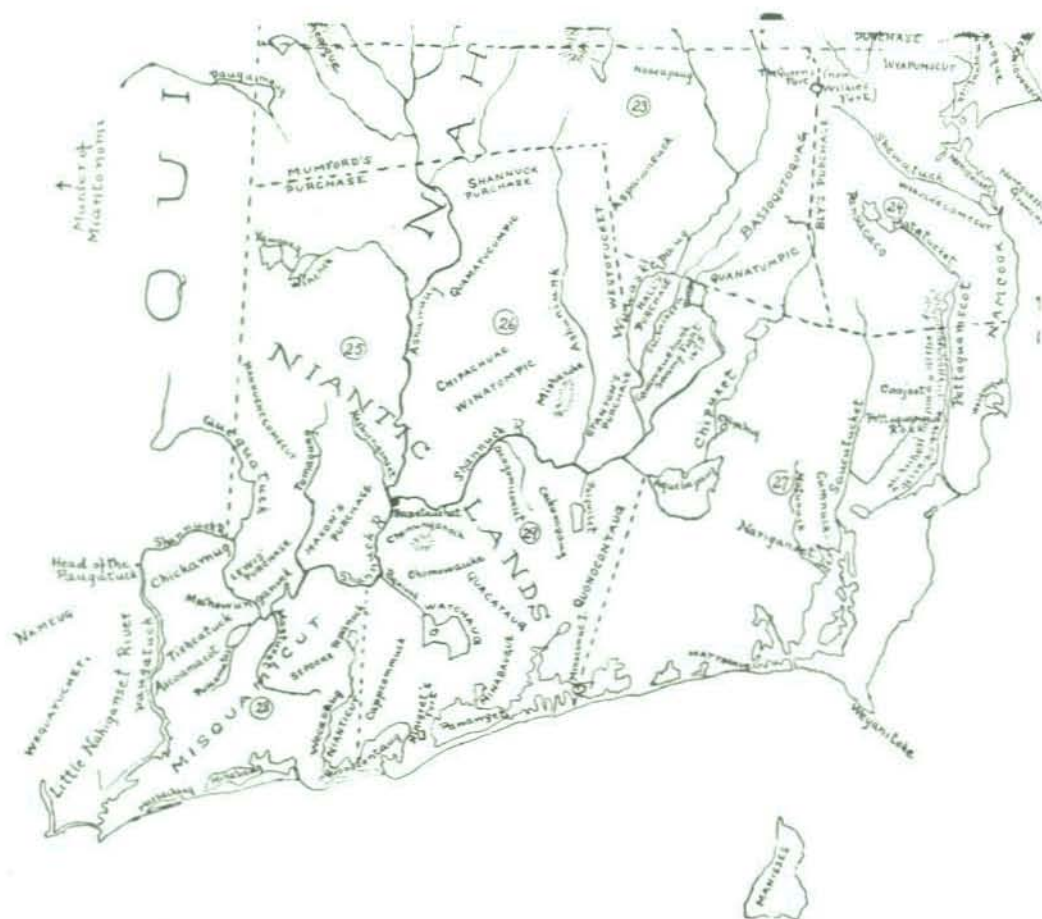
was resentment of white interference which closed off the usual means of increasing a sachem's power.<sup>6</sup>

Ninigret could not have helped but learn that colonists were determined to be a force in Indian-Indian relations. Obviously it did not take a direct attack on whites to provoke their wrath. By complying with Puritan demands, Ninigret evinced a willingness to concede them a role in intertribal affairs so long as that role was traditional. Ninigret had no pressing problems with the Montauks but had merely sought to fill a supposed void. Once it became clear that the English had assumed suzerainty over the Montauks, Ninigret did not challenge them for fifteen years. In this instance Puritans seemed simply to be taking the place of Pequots. The replacement did not make Ninigret happy, but it was comprehensible.

A third major confrontation between Ninigret and the English before 1643 — that over Pequot survivors — showed that Puritan mistrust was hardening into prejudice. Ninigret was not the biggest harbinger of Pequots. In July 1637, Winthrop refused to deal with the Niantic sachem in Boston until he had delivered refugee Pequots. After hesitating Ninigret complied and "was lovingly dismissed." In contrast, Uncas, sachem of the Mohegans, and Wequash Cook both kept Pequots on Long Island and brought them back to Connecticut occasionally to increase their strength. Williams asserted that Wequash Cook had "growne rich" and had become "a Sachim with the Pequots" by harboring them. Records include no action taken against Wequash Cook while Uncas was only chastised and ordered to bring in the names and number of his Pequots to Connecticut authorities.

Friction developed in 1640 over the Puritan decision to execute those Pequots who had killed Englishmen. Connecticut ordered Ninigret to surrender some of these murderers, and he refused. The basis of his refusal was his suspicion that the English were seeking to punish him rather than to administer justice. William Coddington wrote Winthrop that to his personal knowledge twelve Pequot murderers were still alive, eight with Uncas, the other four with Ninigret. Coddington said Niantics wanted Uncas to surrender his eight first so "that they may see its Justice the English seekes." Williams told Winthrop that Narragan-





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Portion of a map of Indian lands in Rhode Island by Sidney S. Rider, 1903, showing Niantic territory which covered a large part of Washington County.

sett sachems could not convince Ninigret to give up four Pequots because "English Partialitie to all the Pequots at Monhiggin is so great and the Consequences so grievous upon the Abuse of the English Love, that all their Arguments returned back (which they use to the Nayantaquit Sachims) as Arrowes from a stone wall."

In 1638 Ninigret had accepted the Puritan claim of their rights over Montauks, a claim that fit the traditional Indian political framework. By 1640 he perceived Puritan actions aimed against him and that those actions upset political balances which existed among the tribes. Not feeling himself able to attract English support, Ninigret preferred to isolate himself from whites. To the

settlers this was just another example of his pride. Winthrop reported that all Narragansett sachems kindly entertained Puritan messengers sent to investigate rumors of a plot in 1640. But Ninigret "carried himself proudly, and refused to come to us, or to yield to any thing, only he said he would not harm us, except we invaded him."<sup>77</sup>

Events of 1643-45 confirmed and strengthened initial impressions of both sides. In 1643 Uncas captured Miantonomo in a war, and commissioners of the newly formed United Colonies allowed Uncas to execute him. Massachusetts, Connecticut, Plymouth, and New Haven had created the United Colonies in spring 1643 largely to better regulate affairs with Indians. Miantonomo's death



History of the Indians of Connecticut by John W. DeForest

*Death of Miantonomo as depicted in a 19th-century wood engraving. According to accounts of the event, Miantonomo was killed by the brother of Uncas with a blow from a tomahawk.*

made his brother Pessacus sachem and increased Ninigret's importance. Puritans usually treated Pessacus and Ninigret as if they were equals whereas they had assumed Miantonomo superior to Ninigret. Both Pessacus and Ninigret were intent on revenging Miantonomo's death but war on Uncas was no longer a simple thing. Puritans committed themselves to the Mohegan's defence in any war caused by the execution.

Twice in 1643 and 1644 Pessacus sought to obtain Puritan approval of war on Uncas. Both times Winthrop denied the request. Narragansetts then made a tactical error of major proportions. Pessacus and other sachems — urged on by Samuel Gorton — signed a document placing themselves under the protection of King Charles I. The action only served to anger the Puritans, doubly so since the text of the submission was clearly aimed at the New Englanders. The document gave Charles the Narragansett country in return for protection from "some of His Majesty's pretended subjects" of whom the Indians had "just cause of jealousy and suspicion." When Massa-

chusetts sent men to interview Narragansett sachems, they were treated rudely. Canonicus let them stand in the rain for two hours. Pessacus answered their questions insolently and told them Narragansetts were going to wage guerrilla warfare on Uncas.<sup>8</sup>

Despite all threats no major war broke out in 1644. Narragansetts did attack Uncas in spring 1645, and the United Colonies moved quickly to support the Mohegan sachem. In May the Massachusetts General Court ordered a letter to the Narragansetts telling them to stop the war. In July commissioners of the United Colonies in a special meeting called up an army to fight the Rhode Island Indians. In mid-August, before that army had gathered, Narragansetts and a Niantic representative signed a peace treaty with the Puritan colonies. That agreement later became a further source of friction between Indians and Puritans but for the moment it brought peace.

Ninigret's role in the war scare, war itself, and submission is unclear, but the English considered him a major cause of agitation. Mason's commis-



sion to command the United Colonies army stated that its commissioners looked "upon the Nianticks as the cheif Incendiaries and causes of the warr and should be glad they might first feele the smart of it." The commissioners may have had evidence for their conclusion, but it is likely they were reacting to their previously formed attitudes about Ninigret. They reacted also to Ninigret's alleged reply to their messengers that Niantics had decided on war against Uncas, "nor would they enquire who began" it. Moreover, if Puritans did not stop protecting Mohegans, Niantics "would heape up [English] Cattle as high as their wigwams," and an Englishman could "not step out of the doores to pisse, but they would kill him."<sup>9</sup>

In 1647 Ninigret could not deny making those statements but argued that the emissaries had provoked him. The commissioners did not accept that explanation; nevertheless, it conforms to Ninigret's personality. On the verge of a war which was just in his eyes, Puritans interfered; his response was his usual boastful posturing. For the English his answer was another instance of his insufferable pride. Thus, even though implicit in Ninigret's answer is his ignorance of who started the war, the commissioners blamed him. Ninigret still preferred a policy of isolation and of avoiding direct contact with the English. He did not attend the peace conference of 1645 because it would have been a recognition of English rights to interfere in intertribal affairs.

In 1647 Ninigret's tactics toward Puritans changed abruptly; he began to court their favor actively. In part he might have become more open because the United Colonies threatened war if Narragansetts and Niantics did not attend "the Colonies just satisfaction or if by any insolent & hostile carriage they [did] give further provocation." More likely, Ninigret attempted personal diplomacy because he believed he might finally have an English ally in Connecticut, John Winthrop Jr. Winthrop was a friend of Williams who in turn was friendly toward Niantics, and there is a tradition that Ninigret once saved Winthrop's life. Further, Winthrop and his new plantation of New London were having problems with Uncas.

Ninigret visited Winthrop in February 1647 and signaled his change in tactics. Winthrop wrote Edward Hopkins, Connecticut's governor —



Dictionary of American Portraits, Dover Publications, Inc.

John Winthrop (1606-1676), governor of Connecticut Colony.

*... the effect of his principall speech was to signify that he heard the English had an ill opinion of him but he knew noe Just cause but because he was a stranger to them not frequenting their courts and plantations as others did which was cheifly because he was so remote from them and fearfull to come amongst them and was also formerly blind, but now sees the English doe Justly, and never begin with any till they are provoked that now he comes to see me, being newly come to be his neighbour and to have information what to doe that he might enjoy the love of the English that he was resolved to be acquainted with them and keepe peace with them and doe whatsoever they shall require in reason.*

Clearly Ninigret himself was aware that he was at least declaring a new policy. He was willing to try to work within machinery established by the Puritans.

Ninigret sought to show his good faith by requesting a pass to attend the United Colonies' next meeting in Boston. Winthrop the elder granted safe conduct, and the Niantic sachem





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*John Winthrop (1588-1649), governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony.*

appeared at the August 1647 session, representing Narragansetts as well as Niantics. The commissioners quickly asked him why Indians had not paid tribute according to provisions of the treaty of 1645. Ninigret unwisely denied knowing of the treaty or why the Indians should pay wampum. His response showed his continuing resentment of Puritan interference in Indian affairs. After the commissioners reminded him of his 1645 threats to the English, he asked for an accounting of the amount of tribute already paid. He agreed to send out messengers to collect wampum and to stay in Boston until the debt was paid. The messengers returned with only two hundred of over one thousand fathom of wampum due. Ninigret asked that the rest be delayed until the following spring, and "then if it were not fully paid, the English should take his head & seise his country." The commissioners offered a less generous compromise which Ninigret "cheerfully accepted, and promised to perform accordingly."<sup>10</sup>

A few days later Ninigret had Williams write Winthrop junior to ask his intercession with the commissioners for a further delay. In July fol-

lowing Winthrop senior requested that his son speak with the Niantic sachem about that tribute. Massachusetts' governor accused Ninigret of being unfaithful and ungrateful and threatened to place all blame for breach of the 1645 treaty on his shoulders. In a second letter Winthrop told his son the commissioners wanted Ninigret to appear at their September meeting.

By September 1648 a new problem had arisen which put tribute into the background — rumors that Mohawks were coming to attack Mohegans and English. Williams believed that Mohawks were coming because of Mohegan attacks on Pocumtuck Indians. His view was a minority one as usual; most settlers blamed the alleged Mohawk coming on a Narragansett and Niantic conspiracy. Mason and Winthrop junior wrote the commissioners charging the Rhode Island Indians with a plot. From the letters the commissioners determined that a conspiracy existed and that Ninigret "in particular Had inquired whither the English would defend Unquas expressing himselfe that if they did, they Could soone burne the houses att Connectacutt."

Like most scares of the period, the conspiracy died as quickly as it had arisen. One can never be sure if there was a plot or what role Ninigret might have played in it, but hard feelings from settlers against him continued. This scare had hardly passed before Mason accused him of the further insolence of hunting in Pequot territory. Winthrop junior was amazed how Mason had heard so rapidly of the Niantic's activity unless it was from "Surmises and Jelousies of the Mohegens." Winthrop defended Ninigret, "conceiving it sufficient to the English to maintaine their right that he acknowledgeth their right in it, and seeketh for licence from them." John Haynes and Edward Hopkins — who alternated as governor and deputy governor in Connecticut's first fifteen years — were not so charitable. Both wrote Winthrop arguing that Ninigret had no right to hunt in the area because his "non performance of Covenants and treacherous designes make him (at least as yett) uncapable to receiving favours or encouragements from any who love the peace of the Colonies."<sup>11</sup>

A minor issue in the continuing relations between Ninigret and the Puritans, this dispute over hunting rights fitted the inimical pattern of those



relations. Puritans protested what they saw as Ninigret's insolent pride, not because his hunting threatened the lives of any settlers. Hunting between the Mystic and the Pawcatuck rivers simply gave further evidence that he would not accept English direction. A dispute between Connecticut and Massachusetts concerning jurisdiction of the area complicated the problem. Ninigret claimed a right to hunt from a Massachusetts authority, Winthrop junior. For Connecticut not to have denied Ninigret's claim would have been to deny its own claims to the area. The incident sketches the developing pattern in which Connecticut of the four Puritan colonies emerges the most strident enemy of Ninigret, and its opposition was connected with the colony's land claims.

Connecticut's growing impatience with Ninigret surfaced in two developments in 1649. The first incident was an alleged attempt to kill Uncas in the spring. The accused would-be assassin was an Indian named Cuttaquin whose confession implicated Ninigret and Narragansetts in the murder try. Connecticut's leaders, especially Mason, believed the story and blamed Ninigret in particular. Williams heard rumors in May that some Massachusetts men on their way to Hartford were going to come through Rhode Island and take Ninigret with them. A month later he received letters from Mason warning him that Connecticut planned war on his Niantics.

War was avoided by Ninigret's voluntary attendance at the commissioners' meeting in July. He still tried to work within the framework the Puritans had established, but their confrontation was not friendly. The commissioners charged him of conspiring with Mohawks, hiring Cuttaquin, failing to pay required tribute, and finally, plotting to revive Pequot power through the marriage of his daughter to "a brother or brothers soone of Sassauas the malignant furious Pequot." The meeting ended with the commissioners urging their colonies to keep defences in good order but not calling for war.

The other major development of 1649 had greater impact in the long run. Previously Puritans had interfered only in Ninigret's affairs with other tribes, but beginning that year they meddled in intratribal conflict among Niantics. Caushawashott — apparently half-Pequot and half-Niantic — broke with Ninigret and found friends among

leaders of Connecticut. In 1648 Caushawashott, then using the name Wequash Cook, reportedly opposed the conspiracy with the Mohawks. The next year he took Mason wampum which Narragansetts claimed was part of their payment to the English. These actions prompted Mason to write two letters to Winthrop junior defending Caushawashott's interests. Hopkins also wrote Winthrop on behalf of Caushawashott. Hopkins claimed no acquaintance with the Indian but remembered that in the previous year he had not been implicated in the Mohawk scare. Caushawashott's problem was that Ninigret was settling Pequots along the eastern bank of the Pawcatuck River which Caushawashott claimed was his. Hopkins was not yet ready to defend the Indian's title to the land, but he was ready to find fault with Ninigret.

By fall 1649 Rhode Island Indians conceded that Caushawashott was out of their control. Through Williams they complained that Caushawashott and his followers would not contribute his share to wampum due the United Colonies. The Indians asked that the Puritans compel him to contribute, implicitly granting them a role in intratribal affairs. Caushawashott's new-found freedom and feeling of importance surfaced when he threatened Ninigret that Mason would attack if he did not limit his hunting area. Whether Caushawashott's threat had any basis in fact is less important than that he made it. Thanks to his friendship with Puritan enemies of Ninigret, Caushawashott was able to defy a sachem who should have been his superior.<sup>12</sup>

Between 1649 and 1653 relations between Ninigret and the Puritans were tense and unfriendly but manageable. No major incident occurred to inflame the situation, and Ninigret still relied on Winthrop the younger. In 1653 Connecticut turned English attention again on Ninigret. As usual Puritans feared there was a conspiracy against them. This time fear arose because the Niantic sachem had spent part of winter 1652-53 with the Dutch on Manhattan Island. The United Colonies sent representatives to him to find out why he had visited the Dutch. Ninigret denied any conspiracy existed and explained he went because he had heard a Frenchman on Manhattan could cure an undisclosed illness.

Ninigret's answer is not convincing even now,



but the tone of his response is full of respect for English power, if not for the English themselves. Ninigret could find no reason "why hee should not keep his league with the English his old frinds and if these things [the plot] were soe how can hee expect to bee preserved hee and his by a few Dutch men whoe are soe Remote when as wee doe live by the dore of the English?" Also "what doe the English thinke that I thinke they bee asleep and suffer mee to doe them wronge doe not wee know the English are not a sleeppy people?" Overall his response was conciliatory and constituted a final attempt to salvage friendship with the Puritans. In further proof of his intention he sent Awashaw to the meeting of the United Colonies. More diplomatic than Ninigret in his encounter with the commissioners, Awashaw succeeded in getting them to reveal that news of Ninigret's supposed conspiracy came from Uncas; he could not manage to make them admit the bias of the source.

Ninigret broke the tense peace resulting from the April meeting by attacking the Montauks in summer 1653. He asserted that the Long Island Indians had killed one of his men. The Puritans countered "that the man Ninnegret saith was Murthered by the long Islanders was Justly put to death by them with the approbations of the Court at Conecticott." The commissioners' messengers had to endure "rude and hostile affronts offered by Ninnegrets men" and were given "proud peremptory and offensive Answers" by Ninigret himself. It reminded the commissioners how "proudly and Insolently" Ninigret had treated their emissaries in 1645. They voted to call up an army to attack the Niantics. Simon Bradstreet dissented, stopping any immediate action. He argued that "noe agreement produced or proved wherby the Collonies are oblidged to protect the long Island Indians against Ninnigrett or others and soe no Reason to engage them in their quarrells the grounds whereof they can not well understand."<sup>13</sup>

Bradstreet's action might have set a precedent had it been allowed to stand; instead it served only to cause a crisis among the United Colonies on the nature of their confederation. By September 1654 Ninigret and the Montauks were involved in full-scale war. The commissioners regained their unanimity and declared war on the Niantics. Massachusetts reversed its position because in

1654 war with the Dutch was not as likely as it had been a year earlier. In addition, Ninigret had hired Pequots to fight for him. He had also "hired & drawne downe many forraigne Indians Armed with guns pistolls & swords to the terror of the English and Indians thereabouts." This looked too much like an Indian conspiracy for the Puritans to ignore it.

As usual, the English found support for their fear in Ninigret's answers to their representatives. Responding as a proud warrior who resented Puritan interference, the Niantic sachem glibly denied owing the English any tribute for Pequots because he no longer had any; he had only hired some to help him. "Concerning his Invading of the long Islanders hee Answered: wherfore should hee acquaint the Comissioners therwith when the long islandors had slayne a Sachems son and sixty others of his men? And therefore hee will not make peace with the long islandors but doth desire the English lett him alone . . . Adding if your Governors sonne were slayne and severall other men would you aske Counsell of another Nation how and when to Right your selves? . . . Wherfore should I acquaint the Commissioners with it? I doe but Right my owne quarrell which the long islanders began with mee." He yearned to isolate himself from the English and to close the door he had opened in 1647.

For Puritans his answer was simply insolence. Mason had noted earlier in 1654 that the Indians' "pryde and insolvency is growne very highe." Massachusetts justified war as a way to "Abate the pride and power of Ninigrett." The commissioners decided that "the forbearance and lenity of the Collonies doth but encrease his Insolence and our danger." After their expedition returned without having fought Ninigret who had retreated into a swamp, the commissioners were unhappy with their commander Samuel Willard. The expedition had not succeeded because "Ninnegrett whoe while our smale army was there had his mouth as in the Dust soone after grew hie and Insolent in his speech and Cariages." Colonists intended the war to reduce Ninigret's pride and force him into admitting English hegemony; their commissioners believed Willard had failed to achieve this goal.<sup>14</sup>

Actually results were more ambiguous than the commissioners first thought. In 1656 Ninigret did



appeal to the United Colonies in hopes of their justifying his conduct toward the Long Island Indians. The commissioners rejected his appeal because he did not present his case strongly or clearly and they remembered how proudly he had acted toward them the previous year. It is noteworthy that Ninigret again tried to use machinery set up by Puritans to handle intertribal conflicts. Similarly in 1657 Narragansetts and Pocumtucks requested that Massachusetts' general court allow them to wage war on Uncas, a request also denied. The expedition against Ninigret may have had the short-term effect of making Indians respect Puritan policies more.

A second result of the war reduced Ninigret's fighting strength. The United Colonies resurrected the Pequot tribe in 1655 by creating two bands on two reservations. One group under Caushawashott (now called Harmon Garrett) consisted in part of Pequots who had deserted Ninigret. Caushawashott's reservation ran from the Pawcatuck eastward, on land claimed by Ninigret and by Rhode Island. Commissioners probably felt that Caushawashott had some hereditary claim to the area, but their action had other implications; their grant was a challenge both to Ninigret and to the heretical colony of Rhode Island.

Ninigret's reduced ability to oppose Puritans became evident in 1660. The commissioners charged him with "an Insolent carriage to the English and a barbarouse and Inhumaine acte" involving a new attack on Long Island Indians and a raid on Norwich. Confronted with a Connecticut army, Ninigret, Pessacus, and Scuttup mortgaged the entire Narragansett country to pay the fine required by the Puritans. In October 1660 the sachems mortgaged the area to land speculators led by Humphrey Atherton on condition that they pay the fine. Atherton paid and, when the Indians defaulted in their payment, he took possession of the region in spring 1662.<sup>15</sup>

Interestingly enough, in this period the commissioners acted favorably on one of Ninigret's petitions. In 1661 Ninigret protested Caushawashott's efforts to sell some land Ninigret claimed, and the commissioners agreed to hear the case. In 1662 "Commissioners upon the whole Case thought it not meet to prejudice the title of Ninigrett." It is possible that the strength of Ninigret's evidence simply convinced the Puritans, yet

it is hard to imagine they did not also realize that the mortgages of 1660 already gave them a claim to the land. Recognizing Ninigret's claim confirmed his earlier mortgages as legitimate.

In 1663 Narragansett sachems and Ninigret renewed their submission to the king. Two years later the royal commission sent to conquer New Netherlands and to investigate conditions in New England voided the Atherton mortgage and declared that Narragansett country was the king's province. In the long run the declaration made little difference. As one historian has commented, Robert Nichols, head of the commission, in the king's name "did, indeed, declare all these proceedings void, but no attention seems to have ever been paid to him." Still the Indians' attempt to use Charles II's power as a counterweight to the Puritans indicates some political sophistication. It represents an effort to fit themselves into the new order whites had created.

Ninigret used that submission in his dealings with colonists; it served as the basis of his relations with Puritans through the 1670s. For him it meant that Indians and settlers were all subjects of the king and so equals. Such an interpretation fitted his preference for acting as if the colonists had no control over him. In 1669 the English again accused him of conspiring against them. Mason first raised the alarm, but New York's governor Francis Lovelace also wrote to Rhode Island authorities about it. Ninigret appeared before Rhode Island's council to explain his conduct. His response gives his view of the relationship between himself and settlers. He wondered

*there should bee any such report raised, considering his owne innocency, and that ever since himselfe heard the words by the Commissioners, spoken as from King Charles his mouth, and hath since laid it up in his heart that the King did looke upon himselfe and Sucquansh and their Indians as his subjects, together with the English; and said hee understood that the English of this Colony were to help them, if any should bee too mighty for them, and they to doe the like to the English if any should invade or make war upon the Colony.*

He saw English colonists and himself as allies and equals under the king. The only responsibility either party had was to aid the other during wars. Presumably at other times neither party



should interfere in the other's activities.<sup>16</sup>

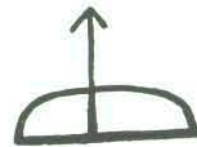
Ninigret implied some limitation as to which Englishmen he bound himself to help. His relationship applied particularly to settlers of "this Colony," Rhode Island. The limitation was full of political meaning, at heart anti-Puritan and anti-United Colonies. Puritans had attacked him and exacted tribute from him. Ninigret declared independence from them as an equal subject of the king and because he did not live in any of the United Colonies. Being an equal subject freed him from paying any tribute, while living in Rhode Island limited his political responsibilities to that colony. Ninigret obviously knew his enemies and understood divisions among colonists themselves.

Ninigret used that submission a second time at the outbreak of King Philip's War in 1675. English fear of all Indians mounted, and they sent messengers to determine loyalties of all the various tribes. Tobias Sanders interviewed Ninigret and found him opposed to Philip. He had a personal grudge against Philip, but he assured Sanders that even if Philip "had not dun him that injury hee cannot for gett the kindness that he recived from King Charls, and the commshners when thay wear in thees parts." He "saith it again & again that King Charls and his commishners have so injaged his hart, so that if the English can finde that he prove falc to them he shall desier no favor from them." To prove his loyalty, Ninigret sent the head of one of Philip's warriors to Fitz-John Winthrop, and after one of the battles he buried the dead.<sup>17</sup>

By that time Ninigret no longer appeared a major Indian figure. Based more on memories than on facts, English fears concerning him were exaggerated. By the 1670s the proud warrior of the 1630s had become a wily old man. He still valued his autonomy, but it no longer had much substance. Though he had apparently never killed or even injured any white person, the English had split his tribe, deprived him of much of his power, and made his claim to his land tenuous. His tactics of defiance, withdrawal, active diplomacy, and submission to the king all failed in their objective to make colonists recognize his freedom in Indian-Indian relations.

Historians have noted Ninigret's failure to attain his goal; they have said less about his tactics

to handle problems caused by the presence of whites. By dwelling on the ultimate inability of Indians to deal successfully with disruptions to their cultures, historians have not been just either to Indians or to history. Indians have seemed far too passive while history has appeared far too simple. Ninigret's career should remind us of the complexity of Indian-white relations and of the creative participation of Indians in those relations.





- 1 Bernard W. Sheehan, "Indian-White Relations in Early America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 26 (April 1969) 267-286. Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., "Political Context of a New Indian History," *Pacific Historical Review* 40 (August 1971) 357-382. P. Richard Metcalf, "Who Should Rule at Home? Native American Politics and Indian-white Relations," *Journal of American History* 61 (December 1974) 651-665.
- 2 Samuel G. Drake, *Biography and History of the Indians of North America, from Its Discovery*, 10th ed. (Boston, 1848) 2: 67-83.
- 3 John Mason, *Brief History of the Pequot War* (reprint Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1966) 4-5.
- 4 Niantic-Narragansett relationship was a close one based on kinship. Drake, 2: 58, 67, gives two possible ways in which Ninigret was related to Miantonomo the Narragansett sachem. John Winthrop wrote that Niantics and Narragansetts had many blood ties — James K. Hosmer, ed., *Winthrop's Journal* (reprint New York, 1959) 2: 78. Apparently other Niantics under Wequash Cook had ties with Pequots — Allyn B. Forbes, ed., *Winthrop Papers* (Boston, 1929-1947) 3: 318, 494, 501. Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians 1620-1675* (Boston, 1965) 55, sums up the relationship: Niantics were "sometimes subservient to the Narragansetts, sometimes allied to them, and at other times totally independent."
- 5 *Winthrop Papers* 4: 43-45. Leicester Bradner, "Ninigret's Naval Campaigns against Montauks," *Rhode Island Historical Society Collections* 18: 1 (January 1925) 14-19.
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## Cleaning Out the Bottles





## Public Health and Preventive Medicine in Providence, 1913

by Abby Cohen\*

Inquiry into production, distribution, and consumption of milk appears superficially insignificant within the scope of American urban history, a field offering an abundance of source material coupled with relative neglect by historians. Yet such activities did become of primary concern to citizens of Providence in 1913, when allegations of wrongdoing in the office of the Milk Inspector prompted an investigation. *Milk Committee Investigation Reports* reveal to the contemporary reader a fascinating story, replete with well developed characters, a thickening plot and villains who get their just deserts at the end for jeopardizing the community's welfare. To the historian, this investigation serves more importantly as a case study of the era 1850-1920; the broad themes which characterize that period are found in microcosm in this very local scandal.

Three major themes predominate in those years: growth of the city and its consequentially deleterious effects on health needs of urban dwellers, political organization which accompanied this growth and its ramifications for society, and rise of a new type of reform "rationally" conceived and dedicated to scientific principles. Those themes provide the framework for development of the public health movement in general and of milk inspection in particular.

Like almost all urban centers in the middle to late nineteenth century, Providence experienced rapid increase in population, which would have profound implications for the city's physical environment. In June 1900, Providence had 175,597 people living within its boundaries. By

1910, the federal census reported that the population had surged to 224,326, an increase of approximately 27.5%. The primary factor in this surge was migration from both European and American soils. Cities like Providence offered many inducements to these migrants, especially in the form of jobs, which might eventually lead to security and success. To residents of rural villages at home and abroad where discontent with isolated, impoverished life was widespread, the promise of freedom and opportunity met eager ears.

Harsh discoveries often awaited new settlers. As a mecca for dreams, cities were a disappointment. Cities were not paved with gold, nor was the climb from poverty to wealth quickly and easily achieved. Housing was often sorely inadequate in the inner cores, areas of obliged residence for those who lacked money to commute to work. Growing population converging in a limited area forced up prices of accommodations. In order to afford housing, immigrants had to split the cost of renting a tenement with others. Although conditions were not so severe as in cities like New York or Boston, Providence "had its share of dwellings, frequently owned by absentee landlords and occupied by immigrants, 'where people live[d] and die[d] in utter defiance of all sanitary laws.'"<sup>1</sup> Overcrowding and disease often accompanied urbanization.

Hygienic customs which had been sufficient in rural areas simply were no longer adequate in urban centers. Lack of sewage, refuse and waste disposal, of proper ventilation, of pure food and water, and of health regulations resulted in un-

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necessary sickness and death. Lower classes suffered most, due to the physical and low paying nature of their jobs.

At the outset, health was a moral issue which remained outside the scientific realm. Duties of the first state boards of health were not devoted to disease control at all but to performing welfare functions. Disease was regarded as the consequence of lack of sanitation which was in turn ascribed to lack of moral fiber inherent in a lower class populace. These so-called personal inadequacies were not at first deemed worthy of consideration by the middle and upper class public.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time there was a dearth of scientific knowledge. Doctors commanded little esteem; specific etiologies of most diseases remained unknown. There was merely a set of staunchly held beliefs which regarded filth as a breeding ground of disease, all kinds of filth as dangerous, and air as the sole carrier of disease. Together they came to be known as the filth theory of disease.<sup>3</sup>

Interest in public health grew rapidly as population density increased and urban environment deteriorated. Individuals involved in this movement were attracted to reforms for quite diverse reasons. Some, like Dr. Stephen Smith, president of the New York City Board of Health, genuinely felt a humanitarian desire to improve living conditions of the city's poor. Many of the educated, affluent class looked upon prevention of disease as a duty. Others, like Lemuel Shattuck of Massachusetts, a man significantly ahead of his time, urged public health controls as a means of limiting contagion. He stated, "It behooves the city authorities — it behooves every individual citizen to seek out and remove every removable cause of disease and death, in whatever section of the city, under whatever circumstances, and among whatever class of citizens it may appear." He understood that any efforts undertaken by the middle class to maintain and improve their own sanitary conditions would be stymied by lower classes. Lack of cleanliness and "decency" among the poor would not be constrained by neighborhood borders; epidemics attributed to lower classes were affecting whole cities. "With a large population unable or unwilling to take on personal responsibility to conduct their lives in accord with recommended sanitary principles, the

state could properly play the role of guardian to society and policeman to the uninitiated." On this basis, coupled with increasing scientific knowledge, the Massachusetts Board of Health was established in 1869. However, even Shattuck's practical work in gathering vital statistics, and his accurate assessments of the health situation were disregarded very quickly because they remained couched in pietistic terms. He, like other men of his era, viewed disease as the penalty for sin, and this ultimately prevented implementation of much of his work.

Social control was not the only objective of public health sought by reformers. Others supported public health regulations on grounds of economic necessity. As early as 1860, areas which sent representatives to conventions dealing with public health and quarantine were almost exclusively active, commercial centers, "whose further growth and prosperity were dependent on assuring the health and activity of a large and heterogeneous population."<sup>4</sup>

In a series of lectures in Germany in 1873, Max von Pellenkofer concisely stated the economic significance of illness. Sickness cost a nation money by destroying its labor power. This occurred in either of two ways — temporary or permanent disability resulting in unemployment, or loss of life which might also be termed a capital loss. To von Pellenkofer, spending money for the improvement of urban health conditions was thus a wise and sound economic investment. Like Shattuck, he realized the ultimate failure of any attempt by upper classes to "buy" healthful conditions only for themselves. "The rich have to pay a bill and the poor cannot contribute anything; yet the rich draw considerable advantages from the fact that such institutions benefit the poor also." Not only would the rich be providing ideally valuable help for the poor, but also performing something of tangible value — saving money in the long run — for themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Providence moved quickly with regard to issues of public health. The methodology and scope of public health work were dramatically altered, due to expertise of men like Dr. Edwin Snow (first vice-president of the American Public Health Association), and Dr. Charles V. Chapin — both fortunately in the employ of Providence's Board of Health. As Wilson G. Smillie recounts in his





RIHS Library

*Dr. Charles V. Chapin (1856-1941)*

RIHS Library

*Dr. Edwin Snow (1820-1888)*

history of public health: "Perhaps the best record of public health in a city was that of Providence, R.I. Dr. Edwin Snow began his duties as Superintendent of Health in 1856, and served continuously until he was succeeded by Charles Chapin in 1884. Chapin continued in this office for 48 years — to 1931."

What characterized Providence's health department was its growing tendency to apply science to public health. Following the trend at the turn of the century, there was greater reliance on technical expertise. Most important of all, the filth theory had given way to Koch's germ theory of disease. Tasks to which Dr. Snow initially had turned his attention — such as removing decaying materials, cleaning streets and yard privies — gave way to greater emphasis upon functions of vital statistics, communicable disease control, epidemiology and environmental sanitation.

Dr. Charles V. Chapin was most influential in bringing the bacteriological/germ theory of disease to Providence. This theory incorporated the notion that specific agents of infection caused specific diseases. Within this framework it became

clear that there could be individual immunity to specific infection and "healthy carriers." Under Chapin's direction the first municipal health laboratory in the United States was established in 1888. The advent of scientific investigation meant a new reliance on technical experts in the fields of biology, medicine, chemistry and engineering. G.T. Swartz, a chemist, was made director of the laboratory and his primary function was to perform analyses on Providence's food and water. It was now evident that the way to prevent disease was through the monitoring and control of environmental conditions. This meant not only cleaning up filth which had already been created, but working towards prevention of many conditions from their point of origin.<sup>6</sup>

Food and milk had long been considered agents of disease, but need for milk inspection had arisen primarily from growth of the city. The dependable farmer down the road no longer supplied milk to one's doorstep. Increased population density, and resulting disappearance of farm lands within the city's boundaries had necessitated that milk be transported from outlying farms into the



city. Therefore, the urbanite was much less able to guard against "rotten" milk. Milk coming into the city from outside presented two new dangers to the consumer. First of all, the large demand for milk forced dealers to collect it from a wider territory. In Providence this meant that milk was shipped in from Connecticut, and that the inspector had no power to regulate its production under his department's charter. Secondly, since so many producers were involved, distributors eased their task by pooling all their milk. In doing so they often sacrificed quality but, far worse, they often spread disease over a far greater area. This second danger was not taken lightly in cities. A study had proven conclusively that Chicago's 1911 septic sore throat epidemic, affecting over 10,000 inhabitants, was attributable to a milkborne germ. It was known that certain beneficial bacteria in milk caused the production of marketable items like yogurt and cheese. Yet by 1900 it was also clear that milk provided an exceptional medium for incubation of germs which developed into diseases like typhoid fever, diphtheria, scarlet fever, cholera, and especially tuberculosis.<sup>7</sup>

Increasing incidence of tuberculosis convinced many, especially in the upper classes, of the need for milk regulation. Elaboration of this point comes from one writer who remarked "the truth is, the wealthy and well-to-do get more milk than the poorer people so the amount of milk used by the average citizen is considerably less than .6 pt." A careful study of milk consumption done by John R. Williams in Rochester, New York concluded that "the poor not only use less milk and bought it in smaller quantities than the well-to-do but the use of store milk and condensed milk was largely confined to the laboring class." The wealthy consumed more milk than the poor, but the type of milk which they consumed did not go through as many processing stages or possible points of infection as that which reached the poor. Still, people were infected by this insidious disease regardless of class. Extensive possibilities of entrance of tubercle bacilli made it especially difficult to combat. A system was needed which by issuance of licenses could enable the Office of the Milk Inspector to follow the entire route of market milk from cows in the barn to the bottle or can and dipper where it was ultimately sold.

Analysis written by a health officer in 1917

identified six major stages in transmission of milk from dairy farm to consumer where infection could result. They were: 1) on the farm — water supply, farm hands and/or equipment; 2) enroute to the creamery or city in unsealed, unsterile cans; 3) in city milk plants, where often the milk was tasted using a dipper placed back in the can; 4) by unsanitary cans and bottles; 5) in delivery; and 6) where milk was stored for sale. Tuberculosis did not always occur from tubercles on the cow's udder, hairs or feces finding their way into the milk; it might also result from a farmhand or dealer coughing sputum near the cow or near the milk.

Economics played a major role in determining need for milk regulation. Eager to turn a profit on milk sold in the city, both producers and distributors resorted to tactics harmful to the consumer. Perhaps the worst tactic employed was feeding cow herds cheap feed often infected with germs. Already outlawed was "swill milk," or milk from cows fed on "distilling slops." Farmers utilized another harmful technique. Desirous of profit and interested in producing greater quantities of milk, they sold their calves and added to their herds by purchase of cattle shipped in from a broad area. Unfortunately, this movement of cattle spread disease more rapidly and resulted in a loss of control over livestock epidemics.<sup>8</sup>

The profiteering method employed by distributors — adulteration of milk — was to play a major role in Providence's milk scandal. As Smillie noted, "Adulteration of food was very common and remained the chief problem in food sanitation for over fifty years. Adulteration was not an attempt at fraud, nor designed to damage health, but represented *strained efforts to make money*. This observation was made by E.R. Squibb (This man was to found at a later date the great drug supply firm that now bears his name) in 1879."<sup>9</sup> Adulteration was harmful for two reasons. The more dangerous and more rare form of adulteration involved use of a liquid other than water to dilute the milk. Formaldehyde, a chemical identified in the Providence investigation, was occasionally used, for it was a preservative intended to extend the period of time in which milk could be sold. More commonly, however, producers either added water or removed cream. Note that at this point in time milk came with the cream — the tech-



nique of removal of cream was known as "topping" and the resulting skimmed milk was to be labelled as such. Clearly, adulterated milk was the most profitable product for producers and the least expensive for consumers. As Dr. Charles V. Chapin, Providence's Superintendent of Health, so cogently remarked, "If the mass of consumers continue to consider merely the number of cents per quart which they are obliged to pay, without regard to quality, and there is every reason to believe they will so continue, there is little chance of improvement through competition. It therefore seems likely that the milk supply so far as cleanliness is concerned can only be improved by official control."<sup>10</sup>

Official control began quite early in Providence. In 1878, ten years prior to creation of the board of health laboratory, a distinct department had been established to conduct routine analyses, to determine the state of milk supplied to Providence. The Office of the Milk Inspector was under supervision of the milk committee of the board of aldermen. However, the committee quickly deteriorated into a rubber stamp organization. Because the department was not under auspices of the board of health it became a political tool independent of any checks on its power.

The notion of "science" was extremely influential in fostering growth of not only the political power of individual public health professionals, but the authority such persons commanded on health boards as well. As Barbara Rosenkrantz commented in her study of the Massachusetts Board of Health, "'Science' became for the physician, the sanitary engineer, and the laboratory investigator, a goal as well as a procedure, which gave it the authority of higher law and removed it from criticism." In addition, "merging of concepts of individual self-restraint with final judgement and disposition by the expert resulted." Scientific knowledge was to gain the upper hand not only in difficult political situations but particularly in situations of a fiscal nature. The product was a concomitant growth of "scientific" power and lessening of "lay" power. "Public health became the province of the specifically trained and authorized." Unfortunately, however, the milk inspector's position was very susceptible to bribery and fraud; he was able to hold extensive power without check.<sup>11</sup>

The milk inspector's primary duty was to issue licenses that involved imposition of certain restrictions on producers and dealers selling milk in Providence. Granting of licenses was contingent upon inspection of cows and their living conditions, and of milk handling and distribution. In this manner the municipality could have direct control over the quality of milk being marketed within its limits. If the product was analyzed and found to be below standard, it was either confiscated or sold as skimmed milk, and offenders were prosecuted. The penalty took various forms — fines, imprisonment, advertisement (names of convicted dealers published in newspapers) and/or revocation of one's license.

It was also the duty of the inspector to be certain that his dealers were aware of Providence's regulations. Walter O. Scott, city milk inspector, did publish a booklet in 1906 entitled, "Facts which You as a Dealer Cannot Afford to Overlook."

The final required duty of the inspector and his department was collection of milk. Dr. Chapin explained that the collector was obligated to carry samples to the department chemist for analysis and "secure all evidence that it may be necessary to use in case of trial, and to keep a careful record of all his proceedings." He also commented, "Usually inspectors make their rounds on foot. Out in Providence, owing to the speed with which certain milkmen drove out of sight at the collector's approach, the latter was furnished a horse and buggy, which he uses in his work." Samples were taken not only for the purpose of prosecution. Daily "consumer" samples were taken solely to note the general quality of milk.<sup>12</sup>

Milk consumed in Providence had long been named to be of the best quality available for the price homemakers were paying. When prices were to be raised however, a group of women became concerned not only about the price but were anxious to know if milk they were buying was indeed the best available. The group, established in 1912 and known as the Housewives League of Providence, was one of the first local leagues of a nationwide organization. Typical of urban progressive reform, the league's philosophy followed the new national focus on business, scientific management and efficiency. Jennie Heath, national president, addressed her member-



ship. "As we were pioneers in establishing the recognition of the fact that homemaking is a business — an industry — so we are pioneers in organizing that industry." Heath explained that other industries had organized and profited, often at the housewife's expense. "There must be no wavering now, consumers must be made class conscious. We must continue to organize our industry in order to treat as a unit, with the industries which supply the needs of the home; . . . it means, to her, better conditions under which the material she buys is manufactured and better trade conditions . . . Every penny spent, has some effect on industry, commerce and trade and we must face our responsibility and power in effecting and controlling trade conditions so that our homes may be protected and industry standardized and stabilized . . . Home efficiency — Organization — Loyalty." City directories indicate that most of the prominent women belonging to the league were wives of the rising technical and professional class. Their husbands were employed as professors, teachers, engineers, physicians, and clerks. Some of the women were district nurses.<sup>13</sup>

In 1913 the league's interest in milk prompted Sophia Lustig, then president of the Providence branch, to interview Walter O. Scott:

*The only fact impressed upon me was there was concern in Providence which was selling poor milk, and which was much more expensive than it should be, and Mr. Scott had no authority over that concern, because there was too much political influence . . . there was, I think, a quarrel or struggle between the milk inspector who was trying to get good milk for Providence and between a certain dairy which was trying to make money by some undesirable means, and that concern unfortunately was, well, was using so much money for bribing influential people that Mr. Scott couldn't do anything with them.*

Shocked by such discoveries, Mrs. Lustig met for a second time with Mr. Scott, this time accompanied by Mrs. Hammond, another league member, as a witness. Making a number of accusations, Scott identified the offending company as the Providence Dairy Company, a distributor which supplied nearly one half the city.

*He told me they supplied hospitals for very cheap, they undersold their milk to the hospitals and thus got advertising, and that they sent*



*Evening Bulletin, May 7, 1913*

*Walter O. Scott, city milk inspector, object of Providence Housewives' League's bottle washing in the cartoon beginning this article.*

*women dressed up as nurses to different houses and told them to say that they came from hospitals and they came to tell them that the milk they were getting was very poor and to advise them to get Providence Dairy Company milk. He also told them Providence Dairy Company have different wagons with fancy names on them, so many people didn't realize they had Providence Dairy Company. They thought they were getting from different farms, farm milk. And he also told me the Providence Dairy Company was selling pasteurized milk and that it was nothing but simply full of dead boiled bugs. It gave me such creeping sensation I could never get rid of that expression since.*

Such revelations prompted Mrs. Lustig to form a committee under the chairmanship of Mrs. Mary C. Brackett. A decision was made to collect two or three samples from each dealer, label them with numbers and bring them to local chemists Calder and Strickland for analysis. Strickland found that of seventy-six samples, forty-three were at or above standard but that thirty-three were below.



At this juncture the situation altered radically. As Mrs. Lustig later recalled, "Mr. Scott makes a statement that Providence Dairy Company sells rotten milk and he can't do anything about that company. Mr. Scott gets up at the Milk Conference and says that the Providence standard of milk is the best standard can be, and if anyone brings him one sample below standard he will be very much surprised, or something to that effect. In the meantime we had our own investigation carried on and we had many samples below standard; and if the milk inspector does not know what is going on in his own city, then we felt we had better come before this committee."<sup>14</sup>

Fear that Mr. Scott was now suppressing his knowledge caused the league's committee to bring its evidence to the *Providence Journal* which used the information in a manner befitting the age of muckraking journalism — "The only positive statement by Scott was that the women should keep out." A cursory review of daily front pages reveals the urgency and indignation which confronted readers. "Inquiry Investigates Low Milk Standard — Products of Many Local Dealers Below State Requirements — Housewives Investigate." "Milk Quality Ignored While Politics Rules." "The latest developments in the milk situation indicate that the Office of the Milk Inspector is used as a political machine, and that the inspector himself, Walter O. Scott, is playing politics at all times with all the power of his position directed toward aiding his friends politically." "Protection for Milk Dealers — Regular Payments for Privilege of Selling Poor Product — Charges of Bribery Baylies R. Chace." Finally, "Committee of Milk of the Board of Aldermen Vote to Investigate."<sup>15</sup>

Arousal of public concern had convinced the committee to reassert its power. Its members voted unanimously to investigate the milk department — to note whether an adequate job had been done and whether there had been any wrongdoing on the part of employees. Henry C. Cram, assistant city solicitor, collected much testimony and advised the committee that a *prima facie* case of malfeasance had been proven. At this point Mr. Scott was discharged, charges were formulated and a second committee was appointed. Its responsibilities were to investigate all charges and prosecute if necessary. Open to the public, the in-

vestigation became a tribunal rather than a trial.

At the first hearing, the clerk stated, "Owing to statements made in the public press and elsewhere relative to the quality of the milk supply furnished to consumers in the City of Providence and to the methods of inspection of the same by the Officials of the City of Providence charged with such duty, this committee unanimously decided that a full and complete investigation of the entire subject was imperative . . . The committee will not limit the investigation to any particular matter or period of time, but is prepared to hear all evidence bearing on the subject." What resulted was a torrent of testimony — 3,272 pages to be exact.<sup>16</sup>

Initial testimony centered on means of insuring that previously analyzed milk had not been tampered with by those delivering the product to the chemist. Franklin Strickland faced heavy questioning on his methods of testing. The defense brought in milk analysis experts to cast doubt on Strickland's results on the basis of "outdated" techniques which Strickland employed. Accuracy of the chemist's results was the point on which much of the investigation hinged. As Dr. Chapin had remarked, "The chemist on his part must analyze with great care samples given him, preserving with certainty their identity with time, and he too must carefully record his work and be prepared to explain and justify it on the witness stand . . . Analyses made by the chemist shall be accepted as *prima facie* evidence." Some of the milk was found to contain excess water, gelatin, dirt, and even formaldehyde, although the latter sample was subject to controversy.<sup>17</sup>

Such startling discoveries prompted defense attorney Irving Champlin to state that results of the league's analyses were worthless, because they had not been performed by the inspector. The league responded: "In answer to many questions, the Housewives League wishes to state once more that its position in the milk investigation is simply to present to the milk committee the results of the analyses made for it showing that many of the samples are below standard set by law. The league feels that it can leave the rest of the investigation of the placing of blame for incompetence or graft with the milk committee, where it belongs. The Housewives League is interested simply in doing its best to see that families of the people of Providence are provided



with pure milk."

Soon new issues arose. Testimony of a few people indicated that Baylies R. Chace, deputy inspector, had been paid money for telling producers when their cows would be inspected. Allegations were also made which disclosed that dealers were also paying protection money of anywhere from five to fifteen dollars per month. Wilson Wilmarth, an agent of Providence Dairy Company, asserted that dealers were requested by Mr. Chace to mark their cans indicating good or bad milk in the rear of the wagon. Other testimony related that during November, December, January and February when weather was cold and issuance of licenses occurred, *no* samples were taken. All men worked in the office and made periodic trips to farms for inspections. James Gunn, milk collector, stated that when Mr. Scott went out of town only railroad samples were taken. These samples were not admissible evidence for prosecution purposes because the car samples were not in the possession of the owner or consignee.<sup>18</sup>

Testimony went on for months, terminating in December 1913. Charges were hurled back and forth, and numerous attacks on the credibility of all witnesses occurred. By the time the investigation was complete, public interest had waned. The result of the prosecution was that Baylies R. Chace was convicted of graft and dismissed. It was adequately proven that Walter O. Scott had been negligent of his duties but had never accepted graft. As the committee reported, "If Scott did not know of this graft existing in his department he could have known it by reasonable diligence and reasonable effort and since the evidence does not disclose such diligence and such effort on his part, he ought not to be retained as Milk Inspector of the City of Providence." The committee resolved that Scott was guilty of certain misconduct but, lacking a single vote, was not to be removed from office.<sup>19</sup>

The verdict did however result in a dramatic change for the milk inspection department — one that would remove the department from political influence. By an act of February 10, 1914 the superintendent of health was made ex-officio inspector of milk, placing the milk department under the health department. Later the superintendent of health provided for a deputy in-

spector of milk appointed by him and subject to approval by the board of aldermen. Needless to say, Mr. Scott was not rehired once reorganization of the department occurred.<sup>20</sup>

Providence's citizens, represented by the housewives league, had made significant gains in the drive for both a better supply and distribution of milk in particular, and public health in general. Increased scientific knowledge had confirmed to reformers need for a healthy, contaminant-free environment. Food sanitation was clearly included in this goal. Deteriorating urban conditions demanded that public health concern itself with other tasks as well, such as communicable disease control, sanitary engineering, health education, industrial hygiene and housing.

Still, much work remained to be accomplished in the food sanitation field. Rhode Island as of 1914 had the lowest standard in the United States for allowable amount of fat in milk and had no standard whatever for allowable amount of bacteria. The 1913 scandal gave further impetus to alter this situation; lobbying by many statewide groups concerned with health began in support of an adequate state law. They desired a law which clearly defined acceptable standards and indicated under what conditions milk could or could not be sold. The intention here was to prevent marketing of milk which, while able to pass the fat standard, had been produced on a farm rife with contaminants. Strong opposition from state dairy producers and distributors prevented such attempts from being favorably acted upon for quite some time, and organizations like the housewives league, noting that Providence had achieved a fairly well protected milk supply despite the law, concentrated their efforts on education rather than legislation. In 1914, the housewives league opened milk stations to guarantee that infants would have access to good, clean milk, and provided information to mothers on infant care.

Reformers remained vigilant to see that political influence and economic factors were secondary to a pure milk supply. In 1920 their support helped defeat a measure which would have lowered the already substandard law "Of Milk." Mary C. Brackett, chairman of the league's milk committee, commented, "The women of R.I., who fought one bitter fight to rescue milk from the field of politics, resent any indication of its



return. The food of our children may not become a plaything! The League is assured of the united support of the women of the state on the matter. Members of the Housewives League — watch the legislature! Be ready — stand firmly together — carry on — in defense of the Home!"<sup>21</sup>

Scientific advances also continued as a force in the drive for better milk. Newly gained knowledge in the area of thermal death points for bacteria furthered the desirability of pasteurization. There had been many objections to this process, for pediatricians were convinced that pasteurized milk would lose its flavor, quality and food value. At an 1897 gathering of the Massachusetts Board of Health, Dr. Sedgewick of Boston and Dr. Chapin of Providence were its lone supporters. Objections diminished after 1910 when a septic sore throat epidemic swept through Boston as the result of a single "model" dairy distributing raw milk. Certification of milk — production of a high grade milk which was certified by a commission for its purity — was no longer deemed adequate. Economic considerations such as the cost of carefully inspecting distant dairy farms was far outweighed by the expense of losing milk to bacteria. Although a dozen years would pass after the scandal before pasteurization would come into regular use here, Providence was well ahead of other areas in the nation. Through Chapin's efforts the city council in 1925 passed a new milk law which provided for pasteurization and grading. Boston, often in the forefront of public health measures, did not require mandatory pasteurization until 1929.<sup>22</sup>

So small a scandal in Providence wrought rather significant changes in the quality of milk entering the homes of its citizens. The milk scandal encapsulates many themes of the 1850-1920 period — changing health requirements brought on by the growth of the city, corruption of agencies under control of municipal government, and attempts by progressive reformers to apply their faith in science to rather complex urban problems. One must be amazed at the enormity of the task which reformers faced and the sizeable measure of success they achieved.

- 1 James Cassedy, *Charles V. Chapin and Public Health Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962) 47.
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- 3 Charles Chapin, *Municipal Sanitation in the United States* (Providence: Snow and Farnham, 1900) 286.
- 4 Rosenkrantz, 19, 31, 39.
- 5 Max von Pellenkofer, *Value of Health to a City* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1941) 1, 47.
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- 8 Parker, 2, 77, 36.
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- 11 Rosenkrantz, 75, 107, 120.
- 12 Chapin, 376, 388.
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- 14 *Milk Investigation Committee Reports* (Providence, 1913) v. 1-4, p. 9, 14, 25, hereafter cited *Milk Reports*.
- 15 *Providence Journal* May 5, 7, 8, 9, 1913.
- 16 *Milk Reports*, 1.
- 17 Chapin, 397.
- 18 *Milk Reports* 411, 613, 1301, 1165.
- 19 *Providence City Council Resolutions* 1914, 22.
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## From the Collections

To celebrate spring it is fitting to grace these pages with delicate watercolors of wildflowers. The common yellow lily and Solomon's seal are two specimens from a collection of botanical drawings by Edward Lewis Peckham (1812-1889).



*Lilium Canadense*  
Class 6. Order 1.

Common Yellow Lily  
*Hexandria Monogynia*





May 10, 1842. Wells - Col. Van.

*Penstemon*  
et al. Order 1.

*Multiflorus*. Many flowered. *Penstemon*  
*alexandrinus* *Montanus*