

# RHODE ISLAND HISTORY



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Courtesy of the *Providence Journal*

*Fish is distributed to unemployed in Providence, January 1932. The above and nine other depression-era photographs in this issue were taken by photographers for the Providence Journal.*

# RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

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Courtesy of the Providence Journal

*Unemployed men work on a construction project at Rhode Island Hospital in February 1931.*

## Life on Relief in Rhode Island, 1934: A Contemporary View From the Field

*edited by James T. Patterson\**

Harry Hopkins, head of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, had to move quickly to distribute roughly more than two billion dollars in aid to needy Americans from 1933 to 1935. To assist him in this colossal task, he employed regional officials and roving observers who travelled about the country talking to the unemployed and to relief administrators. These field reporters sent unusually frank evaluations of federal programs back to Washington. Many of the reports survive in files at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park.<sup>1</sup> They deserve publication, for they offer vivid perspectives on the operation of public policy, and on the often desperate coping of the poor and unemployed.

Two of these reports dealing with Rhode Island are reprinted here in full. They concern conditions in late 1934, a time of continuing poverty and unemployment. The first report, written November 25, is by Robert Washburn, a regional official of the FERA. The second came three weeks later from a roving observer, Martha Gellhorn.<sup>2</sup> A young, passionate critic of social conditions, she writes more sharply than Washburn. Of particular interest is her view of what she thought was the "terrifying cynicism" and "hopelessness" of young Rhode Islanders.

Hopkins, an open, flexible administrator, virtually invited criticism of his operation, and it is not surprising that his roving advisers were sometimes unsparingly negative about various aspects of the FERA. These two reports are characteristic of this genre, and could not have given Hopkins much ground for self-congratulation. Their focus on political favoritism in relief, and on the sheer inadequacy of the program, echoed criticisms made publicly by many Americans at the time.

Though the reports differ in tone and emphasis, they dwell on weaknesses — as they saw them — of the New Deal relief effort. They are highly skeptical of the argument, then being developed into public policy by Hopkins and Roosevelt, that work relief is preferable to the dole. The accounts by Washburn and Gellhorn of waste, graft, and nonproductivity in Rhode Island work relief projects constitute discouraging reading for people (then and now) who see public employment as the answer to problems of poverty and joblessness.

Washburn and Gellhorn are also much concerned about the impact of relief, including work relief, on the morale of recipients. Here they challenge a conventional wisdom that work relief is better for the morale of people than the dole. Though aware that the recipients must get help, they are unable to overlook what they see as a weakening of the work ethic and a growth of cynicism among depression-era Americans. This deep-rooted fear of the long-range impact of dependency has influenced American welfare policies throughout the nation's history.

How reliable are these reports? It is as hard to supply a solid answer to that question as it is to say whether Rhode Island's experience as described here was "typical." A few caveats, however, are worth making. First, Rhode Island's heavy emphasis on work relief in 1934 was not typical of other states, most of which then relied primarily on the dole. (Work relief, sponsored by the Works Progress Administration, became basic government policy only in 1935.) Work relief elsewhere, therefore, probably did not employ so many "malingerers" as Washburn found in Rhode Island. Second, later congressional investigations uncovered little political favoritism in the operation of federal relief dur-

\*Mr. Patterson is a professor of history at Brown University.





Courtesy of the *Providence Journal*

*Unemployed working at Dexter Asylum, Providence, in December 1930.*

ing the 1930s. If Gellhorn is correct in stressing political considerations in Rhode Island relief administration, she is revealing an atypical situation. She may have exaggerated; her reports about other states purported to find more political favoritism than fellow observers were able to discover.

Third, both reports were perhaps unduly concerned about the consequences of prolonged dependency. Far from dropping the work ethic, most Americans in the 1930s resisted going on the dole. Many delayed long, and agonized hard, before accepting relief. "Regular" jobs in private employment continued to be their goal. When better times returned after 1939, the once-unemployed were delighted to work hard, to seek overtime, and to rely on their own efforts to establish some security in their lives. If a "welfare ethic" has developed in the United States, it has done so not because of government handouts in the 1930s but because most Americans in a postwar age of affluence have be-

come accustomed to having a decent standard of living — paid by the government if necessary.

Still, the reports of Washburn and Gellhorn remain instructive. They are on target in noting problems associated with work relief, and the inadequacy of family budgets and federal spending. They reveal especially the ways in which unemployed people struggled to maintain their dignity and self respect in the midst of hard times, which hit them with the bewildering force of a hurricane.

1. See especially the papers of Harry Hopkins and of Lorena Hickok, and of the Works Progress and Federal Emergency Relief Administrations. The papers of Rexford Tugwell and Aubrey Williams (Hopkins's deputy) also contain relevant materials. The two reports published here are in boxes 67 and 66, respectively, of the Hopkins papers.

2. Better known as a roving reporter, war correspondent, author of numerous books, and later (in 1940), the third wife of Ernest Hemingway.



FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ADMINISTRATION  
Walker-Johnson Building  
1734 NEW YORK AVENUE, NW.  
WASHINGTON

Hartford, Conn.  
November 25, 1934

Dear Mr. Hopkins,

Business is more optimistic in Providence than anywhere else I've been. In the last few weeks not only have their textile plants been active, but the moderate-priced jewelry industry, too, Providence's second largest. In neither case is this a normal seasonal upturn, and business men are pretty bucked up over it. The Community Chest drive, to the surprise of everyone, appeared to be going to exceed its quota this year.

About 16,800 cases are on relief in Rhode Island out of a population of about 687,000.<sup>1</sup> Providence, with a population of about 253,000, has about 7,000 cases. In neither the State nor the city is this much higher than last summer, when the load failed to drop as might have been expected. No great increase in case load appears to be in sight yet for this winter.

As about 90 percent of all unemployment relief in Providence<sup>2</sup> (and generally through the State) is in the form of work relief, I had expected to find there in greatest degree the benefits in morale to be hoped for in a work program. Such, however, does not seem to be the case, and I found only a couple of people who felt as the thing worked out it was any better than a dole (except in regard to worthwhile projects put through, at an extra cost that is problematical).

Considering the quality of the supervision and the planning — both apparently of the best — the morale on the jobs is disappointing. There are exceptions on some jobs, of course. But the inclusion of such a large percentage on work relief means the inclusion of large numbers of the lame and the halt, as well as malingerers, and the fact that direct relief is such a small part of the show means that in practice there is no alternative to putting a man out on a job if his family needs relief. The men — many of them — apparently feel that they will have to be kept on whether they work or not, and they are right.

"I think almost all plan to give a days' work for a days' pay when they start," an engineer told me. "But soon the agitators get after them, tell them it's no use killing themselves, etc. And then, too, a lot of them are mill hands, jewelry workers, and so forth, and not fit." On storm sewer jobs, which comprise a large part of the projects and are among the best prosecuted, he estimates that the work costs just twice what it would in the competitive market.

To keep up the morale as well as possible they have segregated the worst of the "lame and lazy" into gangs on a couple of cut-and-fill projects where work morale would probably be bad anyway, and here they just stand around for the most part and make practically no pretense of working. Unfortunately one of these projects, on an old reservoir site, is right out where everyone in town sees it, so that the average citizen of Providence probably has an even worse idea of the work morale than is justified.

Relief people estimated that they might reach maximum efficiency if they could fire a quarter of those working and care for them in some other way (That would give 65 percent on work relief, 35 percent on direct relief). This can't well be done even in egregious individual cases now because apparently no policy has yet been worked out toward rents in direct relief cases, and if someone with a large family is fired the social worker puts him back for the sake of the family. Relief people feel that under such an arrangement no higher wages would be necessary to make the majority want to work for cash instead of being cared for by food orders.

The primary budgets are quite low — \$6.75 for a man, wife and child<sup>3</sup> — but in practice are not as inadequate as would appear from that, because of the policy of supplementing with special items beyond that when needed instead of lumping the special items in the budget. Work relief wages,





*Courtesy of the Providence Journal*

*Tainted meat is displayed for the news camera by relief workers in Providence. Some of the workers admitted that the meat was rotten on the outside but good on the inside. One six-pound ham proved to have three pounds of good meat inside; the rest was decayed.*

for instance, were about \$200,000 last month and direct relief (most of it in supplementation of these wages) \$113,000. For efficient administration of this large amount of supplementary relief, it would be thought that a low case load per social worker would be necessary. The actual load is about 150 and the worker cannot as a matter of routine get to all her cases once a month, I was told.

Private agencies feel that budgets are inadequate and relief people think they are all right. I have no notion where the truth lies. Dr. Pinkney of the Tuberculosis Society says that, while 10 years ago there were 30 deaths from TB among children under 14 years, that has continued to drop steadily through the depression until so far this year there have been only three. He feels that the factors involved have been enforced rest (no money for movies, etc.) and better diets through education, the fact that people can't afford candy, etc. He notes a great gain in weight among people who pass through his examinations, and feels that the relief given is adequate. He expects to see the TB rate go up once more as soon as "good times come and people start running around again."



All those talked to emphasized in their criticisms that they thought the set-up a good one, the administration efficient, and pointed out that even in the late campaign there had been no charges to amount to anything. Because of this and because of the obvious efficiency with which the projects have been worked up — there seems to be no dearth of them, as complained of elsewhere, though most seem to be of public works character — I thought the criticisms particularly interesting. Certainly it would seem true from my superficial survey that the work morale is not as good here as in some places in Mass. where the set-up is much more difficult to administer and where the supervision may not be anywhere near as good. In fact, to make an impossible comparison, the morale on the job in Providence is only a shade better, I'd think, than the worst I found in Mass. (leaving out of consideration for the moment further damage to morale that comes in a politics-ridden community). The only possible reason for this would seem to be that the work program in Mass. is so much smaller that it is a privilege to be getting work relief instead of food tickets.

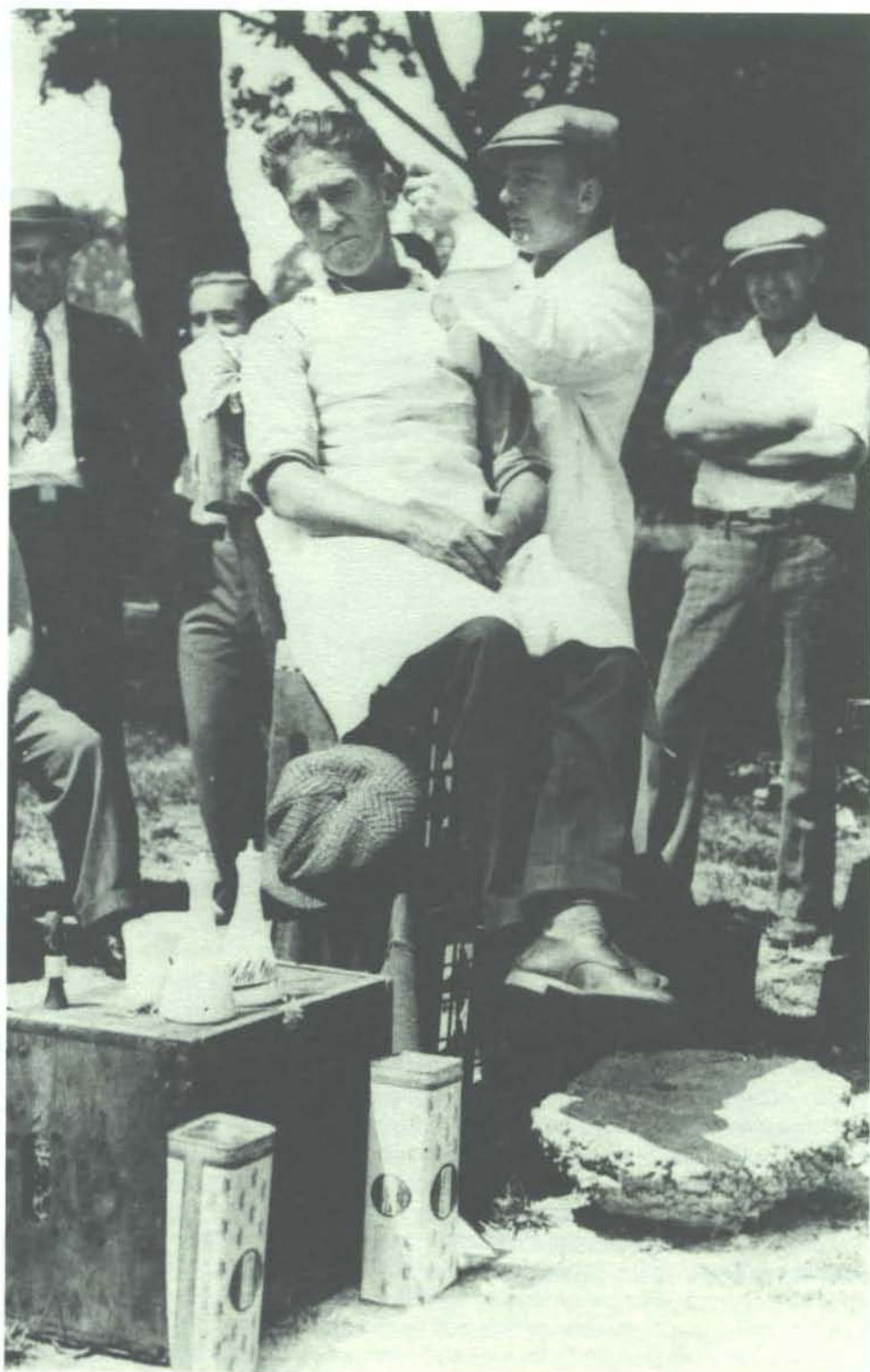
The secretary of the local taxpayers' organization said, "I don't see how work relief's improved the situation in the least, desirable as it is in theory. Too many of the workers feel they are getting a dole anyway." Part of the reason for this, perhaps, is the low budget base, which forces supplementation in such a large number of cases, thus breaking down the distinction between work relief and direct relief to large degree. There is no organization among the unemployed at all, though a year ago a thing called "The-Right-to-Live-Club" ran like wildfire and gave the relief people no end of trouble.<sup>4</sup> It broke up.

Even though people generally seem to feel that work relief, in practice, is destroying morale as much as it is helping it, they voice no criticism of State or Federal help in relief, so far as I could find. Providence, like New York, had a privately financed emergency work drive in the early days, and here, as in New York, the fact that the eminently conservative people who headed it threw up their hands and asked the State to come in in the end serves to make it pretty commonly accepted that such action was necessary. Mr. Cody's personal feeling is that a modified CWA would be the solution, with the people picked on the basis of need but thereafter paid for the job done without reference to budgets.<sup>5</sup> He feels that the great majority of those on relief feel the Government owes them jobs without any corresponding sense of responsibility for the work they do on those jobs.

Relief officials seem to feel that white collar people in Providence are not very hard hit, but others do not agree. Of those on work relief, about 4,500 are common labor, 1,000 women (sewing projects, etc.) 450 skilled and only 100 white collar. Somehow those who might be interested haven't bothered to think up white collar projects. Of the whole group, it is plain that few are having any special work skills preserved, as few are working at anything like their normal jobs, except among skilled labor. Thoughtful people generally complain that white collar people have to sacrifice their chance of rehabilitation to get on relief. On the other hand, Mr. Cody feels that Federal orders in this regard have been too liberal, forcing them onto the dangerous ground of setting up a class distinction. It has seemed to me that here, as elsewhere, a chief service of relief to the white collar people has been in the creation of non-relief jobs for them: engineering, clerical, etc., which they can accept with no loss of morale.

Dr. Richard Allen, Deputy Superintendent of Schools, has made studies among his high school graduates, following them for five years after graduation. Of the classes a year out, half are in college, 20% unemployed, 20% employed full time, and 10% part time. Those who go to college he doesn't follow further, and as his work doesn't touch those who drop out of high school, he naturally misses the group that is probably worst off. His last study of graduates five years out of high school who never went to college (made in 1932, however) showed only 5% unemployed. Another survey is in course now. He says that half the girls from the ages of 16 to 18 are at work in their own homes or elsewhere, chiefly in domestic service, but that the boys of those ages are in very bad shape, with no jobs and nothing to do but get into trouble.

He is on the Governor's Rehabilitation Commission and is trying to put over two ideas to meet this special problem and another to help in the general unemployment situation. If he fails to get



Courtesy of the Providence Journal

*Henry Duckworth, an unemployed barber from Providence, gives free haircuts at an outdoor "shop" in a vacant lot in Olneyville.*



the State to do it, with the first two, he is going to try to get the Federal Government to do it, setting up Providence as a demonstration center.

His idea with the young people is a "skimming, not a screening process," helping those who would appreciate it and give promise of most usefulness to Society. He already has a small privately contributed fund from which he gives scholarships of \$2.50 a week to keep kids in high school where they are well adjusted but lacking clothes, carfares, lunch money, etc. He wants the State to augment this fund. The amount involved, for Providence, is tiny. He also is going to try to get the State to take care of the most promising needy young people at least — say the top 2/3 of them — until they are 18, with camps in summer, opening boys' clubs to them daytimes in winter, classes, etc.

For the general problem he is promoting a "Rehabilitation Authority" that can acquire land for relief projects (secretly and cheaply, where State or city would have to do it openly and expensively) and that can also promote other activities beyond the limits of actual relief, buying and selling, running a second-hand store on a self-supporting basis for furniture that has been repaired by unemployed who may or may not qualify for relief itself, trying to diversify its activities to give a chance for all types of skills and wrestle with the problem of helping people to rehabilitate themselves so they will be able, many of them, to get off relief if better times come, even though their old jobs may never return.

How practical his scheme is, especially his notion of having it all run by educators ("The presidents of Brown and the other three nearby universities") I don't know, but it's the first instance I've found anywhere of anyone even trying to tackle the problem of what's to be done eventually to help people get off relief and keep off if the present unemployment crisis comes to an end.

Yours truly,

Robert Washburn.

Mr. Harry L. Hopkins,  
F.E.R.A.,  
1734 New York Ave.,  
Washington, D.C.

1. "Cases" represent the sum of families and single individuals aided. Nationwide, the total number of individuals aided in 1934 was three to five times the number of cases. The same was true of Rhode Island, in which 76,000 people received FERA assistance in October 1934. This was about 11% of the state's population, compared to a national average at that time of 15% (19 million people). These figures, however, are based on reports from the states; New England states, with a strong historical tradition of local poor relief, tended not to enumerate some of those aided only by localities. It is probable, therefore, that considerably more than 11% of Rhode Islanders were on some form of federal, state, or local relief at that time. Moreover, the case load was increasing faster (2.8% in September) in Rhode Island in late 1934 than in the nation as a whole (1.6%). See *Monthly Report of the F.E.R.A., Nov. 1 Through Nov. 30, 1934* (Washington, D.C., 1935).

2. Rhode Island's stress on work relief was unusually great. The national average of relief cases doing work was 47% at the time. *Ibid.*, 50. The best study of the unemployed and work relief in the depression remains E. Wight Bakke, *The Unemployed Worker: A Study of the Task of Making a Living without a Job* (New Haven, 1940).

3. Washburn's figure presumably means per week. The average monthly relief payment per Rhode Island family at the time was \$30.78, compared to a national average of \$26.39. *FERA Monthly Report*, 56.

4. A study which argues that there was considerable agitation among the unemployed in the 1930s is Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York, 1977). Most historians disagree with their view.

5. The reference is to George R. Cody, secretary of the state unemployment relief administration. The CWA was the Civil Works Administration, a federal work relief program operated under auspices of the FERA during the winter of 1933-1934.



## REPORT ON RHODE ISLAND

My dear Mr. Hopkins:

I visited Providence, Pawtucket and Woonsocket. There is a good deal more to see.

The relief load will go up this winter; even when mills are adding new hands, the local loads increase. Mr. Cody, state administrator, says this is because every winter more people, who have been holding their own somehow, give up and come on relief. The winter clients are new ones: finally hopeless.

The mill owners I saw didn't seem as cheerless as their Mass. colleagues: though it has now become a ritual for mill owners to weep about their impossible lives and how no man can make a decent living any more. One of them, however, in a burst of candor, admitted that the whole group had cleaned up in 1933 in a way which resembled war profiteering and that any textile manufacturer who hadn't was such a mutt that he deserved bankruptcy. Now, these mills (those that run at all) seem to be running fairly regularly. This is during the last month or so. They seem to do the usual thing about wages: that is to say wages are scaled down *towards* the minimum, rather than up from it. Likewise the NRA shorter hours have apparently been well counteracted by increased work loads and speeded machinery. I saw two gentlemen who are the big boys in the state UTW. They claim that 40% of the state textile workers are employed part-time earning between \$5 and \$7 a week.<sup>1</sup> They also claim that "the present system of stretched-out work loads and speeded machinery is taking ten years off the life of the worker." Which is a pompous way of saying what does seem to be the truth: that the men really can not keep up with their work and stay sane and healthy: and that very definitely this rhythm of work, coupled with malnutrition (as who can eat well on \$5) is breaking them down nervously.

To finish up with the mill owners: they refuse to predict about future employment. They "don't know what the government is going to do next." They are not sure they will have orders etc. etc. Business is not as good as in 1933. They are all at heart deeply opposed to the union; and to NRA. (Which has probably benefitted them a good deal more than it has the workers.) They are far from enthusiastic about ERA;<sup>2</sup> and I must say that their criticisms are fairly reasonable. They state that ERA is "all mixed up with local politics" and fairly reeks. They also state that the quality of work is a joke; and tell you fine stories about how shovels were taken away from the relief clients so that at least they'd stand up on the job and not just lean etc. . . .

It is apparently true that politics have crept into relief here: that is to say, in the local administration. Being catholic and democrat seems to be essential before one can administer local affairs. And if the unemployed don't get what they want, they telephone a local politician, and service results. It is not too savoury. There are odd little things which unfortunately I couldn't go into for lack of time, relative to buying at certain stores (buying underwear, specifically) at what seemed pretty stiff prices: someone was a pal of someone high-up in ERA. Also buying cardboard shoes. Very queer. I don't think this applies to the state administration.

The unemployed themselves are getting pretty good service, as these things go. (After five states, I am sure of this: relief is below subsistence level everywhere, and — no matter how well bolstered up with extras, nor how great the care and extra social service work — it is ruinous to the morale of the people receiving it.) Housing is not as bad as in the south; but the actual conditions of the home range according to individuals. I find that the smaller the family the better the home: and the quality, cleanliness etc. of the house also have a good deal to do with the age of the tenant: young couples still keeping more pride or ambition or whatever it is. Rents are not paid regularly; but only as a last resort to avoid eviction, in most cases. The unemployed run up the most fantastic debts: but this in no new idea. I saw one family that had \$3000 worth of grocery debts; but had been





United Press International Photo

*Martha Gellhorn, who served as a roving observer for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) in 1934, is shown above in 1940 when she worked as a war correspondent for Collier's magazine.*

busy at this for about ten years. They also buy on the installment plan whenever they have a chance: and buy the most amazing things, such as sets of flat silver for ornamental table use; and oil paintings and other such items.

The people I saw myself (our clients) were in pretty bum shape. Either they were ill, or else the morale had so decayed that they were really not much use as human beings any more. The social service workers tell me that people keep coming to the office, and standing around, saying, "What you giving out today?" They have to stop and think what they could ask for. It isn't good; and it is impossible to take a high censorious tone about it. On the other hand, (my authorities are social workers and the union men, and my own visits to work projects) the usual attitude towards the ERA work projects is that this is a kind of big official bluff to save their faces. They don't like the work because it is rarely their own kind of job: and frankly they work as badly as any group of men I have ever seen. The exception was a mattress and quilt factory; manned pretty much by textile workers, men and women, who were all the same doing a job which resembled their own former work. Here they seem to be getting something done and there was an entirely different spirit to the



Courtesy of the *Providence Journal*

*A mother and her children in their Providence apartment, January 1933.*





Courtesy of the *Providence Journal*

*Unemployed working at Dexter Asylum in Providence, 1930.*

completely comic attitude of the men leaning on shovels. (By the way, it is said in this state that much graft goes on about hiring people for these outside jobs: the supervisors put on their pals and no one cares too much about the road or whatever they are doing. One objects to the graft: but if you see the old men, the patently infirm textile workers, wheezing about in this cold, you realize that these people are physically incapable of doing the work; and it is just foolishness to expect it of them.)

While I was there, the papers carried stories about your wanting to stop relief and do a great work plan, paying decent wages. They all asked me about this, very excitedly. What did it mean; what would they be doing. I think probably the majority of them want to work seriously, as they understand work (the eight hour day; the whistle and supervisor) and want to manage their own lives as muddle-headedly as they are used to. The only thing is: who will administer this. A priori, if the kind of administration continues which now blights a good deal of the ERA organization, I think there will be such whopping graft and incompetence as was rarely seen before. Also, there is one other problem. Right now, and this is generally conceded, a man on relief is a good deal better



Courtesy of the Providence Journal

*This family's income in January 1933 was \$12 per week. The children are home from school because they have no proper clothing. One boy, without shoes, wears overshoes. When this photograph was taken, three other children were in the hospital.*

off than a part-time worker in private industry. In the first place, the relief client gets more. And in the second place, he is sure of his future; whereas the industrial worker doesn't know from day to day when his part-time is going to evaporate to nothing. The result is that people leave jobs voluntarily to get on relief; and do not make the effort they might to get back into industry. I still believe that they want to work, and don't want to stay on relief. But if you have the choice between two evils, you take the lesser one: and this is their attitude. It is not their attitude if they are skilled laborers, having made pretty good wages: then they try constantly to get back into the old job. But often when they get back, they find wages have been scaled down; the job only runs a few days a week; and they are not in the class they thought they were. Then obviously, relief is as good a bet as any and they come back willingly. Considering what lousy wages the two industries I have seen pay, it would seem to me that a decently paid ERA massive work project, would find itself overburdened with people who justifiably wanted to earn a proper living; and found that the best way.

The health set-up is private in this state, with free clinics attached to hospitals; and some county health work. At the Memorial Hospital, which runs the biggest state v.d. clinic, they told me v.d. was on the increase; and that "syphilis was a disease of young people." A very unscientific way to put it, I suppose; but what they obviously meant was that the majority of new cases coming in



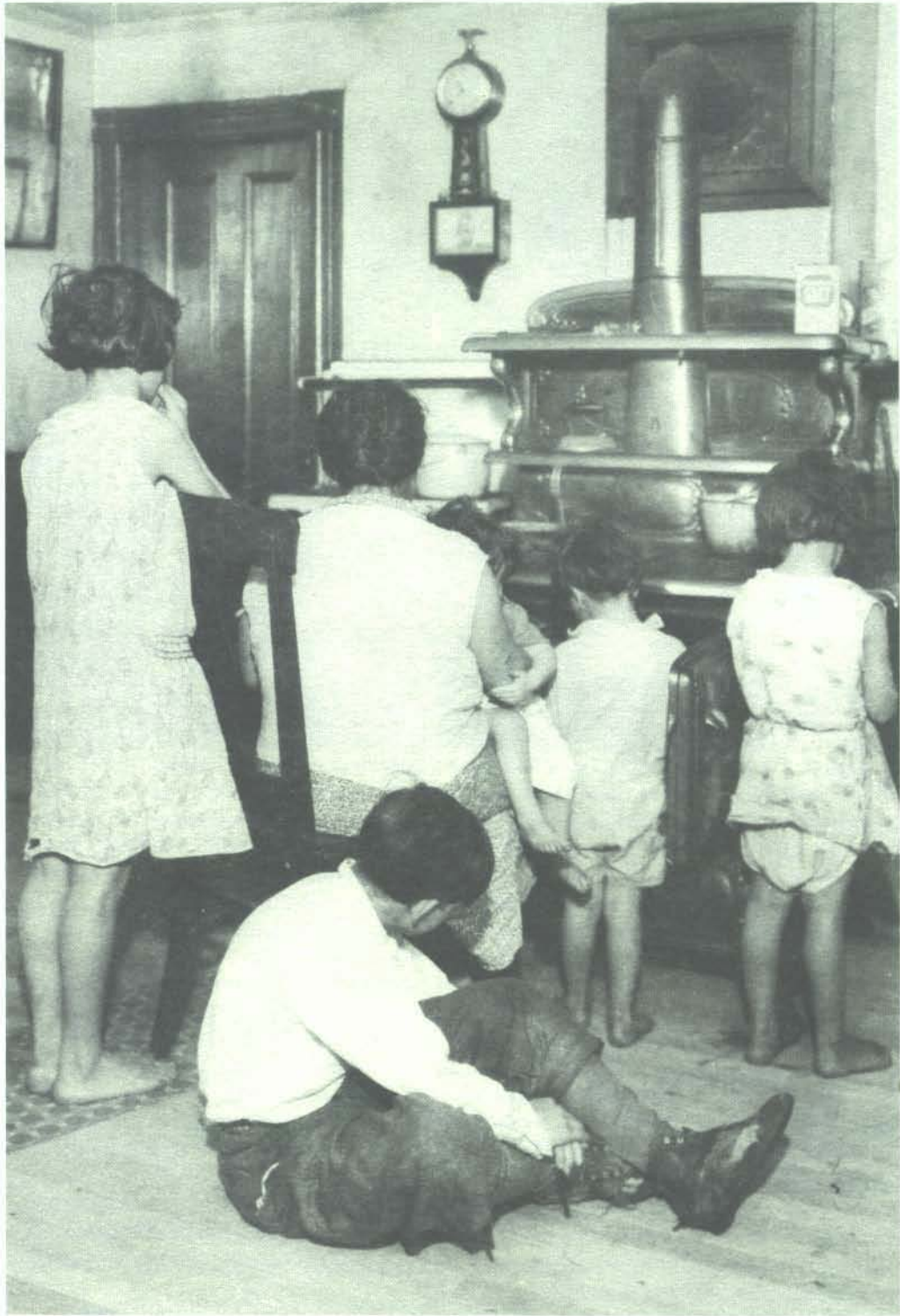
fitted into the 18-25 age group. I think this is interesting as more than a health question; and dove-tails with the scant observation I've been able to make of the young. These young men and girls who sit about the home waiting for nothing at all, are the greatest single tragedy in this whole mess. I find them really hopeless; much more hopeless than the older people, who can remember an easier life, a less stringent world; and refuse to believe that the end has inevitably come. But these young people have grown up against a shut door; a boy of nineteen said to me "Why the hell should I get up in the morning lady; what am I going to do with all these days . . . I've been looking for a job for four years. I've had two; five months I've worked in all. After a while you just know it ain't getting you anywhere. There's nothing for us. I get up sometime and go down to the corner and talk to the boys . . ." I would find it hard (not being a good enough writer) to describe the understandable and terrifying cynicism of these children. One said to me, "I'd steal if I had the guts." A very pretty Italian girl of twenty one, saying, "I'm young; it seems to me I got a right to something; if it's only one new dress a year . . ." I don't know whether this hopelessness will turn into suicidal depression, or into recklessness: depends on the individual probably. But at the moment, I think the best ones would do anything (what moral standards can be expected of people who have been cheated of the right to live and go on): the girls definitely would take to the streets if they could make anything out of it; and the boys would go in for the petty gangsterism which might at least provide food. Another boy said to me, "It's funny; a lot of times I get offered a drink — seems like people don't want to drink alone: but no one ever offers me a meal. Most of the time I take a drink it makes me sick; ain't got enough in my stomach."

The District Nurses and hospital nurses speak of increased nervous disorders amongst children particularly; the Neurological Clinic in Providence is swelling its attendance; the Mental Hygiene Clinic doctor spoke to me at great length about this question as related to children. He says that they are seeing a better class of people in their clinic; and that most of the people are not on relief, but are starving. These are white collar people who avoid relief; whose pride remains stronger, in many cases, than hunger. The result on the children is this: malnutrition (everyone speaks about that as usual; all nurses doctors etc.) and then a neurotic condition produced by hearing and being constant part of the parental fear. The child grows obsessed with the material problems of the home, and mentally shoulders them: and the nervous system cracks. He speaks of little boys earning pocket money by perversion; little girls stealing in the five and ten cent store etc. You probably know all this anyhow: I don't want to howl doom, but it is really a horrible mess. And what can these young men and women do; what will these children grow up to. I should think it would be a cinch to run a war these days, with a good many of the world's young men having nothing better to do anyhow than get shot; and at least fed for a bit beforehand, and busy . . .

Martha Gellhorn

1. The NRA (National Recovery Administration, established in 1933) attempted to control hours and wages of American industries. Average weekly hours in cotton textiles, late 1934, were 34, at an average weekly wage of \$14. The average weekly hours in wool textiles were 31, at an average weekly wage of about \$16. See Research and Planning Division, NRA, *Charts on Major Industries under the Operation of the National Industrial Recovery Act* (Washington, D.C., 1935). The average weekly earnings of manufacturing production workers in 1934 (nationwide) were \$18.50, for a 35 hour week. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C., 1975), 170.

2. ERA was the Emergency Relief Administration.



Courtesy of the Providence Journal

*The photographer found this family without sufficient clothing, food, or fuel, January 1933.*





Courtesy of the *Providence Journal*

Boy Scouts collect clothing for President Roosevelt's "Share Your Clothes" campaign in 1933.



Courtesy of Senator Claiborne Pell

*Alfred E. Smith, Herbert C. Pell (chairman of the New York Democratic Party), and Franklin D. Roosevelt.*



## Honor Among Gentlemen: Herbert Pell, Franklin Roosevelt, and the Campaign of 1936

by Michael Stewart Blayney\*

Although members of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration came from an unusually wide spectrum of social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds, Roosevelt's fellow patricians enjoyed particularly close relations with the president. These patrician New Dealers need closer examination. Edward N. Saveth has called the American patrician class a neglected area of historical research, while E. Digby Baltzell has recommended that historians trace the "aristocratic threads of friendship" between FDR and his upper-class supporters.<sup>1</sup> This paper traces one aristocratic friendship which eventually bore political fruit.

Herbert Claiborne Pell first met Franklin Roosevelt when the two were students at Harvard University.<sup>2</sup> Unlike Roosevelt, Pell lacked the energy and drive to sustain a permanent career. As a member of old knickerbocker New York society, he possessed a place of distinction as one of New York City's Four Hundred. As a believer in an enlightened upper class, he was attracted to liberal ideas, and for brief periods in his life he was actively engaged in politics. Pellbridge, the Pell estate, was located only a few miles from Roosevelt's Dutchess County home, and the two men were friends when FDR entered the White House. In 1936 Roosevelt sought reelection, and for the first time since the president had assumed office, Herbert Pell actively campaigned for his Hudson River neighbor. The circulation of anti-Roosevelt rumors during the campaign had angered him, and he sought to combat and expose the stories as Republican propaganda. Pell defended the president not merely as a

political supporter, but as one gentleman fighting for the honor of another. Following his reelection, Roosevelt rewarded Pell with an appointment as minister to Portugal.

Herbert Pell's defense of Roosevelt grew out of deeply rooted suspicions of the American business community. By all appearances, he should have been an articulate defender of business interests, for he personally benefited from American capitalism as few did. Ironically, the very security which wealth brought enabled Pell to see beyond the narrow perspective of his own class and encompass a much larger view of American society.

Unlike many of the rich, Pell's lofty social position was not a product of the recent good fortune of one lifetime. The bulk of his wealth lay in the Lorillard tobacco industry. From the eighteenth century, the Lorillards profited greatly from tobacco and real estate investments in New York City.<sup>3</sup> Pell's uncle — Pierre Lorillard — founded Tuxedo Park, one of the most revealing symbols of the privileged class during the entire Gilded Age.

Located about forty miles from New York City in Orange County, Tuxedo Park had belonged to the Lorillards since the early 1800s. Under Pierre Lorillard's guidance, it became an exclusive community for the rich who lived in separate residences and who socialized in the park's clubhouse. It was here that the tuxedo got its name; for many years it was the only place where the jacket was worn. Tuxedo Park had its grand opening on June 1, 1886, "and for the next several decades one's social position depended on whether he had attended the opening

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Courtesy of Senator Claiborne Pell

*Pellbridge, Pell's home in Dutchess County, New York.*

of the Tuxedo Park clubhouse that day." Emily Post recalled that "Mr. Lorillard ordered homes in the same way that other people might order boots."<sup>4</sup> To insure privacy, an eight-foot barbed wire fence was laid around the entire circumference of the park. This atmosphere certainly was not conducive to the growth of liberal ideas. Tuxedo purposely isolated its members from the practical problems of the real world, thus mitigating their interest in politics, though the protected surroundings of the park may have helped to breed narrow, reactionary opinions.

Nor were the residents of Tuxedo Park interested

in making money. They were not "men on the make," socially or economically, for they were men who had already made it. Emily Post observed that the Tuxedo residents were not impressed with extravagant social entertainment. One resident of Tuxedo even argued that he and his neighbors lived rather austere compared to the social climbers of Newport, Rhode Island.<sup>5</sup>

This kind of security pervaded Herbert Pell's life. It enabled him to turn from mundane economic matters to philosophical and intellectual speculation. Significantly, Pell never worked at making



money. Indeed, he displayed no talent whatsoever as a businessman. He did, however, choose capable individuals to administer his property. "I'm a better judge of trustees than I am of securities," he once confessed.<sup>6</sup>

A more important consequence of Pell's financial security was his insistence that the rich, because of their inordinate power, had certain responsibilities to the rest of society. The better off one was, Pell reasoned, the greater his responsibility: "We owe something to the country, and the more property we own, the more we owe."<sup>7</sup> The mark of a true aristocrat, said Pell, lay not in the size of one's bank account, but in education, good manners, and — above all — in service to the community before any thought of personal gain. In short, a rich man should emulate the ideal of the Christian gentleman. By this definition, Pell thought Thomas Jefferson deserved to be called a gentleman as well as an aristocrat, and he hoped that perhaps a new enlightened aristocracy in twentieth-century America might come into its own.<sup>8</sup>

Pell's baptism in American politics came when he ran for office in the 1918 congressional race. He ran in what later became known as the "Silk Stocking District," the middle part of Manhattan from Fourteenth Street to Ninety-ninth. Realizing that his district was a Republican stronghold, he hoped that by putting up a respectable fight, his old friend Franklin Roosevelt, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy, might give him a place on the Navy Pay Corps.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, by the fall of 1918, Pell's campaign had come to Roosevelt's attention. He congratulated Pell on his nomination for Congress and wished him success in the election.<sup>10</sup>

During the campaign Pell offered himself as a responsible conservative favoring constructive change. He exploited intraparty Republican strife skillfully enough to take the normally Republican district by 1,700 votes.<sup>11</sup> This was a tenuous hold indeed, for the political winds were increasingly blowing against the Democratic party. Pell won in a Republican year, when the people refused to give President Woodrow Wilson the Democratic Congress for which he asked. Two years later Wilson would be repudiated as the Republicans led the nation back to "normalcy."

As a congressman, Pell usually voted as an urban progressive. He championed his New York City constituency by advocating the continuation of

daylight saving time after the war and by opposing the Volstead Act. He found the postwar Red Scare serious enough to suggest the deportation of alleged subversives.<sup>12</sup>

In 1920 Pell ran for reelection, knowing the odds were against him. Not to Pell's nor anyone else's surprise, the Republicans handily regained the district.<sup>13</sup> Pell's next political opportunity came in the summer of 1921 when the state chairman of the New York Democratic Party resigned. With the help of Roosevelt, Pell was appointed state chairman. During Pell's tenure as chairman, for the first time in thirty-five years, a Democratic governor, Alfred E. Smith, was reelected.<sup>14</sup> But by 1926 Pell found it extremely difficult to work harmoniously with an increasingly conservative Al Smith.<sup>15</sup>

As the 1920s progressed, Pell became more hostile toward the business community. The scandals of the Harding administration proved that business leaders could be dishonest as well as selfish. Episodes like the Teapot Dome scandal made a deep impression upon a man whose watchword was personal integrity. "Am I to look up to Doheny and Sinclair?" Pell once stormed. "Am I expected to bow to Rockefeller? By God, I won't do it! . . . I'm not going to accept the idea that they are the natural leaders of the country."<sup>16</sup> Pell acknowledged that although businessmen might be personally honest — enough to refrain from cheating at cards, for example — they had little regard for truth when it came to making money.<sup>17</sup>

In January 1929, he warned Roosevelt, the recently inaugurated governor of New York, that compromise with the implacable business leaders would prove futile. For Pell, *noblesse oblige* now took on radical implications:

*Of course, I am more of a radical than you, but it seems to me that the national election of 1924 showed very definitely that the business community was not interested in honest government, and the election of 1928 convinced me that the great financial organizations of the country were ready to strain every nerve and stoop to any depth to retain in office the administration that let off Sinclair and Doheny. Every time we have tried conciliating these people, we have failed or been corrupted.<sup>18</sup>*

In a reply to Pell's warnings, Governor Roosevelt agreed with his uncomplimentary assessment of business, forecasting Republican defeat when the prosperity of the 1920s ceased:

*You are right that the business community is not in-*



*terested in good government and it wants the present Republican control to continue just so long as the stock market soars and the new combinations of capital are left undisturbed. The trouble before Republican leaders is that prevailing conditions are bound to come to an end some time. When that time comes I want to see the Democratic party sanely radical enough to have most of the disgruntled ones turn to it to put us in power again.*<sup>19</sup>

The stock market crash and the depression which followed only increased Pell's opposition to the business community. Convinced that Roosevelt was the man best equipped to lead the nation out of the depression, Pell became a supporter, if not an active worker for the New York governor. He wanted to make sure that the Democratic party provided no solace for businessmen seeking to escape public wrath. In Pell's opinion, Roosevelt — above all other candidates — best understood the forces of change shaping the country.<sup>20</sup> But despite assurances to FDR that "I am back of you one hundred percent," Pell held no official party post during the campaign of 1932.<sup>21</sup>

In 1934, with the first New Deal well underway, Pell congratulated Roosevelt on the improvement which had taken place in the country since his inauguration.<sup>22</sup> As a partisan observer of the New Deal, he took particular interest in the demise of the National Recovery Administration in 1935, predicting that the Supreme Court's decision declaring the New Deal agency unconstitutional would necessitate stronger action against business by the administration. Since the NRA provided a chance for honest and responsible business leaders to constructively serve the community, Pell saw the court's ruling as the latest in a series of blows against the kind of liberalism he espoused while in Congress. He compared the business community's jubilation over the death of the NRA to the slaveholders who applauded the Dred Scott decision prior to the Civil War. Like the Southern planters, the utter selfishness of the business element made it a class bound for extinction.<sup>23</sup>

Before 1936, the year of Roosevelt's first reelection, Pell was still an observer, not a participant. Early in 1936 he asked Roosevelt for a diplomatic appointment and characterized himself as "the last capitalist who is willing to be saved by you." He congratulated the president for his efforts, but he admitted some disappointment: "I am sorry that you have not wanted any assistance from me."<sup>24</sup> He

received no reply. Clearly, if Pell wanted a position, he would have to earn it.

The 1936 campaign presented Pell with a perfect opportunity for political work. As a patrician gentleman, Pell was genuinely shocked by the circulation of malicious anti-Roosevelt rumors in the campaign. Far from being "just politics," Pell saw these stories as the work of a desperate and unprincipled opposition. For Pell, the stories represented not an ordinary affair of politics, but an affair of honor. Even in the rough and tumble arena of politics, he insisted, the code of the gentleman still applied. He even characterized the entire Democratic party as the "party of gentlemen." Pell decided to rebut the whispering campaigns, and he made an appointment to see Roosevelt in Hyde Park. He later recalled:

*I drove over to see him [Roosevelt] and told him that I thought he should do something about them [the rumors]. He had the reaction that any gentleman would have — he wanted to do nothing, to pay no attention to these stories. I suggested that he was not only a gentleman, but President of the United States and a candidate for reelection, and I thought something ought to be done.*<sup>25</sup>

If FDR dismissed Pell's warnings, Democratic party leaders did not. Pell was subsequently appointed vice-chairman for the 1936 national campaign. His first official act was to send a letter to all Democratic county chairmen. In the letter, he hinted that the Republicans had instigated the rumors and he urged all county chairmen to investigate the authorship of "this slimy abuse."<sup>26</sup> Pell further requested that county chairmen report all rumors to him. Finally, he warned of dire consequences should the Democrats fail to silence the rumors.

Soon all sorts of bizarre tales began pouring into Pell's office. One story claimed that the president was not the real Franklin Roosevelt, and that the imposter in the White House was in reality an American Indian who "had been adopted while a baby by a director of a western railroad."<sup>27</sup> Another bit of gossip insisted that Roosevelt never graduated with his Harvard class in 1904. Pell checked and found this rumor was true: Roosevelt had graduated in 1903, finishing one year ahead of his class; the confusion arose because Roosevelt had stayed on at Harvard for an extra year to take additional courses.<sup>28</sup>





Courtesy of Senator Claiborne Pell

*Herbert C. Pell and Franklin D. Roosevelt sit on the front porch of Pellbridge, Pell's New York estate.*

Pell's favorite story was popular among his fellow patricians. In a conversation with a member of Newport society, FDR had allegedly lost his temper, and shaking his fist in the man's face, he had stormed: "You tell your friends at Newport, I'll get them."<sup>29</sup> Pell personally related this to the president, who thoroughly enjoyed the tale.

The most disturbing rumors concerned Roosevelt's physical and mental health. Some of the most vicious suggested that the president's polio was actually syphilis, and that he was totally incapable of completing a second term. For these stories, Pell composed a standard answer:

*The rumor which you describe about the President's health is quite untrue. You may remember the same sort of stories were told four years ago when he was first running. . . . He has become continuously stronger since his original attack of infantile paralysis. The history of this disease shows that those who recover from it do not suffer in their general health, especially if. . . it is possible to take continual exercise.<sup>30</sup>*

The 1936 campaign bore all the earmarks of class warfare.<sup>31</sup> Pell's new post, therefore, made it increasingly difficult for him to continue all the aspects of the social life he had previously enjoyed. His close friends now gathered at the Knickerbocker and Union Clubs to attack Roosevelt as a "traitor to his class." These men relished the very rumors Pell sought to dispel. At times Pell's role in the campaign forced him to choose between society and social conscience.

At the outset of the campaign Pell optimistically reported to Roosevelt that "even in the Knickerbocker Club, we have a pretty solid old guard for you."<sup>32</sup> His tone soon changed, however, when the Union Club, to which the Pell family had belonged since its founding in 1862, became a headquarters for anti-Roosevelt activities. In 1936 all Union Club members received invitations to a meeting of the Crusaders, a group dedicated to the destruction of the New Deal. Pell angrily protested that the club's purpose was social, not political. Unless the Crusaders ceased using the Union Club as a meeting place, said Pell, he would promptly resign.<sup>33</sup> The Union Club secretary politely ignored his demands. The Crusaders continued to meet within the club's walls because they, not Herbert Pell, represented the sentiments of most Union Club members. Pell's resignation from the club proved painful, and it only partially resolved a lifelong contradiction. De-

spite his support for FDR, Pell continued to find himself at home in the Knickerbocker Club as well as in Newport and Tuxedo society.

Neither malicious rumors nor the hostility of the Union Club affected the outcome of the 1936 election. Roosevelt carried every state except two, and garnered one of the most impressive popular majorities in the nation's history. Roosevelt's image as the enemy of the upper class undoubtedly proved instrumental in his landslide victory.<sup>34</sup>

Pell celebrated the Democratic triumph by ridiculing his fellow patricians. On election night he attended a gathering at Newport's Clambake Club. Earlier that spring Pell had instructed his gardener to plant some sunflowers; by election eve, the sunflowers — now the symbol of the Republican candidate, Governor Alfred M. Landon — had dried up, and birds had eaten their seeds. The few remaining leaves were pitifully withered. On election evening as Newport society sat stunned at the Republican debacle, Pell walked from table to table in the club's main dining room, and deposited one withered sunflower on each table. At the end of the presentation, he bowed and gravely withdrew.<sup>35</sup> The sunflower episode was Pell's way of mocking his own class. Perhaps, too, he intended the sunflowers to have deeper symbolic significance, for like the American patrician class, they recalled only faded glory.

Pell was rewarded for his minor role in reelecting Roosevelt with a diplomatic post. In the spring of 1937, he received a telephone call from the White House asking if he would serve as minister to Portugal. Pell's friendship with Franklin Roosevelt finally paid off. As minister, he continuously sought to remind Roosevelt of their friendship. Shortly after taking his Lisbon post, Pell wrote: "Dear Mr. President: I presume that an official of the government should not address you by your first name."<sup>36</sup> After describing the international situation in Europe to the president, he fondly recalled the recent presidential election:

*I heard a very just criticism of your administration the other day. It was said that you had been elected on the promise to help the forgotten man and that so far you had done nothing whatever for either Landon or Knox, and who is more forgotten than they?<sup>37</sup>*

In 1941, Pell was transferred from Lisbon to Budapest, Hungary. Two years later, in the face of considerable State Department resistance, FDR ap-





Courtesy of Senator Claiborne Pell

Herbert C. Pell, minister to Portugal, 1937.

pointed Pell as American representative to the United Nations War Crimes Commission. In 1945 the State Department fired Pell for taking too strong a stand against Nazi war crimes.<sup>38</sup> He received these positions neither from any political debt Roosevelt owed him nor because of generous financial contributions made to the Democratic party. Put simply, Roosevelt liked Pell. His affection stemmed largely from a commonly held perspective of the proper role of the upper class in American society. Both men saw the New Deal not as revolutionary, but as the fulfillment of *noblesse oblige*.

Although Roosevelt may have been stung by charges of "traitor to his class," he was especially delighted when a fellow patrician lauded his efforts. Roosevelt's affection for Pell was clearly de-

monstrated when, at the height of the public utilities controversy in 1935, Pell pledged FDR his full support.<sup>39</sup> Roosevelt's response suggested much more than polite appreciation:

*When a man can write me that he has over a quarter of a million invested in power securities out of less than half a million in the world, and still backs me in my fight against the reckless exploitation of the public — that is a 'he man' by gosh!*<sup>40</sup>

Herbert Pell's lifelong friendship with Franklin Roosevelt led to a far greater measure of public service than Pell would have ever realized from his own efforts. The Pell-Roosevelt friendship was rooted in the shared experience of class, and this shared experience helped forge the shared philosophy of two patrician gentlemen.

1. Edward N. Saveth, "The American Patrician Class: a Field of Research," *American Quarterly*, XV (1936), 235-252; E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy and Caste in America* (New York, 1964), 241.
2. Leonard Baker: *Brahmin in Revolt: A Biography of Herbert C. Pell* (New York, 1972), 30-32.
3. Herbert Claiborne Pell Oral History Project, 5, Columbia University, New York, New York, p. 5., hereafter cited as OH.
4. Baker, *Brahmin in Revolt*, 13.
5. *Ibid.*, 14.
6. OH, 304; Interview with Senator Claiborne Pell, Herbert's son, Aug. 2, 1971, hereafter referred to as Pell Interview.
7. Herbert Claiborne Pell (hereafter referred to as HCP) to Daniel Tobin, Sept. 12, 1940, Box 14, Herbert Claiborne Pell Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, hereafter cited as Pell MSS.
8. HCP to Miss Mary Carter, May 1, 1943, Box 3, Pell MSS.
9. OH, 242.
10. FDR to HCP, Oct. 11, 1918, from a collection of Herbert Claiborne Pell's papers in the possession of Senator Claiborne Pell, hereafter cited as C.P. Coll.
11. OH, 252.
12. *Congressional Record*, 66th Cong., 1st Sess., 1321, 2564, 6979.
13. OH, 291.
14. *Twentieth Anniversary Report of Class of 1906 at Harvard University* (Cambridge, 1926), 220.
15. OH, 332.
16. Quoted in Baker, *Brahmin in Revolt*, 101.
17. Pell Interview; OH, 332.
18. HCP to FDR, Jan. 4, 1929, Private Correspondence, 1928-1932, FDR Papers.
19. FDR to HCP, Jan 28, 1929, *ibid.*
20. HCP to John W. Davis, Jan. 12, 1932, Box 11, Pell MSS; HCP to FDR, Sept. 17, 1931, Private Correspondence, 1928-1932, FDR Papers; HCP to James M. Curley, Sept. 17, 1931, Box 136, Pell MSS.
21. HCP to FDR, Sept. 3, 1932, Box 31, Pell MSS.
22. HCP to FDR, Jan. 6, 1934, PPF 414, FDR Papers.
23. Herbert C. Pell, "Am I my Brother's Keeper?" *Chicago Argus*, I (1935), 3; HCP to George Bond Cochran, Aug. 21, 1935, Box 3, Pell MSS.
24. HCP to FDR, Feb. 2, 1936, Box 31, Pell MSS.
25. OH, 392.
26. Circular letter, HCP to Democratic County Chairmen, Aug. 23, 1936, Box 15, Pell MSS.
27. Baker, *Brahmin in Revolt*, 158.
28. HCP to David Gray, n.d., Box 5, Pell MSS.
29. HCP to FDR, Oct. 17, 1936, Box 31, Pell MSS.
30. Circular letter, HCP to Democratic County Chairmen, Aug. 23, 1936, Box 15, Pell MSS.
31. William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York, 1963), 195-196; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval* (New York, 1960), 584-585; James Macgregor Burns, *Roosevelt: the Lion and the Fox* (New York, 1956), 270-278.
32. HCP to FDR, June 21, 1936, PPF 414, FDR Papers.
33. Circular letter from the Crusaders to Members of the Union Club, May 23, 1936, Box 6, Pell MSS; HCP to L. V. Hoppin, June 7, 1936, *ibid.*
34. Burns, *Roosevelt*, 270-278.
35. HCP to Edward E. Perkins, Nov. 5, 1936, Box 18, Pell MSS.
36. HCP to FDR, Sept. 11, 1937, PPF 414, FDR Papers.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Baker, *Brahmin in Revolt*, 205, 247, 254-255.
39. HCP to FDR, June 23, 1935, Box 31, Pell MSS.
40. FDR to HCP, July 2, 1935, *ibid.*



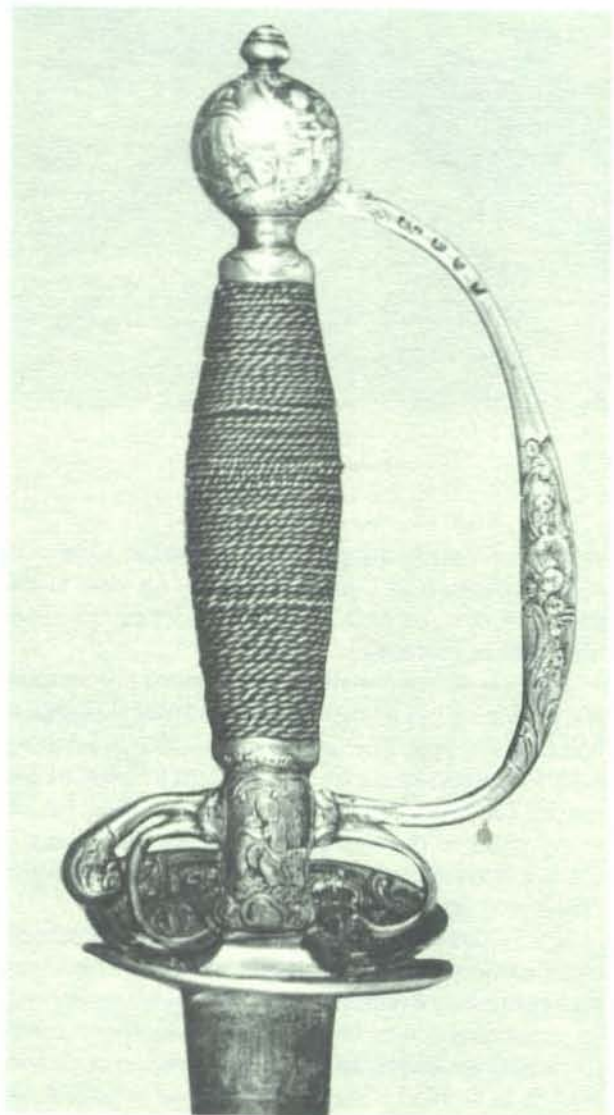
## Rochambeau's English Sword

by Robert P. Emlen\*

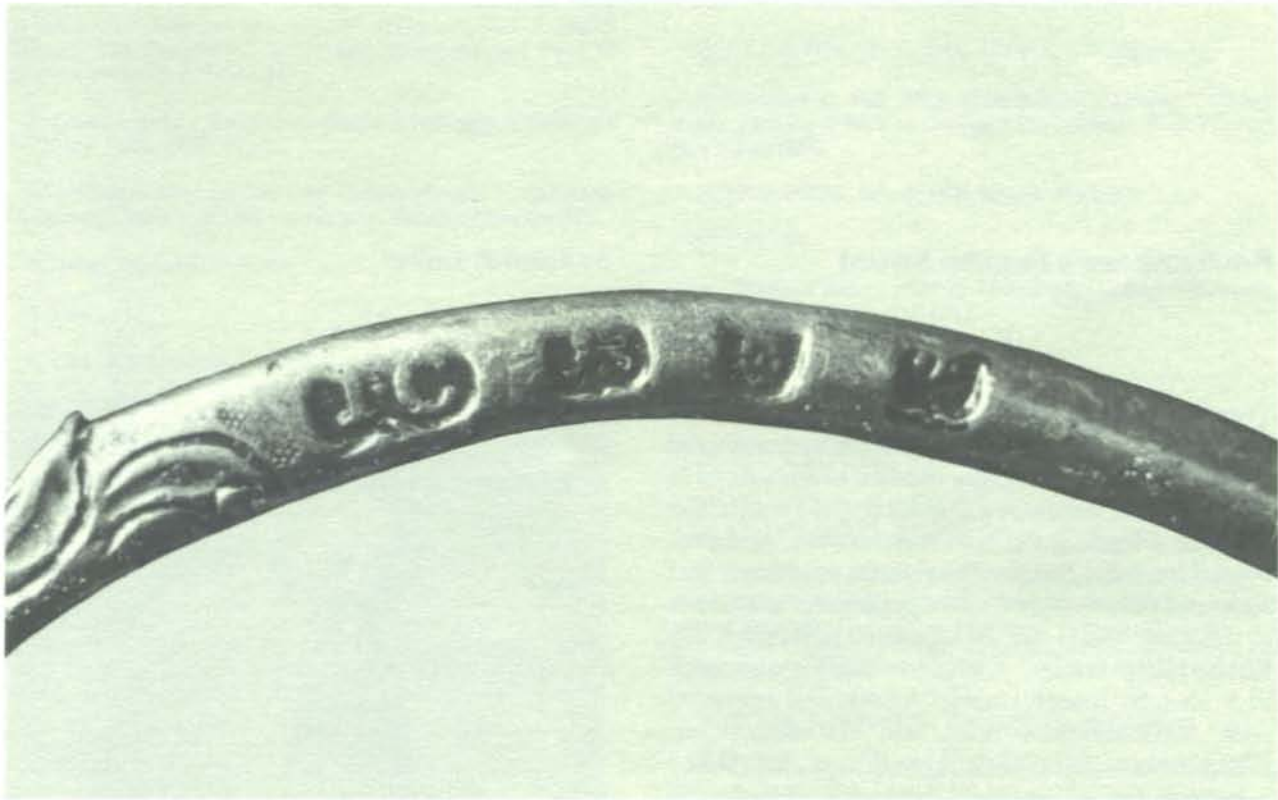
Two hundred years after his arrival in Newport, the warm associations Rochambeau formed with the people of Rhode Island are recalled in the tokens of friendship he left among them. His gold watch, the work of a leading Parisian watchmaker, was presented to John Smith, Providence merchant and signer of Rhode Island's renunciation of allegiance to the king, and is still the treasured possession of a Rhode Island family.<sup>1</sup> A silver dressing spoon made in France by Joseph Gabriel Agard, and engraved with Rochambeau's crest and the inscription, "Rochambeau to Lt. Gov. Jabez Bowen, R.I. 1780," is now in the collection of the Newport Historical Society.<sup>2</sup>

Of all the objects known to have been presented by Rochambeau to his hosts, the most impressive is his silver-hilted officer's sword, which was given to the Rhode Island Historical Society in 1928 by George Lewis Cooke and Evelina Cooke Hardy. "My great-great-grandfather was Nathan Miller who served in the War of the Revolution in the capacity of Brigadier General of the Rhode Island Militia for the Counties of Bristol and Newport," wrote Mrs. Hardy in her letter of presentation. "His acquaintance with General Rochambeau ripened into a mutual friendship and at a ball in Newport they exchanged dress swords."<sup>3</sup>

The short, light weapon is technically called a gentleman's small sword. With the development of flintlock pistols, small swords became outmoded as hand weapons and by the time of the Revolutionary War were worn more for social display than for armed defense. The sword's social function is emphasized by the ornamentation on its silver hilt, which is decorated in repoussé work, with pastoral



\*Mr. Emlen is the Society's associate curator. He wishes to thank Robert S. Cocroft, copy editor of this journal, for suggesting the means by which Rochambeau may have obtained his English sword.



scenes of young shepherds and lambs. Unexpectedly, stamped in the knucklebow, up next to the pommel, are the four marks that identify all silver wrought in England.

Though difficult to read, the mark on the far right is a gothic "E" in a shield, the date letter assigned to indicate the year 1760 at the assay office in London, which is represented by the adjacent leopard's head mark. The purity of the silver is affirmed by the assay mark of the lion passant, while the initials "JC" in a leafy cartouche identify the maker as sword cutler and goldsmith John Carman II.

No evidence survives to explain how Rochambeau came to own an English weapon. The honor and ceremony invested in a gentleman's sword was so great that it was customary for victorious forces to permit an officer to retain his weapon in defeat, and it is unlikely that Rochambeau acquired the sword as the spoils of war. But it was also an honored custom for fellow officers to exchange their weapons in a display of friendship, and perhaps

this tradition brought an English sword into Rochambeau's possession. Given the many friendships he formed in Rhode Island, Count Rochambeau may well have relinquished his own French sword early on in the campaign, and his friend and admirer General Miller may have received only Rochambeau's latest sword, itself the gift of another American officer who would naturally be armed with an English weapon. Though only conjectural, the vision of Count Rochambeau, much too gracious to decline the honor of exchanging swords up and down Narragansett Bay, provides a fresh and engaging picture of the man during this year's bicentennial celebration of his arrival in America.

1. Edwin Martin Stone, *Our French Allies* (Providence, 1884), 224.

2. *Newport History*, Newport Historical Society Bulletin #137, XLIII (1970), 19; *ibid.*, Bulletin #138, XLIII (1970), 45.

3. Letter from Mrs. Evelina Cooke Hardy, June 17, 1928, RIHS Archives, RIHS Library.