

RHODE ISLAND HISTORY



VOLUME 39:2 MAY 1980



RIHS Library

Opportunities for women in the work force expanded during the first part of this century — especially in clerical jobs. Growth of business, and the mechanization of office work through typewriters, adding machines, and dictating machines, brought new jobs for women. Above, Grace Kaye (seated) seems at home in the office at Royal Weaving Company, Pawtucket, ca. 1910-1918.

RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

Published by
THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 52 POWER
STREET, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02906 and printed
by a grant of the STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE
PLANTATIONS, J. Joseph Garrahy, Governor.

J. Joseph Kruse, *president*
Alden M. Anderson, *vice president*
Frank Licht, *vice president*
Richard F. Staples, *secretary*
Rachel Cunha, *assistant secretary*
Karl F. Ericson, *treasurer*
Stephen C. Williams, *assistant treasurer*
Albert T. Klyberg, *director*
Clifford P. Monahan, *director emeritus*

FELLOWS OF THE SOCIETY

Carl Bridenbaugh
Antoinette F. Downing
Sydney V. James

PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

E. Andrew Mowbray, *chairman*
Henry L. P. Beckwith, Jr.
Dr. Francis H. Chafee
Prof. Howard P. Chudacoff
Dr. Patrick T. Conley
Wendell D. Garrett
Dr. Seebert J. Goldowsky
Robert Allen Greene
Pamela A. Kennedy
Charles P. O'Donnell

STAFF

Glenn Warren LaFantasie, *editor*
Sarah C. Gleason, *copy editor*
Robert Cocroft, *editorial assistant*
Helen Keabian, *picture editor*

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

Editorial offices at Aldrich House
110 Benevolent Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02906

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Old Barriers and New Opportunities: Working Women in Rhode Island, 1900-1940 <i>by Sharon Hartman Strom</i>	43
Uphill Battle: Lucius F. C. Garvin's Crusade for Political Reform <i>by Carl Gersuny</i>	57
From the Collections	76

VOLUME 39 NUMBER 2 MAY 1980

RHODE ISLAND HISTORY (ISSN 0035-4619)

*The Rhode Island Historical Society assumes no
responsibility for the opinions of contributors.*

Rhode Island History (1942-) and its predecessors *Rhode Island
Historical Society Collections* (1918-1941) and *Publications of the
Rhode Island Historical Society* (1893-1901) are available in microform
from Xerox University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor,
Michigan 48106, (313) 761-4700. Please write for complete information.
Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in
Historical Abstracts and *America: History and Life*.



RIHS Library

Workers affixing labels to baking powder cans at Rumford Chemical Works, East Providence.

Old Barriers and New Opportunities: Working Women in Rhode Island, 1900-1940

by Sharon Hartman Strom*

As census-takers and social commentators were making their observations on changes in American life at the turn of the century, they all noticed something new: more women were working than ever before, and they were working in a greater variety of jobs.¹ Whereas most women in the nineteenth century had been limited to a narrow range of jobs, especially in domestic service, the sewing trades, teaching, and mill work, the census of 1900 reported women in 295 of the 303 occupations listed. New opportunities for women as secretaries, nurses, librarians, salesgirls and social workers seemed to have appeared overnight, and more women than ever before worked in manufacturing. The president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Frances Willard, announced that "nowadays, a girl may be anything, from a college president down to a seamstress or a cash girl. It depends only upon the girl what rank she shall take in her chosen calling." *Everybody's Magazine* in 1908 published an eight part series on female workers entitled "The Woman's Invasion," and the ambivalence of that title summed up both the excitement and the reservations of many toward the growing number of working women: if more women found jobs, how many men would be unemployed? How would the employment of women affect traditional relationships between the sexes? Above all, what would happen to the American home?²

Could, as Willard argued, "a girl be anything" by 1900? Keener observers perceived that the lives of working women had not changed significantly since

the nineteenth century. For one thing, as the *Journal* of the Providence Board of Trade happily reassured its readers in 1908, women had not made real inroads into more prestigious, better paying jobs: "It is true that we have women doctors, lawyers, opticians, preachers, dentists, insurance and real estate agents, architects . . . and undertakers; but in none of these vocations have they become alarmingly numerous."³ The majority of the female work force was still young, mainly fourteen to twenty-five years old, and married women were still only a small part of those employed outside the home. Women's wages were universally lower than men's, and women's jobs did not lead to promotions or higher level positions. Few professional jobs provided enough income for a woman to support herself comfortably, let alone a family. Most single women who were wage earners lived at home and turned all or most of their salaries over to their parents.⁴

Rhode Island in 1900 had an exceptionally large female work force, and in fact had an exceptionally high percentage of women in its population.⁵ New England textile mills had attracted single women, widows and deserted wives since the mid-nineteenth century, and by 1900 towns like Lowell and Fall River had more white women working, in proportion to population, than any other region in the United States.⁶ Other industries such as jewelry, rubber, and paper boxes also consciously recruited women workers. By the late nineteenth century, Rhode Island produced nearly one-half of all the jewelry and silverware in the United States, and by

*Ms. Strom is associate professor of history at the University of Rhode Island. She wishes to thank Kate Dunnigan for sharing her research on working women in Rhode Island and for helpful criticism of an earlier draft of this paper.

1930 over half of its jewelry workers were female.⁷ Compared to other states in the Union, Rhode Island had fewer men and more women employed in manufacturing industries. Between 1880 and 1920, thousands of immigrants from England, Ireland, French Canada, Italy, Eastern Europe and Portugal came to Rhode Island precisely because it offered factory jobs for women and children that supplemented whatever work men could find. By 1910, seven out of every ten Rhode Island residents were either foreign born or the children of foreign born.⁸

Before World War I, the majority of Rhode Island women employed in manufacturing worked in textile mills. Between 1860 and 1880 the Rhode Island textile industry expanded rapidly and mill owners made fabulous profits. Fueled by a seemingly endless supply of workers, many of them children, the mills kept wages depressed and moved toward an ever-increasing division of labor. Throughout the nineteenth century, educators and reformers bitterly complained that the state's child labor laws were virtually unenforceable and that girls and boys as young as eight were often found in mills. Leonora Barry, visiting New England in 1887 as an organizer for the Knights of Labor, noted that the condition of wage workers in Rhode Island was "truly . . . pitiful . . . being for the most part in the control of soulless corporations, who know not what humanity means."⁹ By the 1890s New England's supremacy in the textile industry was being challenged by the growing number of mills in the South, where cotton staples were near-at-hand, child labor even less restricted than in New England, and labor unions nonexistent. The growth of the Southern textile industry, much of it financed by New England money, was phenomenal; the region expanded its number of spindles from 0.5 million in 1880 to 10.4 million by 1908.¹⁰

In the long run, New England could not compete with the economic advantages of the South, but between 1900 and World War I it managed to hold an edge. Through more efficient work processes, production speed-ups, and refinement of textile machinery, the New England states increased their production from 8.6 million cotton spindles in 1880 to 15.5 million in 1908; yet in the same period, the proportions of women and children mill workers steadily decreased. In 1870 men constituted only 31.5% of the work force in the cotton industry, children 17.1%, and women 51.4%; by 1910 men

were 51.3%, children under sixteen were 10.5%, and women were only 38.2% of the total work force. A number of factors probably contributed to this trend. The standard of living and the purchasing power of the working class did increase between 1890 and 1925.¹¹ Many working class families probably found it possible to keep wives, mothers and younger children at home. The war against child labor launched by reformers during the Progressive period eventually reached Rhode Island, and in 1906 a new child labor law set the working age at fourteen.

While some children lied about their ages and managed to start work in factories or mills at twelve or thirteen, the evidence suggests that by 1910 most young people began working in the mills at fourteen or fifteen.¹² One observer noted in 1912 that employers were becoming convinced "that the employment of young children is not profitable."¹³ There is some evidence that in speeding up production, employers hoped to assign more and sometimes heavier machinery to employees, so adults were preferable to children. Textile work called for a certain level of physical competence.¹⁴ Mabel got her first job winding skeins in the mills at J. P. Coats in 1917, and recalled: "I was a healthy, strong girl and a good worker. . . . I was lucky to get the job and I worked hard to keep it. I remember at first I was afraid of the machine, but I was particularly afraid of the woman who I was assigned to work with. She had a reputation as a hustler."¹⁵

By the early twentieth century, then, most young women stayed in school until they were fourteen or had graduated from grammar school. Women recalling why they left school in these years often remark that they would have liked more education but had no choice about helping to supplement their family incomes.¹⁶ Mary said, "I don't recall thinking twice about leaving school then; I loved school, but my mother was always sickly, and when I reached working age, I had to go, that was all." Alice attended a parochial school in Central Falls and remembered that of twenty-five students in her eighth grade class, only three went on to high school. A neighborhood friend of her mother used to say "you were fourteen on Saturday, had a party on Sunday, and you'd be in Coats on Monday." Work was a stage of life, the stage between school and marriage. Going out to work signified that childhood was left behind and adolescence had



RIHS Library

Children and adults often worked side by side in textile factories. Above, a kier room, where cloth was boiled or bleached in large vats, at Apponaug Print Works, Warwick, 1900.

begun. Virginia thought "the days were long and hard," but she "enjoyed working with her friends and getting away from home and her mother." Marjorie lived on a farm in Seekonk and left school at fourteen to take a job at the Rumford Eastern Bolt and Nut Company with two of her friends. Her day began at 5:00 A.M. so she could walk three-and-one-half miles to the state line, where she boarded a trolley to town. It was sometimes "quite a job dragging a lunch basket through the snow, but it

was better than being on the farm stuck out in the middle of nowhere."¹⁷

Conditions in the mills were poor: the noise was deafening, the floors often slippery, the air filled with cotton lint. One fourteen-year-old was worried when a relative told her she would soon lose her "high color" in the mills. Yet there were consolations: women often worked with friends and relatives, and lively teenagers found time for fun during the regimen of the factory day. Bertha



RIHS Library

Young women tending skein winding machines at Royal Weaving Company, Pawtucket. Detail of a photograph, ca. 1910-1915.

worked with other adolescent farm girls and recalled that "we were all poor, and we knew it. So we got along well. There was a lot of chumming around." Virginia worked "in the spinning and twisting department watching 200 ends to make sure everything was going well." She was responsible for fixing the broken ones. The part she remembered best, however, was when she and her friends "would leave the machines and go to the ladies room to arrange their hair and experiment with new looks." When they returned to their machines "the ends . . . would be lying broken on the floor and the supervisor would be in a rage." Eventually the door was removed from the ladies room.¹⁸

Relations between employers and employees varied widely depending on the size of the mill, its position in the community, and how wide a gulf

there was between foremen and workers. Alice worked as a spooler at J. P. Coats. "Our work wasn't heavy," she recalled, "but it was very fast . . . You had to keep ten tracks filled with the empty spools. In the back of the machine there were these big bobbins of thread. You had to string the thread through so the empty spools would be filled up. You had to keep the full spools picked up and keep the tracks filled with empty ones, so you were going all the time. . . . Some of the men were real mean. . . . If your machine broke down or wouldn't run right, the spool wouldn't come out perfect. You'd go to the fixer, they called him. That was his job. He wouldn't have had a job if something didn't happen to the machine. You'd bring the spool to him and he'd knock it out of your hand and I'd be crying, picking 'em up off the floor. . . . If there were any spools on the floor

the boss would come around and holler at the workers: 'I'm gonna fire you, I'm gonna fire you.'"¹⁹

The pace was somewhat different in the smaller, more paternalistic North Scituate mill where Clara worked a loom and her father was a foreman. The mill adjoined a baseball field, and if a ball game was going on the workers would "sneak out the back door and stand and watch . . . and their looms would be in there thrashing and going." Clara's father would then "go out and drag them back in," telling his daughter to "get in there and . . . keep those looms going."²⁰

Textile mills in Rhode Island always had a large proportion of married women workers. Based on an investigation of some Rhode Island mills, the federal government reported in 1910 that 33.2% of female textile workers over sixteen years old were married, widowed, divorced or separated.²¹ Many women tried to work until their first child was born. Some even managed to work during the infancies of their first few children by taking the night shift so that husbands could be at home with the babies. The more paternalistic mills kept places for women who were out because of childbirth. One mother who lived across the street from the mills in Scituate had a friend watch her looms while she went home to nurse her child.²² For most mothers with young children and growing families, however, working in the mills was too exhausting; a fifty-eight hour week simply left no time for housework or raising children. Many married women in the mills were thus in their forties or fifties, with children old enough to fend for themselves. Married women in their late twenties and thirties often regulated their work hours by doing jewelry piece work, taking in homework or laundry, or renting rooms to boarders.

Throughout this period, women workers staged job actions and strikes to protest working conditions and wages, even though very few female workers were unionized. When fifteen women employed in the folding room of the U. S. Finishing Company went on strike for higher wages in 1901, the company simply replaced them with new workers. But in 1906 ninety women and girls who worked in the sorting department of the Union Wadding Company in Pawtucket went on strike for ten days to gain a one dollar per week

raise, and won a "mutual concession" from the company. The American Federation of Labor craft unions largely ignored women and concentrated on skilled jobs, like mule spinning or loom fixing, most likely to be held by English-speaking men. These unions were so irrelevant to women that a 1910 government survey of 118 women in the Rhode Island textile industry discovered that 83 had "no opinion" about unions.²³ Women textile workers did play an important role, however, in the Congress of Industrial Organizations struggles of the 1930s.

Aware of trends in women's work, optimists pointed to the decline in domestic service, believing this meant new opportunities for women in other fields. Since the late nineteenth century, observers of women's work knew that most women would leave domestic service for almost any other kind of job, especially ones with defined hours. In 1870, 60.7% of all working women were domestic servants, while in 1900 the number dropped to 33%, and by 1920 to 18.2%.²⁴

Domestic servants were on call day and night, their work was demeaning, and they were isolated from families and friends. In Rhode Island, Irish and Afro-American women were most often employed as domestic servants because of tradition and because they spoke English.²⁵ Irish women often came alone to the United States and needed places to live. Some hoped to return to Ireland with a dowry and marry there. One person recalled that when an unmarried woman returned to Ireland with a dowry "it was like a slave market. Men . . . would go to the station to look her over and dicker with her family." Others married men in the United States, though some ended up as life-long fixtures in the households of wealthy Americans. Mary came to Rhode Island from Ireland in the 1920s to work in the home of a former school teacher. She worked from 7:00 in the morning to 8:00 in the evening, or longer if her employer entertained. She had one afternoon and every other Sunday off. "The lady of the house was . . . very strict, patronizing, distrusted her servants, and worked them hard." Mary hated her housework job and envied her two younger sisters who worked together in a rubber factory, shared an apartment, and enjoyed "freedom and independence from their employer." Mary eventually escaped through marriage.²⁶

Black women in Rhode Island faced overt discrimination in most factory jobs and therefore became a disproportionately high percentage of the laundresses, servants and waitresses.²⁷ Moreover, of all ethnic groups, they were the most likely to work after marriage. Nursing schools and colleges in Rhode Island refused to admit blacks, and those seeking professional training had to travel to New York or Philadelphia. Very few could find work as clerks or secretaries. Julia, despite a high school diploma and outstanding grades in French, Latin and mathematics, spent her life working as a waitress and a cleaning woman; her best job was in a textile mill during World War II when the labor supply was artificially low.²⁸

While the number of white women employed as domestic servants continued to decline after 1900, other job categories showed dramatic increases.

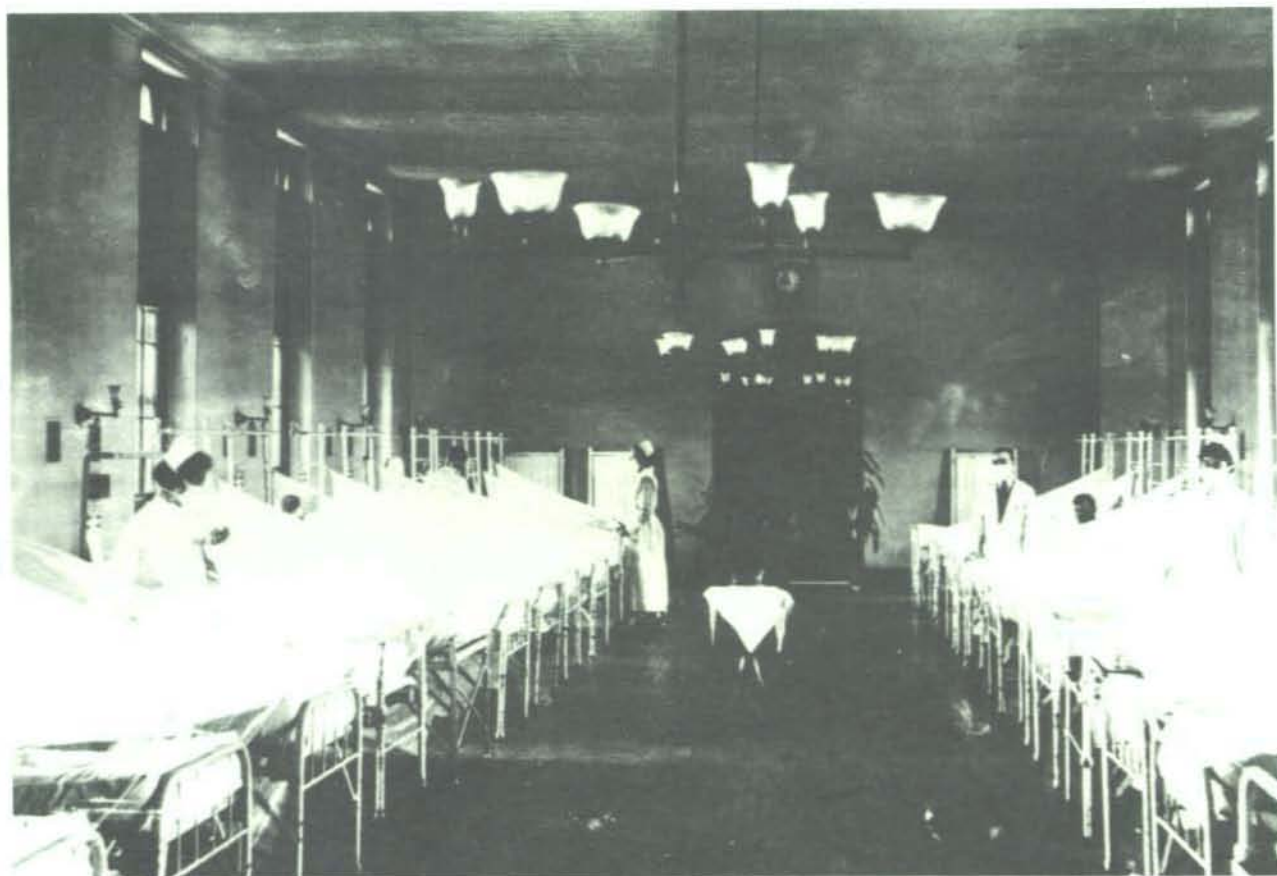
Nursing, clerical work, sales and the "women's professions" such as teaching, social work and library work, all grew during the course of the early twentieth century. Most feminists saw this growth as a sure sign that women would soon gain economic equality with men. Mrs. R. J. Barker, head of the Tiverton School Committee, declared in 1911 that the woman "accountant, stenographer, telegrapher," and teacher is "giving of her intellect . . . for the advancement of other women."²⁹

Yet there was a social hierarchy to these jobs, largely tied to the gentility of each occupation and its distance from the working class and recent immigrants. Nursing and sales work were occupations which some working class women could aspire to as a step up from the mills and factories. Clerical work required training and some high school education. Social work, teaching and li-



RIHS Library

Kitchen of a restaurant in Providence, ca. 1899-1905.



RIHS Library

A ward at Rhode Island Hospital, Providence, ca. 1915-1920.

brary work all required college training and were the domains of the upper middle class and those upper-class women who chose to work. Factory work, on the other hand, continued to be largely the domain of immigrant women.

A closer look shows that the exigencies of the changing American economy, not a new equality, had opened these new occupations to women. By the late nineteenth century, the health business in the United States was undergoing a revolution in technique and credibility; for the first time in the history of the medical profession the average patient began to have a better chance of surviving an illness if he saw a doctor than if he did not. The increasing number of operations required hospitals for doctors to perform surgery; medical schools all over the country were turning to internships in the hospitals as a standard part of

physician training. Expectant mothers in record numbers were having their babies in hospitals under the supervision of doctors instead of midwives. As elsewhere in the country, Rhode Island's cities launched major hospital building campaigns in the last third of the nineteenth century. Rhode Island Hospital, St. Joseph's, Providence Lying-In, Woonsocket Hospital, and Newport Hospital were all established between 1868 and 1892. Nurses' training grew in direct proportion to these ever-burgeoning hospitals. Between 1882 and 1900, Rhode Island Hospital added a children's ward, buildings for the treatment of contagious diseases and outpatients, an ear, nose and throat infirmary, facilities for skin diseases and orthopedic surgery, and a \$160,000 southwest pavillion. Whereas in 1869 the hospital had treated 250 patients, by 1919 the number had

risen to 9,000. Seventeen women were enrolled in the first nurses' training course in 1882; by 1922, 181 students were enrolled.³⁰

While hospitals presented their nurses' training programs as an opportunity for women to gain a profession in the medical field, their main concern was to recruit a labor force. Instructed mostly at bedside, students were required to live at the hospital and work twelve-hour shifts, for which they were paid small monthly salaries. The course was originally two years but was extended to three at the turn of the century. When their training was over, most graduates became private duty nurses because hospitals preferred the cheaper labor of trainees. Exactly who became nurses at the turn of the century is not entirely clear. In the early years women had to be twenty-one years old to apply, which meant that most candidates left other jobs to begin training. It seems likely that most nurses were native-born working class. Rhode Island Hospital required a sound moral character and the ability to speak good English, but did not specify a high school education. By 1904 the hospital administered an entrance exam, but a thorough grammar school education could have provided the average applicant with the skills in composition, reading, and arithmetic required for admittance. Most middle-class families regarded nursing as an occupation that bordered on the disreputable, and most of a nurse's duties as glorified housework. One middle-class woman reported that her parents thought "nursing was a very menial job," and while they sent her brother to college they enrolled her in business school. She became a telephone operator. Adeline saved two dollars a week from her job as a clerical worker at the Outlet Company to enter nursing school, but was told by her grandmother "that I could not go because it was not proper for young ladies to leave home." Nursing was in many cases an opportunity for the adventurous young woman. Marion graduated from nurse's training in 1917, just in time to enter the Navy Nurse Corps during World War I. She traveled abroad to treat injured sailors, and when she came home in the early twenties she became a private obstetrical nurse and worked in a birth control clinic.³¹

As the standard of living rose in the late nineteenth century, consumption increased in

Rhode Island. Existing department stores expanded and new ones opened in downtown Providence and other cities.³² The number of women working in sales increased accordingly. Early department stores, like the Shephard Company, Gladding's, and the Boston Store, catered to the middle and upper classes. Young women who worked as salesgirls usually earned less than factory operatives, but the hours were shorter and working conditions generally cleaner. At the turn of the century new stores such as the Outlet Company and Woolworth's catered to a wider clientele; they offered lower prices but depended on heavy volume. The Outlet Company's motto was "more for less," and it outraged the more staid department stores in Providence by offering free trolley transfers so that working people could shop downtown.³³ The dime stores paid the lowest salaries, had high labor turnovers, and hired on a part-time or seasonal basis. Not only was a woman unlikely to "meet a million dollar baby" in the dime store, she was also unlikely to sit down for hours at a time. One young Italian woman interviewed by the Women's Bureau in 1921 reported that she had worked at Woolworth's for the previous four years. "For the first two weeks standing all day made her feet hurt so she could hardly wait to get home at night and take off her shoes — then she got used to it." Workers were allowed to sit down when they were not busy but "hardly ever had time."³⁴ By the teens and early twenties immigrant women and their daughters were hired by department stores, for although management wanted workers to speak only English, they frequently needed translators for Italian, Polish or Russian-Jewish shoppers. Anna's father, an Italian, worked as a tailor at the Outlet Company and obtained a job for her there as an errand girl in 1920. She made only five dollars a week, however, and asked to be promoted to a salesgirl. The manager told her that she was "too short," which led her to conclude that Italians were discriminated against in Providence. Another Italian girl "wanted very much to go to high school and become a stenographer," but her mother "refused to let her go, saying that her older brothers and sisters had gone to work and so should she." She first worked at the Rumford Baking Powder factory and then made baby stockings, but quit to take a lower-paying cash-

ier's job at the Outlet. It seemed like "a more pleasant and respectable job. It was closer to being a stenographer than working in a . . . factory."³⁵

Of all the new opportunities, clerical work was surely the most important for women. In 1870 the office was the domain of men; less than 1% of all employed women were in clerical jobs. Then, as American capitalism made the transition to its corporate stage, women began to enter clerical work in large numbers. Larger units of production and business led to more sophisticated methods of record-keeping, more efficient management, and more extensive advertising and sales.³⁶ The Rhode Island Bureau of Statistics noted with some amazement that between 1900 and 1910, while the average number of wage earners in manufacturing had increased only 17% (far less

than the growth in population), the number of salaried officials and clerks had increased by 40%. As office work was mechanized, women were hired to type on typewriters, do bookkeeping on the adding machines, and take steno on dictating machines. Men moved up to managerial positions or were fired. By 1920 clericals constituted about 25% of all the employed women in the United States. They were 92% of the typists and stenographers, and 49% of the cashiers, bookkeepers and accountants.³⁷

In the early years of the century most women who became secretaries quit school in the ninth or tenth grade and then went to an inexpensive business college like Bryant and Stratton. Daughters of both the more solidly established working class and of the middle class were sent to business college instead of high school because it provided



RIHS Library

An office at Royal Weaving Company, Pawtucket, ca. 1931.

training for what parents saw as well-paying and respectable jobs. Until the 1920s clerical workers were certainly in constant demand. Lois graduated from Providence High School in 1918 with honors; she excelled in math and science and had been accepted into a nurse's training program. "Her father, however, had decided that his daughters would become stenographers, because of an opening in the job market."³⁸ Two young graduates of the Charles Business College learned during World War I that "you could get a job anywhere. . . . Another girl and I, we'd take a job in the morning, and if we didn't like it we'd quit at noontime and take another one in the afternoon."³⁹ A French Canadian woman who had studied double bookkeeping got a job at the State House and supported her family all through the 1920s and 1930s. One woman who worked as a secretary at Brown and Sharpe in the 1920s recalled that "office workers were in great demand," but employees were "supposed to be docile, sweet, and work like a horse"; anyone could be "fired for the least infraction of the rules." Nearly all clerical jobs were for single women only, and until World War II major companies like Narragansett Electric and New England Telephone routinely fired women who married. The telephone company was known for its interference in workers' lives: one operator remembered that before a worker was hired "a representative was sent to your home to find out what kind of a . . . family you came from and interviewed your parents. . . . You were required to wear a girdle and stockings to work at all times."⁴⁰

By the mid-1920s most high schools in Rhode Island offered clerical training, and the number of clerical workers increased dramatically. The age for compulsory school attendance rose to sixteen in 1926, and a depression in the textile industry meant fewer jobs for teenagers in manufacturing anyway.⁴¹ Five times as many youngsters attended American high schools in the mid-1920s as had in the 1890s. Economist Paul Douglas argued that the main economic function of the high school was to prepare juveniles for clerical work and salaried positions. He demonstrated that as more women entered clerical work the relative distance between clerical and manufacturing wages narrowed, and he predicted that soon the chief advantage of clerical work would be its social

position, not its pay rate.⁴²

Certainly no woman could move into the middle class on her salary as a clerical worker, although some women were able to "marry up" by meeting men of a higher class at work. By the 1920s and 1930s many women who stayed in high school were pressured by their parents to take secretarial courses so that they could be sure to get jobs. College seemed a distant frivolity to most mothers and fathers, although some young women yearned to go on and had good enough grades to do so. "When Anne was going to Central High School one counselor prodded Anne's mother to let Anne take a college preparatory course, but her mother refused, saying . . . that Anne had no need for any education after high school. Anne graduated in the business curriculum bound for office work, which according to her mother was a more feminine and practical future." One woman recalled that "girls were discouraged from going to college — it was considered a waste of money and effort, since girls should be in a job they could make money in, then leave when they got married."⁴³

Most women who did go to college became teachers, which had been one of the chief occupations for women since the nineteenth century. By 1910, 80% of all teachers were women. The Rhode Island State Normal School, established in 1854, provided a two-year course in teacher training, and by 1905 was one of the largest of its kind in New England. Its graduates, however, faced stiff competition for jobs from graduates of four-year private colleges, so the Normal School worked toward establishing its own four-year curriculum. The Rhode Island College of Education thus appeared in 1920, and by 1930 there were so many applicants — and so many teachers — that enrollment was restricted to 600 places.⁴⁴ RICE was swamped with applications from women, partly because it was the only place in the state for working- and middle-class women to get a college education. Pembroke was too expensive, Providence College was open only to men, the Rhode Island State College at Kingston only offered majors in agriculture or home economics to a tiny student body, and the Rhode Island School of Design specialized in art training. In 1929 the Catholic Teachers College of Providence was incorporated to train nuns who wished to

teach in Catholic schools. Entering the convent was one way for working-class Catholic women to enter the professions.

Women teachers in Rhode Island routinely earned less than men, and they were usually forced to leave their jobs when they married.⁴⁵ Some women became teachers thinking they would like to remain single, and certainly teaching was one of the few occupations that could provide an adequate living for a woman in the early twentieth century. One teacher said her parents "never expected us to marry. My mother knew how hard life was for a married woman and she would always tell us that there was time to get married." In Newport one woman who taught in the 1930s recalled that "marriage was unbecoming [to] a . . . female teacher. When you got married . . . you could finish the rest of the year. . . Then you had to resign . . . and you might . . . if there was a vacancy. . . [become] a permanent substitute the next year. If you did you went in at the minimum. . . . These women had been permanent teachers at the top of the pay scale and when they got married it was like [they] did a bad thing. . . . Their time as substitutes did not count towards retirement." Another woman who had taught for six years joined the Navy in 1943 and was denied a leave of absence from her school district on the grounds that she had not been drafted.⁴⁶

Certainly Willard's claim that women could be anything after 1900 was more fantasy than fact. Nor were the alarmists' fears — that changes in women's work would disrupt the American home or change the traditional relations between the sexes — grounded in reality. While new occupations were opened to women, especially nursing, clerical work and sales, they were available precisely because women were a cheap labor force already struggling within a narrow range of opportunities. While a few women eventually rose to supervise the work of other women, these occupations did not lead to positions of real power in the fields of medicine, business, or the retail trade. As women entered these occupations in large numbers, the usual economic law applied: the more workers, the lower the wages. Only occupations requiring a college education came close to providing women with a middle-class income; most other women, no matter what their

occupation, remained dependent on marriage as a means of economic survival. Indeed, women's work was not seen as a stage of economic independence, but as a transition between dependence on parents and dependence on a husband. Virtually all single working-class and most middle-class women, no matter what their ethnic backgrounds, gave nearly all their wages to parents; almost none lived alone.

Yet work served an important psychological and cultural function in the lives of women which we must not overlook. Despite the harshness of factory jobs, the tedium of clerical work, and the servility of nursing, women enjoyed proving their competence, meeting other women, and broadening their experiences outside the home. A few even withstood the considerable pressures to marry and remained single. While high schools in the 1920s and 1930s were, in one sense, vast training grounds for clerical workers, most women enjoyed school and took pride in obtaining high school diplomas; the conflicts they were beginning to have with their parents about entering nursing school or taking "impractical" courses like French and chemistry showed that both working-class and middle-class women were trying to stretch beyond the narrow range of work laid out for them.

An earlier version of this article was given as a lecture at the Rhode Island Historical Society on June 27, 1979.

1. This paper draws extensively on the University of Rhode Islands Womens Biography Project for first-hand accounts of what women thought about their work. This project grew out of a course entitled "Women in American History," which I have been teaching since 1974. I have routinely asked students in the course to interview older women, usually mothers or grandmothers or both, about their lives. Since work is a major aspect of each interview, I am beginning to develop a sizeable body of material on the cycles of working women's lives in Rhode Island. I have altered the names of the subjects to preserve their anonymity.

2. Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York, 1978), 42, 43; "The Woman's Invasion," *Everybody's Magazine*, 19 (1908).

3. "Statistics of Women at Work; Rhode Island, 1875 to 1905." *Board of Trade Journal* (Sept. 1908), 362. The advance sheets of the 1905 Rhode Island Census showed that women were still overwhelmingly concentrated in a narrow range of jobs. Of 63,317 employed women, 93.6% worked in the following occupations:

Textiles: 24,968

Laundry, domestic service
waitresses & housekeepers: 13,332

Stenographers, typists,
telephone operators & clerks: 5,105

Jewelry, rubber, box & screw
factories: 4,369

Sewing trades: 4,864

Teachers (including Musicians &
Artists): 2,893

Sales: 2,460

Nurses: 1,281

4. The most useful summaries of women's work in the early twentieth century are Rosalyn Baxandall, Linda Gordon, and Susan Reverby, *America's Working Women: A Documentary History — 1600 to the Present* (New York, 1976), 132-222; W. Elliott Brownlee and Mary M. Brownlee, *Women in the American Economy: A Documentary History, 1675 to 1929* (New Haven, 1976), 184-307; Joseph A. Hill, *Women in Gainful Occupations 1870 to 1920*, Census Monographs, IX (Washington, D. C., 1929); and Robert W. Smuts, *Women and Work in America* (New York, 1971).

5. Kurt Mayer and Sidney Goldstein, *Migration and Economic Development in Rhode Island* (Providence, 1958), 20 and 22-23.

6. See William Hard and Rheta Childe Door, "The Woman's Invasion," Part I, 580, for an interesting account of women mill workers in Fall River.

7. For a description of working conditions in these industries see the U. S. Women's Bureau, *Women in Rhode Island Industries: A Study of Hours, Wages and Working Conditions*, Bulletin #21 (Washington, D. C., 1922). The Women's Bureau found that the rubber industry paid women the best wages in manufacturing, that jewelry paid the worst, and the textile mills paid somewhere in between. Useful summaries of the jewelry industry in Rhode Island are Nina Shapiro-Perl, "The Piece-rate: Class Struggle on the Shop Floor," in Andrew Zimbalist, ed., *Case Studies on the Labor Process* (forthcoming); and George Frankovich, "History of Rhode Island Jewelry and Silverware Industry," *Rhode Island Yearbook* (1971).

8. Mayer and Goldstein, *Migration & Economic Development in Rhode Island*; Henry W. Mann, *Manufacturing in Rhode Island*, Rhode Island State Planning Board Special Report No. 13 (Dec. 30, 1937), 9, 53; Niles Carpenter, *Immigrants & Their Children, 1920* (Washington, D. C., 1927), 308-309. For two analyses of work in the lives of Italian-American women in Rhode Island see Judith E. Smith, "Italian Mothers, American Daughters: Changes in Work and Family Roles," and Sharon Hartman Strom, "Italian American Women and Their Daughters in Rhode Island: The Adolescence of Two Generations, 1900-1950," in Betty Boyd Caroli, Robert F. Harney and Lydio F. Tomasi, eds., *The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America* (Toronto, 1978), 191-221.

9. For a detailed history of child labor and school attendance legislation in Rhode Island see H. F. Anderson, et al., "Legislation in Rhode Island Regarding Child Labor and the Protection of Women in Industry," (Mimeographed, W.P.A., n.p., n.d.). Barry's report quoted in Baxandall, et al., *America's Working Women*, 122.

10. U. S. Senate Document No. 645, Report on Condition of Women and Child Wage Earners, Vol. I; *Cotton Textile Industry* (Washington, D. C., 1910), 19.

11. *Cotton Textile Industry*, 19; Melvin T. Copeland, *The Cotton Manufacturing Industry of the United States* (Cambridge, Mass., 1912), 113; Paul H. Douglas, *Real Wages in the United States, 1890-1926* (Boston and New York, 1930). For information regarding real wages in Rhode Island during these years see Mann, *Manufacturing in Rhode Island*, 57-59. Manufacturing wages in Rhode Island consistently remained below the average for the United States.

12. *Cotton Textile Industry*, 85. The U. S. Census of Manufacturers of 1905 estimated that 6% of the cotton mill employees in New England were under sixteen. Rhode Island and Maine were evidently the most lax of all the New England states in enforcing their compulsory school attendance laws. See Copeland, *The Cotton Manufacturing Industry*, 43, 115. In 1906 a commission was appointed by the Massachusetts state legislature to study the need for vocational education in the public schools. One of its investigators, Susan M. Kingsley, studying the employment of juveniles in the textile industry, found that while some mills in Lowell, North Adams and New Bedford were willing to hire fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds, half of these mills preferred employing young people sixteen to twenty. Mills elsewhere hired only a few children. Miss Kingsley concluded that "the industry can thrive without child labor." Edward A. Krug, *The Shaping of the American High School, 1880-1920* (Madison, Wis., 1969), 218-222.

13. Copeland, *The Cotton Manufacturing Industry*, 43.

14. A memorable photograph portrays a group of mill workers at the Royal Weaving Company in Pawtucket standing beside their thread-twisting machines. They are mainly women, but we are immediately struck by how hefty and strong these particular workers are. See Kate Dunnigan, Helen Kebabian, Laura B. Roberts and Maureen Taylor, "Working Women: Images of Women at Work in Rhode Island, 1880-1925," *Rhode Island History*, 38 (1979), 5.

15. Rhode Island Women's Biography Project #253, hereafter cited as RIWB.

16. The Women's Bureau found in 1920 that nearly 70% of the women in their survey who had left school listed economic necessity as the reason. *Women in Rhode Island Industries*, 56.

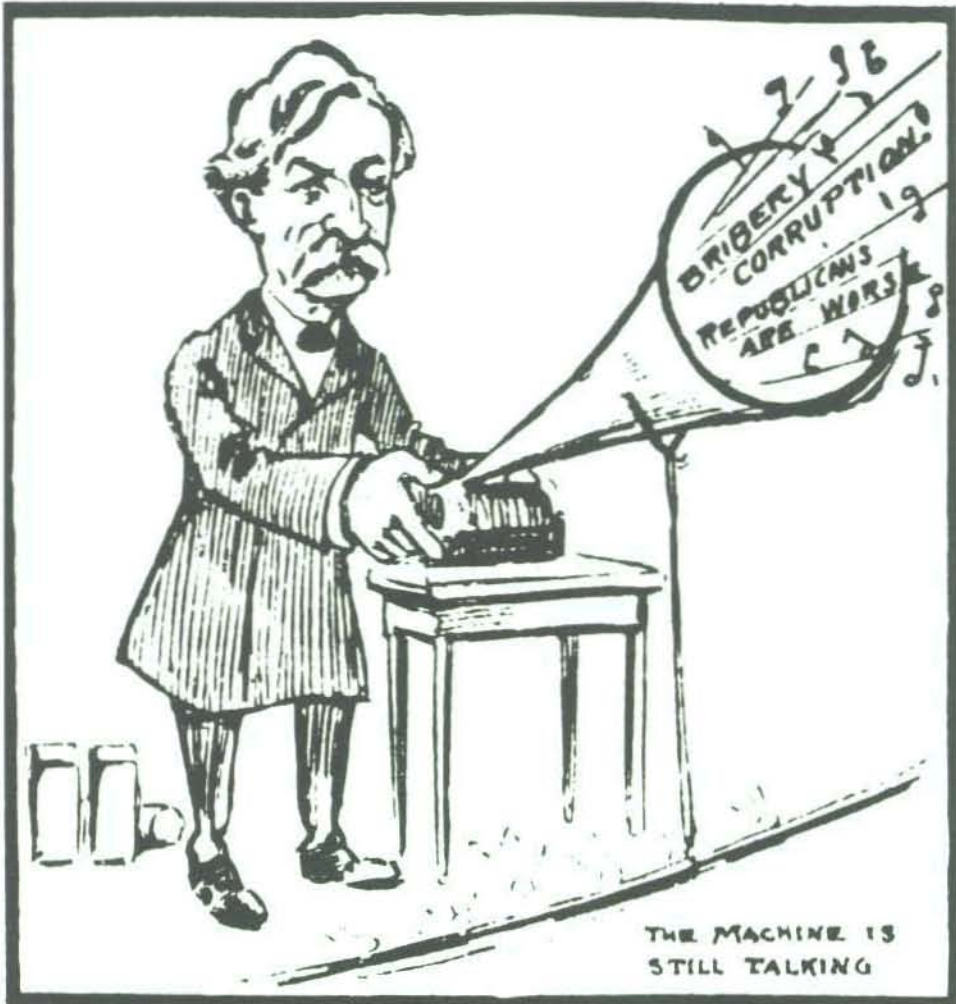
17. RIWB #260, #16, #247.

18. RIWB #248, #16, #208.

19. RIWB #247.

20. I am indebted to Gail Sansbury for this quotation from one of her interviews with residents of Scituate for the film project, "Watershed." Interview with D. W. on Nov. 2, 1978.

21. *Cotton Textile Industry*, 132.
22. Gail Sansbury provided me with this information from her interview with D. B., Nov. 2, 1978.
23. *Rhode Island Bureau of Industrial Statistics*, 15th Annual Report (Providence, 1902), 119; 20th Annual Report (Providence, 1907), 1101; *Cotton Textile Industry*, 607.
24. Hill, *Women in Gainful Occupations*, 36. Related occupations such as taking in laundry or boarders also declined, although the number of waitresses increased.
25. The Rhode Island State Census of 1905 showed that of 7,406 unspecified female servants, 3,485 were daughters of Irish fathers. Exact figures on Afro-American women are not available since they were classified as native born. *Bureau of Industrial Statistics*, 20th Annual Report, Part IV, 56-57.
26. RIWB #289.
27. My extrapolation of the 1940 census figures shows that while Afro-American women made up 1.31% of the total employed female workers in Rhode Island, they were 9.7% of the servants, 0.5% of semi-skilled laborers, 0.26% of the professionals, and only 0.13% of the clericals. They were 0% of the female managers and skilled workers. Alba M. Edwards, *Comparative Occupation Statistics for the United States, 1870 to 1940* (Washington, D. C., 1943), 193, 201.
28. RIWB #149.
29. Quoted in Thomas W. Bicknell, *A History of the Rhode Island Normal School* (Providence, 1911), 95.
30. The best accounts of the growth of the medical profession and nursing in this period are Jo Ann Ashley, *Hospitals, Paternalism & the Role of the Nurse* (New York, 1976); and Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York, 1978), 29-90. A useful chronology of the Rhode Island Hospital may be found in its brief publication, *The Rhode Island Hospital* (Providence, 1923), 11-18. See Charles Carroll, *Rhode Island: Three Centuries of Democracy* (3 vols., New York, 1932), II, 1026-1047, for an overview of the history of hospitals and medicine in the state.
31. *Rhode Island Hospital, Rules and Regulations* (Providence, 1887, 1899 and 1910); *Prospectus of the Rhode Island Hospital Training School for Nurses* (Providence, 1904); RIWB #127, #200. Mabel was the native-born daughter of Scandanavian immigrant parents. She graduated from high school and worked in her father's store until she was twenty-one and old enough to go to nursing school. She worked as a nurse all her life and never married. RIBW, #181.
32. See Susan Porter Benson, "The Clerking Sisterhood: Rationalization and the Work Culture of Saleswomen in American Department Stores, 1890-1960," *Radical America*, 12 (1978), 41-55. Benson is completing a Ph.D. thesis on department store workers and was kind enough to share some of her ideas and notes with me.
33. See Carroll, *Rhode Island*, II, 908-925, for a brief account of the growth of the department and chain stores in Rhode Island.
34. Women's Bureau, Home Visits File on Rhode Island Working Women, Box 181, Record Group 86, National Archives, Washington, D. C. These interviews were compiled for the Women's Bureau bulletin on Rhode Island industries. See note 7, above.
35. RIWB #23, #102.
36. See Margery Davies, "Woman's Place is at the Typewriter: The Feminization of the Clerical Labor Force," *Radical America*, 8 (1974), 1-29, and Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1974), 293-358, for the best analysis of changes in office work at the turn of the century.
37. *Bureau of Industrial Statistics*, 24th Annual Report (Providence, 1911), 142; Elizabeth Ross Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York, 1977), 25-26.
38. RIWB #281.
39. From an interview by Gail Sansbury with H. M., Sept. 29, 1978.
40. RIWB #282, #281, #14.
41. I would argue that as the textile industry contracted, adults began to monopolize jobs once available to teenagers and young adults. The Rhode Island Department of Labor charted a steady decline of minors under sixteen in textiles from 1922 to 1930, with a further decline (to nearly zero) by 1935. *Annual Report of the Department of Labor* (Providence, 1935), 97, 112. Between 1919 and 1947 Rhode Island lost 24% of its jobs in textiles. *Report on the New England Textile Industry by Committee Appointed by the Conference of New England Governors, 1952* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), 106.
42. *Real Wages in the United States*, 366-367. Douglas determined that while manufacturing workers gained an average of 29% in their wages from the 1890s to the mid-1920s, salaried and clerical employees gained only 3%. He attributed this small increase directly to the feminization of office work.
43. RIWB #108, #144.
44. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place*, 57; Bicknell, *Story of the Rhode Island Normal School*; Carroll, *Rhode Island*, II, 979-980.
45. For some examples see Sara M. Algeo, *The Story of a Sub-Pioneer* (Providence, 1925), 46-47.
46. RIWB #138.



Providence Daily Journal, January 17, 1904, p. 3

Lucius F. C. Garvin fought for reform and against corruption in Rhode Island during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries — and was criticized by powerful Republicans and the newspapers they owned.

Uphill Battle: Lucius F. C. Garvin's Crusade for Political Reform

by Carl Gersuny*

Early in 1922, an elderly man took the floor in the Rhode Island Senate to move for action on a bill to reduce from fifty-four to forty-eight hours the work week for children under the age of sixteen. The presiding officer ruled him out of order, and on a division of the house the motion to bring the bill was defeated by a vote of four ayes to thirty nays.¹ As had been the case on innumerable occasions since 1883 when he first entered the General Assembly as a representative from Cumberland, Lucius F. C. Garvin was on the losing side of a roll call on a piece of reform legislation. Despite this record, Garvin's biography is a remarkable success story.² He practiced medicine for fifty-five years and combined his ministrations to patients with fifty years of political activity. He served twelve years as medical examiner for Cumberland, thirteen years as state representative, five years as state senator in the General Assembly, and two years as governor. That he worked unceasingly for reform in a period when political control by conservative interests was almost complete makes Garvin's achievements even more remarkable.

Lucius Payette Clark Garvin came to Rhode Island by a circuitous route. He was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, on November 21, 1841, to parents who were transplanted New Englanders. His mother, Sarah Ann Gunn, the daughter of a physician from Pittsfield, Massachusetts, was a first cousin of Edward Dickinson, father of Emily Dickinson. In 1822, at the age of twenty-one, Sarah Gunn had married James Garvin, Jr., an Amherst graduate from Bethel, Vermont. James, after completing his studies at Amherst in 1831, was briefly

employed in Hartford as an assistant to the editor of *The Annals of Education*. From 1832 to 1837 he was a teacher in Enfield, Massachusetts, the home town of Sarah Ann Gunn, and in Vermont. In 1838 he moved to Tennessee with his wife and their first child, James Augustus; that same year he was appointed to the faculty of East Tennessee University (now University of Tennessee) as an instructor at a salary of four hundred dollars per year. Later he was promoted to professor of mathematics and modern languages at a salary of one thousand dollars. Eventually he held appointments as professor of natural philosophy, of chemistry, of natural history, and of experimental philosophy — a versatility necessary in a college with a five-member faculty. He also taught surveying and bookkeeping in the preparatory department, and in 1844 he was appointed librarian. In his spare time he calculated eclipses for an almanac and kept weather records for the Smithsonian Institution. When Lucius was four-and-a-half years old, his father died of "bilious fever" (probably typhoid). The trustees of East Tennessee University eulogized him for his talents and scholastic accomplishments as well as his piety and gentlemanly deportment.

Sarah Garvin, with her two fatherless boys, moved to Greensboro, North Carolina, where she taught at a female academy and subsequently remarried. Little is known about Lucius Garvin's childhood. Later he was sent to Sunderland, Massachusetts, to attend public school, presumably under the care of his mother's kin. At the age of sixteen he returned to North Carolina to become a student at the Friends' Boarding School in New Garden,

*Professor Gersuny is a member of the Department of Sociology, University of Rhode Island at Kingston.



By permission of the Trustees of Amherst College

Student photograph of Garvin (detail), from Amherst College Archives.

which later became Guilford College (the school had been established by the North Carolina Quakers "for the purpose of giving their children a guarded, religious and literary education"). Students were required to attend Friends' meeting twice a week and to furnish a Bible, wash basin and towels. Profanity, card playing and consumption of alcoholic beverages were grounds for expulsion. From the school's 1858 day book we learn that young Garvin acquired a Greek dictionary for \$2.25, Arnold's *Composition* for \$1.00, Xenophon's *Anabasis* for \$1.12½, Cicero for \$1.00 and a ten cent notebook. From one of his schoolmates we get some glimpses of the adolescent Garvin. Recording his recollections forty years later, John Gurney Dixon wrote that he and Garvin "together worried over Latin Grammar and struggled with Caesar's Commentaries and the intricacies of Virgil." He remembered his desk-mate as "a nice, agreeable kind of boy — fond of play but also studious."

While Garvin followed in his father's footsteps with respect to "talents, scholastic acquirements and gentlemanly deportment," his piety apparently began to wane at an early age. Dixon remembered that his schoolmate's Episcopalian mother was extremely pious and "once when I spent a week of vacation with Garvin at his mother's house in Greensboro, she had us going to church and listening to a lot of *formalities* and *rot* nearly every day. And I remember how we used to protest (silently and to ourselves) against it."³

Garvin entered Amherst College in 1859. While he was an undergraduate, the Civil War broke out. His older brother and his stepfather fled to St. Louis from North Carolina to avoid conscription into the Confederate forces, and his mother — with two young children of her second marriage — took refuge in Enfield, Massachusetts. After his graduation in 1862, Lucius briefly was a school teacher in Ware, Massachusetts.

In November of that year he enlisted as a private in Company E, 51st Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, a regiment organized for nine months of service to meet the recruitment quota for the Worcester region. The regiment boarded the transport *Merrimac* at Boston on November 25 and reached Beaufort, North Carolina, five days later after a stormy voyage. Quartered in Newbern, in barracks on the banks of the Trent River, the regiment was soon decimated by disease. The malarial swamps of

North Carolina took a fearful toll — seven months after disembarking, the regiment had only 275 men fit for duty out of a total enlistment of 879. Forty died of disease or accident, including seven among the eighty-eight men of Company E. Garvin was stricken with malaria shortly after arrival and could not be sworn in until May 26. He spent most of his army time at Hammond General Hospital at Beaufort; his treatment involved large doses of quinine, which impaired his hearing for the rest of his life. The regiment was mustered out at Worcester on July 27, 1863.

Garvin by then had decided on a career in medicine. He began his medical education as an assistant to Dr. Sylvanus Clapp in Pawtucket, and in 1864 he entered Harvard Medical School. His training included one year as house surgeon in Boston City Hospital (1866). Upon graduation in 1867, he accepted an invitation from the Lonsdale Company to establish himself in Lonsdale, Rhode Island, where he was to practice medicine continuously for the next fifty-five years.

In Lonsdale, a one-company mill village on the Blackstone River, Garvin made a home for his mother and her two children from her second marriage. Also residing with the household was Elizabeth Harris, a white servant (formerly an overseer of women slaves) whom his mother had taken along when she fled from North Carolina. In 1869 Garvin married Lucy W. Southmayd, and they had three daughters — Ethel in 1871, Norma in 1874 and Florence in 1876. Lucy died in 1898, and nine years later Garvin married Sarah Tomlinson. She had been blind since the age of six, a result of meningitis, and was a friend of Helen Keller from their time together as students at the Perkins School for the Blind. (Miss Keller was a house guest at the Garvin home during at least one of her visits to Providence.) Sarah bore two children — Lucius in 1908 and Sumner in 1909.

Garvin in 1876 published a trenchant account of medical practice in a textile village.⁴ The state of public sanitation, work hazards and housing conditions particularly concerned him. Drinking water, he observed, was drawn from the Blackstone River, contained “many impurities,” and was “regarded popularly as the source of much sickness.” He identified contaminated milk as contributing to the “alarming rate of infant mortality” among mill families, where mothers had to stop breast-feeding

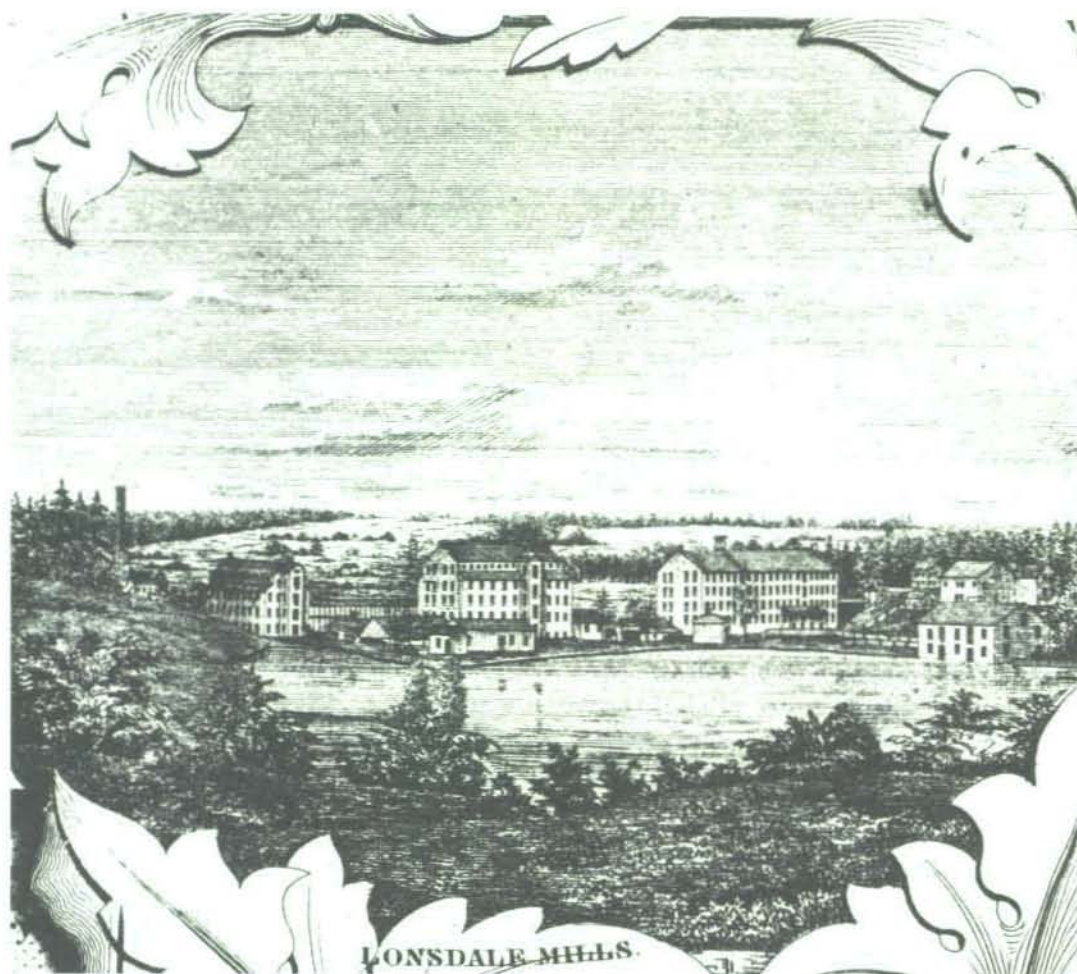
in order to get back on the job. The ravages of tuberculosis also greatly concerned him: during the first five years of his practice in Lonsdale, he encountered sixty-four cases, of which about eighty-five percent were among mill workers.

The principal hazard to the safety of mill workers was from exposed gears and pulleys. He noted that:

the wounds received in cotton mills are peculiar in that their most frequent site, by far, is the hand. . . . The mules, the looms, the cards, the speeders, etc. . . . possess in common the mechanism, usually in the form of gearing, by means of which the various movements are communicated from the central power. Experience shows that these iron cogs, embracing each other so quietly at each revolution of the wheels upon which they are set, furnish the most prolific source of injury. Catching the side or tip of the operative's finger, without warning, they draw it rapidly in, while, like a hungry shark, the second set, reaching farther on, takes a better hold and again draws in — the first laceration of the skin being but a prelude to crushing the bone.⁵

Describing thirty-six injuries caused by uncovered gears, which he treated during his first five years, he noted that nineteen had one or more bones broken, resulting in amputation or stiff joints. While employment of children under twelve was illegal in Rhode Island, “six of the sufferers by gearing ranged from eight to eleven years old.” A boy of fifteen had his hand drawn into a picker, “which crunched the whole limb to near the shoulder joint.” A twelve-year-old boy had all the flesh from the back of his hand stripped to the bone, which left him with minimal use of the hand. This case involved three months of treatment “entailing a heavy expense upon his widowed mother.” As for mill housing, he wrote that making house calls at night in attics with several “fully occupied beds” reminded him of “the effluvium which arose from the hatchways of ships used for transporting soldiers during the late war.”⁶

In this paper, which he had presented at the 1876 meeting of the American Public Health Association, he recommended a number of remedies. To insure mill safety, he called for passage and strict enforcement of child labor legislation. He also recommended the installation of covers for gears, pulleys and other sources of danger; a prohibition of cleaning machinery while in motion; and proper



RIHS Library

A view of Lonsdale, on the Blackstone River, where Garvin practiced medicine for fifty-five years. The above engraving is a border illustration from H.F. Walling's Map of Providence County, 1851.

instruction in the use of machinery. He argued that land was plentiful enough that single-family houses with yards and gardens could be built to replace tenements. Legislation limiting the labor of young people under the age of sixteen to half a day, and the establishment of schools for the young as well as "lectures and lyceums for promoting general intelligence" were also proposed. Finally, he advocated reduction of the work week for adults from sixty-six hours to sixty.

Late in life he recalled some of the features of his early days in Lonsdale. He recalled being "on the go, day and night, answering calls for almost everything, from a case of sprained thumb to

assisting in arrivals of additions to the population." He estimated that he had over one thousand obstetric cases from 1867 to 1921. In the beginning his fee in obstetric cases "was \$6 if called during the day time, and only \$8 if at night, including two or three subsequent visits"; his fee for office visits was fifty cents during the day, one dollar at night. He practiced surgery in his home. "There was no hospital to which we could send our surgery cases, and had there been one near me, I no doubt would have held close to the theory generally held in the profession that it was not wise to send a patient to such an institution for fear that he would not receive the right attention." As for surgical fees, he

recalled that minor cases were attended for "a few dollars," but he had misgivings about charging twenty-five dollars for amputating an arm at the shoulder.

Garvin remembered that in the days when there was no telephone, he was "aroused at all hours of the night by some member of a family, or some friendly neighbor who had volunteered to 'fetch the doctor.'" The roads were poor, unlighted, and often impassable in the winter. Families tried to make do with home remedies but "toward night they became more concerned, and then it was that I was called out of bed. The women folks were not easily scared in those days and the doctors were not called except in what the women presumably considered a last resort. Despite those kindly considerations, the practice of the country doctor was no bed of roses."⁷

As late as 1919 Garvin conducted office hours at 577 Broad Street, seven days a week — daily from 2 P.M. to 3 P.M., and Monday through Saturday from 7 P.M. to 8 P.M. Until 1899 he kept two horses that alternated pulling his buggy. Then he got rid of his horses and relied on a bicycle for making house calls. He often went on foot to visit patients, and in 1921 he was reported to be the only rural physician in the state who did not use an automobile for his practice.

By his own account, Garvin first entered active politics in 1872. He had voted for Lincoln in 1864, but switched to the Democrats in 1876, and except for his 1912-1916 sojourn in the Bull Moose camp, he remained a Democrat for the rest of his life.⁸ Around 1881 Garvin first read *Progress and Poverty* by Henry George, a book that advocated a "Single Tax" on land (and none on improvements) as a remedy for virtually all of the ills of society. This tax, equivalent to the rental value of the land, was to be a sort of nationalization of land, based on the premise that what nature provided should not be privately owned. During the next four decades, Garvin became a tireless advocate of the "Single Tax" and many other reforms.⁹

In 1883 Garvin wrote to Henry George, noting that "one of the chief defects of our so-called statesmen was their ignorance of the principles of political economy, and . . . an acquaintance with the laws of wealth [which are] a prerequisite to wise legislation." Commenting on George's *Progress and Poverty*, he wrote: "I have enjoyed very much the reading of your great work, from which I have

gathered a clearer idea of distribution than from any standard Political Economy. Were I to make any criticism, it would be concerning the results which you anticipate from the adoption of your scheme. But whether you magnify the benefits to be derived or not, I suppose can only be known when the experiment is tried."¹⁰ Later Garvin himself was to attribute almost magical potency to the "Single Tax" — a remedy for drunkenness, poverty and exploitation alike. In later years, Garvin continued to advocate the "Single Tax," describing it as "the most vital force for good in the whole world." In 1909 he explained why he believed so strongly in the tax:

Big reforms are radical in their nature, they correct many abuses. . . . The abolition of hereditary rulers, the emancipation of slaves, the establishment of free education, the separation of church and state, are examples which may be cited. . . . So far as I know there are but two plans which claim to remove the flagrant ills of society. One of these plans [was] promulgated by Karl Marx, the other by Henry George. . . . The Marxian theory that capital and consequently interest should be common property, is not shown to my satisfaction to be either just or expedient. On the other hand, Henry George demonstrates beyond a doubt that the right of all to the earth is equal and that, therefore, ground rental values should be used for public purposes.¹¹

Garvin was appointed to the General Assembly in 1883 to fill a vacant seat in the House of Representatives. His first encounter with legislative adversity occurred on March 27 of that year, when a resolution he offered on changes in the state constitution was defeated by a vote of seven to forty-eight. After election to this seat in his own right in 1884, he introduced a civil rights act, an act to establish a Bureau of Labor Statistics and an "Act in Relation to Giving Instructions in Physiology and Hygiene in the Public Schools," the latter on behalf of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. He also introduced petitions from constituents supporting a ten-hour work day. One of the measures he supported in 1866 was the "Fines and Forfeitures Bill," which was designed to protect mill workers from the imposition of arbitrary wage deductions. He introduced a petition for women's suffrage as well as another remonstrance for a constitutional convention. In 1892 he sought passage

of a nine-hour work law.¹²

In 1885 Garvin became one of the original stockholders and a director of the Rhode Island Cooperative Printing and Publishing Company, organized to publish a weekly workers' newspaper, *The People*. About half of the original stockholders were Knights of Labor, and the Rhode Island Central Labor Union adopted the paper as its official publication. The company was capitalized for one thousand dollars in five-dollar shares, with one vote per stockholder regardless of the number of shares he owned.¹³

As an ardent reformer, Garvin had a strong interest in the newspaper and frequently contributed to its columns. News of his varied political projects were featured on many occasions. He wrote articles about proportional representation, property restrictions on voting, and the need for a state constitutional convention. His election as president of the Co-operative Association of Lonsdale was reported, as were his denunciations of "bribery, corruption, crude legislation, non-enforcement of law, costly and uncertain redress through the courts and other . . . political evils."

The paper also mobilized Garvin supporters when he was under attack. On one occasion *The People* warned, "A rumor has been going around that it is the intention of a few would-be leaders of the party to try and defeat Dr. Garvin. Let every citizen who favors the nomination and election of Dr. Garvin attend and defeat the ring." Later it reported that the expected opposition in the Democratic party failed to materialize, "no doubt owing to the large attendance [i.e., turn-out] of the voters."¹⁴

In May of 1888, at a regular meeting of the Cumberland Anti-Poverty Society, Garvin gave a talk on "Northern slavery." Describing his firsthand experience with Southern slavery during his youth in Tennessee and North Carolina, he observed that "the effect of chattel slavery was to brutalize the slave and barbarize the master." He then turned to the plight of northern wage earners, arguing that "Northern slavery, although unlike Southern slavery in several respects has a resemblance in that the laborer in neither case receives the full fruits of his toil." Ever the votary of Henry George, he attributed this condition to private ownership of land, resulting in workers receiving "but little more than a bare living." A "Single Tax" equal to the rental value of land, in his view, would

have the same liberating effect on the "Northern slaves" that emancipation had had on the Southern.¹⁵

By the late 1880s, Garvin had become a vocal advocate of wide-ranging reform in Rhode Island. Yet the fight for reform became a bitter contest against heavy and prevailing odds. Since the Civil War, the Republican party — under the leadership of Senator Nelson W. Aldrich, Henry B. Anthony, and "Boss" Charles R. Brayton — sustained its power and influence by serving the interests of businessmen and manufacturers in return for large donations to the party; this money, in part, was then spent on bribes or on buying votes from the electorate. The iron grip of the Republicans on the state was buttressed by the state constitution of 1843, which deprived the landless poor of the right of franchise and perpetuated disproportionate representation in the General Assembly, especially in urban areas where population grew steadily from the influx of immigrants. As historian William G. McLoughlin explains: "High-handed manipulation of the electoral process kept the Yankee Protestant majority in power and allowed the employers to treat their workers — men, women, and children — as mere elements of production. Rhode Island, the most densely populated, most heavily industrialized and urbanized state in the Union, was ruled by a small minority of business oligarchs and rural voters."¹⁶ Although suffrage was extended in 1888 after the ratification of the Bourn Amendment, which dropped the real-property restriction for voters in state and mayoral elections, the dominance of the Republican party continued — especially over city governments — because the constitutional change did not alter rural malapportionment in the state legislature.¹⁷

But Garvin was not about to sit back and allow the Republicans to preserve their omnipotence without opposition. After representing Cumberland in the state legislature for sixteen terms, including three as senator, and after four unsuccessful campaigns for Congress, he sought statewide office in the 1901 gubernatorial election. The Democratic convention held at the Music Hall was described by the *Providence Journal* as a "funeral gathering" with fewer than one hundred delegates whose "business was transacted as hastily as possible, [with] . . . a few addresses of the whistling-through-the-graveyard kind." Small wonder that the *Provi-*

denance Journal could only find unkind words to say about the Democrats — the newspaper, still controlled by former editor and owner Henry B. Anthony, was an official mouthpiece for the Republican party and was entirely in the pocket of the party bosses. When Garvin was chosen as the Democrat's candidate for governor, the *Providence Journal* predictably observed that "defeat will come as no new experience to most of the nominees." The prognosis, of course, was accurate. Garvin drew only 16,589 votes against 23,250 for incumbent Governor William Gregory.¹⁸

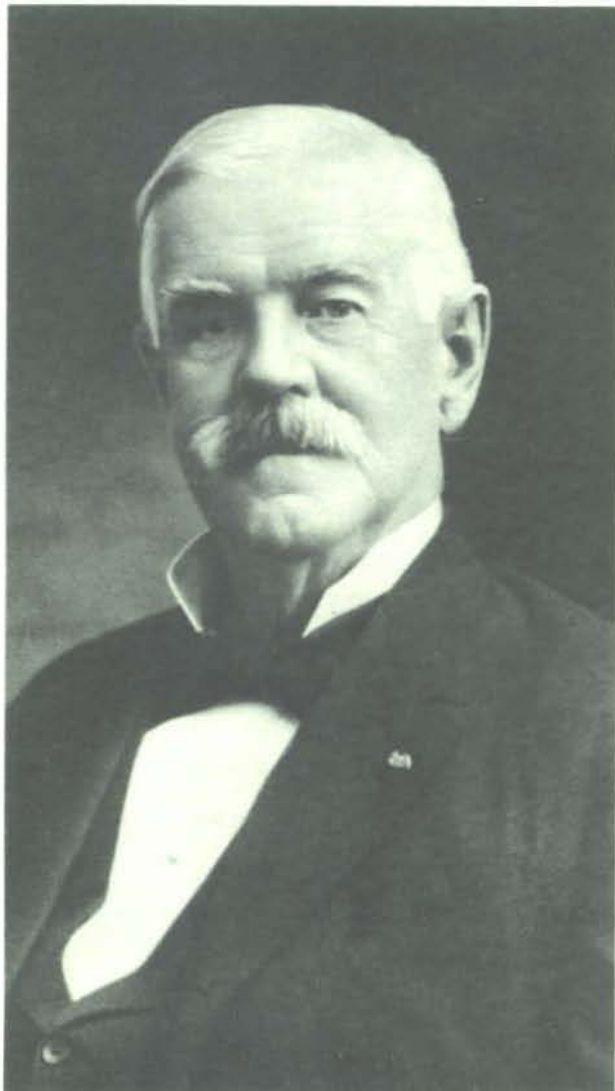
Garvin was again a contender for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in 1902. His rival for the nomination was John J. Fitzgerald, mayor of Pawtucket. There was a great deal of manipulation and infighting, but two days before the convention the Garvin organization predicted that their man would have the votes of 118 delegates.¹⁹ In the quest for delegates, Garvin showed that he was not aloof from the tactical concerns of politicking. Writing to one of his principal supporters, Patrick Henry Quinn of Warwick, Garvin opposed letting delegates vote by secret ballot for fear that it would facilitate penetration of the convention by "Boss" Brayton, the potent Republican leader who was responsible for dispensing party money for bribes and purchasing votes. Garvin, who was concerned that Brayton's money might buy delegates' votes at the Democratic convention, believed that the electorate should know how their representatives voted for the party's nominees. Nor was he convinced of the expediency of a secret ballot: "If republican [party] money, in any considerable amount, is to be used in the convention, it [the convention] will probably go to Fitzgerald, however the vote be taken, but it would be less apt to succeed under an open vote than a secret ballot. Would it not be wise politics, from Brayton's standpoint, to buy the convention?"²⁰ Not only was there an open vote by the delegates, but the preconvention delegate count proved to be very accurate, with the nomination going to Garvin, who won 119 votes to Fitzgerald's 101.²¹ The Providence, Warwick and Newport Democratic organizations were opposed to Fitzgerald, perhaps because of the mayor's alleged connection with Brayton, and lined up behind the Cumberland physician.

After the convention Garvin challenged Governor Charles Dean Kimball (who had succeeded to

office after Gregory had died in December 1901) to a public debate of the issues in the campaign. The *Providence Journal*, undoubtedly knowing more than its readers at the time, observed that the challenge probably would not be accepted, adding facetiously that Kimball's refusal would "deprive the campaign of what might be its principal feature of entertainment. A joint debate between Gov. Kimball and Dr. Garvin would not . . . be a period of maddening excitement or uncontrollable tension, but there might be some fun in it."²² The debate, of course, never took place.

While his nominal opponent was Kimball, Garvin seemed to be running against Brayton, who held the political reins of the Republican party. Manipulated by Brayton and the Republican bosses, "the governorship of the state . . . became a kind of honorary office for big businessmen who liked to think of themselves as capping their private careers in 'public service.'" ²³ Frustrated with the blatant corruption of the Republicans, Garvin wondered how honest citizens could cast a vote for any candidate of Rhode Island's Grand Old Party: "How is it possible, that a patriotic citizen of average intelligence could cast his vote for Republican candidates for General Assembly? When it is beyond dispute . . . that Republican Assemblymen in the most important matters do not exercise their own judgment, but do as they are told by a corrupt boss."²⁴ Undoubtedly Garvin knew the answer to his own question — "patriotic" citizens voted for Republicans because Brayton paid them to do so.

What Garvin did not know, however, was that for the moment the political winds of Rhode Island had changed. The gubernatorial election of 1902 produced a result that probably surprised Garvin as much as it did the Republicans. Garvin — miraculously, it seemed — was elected governor, an effect of increased suffrage made possible by the Bourn Amendment, of the wavering (and usually unpredictable) votes of naturalized, foreign-born citizens, and of a campaign that had split votes among four candidates. Garvin polled 29,825 votes against 23,467 for Kimball, 1,610 for Brightman (a Prohibitionist), and 1,091 for McDermott (a Socialist). Pleased with his election, Garvin attributed his victory to "feeling against the non-enforcement of the Ten-Hour Law," expressing the opinion that "Mr. Kimball may not have been to blame . . . but he was identified with the party which passed the



RIHS Library

"Boss" Charles R. Brayton (1840-1910) controlled Rhode Island's Republican party.

legislation and then did not enforce the law." Garvin reported that on election night he had gone to bed at an early hour only to be awakened at 1:00 A.M. by a telephone call telling him that Brayton, on behalf of the Republicans, had conceded the election.²⁵

Though Garvin had won, he was about to face only misery and frustration in office, most of which was designed by Republican tacticians. In accounts of the governor-elect during the period before his

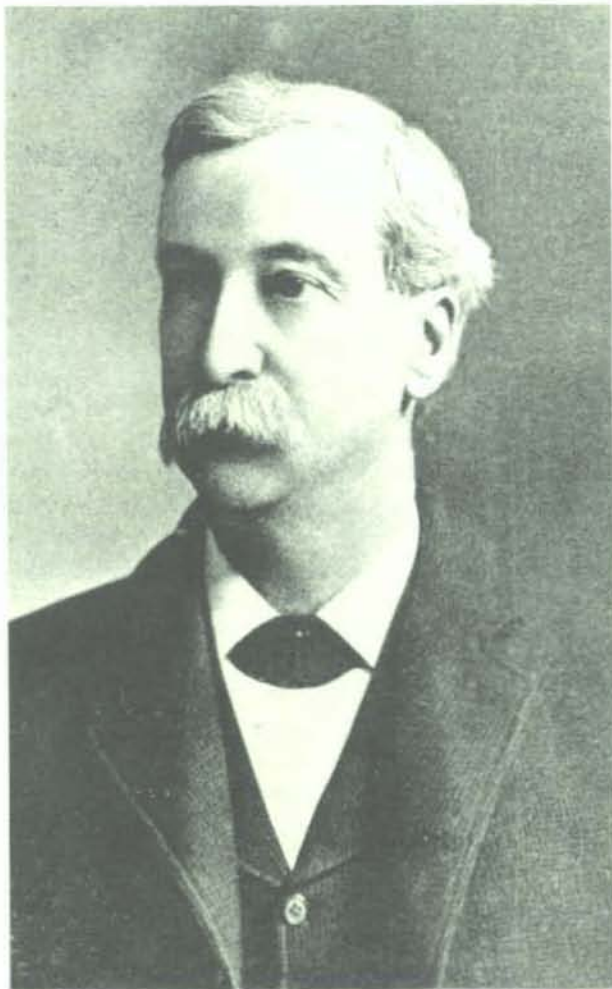
inauguration, the *Providence Journal* paid tribute to his persistence, faced as he was with numerous Republican obstacles that were tossed in his path. When Garvin took the floor of the General Assembly, the Republicans would walk out for a smoke. When he introduced bills, they pigeonholed them and "sealed up the holes." As the Republican-controlled newspaper reported: "The majority could do lots of things to the representative from Cumberland, but to rattle him was not one of these, nor was to curtail his speeches another." He was described as "not much given to fuss and feathers. The pomp and vanities of the gay staff colonel have for him no charm. He was only a private in the Union Army ranks. He is only a country doctor now. He has plugged along at the game of politics in the minority squad." The effect of this description was to portray Garvin as a hayseed, a man who lacked leadership and political experience, though there did seem to be a kind of grudging respect in the newspaper's account of the newly elected governor.²⁶

After taking the oath of office, Governor Garvin prefaced his inaugural address by calling attention to the existence of great discontent among a large proportion of the population "because the enormous amount of wealth is unequally distributed." Specific conditions that required remedy were then elaborated. Over-representation of the rural towns — the constitutional malady that served Republican interests — was at the top of the list. "Inevitably when one-twelfth of the inhabitants of the State dwelling in small towns controlled politically by petty considerations or corrupt influences, possesses more power in legislation than the remaining eleven-twelfths, unjust laws will be enacted and many wise acts will fail of passage." Among unjust laws, he singled out a statute that took the power of appointment from the governor and vested it in the Republican-dominated Senate. (The statute, known as the "Brayton Act," had been passed in 1901, when Republican leaders feared that the Democrats might have a chance at winning the governorship.) He called for restoring veto power to the governorship and enacting a constitutional initiative and referendum to enable 5,000 voters to propose constitutional amendments for later submission to the electorate. He recommended that the state subvent salaries of local school superintendents and appropriate funds for the College of Agricultural and

Mechanic Arts. He expressed dissatisfaction with the neglect of law enforcement, particularly with the performance of factory inspectors, who ought to be "sufficiently in sympathy with the working people to carry out all the provisions of the law." A better-qualified commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics was needed. Construction of a tuberculosis sanatorium was recommended. Reduction of streetcar fares from five cents to three was proposed. And the re-enactment of a ten-hour work day for street car motormen and conductors was endorsed.²⁷

Stripped of veto power and the authority to appoint political protégés, the governorship under Garvin became largely ceremonial. The Senate "dallied playfully with Gov. Garvin's appointments," rejecting almost all of his choices. On another occasion, a Senate session lasting only twenty-four minutes was described by the unfriendly *Providence Journal* as a "friendly game of tag with the Governor's appointments." Garvin, unable to carry out the traditional duties of governor, settled into a routine of political speech-making in which his high office gave him the advantage of receiving more attention than would otherwise have been the case.²⁸ Continuing his medical practice, he set aside an hour a day, three days per week, for official business in the State House. He also presided over the Senate, which sometimes adjourned within ten minutes; the average meeting lasted less than an hour. Although Garvin kept his dignified demeanor as the farce was played out, the governorship of Rhode Island and party politics in the state had reached a nadir. Brayton was quick to call Garvin a do-nothing governor whose only accomplishment was the signing of notaries' commissions, though Brayton neglected to mention the specific legislation that had effectively tied Garvin's hands. But appearances were damaging, especially to those who had little understanding of the Republicans' strangle-hold on state government. Lincoln Steffens, for instance, visited Garvin at the State House and observed that the governor "sat helpless, neglected, alone in his office, with plenty of time to tell me about the conditions which distressed him and to confess his utter lack of power."²⁹

Helpless though he was, Garvin at least was not speechless. And he did have plenty of time, as Steffens pointed out, to talk about what was wrong



RIHS Library

Dr. Lucius F. C. Garvin (1841-1922).

with Rhode Island politics and the Republican party. Steffens, in fact, lent a sympathetic ear and later used Garvin's comments to support his devastating exposé of Rhode Island corruption published in 1905 under the title, "Rhode Island: A State for Sale."³⁰ Garvin, however, did not merely complain to visiting muckrakers or to friends. Instead, he brought his case directly to the General Assembly, and thus to the people of Rhode Island.

In 1903 Garvin sent a special message of condemnation to the legislature in which he charged that bribery and vote buying were standard procedures in elections. He pointed out that cash payments

ranging from two to twenty dollars were commonplace and were ridiculously rationalized on the pretext that voters should be compensated for going to the polls. Garvin flatly accused the legislators of receiving pay-offs: "Many assemblymen occupy the seats they do by means of purchased votes. . . . Bribery takes place openly [but] is not called bribery." Worse, this corruption continued "year after year without punishment." To put an end to bribes and vote buying, Garvin recommended the appointment of a commissioner "whose duties it shall be to employ agents to detect the crime of bribery and to bring to justice offenders."³¹ Given the situation, Garvin's solution was naive. Republicans, who controlled both houses of the General Assembly, were not about to take such a proposal seriously. Nor was corruption limited only to the Republicans; many Democrats refused to support Garvin in office, probably because they profited from bribes, while others in Garvin's party regularly bought votes from the electorate when they could afford to offer more than the Republicans. At the heart of the problem was the blissful marriage of business and politics in Rhode Island, a marriage that could not be put asunder by appointing a commissioner and field agents to nab offenders. Nevertheless, Garvin did demonstrate personal and political courage by firing his salvo at the members of the General Assembly, though the legislators were hardly affected by the attack.

Unsurprisingly, the *Providence Journal* could not ignore Garvin's accusation that "there are a number of men in the General Assembly who would be in jail if the statutes against bribery were enforced." In an editorial the newspaper declared: "What other state has ever had to bear the stigma of having its Governor talk reform from cock crow to sunset, while he deliberately withholds proof that a judge has sunken so low that he will go among the voters, money in hand, and buy votes for his own election." The *Providence Journal* accused Garvin of embellishing facts "at the expense of accuracy" and concluded that he "must go on record as the most lily-livered Executive in the United States." Garvin defended himself by reiterating his views on corruption and he explained that he would not name the judge who had bought his election because it would be unfair to single out one corrupt official among so many. The governor refused to be intimidated by uncomplimentary accounts in the press. Diligently

he continued his reform crusade, defending the right of workers to strike in a speech before members of a painters' union and warning graduates of the State College at Kingston to beware of the inordinate political influence of wealthy men. Yet his crusade, which continued to be an uphill battle, took its toll. Though he remained true to his principles, he could not help noticing that his strides were few. The "task of a reformer," he reflected, "seemed well-nigh hopeless."³²

The echoes of the Dorr War had become faint after six decades, but Garvin at least twice evoked that event and its eponymous leader. At the twenty-fifth anniversary ceremonies of the Rhode Island School of Design, he rejected the conventional image of Dorr, praised him as a great man, and urged that his statue be erected at the State House. At a chowder of the Young Men's Democratic Club, he spoke of a streetcar conductor who had told him that "reform could not be gained except by another Dorr War."

He urged blacks to take part in the political process to improve their condition in society. At the Congdon Street Baptist Church, he spoke in favor of proportional representation, telling "the colored people that with their 2,000 votes they might, under this system, elect the man of their choice to the General Assembly." At a gathering of "colored citizens of Newport" on the occasion of the thirty-third anniversary of the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment, he addressed the subject "Emancipation Not Yet Completed." He described his experience as a child on his stepfather's plantation in North Carolina and dwelt at length on the benefits of emancipation, the striving of black people for an education, and conditions in the South. He urged his audience to avoid exclusive reliance on any one party and advocated the "Single Tax" as the best remedy for the problems they faced.³³

One of the highlights of Governor Garvin's first term was a trip to Andersonville, Georgia, for the dedication of a monument to serve as a memorial for Rhode Island soldiers who had died at the Confederate prison. The governor and other members of the dedicating party (among whom were three veterans who had been imprisoned there) traveled to the May ceremonies by special train. Garvin's speech struck a conciliatory note. His main theme was a pacifist one:

The memories aroused by this spot are sad ones, but

the occasion calls for the deepest gratitude. We may indeed be thankful to meet here, in an unbroken nation — as brothers, once estranged, but now knit together in the bonds of a common history and a common destiny. Those of us who, on either side, participated in the Civil War look back upon it as a horrid dream. . . . The four bloody years serve to remind us how small an advance our boasted civilization has made from barbarism; how little, indeed, we have risen above the brutes. Although we do not yet see it, to settle a dispute by the method of war . . . is to place all who are responsible therefore on a level with the wild beasts. . . . Unlike a volunteer soldiery, a standing army is a menace to the pursuits of peace. Regular officers, so far as their influence extends, are fomenters of war, ever ready to transmute the smiling face of nature into war's horrid visage. . . . I have long wished that the Presidents and the Congressmen who are in haste to enter upon an unnecessary or aggressive war could be compelled to go upon the firing line. No doubt, if such a requirement existed, peace would be perpetual, since these verbal fire eaters, as a rule, take precious good care to keep themselves at a safe distance from the hum of shot and shell.³⁴

To serve as chaplain and to give the benediction, Garvin had brought along the minister of his own congregation at Bell Street Chapel, the Reverend Clay MacCauley. After memorializing the dead, the Reverend MacCauley concluded with a peroration on the consequences of the war. "The control of the country's wealth," he said, "has been aggregated in a few hands. The republic, it is true, is not destroyed. But what intelligent man has not seen that a genuine government of the people, by the people and for the people in the United States is on the verge of passing under the will of a money-powered oligarchy, developed through the opportunities that were made for it by the centralization of civil supremacy in the Federal Union." He concluded with a warning that "in the end, anarchy and despotism will follow the unrestricted usurpations of money power and the greed of political empire."³⁵

After the dedication of the memorial, Garvin saved the life of a four-year-old boy whose leg was broken in a carriage accident. The boy, Edwin Callaway of Americus, was "fast bleeding to death for lack of a physician's care, when the Governor heard of the accident. The Governor hurried to the sufferer . . . tied the severed artery and set the

broken leg. . . . The Governor says that if relief had been delayed a few minutes longer the boy would have died."³⁶

During the 1903 election campaign, Garvin's Republican challenger accused him of having "set one class against another." A candidate on the Democratic ticket, attempting to defend Garvin but somewhat missing the mark, said that "reporters of the *Providence Journal* have dogged Dr. Garvin from one end of the state to the other, and all they could find was that he does not wear the right kind of hat or the right kind of clothes on public occasions." On election eve Providence bookmakers declared Garvin a 10-to-7 underdog in the race. But clothes and gambler's odds do not a governor make; Garvin won a second term by a 1,587 vote plurality, although the Republicans retained control of the General Assembly.³⁷

In his second inaugural address, Garvin tried to convey the dimensions of the crisis at hand by pointing out that unemployment was rising, wage cuts were widespread, and bank failures frequent. He reiterated the need for the reforms he had proposed in his first term, all of which had been ignored by the Republican legislature. He also called attention to other issues, proposing that bars should be closed on election day and that the time had come for a parole system to benefit deserving convicts. But as Garvin outlined his proposals and programs, some Republicans began to grow restless. In the midst of Garvin's address, a copy of which was being distributed on the floor of the House and in the galleries, a Republican leader moved that the grand committee be dissolved. The motion passed and the inauguration was over.³⁸ The abrupt termination of the ceremony was perhaps a signal to Garvin of the kind of treatment he could expect from the Republicans during his second term.

Thus the pattern of animosity continued: Garvin would complain about the Republicans, the Republicans would complain about Garvin; Garvin would bemoan Republican abuses and call for reform legislation, the Republican bosses would deny the charges and ignore the governor's appeal for new laws; Garvin would attempt to carry out his duties as head of state, the Republicans in turn would attempt to discredit him as best they could. One example of the pettiness Garvin faced while in office occurred when the battleship *Rhode Island*

was launched in May 1904. The ceremony went off without a hitch, but only because Garvin had not been invited to attend. President Theodore Roosevelt, when told about the incident, ordered an inquiry; a report later sent to Garvin revealed that the Navy Department had had nothing to do with the ceremony — the shipyard had arranged and paid for the launching festivities.³⁹

Despite these local insults and the general frustration he experienced as governor, Garvin did receive some national recognition for his political efforts. During his first term his name was mentioned as a possible candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1904. William Jennings Bryan first proposed Garvin's candidacy and praised the governor on the front page of *The Commoner* in February 1903:

*The eastern democrats are looking around for a presidential candidate. Why is it that they ignore such timber as that furnished by Rhode Island? Why is it that they pick up men who have never expressed themselves on public question and have never given any evidence of sympathy with the people? Why? Because the reorganizing element of the party does not want a president who would be democratic in office and who would use the great prestige of the presidency to protect the people from the encroachment of organized wealth.*⁴⁰

Garvin, when asked about this accolade from Nebraska, said he thought it was very nice, but added: "So far as mentioning me for the presidency is concerned, Mr. Bryan has done that with others. He seems to be willing to accept anyone rather than Cleveland, and had advanced several names previous to mine."⁴¹

The *Providence Journal* sarcastically reported that the stock market had held firm despite talk about Garvin's possible presidential nomination and Republican wits in the State House proposed a Prohibitionist running mate for the governor with a campaign platform of "No Taxes, No Rum." Republicans in Rhode Island could not take Bryan's interest in Garvin seriously. The *Providence News*, which was also controlled by the Republicans, headlined one story: "Bryan Dotes on Sea Food — His Partiality to Clams Said to be Behind His Suggestion of Governor Garvin for Presidency." The newspaper then delivered its joke and the punchline: "Governor Garvin's boom is said to be in charge of Western clam eaters. He is now spoken of

as the clam eaters' candidate. But Little Rhody is rather far down in the roll call of states in a national convention, and four votes in the electoral college are not much of a foundation for the ambition of clam eaters."⁴²

The Garvin presidential nomination was taken more seriously in the midwest than in the east, however slight its prospects may have been. Six months later Bryan again praised Garvin and listed him among eligible presidential candidates. A few months before the nominating convention, Garvin traveled to Cleveland, Ohio, to discuss his prospects with Mayor Tom L. Johnson, who was also a follower of Henry George and the "Single Tax." Yet, the expectation that this meeting would be followed by a Garvin boom proved to be unfounded. As quickly as it had begun, Garvin's candidacy fizzled.⁴³

Throughout his second term as governor, Garvin persistently attacked the political interests that he identified as undermining state government. At a number of public events he prescribed the cures that he believed would lead to recovery. At a YMCA dinner in 1904 he charged that "public life is deteriorating, public servants are yielding more and more to the greater temptations put before them; the spoilsmen have gotten hold of our political machinery and are using it for their own emolument." At the South County Fair he said that "we all know that it will not do for one class to govern another, especially when the governing class is small."⁴⁴ Whether or not his audiences took heed of his warnings is difficult to measure. Sometimes Rhode Islanders seemed reluctant to be in any way associated with him, even to the point of drawing back when faced with the prospect of shaking hands with a Democrat.⁴⁵

Republicans in the General Assembly had already learned to be wary of Garvin. Presiding over the Senate, he gained a reputation as a shrewd parliamentarian. He often took an active part in floor fights, sending notes to Democratic senators. One Republican thought at first that the messages were dinner invitations; he wondered why he was being slighted until he realized that the notes went only to Democrats.⁴⁶

No matter how well Garvin maneuvered Democrats in the State House, he still faced formidable odds as he tried to sustain what little power the Republicans afforded him as governor. The odds



Providence Daily Journal, August 8, 1905, p. 3

Republican-controlled local newspapers ridiculed William Jennings Bryan's proposal of Garvin as a possible Democratic presidential nominee.

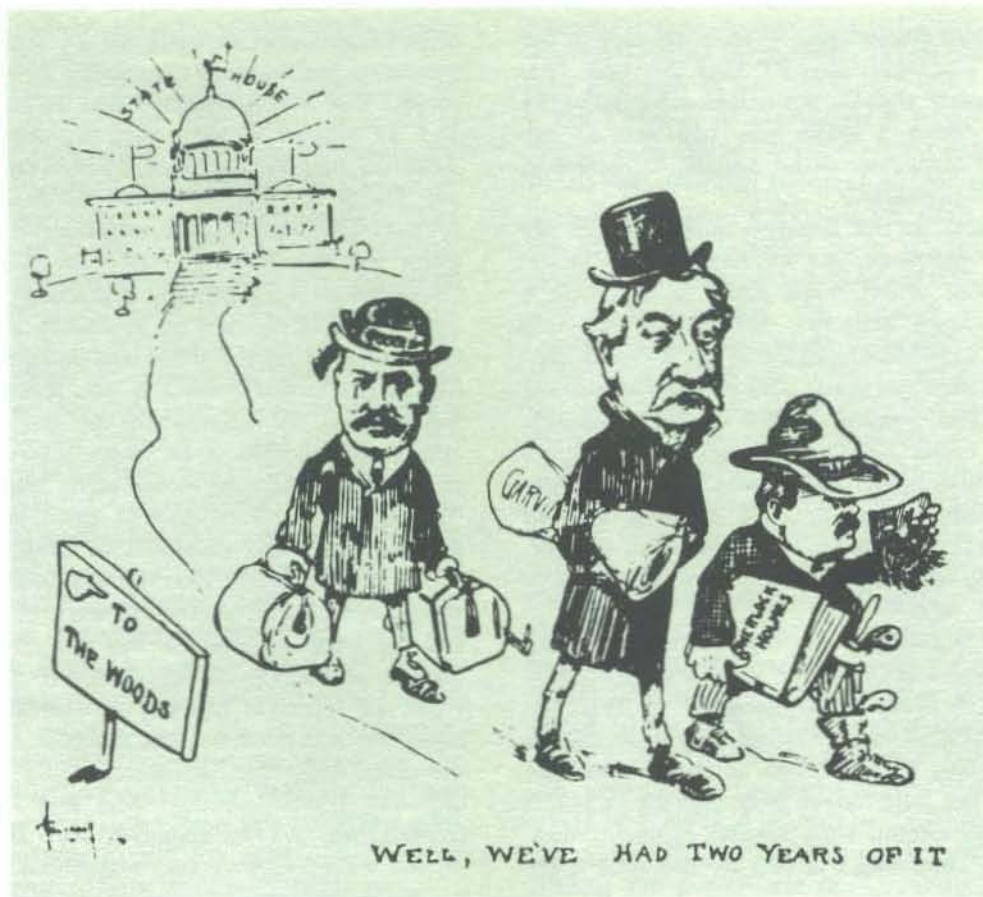
became insurmountable when he ran for reelection in November 1904. This time the Republican machine was well-oiled and Garvin was defeated by George H. Utter, the Republican candidate. Still, the race was a close one, with Utter winning by only 600 votes — a particularly narrow margin considering the Republican presidential landslide in which Theodore Roosevelt won a plurality of nearly 16,000 votes in the state. The *Providence Journal* attributed the close results in the gubernatorial election to Utter's unpopularity with "various liberal-minded elements in his own party" and to the "popular strength of Dr. Garvin," though clearly Garvin had not been popular enough. Smelling a rat, Garvin had a different explanation of his defeat, believing that he had received sufficient votes to be elected but that the election had been stolen from him: *In Providence through the action of the Board of Canvassers and Registration of that city, supported by the State Police Commission, bogus democrats were put into nearly every election office allotted to that party; so that Holden admitted to Mr. Comstock, in private conversation, that he had full control of all election officers in that city — as he also had in some of the wards in Pawtucket. The State machine, therefore, had full opportunity to miscount the votes, and if it did not do so, it must have been unnecessary, which few democrats believe.*⁴⁷

Garvin believed that the corruption of the Republicans would eventually bring their downfall. "Perhaps it is quite as well for the cause of reform," he wrote to Lincoln Steffens, "that the machine should have full swing." Apparently he thought that sooner or later the Republicans would go too far. Shortly after leaving office, he told the Young Men's Democratic Club that the next election would be a good opportunity for the "reform element . . . to make a contest as will overthrow the corrupt machine which rules the State." He called once more for an amendment to the state constitution that would insure equal senate districts.⁴⁸ While he continued to speak out publicly against bribery and corruption, he fed facts and figures to Steffens about the extent of Republican abuses in the state. He reported, for instance, that eight hundred dollars was paid in the Senate to kill a child labor bill introduced during the 1904 session of the General Assembly and he quoted a political leader in one town who declared that votes could be bought

merely by offering voters a cigar.⁴⁹

In 1905 Garvin was nominated to be the Democratic gubernatorial candidate. Identified as a reform candidate, he received unqualified support from the weekly reform newspaper, *The State*: *The people of Rhode Island know that he is a plain, honest man, without cant, hypocrisy, sham or subterfuge. They know that few men equal him in that high personal dignity which does not permit him to be deflected from his straightforward course, or even to be perceptibly annoyed, by the indecent scurrility and mendacious misrepresentation which are the chief weapons employed by those who are set to attack him by the powerful magnates of monopoly who dread him and his far seeing influence on the side of popular rights against the grasping arrogance of ill-gotten wealth.*⁵⁰ Despite this endorsement, and despite his earlier prediction of a reform victory, Garvin lost the election to incumbent Governor Utter.

His political losses, however, did not diminish his commitment to the cause of reform. In 1906 he spoke of the polarization of privilege and power which he perceived as the central issue of the day. "The masses of the people," he said, "do not feel themselves to be really prosperous." On the contrary, they were "painfully aware that the trusts and kindred monopolies, which are wildly prosperous, have become so by exploitation of the common people." He posed the crucial question facing voters: "How to put a stop to private monopoly with its power and privilege, and to substitute therefore a just distribution of the enormous wealth annually produced in the United States — that is the question to which the minds of the voters are directed." He placed his faith in the remedies of election by proportional representation, provisions for recall of elected officials, women's suffrage, and legislation by referendum. Popular sovereignty became one of his favorite causes; in a literary allusion to the perfidious schoolmaster in Dickens's novel *Nicholas Nickleby*, Garvin remarked that "the people no more rule in this country than Squire's pupils governed Dotheboy's Hall."⁵¹ Ever true to his belief in the panacea of Henry George's "Single Tax," Garvin predicted the shape of things to come in a bit of public fantasizing, reported under the heading of "Dr. Garvin, State's Champion Dreamer." His notion of the future included a thirty-hour work week, free public transportation, free public utilities,



Providence Daily Journal, January 3, 1905, p. 3

An unsympathetic press ushered Governor Garvin "To The Woods" as he left office in 1905.

and a "Single Tax" on land to make it all possible. Defending himself as a reformer and a visionary, Garvin said: "Governor Utter once called me a dreamer, and perhaps that I am. Dreams . . . sometimes come true."⁵²

But his dreams of winning another election did not come true. In 1909 he was defeated in a bid for nomination as candidate for the state legislature from Cumberland.⁵³ The defeat apparently discouraged him, for during the next few years Garvin removed himself from the political arena. Although he continued his attack against the sins of political corruption, he chose not to run for public office.⁵⁴ In 1912 he considered becoming a delegate to the Democratic national convention, but finally decided against it.⁵⁵

It seems that his lack of interest in the Democratic convention may have been caused by his need for a change in his political orientation. Although he had been a Democrat since 1876, he decided in 1912 to join other progressives in the formation of the Bull Moose party. Theodore Roosevelt had bolted the Republican convention and had launched the third party. Garvin's rationale for switching party affiliation was grounded in his perception of the Southern domination of the Democratic party. He thought Woodrow Wilson "was progressive himself, but . . . the party could not push progressive doctrines because a great portion of it was recruited from the South, which is by temperament and custom aristocratic and reactionary."⁵⁶ Garvin reported to Roosevelt that the Progressive Executive

Committee had elected him to fill a vacancy in the delegation. Roosevelt replied that he was "immensely pleased" that Garvin had been added to the delegation. "Now I hope you will second my nomination," Roosevelt wrote, adding: "I believe in you with all my heart."⁵⁷

Garvin went to the Chicago convention of the Progressive party as one of four Rhode Island delegates. The others were Julius L. Mitchell, a black Providence attorney, Edwin F. Tuttle, a Woonsocket insurance agent, and Dr. Edward Harris, a Providence physician who was the son-in-law of James Eddy, founder of the socially-conscious Bell Street Chapel. At the convention Garvin served on the resolutions committee, which met for eighteen consecutive hours pouring out a stream of resolutions. He returned to Lonsdale full of enthusiasm but tired, reportedly getting only four hours of sleep in two days.⁵⁸

Although Roosevelt lost the election of 1912, Garvin remained active in the local organization of the Bull Moose party in Cumberland.⁵⁹ By 1916, the party was ailing as its popular support dwindled, so Garvin returned to the ranks of the Democratic party. After his long hiatus from serving in public office, he was elected state senator from Cumberland in 1920, regaining the seat he had won three times before.⁶⁰

Interwoven with Garvin's medical and political careers was his participation in a variety of organizations. The Providence Radical Club was, despite its name, a sedate dining and lecturing society which heard speakers on such varied topics as feudalism, socialism, and — a peculiar concern in its time — oleomargarine legislation. The membership was largely middle class. Garvin was on the executive committee and appeared as speaker on several occasions. He also participated in the People's Forum, a group formed in 1912 by "Single Tax" advocates. It met every Sunday to hear invited speakers, whose remarks were followed by five-minute replies from the organization's members. Eventually socialists gained influence in the group, and in 1920 Garvin resigned as president in protest. He once remarked that socialism "would not necessarily be inequitable" but that its prospects were too remote and its consequences could not be foreseen.⁶¹

From 1904 until its demise in 1921, Garvin was a vice-president of the Anti-Imperialist League, an

organization that campaigned for Philippine independence and opposed annexation of overseas territories. The vice-presidency was largely honorary, and he shared it with such luminaries as Jane Addams, Andrew Carnegie, Samuel Gompers, Samuel Clemens, William Dean Howells and John Dewey. In 1906, Garvin addressed the organization's annual meeting. "To my mind," he said, "imperialism is a symptom rather than a disease. . . . The disease of which it is a symptom, in my opinion, is government of the few. I am confident that if we had in this country what it was aimed to have, a government by a majority of the people, this episode of imperialism would never have come upon us." Other symptoms of the same disease included "bossism and its kindred evil, graft, in both public and business life; multi-millionaires and tramps; trusts and strikes." Part of the problem, he observed, stemmed from the exclusion of women from the franchise as well as the use of grandfather clauses, poll taxes and rigged tests to exclude blacks from the electoral process. As for those who did have the franchise, Garvin claimed, they were all too often duped by "the rich men . . . who govern us." He concluded that the way to eliminate imperialism was to establish true majority rule, armed with initiative and referendum.⁶²

Disaffected with his mother's strict Episcopalianism in early life, Garvin in his adulthood belonged to two nonconforming congregations in Providence — first the Free Religious Society, founded in 1874, and later the Bell Street Chapel, founded in 1889. Each member of the Free Religious Society was "responsible for his opinions to himself alone" and was subjected to no "test of speculative opinion or belief." The state's refusal to grant its minister permission to perform marriage ceremonies was a minor *cause celebre* in 1880. The Bell Street Chapel welcomed all shades of opinion, "from the most 'orthodox' Christian to the most pronounced 'atheist,'" but stipulated that its ministers "must not be 'trinitarians,' must not be believers in 'everlasting punishment' . . . or bound to any system of theology . . . which forbids the subjection of any book, or person, or historic religion, to the test of scientific criticism and the judgment of human reason."⁶⁴ From 1891, Garvin was active in the Bell Street congregation, particularly in its program of lectures and debates on social issues. At various times he served on the finance committee and the sociology

committee, and from 1910 to 1912 he was president of the congregation.⁶⁵

Among his many other activities, Garvin was an accomplished author who wrote over a score of articles on various social issues. His bibliography begins with "Sanitary Requirements in Factories" (1876) and ends with a pamphlet entitled "The Industrial Conflict" (1921). While he was governor, he wrote five articles on reform that were published in *Century Magazine*, the *North American Review*, and *The Independent*. These articles helped to attract interest in his ideas from other reformers outside Rhode Island. In one article he invoked a character from Sheridan's play, *The Rivals* (1775). "As soon as a Yankee is elected to any legislative office," he commented, "his ingenuity, like Bob Acres' courage, seems to ooze out at the end of his fingers. Put him in a shop or a farm and he will find . . . a better and easier way of doing his work; but put him in a legislature, and either he cannot see or will not see that any improvement is possible." Garvin believed that proportional representation would alleviate this problem.⁶⁶ In his last publication, concerning industrial relations, he supported the principle of collective bargaining. While noting that "labor get less than 40% of the value which it adds to the article it produces," he rejected a socialist remedy in favor of voluntary cooperatives.⁶⁷

During the last years of his life, Garvin continued to advocate political and social reforms. He saw proportional representation as "the only thing that will give political liberty to the people." He called for a state constitutional convention to eliminate property qualifications for voting, to establish women's suffrage, and to provide equal representation in both houses of the General Assembly. Although he had earlier supported the war effort in 1917, three years later he presented a resolution on the floor of the state senate "urging upon Congress the duty of the immediate disarmament of the civilized world."⁶⁸

After his election to a two-year term as state senator from Cumberland in 1920, Garvin made house calls on patients "before going to the State House in the morning and following the session in the afternoon." He was often seen late at night bicycling to his patients' homes. But age was catching up with him. He suffered from heart disease.⁶⁹

On April 12, 1922, he submitted a petition

supporting a forty-eight hour work bill. The petition was referred to committee. Six months later, he died suddenly in his office.

On October 4, Cumberland schools and town offices were closed. A large crowd gathered at 577 Broad Street to pay its respects to a man who had helped usher over a thousand of their number into the world, had treated their ailments, and had represented them in the political arena. Reverend Samuel G. Dunham, the minister of Bell Street Chapel, praised him as an "unselfish patriot in the midst of a selfish age." The burial at Swan Point Cemetery was carried out according to the ritual of the Grand Army of the Republic.⁷⁰

A procession of Rhode Island governors, most but dimly remembered, have graced the state with a variety of administrative and political philosophies. Among these leaders, Lucius F. C. Garvin was distinctive. His tenacious adherence to the principles of reform and his persistent fight against the forces of corruption set the stage for later changes in Rhode Island's political structure. Garvin was not ahead of his time; he simply wanted to institute reforms that would make Rhode Island part of its own time, and not part of a legacy that perpetuated social and political inequities. Quixotic in his support of the "Single Tax," he was a stern realist in assessing the power and domination of Republican party bosses. Attacked for his views and denigrated by the press while serving as governor, Garvin maintained his dignity and uncompromisingly remained true to his beliefs. He once said that he saw no reason for being discouraged when people called him a crank, for he knew that his commitment to change could not be swayed by those who believed that innuendos would stop him.⁷¹ Garvin, like many of his time, saw reform as the path that would lead Rhode Island to a better future. Lucius Garvin was called a dreamer by some of his contemporaries, and Rhode Island is the better for his having dreamed here.

1. Journal of the Senate, Feb. 2, 1922, Rhode Island State Archives, Providence. A forty-eight hour work week for children under sixteen did not receive legislative sanction until the January 1928 session of the General Assembly.

2. Unpublished biographical material on Garvin is located in Amherst College Archives, Amherst, Mass.; Quaker Collection, Guilford College Library, Guilford, N.C.; Harvard University Archives and Countway Library, Harvard University; National Archives, Washington D.C.; Town Council Records, Town Hall, Cumberland, R.I. Additional material was provided by Mrs. Edith Parker. Published biographical sources include *Rhode Island Medical Journal*, VI (1923), 29ff.; Robert Grieve, *Illustrated History of Pawtucket* (Pawtucket, R.I., 1897), 320-321; James Herndon, *Men of Progress* (Boston, 1896), 34-35; James L. Bowen, *Massachusetts in the War, 1861-1865* (Springfield, Mass., 1889), 658-661; T.W. Higginson, *Massachusetts in the Army and Navy during the War of 1861-1865* (Boston, 1896), I, 293-294; *Cumberland and Lincoln Directory, 1911-1922*; and other sources as noted.

3. John Gurney Dixon to Roxie Dixon White, Mar. 8, 1903, Quaker Coll., Guilford College Library.

4. L.F.C. Garvin, "Sanitary Requirements in Factories," *American Public Health Association Reports*, III (1875-1876), 68-78.

5. *Ibid.*, 70.

6. *Ibid.*, 71-72.

7. *Providence Journal*, Apr. 2, 1921.

8. *Ibid.*, July 30, 1911.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Garvin to George, July 28, 1883, Henry George Coll., New York Public Library.

11. *Everybody's Magazine*, XXVI (1912), 519; *Providence Journal*, Sept. 3, 1909.

12. Journal of the House of Representatives, 1883, 1884, 1886; Journal of the Senate, 1891, 1892, Rhode Island State Archives.

13. Acts of Incorporation, May Session, 1885, Rhode Island State Archives.

14. *The People*, Mar. 5, 12, 1887.

15. *Ibid.*, May 19, 1888.

16. William G. McLoughlin, *Rhode Island: A History* (New York, 1978), 149.

17. *Ibid.*, 161-162.

18. *Providence Journal*, Oct. 16, Nov. 6, 1901.

19. *Ibid.*, Sept. 19, 1902.

20. Garvin to Quinn, Sept. 30, 1902, Lincoln Steffens Papers, Columbia University Library.

21. *Providence Journal*, Oct. 2, 1902.

22. *Ibid.*, Oct. 11, 1902.

23. McLoughlin, *Rhode Island*, 154.

24. *Providence Journal*, Nov. 1, 1902.

25. *Ibid.*, Nov. 5, 1902.

26. *Ibid.*, Nov. 6, 19, 1902.

27. *Message of Lucius F. C. Garvin, Governor of Rhode Island, to the General Assembly at its January 1903 Session* (Providence, 1903).

28. *Providence Journal*, Jan. 7, 21, 1903.

29. *Ibid.*, Nov. 19, 1902, Mar. 27, 1903; Lincoln Steffens, *Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (New York, 1931), 465.

30. Lincoln Steffens, "Rhode Island: A State for Sale," *McClure's Magazine*, XXIV (1905), 330-353.

31. *Providence Journal*, Mar. 11, 1903; McLoughlin, *Rhode Island*, 162-163.

32. *Providence Journal*, Mar. 26, June 23, 1903; June 15, 1904.

33. *Ibid.*, Apr. 19, 1903; Feb. 9, 1904; Apr. 1, May 8, 1903.

34. *Ibid.*, May 1, 1903.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *New York Times*, May 1, 1903.

37. *Providence Journal*, Oct. 20, 27; Nov. 3, 5, 1903.

38. *Message of Lucius F. C. Garvin, Governor of Rhode Island, to the General Assembly at its January 1904 Session* (Providence, 1904); *The State*, Dec. 30, 1905.

39. Navy Department memorandum, May 13, 1904, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

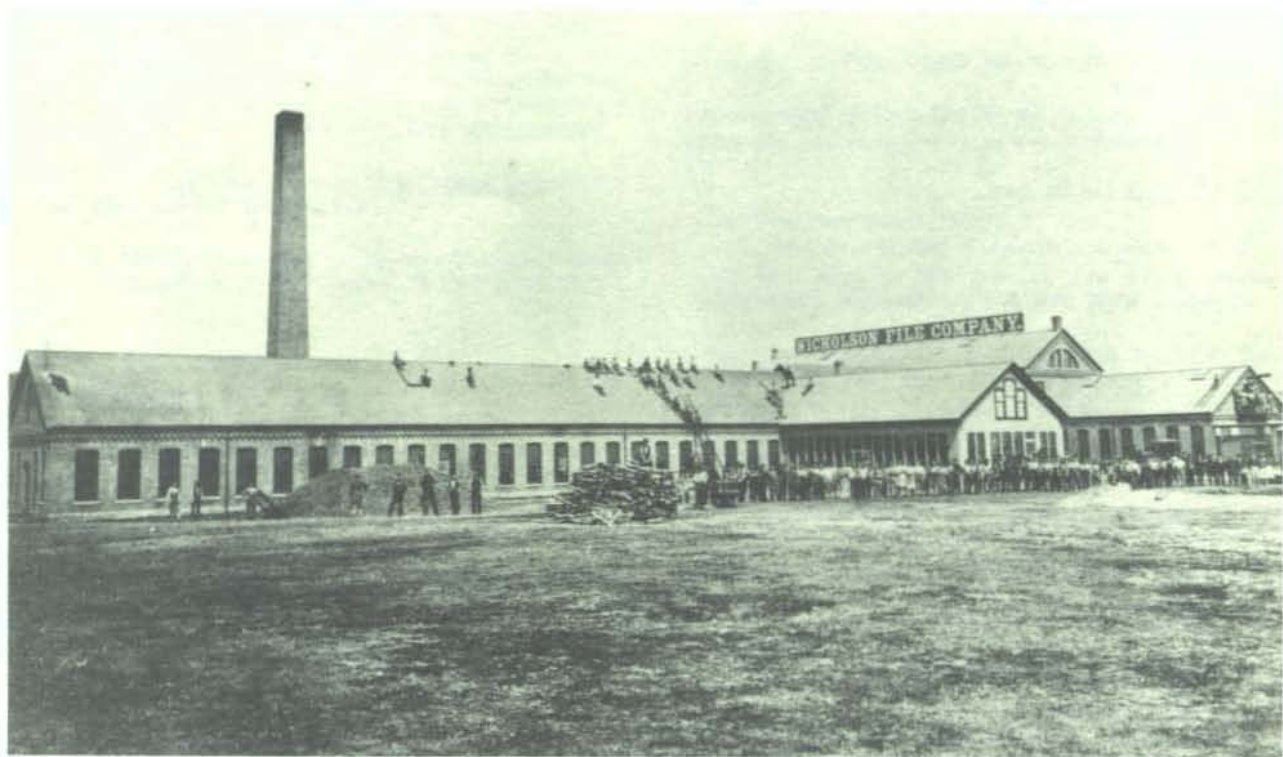
40. *The Commoner* (Lincoln, Neb.), Feb. 13, 1903. The "reorganizers" were gold Democrats who were opposed to Bryan and to the party platform adopted at Kansas City in 1900. Garvin remained in the Bryan camp through 1908.

41. *Providence Journal*, Feb. 13, 1903.

42. *Ibid.*; *Providence News*, Feb. 16, 1903.

43. *Providence Journal*, Apr. 12, 1904.
44. *Ibid.*
45. See David Patten Papers, folder 133, RIHS Library.
46. *Providence Journal*, Mar. 31, 1904. While serving his last term as state senator, Garvin was described as "the best parliamentarian in the State House." *Ibid.*, Jan. 15, 1922.
47. *Ibid.*, Nov. 10, 1904; Garvin to Steffens, Feb. 6, 1905, Steffens Papers.
48. *Ibid.*; *Providence Journal*, Feb. 23, 1905.
49. Garvin to Steffens, Feb. 10, 1905, Steffens Papers; Steffens, "Rhode Island," 341.
50. *The State*, Oct. 21, 1905.
51. *Providence Journal*, Sept. 1, 1906; Oct. 20, 1908.
52. *Ibid.*, July, 30, 1911.
53. *Ibid.*, Oct. 2, 1909.
54. Garvin accused the Republicans in 1912 of buying sixty votes in North Smithfield for twenty dollars a vote, noting sarcastically that the going rate in West Greenwich was only five dollars a vote. *Ibid.*, July 29, 1912.
55. Garvin to Calvin Stebbins, Mar. 29, 1912, Amherst College Library.
56. *Providence Journal*, July 29, 1912.
57. Garvin to Roosevelt, July 26, 1912; Roosevelt to Garvin, July 26, 1912, Roosevelt Papers.
58. *Providence Journal*, Aug. 10, 1912.
59. Garvin to Roosevelt, June 30, 1912, Roosevelt Papers.
60. *Providence Journal*, Nov. 3, 1920.
61. Providence Radical Club Papers, RIHS Library; *Providence Journal*, Jan. 14, 1920; Garvin, "Solving the Labor Problem," *Arena*, XXXVI (1906), 12.
62. Reports of Annual Meetings, Anti-Imperialist League, Houghton Library, Harvard University; *Report of 8th Annual Meeting, Anti-Imperialist League* (Boston, 1906), 46-51. Garvin had once described the situation of blacks as "Emancipation Not Yet Completed." *Providence Journal*, Apr. 1, 1903.
63. Garvin's membership in the Free Religious Society is cited in Grieve, *Illustrated History of Pawtucket*, 320. His participation in the Bell Street Chapel is recorded in its clerk's book, and by Miss Gladys Dyer, the present clerk.
64. Preamble and Constitution of the Free Religious Society of Providence, 1904, RIHS Library; Anna Garlin Spencer, *The History of the Bell Street Chapel Movement* (Providence, 1903), 8.
65. Bell Street Chapel clerk's book and Miss Gladys Dyer.
66. Garvin, "The Remedy for Bribery," *Arena*, XXX (1903), 173-174.
67. Garvin, *The Industrial Conflict* (New York, 1921), 4, 6, 14.
68. *Providence Journal*, Dec. 21, 1918; Aug. 12, 1920. For Garvin's support of the war effort see *ibid.*, May 5, 1917.
69. *Ibid.*, Jan. 15, 1922.
70. *Ibid.*, Oct. 5, 1922.
71. *Ibid.*, July 30, 1911.

From the Collections



The work was strenuous, the hours long, and the noise deafening for the men employed by the Nicholson File Company, the first successful machine-cutting file plant in the United States. William T. Nicholson established his business in 1864. Business was good and the Providence company expanded rapidly. Prosperity led to further expansion of the company in the latter part of the nineteenth century. By the 1890s, Nicholson

owned plants in other parts of the United States.

Workers in these photographs take a break to pose for a photographer's camera sometime around the turn of the century. The operatives were a tough breed, whether facing the grind of another day in the shop as they cut files on Nicholson's innovative machinery (*right*), or risking some frivolous roof-climbing while a photographer snapped a promotional picture of the plant and its workers (*above*).

