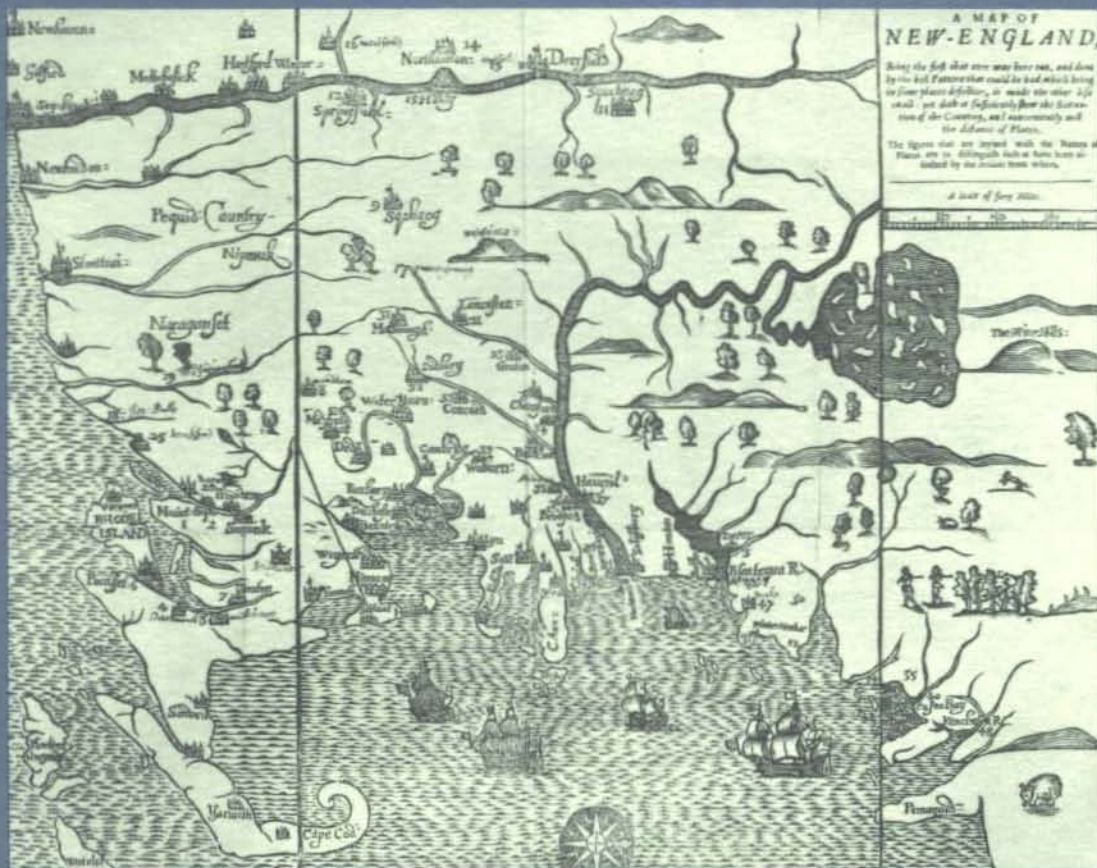




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The Three Rank System of Land Distribution in Colonial Swansea, Massachusetts

John Raymond Hall

In October 1667, the colony of New Plymouth authorized the establishment of a new town south of existing Rehoboth in the lands then occupied by the Wampanoag Indians of King Philip, and in February 1668, the colony approved a name for the town: Swanzey (later Swansea).¹ These decisions culminated a sequence of events in which New England political, economic, social and religious forces all played a part. In 1664, the arrival of Charles II's commissioners with power to resolve boundary disputes had permitted the New Plymouth colony proprietors, who held the rights to the intended town, to fend off the attempts of Roger Williams to absorb the Swansea lands within the neighboring colony of Rhode Island.² The burgeoning Atlantic trade created needs for more and better land for cultivation and for deep water ports—both of which were available in this territory that was part of the Wampanoag country. In neighboring Rehoboth, a pocket of Baptist enthusiasm disturbed the surrounding Congregationalist establishment.³ Aware of King Charles's increasing annoyance with Puritan intolerance in New England, the colony resolved this religious contention with a Solomon-like decision: In spite of Indian opposition it authorized the establishment of Swansea, not only to provide opportunities for more profitable commerce, but also to provide a site for the Baptist community within the bounds of the colony.⁴

Three special interest groups—proprietors, Baptists, and second-generation Pilgrims—were instrumental in the decision. Captain Thomas Willett, a New England merchant and former New Plymouth magistrate—then in his second term as New York's mayor—headed the Sowams proprietorship, a group of Rehoboth merchants and planters who had bought from Governor William Bradford and his associates the land rights to the Indian country.⁵ A tract of land had already been bought from the Indians and, as they retreated, Willett and several fellow proprietors had moved in to occupy the port at Bullock's Cove and its nearby fields and meadows. James Brown, Willett's brother-in-law and one of the Sowams proprietors, was the moving lay force of the Baptist community; its religious leader was the Reverend John Myles, a recent refugee from Swansea in Wales.⁶ The third group, enjoying strong government backing in the colony, consisted of second-

Mr. Hall, a former resident of and history instructor in Swansea, now lives in Arlington, Virginia.

1. Nathaniel B. Shurtleff and David B. Pulsifer, eds., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth*, 12 vols. (Boston, 1855–1861), IV, 169, 176; Otis O. Wright, *History of Swansea, Mass., 1667–1917* (Swansea, Mass., 1917), 47, 51; Richard LeBaron Bowen, *Early Rehoboth: Documented Historical Studies of Families and Events in This Plymouth Colony Township*, 4 vols. (Rehoboth, Mass., 1945–1950), I, 34–35.

2. Thomas W. Bicknell, *Sowams; with Ancient Records of Sowams and Parts Adjacent* (New Haven, 1908), 125; Bowen, *Early Rehoboth*, IV, 54–59.

3. William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630–1833: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), I, 128–134; Bowen, *Early Rehoboth*, I, 33–34.

4. Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Recs. of New Plymouth*, IV, 162.

5. *Ibid.*, II, 5; Bicknell, *Sowams*, 34–42, 133–134; Bowen, *Early Rehoboth*, I, 47–50. See also Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Story of the Old Colony of New Plymouth, 1620–1692* (New York, 1956), 154–155.

6. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent*, I, 130–132.

First Baptist Church, Swansea, Massachusetts. The town of Swansea was founded in the 1660s to provide better opportunities for commerce in Plymouth Colony and as a place where Baptists could settle within the bounds of the colony. Photograph courtesy of Swansea Historical Society.

7. Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Recs. of New Plymouth*, V, 24. The sons of the Plymouth "Old Comers" included Caleb and Zachariah Eddy, John Paddock, Hugh Cole, and Job Winslow. See also Bowen, *Early Rehoboth*, I, 37.

8. Proprietors Booke of Grants and Meetings, 1668-1769, p. 1, Swansea Town Hall, Swansea, Mass. (hereafter cited as Proprietors Booke); *History of Swansea*, 47, 51; Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Recs. of New Plymouth*, IV, 175-176.

9. Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Recs. of New Plymouth*, III, 167. See also *ibid.*, IV, 109-110, 113-114, 183.

10. Proprietors Booke, 5; Wright, *History of Swansea*, 47-49. See also McLoughlin, *New England Dissent*, 132-134; Bowen, *Early Rehoboth*, I, 36.

11. Gerald F. Moran, "Religious Renewal, Puritan Tribalism, and the Family in Seventeenth-Century Milford, Connecticut," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXXVI (1979), 236-254. It is relevant that Willett later married the widow of Milford's Reverend Prudden.

12. Wright, *History of Swansea*, 49; McLoughlin, *New England Dissent*, I, 134.

generation Pilgrims, the sons of "Old-Comers," who were pressuring the authorities for these farming lands at the colony's backdoor, an area that was recognized by both the English and the Indians as the choice of the colony's expanse.⁷ Given the right to proceed with the town's settlement, Willett, two proprietors, and two Baptist representatives met as a colony-appointed body of "Trustees" to begin the process of admitting inhabitants.⁸

By March 1668, when the trustees first met, both Willett and his peers in the New Plymouth government were experienced in the establishment and management of new towns. Willett, as a magistrate in New England and as mayor and chief magistrate of New York City, had judged many cases of greed, fraud, lust, and arrogance. In the settlement of Swansea he proposed to bar such undesirables and, perhaps because he was currently disputing with his four-score Rehoboth neighbors concerning his just share in that town's common lands,⁹ he would try to develop a better formula for dividing up Swansea's vast acreages. To these ends Willett produced two documents: First, a Fundamental Agreement to govern admissions and later a Three Rank System to govern the divisions of common lands that would be acquired over time from Metacom, the Wampanoag sachem whom the English called King Philip.¹⁰

The Fundamental Agreement followed the New England custom of acquiring a community consensus as to self-government in matters of common concern. Willett had spent time in Hartford, and thus was aware of its Fundamental Orders; he was also a regular visitor in Milford, where such an agreement governed admissions.¹¹ In Swansea's case, Willett's proposed agreement excluded any applicants of erroneous religious thought, evil behavior, or inadequate means. These undefined commandments troubled the Baptists. In Willett's subsequent absence (he was still mayor of New York and an active fur trader in Albany), the Baptists constructed a liberalizing interpretation of Willett's proposal that would keep the town's door open to deserving but poverty-stricken Baptist refugees fleeing the king's uniformity policies. For a year, while Willett completed his term as mayor and while the Baptists and the second-generation Pilgrims moved in and erected their homes, the town residents considered Willett's proposal and the Baptists' interpretation. Then, in February 1670, the town having obtained the rights of self-government, the eligible voters assembled in a town meeting and decided that the Fundamental Agreement, as interpreted, was a useful instrument for protecting the town from undesirables.¹² In so doing, they undoubtedly considered not only the question of internal law and order, but also the external danger of admitting ne'er-do-wells who would antagonize the Indian neighbors.

The Three Rank System for controlling future land divisions emerged from Swansea's initial experience with accommodating the first settlers. In the years 1668-1670, each admitted settler was granted land by the authorized committee, either the colony-appointed



Detail of a map showing the lands of Plymouth Colony after King Philip's War. This map originally appeared in Nathaniel Morton, *New England's Memorial* (1677), though it seems to have been based on John Foster's map of New England, published the same year (see front cover of this issue). From Thomas W. Bicknell, *Sowams* (New Haven, Conn., 1908). Photograph courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 4868).

trustees or its town-elected successor, the Committee for the Admission of Inhabitants.¹³ The Sowams proprietors, who already owned a large area in the town as a result of their grant from the colony, gradually occupied their hundreds of acres in the western or Wannamoisett region near Willett and his in-laws, the Browns. Several proprietors, residing in Rehoboth, retained land ownership, but chose not to move into the new town of Swansea.¹⁴ However, their sons, such as Nathaniel and Stephen Payne, Jr., entered the new town and therefore could exercise their voting rights in the Swansea town meetings (see fig. 1). Each Baptist and each second-generation Pilgrim acquired forty to sixty acres to the east of the proprietors in the New Meadow Neck or the Mattapoissett regions. Following them, more settlers straggled in, some getting twelve acres and some six.¹⁵ Obviously, these widely-differing grants reflected the applicants' economic deserts and political leverage.

The need for the Three Rank System became particularly clear as special applicants presented themselves. Thus, the Baptist pastor, under current criteria, was entitled to as much land as anyone else in the town; he was so promised.¹⁶ Then two Boston freemen, not Sowams proprietors but undoubtedly business associates of Willett, were granted 117 acres each without restrictions.¹⁷ And Captain John Dikse, a ship owner and merchant, was also promised as much land as any other inhabitant.¹⁸ These grants to commercial associates suggest that considerable bargaining accompanied their admissions, that already Swansea was faced with the troublesome politics of the land-division problem: How much land should each new settler be granted upon entry, and be entitled to expect in each subsequent division? Over time,

13. The delegated responsibility for distributing town land was discharged by a sequence of committees or groups given various names by town clerks: (1) the Committee for the Approbation of Inhabitants; (2) the Townsmen; (3) the selectmen; (4) the Select Committee for the Management of the Prudential Affairs of the Town.

14. Bicknell, *Sowams*, 34–50.

15. Proprietors Booke, 1–15.

16. *Ibid.*, 3; Wright, *History of Swansea*, 53.

17. Proprietors Booke, 6.

18. *Ibid.*, 3; Wright, *History of Swansea*, 53.

19. Rehoboth Town Meetings Book, I, 182; Rehoboth Town Hall, Rehoboth, Mass.; Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Recs. of New Plymouth*, III, 183; Herbert L. Osgood, *The American Colonies in the Seventeenth Century*, 3 vols. (New York, 1930), III, 461.

20. Louis B. Wright, *The Atlantic Frontier 1607-1763* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970), 185-186; Michael Kammen, *Colonial New York: A History* (Millwood, N.Y., 1978), 55; John Fiske, *The Dutch and Quaker Colonies in America*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), II, 18; James Grant Wilson, *The Memorial History of the City of New-York*, 4 vols. (New York, 1892-1893), I, 305-306.

21. Proprietors Booke, 5, 13-14; Bowen, *Early Rehoboth*, I, 38-39. See also Francis Baylies, *An Historical Memoir of the Colony of New Plymouth*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1830), II, 244-245.

who would determine an inhabitant's deservings as far as his claim to new lands was involved? Should all admitted inhabitants qualify for shares in the new lands? To Willett, having endured Rehoboth debates over land divisions, the prospect of encountering more endless town meetings, where each inhabitant would attempt through argument to maximize his gains, was depressing.¹⁹ To avoid this potential chaos there was need for an unchangeable formula to govern all future land divisions.

In seeking such a formula Willett may have been influenced by his experience among the Dutch in New Netherland. As described in Louis B. Wright's *The Atlantic Frontier*, Governor Stuyvesant in 1657 established two privileged classes of citizens, the Great and Small Burghers.²⁰ Great Burghers were the preachers, the military officers, the government officials, and those substantial residents who could buy into the privileges. Only these Great Burghers could hold high office, an opportunity designed to ensure that the wealthier merchant class maintained control over the state. Furthermore, they were provided with reduced penalties if they erred. Thus, they were granted privileges and immunities. The Small Burgher class included the native-born, the established residents, and those who paid a standard fee for the title. This Small Burgher status entitled the holder to engage in a trade or craft. According to Wright, this maintenance of rigid classes, each with costs and benefits, was on its way out during Willett's terms as New York's mayor. However, it is interesting to conjecture that it was a relevant prologue to Swansea's Three Rank System of land division.

The town records show that in November 1670, a Three Rank System was offered to the voters, but that it was not accepted until the following meeting of February 7, 1671.²¹ The language was as follows:

It was ordered that all Lots and Divisions of Lands that are or hereafter shall be granted to any perticular person shall be proportioned according to the threefold Ranks underwritten so that where those of the first rank shall have three acres; those of the second ranke shall have two acres and those of the third Ranke shall have one: and that it shall be in the power of the selectmen for the time being or committee for admission of Inhabitants to admitt of and place such as shall be received as Inhabitants into either of the sd Ranks as they shall Judge fit till the full number of three score Inhabitants shall be made up & than when the sd number of three score is accomplished the Lands that are already bought shall be devided and proportioned according to the sd threefold Ranks that in the meantime the sd Select men or committie shall have full power to grant Lots unto such persons as may not be paced unto any of the sd Ranks until further order provided the Grants exceed not nine acres to a man.

In accordance with the language quoted above, the record included three columns of names. Above each column appeared this notation:

"the above sd first (or second or third) Rank are only such as are in this Collumn."²²

It is clear that the core of the system was a mathematical equation. Among the Sowams proprietors the costs and benefits of their operations were a function of the shares that each held in the partnership.²³ As merchants and as planters they dealt with units of measurement: ship capacities, cargo quantities, prices, custom duties, and media of exchange. If the arithmetical elements and relationships that governed their business dealings could be extended to control all future land divisions, the result might be maneuvered—on the basis of fixed classes—to ease the process and ensure a profitable result. Given a reasonable estimate as to the total Swansea acreage that would be ultimately divided, an acceptable formula or equation, with the elements and relationships fixed by contract over time, would allow an astute businessman to compute the value of his estate, both in terms of his present holdings and through his rankright in his expected acquisitions. And as Swansea under the colony grant encompassed all of the unassigned lands between the Providence and the Taunton rivers, the prospects for an extensive estate were vast.

Conceptually the Three Rank System can be represented by the following equation:

$$a(3x)y + b(2x)y + c(x)y = z$$

where a , b , and c represent the number of inhabitants assigned to each of the three ranks, so that $a + b + c =$ a maximum of 60. From the beginning, x became associated with 6 acres, this being the plot usually granted to each inhabitant of the third rank. In order to divide up the total number of acres encompassed by Swansea, y would represent the total acreage which, in the optimistic days of 1671, would approach 192,000. Understandably, the system planners intended that very few inhabitants would be in the first rank; therefore, for illustrative purposes, it is reasonable arbitrarily to assign 10, 20, and 30 to the elements a , b , and c , with $a + b + c = 60$. When $x = 6$ acres and $z = 192,000$, y takes the value of 320. With these numbers, the expected value of any one first-rank inhabitant's land would be 5,760 acres, that of a second-rank man 3,840 acres, and that of a third-rank man 1,920 acres. Any one division would encompass an average of 600 acres, an area close to the Touisset Neck division in 1686.²⁴ Possessed of these prospects any Swansea inhabitant could look forward eagerly to the removal of Metacom and his Wampanoags.

The Wampanoags were removed during King Philip's War. This conflict, lasting from June 1675 to August 1676, scattered the Swansea inhabitants and brought to an end temporarily their preoccupation with future land acquisitions.²⁵ Upon the war's conclusion, they were confronted by a new threat to their prospects. In the postwar period, the colonial authorities, burdened with war debts and deserving veterans,

22. The names appearing in these columns have been listed in Figure 1.

23. Bicknell, *Sowams*, 34.

24. Proprietors Booke, 64; Bowen, *Early Rehoboth*, 43.

25. By August 1676, the surviving Swansea inhabitants—their houses and livestock destroyed—had been dispersed among the other English towns of New England.

26. Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Recs. of New Plymouth*, IV, 147, V, 48, 232, 261, 263, VI, 16–17, IX, 243, X, 407–409; Bicknell, *Sowams*, 154; Douglas Edward Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk: New England in King Philip's War* (New York, 1958), 247–248. See also WPA American Guide Series, *Rhode Island* (Cambridge, Mass., 1937), 184.

27. Swanzev Booke of Records containing the Grants and Settlement Choise of [obliterated] Officers and Serveral Orders and Votes of the Town, 1667–1793, Swansea Town Hall, hereafter cited as Swanzev Booke of Recs.

28. Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Recs. of New Plymouth*, II, 92; Osgood, *American Colonies*, I, 298.

29. Proprietors Booke, 12, 50; Bowen, *Early Rehoboth*, I, 59; Baylies, *Historical Memoir*, II, Chap. 4, 245–246; Swanzev Booke of Recs., 62.

reclaimed several large tracts from Swansea's expectations.²⁶ These tracts were granted to veterans or sold to outsiders, thus removing them from the total acreage in which the Swansea residents expected to share under the Three Rank System. For any one rankholder such losses, of course, could be compensated for—at least in part—by an improvement in rank standing. Therefore, improved rank came to seem justified to five of the town leaders who had been originally assigned to the second rank. After all, they could reason, they had borne the heaviest public burdens: deputy, militia captain, constable, church leader, surveyor, and so on. As a result, the committee authorized by the town meeting to pass upon the rights of rank found itself pressured to elevate these deserving leaders to the highest rank.

During the postwar period the dominant group, which had managed the establishment of Swansea, began to lose its leverage over town affairs. Willett had died in 1674, and the burden of leadership had fallen upon James Brown, his Baptist brother-in-law. The town records suggest that the election of May 1681 went against Brown and his old associates; they lost control of the committee that assigned inhabitants to ranks.²⁷ However, before the General Court in June could approve the town's elected officials,²⁸ a minority of the "lame ducks" secretly raised the five second-class leaders to the first class. The town clerk, who was one of the five, inserted their names at the bottom of the original first rank column. Eventually, probably during the next land division, the town learned of this maneuver and in January 1684 a town meeting held the action to be null and void.²⁹ Undoubtedly, the town disliked the fact that James Brown of the committee had included his nephew, Captain John Brown, among the five and that the promotions were unquestionably devious. In denying these promotions, the town democratically expressed its indignation with such duplicity, but it also protected each voter's pocketbook, for under the system's closed equation

Thomas Willett Memorial, Little Neck Cemetery, East Providence. Willett (1610–1674), a prosperous New England merchant, headed the Sowams proprietorship. Photograph by Robert O. Jones.



the promotion of the five would have cost every other rankholder many acres in subsequent land divisions.

It is important to note that in this veto the town did not do away with the Three Rank System; instead, it recommitted its members to a continuance under the original rules: Every rankholder would share in the common lands in accordance with the rank into which he had been originally placed upon admission to the town—or to the system. It is well to remember that the original ranking had been accepted, not only by each ranked inhabitant, but also by his voting neighbors in town meeting.³⁰ This did not mean that changes in rank were impossible; rather it meant that changes had to be accepted ultimately by the town-meeting as well as by the committee and the individual.

As shown in Figure 1, changes did take place. Hezekiah Luther, Jeremiah Child, and Obadiah Bowen, Sr., were elevated in rank; Jarrett Ingraham was lowered in rank. However, the latter is recorded as having agreed to his change, a reminder that perhaps the costs of a rankright may have been critical.³¹ These costs involved rank-related assessments to pay the costs of running fences, building highways, constructing bridges, surveying new divisions, and repaying the original proprietors.³² In such cases, it was understood that the first-rank man, acquiring three times the land, should pay three times the development costs laid upon the third-rank man. Given this reasoning, it may be assumed that Luther, Child, and Bowen could withstand the higher costs of their promotions. Yet there could have been other reasons for their advancement. Unfortunately, the records do not directly explain why Bowen and the others were advanced to the second rank while Elder Samuel Luther, Captain John Brown, and their three co-leaders were denied the first rank. In the case of Bowen, it is noteworthy that his elevation occurred after he began appearing in the elected committees that governed such changes.³³ Given a lack of explanatory data, it may be assumed that the advancement of the three conformed to the system while that of the five did not. Each of the three gained town approval; the five could not—so they sought to beat the system.

There is no evidence that the Three Rank System was used to demote or promote as a punishment or reward for deviant or desirable behavior. If an inhabitant failed to live up to the Fundamental Agreement, or failed to obey any of the other town rules, he was ejected. A general town cleaning seems to have been carried out in 1673.³⁴ Willett, while trading along the Hudson River, was forced to return to Swansea by the Dutch navy's recapture of New York and its harassment of the New England coast. Committed to a lengthy stay at home, Willett appears to have caused a long-delayed enforcement of town discipline. For failing to comply with the rules of admission, five residents were ordered out of the town and off the rank lists.³⁵ These rules included signing the Fundamental Agreement, mandatory building upon the granted home plot, contributing to the meeting house, and working on public projects. In a different category were misbehavior, such as

30. Proprietors Booke, 14; Bowen, *Early Rehoboth*, I, 38–39.

31. Proprietors Booke, 21.

32. *Ibid.*, 7, 13–17, 64; Bicknell, *Sowams*, 34; Bowen, *Early Rehoboth*, I, 43.

33. Swanzey Booke of Recs. lists the sequence of elections.

34. Proprietors Booke, 21.

35. *Ibid.*, 21–22; Swanzey Booke of Recs., 23. Captain Willett again headed the town's management committee.

Myles Garrison House (right), Swansea, ca. 1907–1908. The Reverend John Myles was the religious leader of the Baptist community in Swansea. From Thomas W. Bicknell, Sowams (New Haven, Conn., 1908). Photograph courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 4870).



36. At its June 1671 session, the General Court issued the General Laws and Liberties of New Plymouth. This codification of the colony's laws, which also specified the responsibilities and authority of elected officials, appeared four months after the establishment of the Three Rank System.

37. Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *The First Americans, 1607–1690* (New York, 1929), 72–74.

38. Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1964), 112 *et seq.*

drunkenness, theft, fornication, adultery, and other wrongdoings. This category of offenses was dealt with through the colony's judicial system, including the town selectmen, the local colony magistrate, and the Court of Assistants in New Plymouth—all supported as necessary by the constables and the several juries.³⁶

In the social sphere it may be presumed that the pews in the meeting house were arranged and filled to reflect the social hierarchy of the congregation.³⁷ Within this pattern Captain John Brown might expect to move up front as he rose through the ranks of the local militia. However, Captain Brown, grandson of an original Sowams proprietor and nephew of the first-rank colony magistrate, could not rise in the Three Rank System without his neighbors' consent, even though he had rendered impressive military service during King Philip's War. As time passed, a man's rise in social status did not necessarily translate into an advance in his economic gains through the Three Rank System of land acquisition.

If the concept of the Three Rank System was algebraically and contractually simple, the assignment of the inhabitants to the three ranks was similarly uncomplicated. As shown in Figure 1, the first rank was intended to include those residents who were entitled to as much land as anyone else in town. Judged by their expected contributions to the town, the resident merchants, resident Sowams proprietors, and Baptist leaders were entitled to the largest share of the land. They were the ones who had made the town, and its subsequent land values, possible. The proprietors had put up the capital to buy the lands, and had negotiated successfully with the Indians to make it available for settlement. They possessed the clout in New Plymouth to obtain colony authorization for the town organization. They had the seniority, experience, education, influence, leisure, wealth, and mobility to undertake the policy-making and judicial roles in the town and colony administrations. Furthermore, with the exception of the pastor and his lay leader, John Butterworth, they represented an influential network of New England businessmen.³⁸

The second rank consisted of those sturdy, energetic, and skilled practitioners who make up the productive infrastructure of a community. The town needed them to provide the necessary services; they needed the town to provide the sites and the markets whereby they could prosper. This group was headed by the colony freemen. Eager for land to grow corn and raise livestock for local and overseas markets, they rendered services as carpenters, coopers, brickmakers, seamen, blacksmiths, tailors, millers, and surveyors. They were the town's constables, grandjurymen, and militia sergeants.

In the third rank were the young marrieds, with an emphasis upon sons, younger brothers, cousins, and in-laws of those in the higher ranks. At the time of classification they had probably not achieved freeman status. As less skilled or less influential members of a tribal network, they were fortunate to be included among the privileged rankholders. Thus John Paddock had been adopted by Willett in 1650 at the deathbed request of John's parents.³⁹ Caleb Eddy, son of Pilgrim Samuel, was the younger brother of Zachariah in the second rank, as boys both had been indentured to John Brown, Senior, an original Sowams proprietor.⁴⁰ And there were other interconnections, particularly through marriage.

Although the records are not clear on the subject, it is probable that admission to the ranks became increasingly difficult as time passed. From the outset the Three Rank System was to be restricted to sixty rankholders. William Cahoon sired a son James in town several years prior to earning a third-rank entitlement. This occurred when he agreed to make bricks for the town.⁴¹ Obadiah Bowen and Jeremiah Child had difficulty achieving a second rank upon entry, although their record suggests that they were men of leadership caliber.⁴² As the rankholders observed the postwar contraction of their original grant, they would naturally object to any additions or advancements in rank that would operate to reduce their own equity.

39. Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Recs. of New Plymouth*, I, 198.

40. Byron Barnes Horton, *The Ancestors and Descendants of Zachariah Eddy of Warren, Pa.* (Rutland, Vt., 1930), 28; Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Recs. of New Plymouth*, II, 112-113, 39.

41. Marian Pearce Carter, comp., *Swansea Records, Book A (Births)* (South Attleboro, Mass., 1930).

42. Both Bowen and Child are listed in the Proprietors Booke as attaining the postwar offices of townsman and selectman; Bowen became a town deputy to the colony's General Court. Proprietors Booke, 30 *et seq.*



Martin House, ca. 1728, Swansea, built by John Martin (1674-1757). Martin's father of the same name (1633-1713/14) was among the Third Rank landholders under the formula devised for division of lands in the town (see fig. 1). Photograph courtesy of Martin House Museum, Massachusetts Society of Colonial Dames of America.

Not everybody in town deserved or was granted a rankright. It is known that Samuel Butterworth was granted four acres alongside his brother John; he does not appear in any rankholder list.⁴³ Samuel Eddy joined his rankholding sons in Swansea after the war; he is not on any list. Several men killed in Swansea during the Indian massacre of 1675 were not listed; nevertheless some may have been visitors from out-of-town, as in the case of Gershom Cobb of Middlebury.⁴⁴ Clearly, the town accommodated a number of unqualified transients, indentured servants, and indigent senior relatives. When captains Willett and Dikse died in 1674, their wills revealed that the town included black slaves. Jared Bourne occupied Swansea lands that were owned by Rhode Island's William Brenton;⁴⁵ neither Bourne nor Brenton was included among the rankholders. John Cobleich, James Tisdale, and Thomas Wood were inhabitants, but not rankholders.

There is another interesting element in the Three Rank System. It is clear that the western region of Swansea, called Wannamoisett and Popanomscut, remained primarily a Sowams proprietors' enclave. Initially settled by the Willett-Brown families and their associated resident proprietors, these early leaders were gradually joined there by second-generation Pecks and Chaffees. These were the sons of Rehoboth-based proprietors. These sons lived in Swansea, raised families there, and held offices in the town. However, their names do not appear in the lists shown in Figure 1. They did not sign the Fundamental Agreement, enter the Three Rank System, or share in the 1686 land division. These observations lead to the speculation that they dwelt on their proprietary tracts in the western section of Swansea, but did not apply (or were not judged as qualified) for inclusion in the Three Rank System that governed land acquisitions in the other parts of the town.

FIGURE 1
Three Lists of Swansea Rankholders

Rankholders with year of entry if before 1670	Recorded under fundamental agreement Feb. 1670 et seq	Recorded as in Three Rank System in Feb. 1671 et seq	Recorded in Touisset Neck Division Dec. 1686
FIRST RANK			
a1,b1,d1	Capt. Thom. Willett '60	yes	f yes
c	Rev. John Myles '68	yes	f no
a1,b3,d1	Mr. James Brown '45 c	yes	yes
a1,b3,d1	Mr. Nath'l Paine '69	yes	yes
a1,b2,d1	Mr. John Allen '63	yes	yes
a1,c,d1	John Butterworth '68	yes	yes
	Capt. John Dikse	yes	f yes
a2,d2	Mr. Wm. Ingraham	yes	yes
a2	Mr. Richard Sharp	yes	yes
SECOND RANK			
a1,c,d1	Nicholas Tanner '68	yes	yes
c,d1	Benjamin Alby '68	yes	yes
a1,c	Joseph Carpenter '68	yes	f yes
a1,d1	Samuel Luther '68	yes	yes
a1,d1	Hugh Cole '68	yes	yes

FIGURE 1
Three Lists of Swansea Rankholders (con't)

a1	Robert Jones '68	yes	yes	f yes
d2	Thomas Easterbrook '68	yes	yes	yes
a1	Jonathan Bosworth '68	yes	yes	yes
	William Bartrum '68	yes	yes	yes
	George Aldrich '68	yes	e 1668-73	no
a1,d1	John Myles, Jr. '69	yes	yes	yes
a1	Zachariah Eddy '69	yes	yes	yes
d1	Thomas Lewis '69	yes	yes	yes
	Hezekiah Luther '69	yes	1673 2nd Rank 1671 3rd Rank	yes
	William Howard	yes	yes	yes
	Thomas Barnes	yes	yes	yes
	Capt. Anthony Low	no	yes	yes
a1,b3,d1	Lt.-Capt. John Brown '45	yes	1672	yes
d2	Job Winslow	yes	1672	no
	John Cole	no	1672	f yes
	Sampson Mason	yes	1672	yes
	John Lathrop	no	e 1672-3	no
	William Salisbury	no	e 1672-3	f yes
a3,d2	Joseph Kent	yes	1673	no
	Stephen Brace	yes	e 1673-9	no
	Jarrett Ingraham	yes	before 1673	see below
d2	Jeremiah Child	yes	1679 2nd Rank 1672 3rd Rank	yes
	Timothy Brooks	yes	1680	yes
a1,d2	Obadiah Bowen, Sr.	yes	1686 2nd Rank 1672 3rd Rank	yes
	John Wilson	no	1680	no
	Gideon Allen	yes	yes	yes
	John Thurber	yes	yes	yes
THIRD RANK				
	Thomas Mann '68	yes	yes	yes
	Hezekiah Luther '69		see above	
	Caleb Eddy '69	yes	yes	yes
	John Paddock '69	yes	yes	yes
	Nathaniel Lewis '69	yes	yes	yes
c	Eldad Kingsley	yes	yes	yes
	Samuel Wheaton	yes	yes	yes
a1,d2	Obadiah Bowen, Sr.		see above	
	Obadiah Bowen, Jr.	yes	yes	no
d2	Jeremiah Child		see above	
	Joseph Wheaton	yes	1672	yes
	John Wheaton	no	1672	yes
	John Martin	no	1672	yes
	Capt. Samuel Woodbury	yes	1672	yes
a3	William Cahoon	yes	1673	f yes
	Jarrett Ingraham	yes	1673 see above	yes
	Joseph Lewis	yes	before 1675	f yes
	Nehemiah Allen	yes	before 1675	f yes
	John Harding	no	e before 1673-73	no
	Richard Burgess	yes	1675	no
	Nathaniel Toogood	yes	1679	yes
	John West	yes	before 1686	yes
	Thomas Elliot	yes		no
	John Crabtree	no	before 1686	yes
	John Thurber, Jr.	no	before 1686	yes
	James Cole	no	before 1686	yes
	Hugh Cole, Jr.	no	before 1686	yes

NOTE: At least six second-generation proprietors (Chaffees, Pecks, and Stephen Paine, Jr.) were listed as town residents in other public data, but not in the above lists.

SYMBOLS: a—known freemen: 1 Plymouth Colony, 2 Boston, 3 Rhode Island
 b—proprietor group: 1 Original prop., 2 Bought from original, 3 Descendant
 c—signer of original Baptist covenant
 d—town officeholder: 1 before 1679, 2 after 1678 (some served in both periods)
 e—ordered ejected from the town.
 f—deceased before 1686

43. Proprietors Booke, 6.

44. Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Recs. of New Plymouth*, III, Pt. 2, 150. Cobb's will has been published in the *Mayflower Descendant*, XXXIV (1937), 112.

45. Wright, *History of Swansea*, 81.

46. Proprietors Booke, 64; Bowen, *Early Rehoboth*, I, 43.

47. The names printed here are representative selections from the list of fifty-eight participants. For a complete list see the sources cited above in note 46 or see Figure 1.

48. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent*, I, 136-137.

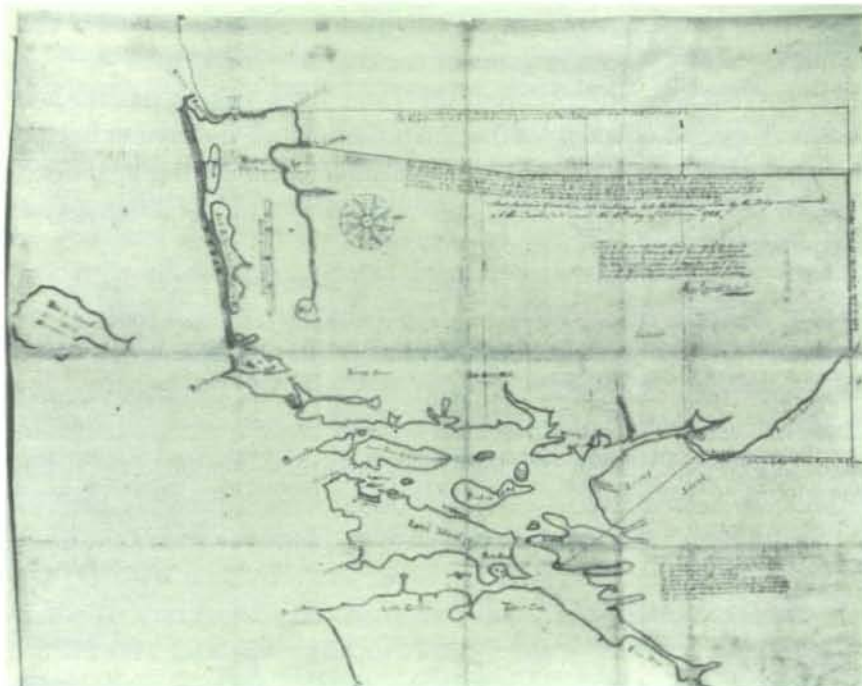
Nevertheless, despite the aberrations and the mysteries that continue to becloud the workings of the Three Rank System, the records show that it continued to control the distribution of land for many years. In 1686, some ten years after the death of Metacom and two years after the revolt against the illicit promotion of the five second-rank leaders, the town divided the common lands that had initially been designated as a sheep pasture on Touisset Neck, a peninsula lying some ten miles from the proprietors' enclave near Bullock's Cove.⁴⁶ The record describes a classic case of the application of the Three Rank System:

Memorandum: That on the 24 of December 1686: At a meeting of the Community of Proprietors for Dividing of the Undivided Land on Twooset Neck Alias Sheep Pasture the sd Neck being laid out already Into one Hundred and Six Six Acre Lots by the Community that the beginning of Lots should be at the North East Part of the Neck Adjoyning to the Land of John Cole Deceased and so Proceeded as Lotted and Numbred in the Plot thereof which lots were Drawn by William Bartrum for the whole Community and are as followeth⁴⁷

ORDER	NUMBER OF LOTS
1 Capt. John Brown	1, 2
3 Elder Samll. Luther	3, 4
4 Mr. Richard Sharp	7, 8, 9
5 William Salisbury	10
8 Mr. John Dikse	15, 16, 17
18 Capt. Thos. Willet	38, 39, 40
26 Mr. William Ingraham	55, 56, 57
27 Jared Ingraham	58
34 Hugh Cole, Junr.	68
36 John Crabtree	71
40 Mr. Nathll. Pain	77, 78, 79
43 Mr. Nicholas Tanner	82, 83
54 John Paddock	97
57 A School Master Lot	103, 104
58 Hugh Cole, Senr.	105, 106

The Charge of laying out these lands is 2s Every Six acre Lott and Somewhat More as appears by the grose Sum which is £9,13/,00d.

The document reveals several interesting facts about the Three Rank System. There is the rank-related charges for the surveying of the tract. There is Captain John Brown in the second rank, as the town meeting of January 1684 had decreed. So is Elder Luther who, upon the death of the first-ranked Pastor Myles in 1683, had taken on his pastoral duties.⁴⁸ Tanner, who had migrated from Wales with Myles, was still in the second rank although the town clerk recognized him as a gentleman: Mr. Nicholas Tanner. As also revealed in Figure 1, up-and-coming sons are entering the ranks: Hugh Cole, Jr., James Cole, and



Map of Rhode Island, by John Mumford, 1720, showing the neighboring towns of "Swanzey" and "Seaconk" in Massachusetts. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 4867).

John Thurber, Jr. William Salisbury, who was ordered to leave town, is either back in or never left. Captain Willett, although dead, gains three lots for his heirs or assigns. The Ingrahams have adjoining lots. From the beginning, lands were set aside for a pastor, a teacher, and a schoolmaster. It may be assumed that the town, through sale or rental of such lots, could obtain funds for the salary of the Reverend Myles, who in 1674 undertook the role of schoolmaster as well as pastor.⁴⁹ This arrangement would conform to the Browns' Baptist view that ministers should not be supported out of taxes.⁵⁰

Ultimately, the Three Rank System took on a life of its own. Having established the rule that any undivided land within the bounds of the town belonged to the rankholders, this privileged group had a pragmatic interest in continuing the organization until every bit and piece of common land or unassigned property had been identified and divided. Theoretically, this included every drained pond and unused cartpath. This shared acquisitiveness held the rankholders together until 1812. On December 26, 1812, an organization calling itself the Proprietors of the Rank Rights in Swanzey met, presumably reviewed their unlikely prospects for further gains, and adjourned for the last time.⁵¹

In the history books Swansea has become known as the frontier town of King Philip's War, but its Three Rank System has had little exposition. In those cases where its three-tiered arrangement has reached the public view, it has been described as an attempt by an aristocratic few to rule autocratically over a God-fearing many. Although it is clear that the Willetts, Browns, and Paines were business princes, it is equally clear that the system merely reflected a continuation of the

49. *Ibid.*, I, 134.

50. Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Recs. of New Plymouth*, III, 81-82; Bowen, *Early Rehoboth*, I, 31.

51. Proprietors Booke, 153.

52. Wertenbaker, *First Americans*, 72–73; William Haller, Jr., *The Puritan Frontier: Town Planting in New England Colonial Development, 1630–1660* (New York, 1951), 24.

53. Baylies, *Historical Memoir*, II, 345–346; William B. Weeden, *The Economic and Social History of New England, 1620–1789*, 2 vols. (Boston and New York, 1891), I, 282; Thomas W. Bicknell, "John Myles and Religious Toleration in Massachusetts," *Magazine of New England History*, II (1892), 237–239; Wertenbaker, *First Americans*, 74.

54. Eligibility to vote in town meeting is examined in George D. Langdon, Jr., "The Franchise and Political Democracy in Plymouth Colony," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XX (1963), 513. In the Proprietors Booke, the select committee was constrained from actions prohibited by the town meeting, and, in the same book, the town meeting forbade the townsmen from disposing of any more land without the town's approval. Proprietors Booke, 4, 25.

prevailing New England land policies whereby men of status and contribution always received more of the common lands than their fellows.⁵² What was different about the Three Rank system was the contractual, mathematical basis that attempted to lock the system in place for all time. It was a businessman's solution to the frontier land distribution problem; it was not an autocrat's persecution of a defenseless majority.

The number of published references to Swansea's Three Rank System is small. Francis Baylies in 1830 first selected excerpts from the Swansea records and drew the conclusion that the inhabitants were subjected to a class structure reminiscent of the Roman Patrician, Equestrian, and Plebian experience. Weeden, writing in 1891 and building upon Baylies's book, concluded that fines used to enforce the public laws were graduated to fit the rank of the offender. Thomas W. Bicknell in 1892 seized upon the usual language of colonial real estate transactions to declare that the elevation of the five second-rank leaders was an attempt to make the established aristocracy hereditary. This language granted to the five and "their Heirs and Assigns for Ever the full Right and Interest of the Highest Rank with all and Singular the Priviledges and Immunities thereto belonging in all and to all the lands in the sd Township yet undivided." Impressed by these high-sounding phrases, Bicknell concluded that the town's rejection in 1684 of its committee's act ended the movement toward feudal tyranny and brought the system to a close. In 1927 Wertenbaker introduced the idea that the Swansea inhabitants had been arbitrarily ranked by the "Trustees" at the very outset, and then were promoted or degraded for reasons deemed sufficient by succeeding imperious committees made up presumably of first rank proprietors.⁵³

These assertions fail to note that the Three Rank System was introduced after the town had achieved self-government through the town meeting,⁵⁴ that the so-called graded fines were actually rank-related assessments or payments associated with the costs of common enterprises such as land acquisitions or facilities development, and that the 1684 vote of the town did not nullify the system but instead reinforced its original provisions. Thus, it was again agreed that all rankholders must remain in the level which they accepted upon entry; unless, that is, the town consented to a promotion or demotion. Further, these assertions fail to recognize that the system continued to govern Swansea's land distribution as long as there remained significant land to be divided.

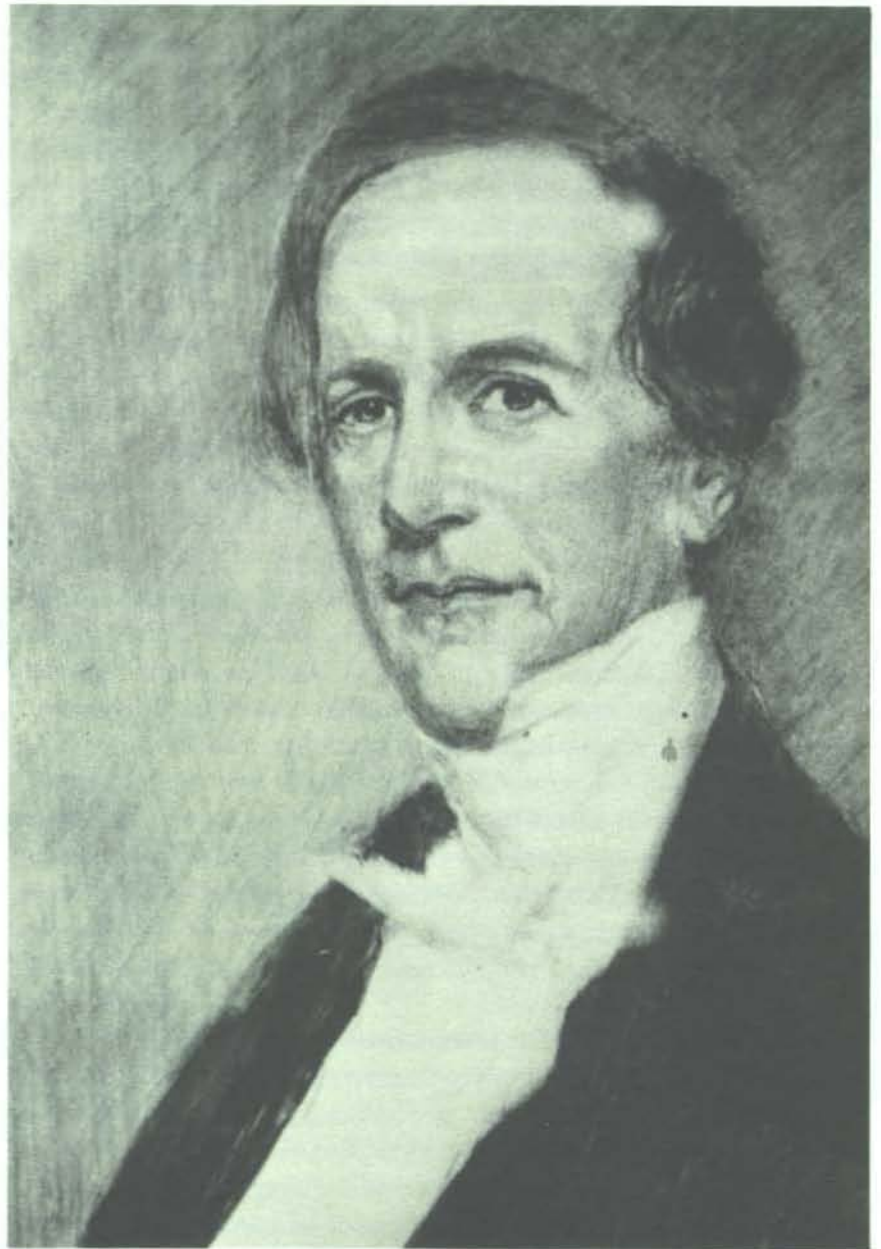
The term aristocracy connotes certain rights resulting directly from birth. One significant characteristic of the Three Rank System was the obvious deployment of families over the several ranks. Thus, not all Browns were in the first rank, nor all Coles and Bowens in the second. As described before, political clout, economic power, social status, and family needs dictated an inhabitant's entitlement to future land acquisitions, and these qualifications were subject to the perceptions of neighbors competing as rankholders in an assembled town meeting.

In the 1940s, Richard LeBaron Bowen returned the focus of attention to the system's land distribution role. He suggested, however, that the process established a landed aristocracy which lasted for merely a quarter of a century.⁵⁵ On the contrary, the town and colony records show that a landed aristocracy existed before Swansea was planned; in terms of vast acreages Willett was as impressive a landowner in Rehoboth as he was later in Swansea.⁵⁶ Through the Sowams proprietorship, the first-rank inhabitants obtained large estates in Swansea before the Three Rank System was authorized by the town meeting. The system reflected the prevailing capitalistic class structure and influence; it did not create an autocratic aristocracy. The special contribution of the Three Rank System was that it marked an advancement in the use of business or management methods to control the development of a New England town. After the initial land assignments had been made by the colony-appointed trustees, who represented both the proprietors and the Baptists, the amount of land that an inhabitant might acquire was ultimately controlled, not by a committee of arbitrary aristocrats, but instead by the cupidity of neighbors as expressed democratically in a town meeting. With decreasing usefulness it lasted, not for merely a quarter century, but for almost a century and a half.

55. Bowen, *Early Rehoboth*, I, 26.

56. For instance, Willett's will in 1671 bequeathed in excess of 1,100 acres of land in the Swansea and Rehoboth areas, not counting his vast holdings in the Narragansett country.

Richard J. Arnold. Courtesy of Katherine Talbot. From The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, ed. Charles E. Beveridge and Charles C. McLaughlin (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), II.



North by South: The Two Lives of Richard James Arnold

Charles Hoffmann and Tess Hoffmann

On January 29, 1853, Frederick Law Olmsted, the future creator of that urban, man-made paradise, Central Park, arrived at a different kind of paradise, the rice plantation on the Ogeechee River near Savannah, owned by a New Englander identified only as Mr. X in *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* (1856).¹ The view from his window upon awakening the next morning seemed to him a veritable Garden of Eden: "A grove which surrounded the house was all in dark verdure: there were oranges on trees nearer the window; the buds were swelling on a jessamine-vine, and a number of camelia-japonicas were in full bloom. . . . Sparrows were chirping, doves cooing, and a mocking-bird whistling loudly."² This plantation, which he described in considerable detail because he considered it a model where the institution of slavery might be observed at its best as a system of labor, was White Hall, owned by Richard James Arnold (1796–1873) of Providence, who divided the year between his Georgia plantation and his Rhode Island residence, traveling back and forth according to the seasons. Olmsted's journeys in the seaboard slave states are well-documented, but the untold story is how the youngest son of Welcome Arnold, a successful Providence merchant, came to be the third largest plantation owner and slaveholder in Bryan County, Georgia—11,000 acres and 200 slaves by the time of Olmsted's visit. The duality of his life, spending the winter season in Georgia but escaping the threat of malaria during the summer by living in Providence and later Newport, ultimately signified in microcosm a divided nation just as it eventually separated his family during the Civil War.

One of the heirs of his father's considerable estate, and a graduate of Brown University in 1814 (he was later one of its trustees for life), Richard Arnold had many possibilities open to him as a young man of wealth from a prominent New England family, including the partnership with his older brother Samuel in the family shipping business engaged in the Baltic and South American trade.³ On coming of age in 1817, he made the grand tour of Europe, traveling ostensibly as an agent for the shipping firm. His brother Samuel's partnership in a cotton mill outside Providence suggested textile manufacturing as a possible investment for his inheritance of \$100,000, a sizable fortune in

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1. In the original "Yeoman" letters published in the *New-York Daily Times* during 1853 and 1854, and upon which the book, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, was based, Mr. X was identified as Mr. A. Positive identification of Richard J. Arnold as Olmsted's host was made by the editors of the Olmsted Papers on the basis of an annotated copy of *Seaboard Slave States* in which Mary Cornelia Arnold Talbot, Richard Arnold's daughter, identified her father. See *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, ed. Charles E. Beveridge and Charles C. McLaughlin (Baltimore, Md., 1981), II, 163–164, fn. 6.

It is important to note, however, that Olmsted's description of Mr. A as a man "trained in the rugged fields of New-Hampshire, among the looms of Lowell and in the counting rooms of Boston" has no basis in fact in Arnold's life (Yeoman letter #24, dated June 14, 1853). One can assume that these were attempts by Olmsted to disguise the identity of Richard Arnold for purposes of publication. In contrast to Mr. A, Mr. X is described in general terms: "Mr. X himself is a New England farmer's son, and has been a successful merchant and manufacturer."

Although we were unable to find any direct reference to Olmsted among Arnold's papers, other documentary evidence directly and indirectly supports the identification in all other details and none precludes it. Unfortunately, the business and plantation journals for that crucial period of Olmsted's visit are missing from the Rhode Island Historical Society collection and from the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina and are presumably no longer extant. Unfortunately, too, Olmsted's notes upon which he based his letters and his book were destroyed by fire.

2. Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journal in the Seaboard Slave States* (New York, 1856), 411.

3. Politics and the law were also possible careers open to Richard Arnold. After graduating from Brown, he served an apprenticeship in the law office of his brother-in-law, Tristram Burges, U.S. Congressman and chief justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court. His great-uncle, William Greene, had been governor of Rhode Island, and even his father had participated in local politics and served intermittently as a deputy in the Rhode Island General Assembly, 1772–1790. However, Arnold never practiced law, and he did not run for political office. Public service was a family tradition, and therefore in 1831 he accepted appointment to a committee of prominent citizens of Providence to investigate the facts and causes of a race riot that had occurred earlier that year in the city. The fact that at the time he owned slaves in Georgia underscores the duality of his life.

4. Upon the death of her parents, Abraham and Barbara Clark Gindrat, Louisa Caroline (who had been born at White Hall) was sent in 1815 to Medford, Massachusetts, as the legal ward of Mary Ann Savage Clay, widow of the Hon. Joseph Clay (1764–1811), while White Hall plantation was managed by an overseer until she came of age.

5. Richard J. Arnold to Samuel Greene Arnold, December 12, 1823, Welcome Arnold Papers, John Carter Brown Library, Providence.

6. Richard J. Arnold to Samuel Greene Arnold, January 30, 1824, Welcome Arnold Papers.

7. Warranty Deed, Emily and Samuel H. Bond to R. J. Arnold, Dec. 24, 1824, Bryan County Record Book, D 220, Bryan County Court House, Pembroke, Georgia.

those days. The small farm he had also inherited was only large enough to earn him the title of gentlemen farmer; it was too small to earn him a living. Eventually he left the farm in charge of an overseer, Prince Bent, a former slave who had earned his freedom by joining Rhode Island's Black Regiment during the Revolutionary War. In the end Arnold chose to seek his fortune and invest his inheritance in a way of life that depended on the institution of slavery. His marriage to Louisa Caroline Gindrat (1804–1871) in the spring of 1823 made him a slaveholder, for she had inherited White Hall plantation from her parents.⁴ The 1,300 acres of land and sixty-eight slaves who lived and worked on the plantation were her marriage dowry.

It was not the act of marriage itself that bound Richard Arnold for the rest of his life to slavery. Although Olmsted had the impression that the entire plantation had been inherited by Arnold's wife, Arnold's decision in 1824 to expand the plantation operation by buying more land and more slaves totally committed him to a way of life that depended on owning slaves. The decision to become a large rice planter in the South was based on economics. As of August 1825, Richard Arnold valued the original 1,300 acres of White Hall at \$5,000, and the sixty-eight slaves at \$280 each, or \$19,040. But after acquiring the plantation, Arnold had to decide whether it would be more profitable to sell off some of the slaves or whether it would make better business sense to buy more land for a more efficient use of his work force. Writing from White Hall to his brother Samuel in December 1823, Arnold indicated that his neighbors agreed "it will be necessary for me to buy more land, or sell a quarter part of my negroes, as the land at this place is not sufficient for more than three quarters of the gang to work on." They advised him to buy more land rather than sell the slaves because land prices were low, "and negroes bring now nothing—owing to the distressed state of the country they are selling, very often & in large gangs to satisfy sherriffs executions at public auctions."⁵ Even though he had doubts about investing much money in the area, it made economic sense to him to follow this advice, and early in 1824, he wrote again to his brother Samuel, "I have purchased a [600 acre] Tract of Prime Land opposite White Hall . . . for which I am to pay \$3500."⁶ He had committed himself to being a large planter and all that this implied in human terms of planning and managing an enslaved community of workers organized for economic purposes.

What Richard Arnold had also done was to commit himself to the idea, based on a pragmatic Yankee approach to business, of expanding his operation rather than contracting it to make it more productive. By the end of 1824, he further expanded by purchasing Cherry Hill plantation, including its sixty-three slaves, from Emily and Samuel Bond for \$9,500.⁷ White Hall and Cherry Hill as contiguous plantations were to be operated efficiently under one management, each plantation with its own work force but with the work gangs interchangeable according to need, putting some of the house servants at White Hall to work in

the fields during the summer months when the mansion house there was closed. He continued to buy more land throughout the antebellum period, the largest expansion taking place in 1835 when he purchased nearby Sans-Souci plantation with over 5,500 acres. But the first purchase was the momentous decision, committing him by his own act to a dual existence as a Northern citizen and a Southern slaveholder.

Although the New England Anti-Slavery Society had been formed in 1831 by William Lloyd Garrison, the Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Society was not organized until 1836. It was still possible in 1831 for Richard James Arnold, slaveholder, to sit in judgment as a member of a blue-ribbon committee of prominent citizens of Providence, a committee which included his brother-in-law, Zachariah Allen (1795–1882), the textile manufacturer, to ascertain the facts concerning the race riots earlier that year in the city and to make recommendations on how best to maintain law and order and protect private property against violent mob action. By 1837, however, when Eliza Harriet Arnold Allen (1796–1873) visited her twin brother Richard's plantation in Georgia, the lines were being drawn in Rhode Island on the slavery issue. Thomas Wilson Dorr, Zachariah Allen's cousin, led the political fight in the state legislature against slavery in the South, and embarrassing questions were being raised about the propriety of slaveholders bringing slaves as house-servants into the free state of Rhode Island. "Mum Phoebe," a favorite house servant at White Hall, usually accompanied the Arnolds north to Rhode Island during the summer malaria season.⁸

Eliza Harriet Allen, however, was not so much concerned about the political and economic issues involved in the slavery question as she was, being a religious woman, with the moral issues. The diary she kept of her journey to White Hall plantation in the early spring of 1837 is a Christian woman's apologia for paternalistic slaveholders like her brother Richard. She was convinced, for instance, that her brother was a good, kind master to his slaves. It was, therefore, "really distressing" for her to see immediately upon landing in Savannah on April 1, 1837, "a poor slave whipped by another" slave at a small river plantation, something "which I am sure I shall not see again," meaning that whatever others may permit or do, such a thing would never happen or be permitted on her brother's plantation where she would be staying.⁹ Nevertheless, it was common practice on plantations in the South, including Richard Arnold's, to punish slaves by whipping them. What Eliza Harriet had witnessed was a slave driver, a fellow slave in charge of a work gang, punishing one of his crew. It was also common practice for planters in the area to give the overseer (who by law was a white man) authority to whip slaves himself or to delegate the job to one of his drivers. In the years before Mrs. Allen's visit, Richard Arnold stipulated that his overseers were "not to chastise the negros with more than thirty lashes for any one offense without first consulting said Arnold" or his agent. By the time of Olmsted's visit in 1853 this clause in

8. Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, II, 187–188, fn. 3. "Mum Phoebe" is also identified as the mother of Amos Morel, Arnold's "watchman" on the plantation.

9. Journal of Eliza Harriet Arnold Allen [Mrs. Zachariah Allen], Apr. 1, 1837, p. 12, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, hereafter cited as Allen Journal.

10. Agreement with Overseer for the years 1846, 1847, and 1848, Arnold-Screven Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Since the overseer, Charles W. Ferguson, was still the overseer when Olmsted visited the plantation in 1853, the same basic agreement remained in effect except that Ferguson's salary was increased from \$500 in 1846 to \$800 in 1849 and to \$1,000 in 1853.

11. When Olmsted asked Arnold how often slaves were punished, Arnold replied, "sometimes, perhaps, not once for two or three weeks; then it will seem as if the devil has got into them all and there is a good deal of it." Olmsted, *Journey*, 439. In his letter to the *New-York Daily Times* dated July 21, 1853, Olmsted described in more detail the method of punishment on the Arnold plantation: "Punishment for light offences was administered with the whip, upon the back of the man or woman, without removing their clothes; the whip is a short stick, with a flat lash of leather. For graver offences, the negroes were placed in solitary confinement in a small, dark house or jail kept for that purpose; and of this they had great dread, and much preferred being whipped."

12. Allen Journal, Apr. 16, 1837, p. 22.

13. *Ibid.*, Apr. 11, 1837, p. 18.

14. Julia Comstock Tolman to Frank J. Hagadorn, Feb. 7, 1853, Hagadorn-Wells Papers, R.I. Hist. Soc.

the overseer's contract had been modified to read: "He [the overseer] is not to punish the negroes with any other article but the lash and always to do it through his Drivers" so that, presumably, a white man never directly wielded the lash.¹⁰ In either case the sting of the lash was the same for the one being punished. The fact that Eliza Harriet did not "see again" such a whipping during the two months of her stay at White Hall did not mean that no whipping took place, just that her only contact with the field hands was on Sunday, their day of rest.¹¹

Part of Mrs. Allen's myopia also resulted from her interest in the Christian education of the slaves at the plantation "Sunday school," a place where punishments were not meted out. Louisa Arnold usually performed the duties of teaching the slave children on Sundays, though Eliza Harriet taught some of the lessons during her visit. On one Sunday, April 16, 1837, Eliza read to the slaves from the Bible and explained the passages. She stopped at all the houses in the slave quarter at White Hall during the course of the afternoon and was much fatigued but also gratified at having carried out a Christian duty. This experience, which she recorded in her journal that same night, led her to some favorable conclusions about the slave system:

The wife of a planter as well as the planter himself is placed in a very responsible situation. So many souls committed to their care. Many think it a very easy situation, but it is from ignorance that they form such an opinion. No one who has not seen, can imagine the constant calls upon their time and patience. No day passes that the attention is not called to some one sick & to many wants which are always freely made known, and always if possible supplied on this plantation at least. I am daily more convinced that every station has its own peculiar cares, and while we think that other than our own wants be easier, and better for us to bear, we ought to be assured that the very station in which [each] of us is placed by providence, is the one for us to fill, that its duties and its cares are such as ought to devolve upon us.¹²

In light of such deterministic philosophy, she could see no moral contradiction between the social and economic conditions of slavery and the fact that her brother owned slaves.

Mrs. Allen's defense of the plantation system as the will of God may have been influenced in part by the arrival at White Hall, earlier that week, of the Reverend Edward B. Hall of Providence. As she noted in her journal, Hall had been "nurtured with Abolition," and therefore "it was thought best [that he] should see all that could be seen," presumably meaning all that could be seen to be benevolently paternalistic and civilizingly Christian. Hence, early in the morning on Tuesday, April 11, normally a work day on the plantation, the slave children were all assembled in school "to exhibit to Mr. Hall."¹³ They were all on their best behavior, and while Eliza did not mention Hall's reaction, certainly nothing she had seen so far or was to see during the remainder

of her visit at White Hall was to make her doubt that her brother and his wife were doing the Lord's work in their operation of the plantation.

But not everyone at White Hall was convinced. Some years later, Julia Tolman, a Rhode Islander and the wife of the tutor hired to teach Arnold's children, pointed out that the paternalism of the Arnolds and the Sunday lessons for the slaves could not hide the fact that education was denied to the slave population of the plantation:

We see slavery in its very best form here. Mr. A [Arnold] never sells his slaves; among his 150, there is scarcely one who was not raised on the plantation. Their wants are all supplied, and Mrs. A. is very careful in ascertaining their wants and in providing flannel for the old people every year. The house servants have much less to do than our Northern servants, for each one has only one thing to do. I mean one kind of work. They think everything of Mr. and Mrs. Arnold. But with however great kindness they are treated, the wrong of the system is not in the least altered. Only a few of them can read and that only a little. One or two have begged Mr. T [William Tolman] to teach them which he does with pleasure. Mrs. A. always teaches the children at Whitehall on Sundays, and she spoke to William about his doing the same at Cherry Hill.¹⁴

Yet many Southerners, like Thomas Savage Clay, the Arnolds' neighbor, friend, and godfather to their second son (who was christened Thomas Clay Arnold), believed that Sunday schools on the plantation were enough to educate slave children toward their own moral improvement. In a short monograph entitled *Detail of a Plan for the Moral Improvement of Negroes on Plantations*, published in 1833, Clay argued that Sunday schools held on the plantation and conducted by the planter and his family would check in the young slaves "that current of vice and impurity, which for ages has been the inheritance of this degraded race" and would also exert "a salutary influence on their parents." If instructions and the power of example failed, however, Clay believed that an offending slave should be punished by being "taught to feel that he is punished for breaking God's law" rather than the master's; in this way, the slave would become "more obedient and profitable."¹⁵ The ultimate appeal of Clay's plan was secular rather than religious, for Clay himself indicated that the moral improvement of slaves "would do more for the good order and quiet of the country, than any civil or military patrol we have ever had."¹⁶

Despite Clay's optimism, internal discipline on plantations was not always successful in controlling the slaves, and many slaves seem not to have been "improved" in the way that Clay had intended. In the early autumn of 1837, about four months after the Arnolds and Mrs. Allen had returned to Providence, Clay informed Arnold about a spate of runaway slaves in the area. Two had been captured, one of them a man named Simon who had "run away three times, & I presume will now be shipped." As for the other runaways, Clay reported that "it is



Plantation scene showing slave quarters in winter. From Frederick Law Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States (New York, 1856).

Photograph courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 4865).

15. Thomas S. Clay, *Detail of a Plan for the Moral Improvement of Negroes in Plantations* (Georgia Presbytery, 1833), 8, 18.

16. *Ibid.*, 7.



Louise Gindrat Arnold. Courtesy of Katherine Talbot. From The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, ed. Charles E. Beveridge and Charles C. McLaughlin (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), II.

17. Clay to Arnold, Sept. 29, 1837, R. J. Arnold Papers, R.I. Hist. Soc.

18. Arnold to Thomas Butler King, July 15, 1841, Thomas Butler King Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

intended, as soon as the accumulation of frost will render it safe, to hunt for them by detachments till they are all caught or driven away."¹⁷

Most runaway slaves were caught immediately within a few miles of their plantations, or, like the ones Clay described, were trapped in the swampland to be hunted down like animals after the first frost ended the danger of malaria. It was not for the color of the soil that this swampy rice-growing area was known as "Black Ankle Country." In the summer of 1841 Richard Arnold's overseer wrote him in Providence to say that he had caught a runaway slave named Larkin belonging to Thomas Butler King, a congressman from that district in Georgia. Arnold wrote an immediate reply:

It seems he has been lurking about there [White Hall] for some weeks & was seen by my Driver, but being so well armed he did not attempt to take him. He however heard him fire a gun, saw him kill a hog & then watched him until night when he discovered where he slept. He then immediately informed the Overseer who took two other white men with him. & went with the Driver, secured him & sent him to Savannah Jail. When taken he had with him a Musket & Dirk. Knowing you are in Washington I thought it doubtful if you would hear of his being in Jail unless I informed you. I have written the Overseer to see Larkin & endeavor to find out where the others are to be found and & his best exertions to take them.¹⁸

The planters thus had their own "underground" network to track down fugitives before the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 gave federal sanction to hunting runaways and returning them to their masters.

If runaway slaves fled to the comparative safety of the swamps, planters and their families in the area fled to the comparative safety of higher, drier ground during the malaria season beginning in late May. Some of the planters, like the Clays and the Arnolds, because of their New England connections had the best of both possible worlds—North in the summer and South in the winter. Richard Arnold, having business interests in the North, mainly investments in real estate and textile manufactories, could attend to them during the long malaria season in the South that ended only with the first killing frost, usually in November. Since Zachariah Allen was the trustee for Arnold's business in the North, Arnold could leave for Georgia knowing that his affairs would be in good hands. Leaving the plantation for the summer was quite a different matter, for it meant being absent during the busy and crucial harvest season. The employment of a white overseer was required by law on large plantations like Arnold's, and thus a virtue was made of the necessity; the overseer was left in charge during the absence of the planter. Like a factory manager, the overseer was responsible for the day-to-day work of the plantation, but since overseers were notoriously unreliable, it was Arnold's practice to leave elaborately detailed instructions for his overseer before he traveled north for the summer. For example, on May 22, 1837, two days before the Ar-

nolds and Eliza Allen left for Providence, Arnold wrote out eleven pages of instructions for his overseer, Mr. J. Swanston. Instructions about late plantings and rice culture, specific tasks to be assigned various slaves, what to do in case of illness, particularly contagious diseases such as cholera and measles—all were set down in minute detail along with the admonition that Swanston was to write once a fortnight to bring Arnold up to date on what was happening, once a week during the harvest, and twice a week if cholera should break out. But the main concern that runs over the years like a motif throughout the overseers' instructions is that the "people" (Arnold never referred to them as slaves) must be kept busy working productively at all times:

Whenever the White Hall people are driven into the house by rain they can pick the burrs from the wool & when picked out, Dick & Tom must wash it clean & Ben can pack it & there is some poor cotton a few can overhaul & that can be packed. If the carpenters get through with the work allotted them, they can get out posts & rails for the fence I contemplate building behind the negro houses at C. Hill.¹⁹

The absence of the master, Arnold was well aware, was likely to make the "people" less than attentive to duty, whatever it did to their hearts.

It is evident from Arnold's 1847–1849 Plantation Journal, a daily record (except Sundays) of plantation business while he was in residence at White Hall, that he was not the stereotype of the Southern planter sitting on the piazza drinking mint juleps and entertaining guests. Entertain guests the Arnolds did, but Arnold himself was deeply involved in the detailed planning and working of his business. What emerges from his journal and letters is the image of a man who saw himself as a paternalistic entrepreneur not unlike his brother-in-law, Zachariah Allen, albeit at the other end of the cotton kingdom, coordinating the daily operations of his two main plantations just as Allen commuted between his two Rhode Island mills, Allendale and Phenix, supervising production and diversifying according to the market, the margin of profit in their businesses dependent upon their ability to increase productivity within their organizations. Both saw themselves as manager-engineers—Allen more engineer because of the machines, Arnold more manager because of the slaves—as well as capitalist-owners, no detail too small to attend to.

The ideal overseer was meant to be a carbon-copy of the planter himself, for if even the smallest detail was overlooked, it could spell the difference between the profit and loss, just as expensive, complicated machine in the mill could be wrecked by a careless workman. At best the overseer was a kind of plant manager who knew that his job depended on the smooth operation of the business, but who in important matters deferred to the decisions of the master-owner and did not take it upon himself to be a surrogate master except in matters where he had received specific authority. Were it not for the real danger of malaria, Arnold would have preferred to remain in Georgia to attend to

19. Richard J. Arnold's instructions to his overseer, J. Swanston, May 22, 1837, Arnold-Screven Papers.

20. Olmsted, *Journey*, 438.

21. Richard J. Arnold to Samuel G. Arnold, Nov. 10, 1824, Welcome Arnold Papers; Journal of Richard J. Arnold, VI, passim, R. J. Arnold papers, hereafter cited as Arnold Journal. In the entry dated Aug. 25, 1825, Arnold recorded his estimate of the value of his slaves on the White Hall and Cherry Hill plantations: "One hundred eight of all ages & both sexes, on an average valued at \$280.—each is \$30,240.—Twenty two di. [ditto] subject to a claim of Mr. Miller for wh. he has brot a suit, & also considering in this estimate the charges against said suit wh. are to be debited other a/c when the suit is closed—Said Miller claim I deem invalid, but considering the 'Glorius Uncertainty of the Law,' shall estimate them at \$130—each 2860 [total] 33,100.—"

22. Olmsted, *Journey*, 486.

23. *Ibid.*, 426–427.

the daily operations of the plantation, particularly during the rice harvesting period in late August and early September. Nonetheless, Arnold not only continued to return to Rhode Island each summer, but he retained his Rhode Island citizenship as well.

By the time of Olmsted's visit in 1853 Arnold had found in Charles W. Ferguson "an uncommonly efficient and faithful" overseer who had been in his employ since 1845. Even so, Arnold told Olmsted, "he would not employ him, even during the summer, when he is absent for several months, if the law did not require it."²⁰ Arnold's distrust of overseers went back to his earliest experience as a plantation owner when he first established the arrangement by which he wintered in Georgia and summered in Rhode Island. Returning from Providence to White Hall in November 1824, after having spent the spring planting his first crop, he discovered that the overseer had poorly managed the harvesting so that the yield was only one-fifth of what it should have been, and, as Arnold noted in a letter to his brother Samuel, "the stupid fellow had not repaired the dwelling house. . . . I cannot build a fire in it, or occupy two of the chambers, the windows having been broken in & now nailed up with rough boards." Furthermore, he was in litigation with the previous overseer, who had managed the plantation for Arnold's wife before their marriage, concerning ownership of twenty-two slaves.²¹ Overseers, Olmsted wrote, summarizing Arnold's view of them, "were almost universally drunken and dissolute, and constantly liable to neglect their duties," Ferguson being the exception.²²

Since Richard Arnold divided his large work force into several "gangs," each with a slave-driver in charge, he designated one of the drivers as head-driver or watchman whose supervisory duties, particularly during the long absence of the master in the summer, were bound to be in conflict with the overseer's perception of his duties. The watchman's duties, Olmsted explained,

were those of a steward, or intendant. He carried by a strap at his waist, a very large number of keys, and had charge of all the stores of provisions, tools, and materials of the plantations, as well as of all their produce, before it was shipped to market. He weighed and measured out all the rations of the slaves and the cattle; superintended the machanics, and himself made and repaired, as was necessary, all the machinery, including the steam engine.

In all those departments, his authority was superior to that of the overseer. . . . His responsibility was much greater than that of the overseer; and Mr. X said, he would trust him with much more than he would any overseer he had ever known.²³

Olmsted was so impressed by the accomplishments and favored position of the current watchman, Amos Morel, that he saw him as a paradigm of the best that the slave system had to offer and his master as the paradigm of an enlightened slaveholder whose generous paternalism represented the institutions of slavery at its Christian and civilizing best:

Here I see their master, dealing with them as a father might with such children; guarding them sedulously against dangerous temptations, forbidding them to indulge in bad practices, rewarding the diligent and obedient, and chastising the perverse and indolent; anticipating and providing for their wants; encouraging them in the provident use of their little means of amusement, and comfort, and luxury; all the time furnishing them the necessary support of life; caring diligently for them in sickness; and only when they are of good age and strength, so long as he is their guardian, demanding of them a certain amount of their labor and assistance to increase his own comforts, provide for his age.²⁴

Eliza Harriet Allen could not have defended her brother in stronger language, but Olmsted was not defending slavery: "Were but all Slavery this, and were but this all of Slavery!" he added. As he had written in an earlier letter to the *New-York Daily Times*, the effect of perpetual slavery "is at war with progress, with enlightenment, with Christianity," and that by offering no hope of freedom it contributes to "the general degradation of manhood, the training of cowardice and imbecility, or duplicity of mind, the constraint upon the free development of individuality of character, and the destruction of the sense of high individual responsibility" in the slave.²⁵

The portrait Olmsted sketched of Amos Morel's rise from a poor slave to a rich, powerful watchman was, however, an idealized one based on information provided him by Arnold (who naturally wished to show the facts in their best light). Actually Morel was both the beneficiary and the victim of the double standard of values inherent in the slave system. For example, the arrangement by which he was sent to Savannah was not as idyllic as Olmsted suggested. Morel, having the basic skill of the blacksmith trade on the plantation, was hired out for wages at the age of sixteen to a Mr. Robinson, a blacksmith in Savannah. He had a marketable skill, and he was hired out for money (twenty dollars per month, two dollars of which Arnold then paid Morel as his "wage"). Following similar arrangements, planters in the area often hired out extra field hands, carpenters, or house servants, particularly if the families went north for the summer months and closed down their mansion houses. By May 1839, Arnold was collecting \$1.25 a day for the plantation account from Morel's employment in Savannah.²⁶ Morel was shrewd enough to take advantage of the system and intelligent enough to learn the machinist's trade so that he was even more valuable to his master; but it was not bad habits, as Olmsted indicated, that ended Morel's career in Savannah in 1845. Rather, he was called back to the plantation when Arnold purchased a steam engine for his thrashing and pounding mill, shipping it all the way from Providence, and required Morel's skill with machines to keep the engine operating.

By 1853 when Olmsted met him, Morel had reached the pinnacle of his power and prestige on the plantation, having assumed the position of watchman, but his position brought him into an inevitable conflict with Ferguson, the overseer. On the one hand, the overseer's duties

24. Letter #28, *New-York Daily Times*, July 8, 1853. This passage was not included in Olmsted's *Journey*.

25. Letter #26, *New-York Daily Times*, June 21, 1853.

26. *Arnold Journal*, May 5, 1837, VII, p. 404.

27. Amos Morel to Richard J. Arnold, June 22, 1852, R. J. Arnold Papers.

28. Morel to Arnold, June 2, 1853, R. J. Arnold Papers. For a detailed account of the Ferguson-Morel feud see Charles Hoffman and Tess Hoffmann, "The Limits of Paternalism: Driver-Master Relationships on a Bryan County Plantation," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, LXVII (1983), 321-335.

29. Olmsted, *Journey*, 711.

30. Morel's "wages" were entirely dependent on Arnold's charity in the form of gifts or credit rather than a matter of legal contract as with the overseer. A slave could not legally "own" money or property in Georgia, and the one thing that Morel could not buy, no matter how many wages he received, was his freedom. It was not until after the Civil War that he worked for monetary wages on the Arnold plantations, his skills as an engineer still needed.

31. Arnold Slave List, Jan. 1, 1858, R. J. Arnold Papers. The total number of slaves listed was 199.

32. Letter #24, *New-York Daily Times*, June 14, 1853.

were spelled out in a legal contract; on the other hand, the watchman's authority and his privileges depended entirely on his ability to please his owner and remain in his master's favor. Morel instinctively recognized this distinction when he wrote to Arnold in Providence in June 1852: "Ples to rite to mr ferguson and tell him the man that cannte plesse my Boy Amos cannte plesse me."²⁷ A feud between Morel and Ferguson came to a head nearly a year later when Morel threatened to kill one of Ferguson's hogs that had broken from its pen and had eaten thirty-seven of his turkeys; Ferguson, in reply, promised to give Morel 100 lashes with a bear-hide whip if the slave dared to carry out his threat.²⁸

For Olmsted, Morel was the exception that proved the rule about the slave system; slavery, as opposed to free labor, "withholds all encouragement from the laborer to improve his faculties and his skill; destroys his self-respect; misdirects and debases his ambition, and withholds all the natural motives, which lead men to endeavor to increase their capacity of usefulness to their country and the world."²⁹ The reality of Amos Morel was that as a slave he had no legal right to the "wages" Arnold credited him with nor to the money on the books for the turkeys he sold to the plantation.³⁰ As a slave he could own nothing, not the Sunday-best clothes he wore when Olmsted first met him; not the three guns "in his possession"; not the ring of keys he wore as a symbol of his authority; not the watch his master bought for him in Providence from his wages; not even his surname which belonged to a white, French Huguenot family in the area. Everything that distinguished him from all the other slaves on the plantation belonged in law to his master.

The reality of Richard Arnold was that he never freed his slaves, and he never freed Amos Morel, who was too valuable to the smooth operation of Arnold's plantation. For Arnold, as for all slaveholders, slaves became a bookkeeping entry; his 200 slaves represented thousands of dollars of capital assets. His notation on a slave list, compiled in January 1858, reveals the extent to which he assigned monetary value to his slaves without regard to the degradation that was involved in treating another human being as simply another piece of property. As the nation sank deeper into sectional crisis, Arnold noted with ease and assurance that his slave property was, in fact, "valuable, should Congress ever pay for freeing slaves."³¹

Yet it cannot be denied that Arnold was, judged by the standards of his day, a benevolent master, and Olmsted saw no contradiction in characterizing him as "a religious, generous and humane-minded man" and as a New England businessman with a "keen talent for organization and administration" who ran his plantation "under the most economical and profitable management."³² The dual nature of slavery as a socio-economic system and as a paternalistic institution allowed Olmsted and others to bemoan its evils while heralding its virtues. But the duality could never fully be reconciled, despite the passionate attempts by Southern apologists to do so. For instance, slaveholders and



Travel pass, issued at Hilton Head, South Carolina, allowing Richard Arnold, his wife, two servants, and a child with a cold, to go to New York. From the R. J. Arnold Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society. Photograph courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi X3 4863).

Southern polemicists often defended the institution of slavery by arguing that the system benevolently provided care and sustenance for its workers. Unlike free laborers in the North, the apologists pointed out, slaves were housed and fed, in good times and bad, in sickness and in health, in youth and in old age. At Arnold's plantation, his agreements with overseers included a standard clause requiring the overseer to attend "to the management of the negroes both well and sick," an instruction that was spelled out as early as 1827. But Arnold's real concern, as revealed in his overseer agreements for 1837 and 1839, was with the possibility of an outbreak of disease among his slaves, for any epidemic (such as small pox or cholera) could have devastating effects upon the operation of his plantation and upon the productivity of his workforce. If the threat of cholera developed in the area, Arnold told his overseer, the slaves were to be moved to safe ground, and "if it should get among my people Daphny & Nan will make the best nurse." According to Arnold's detailed instructions, the threat of cholera should be combated with an increase in rice rations, a ban on fish, and the cutting off of all watermelon vines because "they are bad in cholera."³³

In 1839, Arnold left elaborate instructions for the vaccination of the slave children for smallpox, fearing an outbreak of the disease in the area: "If the scab falls from my child before leaving I will send it to you in a letter which open carefully so as not to lose it. If you do not get it in this way take some from the healthy children at Colon[el] Morris' place just nine days from the day before he left as he vaccinated them on that day & make a list of all you do & of all that take—if they do not take the first time try them a second time."³⁴ In 1837, he had cautioned the overseer to call a doctor should the need arise; Dr. Sanders was available for the Cherry Hill slaves and Dr. Golphin for the White Hall slaves. And Swanston, the overseer, was told to "make the nurse at both places send the child minders into the field every day with a pail of water, morning & afternoon," and to punish anyone who drank ditch water, "for there is no way the dysentery is brought upon a place so soon as by drinking ditch water."³⁵

Was this concern for the health of his slaves a compassionate, humanitarian gesture or a calculated means of protecting his investment?

33. Richard J. Arnold's instructions to his overseer, J. Swanston, May 22, 1837, Arnold-Screven Papers.

34. Richard J. Arnold's instructions for the year 1839 to his overseer, Mr. Sanford, Arnold-Screven Papers.

35. Richard J. Arnold's instructions to his overseer, J. Swanston, May 22, 1837, Arnold-Screven Papers.

36. Allen Journal, Apr. 22, 1837, p. 26.

37. Olmsted, *Journey*, 424.

38. *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, II, 155.

39. Arnold Journal, Apr. 1 and Apr. 15, 1837, VII, pp. 399–400.

Unsurprisingly, Eliza Harriet Allen believed that compassion and Christian charity motivated her brother. In her diary, she emphasized that visiting the sick among the slaves was one of the heavy responsibilities that rested on the shoulders of the planter and his wife, noting that she had missed the Arnolds one morning because they both had gone "early to Cherry Hill to see a sick woman."³⁶ Olmsted, however, revealed that Arnold was careful not to allow malingering slaves to use illness as an excuse for shirking their work. Accompanying Arnold on a daily round of inspection, Olmsted saw him order a youth back to work after deciding that the slave's complaint of a stomach ache was a feint.³⁷

Olmsted, in fact, was so impressed with Arnold's plantation that he considered it "a model of what he [Olmsted] believed slavery should be in America—a benevolent, patriarchal and civilizing institution."³⁸ Certainly it is true that Arnold allowed his slaves to keep guns for hunting even though Georgia law forbade it. It is also true that on the few occasions that Arnold bought or sold individual slaves, he did so for reasons that appear to be humane. On the same day that Eliza Harriet Allen arrived in Savannah, for example, Arnold had agreed to pay \$2,395.80 to the estate of Mrs. Anne Pray for the purchase of two slave families, "they being related to my people," one of whom included Sally, the wife "of my man Abraham," and her two children. He did not want to buy Lizzett, "she being a cripple," and he offered her fifty dollars "if she would choose another Master." Lizzett refused, pleading for Arnold to purchase her and her children, and Arnold, knowing she was Sally's sister, finally consented. Despite his apparent softheartedness, his sharp business sense probably helped to persuade him to acquire the two slave families, for he received a 10 percent reduction on the purchase price "in conformity to Mrs. Pray's Will," a provision that Mrs. Pray had included in order to induce "humane masters" to take both families.³⁹ Surely Arnold realized that the cost of buying and supporting one crippled slave would later be offset by the productivity of the remaining members of the family.

The double standard of morality by which Richard Arnold functioned as a paternalistic slaveholder and Christian gentleman is nowhere better illustrated than in his attitude toward slave marriages. Arnold discouraged his slaves from marrying "off the place," but did not forbid such marriages as did most large slaveholders. The economic reasons for discouraging marriages off the plantation were made plain in an exchange of letters between Arnold and Colonel Lewis Morris in 1847. When Arnold asked to purchase a slave named Lissy, Morris answered that she had married one of Arnold's slaves "without my knowledge" and he explained that he was reluctant to sell any slave "only to gratify the desire of Man and Wife to be together." In reply, Arnold tried to bargain with Morris:

I think there must be some mistake with regard to the value of such a woman as Lissy or any other woman that is a field hand in

Charleston—If it is otherwise they [sell] much higher there than in Savh where she would not bring more than \$500—& probably nor more than \$450—For altho I do not doubt she is—, strictly prime as you state, yet you know she is undesired. I however have determined to unite them as man & wife & if on reflection & further inquiry, you do not consider the price mentioned by you as more than her real value, & will take less, I must pay the \$600.— You will please send me a Bill of Sale after satisfying yourself as to the price together with an order for Lissy, and I will [pay] you the amount on receiving her.⁴⁰

In the end he paid the full \$600 for Lissy. Whether or not Arnold really believed he was paying Morris “more than her real value,” the value of his “property” doubled on July 26, 1847, when Lissy gave birth to Cora, thus increasing the number of Arnold’s slaves from 202 to 203.⁴¹

In 1853, Julia Tolman described in considerable detail the marriage of two other slaves at White Hall—Peter, a carpenter, age thirty-two, and Rhina, a field hand, age twenty-three:

Last week two of Mr. Arnold’s negroes from Cherry Hill were married at Whitehall—*Peter* and *Rinah*. We all saw them married, and then they all came upon the east piazza and danced a while for my edification, as I would not go to the house where they were going to dance. They danced to a fiddle and tambourine. Mr. Arnold is going to get a set of new instruments before the next wedding. They had a grand supper after the dance of rice, hominy, potatoes, turkeys, meats, and plain cake, with two good sized loaves of Bride’s cake frosted and sprinkled with the gayest sugar plums Mrs. A could find. Mrs. A always provides cakes and a supper and a new dress for the Bride and a new suit for the groom, and they looked quite stylish I can assure you. Their dancing was amusing. Some danced as gracefully as any white person I ever saw and some took all sorts of steps, but they all kept the most *perfect* time; they got so excited sometimes, it seemed as though they wouldn’t be able to stop. Their singing too is worth hearing; many have melodious voices. The choir at the church where Mr. A’s family attend is composed of the negroes. We concluded at the night of the wedding that their performances were equal to the *Chrysties*.⁴²

Although slave marriages were not legal, Julia Tolman regarded the one she had witnessed as a Christian relationship sanctified by the preacher and the church. However, it was inherent in the duality of the system that at the same time Arnold sanctioned the marriage, provided the food for the festivities, and paid for the preacher, he also boasted to Olmsted of “a steady increase of his negro stock of five percent per annum,” as though he were breeding cattle. It would be incomprehensible to the nineteenth-century mercantile mind that separated Mammon from God to see any irony in the fact that on the same day that Julia Tolman wrote from White Hall to her cousin in New York about

40. Lewis Morris to R. J. Arnold, Jan. 14, 1847; Arnold to Morris, Jan. 20, 1847, Arnold-Screven Papers.

41. Richard J. Arnold’s Plantation Journal, Feb. 20, 1847, Arnold-Screven Papers.

42. Julia Tolman to Frank Hagadorn, Feb. 7, 1853, Hagadorn-Wells Papers.

43. Olmsted, *Journey*, 418–419; Arnold Journal, Feb. 17, 1853, VIII, p. 254.

44. Allen Journal, Apr. 12 and Apr. 17, 1837, pp. 19, 22.

45. Olmsted, *Journey*, 442–445.

46. Deed, Richard J. Arnold to Thomas Clay Arnold, May 7, 1861, Arnold-Screven Papers.

47. William Amory to B. R. Curtis, Feb. 18, 1865, R. J. Arnold Papers.

48. Actually the Arnold family was reunited with William Eliot, who had been taken prisoner by the Union army, before the end of the war. He was released "on solemn parole of honour" to his cousin, Samuel Greene Arnold, a parole that was approved by President Lincoln. See Henry B. Anthony and William Sprague to Abraham Lincoln, Feb. 24, 1865, Lincoln Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence.

the wedding, Arnold recorded in his account book under "Family Expenses," three dollars as a contribution to the Christian mission in China and four dollars for eggs and a terrapin bought from the plantation slaves.⁴³

To Eliza Harriet Allen, eggs were a gift "I must not refuse," and although she may have been puzzled the first time she received a baker's dozen of such a common domestic commodity from Thomas Savage Clay's slaves, she was prepared the next time, having "brought some pieces of calico &c in return."⁴⁴ Eggs were a dime a dozen on the Arnold plantation, for they constituted "a circulating medium" that could be exchanged for cash, at their par value of twelve for a dime, according to Olmsted. To Olmsted, eggs were a symbol, for they were evidence not only of Arnold's paternalism but also evidence of the practicality of educating "the negro for taking care of himself, in freedom." In paradise "when any man has a balance to his credit equal to his value as a slave, let that constitute him a free man."⁴⁵

But the paradise Olmsted described was fragile. As threats of Southern secession mounted in 1860, Richard Arnold faced a personal dilemma. As a Northerner, he feared the expropriation of his land and slaves if war broke out; as a Southerner, he opposed secession as a prudent course. When Georgia did secede from the Union in January 1861, Arnold clung to the Southern half of his identity, hoping that the Peace Convention of 1861—to which his nephew and son-in-law, Samuel Greene Arnold, was a delegate—might yet save the day. The outbreak of war, however, ended all hope of compromise, and Richard Arnold had to choose between his two selves. On May 7, 1861, three weeks after the firing on Fort Sumter, Arnold sold all his land and slaves in Georgia to his son, Thomas Clay Arnold, and returned north to Newport, where he remained for the duration of the war.⁴⁶ In Newport, he tended to his business interests in the North and defended himself by using terms that revealed his inner conflict. He was, as he told others, "a Union man although a Southern planter."⁴⁷

The Arnold family was symbolic of a divided nation at the beginning of the Civil War. Although Richard Arnold himself chose to remain loyal to the Union, two of his sons stayed in Georgia during the war and supported the Confederacy: Thomas Clay Arnold, as a slaveholding planter and erstwhile private in the Confederate army, and William Eliot Arnold as a member of the 7th Regiment Georgia Cavalry led by Colonel Joseph McAllister (a neighbor of the Arnolds and the largest slaveholder in the county). The Arnold brothers considered themselves Southerners, Georgians first and foremost, even though they both had been born in Providence. The two worlds of Richard Arnold had separated like his family, and it was not until the end of the war that the family was reunited in Newport, having survived the division of war.⁴⁸

At war's end, Richard Arnold, in his seventieth year, decided not to spend the remainder of his life in Newport on his estate, Sunny Lawn. Instead, he bought back his land from his son Thomas and invested

thousands of dollars in restoring White Hall and Cherry Hill plantations to their former splendor and productivity.⁴⁹ The man who some forty years earlier had doubted the wisdom of investing any capital in Georgia decided after the war to invest so heavily in rice planting there that his daughter, Louisa, feared for her inheritance: "Uncle Willie [William Talbot] told me not long ago that they were sinking thousands every year in rice planting & Grandpa was taking property from here [i.e., Providence] & from the west & sinking it at the South—and it did not seem right to him but he did now know what could be done about it."⁵⁰

Arnold died in Providence on March 11, 1873. In a moment of religious questioning he came close to expressing by implication some doubts about his double life as a Northerner who owned slaves in the South. In one of his last letters written from White Hall in February 1872, he told his daughter, Mary Cornelia: "I know you constantly pray for your dear Father. He is in need of those prayers now more than ever not being at all satisfied with my own actions. I read my Bible a great deal [and] have no difficulty in believing fully in Jesus Christ & that is the only way I can be saved. . . . Yet I feel as if I had no interest in the Holy Spirit, and that something must be radically wrong with me."⁵¹ The duality of his life was resolved in death, for his ashes were consigned "to his native soil" in Rhode Island.⁵² He was buried in Swan Point Cemetery in Providence beside his wife, Louisa Caroline, the only one of the family who truly died in exile from her beloved White Hall, where she had been born. Their sons, Thomas Clay Arnold and William Eliot Arnold, never left the South and were buried in Georgia.

49. Early in November 1865, Thomas Clay Arnold signed legal papers in Newport selling the plantation land back to his father for twenty-five dollars and "other considerations." The Arnolds feared expropriation of the land under Sherman's "Special Field Order No. 15" of Jan. 15, 1865, which declared that the abandoned rice fields from Charleston, South Carolina, south along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, to the country bordering the St. John's River in Florida, were "reserved and set apart for the settlement of the negroes now made free by the acts of war and the proclamation of the President of the United States." White Hall and Cherry Hill plantations lay right in the middle of this area. Thomas Clay Arnold, however, continued to run the plantations, his father providing the capital. On Sept. 12, 1867, after the danger of expropriation had passed, Richard Arnold sold back to his son Thomas the plantations for the sum of \$75,000, writing off the "loss" of "Hands and Stock &c" in the account books to the sum of \$100,000, the value Richard Arnold placed on his "property" (i.e., the slaves freed by proclamation, cattle driven off by Sherman's army, and buildings destroyed during the war). Arnold Journal, XI, p. 449.

50. Louisa C. Arnold (Mrs. Samuel G.) to Louisa ("Luly") Arnold (her daughter), Mar. 4, 1870, Arnold-Appleton Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

51. Richard J. Arnold to Mary Cornelia Arnold Talbot, Feb. 12, 1872, R. J. Arnold Papers.

52. Arnold's obituary, written by Zachariah Allen appeared in the *Providence Journal*, Mar. 12, 1873. See also Allen's diary, Mar. 11, 1873, Zachariah Allen Papers, R.I. Hist. Soc.

Book Reviews

Rhode Island: The Independent State. By GEORGE H. KELLNER and J. Stanley Lemons. "Partners in Progress" by LINDA LOTRIDGE LEVIN. (Woodland Hills, Calif.: Windsor Publications, published for the Rhode Island Historical Society, 1982. 224 pp. Illustrations and index. \$24.95.)

Can a "coffee table" history book, conceived by a private publisher for profit and backed by the Rhode Island Historical Society with the hope of gain, be good history? Can a survey of Rhode Island history severely limited in length and controlled in style to appeal to the general reader be good history? Can a volume sponsored by the big businesses, banks, and educational institutions of the state be good history? In this instance, the answer is an emphatic "Yes."

George Kellner and Stanley Lemons, both professors of history at Rhode Island College, have produced a history of this state that every person in public life, every citizen interested in the present and future of this state, should read. The authors have held to the highest standards of the profession in telling the story of the three and a half centuries since Roger William came to the headwaters of Narragansett Bay. Much of that story is well known, told by Arnold, Field, Bicknell, Carroll, Tanner, Gleason, and McLoughlin in varying degrees of detail. But Kellner and Lemons have not simply rehashed the familiar tale in the old patterns. They have reshaped it, changing the emphasis from the colonial period to that since the Civil War. They have brought forward new information, not commonly seen in the older standard accounts. And they have made their own independent assessments of persons and events, certainly appropriate for a history of "The Independent State."

The change of emphasis is easily illustrated. Only the first three of the thirteen chapters in the volume are devoted to the colonial and Revolutionary periods. Thus, only thirty pages (about one-quarter of which are given to illustrations) provide a much-compressed version of the founding, development, and struggle for independence of the settlements around Narragansett Bay. In sharp contrast, about 110 pages (again with about one-quarter of the space used for illustrations) cover the nearly two centuries since Rhode Island reluctantly ratified the federal Constitution. The story is thus brought right down to the present day, an unusual achievement for any historians.

The chapter titles also illustrate the distinctiveness of this volume. "The Polyglot State" traces the streams of immigration that by 1920 made Rhode Island first in the nation in the percentage of foreign-born and native-born of foreign and mixed parentage, a distinction it re-

tained in 1950. Kellner, who is the director of the Ethnic Heritage Studies Project at Rhode Island College and who teaches a course on American immigration, has made a particular contribution here, as the impact of immigrants on the economic, cultural, religious, and political life of Rhode Island is clearly delineated. Not so highlighted, but equally important, is the recognition of women and blacks in this state's history, clarified by the insights Lemons has brought from his course on women in American history and his published work on feminism in the 1920s and on the black experience. The chapter on "The Providence City-State" is enriched by the extensive research the two authors did for their successful multi-media production entitled "Providence: A Century of Greatness, 1832-1932." A chapter on "The Playground of New England" tells of the growth of recreation as an important element in the life of today's Rhode Island. "The Patriotic State" reports on the role of Rhode Island and its people in the wars of the nation, but equally important, describes the impact of those wars on the state's economic and social structure. The final chapter, "Revival and Visions," reports such significant new developments as the historic preservation movement, the effort to develop a more favorable business climate, recognition of the vital importance of wetlands and the necessity for their protection, the struggle to rebuild the blighted cores of the older cities, and the efforts to control urban sprawl.

Complementing the text, and adding greatly to the interest and effectiveness of this history, are many and varied pictures. The numerous black-and-whites are followed by a rich section in full color, celebrating the diversity of the state and its historical experience. Especially noteworthy are the excellent captions for the pictures, for they not only identify but explain the reason for the selection, making the illustrations truly an extension of the text.

Separate from the main text, although presented as chapter fourteen, is the section entitled "Partners in Progress," researched and written by Linda Lotridge Levin, a former staff member of the Rhode Island Historical Society. Brief sketches of forty-one banks, insurance companies, newspapers, colleges and universities, manufacturing and other business firms that supported publication of the volume, not only tell their histories in abbreviated form, but also seek to relate them to the history of the state as a whole.

Handsomely produced, this volume will be an ornament on any coffee table. More important, the combination of text and illustrations, made accessible by a good index, provides an excellent brief survey of the history of the state. Because it is different in conception, organization, and format from William McLoughlin's *Rhode Island: A Bicentennial History* (1978), it complements rather than supersedes that volume. In the two, Rhode Islanders have available a splendid pair of histories that should be read by all.

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