



# Rhode Island History

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# Rhode Island and the American Nation

Albert T. Klyberg

Pride among the American states, it would seem, is a bountiful, natural resource which defies the laws of depletion. State nicknames—the endless Guinness race for firsts, biggest, most enduring—are all part of American folklore. We all know that Virginia is for lovers, that North Carolina is a vale of humility between two mountains of conceit, that California is for dreamers, that Kansas is where the West begins. We associate Ohio with buckeyes, Connecticut with nutmegs and constitutions—the land of steady habits, and so forth. Texas seemingly is afflicted with an enlarged goiter of braggadocio, while Rhode Island suffers with an inferiority complex despite its claim to be sole proprietor of the Atlantic Ocean.

At times of significant anniversaries, however, it is not unseemly to take stock, to make assessments, to observe circumspectly, and to note with appropriate reserve one's achievements, one's accomplishments, and the contributions to what James Bryce described as the American Commonwealth. Such an occasion for Rhode Island is the marking and commemoration of its 350th year.

First, let's deal with those archetypal Rhode Islanders, who, in a manner of time-honored dissent, have expressed their doubts that 1986 really marks the 350th anniversary of Rhode Island. Rhode Island has always had its share of legal hair splitters who relegate other world-class caustics to the farm team, and who have performed the delicate dissection of fine points without

benefit of laser technology or antisepsis at the drop of a hat—unless they are of a Quaker persuasion, in which case they do it with their hats on. The art of hair splitting in Rhode Island was never raised to a productive enterprise like hair cloth manufacture, but was left largely as a cottage industry to be shown off, as it were, like a prize preserve at a fair during those frequent and incessant long distance exercises of the lung and larynx, known in Rhode Island as town meetings. One might also observe that given all of the black crepe Rhode Islanders have bedecked themselves over the years, there must be some secret millionaires in that corner of the textile industry.

To the doubters, gainsayers, curmudgeons, and novitiate devotees of the muse Clio who claim Rhode Island really wasn't an entity until the Patent of 1644, the Portsmouth assembly of 1647, the Charter of 1663, or the restoration of the Charter in 1694, I say, "cool your quills," cap your vitriol. The evolution of this community of Rhode Island began in June of 1636 with Roger Williams's initial settlement of Moshassuck and proceeded with an inexorable, organic—though not always visible—progression to Aquidneck and Shawomet. Although functioning without official royal sanction, Providence begat Portsmouth, Portsmouth subdivided into Newport, and Gorton's settlement at Shawomet derived from all three. Williams early on demonstrated that he was not only a citizen of Providence, but by grace, the sufferance, the permission of the

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New Jersey bred, Al Klyberg came to Rhode Island following college and graduate studies in Ohio and Michigan. While cataloguing manuscripts in Ann Arbor's William L. Clements Library, he became a fan of Rhode Islanders Nathanael Greene and Oliver Hazard Perry. Now in his twen-

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tieth year at Rhode Island Historical Society, he teaches the state's history in evening courses at the University of Rhode Island and Providence College. This essay was originally presented as the address at the Society's 1986 annual meeting.

native Narragansetts also a freeman of the whole country—nothing else could explain the ease with which he set up a trading post at Wickford or raised goats on Prudence Island. Rhode Island—whatever its reversals in its natal days of the seventeenth century—began in the spring of 1636 at the spring of Providence. It is this beginning that we observe now three and one-half centuries later.

Although my main thrust deals with Rhode Island's contribution to the American nation, and is not a review of the historical turning points of our state's history, nonetheless some attention needs to be paid to the incredible durability of this community, this most unusual of social contracts, the "lively experiment" which was a long-shot wager in the survival sweepstakes of the founding of American colonies.

That we are here 350 years later is amazing enough, never mind the shape we're in. No one thought Rhode Island would survive as an entity. Even the original settlers themselves were not really certain about survival; the most optimism they could muster is expressed in the motto, "Hope." Rhode Island was a maverick interloper lodged between Connecticut and Massachusetts Bay, buffered somewhat by Massachusetts' client vassal, the Plymouth Colony. Its existence challenged immediately by Massachusetts and Connecticut, and without standing or portfolio before the Crown and Parliament, Rhode Island had to worry that Williams's delicate diplomacy with the natives would not be upset by the land-hungry members of the early community like William Harris, who had a generous view of the upper reaches of the Pawtuxet River, Providence's western boundary. If all this was not enough, the very nature of the earliest settlers was to put it mildly: unsettling. Fiercely independent, suspicious and hostile to authority, possessed by the period's full repertoire of religious nostrums, this was hardly the group one would bet on to make the compromises and accommodations necessary to founding a harmonious community. In the midst of all the external threats to the colony's existence, the barely contained, perpetual, internal turmoil would have warned off potential in-

vestors who might have cast their economic lot with this corporation.

All dangers, internal flaws, and conspiracies notwithstanding, however, Rhode Island survived its first century. At one point or another, every one of these aforementioned potential threats materialized and challenged its existence (sometimes more than once) and were overcome. The boundaries between Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut were resolved in Rhode Island's favor. Its lack of standing as part of the British Empire was corrected, not once, but three times. Rhode Island emerged with enormous independent status, virtually a free and independent republic, with guarantees and protections particularly in the area of religious liberty that were practically unheard of anywhere else in the old, or new, worlds. Although the mainland settlements were burned to the ground during King Philip's War, the colonists rebuilt. And the instability stemming from a lack of a central, powerful government, as opposed to a loose association of independent towns, was eventually rectified.

Massachusetts and Connecticut in their smug certitude that they each were ordained by God to be a beacon on a hill, to lead both the old and new worlds to a righteous order, proclaimed the advent of the New England way—a model for conducting community life. However, more of the attributes of the Rhode Island way of doing things became the "American way" than those of her sister colonies. Some of Rhode Island's inferiority complex may be laid to the campaign of ridicule and vilification waged by her neighbors. Recent scholarship suggests that in spite of this scorn and derision Rhode Island was probably more of a *part of* than *apart from* New England than might have been previously appreciated. After all, argues Bruce Daniels, if Rhode Island were truly so different from the other New England colonies it would not have been much of a threat to them, but because Rhode Island was not so different and because "Rhode Islandism"—that is, religious toleration and participatory democracy—could be so attractive, yes even seductive, to newcomers in Connecticut and Mas-

sachusetts, these colonies worried that their inhabitants might be inclined to follow the practices of the Narragansett Country. This probably explains why the campaign to stamp out Rhode Island was so intense.

Strictly from a point of economic jealousy, however, Massachusetts and Connecticut belatedly recognized what a true garden of New England was to be had in the Narragansett Country. While the Puritans in the neighboring colonies couldn't stomach Roger Williams's notions of soul liberty, apparently they had little difficulty getting down the beef and mutton produced here. Carl Bridenbaugh likens it to the instance of neighborly jealousy found in the Old Testament of the Bible, the envy for Naboth's meadow. Verrazano in 1524 had been the first to recognize the potential of the mild climate of Narragansett Bay, the potential fruitfulness of the bay islands and abutting mainland. It was because of this agricultural advantage that the first Rhode Islanders survived. They didn't make their living going door-to-door selling religious pamphlets; they were farmers and cattle raisers. Rhode Island's survival hung on nature's bounty. It became a garden of farms and a place of great trade.

Not all of this was "providential circumstance," however. One of the reasons for Rhode Island's prosperity stemmed directly from its principles of religious liberty. When Quakers and Jews were turned away from other colonies, they were welcomed here. Both of these groups had extensive trading contacts with their co-religionists in England, Europe, and South America. Religious liberty in Rhode Island provided an avenue to economic independence; toleration paid dividends in business advantage. Liberty of conscience opened paths to a liberal commerce.

Rhode Island's example of religious liberty, of the separation of church from state, its toleration of difference, its tradition of respect for an individual's right to practice different religious actions is a major contribution to a fundamental American tradition. To be sure, it was not always done here without compromise, lapse, or insincerity, but neither has the record nationwide been unblemished. Perhaps Roger Williams ex-

pressed his insight best in a letter to the town of Providence likening the community to a ship.

The captain has the right to summon passengers and crew alike to perform duties to keep the ship afloat in a storm and on course. But the captain, wrote Williams, has no right to compel the passengers' attendance at ship's prayers. Be they Protestant, Papist, Turk, or Jew, Williams saw no community need to subject individuals to a religious experience which goes against their traditions or consciences.

Williams was not alone in this view. It was shared by all the Rhode Island founders: Anne Hutchinson, William Coddington, John Clarke, Samuel Gorton, and William Harris. It was part of the Patent, part of the Portsmouth compact, the great charter from Charles II. It was the central community tenet. Thus it was in 1657 that Rhode Island's first governor, Benedict Arnold, could reply to Massachusetts' demand that the Quakers in Rhode Island be driven away, "we have no law amongst us whereby to punish any for expressing their own views of religion." Thus, it was not just a radical notion of Roger Williams, but the policy of the colony to respect the "soul liberty" of all comers and to keep a wall of separation between the affairs of government and the functioning of religious bodies. This was Rhode Island's earliest and perhaps the most important contribution to our nation.

Some historians have sought to deny Rhode Island this honor. They argue that the policy of Rhode Island was unique in its seventeenth-century context, that it was uninfluential beyond its time and boundaries. Historians of the drafters of the United States Constitution have pointed out that whereas Williams sought to preserve the purity of religion from corruption by the state, Thomas Jefferson was concerned that church interference could corrupt the state. Our own investigations satisfy us that Rhode Islandism was not lost to the American tradition in the intervening century. Provisions for religious liberty in the charter of Carolina were granted by King Charles II two years after the Rhode Island charter. The wording of the Rhode Island charter appears in documents issued by colonial proprie-



The principle of religious liberty, so vital to America's identity, first found legal expression in Rhode Island's charter of 1663, shown here in part. RIHS Collection (RH X3 2289).

tors: "The Concession of 1664 of New Jersey," and the "Concessions of the Proprietors of Carolina of 1665." The Fundamental Laws of West New Jersey of 1677 provided "that no men, nor number of men upon earth, hath power or authority to rule over men's consciences in religious matters." Similar sentiments are found in the Carolina Charter of 1669, in the Pennsylvania Frame of Government of 1682, Penn's Charter of Privileges of 1701, and the Fundamental Constitutions of East New Jersey of 1683.

There is no evidence that Jefferson read Roger Williams's "Bloudy Tenet of Persecution," but this pamphlet and others were known to John Milton and the English Whig political philosophers like Algernon Sidney and John Locke whose ideas of the rights of Englishmen influenced Jefferson and Madison. Even more to the point, the issue of church and state being kept at arms length is as current as the daily newspaper. Public pronouncements by religious groups today and prominent clergy commenting on issues ranging from right to life, prayer in the schools, the withholding of medical procedures, and religious symbols on public property are some of the key matters of our time. Rhode Island's commemoration of Roger

Williams's principles might even be more important now than their impact on the Constitution's framers two centuries ago.

A second major area of contribution by Rhode Islanders to the American nation is in the visual arts, aesthetics—both in fine graphic arts, and in craftsmanship of furniture and silver, of commercial design and, particularly, in architecture. If one of Massachusetts's contributions was to give America a rich literary heritage—the writings of Adams, Alcott, Emerson, Dickinson, Frost, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Melville, Parkman, and Thoreau—a veritable feast for the mind, then Rhode Island's contribution I believe is a feast for the eye. I know many will take up cudgels for Rhode Island authors like Lovecraft and Perelman and will note that Edith Wharton, Henry James, and many others prominent in the field of American letters, such as Ezra Stiles and Bishop Berkeley, spent creative periods at Newport, but I don't see Rhode Island's contribution to American literature and intellectual life as extensive, or important, as the contributions of Gilbert Stuart or the nineteenth-century landscape painters. Indeed, I would argue that the work of such artists as Alvan Fisher, Fitz Hugh Lane, George Champlin

Mason, John Frederick Kensett, Martin Johnson Heade, John La Farge, Thomas Worthington Whitrege, Alfred Thompson Bricher, William Trost Richards, and others who created a Narragansett Bay collection is nearly as important as the Hudson River School of landscape artists.

Furthermore, the Newport furniture craftsmanship of the Townsend and Goddard families, the needlework school of Sarah Rogers and Mary Balch, the silverware output of Samuel Casey, Samuel Vernon, the clocks of William Claggett and Nehemiah Dodge place Rhode Island in the first rank of American decorative arts. Few areas of the country have works whose prices have held up so well or whose styles have been reproduced so widely.

In American architecture, where else in the nation, in one place can you examine the full



*These examples of colonial Rhode Island's furniture and decorative arts illustrate a tradition of craftsmanship of the highest quality. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 5774).*

range of work from Peter Harrison's Brick Market, Touro Synagogue, and Redwood Library to McKim, Mead and White's Newport and Narragansett Casinos or the Rhode Island State House? The more than ten thousand other structures in Rhode Island already placed on the National Register of Historic Places—structures that span the economic spectrum from humble mill cottages to palatial mansions—attest to the range and richness of Rhode Island's architectural legacy. Our literature is that of line not verse, the visual expression in brick and stone, not book and story.

The growth of the Gorham Manufacturing Company to be the largest producer of silverware in the country by the end of the nineteenth century as well as the flourishing of the jewelry industry here is but an extension of this contribution. Aided and abetted by one of the best design schools in the country, Rhode Island continues to be a center for all sorts of artistic and design activities far out of proportion to its size and resources.

More sobering, perhaps, has been Rhode Island's contribution to the nation's human misery. If our commitment to toleration and sense of eye contributed to higher, soaring, and uplifting aspects of American life, these contributions were balanced by Rhode Island's participation in the African slave trade and excesses that grew out of the creation of the American factory system. There is no easy, or offhanded, way to account for Rhode Island's contribution to the slave trade. At its peak, 90 percent of all the slaves brought to America were carried in Rhode Island vessels. The American slave trade and the Rhode Island participation in that activity were synonymous, one and the same. Because of the slave trade, one might say that Rhode Island's contribution to the world of American professional sports, to American music, to the pre-Civil War Southern economy was great and substantial, but that is a bit like saying that the Holocaust improved the rail system of Europe. Rhode Islanders engaged in the slave trade from 1709 to 1807; during this century there were 934 documented voyages accounting for transporting 106,544 Africans to the West Indies, the Carolinas, and Newport. That



*Workers leaving the Peace Dale Manufacturing Company, circa 1905. Photo 17 of the Hoxie Collection. (RHi X3 5271).*

slave trading, like privateering, was engaged in because more traditional cargoes and more conventional pursuits were not available to Rhode Islanders, due to the lack of local products of any great quantity or value, hardly justifies trafficking in human beings. The slave trade grew out of the West Indian trade, the desire on the African Coast for Rhode Island rum, and the need in the West Indies for inexpensive labor.

The story of Rhode Island and the factory system has a much less sinister cast. The first successful organization of labor, capital, and machinery on the banks of the Blackstone at Pawtucket Falls was another major contribution to American life. Factory-made products in myriad form saved labor, provided ease, built the econ-

omy, and created a livelihood for millions. Child labor which persisted into this century and the exploitation of women and immigrant labor had dire effects. For many years universal free education was constrained by the practice of child labor; the factory system's impact on worker health and safety, on family life, and on democracy in the nineteenth century was also severe.

Recent studies, however, suggest that some reasonable balance is necessary in assessing the costs and benefits in human and material terms. Rhode Islanders—men, women, and children—working the early mills were not much worse off than their counterparts working fourteen or fifteen hours on a family farm. Early Rhode Island mill housing was substantially built; village



life—though controlled by the factory owner in nearly all respects—was cleaner and healthier than the cramped and crowded conditions of the huge sweat shops of the early decades of this century. Occupational hazards in the early mills were probably no worse than those faced by seamen, soldiers, or construction workers. For Rhode Island as well as the rest of the nation, manufacturing jobs attracted millions of immigrants to our shores and contributed to a mix of nationalities whose cultural benefits far outweighed the tears and turmoil caused by the abrasive rub of the daily grind.

Rhode Island became America's first industrialized state; it also became the one that perpetually had the most diverse ethnic mix. The refugee tradition begun by Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson continues to Hispanic and Southeast Asian peoples today. Our history is full of instances of petty bias, discrimination, and bigotry; but the amazing thing about Rhode Island is that this society works at all. Another contribution to America—perhaps least measured, let alone understood—is that Rhode Islanders have achieved a viable community composed of more than twenty-one major nationality groups.

At its peak of manufacturing at the turn of this century, Rhode Island's "five industrial wonders of the world"—Corliss Steam Engine Company, Gorham Manufacturing Company (silverware), Nicholson File Company, Brown & Sharpe (machine tools), and the American Screw Company—could boast of being the world's largest producer in each of their respective industries. This greatness rested on several factors: a precocious entry into each of these fields, a crucial inventive advantage, a venturesome spirit of risk-taking, and a dedication to precision manufacturing and sincere product value. Rhode Island products swept up prizes and medals at all the major national and international trade fairs from 1876 to 1914. In addition to the above-mentioned giants, Rhode Island factories were leaders in the manufacture of stoves (Barstow), fire safety equipment (Grinnell), latex paint (Gutta Percha), fasteners (Bostitch), pipes and valves for municipal water systems (BIF), and rubber products (U.S.

Rubber and Davol). The Herreshoff Manufacturing Company combined both aesthetic design and precision manufacturing. Its contribution to the nation was keeping the America's Cup out of the hands of Sir Thomas Lipton by producing one winning cup defender after another. The firm was as equally adept at producing steam yachts and work boats as it was launching the graceful sailing yachts whose clouds of canvas seemed to catch all available air while snatching the breath away from all beholders.

An inventive spirit of seeking solutions to problems impelled someone like Zachariah Allen to create the factory mutual insurance system because conventional marine and fire insurance companies could not, or would not, adapt to the requirements of his industrial properties. Financial institutions of various kinds were created to solve observable needs: The Providence Bank (Fleet) is the nation's third oldest; the Rhode Island Hospital Trust Company (one of the first trust companies in the country) was devised as a financial service to support the community's hospital. The Federal Reserve Banking System was largely the work of Rhode Island Senator Nelson Aldrich, who saw the need to stabilize the country's banks. Other Rhode Islanders like Katherine Gibbs affected the clerical work of the country by raising standards and consciousness of secretarial and office workers. Scientific management was aided by the time/motion studies of Frank B. Gilbreth. Such common phenomenon as the modern day convenience store resulted from the imagination and drive of Cumberland Farm's Haseotes Family. Hasbro's G.I. Joe toys and Mr. Potato Head are household familiars across the country. Even disasters and dying industries under the spell of Rhode Island know-how were transformed into the country's first conglomerate, Royal Little's Textron. Imagination, ingenuity, and living by one's wits with limited resources have been the basis for many Rhode Island success stories and have served as a model for others.

Less self-serving and less motivated by economic advantage has been Rhode Island's record of patriotism in our nation's wars. As a colony,



*General Nathanael Greene (1742–1786) from an engraving based on the painting by C. W. Peale. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 1563).*

Rhode Island earned a reputation as a nest of privateers. In the Revolution some of John Brown's practices may have seemed motivated by self-interest. There is no doubt, however, that his wartime activities would have put him at the end of a British rope. Rhode Island got behind—some say in front of—the Revolution in the purchase of war bonds and certificates. The exploits of individuals like Nathanael and Christopher Greene, Nicholas Cooke, Silas Talbot, Simeon Thayer, Stephen Olney, and William Barton were truly heroic. Nathanael Greene served alongside Washington from the first. He liberated the Southern colonies of Carolina and Georgia and re-established civil government. Christopher Greene and the First Regiment of Rhode Islanders braved the winter campaign against Quebec, and returned from British jails to stymie the Royal Navy's attack on Philadelphia up the Delaware. Their little fort on



*Oliver Hazard Perry (1785–1819). Engraved by J. B. Forrest from the original by J. W. Jarvis. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 5398).*

Mud Island was raked by cannon shot from all sides until, in the words of Thomas Paine, "they had nothing left with which to cover themselves, save their glory." Trenton and Princeton were part of Rhode Island's laurels. Its forces depleted, the General Assembly raised a complement of freed blacks who fought at Newport and in New York state until destroyed in ambush. Olney's Second Rhode Islanders withstood a galling battle of Springfield, New Jersey, and administered a final stroke at Yorktown. Not surprisingly the graveyard at Williamsburg's Governor's palace looks like a branch office of the North Burial Ground. In the naval war, hotheads like Silas Talbot piloted flaming suicide sloops into the midst of the British fleet. United States marines were first landed from the decks of the *U.S.S. Providence* (John Brown's *Katy*).

In the War of 1812 the *Yankee* of Bristol cap-

tured nearly fifty enemy prizes, while Oliver Hazard Perry and his Rhode Island crews carved a fleet out of the forests of western Pennsylvania and sallied out to destroy veterans who had humbled Napoleon. "We have met the enemy, and they are ours: two ships, two brigs, one schooner, and one sloop," he wrote to his army counterpart, General William Henry Harrison. Even in the days before electricity, this news "electrified" the country. Perry's brother, Matthew C. Perry, later opened Japan for the U.S. just as Captain Robert Gray had opened Oregon for claim and trade by discovering the Columbia River.

In the Civil War, more than twenty-five thousand Rhode Islanders volunteered in the army and navy of the Union, making it unnecessary to resort to a draft. Rhode Islanders served in every conceivable area of the war. While military historians continue to argue over the relative merits of General Ambrose Burnside's contributions, there are none who question the magnitude of those rendered by the Providence Marine Corps of Artillery. From the Benefit Street Armory of this privately organized unit came drill training that influenced most of the key New England artillery batteries. Known as the "Mother of Batteries," the Providence Marine Corps of Artillery produced leadership for all of the artillery units from Rhode Island. More important, however, was the rapid fire drill perfected by the unit, which gave the Union army a firepower punch. No one has yet measured the impact of the cruel irony at Gettysburg when the lead elements of Pickett's attacking force hit the one section of the Union line that been trained to load and fire twice as fast as all the other units. In other Civil War related developments, the Builders' Iron Foundry became the country's third largest producer of heavy guns, and the huge gear required to turn the turret of the ironclad *Monitor* was cast at Providence's Corliss Engine Works.

In the Spanish-American War and World War I, Rhode Islanders responded, with significant participation in the so-called Yankee Division. Perhaps, however, it was World War II that saw some of Rhode Island's greatest patriotic contributions. Narragansett Bay first became a "military dis-

trict" and then a "vital war zone." PT boat and anti-aircraft centers and fuel and ammunition storage depots were added to the installations at Fort Adams, the Naval War College, and the torpedo firing range at Goat Island. Protective gun emplacements with overlapping fields of fire were established at Little Compton and Point Judith. Antisubmarine nets were stretched across the entrances to the bay. Quonset Point and Davisville were transformed from a minor summer camp for reservists to the largest military/industrial port on the East Coast, with railroads, highways, hangars, piers, runways, and a host of support facilities. Davisville factories produced the "Quonset Hut," not one of Rhode Island's most distinguished architectural forms, but certainly its most widely distributed.

Elsewhere, at Chopmist Hill, highly sensitive, powerful radio receivers were built so well that they reportedly picked up the transmissions between Rommel's tank commanders in the desert of North Africa. That Rhode Island continues to celebrate VJ Day is not so surprising to those who lived through wartime Rhode Island or have read about what went on through Korea and Vietnam. Even in the latest events of Lebanon and Grenada, Rhode Island suffered more casualties proportionately than any other state.

Finally, however, Rhode Island's greatest contribution to the American nation may be in the example it has set in the arduous task of overcoming adversity. In its history over the last three and one-half centuries, dealing with challenges, overcoming adversity, and survival are a central thread, if not the critical strain, as I see it, to the Rhode Island story. I also happen to think that the theme of "the underdog beating the odds" is central to what is transpiring in Rhode Island today. It is indeed risky for a student of history to become a pundit or forecaster, but anniversaries like the 350th are an occasion for verdicts of history, or summing up, and making sense of the current scene. And, since "risk" itself is part of my point, I would like to venture the following conclusion.

Rhode Island seems poised, perhaps already entered, on a new era of prosperity and optimism

—one perhaps unparalleled since the mid-1920s. Rhode Island seems finally to have emerged from a fifty-year economic decline and stagnation caused by the departure of its economic mainstay—textile manufacturing—and for that matter, much of the rest of its once impressive manufacturing base, the rubber industry and machine tools, foundry work, and steam engine manufacture. Some of this story of decline is complicated and made murky by external national and international events like the Depression of the 1930s and World War II. Some of it was affected by regional developments in New England. However, we are sufficiently distant from the 1920s and 1930s to be able to report certain facts that seem incontrovertible.

By my reckoning in 1941 there were approximately twenty-one manufacturing firms in Rhode Island that employed one thousand or more workers and forty-nine others that employed at least five hundred. Forty years later, in 1981, only two of the former remained; the other nineteen had closed, moved away, or disappeared. Of the forty-nine smaller firms, only seven were left in Rhode Island, and all of these survivors were owned by companies that were directed and managed from beyond the state's borders. Of course in the intervening forty years some Rhode Island companies too small to be counted in 1941 grew larger: A. T. Cross and Hasbro, for example. Others, like Electric Boat, moved into the state. But by any measure, the number of large manufacturing firms in Rhode Island declined dramatically during this period. Now, 1941 is a good year to use as a base to show this dramatic decline in manufacturing. It is a neutral year: most of the weak textile firms had already turned up their toes in the 1930s, and the artificial growth Rhode Island's economy would enjoy from wartime manufacturing had not really hit its stride.

Looking back over these decades of enormous decline in major manufacturing, several observations are available. In Providence, where once the largest employers were factories, today they are Rhode Island Hospital, Brown University, and the state government. Rhode Island has

made a transition to a postmanufacturing economy and its labor force from industry to the service sector. Health care, education, government, and tourism are the state's largest employers, followed by financial service institutions and retailers. The anticipated economic havoc caused by the partial pullout of the naval fleet in 1974 was alleviated by the growth in tourism. Rhode Island Junior College, with only five hundred students in 1945, has become the Community College of Rhode Island with an enrollment of twelve thousand in 1985. Similar changes are reflected at Bryant College, Roger Williams College, and Rhode Island College. Research and development programs such as the Brown Medical School and the oceanographic programs at the University of Rhode Island account for significant aspects of advanced research in our state.

The age of Rhode Islanders exceeds the national average. Many manufacturing workers laid off when the mills closed never took new jobs; they retired. For many years—until the 1980s—Rhode Island suffered out-migration of its young, who sought job opportunities unavailable in their native state.

In the past five years, however, the decline begun in the 1920s has halted and been reversed. The state's figures for unemployment are now among the lowest in the country, though still trailing other states in the region. Real estate property values have soared. Industries like tourism, employing more than seventeen thousand workers, have grown year after year. Projects like the Capital Center and waterfront redevelopment efforts—the most recent in a long series of turnaround attempts dating to the mid-1950s—actually seem to be able to meet expectations.

Rhode Island's comeback efforts may have elements that other areas of the country can learn from, whether they be "rust belt" or "sun belt." The cautionary word "may" has to be employed because Capital Center and the waterfront are far from established successes. Caution needs also to be expressed as to whether efforts to save Narragansett Bay, or to plan carefully for the land use of our rural towns, or efforts to rescue our



*Festivals and parades have helped immigrants remember their roots while informing their fellow citizens of distinctive cultural backgrounds. A St. John the Baptist parade filled Clinton Street, Woonsocket, on a rainy day in 1906. (RHi X3 4397).*

aquifer from hazardous waste and build proper disposal facilities will be successful. In short, we're not there yet.

Rhode Islanders still need to develop a more positive image of themselves and a confidence in their own abilities. Continued efforts to rid the state of organized crime influence and political corruption will contribute positively to Rhode Island's image. History books that ignore these blots on our record in the last fifty years do no service, and only breed cynicism. Another major step that needs to be taken before we can have a truly successful community, though, is large-scale risk-taking by those who have the financial resources to invest in Rhode Island and attract new job-producing enterprises. A combination of faintheartedness, suspicions about potential insider advantage, and just old fashioned conservatism doomed the Greenhouse Compact, but the need for adventurous risk-taking is as true today as it was in 1913 when President William H. P. Faunce of Brown University observed that we

Rhode Islanders "cannot browse upon the past and become fat. We cannot live on inherited wealth, inherited traditions, inherited memories when we should be getting together to create new wealth, to establish new traditions and memories which posterity may cherish."

The lessons of history exemplified by those Rhode Islanders in the seventeenth century who converted the bay islands into lush breeding pens for sheep, or who exploited trading opportunities in the West Indies or China in the eighteenth, or who risked their shipping profits to build factories in the nineteenth are the lessons of daring and enterprise. They were not acts of recklessness or whim, but of insight and ingenuity. I see evidence that Rhode Islanders today still possess that analytical ability and imagination. The wisdom to preserve essential environments is one clue that Rhode Islanders have not lost the keen sense of the mind's eye. Turning down an oil refinery on Jamestown Island and organizing a Coastal Resources Management Council is one

indication of this commitment; rejecting a nuclear power plant in Charlestown is another. The refusal to sacrifice the state's central drinking water source to serve a highway is a third. And preserving the best of our built environment with a College Hill historic district is yet a fourth proof of this continuing commitment.

To some observers all of these developments would seem to be steps to thwart "progress." This progress, however, in each case was a snare and a delusion that would have resulted in a loss of real quality of life. It is reassuring to note that while Rhode Islanders rejected false advancement, they also pursued forward decision making, notably the Capital Center and the river relocation.

Today, you see, as in Rhode Island's beginning, the question is one of vision—not that of a refuge created by Roger Williams for those oppressed for conscience sake, but the vision of the first enterpriser to step foot on our shores, Giovanni da Verrazzano. For the king of France he described a great bay with five small islands in it: "any large fleet could ride safely among them without fear of

tempest or other dangers." He reported going into the interior of the country and finding it "suitable for every kind of cultivation—grain, wine, or oil." He described friendly and generous inhabitants. The land was rich in foodstuffs, "so fertile that any kind of seed would produce excellent crops." He noted the pleasant hills on either side of the bay, "with many streams of clear water flowing from the high land into the sea." Verrazzano called the harbor "Refugio," the refuge. A century later it became safe waters for people driven by storms over religion. His vision of a place of trade and for cultivation is a worthy one for today, as it was in 1524. His notion of being productive and enterprising with the resources given us (either by nature's bounty or human legacy) is a timely reminder today—a final contribution from Rhode Island to the American nation. It is a lesson learned by a community that has consistently opened its arms and heart to others and has been repaid, in turn, by the best ideas of free unfettered minds. Living by our wits and overcoming adversity is the Rhode Island way.

# A Day in the Life of Roger Williams

## Glenn W. LaFantasie

At the outset I should probably confess that this essay is overly ambitious. Any attempt to reconstruct a day in the life of Roger Williams seems doomed from the very start. Although Rhode Islanders honor Williams as a founding father, and though many Americans identify him as this nation's earliest proponent of religious freedom, we actually know very little about him and even less about how he lived from day to day. Historians and biographers have satisfied themselves with chronicling Williams's most famous accomplishments and with analyzing his most profound ideas. As a result, we have come to learn a great deal about the events surrounding his banishment from Massachusetts Bay in 1636, his friendship with the Narragansett Indians, and the Puritan dimensions of his individual piety that led

him to espouse the principles of religious toleration and the separation of church and state.<sup>1</sup>

But what about the man himself? What about the details of Williams's personality and his personal life? What do we know about the contours of Williams's human temperament, about how he spent his time when he was not battling Puritans in Boston or writing treatises in defense of religious toleration? If we claim to know Roger Williams the founding father of Rhode Island, what can we say about Williams the father and husband or Williams the farmer and husbandman?

"Not much" is the answer given most often by Williams's biographers. Although more biographies of him have been written than of any other American figure born before Benjamin Franklin,

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1. Despite all that has been written about Roger Williams, one searches in vain for an adequate treatment of his life and career. The two most recent biographies, which approach Williams from decidedly different directions, fail to probe beneath the surface of his personality and character. And both race through the last twenty years of Williams's life, leaving readers with the impression that he sank into oblivion after 1660. See Samuel Hugh Brockunier, *The Irrepressible Democrat: Roger Williams* (New York, 1940); Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *Master Roger Williams* (New York, 1957). Some recent scholarly studies successfully explore Williams's ideas and beliefs, but generally give short shrift to his life and times. See, for example, Perry Miller, *Roger Williams: His Contribution to the American Tradition* (New York, 1953); Miller, "Roger Williams: An Essay in Interpretation," in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, 7 vols. (New York, 1963), 7: 5-25; Edmund S. Morgan, *Roger Williams: The*

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*Church and the State* (New York, 1967); Sacvan Bercovitch, "Typology in Puritan New England—The Williams-Cotton Controversy Reassessed," *American Quarterly*, 29 (1967), 166-191; Jesper Rosenmeier, "The Teacher and the Witness: John Cotton and Roger Williams," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXV (1968), 408-31; Henry Chupack, *Roger Williams* (New York, 1969); John Garrett, *Roger Williams: Witness Beyond Christendom, 1603-1683* (New York, 1970); W. Clark Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams* (Chicago, 1979). The secondary literature on Williams is listed in a convenient and useful bibliography: Wallace Coyle, *Roger Williams: A Reference Guide* (Boston, 1977). The best historiographical assessment of the literature on Williams is Leroy Moore, Jr., "Roger Williams and the Historians," *Church History*, 33 (1963), 432-51, but see also Nancy E. Peace, "Roger Williams—A Historiographical Essay," *RIH*, 35 (1976), 103-13. Two excellent dissertations that analyze how Williams's historical reputation has changed since the seventeenth century are Donald Scaggs, "Roger Williams in History: His Image in the American Mind" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1972) and Edward Wallace Coyle, "From Sinner to Saint: A Study of the Critical Reputation of Roger Williams" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1974).

these works generally skim over the human facets of his life that would help us to grasp the gleam of his character or the depths of his humanity. The fault, however, does not rest entirely on his biographers' shoulders. As James D. Knowles, Williams's first biographer, pointed out in 1834: "In my further search for information, I soon discovered, that many persons, well acquainted with our early history, knew very little of Roger Williams. In the books, I found almost every important fact, concerning him, stated differently. I was obliged to gather hints from disconnected documents, and to reconcile contradictory assertions; and in fine, my labor often resembled that of the miner, who sifts large masses of sand, to obtain a few particles of gold."<sup>2</sup>

What Knowles was forced to admit was that the surviving documentary record of Williams's life is frustratingly sparse and incomplete. Although numerous documents have come to light since Knowles's time, there are still great gaps in Williams's life story that will probably never be filled. The gaping holes in Williams's correspondence and in other records of early Rhode Island make it impossible for us to view a complete picture of Williams the man.<sup>3</sup>

Other sources—or, rather, the lack of them—have compounded the difficulty we have in seeing him clearly through the prism of the past. If the documentary records tell us less than we would like to know about him, pictorial sources tell us absolutely nothing at all. There are, for example, no surviving portraits or sketches of Williams that can help us to know who he was or what he looked like. Though romantic images of Williams have been produced in abundance by artists of varying talents, all of these works have been based on sheer conjecture or on the popular

perceptions of what we believe the physical attributes of our true heroes should be.<sup>4</sup> Biographers and other scholars thus have been forced to describe Williams's life and times without having the faintest idea of his physical appearance or even his physical presence during some crucial moments in his career.<sup>5</sup> No wonder, then, that these scholarly labors have sometimes resembled the stumblings of befuddled hunters trying to track a shadow through an uncharted wilderness.

So it is with a grave appreciation of the pitfalls and perils that have bedeviled Williams's biographers in the past that I say that my effort to reconstruct a day in his life is overly ambitious. I cannot describe with certitude a typical day in the life of Rhode Island's founding father or even portray with exactitude one particular day in his life from the extant documents and records. With less precision than I would prefer, and with a conscious trepidation that any historian must feel when he moves beyond the domain of direct evidence, I have attempted to sketch out what one day in Williams's life might have been like.

My proposal to assay a day in the life of Roger Williams could equally well have been given the title: "An Experiment in Biographical Paleontology." Relying as one must on scattered references and incomplete sources, the reconstruction of a day or a sequence of days in Williams's life is not unlike the work of a paleontologist who, having discovered the fossilized remains of an unidentifiable jawbone, uses his knowledge of the geological past to hypothesize the size, shape, and living habits of an entire animal from the solitary bone specimen he has found. To be sure, the details of such a reconstruction may not in every instance be precise.

2. James D. Knowles, *Memoir of Roger Williams* (Boston, 1834), xi.

3. For a detailed account of the history of Williams's personal papers see Glenn W. LaFantasie et al., eds., *The Correspondence of Roger Williams*, 2 vols. (Hanover, N.H., forthcoming), 1:xlvi-lxvii.

4. See Sidney S. Rider, "An Inquiry Concerning An Alleged Portrait of Roger Williams," *Rhode Island Historical Tracts*, 2d Ser. (1891), No. 2.

5. For example, no Williams letters have been found for the period from the early spring of 1641 to the summer of 1645—the longest gap in the documentary record of Williams's life. As a result, scholars have been forced to piece together from various scraps of evidence the facts behind his first mission to England in 1644, when he successfully procured a patent for the Providence Plantations colony from Parliament.





*John Winthrop Jr. (1606–1676) from The Winthrop Papers, vol. 3, 1631–1637. Reprinted by permission of the Massachusetts Historical Society.*

Every effort to reconstitute the past—whether done by paleontologist or biographer—can never be perfectly rendered. There will always be questions that the fragmentary evidence cannot answer.

In Williams's case, it has been my desire as the editor of his correspondence to examine his writings with the eye of a biographical paleontologist. My task, as I defined it for myself, was not simply to collect his letters together, transcribe them into clear texts, and explain archaic and arcane passages in the footnotes. What I have tried to do is to come to grips with Roger Williams himself, to reach an appreciation for the man and the shape of his experience. Out of the corpus of

Williams's correspondence, I have sought to convey the essence of his life by reconstructing as fully as I could the historical context of his life as he lived it.

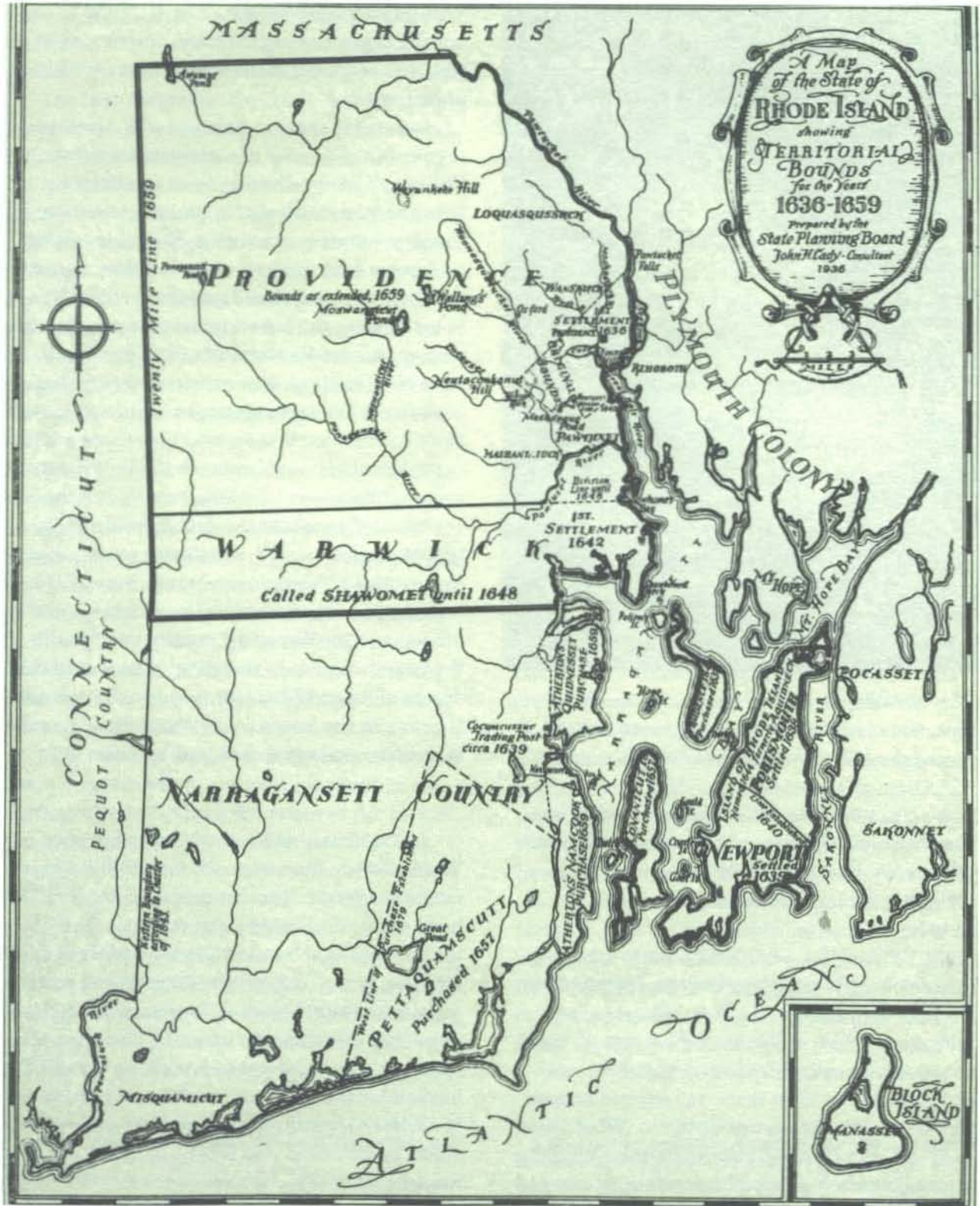
Somewhat more microscopically, I have attempted in this essay to reconstruct a day in Williams's life by drawing upon one letter he wrote to John Winthrop, Jr., in June 1649.<sup>6</sup> To round out my reconstruction, I have also relied on several other primary and secondary sources that help to reveal significant clues about Williams's habits and behavior and that provide us with useful details about what life was like in early New England. Nevertheless, my aim has been to use Williams's letter to Winthrop as my basic source text. It is, in my estimation, a fairly typical example of the communiqués Williams sent to the younger John Winthrop during the late 1640s and throughout the decade of the 1650s. Indeed, the letter itself, which now reposes among the Winthrop Papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston, is unremarkable and innocuous. But its prosaic quality may be just the ticket we need to transport us back into the depths of Roger Williams's world so that we may glimpse, in the frozen moments of the past, some of the circumstantial details of his life.

It was cloudy and wet when day broke on Wednesday, 13 June 1649. For Roger Williams, the rain was a good omen that promised the likelihood of plentiful crops at harvest time. Probably the weather kept him indoors most of the day, allowing him to collect his thoughts and write a reply to the latest batch of letters he had received from John Winthrop, Jr. (1:291). Otherwise, it is impossible to know precisely how he occupied himself for the remainder of this rainy spring day. His letter to Winthrop gives us only a few clues about his activities and almost no hints about his daily routine.

But one fact imparted in the letter is signifi-

6. The letter, dated 13 June 1649, is printed in *LaFantasie*, *CRW*, 1:290–92. All subsequent references to and quotations

from this letter are to this edition and will be noted in the text by page numbers.



John H. Cady's map of Rhode Island's changing boundaries in the first years after its settlement includes the Cocumscussoc Trading Post established by Roger Williams in the late 1630s. (RHi X3 855).

cant. Williams indicated that he was writing his lines from Cocumscussoc, just north of the modern village of Wickford, Rhode Island, where he had established a small trading post in the late 1630s. The exact location of the post is not known, though the matter has aroused some heated debates among local historians. Most likely Williams had set up shop to trade with the Indians to the northeast of Cocumscussoc Brook and close to an inlet that afforded easy access by boat from Narragansett Bay. The extant historical evidence suggests that he erected a rude and simple structure on the site later occupied by Richard Smith's trading post, now called "Smith's Castle."<sup>7</sup>

Although the location of Williams's post remains uncertain, there are a number of sources that can give us a pretty good idea of what Williams's days were like at Cocumscussoc. We know, for instance, that the place itself was remote, far removed from the colony's major settlements at Providence, Warwick, Portsmouth, and Newport. During the late 1640s Williams resided at Cocumscussoc—and not at his home in Providence—for most of the year, usually from late summer to late spring, though occasionally he would leave his post for brief spells to visit his family in Providence or to attend sessions of the colony's General Court in Warwick.<sup>8</sup> For the most part, though, Williams stayed close to Cocumscussoc and worked hard to make his trading venture a going concern.

Indeed, it was financial hardship that probably caused him to devote so much of his time and energy to the trading post. His banishment from Massachusetts Bay in 1636 had brought him to the brink of financial ruin, and ten years later he was still trying to pull himself out of his

persistent indebtedness.<sup>9</sup> The year he spent in England obtaining a parliamentary patent for Providence Plantations had only pushed him deeper into poverty, for the colony had failed to reimburse him for his expenses abroad.<sup>10</sup> Upon his return from England, Williams almost immediately turned his attention to reviving his trading activities at Cocumscussoc. Apparently his efforts paid off: in later life he reported that his trading operation earned him a handsome annual income of about £100, far more than he could have made as a parish minister in Puritan England.<sup>11</sup>

But there were other reasons Williams spent several months at a time at Cocumscussoc—that had little to do with his desire to free himself from debt. Williams was a very private man who cherished his solitude and used it profitably for spiritual reflection and renewal.<sup>12</sup> At Cocumscussoc, Williams found a place surrounded by nature where he could retreat to pursue the intensive soul searching and self examination that he and other Puritans believed were the obligations of every good Christian. There, on the edge of the wilderness, Williams could delve deeply in the spiritual recesses of his soul. There, with the sea and the forests before him, he could attempt to find the hidden secrets of man and God, reestablishing in the process the bonds of his personal relationship with God. There, too, beyond the hubbub and confusion of the everyday occurrences, which in early Providence often erupted into conflicts and clashes among the townsmen, Williams could bring order to his life. Seclusion at Cocumscussoc placed him in command of his daily concerns, freeing himself from the strife of the world.

The political squabbles in Providence and

7. The most authoritative study, which reviews conflicting theories about the post's location and analyzes the pertinent documentary evidence, is Howard M. Chapin, *The Trading Post of Roger Williams* (Providence, R.I., 1933). A recent architectural survey of North Kingstown, including the Cocumscussoc environs, disagrees with Chapin's conclusion, but offers unconvincing evidence to prove its case. See Ellen Weiss, *North Kingstown, Rhode Island: Statewide Historical Preservation Report W-NK-1* (Providence, R.I., 1979), 6, 57.

8. See "Introduction," in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 1:xxv–xlv.

9. On Williams's indebtedness after his banishment from

Massachusetts Bay see the editorial note accompanying his letter to John Winthrop, 24 Oct. 1636?, in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 1:58.

10. See Williams to the Town of Providence, 22 Jan. 1650/51, in LaFantasie *CRW*, 1:328–31.

11. Chapin, *Trading Post*, 14; Williams to an Assembly of Commissioners, 17 Nov. 1677?, in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 2–752.

12. See Glenn W. LaFantasie, "Roger Williams: The Inner and Outer Man," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 16 (1985), 375–94.



"The Landing of Roger Williams," published by Johnson and Fry Company, New York, 1866. (RHi X3 844).

among various factions throughout the colony were enough to drive any reasonable man into the shelter of the peaceful woods. Williams's neighbors and fellow colonists seemed unable to agree about anything. The decade of the 1640s was punctuated by endless disputes over religion, politics, land, and backyard trivialities. Though Williams must have hoped that the colony's parliamentary patent would finally unite the Narragansett Bay settlements once and for all, he was disheartened when the document actually became a political issue in itself that further di-

vided the colonists and provoked new disagreements among them.<sup>13</sup> After having been swept into the vortex of the upheaval happening around him, the constant bickerings finally took a heavy toll on him. More than once during the late 1640s, Williams refused to take part in the turmoil and rejected appeals to arbitrate the differences that had set his fellow colonists against one another.<sup>14</sup> By 1649, he had withdrawn himself almost completely from the public affairs of his town and colony. At the trading post, where he found refuge from the din of politics and the corruptions

13. Dennis Allen O'Toole, "Exiles, Refugees, and Rogues: The Quest for Civil Order in the Towns and Colony of Providence Plantations, 1636-1654" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1973), 310-74; Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York, 1975), 57-64;

James, "Rhode Island: From Classical Democracy to British Province," *Rhode Island History*, 43 (Nov. 1984), 119-35.

14. Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., before 29 Jan. 1648/49, in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 1:271-72.

of mankind, Williams clung desperately to what he called his "beloved Privacie."<sup>15</sup>

Yet it would be a mistake to assume that Williams sought the life of a recluse at Cocumscussoc, wholly removing himself from contact with other human beings. His desire to conduct a prosperous trade with the Narragansett Indians meant that he could not and did not live at Cocumscussoc in complete isolation. Rarely, however, did he wander far from his post unless circumstances demanded it. Under the protocol that evolved in his dealings with the Narragansetts, the Indians who wished to do business with him came to the trading post; Williams did not have to make the rounds of Indian villages throughout southern Rhode Island like a traveling drummer.<sup>16</sup> From what we can tell, it appears that the Indians came freely and frequently to Williams's post to trade their wampum, pelts, corn, and other items for English goods, such as kettles, metal tools and utensils, and cloth.<sup>17</sup> Unlike less scrupulous traders, Williams adamantly refused to trade guns or liquor at his post. He later acknowledged that he had sacrificed profits by scorning the liquor trade, but his moral fiber and his good sense enabled him to carry on a prosperous trade without having to deal in goods that

he believed could only lead the Indians down the path of destruction.<sup>18</sup>

Indians, however, were not his only visitors at Cocumscussoc. Richard Smith and John Wilcox had established trading posts of their own nearby, and Williams must have enjoyed their company from time to time.<sup>19</sup> To keep up his inventory of goods, Williams relied on the frequent visits of itinerant English and Dutch traders who plied the southern New England waters from Salem to New Amsterdam. As a matter of fact, Williams told Winthrop in his letter that John Throckmorton, one of Providence's earliest settlers, had recently stopped off at Cocumscussoc to sell him some Indian corn and wheat that Throckmorton had acquired at Long Island. The price of this produce, he informed Winthrop, was "Extraordinarie deare" (1:291). Other visitors also made their way to the trading post. A group of Winthrop's friends, who had arrived in Rhode Island on a mysterious mission that Williams did not disclose, stayed for a few days with him at Cocumscussoc. Williams notified Winthrop that he had sent the men on to Newport, where they were assisted by the Reverend John Clarke and others (1:290).<sup>20</sup>

From time to time, Williams's children came

15. Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., 28 May 1664, in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 2:527.

16. The nuances of trading practices that developed between Indians and Europeans in southern New England have been largely overlooked by scholars, though a handful of recent studies provide useful discussions of the impact of trade on natives and settlers during the contact period. See T. J. C. Brasser, "The Coastal Algonkians: People of the First Frontier," in Eleanor Burke Leacock and Nancy Oestreich Lurie, eds., *North American Indians in Historical Perspective* (New York, 1971), 64-91; Lynn Ceci, "The Effect of European Contact and Trade on the Settlement Pattern of Indians in Coastal New York, 1524-1665" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1977); Peter Allen Thomas, "In the Maelstrom of Change: The Indian Trade and Cultural Process in the Middle Connecticut River Valley, 1635-1665" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1979); James Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (Oxford, 1981), 118-19, 253-65; Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England* (Oxford, 1982), 51-60, 67-81, 147-57, 201-12; William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983), 91-107. Significantly, Williams recalled in the 1670s that Canonicus, the Narragansett chief sachem, had refused

to trade with him, though he admitted that the sachem had accepted numerous "Goods [and] Mony etc." from him over the years, including some cloth that Williams delivered to Canonicus on his death bed. See Williams to an Assembly of Commissioners, 17 Nov. 1677?, in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 2:752.

17. No inventory survives of the goods Williams exchanged with the Indians, but his storehouse probably contained the usual assortment of manufactured items peddled by other European traders at the time. For a list of trade goods found in Narragansett graves excavated on Conanicut Island see William Scranton Simmons, *Cautantowwit's House: An Indian Burial Ground on the Island of Conanicut in Narragansett Bay* (Providence, R.I., 1970), 159-60.

18. See Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., 19 August 1669, in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 2:591-92.

19. Chapin, *Trading Post*, 16-23; J. Warren Gardiner, "Roger Williams, the Pioneer of Narragansett," *Narragansett Historical Register* 2 (1883-1884): 25-34.

20. Williams described Winthrop's friends as "strangers." It is possible that this group from Connecticut was involved with the faction on Aquidneck Island, led by Clarke and others, that opposed William Coddington's political leadership there, but the evidence is sketchy at best. See note 8 appended to this letter in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 1:291-92.

to visit him at the trading post. Usually only one or two of his six children came at a time, presumably so that Williams would not have to juggle family responsibilities with those of running his business. Occasionally his wife, Mary, may have stayed with him, though the available evidence indicates that she ordinarily remained in Providence with most or all of the children, struggling as best she could to manage the household and raise their three boys and three girls on her own. Williams tried to keep in touch with Mary by writing her letters, all of which unfortunately have perished, but one winter, when their communications had broken down, he was distressed to hear that she had nearly died from a prolonged illness. To comfort her, he wrote her a lengthy letter in which he instructed her in the proper ways she should thank God for delivering her from her afflictions. A few years later, quite pleased with the advice he had offered her, Williams expanded the letter into a devotional treatise entitled *Experiments of Spiritual Life and Health*, which he published as a pamphlet in London in 1652.<sup>21</sup>

But on the morning of 13 June, 1649, Williams awoke at Cocumscussoc with great concern over another member of his family, his eldest daughter Mary, who was staying with him at the trading post while suffering from, as Williams described it to Winthrop, "a fluxe of Reume" that "much affected her head and right eye."<sup>22</sup> In reporting Mary's sickness to Winthrop, Williams informed him that she "hath taken much physick and bene let blood but yet no change" (1:291). The standard remedies of the time, in other words, were not working, so Williams appealed to Winthrop, who had gained

renown throughout southern New England as a skillful physician, to recommend some competent men of medicine in Massachusetts Bay who might treat Mary's malady. Until Williams received a reply from Winthrop, which could take as long as a week or two, all he could do for Mary was to comfort her and pray that her condition grew no worse. Huddled together in the tiny trading post, listening to the rain pounding on the roof above them, Williams and his daughter passed the time interacting in ways we cannot possibly recapture, speaking words forever lost. Surely Williams was as attentive, as doting, as any parent would be toward a sick child. Though his letter tells us little about their day and how they spent it together, it does reveal in some measure the desperation and distress that Williams felt for his ailing daughter. The day, we may safely assume, was probably a long one for both of them.

No doubt the day began for them, as it did for most people who lived in this preindustrial society, when dawn's first hazy light illuminated the trading post. As a good Christian, Williams—and perhaps his daughter, too—must have greeted the morning with prayer and other devotional exercises.<sup>23</sup> Even though Williams denounced the congregational polity of the Massachusetts Bay Puritans, his individual piety differed little from that of most Puritan saints residing in New England and in the mother country.<sup>24</sup> For Williams, as for many other Puritans, prayer was a Christian duty to be performed "frequently, and constantly," but at the very least three times during each day: once upon rising, again at mid-day, and finally before retiring, a routine that followed the example of King David's daily supplications to

21. See Williams, *Experiments of Spiritual Life and Health* (1652), in *Complete Writings of RW*, 7:45–114, esp. 55–56, 59, 70.

22. Williams also told Winthrop (1:291) that his daughter Mary, whom he said was seventeen years old, had not yet begun to menstruate—a situation he apparently assumed was a cause of her poor health. Actually, according to Williams's own account set down in the Providence records, Mary was fifteen at this time. See Horatio Rogers, George M. Carpenter, and Edward Field, eds., *The Early Records of the Town of Providence*, 21 vols. (Providence, R.I., 1892–1951) 1:7.

23. On Puritan devotional practices see Gordon Stevens Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion: Its Place in the Development of Christian Piety* (London, 1957), 67–82; Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982), 156–93; Stephen Foster, "The Godly in Transit: English Popular Protestantism and the Creation of a Puritan Establishment in America," in David D. Hall and David Grayson Allen, eds., *Seventeenth-Century New England* (Boston, 1984), 185–238.

24. For an incisive examination of Williams's individual piety see Gilpin, *Millenarian Piety*.

the Lord. Such prayers could not be simply uttered or mindlessly recited. Hypocrites, Williams pointed out, "pray but in a *form* and *lip-labour*."<sup>25</sup> As a result, he rejected the belief, held by more moderate Puritans, that the Anglican Book of Common Prayer could be used as a prescription for daily devotions. True prayer, said Williams, was "the pouring out of the heart to God, the true breathing of the *soul* to God." Coming from the heart, prayers should be the extemporaneous expressions of one's innermost spirit, a soulful speech to God inspired by the language of the Scriptures but cast in one's own words.<sup>26</sup>

Private devotions were the cornerstone upon which Williams had devised his own individual brand of Puritan worship. Having cut himself off from the congregations of Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth, and having even abandoned the small Baptist church in Providence he had helped to establish in the late 1630s, Williams's discipline of devotion depended entirely upon his private communications with God and upon his tireless search for pure forms of worship based upon the model of Christ's primitive church, as set forth in the Books of the New Testament. According to the senior John Winthrop, William's individualistic piety and radical religious ideas had led him to worship with no one but his wife.<sup>27</sup> Reflecting these Separatist tendencies, Williams emphasized that the good Christian, in his opinion, should perform acts of godliness in secret. God's children, he said, pray, and do good, and fast in secret, regarding no eye but the eye of the heavenly father upon them.<sup>28</sup>

But prayer was only one of several devotional activities Williams would have undertaken on this June morning at Cocomuscussoc. Every child of God was obliged not only to pray, but to test vigorously the health of his soul through meditative self-examination. Introspection was the means by which the true Christian could discern

the depths of his spiritual commitment to Christ and the bowels of his own corruption that prevented him from walking more fully in the ways of Christ. The continual war between flesh and spirit required the true child of God to admit his spiritual failings and shortcomings, and to cry out to the Lord for help in the fight against sin, unbelief, passions, uncleanness, pride, and covetousness. Through meditation and self-examination, Williams said, the good Christian first must come to know himself in order to ascertain more thoroughly the dimensions of his relationship with God. The process, he maintained, was like gazing into a "holy *looking-glasse* to discover to us our souls *spots*, & *blemishes*, as also [to find its] sweet *cordial flowers*, to refresh and encourage our *drooping spirits*."<sup>29</sup>

To conduct such rigorous self-scrutiny, the true Christian needed to achieve not only self-awareness but also a mastery of the Scriptures, the pure word of God against which all men's actions must be measured and weighed. Therefore, Puritan daily devotional exercises typically included time devoted to private reading of the Bible. The pages of Scripture revealed to Puritans like Roger Williams the standards of doctrine and behavior specified by God for the use of his saints. It is difficult to determine how much time Williams or other dedicated Puritans spent each day in private consultation of the Bible. In Williams's estimation, the child of God should always demonstrate "a professed *willingnesse* to get more and more *knowledg* of this heavenly *Father*, of his *name*, of his *works*, of his *word*, of his *Christ*, of his *Spirit*, his *Saints*, and *Ordinances*," which suggests that for Williams every effort to digest the Scriptures could never be considered too much.<sup>30</sup> But it is also hard to know whether Williams restricted his Bible reading to private devotions or whether, with his ill daughter there beside him, he supplemented his silent perusals

25. See Williams, *Experiments of Spiritual Life and Health* (1652), in *Complete Writings of RW* 7:74-75.

26. See Williams, *Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody* (1652), in *Complete Writings of RW* 4:65; Williams, *Experiments of Spiritual Life and Health* (1652), in *ibid.*, 7:60, 75.

27. John Winthrop, *The History of New England from*

*1630 to 1649*, ed. James Savage, 2d ed., 2 vols. (Boston, 1853), 1:369.

28. See Williams, *Experiments of Spiritual Life and Health* (1652), in *Complete Writings of RW*, 7:73.

29. *Ibid.*, 7:60-63, 70-71.

30. *Ibid.*, 7:60.

with readings out loud of chapter and verse. If so, Williams and his daughter may have consumed a good part of the morning reading to each other from the Good Book.<sup>31</sup>

After these devotional exercises were completed, Williams probably had plenty of small chores to attend to. Besides looking after Mary, he must have taken care of the assorted jobs that comprised his daily routine at the trading post and that, as historians tell us, regularly defined the lives of pioneers living on the frontier. With Mary sick in bed, Williams may have assumed the responsibility for preparing their meals, a task to which he had certainly grown accustomed while fending for himself at Cocomuscosoc. The first meal would have occurred between eleven in the morning and high noon; a second meal, supper, would have been served between six and eight in the evening, depending upon many variables, including how closely Williams identified himself with the yeoman and merchant classes of England, who generally took their supper early in the evening, or with the gentry who dined in the later evening hours.<sup>32</sup> Given Williams's partiality for the simple life, and the fact that he had only spent a few years living among the gentry prior to his emigration from England, it is a fair assumption that he and his family considered themselves sturdy yeomen and followed the patterns that typified the lives of middling farmers in both the old and new worlds.

We can only guess what Williams chose to prepare for the two meals that day. Nowhere in Williams's correspondence, or in any other of his extant personal papers, did he mention the fare

served on his family's table. But some other sources, gleaned from the vast array of evidence that documents the lives of early New Englanders, suggest that Williams and his family must have dined primarily on some basic staples, such as bread and cheese, though it is likely that they supplemented their diet with fresh fish, small quantities of red meat and fowl, fresh fruit in season, and various foods made from maize. Williams may have also introduced some Indian foods to his family, including no-cakes, later known as Jonny Cakes, made from corn meal, and perhaps a variety of vegetables, such as peas, squash, turnips, and parsnips. It is also possible that Williams, like so many early New Englanders, savored a local delicacy: eels boiled with herbs.<sup>33</sup>

At some point during the day, Williams must have gone outdoors, if only to fetch fresh water from a spring located near the trading post. The water would have been used for cooking and possibly for bathing; it was shunned as a beverage by most New Englanders. To slake their thirsts, the early settlers drank beer and ale, wines of various sorts, ciders hard and soft, mead and other fermented concoctions, and rum when they could get it.<sup>34</sup>

Outside, Williams may have also checked his woodpile and perhaps toted some logs inside to dry. Though the month of June had probably brought warmer temperatures to southern Rhode Island, an abundant supply of firewood was a year-round necessity. As any Rhode Island Swamp Yankee will attest, even summer breezes off Narragansett Bay have a nasty way of turning

31. If Winthrop was correct in reporting that Williams, after abandoning the Baptist congregation in Providence, worshipped only with his wife, Mary, then it is not certain he would have spent any part of his days reading Scripture aloud with his children. Yet it is possible that Winthrop exaggerated the extent to which Williams had separated himself from worshipping with others. If so, Williams might have believed with other faithful Puritans that family devotional practices, such as Bible readings, were as important as private ones. On these family practices see Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, 55–66; Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 136–55.

32. See Carl Bridenbaugh, *Vexed and Troubled Englishmen, 1590–1642* (Oxford, 1967), 194.

33. On New England foods and "foodways" see Alice Morse Earle, *Customs and Fashions in Old New England* (New York, 1893), 146–62; James W. Baker, "Yeoman Foodways at Plimoth Plantation," in Peter Benes and Jane Montague Benes, eds., *Foodways in the Northeast*. Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife: *Annual Proceedings*, 1982 (Boston, 1984), 105–13; Sarah F. McMahon, "A Comfortable Subsistence: The Changing Composition of Diet in Rural New England, 1620–1840," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., 42 (1985): 26–65.

34. For the location of the spring see the map printed in Chapin, *Trading Post*, 8. On early New England beverages see Earle, *Customs and Fashions*, 163–83; McMahon, "Comfortable Subsistence," 42–43.



damp and chilly after sunset. Besides, the early settlers of New England usually kept their kitchen fires burning throughout the day, even during the warmest days of the summer, to let certain foods simmer and to keep a kettle of hot water handy.<sup>35</sup>

In fairer weather, Williams's time would have been consumed chopping wood or tending the vegetable garden, which he surely must have planted near the trading post. The post itself must have required periodic repairs from time to time. Some evidence suggests that Williams refurbished and enlarged the building at Cocumscussoc or erected an entirely new structure there soon after his return from England in 1645.<sup>36</sup> How skillful he was as a carpenter is anybody's guess, but he must have learned—as many pioneers did—by making his own mistakes and then correcting them. Caring for any livestock that he may have been raising at the post demanded more of his time, though he discovered the advantage of letting his sheep graze freely on a little island in the inlet near Cocumscussoc.<sup>37</sup> From season to season, life on the frontier required the performance of other numerous tasks upon which Williams's survival and livelihood depended.<sup>38</sup>

Inside the trading post, even on an inclement day like this one, Williams could use his time productively, checking and arranging his inven-

tory of goods or putting his business affairs in order. Yet the surviving documents suggest that he was a poor bookkeeper who generally failed to maintain a record of his business transactions or, if he did, managed somehow to misplace them.<sup>39</sup> Rather than jotting down entries on ledger sheets, Williams probably expended his time reading and writing. As stated earlier, Williams read the Bible incessantly; for him, the Scriptures were a source of spiritual fulfillment and a personal pastime, an entertaining diversion as well as a Christian obligation. But Williams read other books as well, virtually anything he could get his hands on. He was a voracious reader, devouring everything from political and religious treatises to scientific and geographical discourses. In the wilderness, where personal libraries were a luxury for the well-heeled and where printed works were at best a rare commodity, Williams relied on the good graces of Winthrop and his educated friends for loans of books and other publications.<sup>40</sup> On this day, as he noted in his letter to Winthrop, he was waiting to receive some pamphlets that Winthrop had sent to his house in Providence (1:290–291). Presumably he had other reading material with him at the trading post to edify his vast hunger for knowledge.

When he was not reading, Williams consumed his hours with his own writing. Removed from the centers of activity in southern New En-

35. On food preparation and kitchen fires see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650–1760* (New York, 1982), 19–21.

36. James Ernst, *Roger Williams: New England Firebrand* (New York, 1932), 265; Winslow, *Master Roger Williams*, 221.

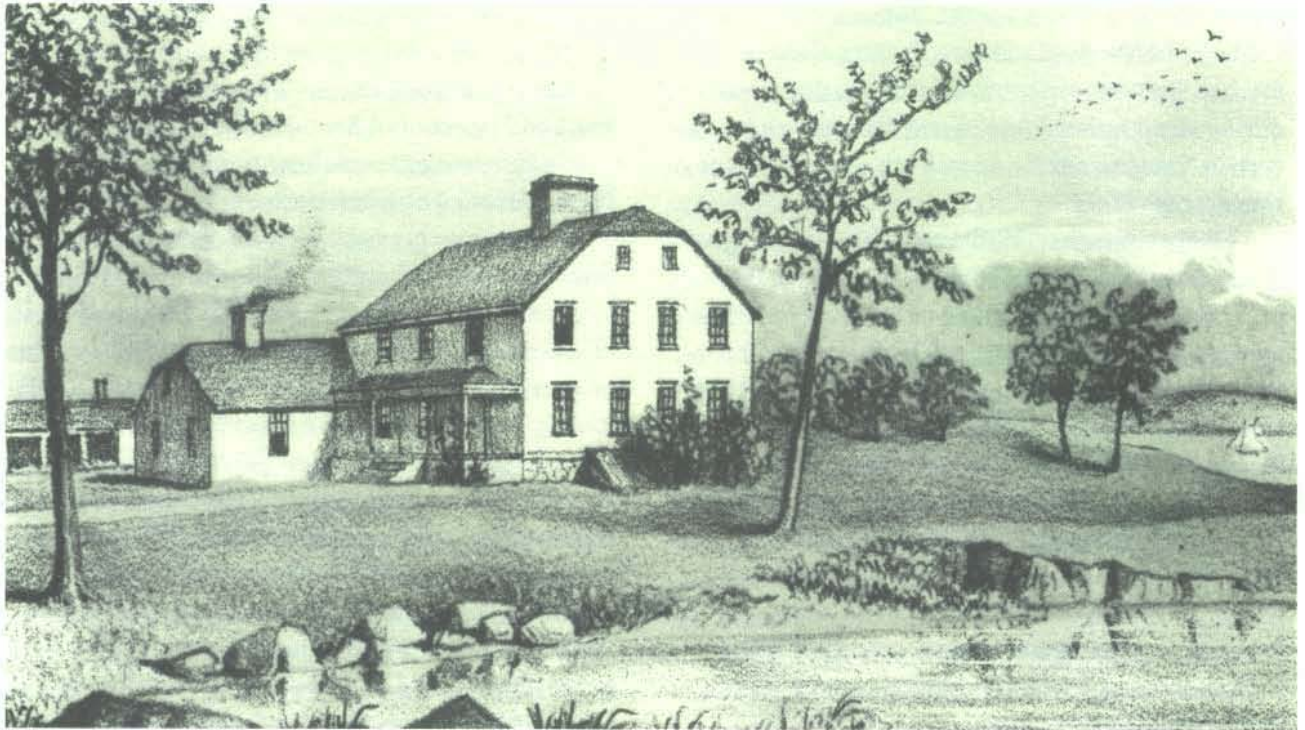
37. Brockunier, *Irrepressible Democrat*, 184. On the raising of livestock by the early settlers of Narragansett Bay see Carl Bridenbaugh, *Fat Mutton and Liberty of Conscience: Society in Rhode Island, 1636–1690* (Providence, R.I., 1974).

38. On agrarian pursuits in the seventeenth century see, for example, Robert Walcott, "Husbandry in Colonial New England," *New England Quarterly*, 9 (1936): 218–52; Darrett B. Rutman, "Governor Winthrop's Garden Crop: The Significance of Agriculture in the Early Commerce of Massachusetts Bay," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XX (1963): 396–415; Keith Thomas, "Work and Leisure in Pre-Industrial Society," *Past and Present*, No. 29 (1964): 50–62; Rutman, *Husbandmen of Plymouth: Farms and Villages in the Old Colony, 1620–1692* (Boston, 1967), 3–65; Bridenbaugh, *Fat Mutton*; Howard S. Russell, *A Long, Deep Furrow: Three*

*Centuries of Farming in New England* (Hanover, N.H., 1976); John J. Waters, Jr., "The Traditional World of the New England Peasants: A View from Seventeenth-Century Barnstable," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 130 (1976): 3–21; Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 127–56; Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Climate and Mastery of the Wilderness in Seventeenth-Century New England," in Hall and Allen, eds., *Seventeenth-Century New England*, 3–38.

39. For one example of misplaced or lost records see Williams to John Winthrop, 30 Dec. 1639, in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 1:201.

40. On books and private libraries see Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1956), 133–45; David D. Hall, "The World of Print and Collective Mentality in Seventeenth-Century New England," in John Higham and Paul K. Conkin, eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore and London, 1979), 166–80. For the regular exchange of books and pamphlets that took place between Williams and the younger John Winthrop see Brockunier, *Irrepressible Democrat*, 186–87.



A later lithograph of Cocumscussoc, also known as Smith's Castle. From *The Homes of Our Forefathers* by Edwin Whitefield (Boston: Whitefield & Crocker, 1882). RIHS Collection (RHi X3 1113).

gland, Williams depended upon letters as his primary line of communication with the outside world. His circle of correspondents was actually quite small, comprising no more than about one hundred friends and acquaintances on both sides of the Atlantic. At the center of this circle, Williams kept up a regular communication with an even smaller network for exchanging news and opinions. He wrote letters to the two Winthrops, father and son, and to other members of the network to pass along intelligence about Indian affairs or to discuss the latest gossip about political and religious events happening in Old and New England. His correspondence, including the letter he wrote on this day to John Winthrop, Jr., thus mitigated his isolation from the temporal world around him.<sup>41</sup>

At Cocumscussoc he also used his time alone to compose drafts of polemical writings he hoped eventually would be published in England. We know, for instance, that at Cocumscussoc, before he departed on a second diplomatic mission to England in 1651, he wrote and revised a draft of one of his most important works, an impassioned attack on the New England oligarchy entitled *The Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody*. He probably composed drafts of other formal writings there as well, for his solitude afforded him the circumstances and conditions he needed to immerse himself in introspection and to use the fruits of his self-examinations in formulating his theological positions.<sup>42</sup>

On this day in June, however, his thoughts seem to have been less focused on his philosoph-

41. Puritan networks are informatively discussed in Charles Edwards Park, "Friendship as a Factor in the Settlement of Massachusetts," *American Antiquarian Society, Proceedings*, 28 (1918), Pt. 1, 51-62; Francis J. Bremer, "Increase Mather's Friends: The Trans-Atlantic Congregational Net-

work of the Seventeenth Century," *ibid.*, 94 (1984), Pt. 1, 59-96.

42. See Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., ca. 20 June 1650, in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 1:316, and Gilpin, *Millenarian Piety*, 136-37.

ical and ideological differences with the New England Puritans than on his daughter's sickness and a troubling crisis that was brewing between the Narragansett Indians and the Connecticut colony. The night before, an Indian courier had brought him some letters that contained threats of war from Captain John Mason, a prominent Connecticut magistrate and militia officer. Mason's letters implicated Ninigret, the chief sachem of the Niantic Indians, and the Narragansett sachems in a plot to assassinate Uncas, the chief-tain of the Mohegan Indians, whom the English settlers of Connecticut valued and protected as a trustworthy ally. According to Mason, Ninigret and the Narragansett sachems had hired a bumbling Indian assailant who had tried unsuccessfully to kill Uncas with a knife. When that attempt failed, Mason said, the Rhode Island Indians resorted to witchcraft to put Uncas under a fatal spell. Luckily for Uncas, the Narragansett sorcery also did not work.<sup>43</sup> But Mason was convinced that the Rhode Island Indians would keep on trying to eliminate Uncas until they found a method that succeeded. He cautioned Williams that if Ninigret and the Narragansetts persisted in such attempts, the Connecticut colony would declare war against them (1:290).

Williams took the warning seriously. He told Winthrop that Connecticut seemed set on a course of punishing the Narragansetts, and he quoted Mason as declaring that the Indians were "sealed to Destruction." Hoping that Winthrop could intercede to maintain the peace, Williams asked him to forward word of Mason's threats to the next meeting of the United Colonies of New England, as assembly of representatives from the Puritan colonies that regulated Indian affairs

throughout the region. Meanwhile Williams hoped that if Winthrop heard any further news concerning this crisis, he would "signifie in a line" (1:290).

To men like Mason, whom Williams personally disliked and distrusted, Williams was a naive dupe of the Narragansetts, the most powerful Indian band in southern New England.<sup>44</sup> True, Williams did befriend the Narragansetts, and seemed to take their side at times when facts belied the Indians' own protestations of innocence, but Williams himself believed that the Puritan colonies, out of their lust for land and their desire to negate Narragansett influence in the region, too readily threatened coercion and military might, when tact and cautious diplomacy should have prevailed. As a result, Williams repeatedly found it necessary to intervene on behalf of the Narragansetts in their often rocky relations with the Puritan colonies. Although his letters show that his attitudes toward Indians changed over time, and that he became less devoted to them after his own concerns demanded his attentions elsewhere, he nevertheless maintained an abiding respect for the Narragansetts' separate existence in New England, and he often took it upon himself to protect their interests.<sup>45</sup>

What compelled him to assume the role of protector toward the Indians as a duty that could not be shirked sprang from his sincere belief that all men, Indian and European, Christian and Jew, had been created equally in the eyes of God, and that mankind's differing ways should be tolerated with Christian patience and understanding, not transformed by the laws or the swords of the dominant. But he also sought to preserve the peace in southern New England out of a more

43. The details surrounding these Indian matters are further spelled out in Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., ca. 7 April 1649, in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 1:277-79; John Mason to the Commissioners of the United Colonies, June 1649, in David Pulsifer, ed., *Acts of the Commissioners of the United Colonies of New England, 1643-1651, 1653-1679*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1859), 2:416-418.

44. On the strained relations between Williams and Mason see Brockunier, *Irrepressible Democrat*, 190-91. In later life, their dealings with each other became more cordial. See

Williams to John Mason and Thomas Prentice, 22 June 1670, in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 2:609-20.

45. There is no adequate study of Williams's attitudes toward and his experiences with the Indians of southern New England. Nevertheless provocative insights into his relationship with the Narragansetts may be found in Lawrence C. Wroth, *Roger Williams*, Marshall Woods Lecture, Brown University Papers, No. 14 (Providence, R.I., 1937), and Sydney V. James, "The Worlds of Roger Williams," *RIH* 37 (1978): 99-109.

practical realization of the devastation that war would bring. Living on the frontier, surrounded by the dangers and uncertainties of the untamed wilderness, Williams understood the vulnerability of the English settlements and of the lives of the people who populated them. He seems to have realized that no Indian band, even one as powerful as the Narragansetts, could swoop down upon the English towns and drive the settlers to the sea, but he also keenly understood that for both sides such a war would bring pain and suffering beyond anyone's wildest expectations. In other words, Williams wanted to keep the peace as much for the sake of the colonists as he did for the protection of the Indians he had come to know as friends.<sup>46</sup>

The fact is that threats and rumors became for him portents of disaster that could not be left to smolder unattended for fear the sparks might ignite into a blazing inferno. Every threat needed quickly to be silenced, every rumor run down to expose its truth or fallacy. To appreciate fully the impact that such menacing reports had on Williams and his fellow colonists, we must first understand that the world of these early New Englanders was very different from our own. Inhabiting a world dominated by the sounds of nature, and uncluttered by the white noise to which the modern era has grown accustomed in the background of our daily lives, Williams and his fellow settlers responded to ominous noises, including rumors and threats, with a different sensibility than we would today.<sup>47</sup> Sudden sounds that reverberated in the normally quiet settlements or along the tranquil frontier produced a heightened sense of anxiety in the colonists, for there were no other noises to muffle the unexpected crash of thunder overhead, the screech of a hurt animal in the woods, or even the sinister crack of a brittle twig breaking from behind. A threatening rumor

held the same properties as other sudden sounds in the wilderness by provoking exaggerated anxiety among the settlers. In their world, one could not readily substantiate or disqualify a rumor simply by switching on a television for an instant report or even waiting for the morning newspaper to arrive. For Williams and his neighbors, rumors—like ominous noises—were tokens of the unpredictability that ruled their lives on the frontier. But Williams's own fears and anxieties, which can be detected throughout his surviving correspondence, seem to have been intensified by his experience of having resided at Cocomscussoc, on the fringe of the wilderness, where his isolation and solitude magnified the uncertainties of pioneer life.

But he was not totally deprived of consolation. His personal courage and fortitude were strengthened by his unwavering faith in his God. It was the heavenly father who held his life in his hands, whose grand design in the end would determine the fate of all mankind. If, as Williams remarked in his letter to Winthrop, God chose to permit war and destruction to engulf the region, neither the "power nor policie of N.E. [New England] can stop his hand" (1:290). That evening, enveloped in the haunting silence of the forest, Williams must have prayed in earnest for God to let the light of peace break through the clouds that hung so threateningly over New England.

Some of his prayers seem to have been answered. His daughter Mary, after experiencing months of discomfort from her sickness, was finally cured by a Massachusetts physician, and she appears to have led an otherwise healthy life.<sup>48</sup> The Puritan colonies, aroused to fever pitch by the various transgressions of Ninigret and the Narragansett sachems, did declare war against the Indians in 1654, but the conflict fizzled out before any battles could be fought, and a fragile

46. See Miller, *Roger Williams*, 49–56; Morgan, *Roger Williams*, 126–29; Williams to the General Court of Massachusetts Bay, 5 Oct. 1654, in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 2:408–13.

47. Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven, 1967), 130–34; David D. Hall, "The Mental World of Samuel Sewall," in Hall, John M. Murrin, and Thad W. Tate, eds.,

*Saints and Revolutionaries: Essays on Early American History* (New York and London, 1984), 75–95. On rumors see also Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor* (New York, 1965); Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (New York, 1966).

48. On Mary's recovery see Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., 10 Nov. 1649, in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 1:302.

peace was sustained between the two sides until the outbreak of King Philip's War in 1675.<sup>49</sup> Williams continued to conduct his trading operations at Cocumscussoc until 1651, when he reluctantly answered a call to travel once more to England in the colony's service. To pay for his voyage, he sold his trading post to Richard Smith.<sup>50</sup>

Having done my handiwork in reconstructing, as fully as I dare, this one rather gloomy day in the life of Roger Williams, and having even tied up some loose ends in the storyline, it would appear that my experiment in biographical paleontology has reached its end. But to say this much and no more about Roger Williams would be still to offer a superficial sketch of the man—and one filled with a good deal of speculation at that. My reconstruction of his day and his conceivable activities does not reach to a dimension that lays bare the significance of his quotidian experiences. We may well ask what possible relevance Williams's daily routines and commonplace activities have for us today. Coming to know a bit more about Williams the man may be satisfaction enough, but can an appreciation of him and the contours of his life help to broaden our perspective of the past and enrich our understanding of the context of our own lives? Is there a connection between Williams's day-to-day experiences and our own experiences as Americans?

I believe there is. The key to understanding

the importance of Williams's daily concerns lies in recognizing the extent to which the frontier influenced and shaped his activities and character. Though Williams sought to find peace for himself and comfort for his soul by effecting a more perfect union with God, his days were largely spent doing things that all pioneers must do: the arduous labors of survival. But surviving in the wilderness required something more, something quite different, than many of the early settlers had anticipated. It is a wonder that Williams—a city boy raised in London, educated at Cambridge, and a chaplain to the gentry of Essex—managed to survive at all. Somehow, though, he developed the skills and talents to conquer the hardships of the wilderness. Somehow he mustered the courage to withstand the uncertainties and the anxieties that pervaded the frontier.

I do not mean to suggest that Roger Williams was a prototype of America's legendary and mythical frontiersmen. To be sure, Williams was no Davy Crockett or Natty Bumppo. Nor was he the sort of pioneer that Frederick Jackson Turner idealized in his famous essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History."<sup>51</sup> But Williams did manifest the spirit of individualism that many scholars and commentators have identified as a distinctive American trait throughout our nation's history. For Williams, as for many pioneers, the frontier experience accentuated self-sufficiency and independent habits of thought.<sup>52</sup> In his quest for spiritual purity, in his desire to

49. For a brief account of the short-lived war of 1654 see the editorial note accompanying Williams's letter to the General Court of Massachusetts Bay, 5 Oct. 1654, in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 2: 403–7. Two important studies that offer differing interpretations of Anglo-Narragansett relations in the years prior to King Philip's War are Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620–1675*, rev. ed. (New York, 1979), and Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1975).

50. See Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., 6 Oct. 1651, in LaFantasie, *CRW*, 1: 351.

51. Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Middletown, Conn., 1973); Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *American Historical Association, Annual Report for the Year 1893* (Washington, D.C., 1984), 199–227. See also Turner's essays in *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920).

52. Ray Allen Billington, "How the Frontier Shaped the American Character," *American Heritage* 9 (April 1958), 4–9, 86–89; Billington, *America's Frontier Heritage* (New York, 1966). Turner's frontier thesis has been hotly debated by scholars. See Billington, *The American Frontier Thesis: Attack and Defense* (Washington, D.C., 1971); George Rogers Taylor, ed., *The Turner Thesis Concerning the Role of the Frontier in American History*, 3d ed. (Boston, 1972). Much of the debate has revolved around the question of America's uniqueness. For a useful selection of scholarly opinions on the nature and limitations of exceptionalism in the American character see Michael McGiffert, ed., *The Character of Americans: A Book of Readings*, rev. ed. (Homewood, Ill., 1970). Recent studies of the frontier increasingly rely on comparative frameworks and the sophisticated methodologies of the social sciences. See, for example, the essays published in Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson, eds., *The Frontier in History: North America and South Africa Compared* (New Haven, 1981). Roger Williams, of course, was far too much

separate himself from the worldly pollutions of church and mankind, in his friendship with the Indians, in his insistence upon the moral principle of religious freedom, in his belief in the sanctity of every man's conscience, Roger Williams made plain his individualistic responses to the world around him and proclaimed, out of the wellspring of his experiences, how the world could be made a better place. By coming to know and understand the experiences that forged Williams's ideas and actions in the frontier world of New England, we may perhaps discover in his example the very seeds of the American character.

It would be foolish, however, to claim that the frontier—and the frontier alone—gave birth to Williams's individualism. A number of other forces influenced his individualistic thought and behavior, including the moral thrust of Reformation pietism and the particular theological impulse of Puritanism, both of which placed burdens on individuals to reconcile their per-

sonal relationships with God and society.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, it would be misleading to imply that Williams's confrontation with the frontier compelled him to abandon all of the cultural traits and attitudes that he and the other settlers of New England carried with them from the Old World. The colonists were, after all, transplanted Englishmen who replicated English customs and culture in the New World and who viewed the mother country affectionately and obediently as home.<sup>54</sup>

But it is also true that over time old attitudes and customs were replaced by new ones. Frontier conditions helped to accelerate the change. And in time the frontier itself, soon sprinkled with farms and villages, became a new homeland for the settlers, a place where they learned through experience either to adapt the patterns and ways of the Old World or to discard them entirely.<sup>55</sup> In this respect, then, the New World gradually produced, as Crèvecoeur observed in the eighteenth century, "a new man, who acts upon new

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the pessimist to personify Turner's model of the optimistic pioneer. Cf. David M. Potter, "The Quest for the National Character," in Don E. Fehrenbacher, ed., *History and American Society: Essays of David M. Potter* (Oxford and New York, 1973), 228–55.

53. William G. McLoughlin, "Pietism and the American Character," *American Quarterly*, 17 (1965): 163–86. See also Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition* (New York, 1979). On Williams's individualism see Richard Martin Reinitz, "Symbolism and Freedom: The Use of Biblical Typology as an Argument for Religious Toleration in Seventeenth-Century England and America" (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1967), 275–84; Chupack, *Roger Williams*, 145–49.

54. On the transference of English culture and localism to New England during the seventeenth century see T. H. Breen, *Puritans and Adventurers: Change and Persistence in Early America* (New York, 1980), 3–23, 68–80; David Grayson Allen, *In English Ways: The Movement of Societies and the Transfer of English Law and Custom to Massachusetts Bay in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1981); Stephen Foster, "English Puritanism and the Progress of New England Institutions, 1630–1660," in Hall, Murrin, and Tate, eds., *Saints and Revolutionaries*, 3–37; Allen, "Both Englands," in Hall and Allen, eds., *Seventeenth-Century New England*, 55–82; Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, "Reconstructing British-American Colonial History: An Introduction," in Greene and Pole, eds., *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore and London, 1984), 1–17. For one historian's effort to reconcile the

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two apparently conflicting schools of thought on exceptionalism and the replication of English ways in America see Paul Lucas, *American Odyssey, 1607–1789* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1984).

55. See Perry Miller, "The Shaping of the American Character," *New England Quarterly*, 28 (1955): 435–54; Miller, "Errand into the Wilderness," in *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), 1–15; Oscar Handlin, "The Significance of the Seventeenth Century," in James Morton Smith, ed., *Seventeenth-Century America: Essays in Colonial History* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1959), 3–12; Miller, "From the Covenant to the Revival," in James Ward Smith and A. Leland Johnson, eds., *The Shaping of American Religion*, 4 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1961), 1: 322–68; Russel B. Nye, *This Almost Chosen People: Essays in the History of American Ideas* (East Lansing, Mich., 1966), 208–55; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, Conn., 1967); Peter N. Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness: The Intellectual Significance of the New England Frontier, 1629–1700* (New York, 1969); Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven, Conn., 1975); Carl Bridenbaugh, "Right New-England Men; or, The Adaptable Puritans," *Massachusetts Historical Society, Proceedings*, 88 (1976), 3–18; William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay in Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977* (Chicago, 1978), 24–44; Bercovitch, "New England's Errand Reappraised," in Higham and Conkin, eds., *New Directions*, 85–104; Alden T. Vaughan, "Seventeenth-Century Origins of American Culture," in Stanley Coben and Lorman Ratner, eds., *The Development of American Culture*, 2d ed. (New York, 1983), 16–42.

principles."<sup>56</sup> If we can see Roger Williams in this light, if we can try—however imperfectly—to recapture the multifaceted contours of his life and the diverse activities of his daily routine, we may

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56. Quoted in Max Lerner, "The Idea of American Civilization," in McGiffert, ed., *Character of Americans*, 10. On Crevecoeur see also Arthur M. Schlesinger, "What Then Is

begin to perceive more clearly the process by which Roger Williams the Englishman became Roger Williams the American.

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the American, This New Man?" *American Historical Review*, 48 (1943): 225-44.

## Book Review

*Fall River Outrage: Life, Murder, and Justice in Early Industrial New England.* By DAVID RICHARD KASSERMAN. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986. 254 pages. Biblio. \$25.00 cloth, \$14.95 paper.)

When Lizzie Borden allegedly gave her parents some forty "whacks" with an axe in 1892, the suffocating publicity obscured another murder incident of much greater historical importance in the same Fall River, Massachusetts, area. Six decades earlier in 1832, the suspected homicide of a local "mill girl" by a Methodist minister from Bristol, Rhode Island, unleashed a maelstrom of partisan passion throughout Jacksonian America.

David Richard Kasserman, an anthropologist, has retrieved the life and death of Sarah Cornell from under the long shadow of the Borden affair. *Fall River Outrage: Life, Murder, and Justice in Early Industrial New England* dynamically places the forgotten murder in the volatile framework of a society poised on the brink of industrial transformation but with a cultural superstructure loaded with preindustrial baggage. The wrenching change precipitated by workers who left farmlands and cottage industries for the new factory system created fractures in the once idyllic yeoman world of the Founding Fathers.

Sarah Cornell, a transient cotton weaver working in Fall River, was found hanged in a farmyard in nearby Tiverton, Rhode Island, on 21 December 1832. An inquest disclosed she was pregnant. Authorities initially suspected suicide but an incriminating note found in her Fall River boarding room read: "If I should be missing enquire of the Rev Mr Avery of Bristol he will know where I am Dec 20th S M Cornell" (p. 9). An investigation began that centered on the relationship between the murdered woman and the Rev. Ephraim Avery, a Methodist preacher from Connecticut who ministered to a small congregation on Rhode Island's East Bay.

The two met in Lowell, Massachusetts, and

began a Jekyll and Hyde connection that culminated, the prosecution would charge, in adulterous intercourse at a religious camp meeting. Sarah Cornell, like others in the emerging class of factory operatives, found a degree of emotional liberation in the Methodist church and the second great awakening in the United States. Furthermore, the Methodists encouraged women to participate actively in some church affairs. Alongside her religious enthusiasm Sarah Cornell also earned a reputation for promiscuity in a society that cruelly isolated those under "social suspicion." She embraced the Methodist experience and a confessional relationship with Rev. Avery as a redemptive catharsis for her illicit behavior and as a way to continue her "wayward" behavior at the popular camp revivals. As her sullied reputation dogged her in the narrow social milieu of the times, she often changed her name and reset her industrial compass to the many other points on the New England factory circuit. Always, her benighted past seemed to follow her. The Rev. Avery, once a source of understanding and compassion, replaced the earlier letters of introduction for Sarah with vinegar warnings to Methodists in other towns. Her initial admiration exploded in hatred and a warped sexual affair.

The Rev. Avery was tried for murder (and suspected of attempted abortion) in Newport in the summer of 1833. The longest contemporary trial in U.S. history curdled for twenty-one court days and included 239 witnesses, expert medical testimony, local bit players, high-paid defense lawyers, sexual innuendo, and allegations of witness intimidation. Teasing circumstantial evidence definitely implicated the minister but the sensational hearing ended in a controversial innocent



verdict. The public trial began once the legal one ended in an atmosphere some compared to the Salem witch episode. The heart of the issue was, according to an unusual sympathetic female journalist who took up Cornell's case right after the trial: "Who was responsible for the moral decline, and thus the death, of Sarah Cornell?" (p. 235).

The Methodist defense had portrayed Sarah Cornell as a demented trollop, the product of an alien factory system that prostituted young women at the altar of profit. Capitalists and factory workers alike, especially in the Fall River vicinity, rebuked the charges and defended the new industrial way of life and work. Mill interests, with close ties to the established Congregational church, counterattacked viciously. From pulpit and press they excoriated Methodism as a religious fifth column undermining American institutions and ways with Masonic-like intrigue by sucking workers into an evangelical vortex.

The Methodists demonstrably lost the public relations battle. Avery was satirized in poems and plays, burned in effigy, and threatened by mobs. He gingerly left the area for banishment to an Ohio farm in 1836. The Methodists, according to the author, "could neither abandon him with honor nor maintain him with credit" (p. 253). Posterity, at least at the time of the Borden case,

still championed Cornell's virtue if not the free market morality of the factory system. The *Providence Journal* thus reassured its readers in 1892 that "Those were the days before the influx of foreign operatives—Canadians, Irish and English—in our mills. The girls of our own New England families were our mill workers, and they lost no caste thereby" (*Providence Journal*, 9 Sept. 1892).

Professor Kasserman has employed his anthropological skills without relying on the annoying buzzwords and overtaxed phraseology that so often pollute the social sciences these days. He has crafted a popular piece of scholarly research that reconstructs and interprets this fascinating tale from a feminist perspective. The industrial-religious dichotomy is well framed but remains more suggestive than the detailed substantiation it deserves. The author, to his credit, objectively outlines the protagonists' careers without rendering a verdict. Instead, Kasserman allows the reader to judge whether a heinous murderer manipulated a legal escape or a designing mill thornbird destroyed herself to incriminate a befriending minister in a complex, post mortem conspiracy.

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SCOTT MOLLOY

*A Dependent People: Newport, Rhode Island in the Revolutionary Era.* By ELAINE FORMAN CRANE (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985. xxx pages. \$25.00.)

Elaine Forman Crane's *A Dependent People: Newport, Rhode Island in the Revolutionary Era* offers a solid and deceptively modest analysis of the impact the American Revolution had on the seaport town of Newport, Rhode Island. Crane argues that Newport's inhabitants profited from Great Britain's benign neglect throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and that they were progressively damaged by the mother country's increasingly intrusive eco-

nomic policies after 1763. For a city that was "completely dependent on the sea for sustenance and livelihood," (p. 47) and whose every member was in some way inextricably tied to mercantile endeavors, anything that threatened the economic equilibrium might well prove disastrous, even fatal. The coming of the war meant just that. While everyone in the town struggled to return to the good old days, some by espousing the loyalist cause, others by moving with consider-

able reluctance to the patriot banner, nothing could stop the decline of a once prosperous merchant community. As Newport's economy worsened, the religious, political, and ideological differences characterizing its heretofore cynically pragmatic inhabitants grew steadily more important, exacerbating the tensions of an already fragmented and heterogeneous community. "Unrestricted trade," Crane argues, "provided the only setting in which interdependence and harmony could flourish" in the island town (p. 107).

Crane's basic argument is gracefully and convincingly stated. She makes excellent use of demographic data and economic statistics, managing to communicate that information clearly and succinctly so that even a layperson can understand the charts and tables contained in the body of the monograph. Her contributions to our understanding of urban blacks and women of all classes is both solid and suggestive. She manages to extract the most from frustratingly meager sources, without claiming more than her evidence legitimately can tell us, as she explains how minorities shaped and were shaped by the peculiar features of Newport's society.

Historians may well question certain of Crane's assertions. They may wonder, for instance, if the slave trade was as central to Newport's economy as she suggests. They may ask

whether the city was really more lawless than other commercial centers, or if Rhode Island had a lower percentage of eligible voters than other colonies. It is always tempting to overstate the case of Rhode Island's singularity, and both contemporaries and historians have often been all too eager to dismiss it as the eccentric exception to every rule. Most importantly, Crane may well have overemphasized the importance of British colonial policy in creating the conditions for Newport's demise. There is considerable evidence to indicate that the growth of Providence, an increasingly competitive commercial center located on the mainland, would have accomplished in a more leisurely fashion what the Revolution did in such short order. The American Revolution may, in other words, simply have hastened, rather than caused, an inevitable process.

Nevertheless this is a solid if much too brief effort. One assumes that the constraints of the publisher, and not the paucity of available material, explains the often cursory treatment of Crane's tantalizingly suggestive insights. The subject deserves a deeper and more lengthy hearing.

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