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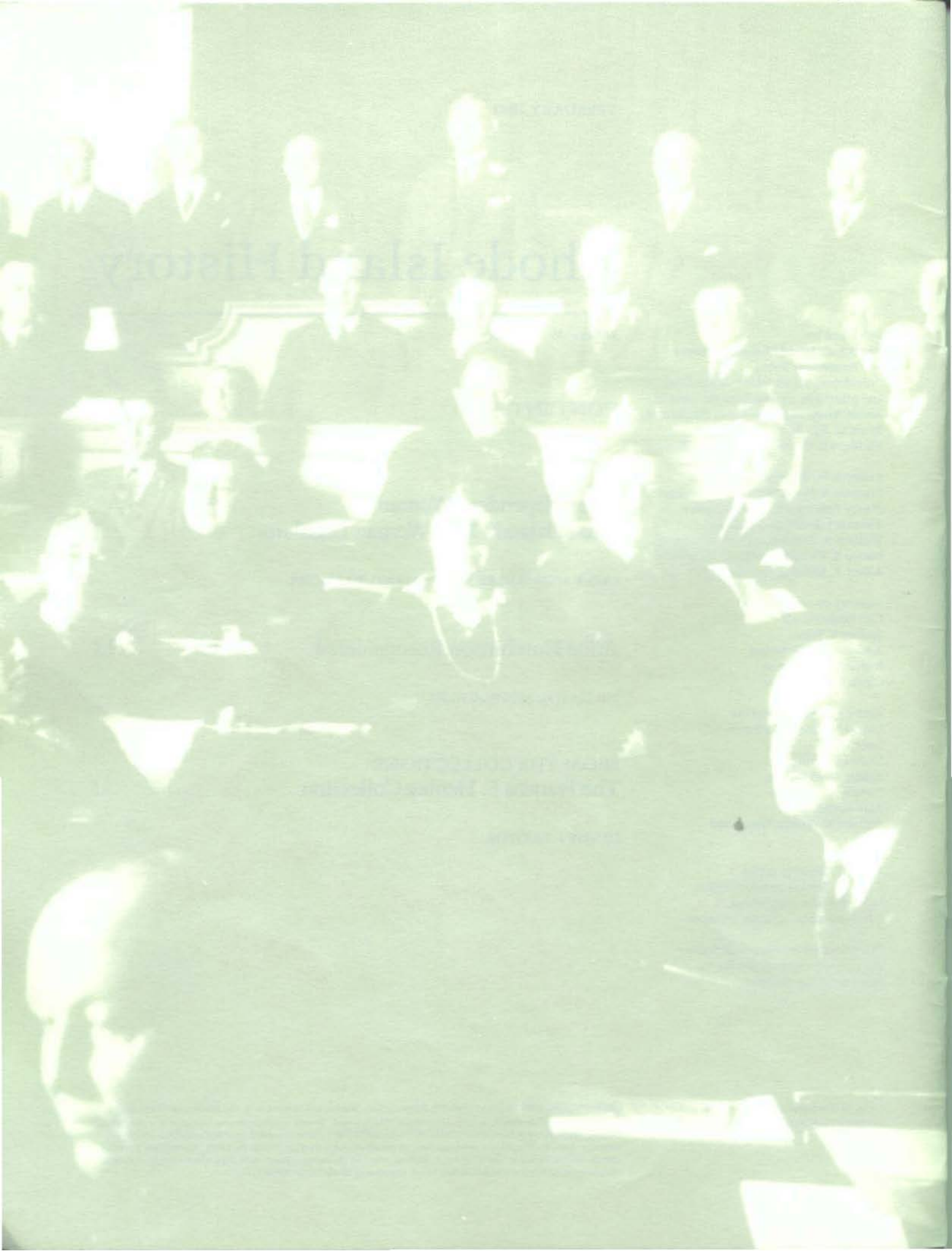
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DENISE J. BASTIEN



The Independent Woman: Rhode Island's First Woman Legislator

EMILY STIER ADLER AND
J. STANLEY LEMONS

It was in 1920 that Rhode Island's women finally gained the general right to vote,¹ but neither of the women who ran for the General Assembly that year came close to winning. Rhode Island would have to wait until 1922 before the first woman would capture a seat. That woman was Isabelle Ahearn O'Neill. A teacher of elocution and physical education, a stage and silent-screen actress, a suffragist, and a vigorous political campaigner before she entered the General Assembly in 1923, this pioneer was almost everything that the women's movement could hope for in the 1920s. Pledging herself to support women's causes and to fight for legislation that the women's organizations promoted, she was conscious of her role as the legislature's first and only woman and often spoke on behalf of the women of the state. Although her original nomination depended upon a powerful political patron, O'Neill was no man's captive. Her life was the story of an independent woman.

Isabelle was the last of ten children, the seventh daughter born to Daniel and Mary (O'Conner) Ahearn of Woonsocket.² She was the favorite child of her father, who indulged her within the limits of a strict Irish Catholic upbringing. Daniel bought her a horse, gave her money when she needed it, and helped make certain that she got a good education.³ Isabelle was not only the first of her family to go to high school; the family was successful enough to afford the luxury of advanced education for her.

Her parents were immigrants from Ireland. Mary O'Conner was born in 1839 and came with her parents to Massachusetts in 1847. Daniel Ahearn was also born in 1839, and his family emigrated to America the following year.⁴ After growing up in New York City, he moved to New Hartford, Connecticut, and then to Springfield, Massachusetts, where he met and married Mary in 1860. Their first child, a son, was born in March 1861. When the Civil War erupted in April, Daniel became a three-month volunteer in the Twenty-seventh Massachusetts Infantry.⁵ Sometime early in the war the family moved to Woonsocket, where the Ahearns' second son was born in 1863. From then until the birth of Isabelle on 8 June 1880, a new child was added to the family nearly every two years.

Energetic and ambitious, every able-bodied member of the family went to work. After the Civil War, Daniel Ahearn became an agent for the Howe Sewing Machine Company in Woonsocket, and by 1875 he owned a house in Millerville, a mill section in the northeast corner of the city.⁶ About 1880 he began a horse carriage and equipment business in Millerville, selling such items as whips, robes, and horse blankets.⁷ His business prospered to the point that in 1888 he opened a stable and carriage barn on Main Street in Woonsocket and became a horse trader and auctioneer. His two older sons, who had been working as spinners in textile mills, now went into business as the Ahearn Brothers at the same address, dealing in meat, vegetables, and other provisions. In addition, their mother Mary advertised the sale of toys and fancy goods at the same place.⁸ Thus the Ahearn family operated three enterprises from one location. Ahearn Brothers

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Isabelle Ahearn O'Neill, circa 1900. This portrait was taken while she was the proprietress of the Ahearn School of Oratory, Drama, and Physical Education. Courtesy of Mary F. Flemming.

lasted about three years before the boys went to work full-time for their father as agents, salesmen, teamsters, and stable foremen. As the children grew up, several entered the family business. Daniel Jr. and Timothy first were salesmen on the premises and then went out as agents for the company. Joseph became a teamster, then a hostler, stable foreman, and clerk.⁹ Emma became the company bookkeeper. As they grew up, four of the other daughters were employed elsewhere as milliners, dressmakers, and dry-goods clerks.¹⁰

In 1892 Daniel Ahearn moved to Providence and opened a stable and horse-trading business at the corner of Dorrance and Pine streets. Despite the depression of the 1890s the family fortunes improved; by 1895 he had business locations in Newport and Providence, and he soon expanded to Westerly and Fall River.¹¹ Keeping between seventy-five and one hundred horses on hand, he catered to the carriage trade in the seaside resort areas of Newport and Watch Hill, offering good horses for sale and fancy carriages for hire during the summer season. In addition, he conducted the City Auction Mart on the present site of the Omni Biltmore Hotel in Providence.¹² In 1895, when telephones were truly unusual, D. Ahearn and Company had a business line. That year he moved his large family, including his adult but single sons and daughters, into a twenty-room house on America Street on Federal Hill.¹³

The family's hard work and success made it possible for the last child, Isabelle, to graduate from the Federal Street Grammar School in 1896, attend Classical High School, and then go on to higher education. She attended the Lynn School of Oratory in Providence, the Boston College of Drama and Oratory, and Dr. Sargent's School of Physical Education in Cambridge before opening her own academy in Providence, the Ahearn School of Oratory, Drama, and Physical Education, in 1900. From then until she married in 1907, she annually presented public recitals of her students at the Providence Opera House. At the same time, she taught elocution and physical education in the parochial schools in the Providence area.¹⁴

Inasmuch as the Ahearns spent a great deal of time at Matunuck during the summers, Daniel Ahearn built a twenty-one-room summer house there in 1906. After Daniel Jr., Rosella, Emma, Joseph, and Isabelle married and had their own children, they often brought their families to stay in the house. The place lacked running water and electricity, but it overflowed with people. Sometimes Daniel discovered that some of the children staying there were not actually members of the family, and he would send them home. Later, between 1914 and 1919, Daniel ran the house as a summer resort for paying visitors.¹⁵

During one of the summers at Matunuck, Isabelle met a handsome Connecticut man, John Aloysius O'Neill, a manager of an S&H Green Stamp office. He had a fine singing voice and a lively personality, and they made quite a dramatic pair. Although Isabelle was her father's pet and was indulged in most things, Daniel Ahearn did not approve of John O'Neill; but the independent streak that Isabelle would so often exhibit asserted itself, and the couple eloped and were married on 25 November 1907.¹⁶ Isabelle was twenty-seven years old and John was thirty-six. They moved to the Edgewood section of Cranston, where their son John was born in November 1908.¹⁷ The life of little "Jack" proved to be short; he died of meningitis just three weeks after his third birthday.¹⁸ Isabelle's marriage was even shorter. Both she and John O'Neill had dominant, powerful personalities, and Isabelle would not be submissive to him. They were separated by 1910, and John moved away and disappeared from her life. "It's too bad, because they were both such nice people," said Isabelle's niece, recalling their

failed marriage. Being a strict Roman Catholic, Isabelle never divorced. In later years she sought to locate John but was unable to find him.¹⁹

The end of her marriage and the death of her infant son evidently affected Isabelle O'Neill deeply for a time. For two years she threw herself into touring the country for the New York Dramatic League on behalf of "clean theater"; then she buried herself in acting. She joined the Empire Stock Company in Providence and played the leading lady with acting companies in Albany, Troy, and Brooklyn, New York, performing on the stage from 1912 to 1915.²⁰ Returning to Providence in 1915, she joined the acting company of the Eastern Film Corporation, a new silent-movie production company owned by Frederick Peck.²¹ She also reopened her oratory, dancing, and drama school, and from 1915 to 1919 she presented annual recitals at Churchill House, Frobel Hall, or the Elks' Auditorium. In 1917 she toured the Keith, Albee, and Pantages vaudeville

Before her career in politics, Isabelle was an actress and appeared on both stage and screen. She is seen here (second from left) on the set of a motion picture studio in 1915. Courtesy of Mary F. Flemming.



circuit in a one-act drama. Such acts were popular in vaudeville at that time, and the Keith-Albee circuit was one of the top tours in the nation. In addition, she resumed teaching elocution and physical education in such schools as St. Mary's Bay View and St. Xavier's Academy.²² By 1919 she had rejoined her father's household at 380 Broadway in Providence, where she would live for the rest of her life.²³

By this time Isabelle O'Neill had turned her dramatic and oratorical talents to political causes. The campaign for woman suffrage climaxed in Rhode Island between 1917 and 1920, and she was part of the effort.²⁴ Among her other activities, she was a member of the Rhode Island Equal

Suffrage Association and its successor, the United League of Women Voters. The Equal Suffrage Association, founded in December 1868 by such notable women as Paulina Wright Davis and Elizabeth Buffum Chace, saw its efforts at long last come to fruition when Rhode Island easily ratified the woman suffrage amendment to the Constitution on the first day of the General Assembly's regular session in January 1920.²⁵

At the 1919 convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, its president, Carrie Chapman Catt, called for the creation of a league of women voters, and the National League of Women Voters was established in February 1920.²⁶ Meanwhile various leagues of women voters sprang up in Rhode Island, including the Providence League of Women Voters, among whose members was Isabelle O'Neill. In October the Rhode Island leagues merged into the United League of Women Voters and established a number of action committees. For one of these, the Disarmament Committee, Isabelle wrote a one-act play entitled *The Fifth Commandment* in 1921. She presented it to various groups in Providence, including the Queen's Daughters at Cathedral Hall and the Neighborhood Club on Webster Avenue.²⁷ Isabelle was also attracted to the League of Women Voters because it sought to prepare women for participation in politics,

and she had already become a campaign speaker for Democratic candidates in 1920.²⁸ She was looking ahead in May 1921 when she enrolled in the league's "School of Government Procedure" and served as a member of a house of representatives when the league staged a mock legislature of the imaginary state of Nemo.²⁹

Joining the Democratic party was a natural step for Isabelle. Her father had been active in the party since his Woonsocket days; in 1888, in the first election after Woonsocket adopted its new city charter, he had in fact run for the common council from the Fifth Ward, finishing fifth in a six-man field.³⁰ Isabelle declared that she joined the Democratic party immediately after enfranchisement because it offered women the best opportunities for office holding and because it favored legislation beneficial to women.³¹ However, it is doubtful that she ever gave the Republicans a passing consideration. In any case, the Democrats got a dramatic speaker who was soon campaigning for the party around the state. During the 1920 campaign she sometimes spoke at four political rallies a day, and she was tireless in her efforts again two years later. She was frequently one of the featured speakers, and as the chair of the William S. Flynn Women's Auxiliary Committee, she presided over a party rally at the Narragansett Hotel in October 1922, an event the *Providence News* declared to be "the first political rally in this State to be presided over by a woman."³² Flynn was the Democratic nominee for governor, and he swept into office with a Democratic tide that year. It was the greatest Democratic success since 1902.

Isabelle also won election that year, becoming the first woman to win a seat in the General Assembly. It was not an easy race for her. She went up against two men, both of whom had served in the legislature: one was the Republican incumbent, the editor of the *Olneyville Times*; the other was a disgruntled Democrat who had held the seat for four terms between 1912 and 1920 and had been the

party candidate in the previous election.³³ Despite an apparent split in the Democratic party and the strength of an incumbent, she defeated her opponents handily. She attributed her victory in part to stamina and good health. "I made more speeches than most of the men in the campaign. One day I spoke nine different places. It was pretty strenuous . . . but if it were not for the fact that I am strong physically, I would have been unable to keep up the pace."³⁴ During the campaign she made about a hundred speeches, both in her own district and, for the general ticket, throughout the state. The *Providence Journal* pronounced hers to be "some of the best speeches of the campaign. And she did it without a physical setback." Others became ill or lost their voice, but not her. She had always been quite athletic, having been the best

On 6 January 1920 the Rhode Island General Assembly ratified the Twentieth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, granting women the right to vote. Here Governor R. Livingston Beeckman signs the ratification resolution as members of the Rhode Island Equal Suffrage Association look on. RIHS Collection (RHI X3 6143).



swimmer on her college team and an expert horsewoman.³⁵ She was not a teacher of physical education and elocution for nothing!

As notable as her victory might seem, equally remarkable was her getting the chance to run in the first place. The record of women's legislative success in the 1920s and 1930s reveals that getting nominated was harder than winning a race. The primary system did not begin in Rhode Island until 1948. How, then, did Isabelle O'Neill get the Democratic nomination? The answer to that question lies in her friendship with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Dorney.³⁶ Tom Dorney was her patron and sponsor, the one who put her name forward. The first Democratic alderman ever elected from Providence's Ninth Ward, he was the chairman of the Democratic City Committee, and it was he who determined who ran. Isabelle chaired the Ninth Ward Democratic Women's Club and was a friend of Mrs. Dorney, a club member. When Isabelle won her race, Mrs. Dorney gave a dinner in her honor; when Isabelle announced that she was to study law, she registered in the law office of Thomas Dorney. One might note also that Isabelle and her family lived at 380 Broadway, and the Dorneys lived at 372.³⁷

This first woman legislator quickly announced her allegiance to the women's reform agenda. In the first interview after her election, she declared, "I am a member of the United League of Women Voters [and] I shall work to further all of the measures endorsed by that organization."³⁸ Such measures eventually included a mothers' aid bill (today we call it aid to dependent children), a forty-eight hour workweek law for women workers, a night-work bill for women, a bill to prohibit women from working four weeks before or after the birth of a child, measures to close down houses of prostitution, jury service for women, office holding for women, prohibition law enforcement, state participation in the federal infancy and maternity protection program (the Sheppard-Towner Act), appointment of policewomen, prohibition of child labor, regulation of industrial homework, appointment of home teachers for foreign-born women, equal pay for women teachers, improvement in teacher pensions, and so forth and so forth. All of these measures were presented or endorsed by the League of Women Voters or other women's organizations during the 1920s. While some of the measures, such as the protective legislation for industrial women, were condemned by more militant feminists then and later, they had the broad support of the social feminists and leading women of that era.³⁹ Isabelle was "utterly opposed to a woman's party" and rejected the efforts of the National Woman's Party to promote the Equal Rights Amendment.⁴⁰ Perhaps reflecting her own Catholic faith, she also took a stance independent of the women's groups when it came to the issue of divorce reform. While most felt that divorce laws were too difficult and unfair to women, she condemned Rhode Island as the "Little Reno" of divorce evil and introduced a bill to toughen the laws.⁴¹

Her seating in the House of Representatives and her every activity there were worthy of news coverage in 1923, even in Boston. An unusually large number of people crowded the gallery and the chamber at the State House to witness the inauguration of William Flynn, the first Democratic governor in fourteen years, and to see Isabelle O'Neill take the oath. Her first official act in the General Assembly was to walk to the front of the chamber to cast her vote for speaker of the House, and the men and women in the crowded room gave her a standing ovation that went on for several minutes. She responded with bows and a wide smile.⁴² A Republican, Philip Joslin, was elected speaker, and he announced that by courtesy of the House, Isabelle would have her choice of a seat. She thanked the House and chose desk number 11 in the front row on the aisle, the seat



The Grand Committee of the General Assembly, January 1925, Isabelle O'Neill (seated middle right) was the only woman in the legislature when this picture was taken. Courtesy of the Providence Journal Company.

formerly occupied by the new lieutenant governor, Felix Toupin.⁴³ At the inaugural gala later she was a center of attention, and the newspaper pictures of the inauguration featured her as well as Governor Flynn. The *Providence Journal* reported that she was "clad in an embossed gold cloth gown with garniture of gold grapes and side train [and] carried American Beauty roses."⁴⁴

Isabelle O'Neill was no shrinking violet in the Assembly, and the newspapers reported on the bills she introduced and the speeches she made. Even the Boston papers told about her dramatic performance in the debate on a bill to raise the poll tax in Rhode Island. "She pictured a young man going away amid the blare of trumpets, waving banners and good wishes, ready to sacrifice his life in the World War. Then he returns home maimed and broken," but when he goes to the polls, he finds that he cannot vote for the "measly little offices of Alderman and Councilman." She sobbed as she told the story; and when she had moved strong men nearly to tears, she turned to invective and satire.⁴⁵ She was quite sensitive to the fact that the male legislators were measuring all women by her performance in the Assembly. "When my first motion was defeated," she said, "the men looked to see if I were going to cry." She noted that at the beginning of her term "it was 99 men and Mrs. O'Neill," but she reported that she was soon accepted as a member and learned to give and take.⁴⁶

If her party leaders in the House expected her to be a pliable follower, she soon disabused them of that illusion. For example, she voted against a Democratic motion to hold a referendum on the question of repealing Rhode Island's prohibition-enforcement law.⁴⁷ Of all the states in the Union, Rhode Island was probably the most opposed to prohibition: it refused to ratify the Eighteenth Amendment and had carried an unsuccessful challenge to the constitutionality of the amendment itself to the United States Supreme Court. Prohibition repeal was heavily favored by the Democratic party, but Isabelle voted the way the

women's organizations leaned—toward stricter enforcement. Perhaps it should be noted that her father had once been a prohibition advocate, having been vice president of the National Father Matthew Total Abstinence Society, and had lectured all over New England for the cause.⁴⁸

Another notable incident occurred during her second term in 1925, when the House was considering a bill to create a state police force in Rhode Island. She was one of only four Democrats to support the bill. The Democratic minority leader, Francis B. Condon of Central Falls, was provoked enough to say of another of the errant Democrats, "I cannot vote a man out of the Democratic party, but a member of that party can vote himself out."⁴⁹ Isabelle had been quiet on the police bill until Condon made a scornful remark about the fact that the Women's Rhode Island Committee for Law Enforcement was behind the measure. When Condon sat down, O'Neill gained the floor, and, as the *Providence Journal* reported it, "her eyes flashing and her voice tense with excitement, [she] faced her 99 male colleagues to recite a woman's declaration of the right to have an interest in public affairs." She declared, "When I came here today, I was in doubt about this bill, but I am not now. I'd like to impress upon the men of the General Assembly and the men of the State that women are not morons. On various occasions in the General Assembly since I have been here, I have heard women spoken of as citizens seeking personal aggrandizement. I have seen bills come in here affecting the pay of women and have them laughed at. . . . I have been incensed time and time again by you men's attitude toward women. Why shouldn't we take an interest? We are the mothers of our soldiers. And then you speak of this bill in ridicule because women want it. . . . I'm going to vote for it."⁵⁰

Such displays of independence did not harm her position in the party. She was chosen as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1924, 1928, and 1932 and was Rhode Island's Democratic national committeewoman from 1932 to 1936. She was elected to the Rhode Island House for four terms; and when the number of seats for Providence in the Senate was expanded from one to four in 1930, she claimed one of them, becoming the second woman to be elected to the Rhode Island Senate. In her first term in the Senate she was unanimously selected to be a Democratic deputy floor leader, making her the first woman to have a leadership position in the Assembly. It would be 1980 before another Democratic woman would get that honor and responsibility. She was reelected to the Senate in 1932; but as a reward for her speaking all over New England on behalf of Franklin D. Roosevelt in that year's presidential campaign, she received a federal appointment in November 1933 and resigned her Senate seat.⁵¹

As one of a substantial number of women appointed by the Roosevelt administration, Isabelle O'Neill became the legislative representative for the United States Bureau of Narcotics, charged with the task



Isabelle O'Neill presents her Rhode Island Narcotic Drug Law to Governor Atam Pothier, 24 April 1926. Courtesy of the Providence Journal Company.

of persuading the states to adopt the Federal Uniform Narcotics Law. In this effort she traveled throughout the country to gain the support of judges, lawyers, legislators, governors, and law enforcement officials. She addressed state legislatures, represented the U.S. commissioner at trials and ceremonies, and conducted seminars on drug laws for various groups, including one for the New York State police in 1935.⁵² She even traveled to Europe to consult with directors of Scotland Yard, the French Sureté, and other law enforcement agencies. As the *Providence Evening Bulletin* reported, "The post is said to be one of the most important ones given a woman under the Roosevelt Administration."⁵³

Her interest in drug laws and enforcement developed from her concern about health and physical education. In 1925 she had pushed for a state drug law and was appointed to a joint legislative commission to study the problem. She drafted the Rhode Island Narcotic Drug Act adopted in 1926, and Governor Aram Pothier appointed her a legislative representative to the Narcotic Drug Board, on which she served until 1931. Thus she had substantial credentials to bring to her new position with the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics.⁵⁴ She remained with this federal agency until 1943, when she resigned in order to be with her family in Rhode Island. By then she was sixty-three years old, and her sister Mary, who was going blind from cataracts, needed care. Besides, Isabelle was tired of traveling; as she told her niece, she never wanted to see another suitcase.⁵⁵

She could not retire, however, because she did not have an adequate pension to support herself and her blind sister, and so she secured a position in the Rhode Island Department of Labor as a cost-of-living investigator.⁵⁶ The essence of this job was doing comparison shopping in drugstores, groceries, and clothing stores in order to discover what things cost. She was still doing this in 1953, at age seventy-three, when the state began requiring an examination for holding such a position. She refused to take the exam, arguing that she could do the job and that her years of experience ought to count for something. While she admitted that she was not available for full-time work at the Labor Department, she refused to resign. Instead, she descended on the legislative halls to demand justice. Florence Murray, a young senator from Newport, recalled encountering Isabelle O'Neill in the corridor one day. Isabelle stretched out her arm and declared in a dramatic voice, "I will not walk away until they have dealt with my problem." Senator Murray found the answer: a pension could be included for her in an omnibus bill in the General Assembly. Discovering that legislators' widows who were left without adequate income were often provided for in such bills, Murray proposed that Isabelle O'Neill be accommodated that way also. It was done, and Isabelle's service ended in 1954.⁵⁷

Isabelle O'Neill still had two decades to live. Those retirement years were devoted to her family and her church. She was a member of the Daughters of Isabella, St. Joseph's Hospital Women's League, St. Michael's Rosary and Altar Society, and other Roman Catholic organizations.⁵⁸ Always a strong-willed, independent person, she fought being hospitalized even after she became almost too unsteady to walk.⁵⁹ Failing from heart disease, she contracted pneumonia, and on 17 March 1975 she died three months short of her ninety-fifth birthday.



Representative Isabelle Ahearn O'Neill, November 1927. Courtesy of the Providence Journal Company.



Notes

1. School suffrage was permitted by 1916, and one of Rhode Island's future legislators, Lulu Mowry Schlesinger, was elected to the Charlestown School Committee that year.
2. Daniel Ahearn's obituary in the *Providence Journal* (14 Nov. 1927) declared that he was the father of thirteen children, an error the *Journal* repeated in Isabelle's obituary (18 Mar. 1975). There were ten children: see *Rhode Island State Census, 1885*, vol. 13: Woonsocket, and *Twelfth Census of the United States, Rhode Island* (1900), vol. 8, Enumeration District 87, sheet 8. Isabelle herself confirmed the lower number in an interview with the *Providence Sunday Tribune*, 26 Nov. 1922.
3. Interview with Mary Flemming (a niece who cared for Isabelle O'Neill in her later years), 18-19 Mar. 1986.
4. *Twelfth Census, Rhode Island*, Enumeration District 87, sheet 8.
5. Daniel Ahearn's obituary, *Providence Journal*.
6. *Woonsocket Street Directory*, 1875-76.
7. *Woonsocket Street Directory*, 1882-83.
8. *Woonsocket Street Directory*, 1888-89.
9. *Woonsocket Street Directory*, 1892; *Providence City Directory*, 1893, 1894, 1895, 1896.
10. *Providence City Directory*, 1897; *Providence House Directory*, 1897, 1903.
11. *Providence City Directory*, 1895; interview with Mary Flemming.
12. *Providence City Directory*, 1898, 1899.
13. *Providence City Directory*, 1895; *Twelfth Census, Rhode Island*.
14. "Biography—Isabelle Ahearn O'Neill," papers in the possession of Mary Flemming, see also *Providence Sunday Journal*, 31 Dec. 1922.
15. Interview with Mary Flemming.
16. *Ibid.*, copy of Record of Marriage, Division of Vital Statistics, Rhode Island State Department of Health. The age given by Isabelle was twenty-four, but she was shaving her actual age by three years.
17. Birth record from Cranston, 5 Nov. 1908.
18. Death certificate of John O'Neill, 29 Nov. 1911.
19. Interview with Mary Flemming. In a newspaper interview in 1934 Isabelle described herself as a widow, but actually she never knew what became of John. See *Boston Traveller*, 28 May 1934.
20. "Biography—Isabelle Ahearn O'Neill." See also "Autobiography—Isabelle Ahearn O'Neill," papers in the possession of Mary Flemming, *Providence Sunday Journal*, 31 Dec. 1922.
21. About the Eastern Film Corporation, see *Moving Picture World*, 4 Sept. 1915, 1624; *Motion Picture News*, 11 Sept. 1915, 49. Also see "Autobiography—Isabelle Ahearn O'Neill."
22. Interview with Mary Flemming; "Biography—Isabelle Ahearn O'Neill."
23. *Providence House Directory*, 1920.
24. *Providence Evening Tribune*, 8 Nov. 1922; *Providence Journal*, 9 Nov. 1922.
25. Sara Algeo, *The Story of a Sub-Pioneer* (Providence: Snow & Farnham, 1925), 1-2, 258-59. Also see the sketch of the history of the Rhode Island Equal Suffrage Association in the League of Women Voters MSS, series A, subseries 1, box 1, folder 8, at the Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS).
26. J. Stanley Lemons, *The Woman Citizen: Social Feminism in the 1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 49-50.
27. League of Women Voters MSS, RIHS; play notices in *Providence Evening Bulletin*, 25 Oct. 1921, 3 Nov. 1921.
28. She spoke at four campaign rallies on 1 Nov. 1920. *Providence Journal*, 2 Nov. 1920.
29. *Providence Journal*, 24 May 1921. Also see League of Women Voters scrapbook no. 1, RIHS.
30. *Providence Journal Almanac*, 1889.
31. *Providence Journal*, 9 Nov. 1922.
32. *Providence News*, 28 Oct. 1922.
33. *Providence Journal*, 9 Nov. 1922.
34. *Providence Sunday Tribune*, 26 Nov. 1922.
35. *Providence Sunday Journal*, 31 Dec. 1922.
36. Interview with Mary Flemming. See also *Providence Sunday Tribune*, 26 Nov. 1922; *Providence Journal*, 29 Nov. 1922; *Providence Evening Bulletin*, 27 Mar. 1925. About Dorney, see *Providence News*, 28 Apr. 1928.
37. *Providence City Directory*, 1922.
38. *Providence Evening Bulletin*, 9 Nov. 1922.
39. Lemons, *The Woman Citizen*, 181-204.
40. *Providence Sunday Tribune*, 26 Nov. 1922.
41. *Boston American*, 10 Jan. 1925; see also the radio script for broadcast on WEAN, 15 Apr. 1933, in papers in the possession of Mary Flemming.
42. *Providence Evening Bulletin*, 2 Jan. 1923.
43. *Ibid.*, 3 Jan. 1923; *Boston Post*, 3 Jan. 1923.
44. *Providence Journal*, 3 Jan. 1923.
45. *Boston Transcript*, 15 Feb. 1923; see also *Providence Journal*, 11 Feb. 1923.
46. *Providence Journal*, 1 May 1923.
47. *Providence Evening Bulletin*, 21 Mar. 1923.
48. Daniel Ahearn's obituary, *Providence Journal*.
49. *Providence Journal*, 1 Apr. 1925.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Providence Journal*, 3 May 1932; *New York Times*, 28 Oct. 1932; *Boston Daily Record*, 15 Sept. 1932; *Providence Evening Bulletin*, 27 Feb. 1933; *Providence Evening Bulletin*, 20 Nov. 1933.
52. *Washington Times*, 16 Feb. 1934; *Boston Traveller*, 28 May 1934; *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, 27 Oct. 1934; *Washington Post*, 3 Apr. 1935; "Biography—Isabelle Ahearn O'Neill."
53. *Providence Evening Bulletin*, 20 Nov. 1933.
54. "Biography—Isabelle Ahearn O'Neill"; *Providence Evening Bulletin*, 1 Oct. 1925.
55. Interview with Mary Flemming.
56. *Ibid.*
57. Interview with Florence Murray, 18 Aug. 1986.
58. "Autobiography—Isabelle Ahearn O'Neill."
59. Interview with Mary Flemming.





The holy ^a Gospel of Iesus Christ,
M^c Worscote^b according to Matthew. *wth Apocryphy*

THE ARGUMENT.

IN this historie written by Matthew, Marke, Luke, & Iohn, the Spirit of God so gouerned their hearts, that although they were foure in number, yet in effect and purpose they so consent, as though ^h whole had bene composed by any one of them. And albeit in stile and maner of writing they be diuers, and sometime one writeth more largely that which the other doth abridge: neuerthelesse in matter & argument, they all tend to one end: which is to publish to the world the fauour of God toward mankind through Christ Iesus, whom the Father hath giuen as a pledge of his mercy and loue. And for this cause they entitle their story, Gospel, which signifieth good tidings, forasmuch as God hath performed in dedde that which the fathers hoped for. So that hereby we are admonished to forsake the world, & the vanities thereof, and with most affectioned hearts embrace this incomparable treasure freely offered vnto vs: for there is no ioy nor consolation, no peace, nor quietnesse, no felicity nor saluation, but in Iesus Christ, who is the very substance of this Gospel, and in whom all the promises are Yea, and Amen. And therefore vnder this word is contained the whole new Testament: but commonly we vse this name for the historie, which the foure Euangelists write, containing Christs comming in the flesh, his death, and resurrection, which is the perfect summe of our saluation. Matthew, Marke, and Luke are more copious in describing his life and death: but Iohn more laborereth to set forth his doctrine, wherein both Christs office, and also the vertue of his death and resurrection more fully appeare: for without this, to knowe that Christ was borne, dead, and risen againe, should nothing profite vs. The which thing notwithstanding that the three first touch partly, as he also sometime intermedleth the historicall narration, yet Iohn chiefly is occupied herein. And therefore as a most learned interpreter writeth, they describe, as it were, the body, and Iohn setteth before our eyes the soule. Wherefore the same aptly termeth the Gospel written by Iohn, the key which openeth the doore to the vnderstanding of the others: for whosoever doth know the office, vertue & power of Christ, shall reade that which is written of the Sonne of God come to the Redemption of the world, with most profit. Now as concerning the writers of this history, it is euident that Matthew was a Publicane or custome gatherer, and was thence chosen of Christ to be an Apostle. Marke thought to haue bene Peters discipule, and to haue planted the first Church at Alexandria, where he reuled the eight yeere of the reigne of Nero. Luke was a Physitian of Antiochia, and became Pauls discipule, and fellow in all his traouailes: he liued fourescore and foure yeres, and was buried at Constantinople. Iohn was that Apostle whom the Lord loued, the sonne of Zebedeus, and brother of James: he died three score yeres after Christ, and was buried nere to the city of Ephesus.

CHAP. I.

1 The genealogie of Christe, that is, the Messias promised to the Fathers. 18 Who was conceived by the holy Ghost, and borne of the Virgin Mary, when she was betrothed vnto Ioseph. 20 The Angel sauffieth Iosephs minde. 21 Why hee is called Iesus, and, wherefore Emmanuel.

Luke 3. 23.

This is the hearfall of the rogenie, where of Iesus Christ is sprung according to the flesh.

So called, for that he came of the stocke of Dauid.

These two are first rehearsed, because Christ was especially promised to some of them and their seede, and therefore Christ commonly was called the sonne of Dauid, because the promise was more euidently confirmed vnto him. Gen 21. 2 Gen 25. 24. Gen. 29. 35. Gen. 38. 27.

By incestuous adultery, the which shame setteth fourth his great amity, who made himselfe of no reputation, but became a seruant for our sakes: yea, a worme and no man, the reproch of men, and contempt of the people, and at length suffered the accursed death of the crosse. 1. Chron. 2. 5. 1. Sam. 4. 18, 19.



THE Booke of the generation of IESVS CHRIST the ^d sonne of ^e Dauid, the sonne of Abraham.

2 ^a Abraham begate Isaac. ^a And Isaac begate Iacob. ^a And Iacob begate Judas and his brethren.

3 ^a And Judas begate Phares, and Sara of Thamar. ^a And Phares begate Esrom. ^a And Esrom begate Ram.

4 And Aram begate Aminadab. And A-

minadab begate Naasson. And Naasson begate Salimon.

5 And Salimon begate Booz of ^a Rachab. And Booz begate Dbed of Ruth. And Dbed begate Jesse.

6 And Jesse begate Dauid the King. And Dauid the King begate Salomon of her that was the wife of Urias.

7 And Salomon begate Roboam. And Roboam begate Abia. and Abia begate Ala.

8 And Ala begate Iosaphat. And Iosaphat begate Ioram. And Ioram begate Ozias.

9 And Ozias begate Joatham. And Joatham begate Achaz. And Achaz begate Ezechias.

10 And Ezechias begate Manasses. And Manasses begate Amon. And Amon begate Iolias.

11 And Iolias begate Iacim. And Iacim begate Iechontias and his brethren about the time they were caried away to Babylon.

12 And after they were caried away into Babylon, Iechontias begate Salathiel.

1. King. 20. 21 and 21. 18. 1. Chron. 3. 13. 14. 15. 2. King. 23. 34 and 24. 1, 6. 2. Chron. 36. 4. 9. 1. Chron. 3. 16. 1 After the captiuitie, the title royall was appointed vnto him: so that notwithstanding that they were as slaves for the space of seventy yeres, yet by the providence of God the gouernment remained in the familie of Dauid, where it continued till the comming of Christ.

g Rachab and Ruth being Gentiles, signifie that Christ came not onely of the Jewes, and for them, but also of the Gentiles, and for their saluation.

Ruth. 4. 21. 1. Sam. 16. 1. and 17. 12. 2. Sam. 12. 24. 1. King. 11. 43. 1. Chron. 3. 10.

h He had committed three Kings, Iozias, Amasia, Azaria, abridging the number, to make the times fourteene generations.

Anne Hutchinson Reconsidered

"[S]he being dead, yet speaketh." Hebrews 4:11

WILLIAM G. MCLOUGHLIN

So many new and controversial books and articles have appeared about Anne Hutchinson in recent years that it is time to reconsider her place in American religious history. The Antinomian crisis of 1635-37 in Boston, formerly dismissed by most historians as a curious but ephemeral episode of the early history of American Puritanism—a tempest in Boston's teapot—now looms up as a critical turning point in the story of the Christian churches in our culture. At least six books and numerous scholarly articles were published about Hutchinson in the 1980s.¹ Every history of early Massachusetts now devotes many pages to her. Although she lived in New England for only eight years, she left an indelible mark upon its cultural development. It is time to reexamine and reevaluate this remarkable woman.

In its broadest aspects Anne Hutchinson's career illuminates three fundamental paradoxes in American civilization: first, our admiration for vigorous individualism and our respect for duly constituted authority; second, our striving for moral perfection and our commitment to pragmatic accommodation; and third, our belief in human equality and our assumption that women are yet somehow not fully equal. Beyond that, Anne Hutchinson has become a major figure in the history of American feminism as a forceful symbol of women's role and women's theology in the churches of America.

In order to understand Anne Hutchinson's place in religious history, it is necessary to consider her life in the context of the English Reformation. Fifteen years after Martin Luther posted his ninety-five theses on the church door in Wittenberg, Henry VIII broke with Rome and established the Church of England, placing himself at its head. But Henry's theological reforms did not go so far as many wanted, and Queen Elizabeth did not go much farther when she came to the throne. By 1603, when Elizabeth died, England was seething with religious unrest. Radical Christians had now separated from the Church of England in an effort to restore the ideals and practices of the primitive churches and to move closer to Calvinist theology. These radicals included the Scrooby Pilgrims (called Separatists) who settled in Plymouth in 1620. Among the more conservative reformers were those called Puritans, who hoped to reform the Church of England from within. This was the group that Anne Hutchinson joined.

The Puritan movement opposed the Separatists on the left and the more conservative Presbyterians of the Church of Scotland on the right. Those Puritans who came to New England have been described as Nonseparating Congregationalists because they hoped to abolish the episcopal structure of the English church and substitute a congregational polity to which only those who underwent a critical religious experience (salvation by faith through grace) would be admitted as members.² The king and his bishops forced the Separatists out of the country after 1608, and it looked as though the Nonseparating Puritans would also be suppressed. Yet, although thousands of these Puritans emigrated to New England between 1629 and 1640, the movement continued to grow in Old England until it

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was able to launch a successful revolution in the 1640s under Oliver Cromwell. By that time Anne Hutchinson had come to New England, and she had already started her own revolution in Boston.

In his book *Wayward Puritans*, the sociologist Kai T. Erikson describes Anne Hutchinson as a woman who lived at the crossroads of early American history.³ One way to look at this crossroad is to say that the settlers of Massachusetts Bay were facing critical choices about the kind of Christian community they were about to establish in the New World. They wanted it to be a Bible commonwealth, and they wanted it to be "a city set upon a hill," a model for all the world of a perfect Christian state. That vision has cast a long shadow in the nation's history. Today most Americans still believe that the United States is a model for the world, though not quite in Anne Hutchinson's terms or those of the Puritans. In many ways the choices made by the people of Massachusetts in the 1630s shaped our country and brought it to what it is today. We consider ourselves the model of freedom, of idealism, of equal opportunity, and of a stable, orderly, and progressive social system. If the United States is not a Christian nation, it is one clearly formed upon Judeo-Christian principles. In this respect, for better or worse, we owe a major debt to the Puritans. John Winthrop, the leading figure in the Bay Colony, is still cited by presidents and politicians who consider us today a city upon a hill, in special covenant with God, leading the world to the millennium. We like to think of ourselves as a chosen people with a manifest destiny to save the world from error and to make it over in our image.

Yet the New England legacy is ambivalent. We all know that the Puritans were not a very tolerant people and that they had a very rigid view of religious conformity. They expelled Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, they whipped and jailed the Baptists, they hanged Quakers, and they put to death people they considered witches. Anne Hutchinson was aware of this double image; she was there when critical decisions were being made, and she spoke in favor of a church-state order different from the one that emerged victorious under Winthrop's leadership.

To Anne Hutchinson, a truly Christian society had to be based upon the ideal of the priesthood of all believers, and the state had to permit the existence of a united church of Christ rooted in a mystical fellowship of those who shared the presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Christian fellowship for her did not distinguish between males and females, rich and poor, and it knew no narrow sectarian or nationalistic covenant with God. Hutchinson also considered John Winthrop and such ministers of the Bay Colony as John Wilson, Zechariah Symmes, and Thomas Welde mistaken in believing that membership in God's church could be discerned by fallible human eyes and measured by the appearances of piety, honesty, and morality, or what were called "good works." Hutchinson was convinced that God worked in many ways not knowable by man or measurable by outward behavior or professions. Furthermore, she believed that in forming churches based upon what she called "the covenant of works" rather than "the covenant of grace," the ministers and lay leaders of the Bay Colony were moving away from the true spirit of the Puritan movement, which had given it strength to stand against persecution in Old England. They were mistaking outward moral behavior for inward grace or salvation. Winthrop's Bible commonwealth seemed to her a retrograde movement that would lead toward a church of hypocrites—people who professed and displayed outward conformity to local norms but who inwardly were not truly one with

God. It proved, in fact, to be a movement that foretold the cultural captivity of the churches in America.

Like all Calvinists, Hutchinson believed that men have been so depraved since Adam's fall that they act essentially out of self-interest, and that self-interest leads them to behave according to the standards of the world and not from love of God. Thus most men behave well only out of fear of damnation. In addition, she believed that by insisting that God had made a covenant with the settlers of New England to establish a special community because they were a chosen people, the founders of the colony were creating the same kind of formal, spiritually dead established church that they had fled England to escape. Ultimately this would breed only smugness, complacency, and self-righteousness, with outward forms substituted for inward faith.

Billy Graham preached such Christian nationalism in the 1950s when he said, "If you would be a true patriot, then become a Christian. If you would be a loyal American, then become a loyal Christian."⁴ Graham has grown older and wiser and now preaches that God does not make covenants with chosen nations, defining their national enemies as his enemies and their national security as basic to the survival of Christianity.

To many other Americans, however, Billy Graham's earlier view seems perfectly reasonable, and for that we have John Winthrop and John Wilson to thank. For what they established in their city upon a hill, after banishing heretics, was a community in which "grace flowed through the loins of the saints," a New Israel in the New World. It was a community with a hierarchical and patriarchal social structure led by elect males and organized in parish churches.⁵ This, they firmly believed, was God's way. It was, in fact, the purified church and state for which England was to undergo a drastic revolution under Cromwell.

When we come to examine closely what was labeled Antinomianism (against law) by Winthrop and the Bay Colony ministers, we recognize today that it is a far more radical definition of church and state than most of us can easily embrace, however much we may admire Anne Hutchinson's courage and audacity. By labeling her an Antinomian, the Puritan leaders branded her as a lawless fanatic who would govern by direct revelation. Her mystical reliance upon the spirit of God within her would undermine all law and order; it would prevent the enforcement of the word of God by civil authorities. Denying that they had any intention of returning to false ecclesiastical or political principles, the leaders of the Bay Colony believed that they were creating a "middle way" between the Anglican Reformation and the radical Separatists, Anabaptists, Familists, and other extremists. Considering themselves practical, realistic, level-headed reformers, they branded Hutchinson as visionary and dangerous. That division between the pragmatist and the perfectionist has been at the basis of American cultural conflict ever since. It poses the binary tension within which the people of this country have oscillated for more than three centuries—a tension between noble idealism and hard-headed expediency. The measure of respect that one accords to Anne Hutchinson or to John Winthrop in evaluating the Antinomian movement in our history is a pretty good index of where one stands within that fundamental polarity.

Anne Hutchinson was a woman who would have left a mark upon any age, but in 1636 she found herself involved in a controversy particularly suited to her talents and temperament. Born in Alford, England, a town north of the old city



Sculpture of Anne Hutchinson.
Cyrus Dallin, sculptor; located in
front of the Massachusetts Statehouse.
RIHS Collection (RHi X3 6508).

of Boston, Anne Marbury was one of fifteen children of a crusty, disputatious, strong-willed minister of the Church of England, the Reverend Francis Marbury. Marbury was no Puritan, but like the Puritans he was highly critical of the clergy of the established church.⁶ He was imprisoned more than once for publicly denouncing the ignorance, corruption, and incompetence of the Anglican clergy. Anne grew up in Alford, but after her father was reinstated to good standing in the church in 1605, the family moved to London, where Marbury became a pastor. The Marburys may well have rubbed shoulders with William Shakespeare in the streets of that metropolis.

Living in an era of political and religious turmoil, Anne Marbury appears to have mastered all of the fine points of Anglican and Calvinist theology. She read her father's books of theology and sharpened her native intellectual ability through regular discussions with her father and siblings. We know little of her physical appearance, but all accounts agree that she was remarkable for her nimble wit, her strong assertiveness in debate, her bold presentation of her own position, and her genuine compassion in helping other women both by medical care and by psychological and spiritual counseling. Hutchinson was not so mystical that she thought babies dropped from heaven into the cabbage patch. She had good reason to learn all she could about health care, for the body, she believed, was the temple of the soul, and for the reborn it became the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Physical birth and spiritual rebirth were logically connected in her thinking.

Her father died in 1611 when she was twenty. A year later she married William Hutchinson, a prosperous cloth merchant. They lived in Alford, her childhood home. It is not clear just when she made the decision to join the Puritan movement, but from her later account her religious conversion appears to have occurred during the 1620s.⁷ This was after she and her husband had discovered the Reverend John Cotton preaching in the town of Boston twenty-four miles south of Alford. They traveled there regularly to hear him, and he had a profound effect upon their own religious transition from the Anglican to the Puritan persuasion. That Anne was no radical at this time seems indicated by her refusal to be swept into the Separatist movement.

Tensions within the Anglican Church reached a critical point in the 1630s. John Cotton was expelled from his position by the archbishop for his Puritan leanings, and in 1633 he left for New England to join John Winthrop and the founders of the Bay Colony. Anne Hutchinson persuaded her husband to follow Cotton, and in 1634 they reached Boston with their children. During her lifetime Anne was to bear fifteen children, like her mother, and this was part of her incentive to become a midwife.

Life in the primitive village of Boston was extremely difficult. Although there were several towns in the colony, the total population in the Massachusetts Bay area at that time was only about four thousand. Boston itself held just one-quarter of these, or roughly two hundred families. Most of them lived at first in small log houses with thatched roofs and one or two rooms. Shortly after the Hutchinsons arrived, they were admitted to the Boston church in which John Cotton and John Wilson were preaching. The colony was already becoming involved in quarrels fomented by Roger Williams. Williams had become a Separatist, and he urged the Bay Colony to follow the example of the Pilgrims at Plymouth and announce its own separation from the unredeemable Anglican Church. He went even farther and denied the right of the civil authorities to enforce religious conformity and church attendance, and for this he was banished

in 1635. There is no record that Anne Hutchinson or her husband ever lifted a finger to defend Williams or to oppose his banishment. Separation of church and state was apparently not part of her teaching; she was content to work for reform within the existing church structure.

Anne Hutchinson was teaching theology at this time to some of the women of Boston. They met weekly in her home to discuss the sermons preached by John Cotton and John Wilson. Her exposition of theological fine points and her lively leadership in the discussions later attracted male visitors to her meetings, among them Governor Harry Vane. While her husband rose to important positions in the church and in the state, Anne quickly established herself as a significant religious and social force in that small community. Her role as a religious leader became evident when her brother-in-law, the Reverend John Wheelwright, came to Boston from England in 1636. Hutchinson and those who admired her urged that Wheelwright be appointed as a third minister of the Boston church. And that was when she began to arouse opposition.

She wanted Wheelwright to join with John Cotton because she had come to distrust the preaching of John Wilson. Wilson, she told those at her meetings, was preaching that people could prepare themselves to receive grace and be part of the elect for whom Christ died; by leading prayerful and pious lives, they could provide a pure vessel into which the Holy Spirit would be poured. Wilson was also preaching that it was a pretty good proof that someone was one of the elect and had been regenerated by the Holy Spirit if he or she led a moral, upright, and industrious life. The Puritan ethic was defined in terms of piety, morality, honesty, industry, sobriety, and thrift. But while this was a commendable moral ethic, Anne Hutchinson did not believe that moral behavior entitled anyone to church membership or that it was any proof of election. Such beliefs were a corruption of true Christianity, she felt, for they meant that people who lived moral lives from self-interest and people whose thrift, sobriety, and industry helped them grow wealthy would be assumed to be converted by God, when in fact they may well have been spiritual hypocrites or spiritually deceived into believing they were of the elect. Preaching that people could work their way into the church through their good behavior, or could bind God to save them by preparing themselves for salvation, incorrectly interpreted true doctrine; i.e., salvation by faith alone. It also limited God by appearing to make salvation a contractual arrangement between equals: when men or women did their part and lived piously, soberly, and uprightly, then God was obliged to do his part and send them grace.

The Church of England admitted persons on the basis of these beliefs, and this, Hutchinson felt, could only lead backward in New England. As historians can now demonstrate, she was correct, for gradually the spiritual fervor of the early Puritan movement waned. After 1640 Puritanism became institutionalized and routinized. As the New England churches lost their original pietistic spirit, they lapsed into institutions whose members were admitted in adulthood almost as a matter of course; a kind of birthright membership developed.⁸ But the leaders of the Bay Colony did not foresee this change. They believed Anne Hutchinson was insulting them and their cause, and they said so.

New England Puritanism contained a number of basic paradoxes and inconsistencies, and Hutchinson adroitly put her finger on these incompatible elements. At the time, however, she seemed to be seeing heresy where there was none. In fact, the logic of her beliefs seemed to undermine all church organization and ritual. Since God's grace was, for her, unconditional (or arbitrary), it mattered

little how people behaved in their outward lives. In addition, she insisted that even salvation could not wholly save mere humans from sin. Ultimately she claimed that only the truly elect could discern other truly elect persons, and that the elect recognized each other through the mystical operation of the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. Worst of all, however, her teachings led to the denigration of the Bay Colony's civil and ecclesiastical leaders, whom she called false leaders and false preachers.

John Wheelwright was not selected to become a pastor in the Boston church, although Governor Harry Vane supported the Hutchinsonians in their effort to have him appointed. John Winthrop's opposition proved decisive in this controversy. It now became clear that a major dissension was brewing. Matters were made worse when Wheelwright, in a fast-day sermon soon after his failure to attain office, boldly asserted that the true followers of God would and should do everything in their power to assert control over the colony to save it from corruption. "We must all prepare for a spiritual combat," Wheelwright said. "Behold the bed that is Solomon's; there is three-score valiant men about it, valiant men of Israel, every one hath his sword girt on his thigh. . . . They must fight, and fight with spiritual weapons . . . we must all of us prepare for battle and come out against the enemies of the Lord. And if we do not strive, those under a covenant of works will prevail."⁹

In this sermon the colony's leaders found a clear threat of insurrection. While Wheelwright specifically said that he spoke only of spiritual and persuasive means of asserting control, his opponents took him to mean otherwise. They put him on trial for fomenting sedition against duly constituted authority. In March 1637 they convicted him. Soon after, the authorities passed a law prohibiting anyone with Hutchinsonian leanings from entering the colony. Six months later John Wheelwright was banished, and all who had supported him were forced to give up their guns. Many were then disfranchised, and other Hutchinsonians were banished also. In most history books this is considered a victory for law and order by practical leaders who rightly saw that only anarchy could result from the presence of two such opposing factions in the colony.¹⁰

The final act in this drama came when a synod of ministers from Massachusetts and Connecticut made a list of all the erroneous views of the Hutchinsonians. They discovered eighty-two heretical positions dangerous to the stability of the commonwealth and the truth of Calvinism. Several ministers were then delegated to confront Anne with these errors and to persuade her to recant them. Most of the errors were so farfetched—such outrageous perversions of her teaching—that she disclaimed them readily and was indignant that they were ever imputed to her. But there were several presumed errors that she could not deny, especially those that condemned the doctrine of preparation for grace, denied that good works were evidence of election, and affirmed that God's grace was unconditional. John Cotton at first seemed to defend her position, but he later turned against her. In November 1637 she was convicted of libeling (or "traducing") the ministers of the colony and sentenced to banishment.

Because she was pregnant, her banishment was delayed, and she spent the winter under arrest. In March 1638 her church placed her on trial for heresy, and she was excommunicated. Later that month she and about half of her followers left Massachusetts for Rhode Island. The leader of this group, which included several of the most influential men of the colony, was William Coddington (another group of her followers went to Exeter, New Hampshire, with John Wheelwright). Coddington and the Hutchinsons received timely assistance from Roger

Williams in Providence, who helped them to purchase Aquidneck Island from the Narragansett Indians.

All that we know of Anne Hutchinson's beliefs we learn from the stenographic report of her trial and from other reports by her enemies. She left no theological writings of her own. Most historians have agreed that the trial was not fairly conducted, that Anne was denied ordinary rights, and that she defended herself so ably that she almost succeeded in thwarting her accusers. But when she said that God revealed various things to her directly, and that one of these was his promise that Massachusetts Bay would be destroyed if its leaders continued to persecute her, she provided a convenient handle for her own conviction. People who believed that God spoke to them directly, and who therefore placed God's voice above the voices of the learned ministers and the duly elected magistrates, were clearly unfit to remain in the kind of Bible commonwealth that the majority favored in 1637.

The trial of Anne Hutchinson. Engraving from Scribner's Popular History of the United States, ed. William Cullen Bryant et al. (New York, 1897). RIHS Collection (RHi X3 4266).



Hutchinson meant to say that the elect were not bound to obey the law of the Mosaic or Abrahamic covenant, the law that said "Obey my laws and you will be my people." But in her excitement she seemed to be saying that the covenant of

grace enabled the elect to know God's will even in future events of a secular nature. To her, the covenant of works, and her opponents' belief that only a learned ministry and God-ordained magistracy knew the truth, were such departures from true religion that they would bring down destruction upon the colony. But she put this badly. It was one of the few times her keen intelligence failed her.

Historians have noted that her banishment was meant to indicate to conservative Puritans in Old England that the New England Puritans were able to use their middle way of church-state relations to control fanaticism without bishops, church courts, and a king who was head of the church. In addition, banishing Anne Hutchinson made her a cautionary or monitory figure to other females who might assume the right to venture out of their proper sphere.

While a careful reading of her trial record and other statements can show us what the Hutchinsonians stood for in the debate over Calvinist doctrines, we have much less evidence to describe how they felt about organizing a social order. Here we must rely upon what little is known about their own colony at Pocasset (now Portsmouth) in Rhode Island. The records of this community are very scanty, but from what little survives, it does not appear that Anne Hutchinson and

her friends were particularly radical.¹¹ Although they said that they would not persecute anyone for conscience, we know that the Puritans said the same thing; to the Hutchinsonians, as to the Puritans, it was not persecution to whip, jail, or

hang a heretic, for one could only "persecute" a truly good and orthodox person. We know how the Hutchinsonians dealt with Samuel Gorton, an eccentric mystic who believed that women as well as men should be allowed to preach: when Gorton appeared in Pocasset, after being banished from Boston and Plymouth, he was whipped and banished from the town in 1639.¹² We know too that Pocasset, like Boston, was organized in accordance with wealth, education, and social position. The well-to-do were given more land and high office, while the poor were relegated to inferior status. We also know that the Pocasset settlement was not a very stable one. In 1638 Coddington and some of the other leaders were deposed from office and left in a huff for the southern end of the island, where they founded a town called Newport.

It was reported to those in Boston that Anne Hutchinson continued to expound the word of God in Pocasset, but it seems doubtful that she did so outside her own home. There is no record of her leading a church or of any meetinghouse being built in the town. In fact, while it is known that John Clarke preached in Pocasset, there is no record that he founded a church there (though he later did so in Newport). Under the Hutchinsonian theology it is difficult to see how a visible church could have been founded unless everyone was willing to accept the right of those who believed they were of the elect to choose the church's members on the basis of their own mystical knowledge of each other's sainthood.

Antinomianism did not produce religious stability in Pocasset. When John Clarke moved to Newport, he became a Baptist. Anne Hutchinson's sister, Katherine Marbury Scott, went to Providence and convinced Roger Williams to become a Baptist also (he left the denomination after a few months). Some Hutchinsonians questioned the practice of infant baptism, though there is no evidence that Anne Hutchinson ever did. The members of Clarke's church later split over whether to worship on the Lord's Day (Sunday) or on the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday), and this led to the formation of the Seventh-Day Baptist denomination. After 1656 many of Hutchinson's followers joined the new sect called the Society of Friends, or "Quakers."¹³

From this history it can be argued that the Puritans were right to see a kind of anarchy inherent in the Hutchinsonian position and a certain confusion arising from reliance upon the teaching of the Holy Spirit dwelling within the heart of each believer. But all of this misses the point. Anne never said she was a system builder. She opposed the idea of institutionalizing the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. And, as we know, Roger Williams did no better when he separated church and state. The proliferation of various ways of being Christian was one of the legacies of both these early Rhode Islanders.

In 1642 William Hutchinson died. He had been Anne's anchor through the years of controversy—always supportive, always loyal. It was reported that Anne had forced him to renounce his position as a magistrate in Pocasset because she had ceased to believe that God had ordained the institution of magistracy. How could saints be governed by secular authority? Why should they be, when the Holy Spirit dwelt in them? It was not, of course, that she believed the elect were perfect and could never sin. On the contrary, she said that they could sin as much as reprobates and still retain their election; she never doubted the Puritan doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. This left her open to the charge of believing that sin must originate with God and that sinners are not responsible for their own behavior because the Holy Spirit is living within them and guiding them. Her strict interpretation of unconditional election led to what some considered a

fatalistic reliance upon God. But for her, fatalism was perfectly consistent with man's fallen state, God's omnipotence, and the necessity of total reliance upon God's will.

The last act in Anne Hutchinson's history began with her decision, after her husband's death, to move with her unmarried children to the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam. There she lived at Pelham Bay (southeast of present-day Eastchester) until the Dutch inadvertently stirred up an Indian rebellion. Among the first settlers to be killed by the Indians were Anne and four of her children. And so her life ended, in August 1643, with Anne a victim of the white man's theft of the Indian's land—a sin that Roger Williams had denounced in Boston a decade earlier, but that Anne Hutchinson had never mentioned.¹⁴

This, then, was the historical context of the Antinomian movement. It remains to summarize some of the different ways in which historians have been interpreting that movement since then. Here I will be recapitulating some of the important work done by Professor Amy Lang in her fine study *Prophetic Woman: Anne Hutchinson and the Problem of Dissent in the Literature of New England*. Professor Lang shows very clearly that from Cotton Mather to Nathaniel Hawthorne, the prevailing image of the Antinomian was pervaded by the fact that Anne Hutchinson was a "public woman" and therefore a woman out of her sphere. As Lang demonstrates, early historians of Antinomianism started by connecting her unwomanly conduct with the work of Satan, thus justifying not only her banishment but her final miscarriage after her banishment and her cruel death at the hands of savages.

Later, when the Revolutionary ideology made religious liberty an ideal of the new nation, the Puritans were criticized for failing to tolerate Anne. Nonetheless she was seen as a very eccentric and unstable person, both as a woman and as a theologian. Those who studied her during the nineteenth century tended to find her beliefs of negligible significance and her controversy irrelevant to history; that controversy, it was claimed, was about abstruse points held by Calvinists of an earlier day—points no longer central to Christian thought. But while Anne Hutchinson gradually received more sympathy from historians as a persecuted Christian, she was not exonerated from her unwomanly conduct in leaving the sphere of hearth and home to enter into public debate. In fact, the American Protestants of the nineteenth century (the Victorian era) were convinced that she was more sinful for being unwomanly than for believing in the covenant of grace. Professor Lang makes a good case that Emerson did not really consider her a true forerunner of Transcendentalism (though some Transcendentalists thought she was) and that Hawthorne probably had her in mind when he branded the eccentric (and adulterous) Hester Prynne with a scarlet letter in his novel of that name.

Until the twentieth century the best Hutchinson could obtain from historical study was a concession that she was a pious and godly woman, that her trial was a grave miscarriage of justice, and that her theology was so recondite as to have not been worthy of any trial. Still she remained a cautionary figure in a male world; her real sin was forgetting that she was only a woman and that God had not ordained women to engage in the difficult and learned practice of Biblical exegesis or in the rough-and-tumble of worldly politics. In fact, until the middle of the twentieth century, most historians, being male authority figures, felt that Anne Hutchinson was a rather brazen, arrogant hussy; that however bright she was, she was really guilty of improper behavior, a scandal to the norm of female domesticity. As Professor Lang puts it, "The gender-specific problem of the

public woman figures [in] the dilemma of maintaining the law in a culture that simultaneously celebrates and fears the authority of the individual."¹⁵ Privately we admire Anne Hutchinson as a strong-minded individual, but for male authority figures she was always a threat and her womanhood was therefore held against her.

Beginning with the works of Perry Miller in the 1940s, however, a new set of perspectives began to appear. Miller and his pupils reexamined Puritanism and redefined the importance of the Antinomian movement. Through his emphasis on theology as a major feature of the Puritan community, Miller gave the Hutchinsonians a new significance in the history of the Bay Colony. Recognizing and pinpointing the redefinition and institutionalization of Puritanism in the New World, he was the first to depict the Hutchinsonian movement as the turning point in Puritanism's decline. Miller clearly delineated, at last, the significance of the Puritan belief in preparation for grace and in church membership based upon the evidence of good works. He showed that Anne Hutchinson was upholding an older pietistic approach to the Puritan movement, while Winthrop and her other opponents were more interested in order and stability than in theology.¹⁶

In this line of argument Miller was followed by his pupil Edmund S. Morgan, whose 1958 volume *The Puritan Dilemma* is still the most widely used textbook on Puritanism. Morgan claimed that Anne Hutchinson was Winthrop's intellectual superior in every respect except political common sense.¹⁷ He argued that Winthrop railroaded Anne Hutchinson out of the colony because it was not big enough for both of them, but he concluded his analysis of the movement by claiming that no other choice was possible if the colony was to survive. Writing as a hard-headed neoliberal in the 1950s—in an era when liberals spoke of "the end of ideology" and favored pragmatic solutions to political problems—Morgan had even less sympathy with Hutchinson's theological position than his mentor did. For him, "the Puritan dilemma" was how to live in this world and still be a good Calvinist; in these terms Anne Hutchinson was unrealistic, for she was more concerned with following the logic of her views, regardless of practical consequences, than with accommodating to the world.

Following Morgan's book sociologists and psychologists began to study the Antinomian crisis from other viewpoints, those inspired by Erik Erikson's famous studies of Martin Luther and Mahatma Gandhi. One sociologist, Kai Erikson, concluded in 1966 that Hutchinson and her "odd opinions" deviated too far from the acceptable norms of Massachusetts society. Following Emile Durkheim, Erikson maintained that persecution of social deviants marks the health of society, for it gathers the community into a solid phalanx against those who threaten its accepted beliefs and values. Although few Bostonians understood the theological quibbling that led to Anne's banishment, Erikson believed, they were agreed that her behavior was out of line with what was expected of respectable, decent, orderly, and normal Puritans. He was willing to concede that her being a woman was one of the marks of her deviance, but he also followed Miller and Morgan in arguing that pragmatically speaking, Winthrop stood for common sense and Anne Hutchinson for fanaticism. No one was to blame in such a scenario, however, for society sets its own standards and defines its own deviants. The sociologist simply charts the middle of the road in terms of those who are driven off into the gutter.¹⁸

A few years earlier Emery Battis had utilized both sociology and psychology to analyze the Antinomian movement in the most intense detail yet provided by a

historian. In *Saints and Sectaries* Battis concluded that Anne Hutchinson's behavior was psychologically abnormal. She had too intense a relationship with her father; too emotional a bond with her father-figure, John Cotton; too little concern for her spineless husband, William. Her psychological instability led her to challenge other male authority figures, said Battis. Anne battled for her own psychological needs rather than for theological and ecclesiastical concerns, and the latent psychological meaning of this struggle is more important than the overt civil or theological meaning.¹⁹

Why, then, did so many other, more psychologically stable people in Boston side with Anne Hutchinson? Here Battis pointed out another latent meaning in the controversy; drawing on Max Weber, he analyzed the wealth and social standing of those who supported her. Battis's statistical analysis led him to conclude that most of the staunch Antinomians were merchant entrepreneurs, men of rising wealth, while most of their opponents were landed gentry with more traditional views of social order. The rising merchant class differed from the old landed class in desiring less restraint upon business enterprise. These entrepreneurs chafed under the efforts of the Puritan gentry who dominated the legislature (and who clung to an older, medieval social ethic) to pass laws regulating wages and profits. The entrepreneurs also disliked the clerical denunciations of "filthy lucre" and the clerical insistence that people remain in the social rank to which they were born. Hutchinson's views appealed to these "new" men because these views were closer to a new individualistic, laissez-faire social ethic, one that would limit the regulatory power of the state and exalt the free enterprise of the rising middle class. Anne Hutchinson, it seemed, was not the Thoreau of Massachusetts Bay but the Ayn Rand.

Finally, in the 1970s, a group of feminist historians entered the field and produced important new reevaluations of the Antinomian crisis. For these writers, Antinomianism is one of the earliest examples in our culture of the way in which gender issues govern social power and behavior. Anne Hutchinson's theological contributions to Puritanism, these historians said, were ignored and denigrated primarily because Hutchinson dared to challenge male hegemony. The leaders of Massachusetts Bay decided to make an example of her as a symbol of the danger posed to society when a woman leaves her God-appointed sphere. This feminist viewpoint totally reversed the interpretation of the early nineteenth-century historians. It exalted Hutchinson for daring to be a woman and daring to assert woman's equal role; it eulogized her as a compelling symbol of the new movement for equal rights for women.

Anne Hutchinson has also become a contemporary symbol of a major gender revolt within our churches, where women theologians like Mary Daly, Rosemary Ruether, and Elizabeth Fiorenza are critical of the patriarchal basis of the Christian church and demand that the Bible itself be reexamined to expose its bias against women. Instead of disparaging Hutchinson's theology as abstruse or mere "quibbling" over Calvinist exegesis, feminists argue that her willingness to stand up as a woman and seek theological change marks Hutchinson as a martyr to both women's history and church history. She is now cited as an example of what is necessary today if the Christian churches are to become relevant again in modern society. Hutchinson preached the priesthood of all believers, and from this ideal derives the equality of women in Christianity and their right to do everything a man can do in church and civil affairs.

I am not personally convinced that Anne Hutchinson was consciously trying to empower women—that is, to give them a special or equal role in the church as

women. In fact, at her trial she made a point of stressing that she never taught theology at the meetings in her home when men attended. Nevertheless her behavior demonstrated her belief that God's message could and should be defended by women as well as by men when it was being perverted, and that women could minister to fundamental human concerns in spiritual affairs as effectively as men could. Just as she was a medical and psychological minister to women in her daily life, so, as a Christian, she asserted a sphere of influence that she believed was not only perfectly legitimate in the Christian order but also obligatory. God spoke through all of his saints regardless of gender, and they were all bound to uphold his truth.²⁰

In what I have been saying about historical reinterpretations, I am not simply reciting the truism that every age makes past symbols into relevant examples of contemporary concerns. In seeking a "usable" past, too often we distort it. The study of African-American history, for instance, is not just a search for tools for the present civil rights movement; more importantly, it is an effort to understand how and why black slavery and white racism obtained such a strong hold on our culture. Similarly, studying the Puritans' quarrel with Anne Hutchinson can give us a better understanding of the founding of American civilization and how that quarrel gave it shape. While each new interpretation of the Antinomian crisis may reflect the particular concerns of its age, it can also help us to see more clearly who Anne Hutchinson was and what she and John Winthrop represented both for their times and for ours. Different historians may emphasize different aspects of that affair, but taken together they are all helping us to deal with the living past. As William Faulkner once said, "The past isn't dead, hell, it isn't even past." Anne Hutchinson has thus become, like Christianity itself, a many-splendored thing. She lives because she was with us at a vital crossroads in our past, and because her actions help us to comprehend more clearly the vital religious, social, and feminist crossroads in the present. It is the best possible tribute to her that, though long dead, she still speaketh.



Notes

1. The two most recent books are Amy S. Lang, *Prophetic Woman: Anne Hutchinson and the Problem of Dissent in the Literature of New England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), and Robert Rimmer, *The Resurrection of Anne Hutchinson* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1987).
2. For the significant aspects of "Nonseparating Congregationalism," see Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933).
3. Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: John Wiley, 1966), 106.
4. William G. McLoughlin, *Billy Graham: Revivalist in a Secular Age* (New York: Ronald Press, 1960), 143.
5. Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family* (Boston: Trustees of the Public Library, 1956), 102.
6. For details of Anne Hutchinson's life, see Winifred K. Rugg, *Unafraid: A Life of Anne Hutchinson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930); George E. Ellis, *The Puritan Age in Massachusetts* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1888), 300-362; and Emery Battis, *Saints and Sectaries: Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962).
7. See Battis, *Saints and Sectaries*, 44, 49-50. Battis suggests that she may have arrived at her Antinomian position during a conversion experience in 1630-31. She held Antinomian views by the time she came to Boston.
8. For the decline of piety in New England after 1640, see Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), and Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, chap. 6, "Puritan Tribalism."
9. Quoted in Battis, *Saints and Sectaries*, 142.
10. Battis states that there were 187 males in the Bay Colony who may be considered Hutchinsonian. Ninety of them lived in Boston. These may not all have had large families, but even if they had an average family of only 6, that would have been almost half of the 1,200 inhabitants of that small town in 1637. The Hutchinsonians were outvoted in the general election of that year by the voters in the surrounding towns, where Anne had less support because fewer there had ever met her. *Saints and Sectaries*, 66, 257, 296.
11. Those who first settled in Pocasset signed a political covenant in which they agreed that "We whose names are underwritten do here solemnly in the presence of Jehovah incorporate ourselves into a Bodie Politick, and as he shall help, will submit our persons, lives and estates unto our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords." Battis, *Saints and Sectaries*, 231. See also Rugg, *Unafraid*, 221.
12. For Samuel Gorton, see George A. Brayton, *A Defense of Samuel Gorton* (Providence: S. S. Rider, 1883); Adelo Gorton, *Life and Times of Samuel Gorton* (Philadelphia: G. S. Ferguson, 1907); and Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 28-60. Gorton's manuscripts are located at the Rhode Island Historical Society.
13. For religious controversy in Pocasset and Newport in these years, see Thomas W. Bicknell, *Story of Dr. John Clarke* (Providence: printed by the author, 1915), and James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 25-83.
14. That she settled near the Indians at Pelham Bay to convert them seems debatable, although some historians have made that claim.
15. Lang, *Prophetic Woman*, 3.
16. See Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts*, 158-63. According to Miller, "Any orthodox Protestant community would have looked upon her as Massachusetts did, and have disposed of her in pure self-defense."
17. Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), 147.
18. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*, 71-106.
19. Battis, *Saints and Sectaries*, viii, 8-14, 28-30.
20. Lang, *Prophetic Woman*, 42. Hutchinson "reduced herself to a medium through which God spoke," says Lang, "and in this way empowered herself more fully than the men in whom the community vested power"; thus "she disrupted the chain of authority that shaped Puritan civil relations."



FROM THE COLLECTIONS The Frances E. Henley Collection

DENISE J. BASTIEN

From time to time and as space permits, the Rhode Island Historical Society presents new collections to the readers of *Rhode Island History*. Highlighted in the following pages are architectural drawings by Rhode Island's first professional woman architect, Frances Henley.

The Frances E. Henley Collection spans nearly sixty years, from 1889 to 1946. The collection consists of architectural drawings, photographs, sketches, and personal papers. Through Miss Henley's notes, her public speeches, and her personal correspondence, we are given an insight into the roles that women played in society and in the workplace at a time when these roles were in transition.



Pen-and-ink sketch. RIHS Collection
(RHi X3 6506).

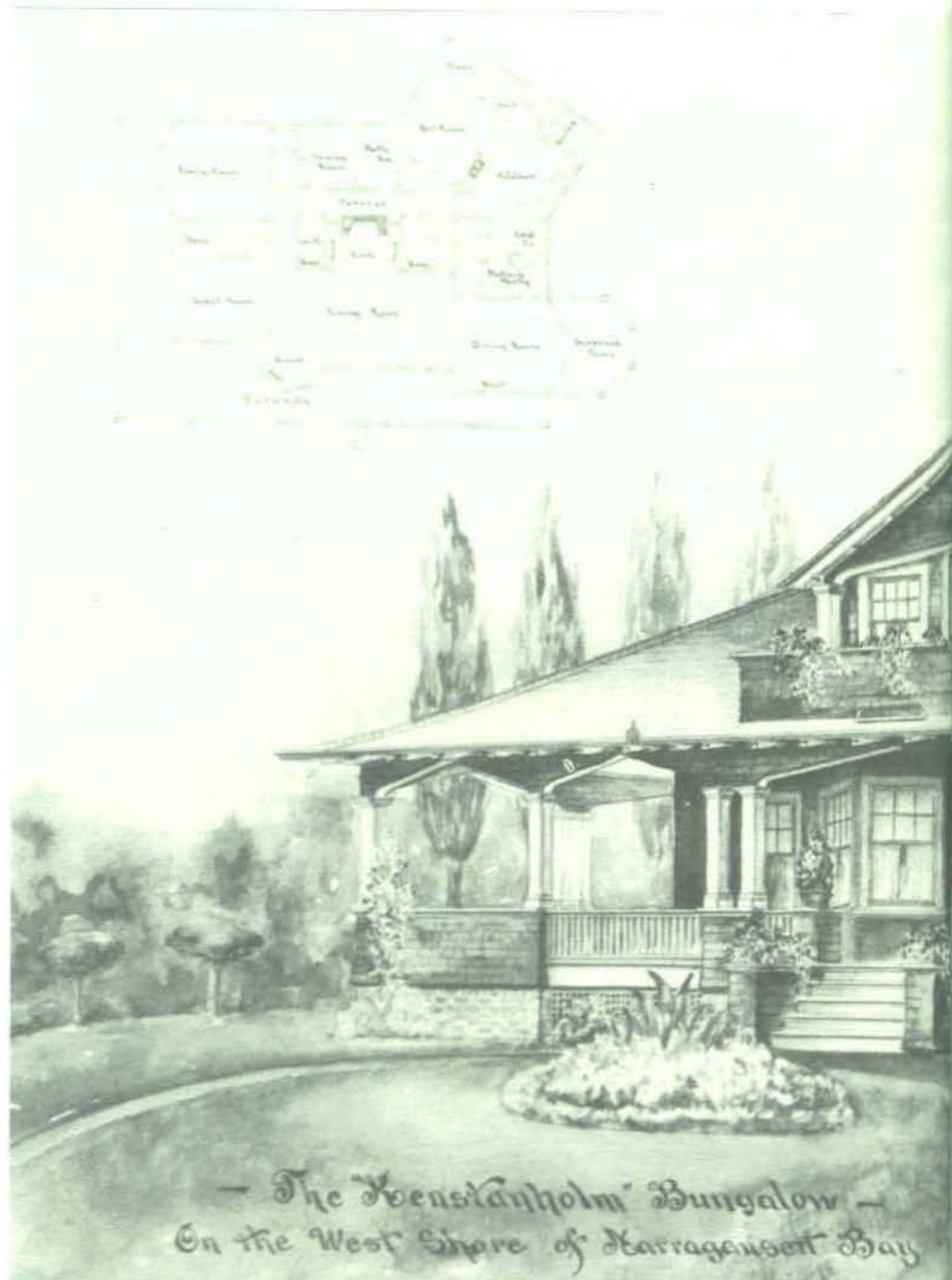
Frances Henley's drawings reflect more than the simple placement of windows and walls; they encourage us to read deeper—to find the cultural significance of what *home* means. The drawings selected here and the quotations gleaned from Miss Henley's personal papers are intended only as an introduction to this notable pioneer in the history of Rhode Island women. We hope that this glimpse will inspire an in-depth investigation into the woman, her work, and her time.

"A house is built of bricks and stones,
Of sills and posts and piers;
But a home is built of loving deeds
That stand a thousand years.

"A house, though but a humble cot,
Within its walls may hold
A home of priceless beauty, rich in
Love's eternal gold.



Portrait of Frances E. Henley.
Photograph by Bachrach Studios. RIHS
Collection (RH1 X3 6504).



Perspective: The Kenstanholm
Bungalow, West Shore of Narragansett
Bay. Watercolor on board. RIHS
Collection (RH1 X3 6501).

"The *men* on earth build houses—halls
And chambers, roofs and domes—
But the *women* of the earth—God knows—
The women build the homes."

—Included in a talk on radio station WEAN,
31 May 1932



"The House of unpretending simplicity attracts the criticism of *no one*. Adapt a style suitable to the tastes and modes of living. In the simplest type of house, one may live as beautifully as one pleases, and unless one wishes to conform to the requirements that formality exacts, she should not choose the extreme formal type of structure."

—Speech to the Women's Republican Club



Competition drawing: Design for a Small House, by Arthur Almy and Frances Henley. Ladies' Home Journal Competition. Pen and ink on paper. RIHS Collection (RH 3 6502).

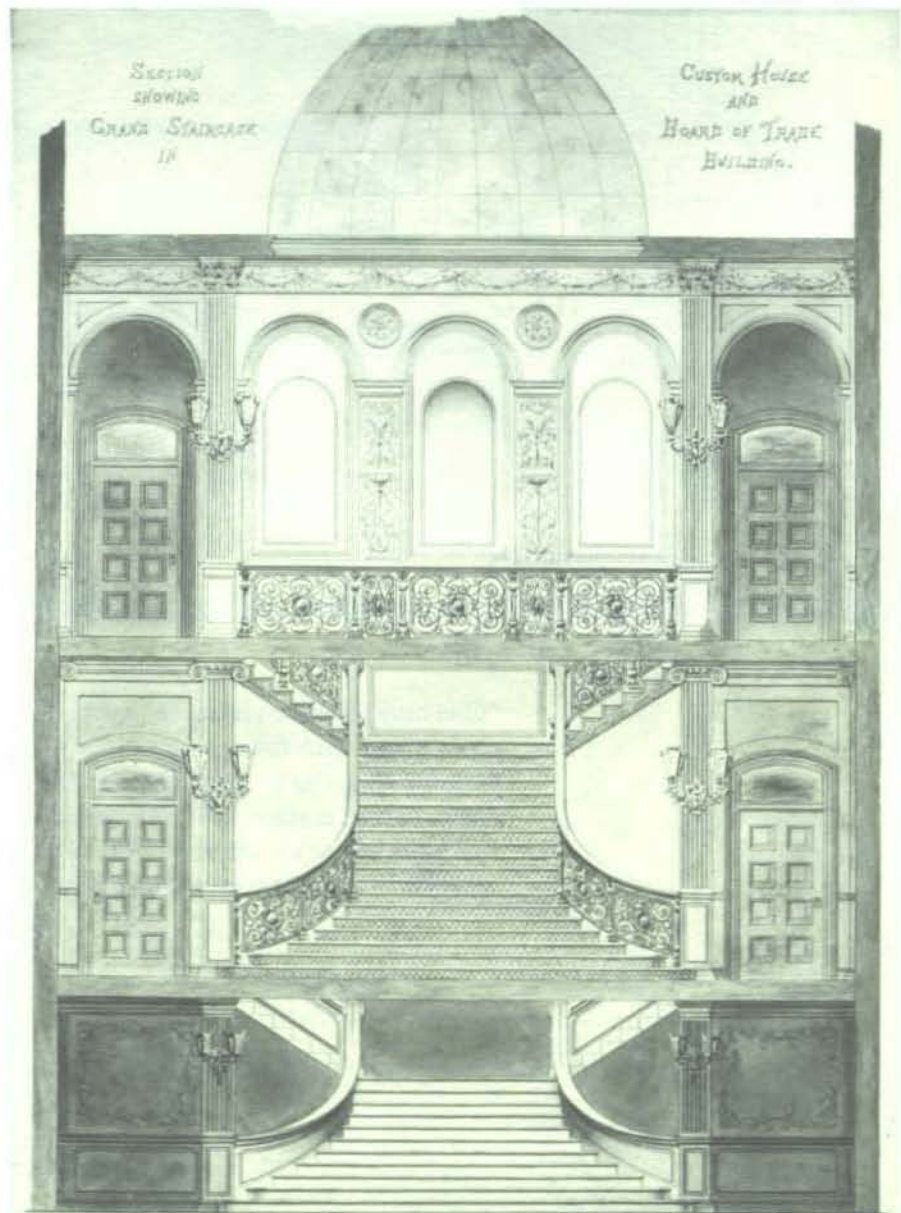
Perspective: Study for a Window Seat. Watercolor on board. RIHS Collection (RH 3 6503).





"The time arrived for me to join the class in Architecture. . . . I was more or less of a puzzle for the Professor, who began by teaching me the decorative part, while the boys were beginning with the constructural, and when I requested that I be given the complete course he said, 'Oh, I thought you would want the pretty part, only.' Such was the attitude of man toward woman when I began my study of architecture—as well as when I began to practice."

—Speech to the Gaspee Chapter, Daughters
of the American Revolution, 11 June 1934



Section: Custom House and Board of
Trade Building. Student project.
Watercolor gouache on paper. RIHS
Collection (RH1 X3 6505).

Rendering: Sketch of Living Room. Pen, ink, and watercolor on paper. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 6507).



"One may produce a room of charm, comfort and atmosphere so inviting to one's friends and *young people*, that they will *want* to stay at home; and their friends will prefer to spend their leisure hours there, rather than in amusement places or on the streets. *HOME*, you know is where the spirit is instilled into the youth of our Country. *HOME*, is what you make it, always, and beauty is achievable without great expenditure."

—Speech to the Parent-Teacher Association,
Montague Street School, 16 October 1933