

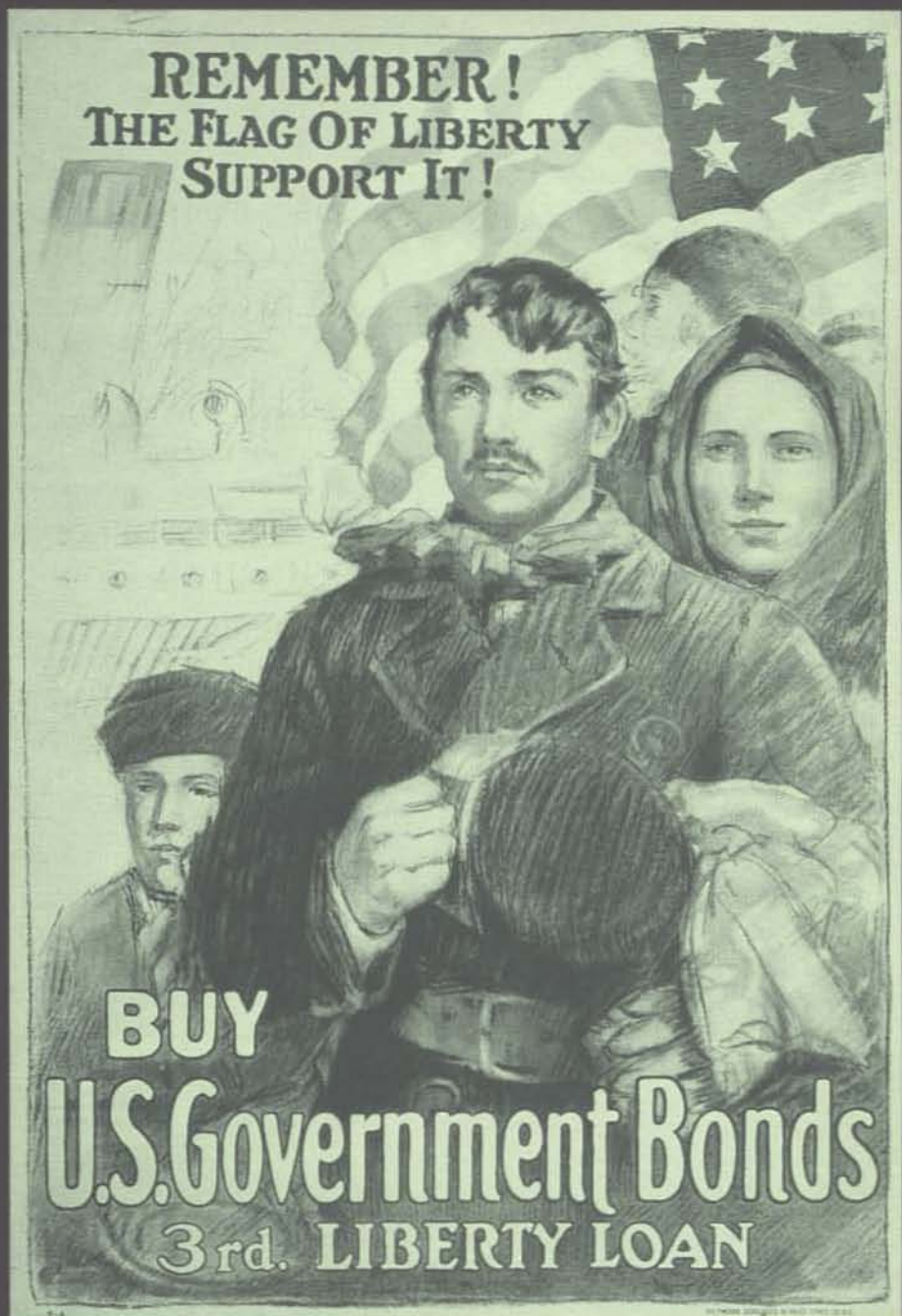


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CONTENTS

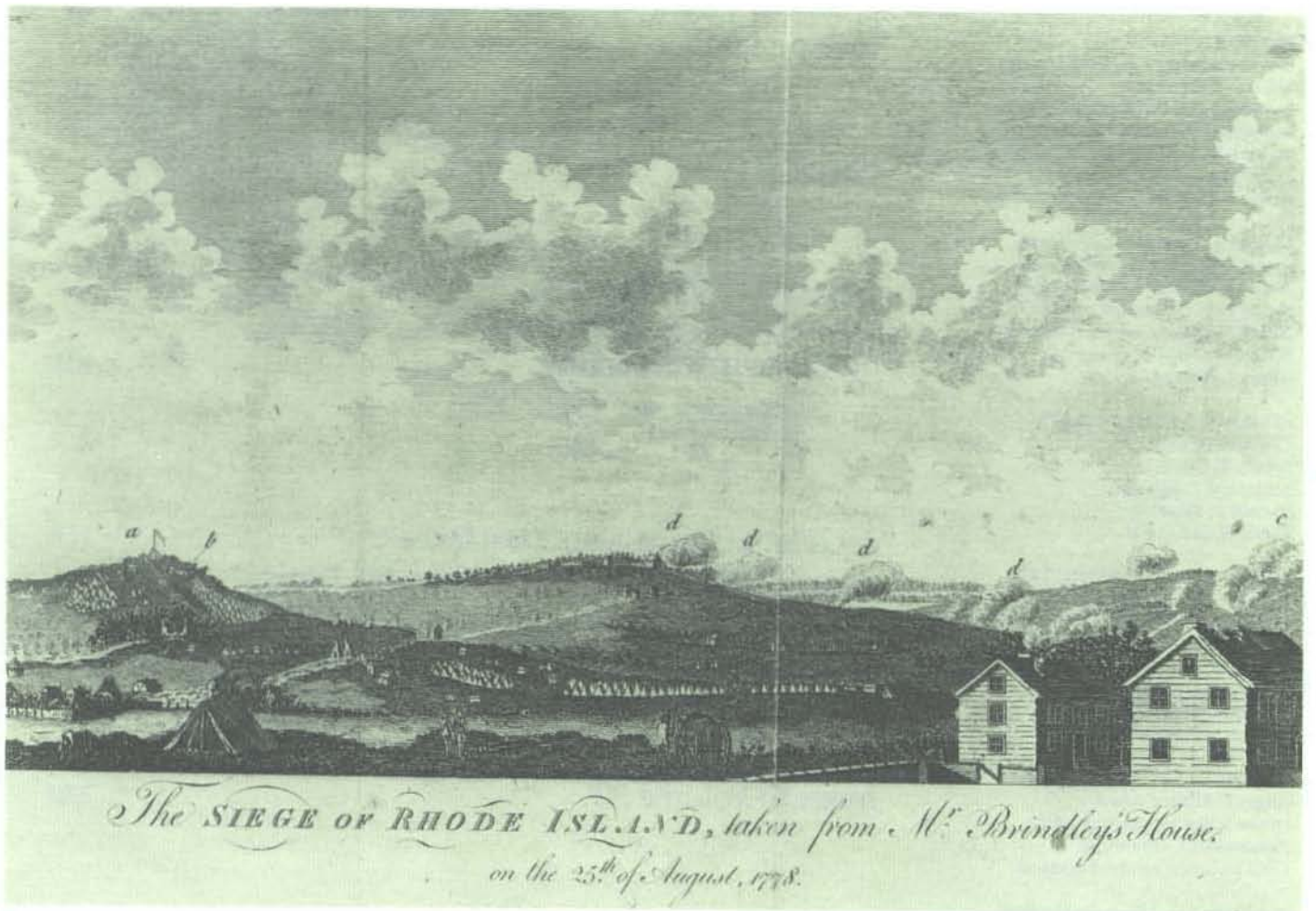
- On and Off the Record:
Town Clerks as Interpreters
of Rhode Island History 103

RUTH WALLIS HERNDON

- "A Giant of Embodied Conscience":
Joseph M. Coldwell and the Socialist Party
in Rhode Island 117

JOSEPH W. SULLIVAN

- Index to Volume 50 130



"The Siege of Rhode Island, taken from Mr. Brindley's House on the 25th of August, 1778." Hand-colored engraving. Plate from *Gentlemen's Magazine* 49 (1779): 101. RIHS Collection (RH1 X3 1754).

On and Off the Record: Town Clerks as Interpreters of Rhode Island History

RUTH WALLIS HERNDON

From Abel Tanner's perspective, Hopkinton faced a difficult year in 1784. As Hopkinton's town clerk, Abel was an official chronicler of town government affairs, and thus, like all recorders of town meeting and town council minutes, he served as an interpreter of Rhode Island history and culture: by what he chose to record and by the way he recorded it, he conveyed his sense of the town's economic, political, and social order and disorder. In 1784 disorder seemed to prevail.

The Revolutionary War had come to an end without physical damage to Hopkinton, but the conflict had left its mark in other ways. Before the war the freemen had gathered in town meetings five or six times each year; in 1784 they convened seventeen times, and economic woes appeared on the agenda almost every time. Hard money was scarce; heavy town, state, and Continental taxes during the war years had left many Hopkinton residents financially devastated. Six men asked for and received complete exemption from taxes, and the three tax collectors requested that the town excuse the "bad rates" of another twenty-four people whose assessments they had been unable to collect.¹

The town itself procrastinated in paying its share of state taxes. As a result the county sheriff jailed town treasurer Joseph Thurston twice to force Hopkinton to pay up.² Looking for a way out of their problems, Hopkinton's freemen instructed the town's deputies to support a General Assembly act to issue paper currency.³ The act did not pass that year, however, and Hopkinton's citizens continued to struggle with debt and delinquent taxes throughout the 1780s.

Hopkinton's six elected town councilmen experienced an equally difficult year in 1784, meeting sixteen times to discuss and resolve pressing social problems. They warned forty transient families to leave Hopkinton and to expect no support from the financially beleaguered townspeople. The town sergeant and his constables physically removed another nine families from Hopkinton to other towns where the council decided they rightfully belonged. Three other families, without land or opportunities, decided themselves that they might be better off elsewhere, and they applied to the Hopkinton council for certificates that would allow them to attempt settlement in another town.⁴

Edward Wells had been an overseer of the poor in Hopkinton since 1771; by 1784 his thirteen years of experience qualified him as a veteran in hearing and resolving the problems of the poverty-stricken. He had participated in many decisions to remove transient families from Hopkinton to other towns, and his overseer's responsibilities included receiving into his care any people sent back from other towns to Hopkinton. Thus it came as no surprise to Edward when, in the autumn of that difficult year, the town sergeant from neighboring Richmond brought Phebe Perkins to his door.⁵

No one wanted Phebe Perkins. Poor, unmarried, and itinerant, twenty-four-year-old Phebe was about to deliver an illegitimate child. When Phebe's pregnancy had become obvious and word of it had reached the ears of Richmond's council-

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Catchpenny engraving, circa 1760, by Bowles & Carver, London. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 6883).

men, they had sent her out of their town before the baby was born.⁶ Since Phebe had been living in Richmond for some time, any child she delivered there would have been that town's legal and financial responsibility.⁷

Edward Wells took Phebe in, found a place for her to live, and saw to it that she had proper care during and after her delivery. Noting the condition of her footwear when she arrived, he even arranged for her to receive another pair of shoes.⁸

Edward also immediately reported Phebe's presence and condition to the town councilmen, who quickly convened "to consider with regard to an order for the removal of one Phebe Perkins from Richmond to this town."⁹ The council decided to appeal her removal by suing Richmond in the county court. At their next meeting the councilmen prepared for the lawsuit, appointing a committee "to collect the circumstances relating [to] the order for removing Phebe Perkins from Richmond to Hopkinton & point out the reasons to support the appealing therefrom."¹⁰

One of the most obvious reasons for the appeal, in that difficult year of 1784, was economic. The costs of caring for an impoverished woman and her newborn child stretched the town's already thin finances.

Within three months of her arrival, in payments authorized in January 1785, Phebe had cost the town a considerable sum: Edward Wells received 12s. for providing room and board for her and finding a place for her to live; Cary Clarke received £7 10s. for boarding, nursing, and "assisting" her "in her late sickness"; Dr. Ross Coon received 3s. for bleeding her and giving her "strong drops"; Joseph Witter, Jr., received 5¹/₂s. for providing her with shoes.¹¹ In all of 1784 Hopkinton had spent slightly over £22 on care of the poor.¹² In one council meeting alone, in 1785, the town had spent £8¹/₂—well over one-third of the previous year's total—on the care of one woman and her infant child.

By the time the town council met on 19 January 1785, Phebe was well enough to undergo examination but apparently not able to travel very far, since the councilmen came to her.¹³ The council opened its session at Abel Tanner's house that day, but after most of its business was completed, it adjourned and reconvened at Samuel Witter's house, where Phebe was staying.¹⁴ The councilmen asked her questions about her past—questions aimed at discovering which Rhode Island town had primary responsibility for her welfare. Her story was that of a woman on the edge of poverty, moving with the seasons, counting time in harvests, somehow surviving outside the traditional network of family relationships. The clerk recorded Phebe's story as follows:¹⁵

[Phebe] on oath saith that she was born at Newport, that she was bound an apprentice to Abraham Burden then of Westerly who carried her to Stephen Perry's in Charlestown where she lived till said Perry moved to Hopkinton, & went to Hopkinton with said Perry where she lived till she was of age, which was the 25th day of August 1778; that she knows of no contract between said Burden & said Perry concerning her living with said Perry; that she saw her indentures at

Perry's but doth not know how he came by them; that she did not know whether Perry claimed a right to her time or not; that in about three weeks after her time was out she went to one Averies in Connecticut to work where she stayed three weeks & then returned to said Perry's & stayed there till the beginning of the winter following & then she went to Benjamin Wilbur's in Richmond, where she lived till the spring following when people began to pick greens for sauce; that then she went to Thos. Sweet's in Hopkinton, where she worked two weeks; then she went to Timothy Larkin's & worked one week & then returned to said Sweet's & lived there till strawberries began to be ripe & then she went to Lebeus Sweet's & lived there till the first of August following & then returned to said Perry's & stayed there one year & then went to Amos Collins's in Stoningtown & lived there till the next spring & then went to Sweet Peckham's in Westerly & there lived till the next fall & then went to Charlestown & lived at different places in said Town near 2 years & then removed to Edward Perkins Esqr. in Richmond where she continued more than 2 years.¹⁶

In the six years since she had come "of age," Phebe had moved twelve times. Her connection to Stephen Perry through indenture papers probably gave Richmond's council an excuse to return Phebe to Hopkinton, but her continuous wanderings since she turned eighteen made it difficult for anyone to determine where legal responsibility for her welfare now lay.

Stephen Perry, for whom Phebe worked during and after her indenture term, is an elusive character in Phebe's story. His name appears on Hopkinton's tax lists intermittently from 1777 through 1779 and from 1788 to 1789. Land evidence records show no sale of property by Stephen, but he apparently moved out of Hopkinton, since his name disappears from the tax lists between 1780 and 1788.

A wealthy man, Stephen paid three to four times more than the average taxpayer in every assessment on which his name appears.¹⁷ But despite his wealth there is no evidence that Stephen ever took part in the political life of Hopkinton. The town clerk never entered him on record as a freeman, nor does his name appear on any voter lists made when he was a resident of the town. A survey of the town minutes shows that he never served the town in any public capacity, even as a minor official, such as surveyor of fences. He did not have a permanent, settled commitment to Hopkinton, and he was absent when Richmond sent Phebe back. The town council could not look to him to take any responsibility for his former servant.

The history related in Phebe's oral testimony must have strengthened the Hopkinton councilmen's resolve to appeal her removal, and they voted that very day to carry on the case "to final judgment." One month later the freemen officially appointed Abel Tanner "agent for this town" in Phebe's case and then ordered Ross Coon, the tax collector, to provide Abel with money to carry on the town's appeal.¹⁸ A few months later the freemen elected Thomas Wells to prosecute the case after Abel declined to do so.¹⁹



The Hopkinton council planned to bring the case to the Court of General Sessions of the Peace for Washington County in August 1785.²⁰ The records of that court no longer exist, but Hopkinton's town meeting and council minutes hint that the town won its appeal. After June 1785 Phebe appears in Hopkinton's records only once: in September 1786 Zebulon Weaver received twelve shillings for "keeping" Phebe and her child for eleven days and for attending council on her behalf.²¹ The small amount and the short time involved suggest that this was an obligation remaining from Phebe's first few months in Hopkinton. Apart from this one reference, neither Phebe nor her child ever appears again. If the county court had ordered Hopkinton to take legal responsibility for the illegitimate child, the town records would contain mention of an indenture for the child—the

standard way town councils coped with the expense of raising fatherless children. In all likelihood, Phebe and her child were removed to Richmond, there to live a life of servitude among "the poor of the town."

Phebe Perkins's experience illustrates the grim life of many powerless people living on the margins of society in eighteenth-century Rhode Island. But I have presented her story for another reason: to make a point about the documents that contain her history.

Phebe's personal testimony about her wandering life came to light only when the present-day Hopkinton town clerk discovered in the attic of the town hall a cache of documents dating from the eighteenth century.²² This remarkable find, in April 1991, included some miscellaneous papers collected by the town clerks of the late 1700s. Among the papers appeared the rough draft of the official town council minutes of 19 January 1785, when Phebe Perkins told her story.

Abel Tanner had taken minutes of the meeting on scrap paper. Later he edited these minutes and entered them in the leather-bound volume of town council records which he usually kept in his home, as did all town clerks of that day. This volume's safekeeping was entrusted to one town clerk after another until 1861, when it and all other town documents were lodged permanently in the newly built town hall.²³ Thus carefully preserved, the records seemed an indisputable authority on town business of the past. But the discovery of the rough-draft minutes allowed a comparison between the first and final versions, a comparison which showed that the clerk had omitted certain items from the official record.²⁴ Abel Tanner had reshaped the historical record of the town.

The business of that January council meeting ranged over typical administrative concerns of an eighteenth-century Rhode Island town: care of the poor, policing of transients, probate of an estate, and reimbursement of citizens who had performed services for the town. This last business occupied the greatest amount of time. Thomas Wells, Samuel Maxson, William Witter, and Daniel Button all applied to the council for reimbursement. Thomas Wells received a little over 15s. for timber he had provided to repair a bridge. Samuel Maxson received nearly £10 for "supporting" Peleg Burdick for the previous ten months and another £3 for providing clothing for Peleg, one of the poor of the town. William Witter received about 5s. to cover eight days of room and board for Samuel Button, another town charge. Daniel Button also asked for an unspecified amount for seven days' care of Mary Marshel, a transient woman; but the council denied this request.

Other men came to the council meeting that day with different needs. Elisha Larkin and Joshua Church wished to move out of Hopkinton and settle elsewhere: Elisha in Charlestown and Joshua in Richmond. Neither of these men owned enough real estate to qualify as a voting freeman, a status that would have eased a move to another community within the state. Because of their landless status, Elisha and Joshua needed departure certificates from the Hopkinton Town Council in order to move to another town. These certificates, which the men would present to the town councils of Charlestown and Richmond, vouched that the bearers and their families were legal, settled inhabitants of Hopkinton, and that Hopkinton would receive them back again and take responsibility for them if they could not care for themselves.

The council granted a certificate to Joshua Church that same day. The certificate covered Joshua and his "natural family under age," suggesting that Joshua had both adult children from an earlier marriage and stepchildren from his present marriage. Unlike Joshua, Elisha Larkin had to wait for his passport. He received it

seven weeks and three meetings later, when the council granted a certificate covering him, his "natural family," and Margaret Larkin, the orphaned daughter of a kinsman, who apparently completed Elisha's household.²⁵

There were three other pieces of business. Joseph Marshal, a newcomer to Hopkinton, had failed to bring a certificate for himself and his family to the town council, and the councilmen ordered him to appear at their next meeting "in order to give an account of his last legal place of residence or procure a certificate." Stephen Potter presented papers to be included in the administration of the estate of Cesar Wells, who had died a few years earlier. And in the last item on the agenda, the council examined Phebe in preparation for an appeal to the county court.

All these matters appear in the rough-draft notes, but not all survived the clerk's editing to be preserved in the official record. Although the clerk recorded Phebe's personal testimony in his notes, he omitted it altogether from the official minutes. By answering the questions put to her by the councilmen, Phebe left a record of her life, but Abel Tanner did not include that record when he redrafted his minutes; he recorded only what the councilmen decided about Phebe, and not what Phebe said about herself. By this omission he very nearly silenced a voice from among the obscure masses in Rhode Island's past—the kind of voice we now strain to hear.

Abel followed common practice among town clerks of his day when he drafted notes during that January meeting and recorded the final version later. In the town meeting and town council records of all towns, minutes sometimes appear out of chronological order, indicating that the clerks recorded their notes sometime after the meeting. In one case the South Kingstown town clerk let his notes accumulate because the town could not afford a new record book; eventually the freemen voted "that the clerk make a minute book of one quire paper & record the minutes of the town meetings which are not recorded." Uneasy about this lax record keeping, the freemen also voted that the "[record] book be for the future brought to the town meetings."²⁶

In other cases the elected clerk might be unable to attend a meeting, and a clerk pro tem (usually one of the councilmen) would take minutes in his place. Later the elected clerk would enter these minutes in the official record. South Kingstown town clerk William Potter once had to guess who had taken minutes in his absence: "I don't find any clerk entered," he wrote at the end of the official record of a council meeting, "but [the minutes] being sent to me from Jeffry Watson Esqr. & the minutes entered in his handwriting, I have ventured to enter the same on record."²⁷

Abel's omission of Phebe's personal testimony, however, did not represent common practice. In most other Rhode Island towns, the clerks recorded a summary of the transients' examinations that frequently occupied the town councils. Some clerks included verbatim transcriptions of the questions put by councilmen and the answers given by the persons under examination, but Hopkinton's records contain no such verbatim accounts. Up through 1800, Hopkinton's clerks recorded only two examination summaries in the official record, and both are in the third person—the clerk's paraphrase of the transient person's story.²⁸ The discovery that Phebe Perkins's examination existed in the rough draft but not in the final version suggests that other examinations may have disappeared also. Hopkinton questioned many transients, a necessary feature of the legal process of removing unwanted people from the town, and well

over a hundred families were removed between 1757 and 1800.²⁹ But Hopkinton's town clerks saw no reason to include the details of these many examinations in the official record.



The deletion of Phebe's examination constituted the most substantial piece of editing, but a careful study of the two versions of the minutes shows that Abel made other changes as well. One concerned the matter of race. In the rough-draft minutes, the clerk wrote: "Stephen Potter's 2 papers to be recorded as credit against the inventory of Cesar Wells, late deceased." In the official version, the entry reads: "Stephen Potter's 2 receipts ordered to be recorded." Cesar Wells's name had been dropped from the record; and Cesar Wells was black.

James Wells, Jr., the patriarch of a large family and one of the wealthiest landowners in Hopkinton, owned several slaves, Cesar among them.³⁰ But Cesar won his freedom by enlisting in the Continental army during the Revolutionary War.³¹ In February 1778 Rhode Island's General Assembly passed a law proclaiming "that every able-bodied negro, mulatto, or Indian man slave, in this state, may enlist" in the Continental army. Upon passing muster before Colonel Christopher Greene, who would lead this "Black Regiment," every enlisted slave would "be immediately discharged from the service of his master or mistress, and be absolutely FREE, as though he had never been encumbered with any kind of servitude or slavery."³² Cesar Wells responded quickly to this opportunity. He enlisted during the first week of March 1778, and the state valued him at one hundred pounds in order to reimburse his owner for the loss of his labor.³³

Cesar served in Rhode Island's Black Regiment for nearly four years. About two hundred blacks were drawn into this unit over the course of the war.³⁴ These men participated in the Battle of Rhode Island in August 1778, and they saw combat in several other locations during the war.³⁵ In 1781 they were involved in a campaign that took them to Wilmington and Philadelphia. Although the war substantially ended with the British surrender at Yorktown on 19 October 1781, the Black Regiment (now under Colonel Jeremiah Olney) lost 106 men between 17 October 1781 and 16 March 1782. Cesar was one of these; he died on 11 January 1782 in the Philadelphia barracks. The cause of his death is not given, but his name is listed with those "who have been killed in Action or Died in Hospital."³⁶ He had remained a private the entire time and had drawn private's pay (two pounds per month for most of the war) for his services,³⁷ with the military providing his food, weapons, clothing, and knapsack.³⁸

Cesar left an estate of clothing and money when he died. The confusion in the wake of the war and the occurrence of his death in another state slowed Hopkinton's administration of this estate, and it was not until September 1783—nearly twenty months later—that the town council finally named an administrator. Cesar had left behind a widow, Abigail, whom he had married in 1775, while he was still a slave.³⁹ But Abigail, probably also black,⁴⁰ was not offered the administration of her husband's estate, as would have been the case if she were white. Instead, the councilmen appointed Stephen Potter, a white man, to settle Cesar's estate.⁴¹

Tax records indicate that Stephen owned only a middling amount of land,⁴² but he came from a politically prominent family. His father, Thomas, had been Hopkinton's first town treasurer, serving the new town for nine years. In 1787 Stephen's younger brother Caleb would take Abel Tanner's place as town clerk and keep Hopkinton's records for thirty-one years.⁴³ Although Stephen never held

a major town office, his work as administrator of Cesar's estate qualified as yet another public service contribution from this civic-minded family.

As administrator, Stephen traveled to Providence and East Greenwich to obtain certificates verifying Cesar's military service and death. He also arranged for an inventory of Cesar's possessions, which included a few articles of clothing, a knapsack, some "old linen," a chest, and a treasurer's note worth £28 (probably his savings from four years in the army). The total value of Cesar's estate was £30 7¹/₂s.⁴⁴ (In 1990 money this is equivalent to a little over \$1,300.) The two receipts that Stephen presented during the council meeting on 19 January 1785 diminished the estate's value by £4 (80s.): Stephen had given 47s. to Abigail, and the other 33s. had gone to reimburse Stephen for his travel and expenses on behalf of the estate.⁴⁵



Catchpenny engraving, circa 1760, by Bowles & Carver, London, RIHS Collection (RHi X3 6884).

Abigail Wells eventually received the remainder of her husband's estate, but only because the town meeting intervened to set aside the custom that towns had first claim to any property Negroes may have accumulated in their lifetime. In December 1785 the freemen voted to give up their "right" to Cesar's estate in favor of "the said widow Abigail and her heirs & assigns forever."⁴⁶ On 1 January 1786 Abigail put her X on a receipt, verifying that Stephen Potter had given her £26, "it being the remainder part of the estate of my husband Cesar Wells."⁴⁷

The probate records tell the story of Cesar Wells's estate, and Abel did no permanent damage when he edited out Cesar's name in the council meeting records. But it was not the usual practice to abbreviate entries in this manner. The overwhelming majority of probate entries in the Hopkinton records cite both the administrator and the deceased; when only one person's name appears, it is the deceased's—the one whose estate is in probate. The clerk's brevity in Cesar Wells's case suggests racial insensibilities. A black man, although free, had no legal status, and the town, by custom, had first claim to his estate. In Abel's mind, perhaps, Cesar's property had become "public" property, and so Abel struck from the record the unnecessary information that the estate had belonged to Cesar.

Another omission from the final version of the council minutes concerned the request of a poor white man. Of the four men who applied to the town council for reimbursement at that meeting, only three received payment: Thomas Wells, Samuel Maxson, and William Witter. The council refused Daniel Button's request for reimbursement, and Abel Tanner omitted Daniel entirely from the final version.

The rough-draft notes read: "Voted that Daniel Button have an order to the treasury for £ [amount not filled in] it being for what he did in supporting Mary Marshel a transient person 7 days—Order given." Afterwards the clerk drew several lines through "Order given" to indicate that the order had been rescinded. Then he drew a large X through the entire entry. There is no hint in the official record that Daniel had ever applied for reimbursement, and so he too disappeared from that record.

Thomas Wells, Samuel Maxson, and William Witter could afford to support the poor until the town paid them back. These three men, who received repayment that day, possessed more than average wealth. In the March 1786 town tax, the average assessment was 14¹/₂s., but William Witter paid 30s., Thomas Wells 60s., and Samuel Maxson 70s.⁴⁸ Daniel, on the other hand, had little to spend for the support of others. He was so poor that his name did not appear on any tax list from 1782 on. He had owned some property at one time, but it was a meager amount: in January 1780 he paid 4s. tax when the average was over 53s.⁴⁹ Viewed

economically, Daniel's need for payment exceeded that of the other three applicants, and it is curious that the council singled him out for refusal.

The clerk did not state why the councilmen had changed their minds about reimbursing Daniel, but other records testify that Daniel's claim was valid. Twenty months later, in September 1786, Daniel applied for and received a departure certificate for himself and his wife "to remove to any town within the United States of America." At the same time, the council reimbursed Daniel three shillings "for service or support in the affair of Mary Marshal."⁵⁰ Mary Marshal had been removed from Hopkinton to South Kingstown in December 1784; in February 1785 the council reimbursed Phinehas Edwards, Hopkinton's town sergeant, for the costs of removing her.⁵¹ But Daniel, who had supported her for seven days before her removal, waited nearly two years for payment from the town.

Between the rough draft and the final version of the minutes of that January council session, Daniel Button and Cesar Wells were deleted from the record and Phebe Perkins was reduced to no more than an abstract presence. Fortunately, the discovery of the rough draft and a search through other town and state records have permitted the reconstruction of their stories. These are stories that would have sounded familiar to most town councilmen of their time. Within Rhode Island's borders circulated a population of marginal people—blacks, Indians, impoverished whites, transients, and the children of all of these. Their stories of continuous migration and perpetual poverty expose the grim underside of preindustrial New England.



The editing revealed by this comparison between the rough and final drafts of the council minutes cautions us that official town records are not the "original" historical documents that we may take them to be. They are in fact the product of judicious editing by the town clerks, who made decisions about what belonged and what did not belong in the permanent record. Other clerks may not have edited their rough-draft notes so dramatically as Abel Tanner did, but all town clerks acted as gatekeepers, allowing some material into the record and shutting other material out. In doing so, they determined what would become the official historical documents for their time. We do not have access to all the information that they had because of the choices that they made.

Abel Tanner, who made the choices we are looking at here, had been a pillar of Hopkinton's political life for sixteen years. In 1769, when Abel was twenty-eight years old, the freemen had elected him as the second of two deputies to the General Assembly, the first of many important public offices he would hold for the town.⁵² By 1785, when he took the minutes of the council meeting discussed above, he had served as first deputy, town councilman, overseer of the poor, tax assessor, and auditor, and he had been town clerk for eleven years.⁵³ The freemen frequently elected him to various committees tasked with drawing up petitions, making recommendations to the town meeting, or resolving town difficulties. Abel had won the confidence of his colleagues in the General Assembly as well: they elected him judge for the county court system several times in the 1780s, and even Hopkinton residents occasionally referred to him as "Judge Tanner."⁵⁴

Abel Tanner had both the experience and the mature judgment to deal competently with Phebe Perkins's transience, Cesar Wells's estate, and Daniel Button's request for payment. No evidence suggests that Abel bore any particular malice against women, blacks, or poor white men. Why, then, did he delete so much of these people's stories from the official record while leaving the stories of others intact?

Indenture between Maria Kerkner, aged twelve, and Laurence Sickel, a gentleman of Philadelphia, 15 October 1810. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 6885).

J. Cruksbank, Printer.

His Indenture

Witnesseth That *Maria Kirkner* aged *twelve* years *& eight months* the with consent of her Mother *Sarah Miller late Sarah Kirkner*

HATH put ~~himself~~ ^{herself} and by these Presents, *Said Maria Kirkner*

~~himself~~ ^{herself} DOTH voluntarily, and of his own free Will and Accord, put ~~himself~~ ^{herself} Apprentice to *Lorenzo Sichel* of the City of Philadelphia Gentleman

to learn ~~the~~ Art, Trade, and Mystery, and after the manner of an Apprentice to serve *Said Lorenzo Sichel & his assigns*

from the Day of the Date hereof, for and during, and to the full end and Term of *five years & five months*

next ensuing. During all which Term, the said Apprentice ~~his~~ ^{her} said Master faithfully shall serve, his Secrets keep, his lawful Commands every where readily obey. He shall do no damage to ~~his~~ ^{her} said Master, nor see it to be done by others, without letting or giving notice thereof to ~~his~~ ^{her} said Master. He shall not waste ~~his~~ ^{her} said Master's Goods nor lend them unlawfully to any. He shall not commit Fornication, nor contract Matrimony within the said term. He shall not play at Cards, Dice, or any other unlawful Game, whereby ~~his~~ ^{her} said Master may have damage. With ~~his~~ ^{her} own Goods, nor the Goods of others, without licence from ~~his~~ ^{her} said Master, he shall neither buy nor sell. He shall not absent ~~himself~~ ^{herself} Day nor Night from ~~his~~ ^{her} said Master's Service, without his Leave: Nor haunt Ale-houses, Taverns, or Play-houses; but in all things, behave ~~himself~~ ^{herself} as a faithful Apprentice ought to do, during the said Term.

And the said Master shall use the utmost of his Endeavours to teach or cause to be taught or instructed the said Apprentice in the Trade or Mystery of *Hand writing & Plain Sewing* and procure

and provide for ~~his~~ ^{her} sufficient Meat, Drink, *Clothing*

Lodging and Washing, fitting for an Apprentice, during the said Term of *five years & five months* & *Said*

Master is to give Said apprentice five Dollars

Whole days Schooling during Said term &

wherefore to give her two Suits of Clothe

and of which shall be new & thirty dollars

in Money

AND for the true Performance of all and singular the Covenants and Agreements aforesaid, the said Parties bind themselves each unto the other, firmly by these Presents. IN WITNESS whereof, the said Parties have interchangeably set their Hands and Seals hereunto. Dated the *fifteenth* Day of *October* Annoque Domini, one thousand, eight hundred and *Two*

Maria Kirkner
Mark

Sarah Miller
Mark

Lorenzo Sichel

Sealed and delivered }
in the Presence of }
Benjamin Ferguson }
of the County of Philadelphia }
in the County of Philadelphia }

Perhaps the answer lies in a combination of the difficulties of 1784 and the political context in which Abel made his choices. In 1784 the town council had met sixteen times, and in 1785 it would meet twenty-two times, taxing the time and energy of both council and clerk. Needy Hopkinton residents were draining the town's already low resources, even as numerous transient families appeared in town and threatened to make demands on the budget. By January 1785 Abel had served for five years as a justice in the county court in addition to carrying out his duties as town and council clerk, and he may have been weary of the persistent social problems that took up so much of his and the council's time. When faced with three more people in need, he apparently viewed them more as problems to be solved than as people to be heard.

Abel and the council did in fact "solve" the problems these people presented. They resolved to take Phebe Perkins's case to court, they recorded the receipts relating to Cesar Wells's estate, and they refused Daniel Button's request for money. Abel then recorded the *solutions*, not the problems. The solutions represented the accomplishments of the council, and Abel, as clerk, recorded what reflected the council's effectiveness. The message he sent via his minutes concerned not the stories of individual problem people but the stories of effective councilmen and decision makers. In this context, details about Phebe, Cesar, and Daniel were irrelevant; these details were part of the problem, not the solution. The irony for us is that in faithfully recording the solutions of the council, Abel silenced the voices of the people on whose behalf the council met.

Even though town clerks recorded data from the town meeting and town council sessions selectively, they still left behind records that contain a wealth of information about the political, social, and economic conditions in which people lived—including socially marginal people like Phebe Perkins, Cesar Wells, and Daniel Button. Despite their limitations, the town clerks' records allow us to see further into the lives of voiceless people than any other eighteenth-century documents. Diaries, newspaper articles, letters, and even autobiographies tell us of the lives of the educated, wealthy elite. To hear the voices of the poor farmer, the wandering servant, and the black soldier, we must comb the records of the clerks, whose business brought them regularly into contact with the most disadvantaged people of their day.

The clerks themselves were among the elite, forming a cadre of wealthy, literate, civic-minded white men around whom town business revolved. Of all elected town leaders, town clerks stayed in office the longest, with an average tenure of fourteen years. As a group, town clerks were three times wealthier than the average taxpayer in their towns, and their records reveal a level of literacy that surpassed that of the vast majority of their fellow townsmen.⁵⁵

Town clerks were in a unique position to communicate their sense of social order through the records they maintained. Abel Tanner's decision to omit Phebe Perkins's testimony tells us something about Abel's sense of order in 1785, after he had spent eleven years listening to, recording, and helping resolve the problems of the poorest members of society. His editing suggests that we can read town meeting and town council minutes not just as chronicles of political, economic, and social events but also as diaries written by the clerks. When we read their records, we see the world from their perspective.

That perspective could and did change. When Abel Tanner first took office as town clerk in June 1774, he appended titles to the names of all other elected officers: "Capt. Edward Wells," "Joseph Witter, Jr., Esqr.," "Mr. Jesse Maxson."

Even such minor officials as surveyors of highways and fence viewers were recorded as "Mr." and "Capt." and "Esqr." in the new clerk's official minutes. In marked contrast, Abel recorded his own name as town clerk without any title at all.⁵⁶ This unilateral deference did not last long. By the next year Abel had become comfortable enough with his peers and sufficiently sensitized to the distinctions of office to confine his use of titles to holders of the most important offices.⁵⁷ Similarly, he took few liberties in his recording at first: his handwriting is initially neat, careful, and confined. But within a year or two his writing grew larger and he began to sign his name to the minutes with great curlicues and flourishes that could take up half a page.⁵⁸ Through his official record keeping, Abel communicated his growing ease in his new position just as surely as if he had kept a journal.

The town records of Rhode Island tell us a good deal about people otherwise rendered nearly invisible to history by poverty and powerlessness. Yet it should be remembered too that to a great extent these documents were shaped by the thinking of the men who wrote them, men who made choices in their record keeping that reflected their own perception of the social, economic, and political order in which they lived. The town clerks have thus provided us not with unbiased chronicles of their towns but with edited interpretations of their times.

Notes

1. Each year the town clerk recorded in the town meeting minutes the names of all persons declared exempt from taxes or whose taxes were written off as "bad rates." In 1784 the freemen granted these exemptions and write-offs in a number of separate town meetings between 5 Jan. and 7 Dec. Hopkinton Town Meeting Records, 1:np. These 30 men represented nearly 8 percent of the 380 taxpayers listed in the state tax assessment of 16 Dec. 1785.
2. Town meetings of 1 Jan. and 8 Nov. 1784, Hopkinton Town Meeting Records, 1:np.
3. Town meeting of 21 Apr. 1784, Hopkinton Town Meeting Records, 1:np.
4. The town council minutes record all decisions to either "warn out" or remove transient people and to grant departure certificates to poor settled families who wanted to move elsewhere. In 1784 these decisions occurred in various council meetings from 26 Jan. to 15 Dec. Hopkinton Town Council Records, vol. 2.
5. Town council meeting of 9 Oct. 1784, Hopkinton Town Council Records, 2:144.
6. Hopkinton's town council minutes of 3 Jan. 1785 refer to Phebe's "lying in," and the council minutes of 8 Sept. 1786 refer to "Phebe Perkins & child." Hopkinton Town Council Records, 2:214, 2:259. Richmond's town council records from 1783 through 1800 are missing, and so we do not know Richmond's views on Phebe's removal to Hopkinton.
7. See "An Act, directing what shall be a legal Settlement; and for the Removal of poor Persons, and the Method of binding out poor Children," *Acts and Laws of The English Colony of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations in New-England, in America* (Newport: Samuel Hall, 1767), 228-32. Town records contain numerous examples of councils acting quickly to remove pregnant women to other towns for this very reason.
8. Town council meeting of 3 Jan. 1785, Hopkinton Town Council Records, 2:213-14.
9. Town council meeting of 9 Oct. 1784, Hopkinton Town Council Records, 2:144.
10. Town council meeting of 3 Nov. 1784, Hopkinton Town Council Records, 2:146.
11. Town council meeting of 3 Jan. 1785, Hopkinton Town Council Records, 2:213-14.
12. This is the total of all expenditures in support of the poor that were authorized during town council sessions and town meetings in 1784.
13. Rough draft of minutes for town council meeting of 19 Jan. 1785, loose papers, Hopkinton town clerk's office.
14. The minutes of the town council meeting of 3 Mar. 1785 indicate that Samuel Witter had cared for Phebe in his home from 6 Jan. to 17 Feb. 1785. Hopkinton Town Council Records, 2:218.
15. For reasons of clarity, I have brought the spelling and capitalization in quotations from town records into conformity with twentieth-century standards, and I have added commas, periods, and apostrophes when the length or complexity of sentences seemed to warrant such interference.
16. Rough draft of minutes for town council meeting of 19 Jan. 1785, loose papers, Hopkinton town clerk's office.
17. He paid 47s. (the mean was 14^{1/2}s.) in the Hopkinton town tax assessed 13 Oct. 1777; nearly £30 (mean, £8^{1/2}) in the state tax assessed 6 Apr. 1779; 167s. (mean, 45s.) in the state tax authorized by the town meeting on 7 Aug. 1788; 204s. (mean, 52s.) in the town tax of September 1788; and 116s. (mean, 32s.) in the state tax assessed 4 Apr. 1789. All tax records are at the Hopkinton town clerk's office.
18. Town meeting of 14 Feb. 1785, Hopkinton Town Meeting Records, 1:np.
19. Town meeting of 7 June 1785, Hopkinton Town Meeting Records, 1:np.
20. Ibid.
21. Town council meeting of 8 Sept. 1786, Hopkinton Town Council Records, 2:259.
22. *Westerly Sun*, 7 Apr. 1991; *Providence Journal*, 11 Apr. 1991.
23. Hopkinton Bicentennial Committee, *The History of the Town of Hopkinton, Rhode Island, 1757-1976* (Westerly: Utter Co., 1976), 131-32.
24. The original clerk's minutes for the Hopkinton town council session of 19 Jan. 1785 (a four-page document) are contained in a collection of loose papers in the Hopkinton town clerk's office. The official record of the same meeting is in Hopkinton Town Council Records, 2:150.
25. Town council meeting of 7 Mar. 1785, Hopkinton Town Council Records, 2:155.
26. Town meeting of 27 June 1777, South Kingstown Town Meeting Records, 2:15.
27. Town council meeting of 20 Nov. 1777, South Kingstown Town Council Records, 6:61.
28. Examination of Latham Clarke, town council meetings of 14 May 1759 and 30 July 1759, Hopkinton Town Council Records, 1:23, 1:26; examination of Mary Marshel, town council meeting of 15 Dec. 1784, Hopkinton Town Council Records, 2:212.
29. Rhode Island law empowered town councils "to enquire, either by the Oath of such poor Person or otherwise, in what Town he was last legally settled; or if they cannot find he hath gained any legal Settlement, then in the same Manner to enquire after the Place of his Birth, and upon the best Information they can obtain, to adjudge and determine to what Town or Place he lawfully belongs." *Acts and Laws of Rhode-Island* (1767), 228.
30. James Wells, Jr.'s ownership of Cesar is verified by state treasury records; see "The Treasurer's Account of the Negro Slaves Inlisted into the Continental Battalions," in Sidney S. Rider, *An Historical Inquiry concerning the Attempt to Raise a Regiment of Slaves by Rhode Island during the War of the Revolution*, Rhode Island Historical Tracts, no. 10 (Providence: Sidney S. Rider, 1880), 53. James fathered eight children, recorded in Hopkinton Vital Records, 1 (1726-94): 73. In the April 1779 state tax assessment, he paid £34 6s.; the average was £8 10s., and only eight men paid more than he did.
31. Town meeting of 6 Dec. 1785, Hopkinton Town Meeting Records, 1:np. Cesar's enlistment and his presence in Col. Christopher Greene's "Black Regiment" is also confirmed by the Revolutionary War Names Index, Rhode Island State Archives; by Military Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society; and by *List of Black Servicemen Compiled from the War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1974), 15, 22.
32. The law creating the Black Regiment was passed in February session, 1778. John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England*, vol. 8 (Providence: Cooke, Jackson, & Co., 1863), 358-60. The General Assembly repealed the act a few months later in its May sessions, thus barring any new

- slaves from enlisting, but the regiment was already complete. Bartlett, *Records of Rhode Island* 8:399. For further commentary on the law and its repeal, see "The Rhode Island Black 'Regiment' of 1778," in Rider, *An Historical Inquiry*, 9-20, 36.
33. Cesar's enlistment date is verified in the Revolutionary War Names Index, Rhode Island State Archives, and in "The Treasurer's Account of the Negro Slaves," in Rider, *An Historical Inquiry*, 53. The latter also records Cesar's value.
 34. Rider estimates that the total number of men enlisted in the battalion over the years of the war "did not exceed a hundred and thirty or a hundred and forty men." "The Rhode Island Black 'Regiment,'" 22. Lorenzo J. Greene's research places the number at between 225 and 250. "Some Observations on the Black Regiment of Rhode Island in the American Revolution," *Journal of Negro History* 27 (1952): 165. Benjamin Quarles accepts this latter estimate in *The Negro in the American Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 73, n. 21.
 35. See Rider, "The Rhode Island Black 'Regiment,'" 22-24; Greene, "The Black Regiment of Rhode Island," 169-70; Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution*, 80-82.
 36. "Return of Non Commissioned officers & Soldiers In the Rhode Island Regiment," *Military Papers*, 18 Mar. 1782, Rhode Island Historical Society.
 37. Information about Cesar's pay is contained in "Military Returns, Revolutionary War," 3:23, 4:1, 4:10, Rhode Island State Archives; in "Rhode Island Revolutionary Muster Rolls, 1774-1782," Shepley Collection, Rhode Island Historical Society; and in Military Papers (index card for Cesar Wells), Rhode Island Historical Society.
 38. Clothing list, 11 June 1781, Military Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society.
 39. Elder John Gardner officiated at the marriage of Cesar Wells and Abigail Potter on 28 Oct. 1775. Hopkinton Vital Records, 1:72. Abigail apparently was a free woman, for the marriage record identifies Cesar's status as "servant" but gives no such status for Abigail.
 40. Custom very likely prevented interracial marriages at the time Cesar and Abigail were married. Later, in 1798, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed a law prohibiting anyone from performing a marriage between a white person and a Negro. *The Public Laws of the State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations* (Providence: Carter and Wilkinson, 1798), 483.
 41. Town council meeting of 1 Sept. 1783, Hopkinton Town Council Records, 2:119.
 42. In the April 1779 state tax assessment, Stephen Potter paid £11 8s.; this was about 34 percent more than the average tax of £8 10s. In the March 1786 assessment, he paid a little less than 19s., about 30 percent more than the average tax of 14¹/₂s.
 43. Stephen's family relationships are verified in Thomas Potter's will, Hopkinton Probate Records, 2:24-26. Thomas Potter served as Hopkinton's town treasurer from 1757 to 1768; see Hopkinton Town Meeting Records, vol. 1. Caleb Potter served as town clerk from 1787 through 1818; see Hopkinton Town Meeting Records, vols. 2 and 3.
 44. The inventory was taken on 28 Dec. 1783 and recorded on 22 Feb. 1784. Hopkinton Probate Records, 2:213.
 45. Probate entry of 1 June 1785, Hopkinton Probate Records, 2:223.
 46. Town meeting of 6 Dec. 1785, Hopkinton Town Meeting Records, 1:np.
 47. Probate entry of 17 Feb. 1786, Hopkinton Probate Records, 2:240.
 48. Hopkinton town tax assessed 10 Mar. 1786, Hopkinton town clerk's office.
 49. Hopkinton town tax assessed 26 Jan. 1780, Hopkinton town clerk's office.
 50. Town council meeting of 4 Sept. 1786, Hopkinton Town Council Records, 2:258.
 51. Town council meetings of 15 Dec. 1784 and 14 Feb. 1785, Hopkinton Town Council Records, 2:212, 2:216.
 52. Town meeting of 19 Apr. 1769, Hopkinton Town Meeting Records, 1:88.
 53. Abel's election to various offices is recorded in the annual June town meeting minutes, Hopkinton Town Meeting Records, vols. 1 and 2.
 54. The General Assembly elected Abel as fifth justice of the Inferior Court of Common Pleas and General Sessions for King's County (later Washington County) in September 1780; he was elected fourth justice in May 1781, advanced to third justice in the same session, and reelected as third justice yearly through 1785. Bartlett, *Records of Rhode Island* 9:222, 9:384, 9:403, 9:542, 9:691 and 10:22. For a local reference to "Judge Tanner," see town meeting of 6 Oct. 1788, Hopkinton Town Meeting Records, 2:44-45.
 55. Data about town clerks' tenure, wealth, and education is from Ruth Wallis Herndon, dissertation draft (American University, 1991).
 56. Town meeting of 7 June 1774, Hopkinton Town Meeting Records, 1:113.
 57. Town meeting of 6 June 1775, Hopkinton Town Meeting Records, 1:117.
 58. Hopkinton Town Meeting Records, vol. 1, and Hopkinton Town Council Records, vol. 2.

CONSCRIPTION
May Mean DEATH TO YOU!

MASS MEETING

To advocate the Repeal of the
Conscription Law

Sunday, May 20th, at 2:30 P. M.

On Vacant Land, back of Depot
Opp. State House, Promenade and
Frances Streets

James P. Reid Joseph M. Coldwell
Edw. M. Theinert John H. Holloway
AND OTHERS WILL SPEAK

Come, Thousands Strong, and protest
against this un-American measure.

Meeting under auspices of the

Socialist Party of Rhode Island

"A Giant of Embodied Conscience": Joseph M. Coldwell and the Socialist Party in Rhode Island

JOSEPH W. SULLIVAN

One of the most remarkable and enduring features of Rhode Island political history has been the prominence of dissenters. From her inception as a refuge for the otherwise-minded, Rhode Island has measured her political heroes in degrees of heterodoxy. The more obstreperous they were, the more we revere them. The legacy of Roger Williams, passing through Thomas Wilson Dorr, together with the frequent contentiousness of our legislature, may well justify replacing the statue of The Independent Man atop the State House with a revised version to be called The Obstinate Man.

Such a prospect may not be so unfortunate, since obstinacy can be a virtue when animated by conscience. And in choosing a model for that statue, Rhode Island could do much worse than to consider Joseph M. Coldwell, a labor leader and socialist who was the only Rhode Islander jailed for sedition under the Espionage Act of 1917. Unlike Williams and Dorr, Joseph Coldwell is not a household name. He never founded a colony or led a rebellion. But like his illustrious predecessors, he espoused unpopular causes, spoke out emphatically and frequently against injustice, took upon himself the burdens of the oppressed, the disadvantaged, and the disenfranchised, and was expelled from society by the sentence of a court.

There is little primary material dealing with Coldwell: only occasional news stories in the local radical press, a flurry of front-page articles concerning his trial and conviction for sedition, a retrospective study or two written by friendly reporters around the time of his death, some extant letters, and a fascinating interview with a man who knew him well. Yet from these scraps one may view a figure of faith and integrity, a man whose contributions to the cause of building the Cooperative Commonwealth should, at the very least, earn him a modest place among Rhode Island's revered dissenters.



Joseph Maurice Coldwell was born on 2 June 1869 in Montreal. After a stint as a railway construction worker in the Midwest, he settled briefly in New York and then moved to Brockton, Massachusetts, where he found employment in the city's shoe factories.¹ In 1898 the organizing activity of the Boot and Shoe Workers Union coincided with the development of the Socialist party in Massachusetts. With the support of the shoe workers, Socialist Charles W. Coulter launched a successful campaign for the Brockton mayoralty in 1899, while other Socialists contested seats in the city council and the state legislature.² In the spring of that year Eugene V. Debs visited Brockton to stump for the Socialist ticket. Coldwell attended Debs's lectures and was soon won over to socialism. He participated in these and subsequent campaigns for the Massachusetts party, was chosen secretary of the Brockton local, and in 1911 received the party's nomination for Massachusetts state treasurer.³

During this period Coldwell developed a reputation as an effective labor organizer. When an arthritic ailment brought an end to his employment in the shoe mills, he sought a less taxing occupation by becoming a professional photographer.

Joseph Sullivan is an adjunct lecturer in history at the Community College of Rhode Island.

Broadside announcing a 1917 antiwar rally at which Joseph Coldwell was to speak. The event was banned by the police. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 6877).

The better part of valor.

Are you a brave man or a coward?

It takes a brave man to stand up for his principles. Cowards stand behind leaders and die, imagining that by so doing they become heroes.

The motive of an act is its measure. If you think the war is hell and that you as a citizen of the United States of America have no business to be fighting in France for England and you are a coward to stay with it. If you had the courage to face criticism you would get out and over the top in no time to a place where there is some likelihood that you may see home again.

What business is this war in Europe to you anyhow? You don't want to annex anything, do you? You don't want to give up your life for the abstract thing «humanity».

If you believe in humanity and that life is precious, save your own life and dedicate it to the service of your own country and the woman who deserves it of you.

Lots of you fellows are staying with it because you are too cowardly to protest, to assert your own wills. Your wills are the best judges of what is best for you to do. Don't ask any one's opinion as to what you would better do! You know best what is the right thing to do. Do it and save your life! Germany never did any harm to you, all the newspaper tales of wrongs were printed to inflame you to the fighting pitch, they were lies you know you can't believe what you read in the papers.

If you stay with the out ten chances to one all you will get out of it will be a tombstone in France.

This handbill was distributed to promote the Socialists' stand against the war. RHS Collection (RH1 X3 6878).

Coldwell operated a photographic studio in Milford, Massachusetts, but his devotion to the labor movement took precedence. In the spring of 1913 Coldwell was asked to organize and lead a strike at the Draper Textile Machine Company in Hopedale, Massachusetts.⁴ One of his lieutenants was a young Italian immigrant named Nicola Sacco, a man who, like Coldwell, would become the subject of a sensational trial. Another strike acquaintance was the even younger Luigi DePasquale, later to become the colorful judge of Providence's Sixth District Court. Arrested at Hopedale for carrying a weapon, Coldwell was subsequently convicted of inciting a riot and spent three months in the Worcester House of Correction. He decamped for Providence upon his release just as the clouds of war were gathering across Europe.⁵

Establishing his photographic studio in an apartment at 1929 Westminster Street, Olneyville, Joseph Coldwell continued his involvement in labor and Socialist activities. The *Providence City Directory* for 1918 identified him as "state organizer, Socialist Party of R.I." Larry Spitz, an official of the Independent Textile Workers Union, recalled that in a number of strikes where workers were barred by injunction from picketing, Coldwell, though not an employee, and with a painfully arthritic hip, would walk the picket line in solitary defiance.⁶ Coldwell worked hard for the Socialist party in Rhode Island, speaking often and combining his agitation for economic democracy with his championing of organized labor. A frequent delegate to the party's national conventions, he became a friend and correspondent of such other notable leftists of the period as John Reed and Jack London.⁷

Founded at the turn of the century, the Rhode Island Socialist party was an amalgam of former Socialist Labor party members, Populists, and followers of Edward Bellamy's Nationalist movement. Lacking anything like a stronghold, the party did manage to win modest support in scattered areas such as Olneyville, the Fourth Ward of Pawtucket, and the town of East Providence. Between 1898 and 1920 it ran candidates for nearly every statewide office in each election and offered mayoral and legislative candidates in Providence, Pawtucket, East Providence, and Woonsocket fairly regularly. In addition, it organized social events such as excursions to Rocky Point and card parties at the various locals. When Eugene Debs visited Providence during his 1912 presidential campaign, the *Labor Advocate* reported that "thousands cheered" his speech. But despite all this activity, local Socialist candidates seldom won more than 2 to 3 percent of the vote in any election. Though "thousands" may have cheered, barely two thousand Rhode Islanders voted for Debs in 1912.⁸

Although Socialist candidates won important municipal victories in Massachusetts, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Montana, Socialists were never able to penetrate the feudalism of Rhode Island politics. With the state's working class bitterly divided along ethnic, cultural, religious, and political lines, Rhode Island's workers were too busy fighting each other to unite against a common capitalist foe. Added to this was the considerable opposition of the Roman Catholic Church, to which a substantial number of workers belonged. Ignoring her own socialist traditions, evident in the writings of Thomas More and the collectivism of the monasteries, the Church launched shrill attacks on the Socialist party and, after his 1911 election, on state representative James P. Reid, an Olneyville dentist, nominal Catholic, and the state's only Socialist officeholder. Other than Reid's single-term victory, Rhode Island's Socialists had little to show after a decade of organization. Municipal corruption and labor strife were often the keys to Socialist victories in Milwaukee, in Schenectady, New York, and in Butte, Montana, where mayors, aldermen, state legislators, and school officials were elected in abundance.⁹ But in Rhode Island—squalor, greedy employers, and deplorable working conditions notwithstanding—socialism was the road not taken.

As the clouds of World War I darkened, the Socialist Party of America met at an emergency convention in Saint Louis to denounce American intervention. The result was the Saint Louis Resolution, which condemned the combatant nations and urged that Socialists and workers in solidarity refuse to aid the war. Upon President Wilson's war declaration on 17 April 1917, the party reiterated the Saint Louis Resolution and pledged its resistance to the draft,¹⁰ a pledge echoed by Socialists in Rhode Island. An antiwar meeting in Providence scheduled for 20 May was prohibited by the Board of Police Commissioners. Superintendent John A. Murray publicly warned Coldwell, former state legislator James P. Reid,

OFFICERS:
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PEOPLES' FORUM

OF RHODE ISLAND INC
 EXECUTIVE OFFICE . . . 605 UNION TRUST BLDG. PROVIDENCE

MEETS SUNDAY
 EVENINGS 8 TO 10
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 RIVERSIDE

PLATFORM OF PRINCIPLES

THE OPEN FORUM STANDS FOR:

1. The complete development of democracy in America.
2. A common meeting-ground for all the people, in the interest of truth and mutual understanding, and for the cultivation of community spirit.
3. The fullest and freest open public discussion of all vital questions affecting human welfare.
4. Free participation from the forum floor, either by questions or discussion.
5. The freedom of forum management from responsibility for utterances by speakers from the platform or the floor.

"Let There Be Light"

*Platform of the People's Forum. RIHS
 Collection (RH1 X3 6879).*

Lincoln farmer Edward Theinert (a frequent Socialist candidate), and other Socialist figures that any such disloyal rallies would result in their arrests.¹¹ On 30 March the *Providence Journal* noted that antidraft broadsides had been posted in dozens of places throughout Pawtucket. On 4 June, Coldwell was arrested on Westminster Street for distributing handbills without a permit. While being detained at Providence Police Headquarters, he was again arrested, this time by agents of the Justice Department, and charged with conspiring to obstruct the draft. On 8 June a federal grand jury indicted him on two counts of interfering with conscription. After a hearing, he was released on five thousand dollars bond. For some unknown reason no further action was taken on the indictment. Coldwell continued to speak publicly against the war after his release.¹²

In the latter half of 1917 a number of prominent Socialists were arrested, charged with various offenses under the Espionage Act, and sentenced to long prison terms. With the passage of this law on 15 June 1917, the United States embarked upon a program of repression equaled only by the measures employed during the Civil War. The Espionage Act made it a crime to "convey false reports or false statements with intent to interfere with the operation or success of the military or naval forces of the United States, to promote the success of its enemies, or to attempt to cause insubordination, disloyalty, [or] mutiny" in the armed services "or to willfully obstruct recruiting or enlistment."¹³ Such national figures in the Socialist party as Rose Pastor Stokes, Kate Richards O'Hare, and her husband Frank O'Hare were among the first of many radicals convicted in what was essentially the beginning of the Red scare. All over the nation Socialists and members of the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World were arrested, their offices raided and smashed. Radical newspapers were banned from the mails by Postmaster General Albert Bursleson. The U.S. House of Representatives expelled

Wisconsin's Socialist congressman Victor L. Berger shortly after he had won his second term. Occasionally the repression reached absurd proportions as politically innocuous persons were arrested on the basis of trivial remarks that few sensible people could construe as seditious.¹⁴

In an atmosphere redolent with fear, suspicion, and violence, and though he was already under indictment, Joseph Coldwell continued to speak out against the war. On 30 November 1917, at a court-martial convened at Fort Adams, Providence draftees Theodore Hiller, Adolph Yanyar, and John T. Dunn were convicted of desertion from the draft and received twenty-year prison sentences. The next January, at a public discussion known as the People's Forum, held weekly at Providence's Gaiety Theatre, Coldwell attacked the army's sentence and referred to U.S. soldiers as "murderers in uniform." Hiller, Yanyar, and Dunn, according to Coldwell, were "victims of a damnable system of government. I welcome the day when the people of America will overthrow their existing Government and set up one based on the lofty ideals of the Bolshevik movement."¹⁵

Alleging that young men of draft age were in the audience, federal agents who had witnessed the speech filed complaints, and these resulted in another Espionage Act indictment on 25 February 1918. This time the government pursued the matter. After being released on twenty thousand dollars bail, Coldwell went on trial in federal court in Providence on 13 March. Under the provisions of the Espionage and Selective Draft acts, all the government needed to show was that his utterances counseled, incited, or encouraged draft-eligible men to refuse to register for the draft, or to avoid duty once drafted, and (rather redundantly) that his words advocated resistance to the war effort.¹⁶

In a packed courtroom fourteen witnesses, including news reporters and draft-age men, testified to Coldwell's "damnable system of government" remarks. In his own defense Coldwell claimed that his words were "damnable system of *society*," but it is likely that he was more specific in his denunciations. U.S. attorney Thomas Baker introduced antidraft cards that had been mailed to sundry draft-age men in Providence as propaganda urging them not to register. The signature on these cards matched Coldwell's signature. A postal superintendent testified that Coldwell had sent a great deal of disloyal material through the U.S. mails. Some time was spent in pointing out the physical distance between the Gaiety Theatre and the U.S. Army recruiting office in the Caesar Misch Building on Weybosset Street, as if patriotic young men, on their way to enlist, were led astray by the treasonous orations inside the vaudeville theater. But the most damaging testimony concerned the defendant's reference to soldiers as "murderers in uniform." When asked if she believed that soldiers were murderers, witness Margaret T. Deasy, a stenographer for the People's Forum, probably spoke for many Rhode Islanders when she replied that her brother was in uniform and he was not a murderer. Finally, on 14 March, after an unsuccessful attempt to introduce evidence pertaining to Coldwell's 1913 Hopedale weapons charge, the prosecution rested.¹⁷

Defense attorney Anthony V. Pettine sought to show that the limitations upon free speech imposed by the Espionage Act were unfair and that Coldwell's comments were in no way disloyal. Pettine's first tack was useless, since the jury was not asked to judge the law. Introducing witnesses who testified that Coldwell's remarks did not seem to be seditious made little impact upon the jury, and the revelation that federal agents had secretly placed a dictograph machine in his apartment may actually have increased suspicions against him. Pettine's only case for the defendant was the defendant himself, and Coldwell spent approxi-



Joseph M. Coldwell, federal prisoner 10057, Atlanta Federal Penitentiary. 1919. Winfield Townley Scott Papers, Brown University Library.

MY LIFE IN PRISON WITH DEBS

10,057

Coldwell's Prison Number



JOS. M. COLDWELL

Prominent Socialist worker who spent 36 months in Atlanta Prison in daily association with Eugene V. Debs.

Leader of the Hopdale, Mass., strike, together with Nicola Sacco, whose conviction on a framed up murder charge has aroused the workers of Europe and America to a realization of the lie of capitalist class-justice.



A Lecture

For Workers About Workers

9,653

Debs' Prison Number

By **JOSEPH M. COLDWELL**

Militant Labor Leader and Class-war Prisoner, recently released from Atlanta, Ga., prison, where he served a sentence of twenty-six months with EUGENE V. DEBS for violation of the Espionage Act

Support the Fight for the Release of Fellow Workers

"It is a binding duty upon everyone who is for the working class in its fight against capitalist despotism and the destruction of the last vestige of our liberties to support the cause of the class-war prisoners until the very last one is free."

Hear this magnificent presentation of the prison life and cause of American Class-war Prisoners

Auspices WORKERS PARTY of AMERICA

Admission, 25 cents

Broadside advertising Coldwell's 1922 lectures. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 6880).

mately two and a half hours on the stand answering a variety of questions regarding his views on war and conscription.¹⁸

Apparently this desultory rehashing failed to impress the jury. On 19 March, Joseph Coldwell was found guilty on two counts of interfering with the draft and two counts of sedition. A motion for a new trial was unsuccessful, and on 30 March 1919 U.S. District Court judge Arthur Brown sentenced Coldwell to four concurrent three-year sentences in Atlanta Penitentiary. A writ of error filed by Pettine was also denied. Even while waiting for the outcome of his appeals, Coldwell continued to speak at the People's Forum, attacking the Espionage Act as an infringement upon the First Amendment.¹⁹ He began serving his sentence at Atlanta Federal Penitentiary on 30 October 1919.

As Coldwell's appeals were being considered, federal agents arrested Eugene Debs in Cleveland and charged him with violating the Espionage Act. Elderly, ill, and retired, Debs had abstained from any vigorous denunciations of the war, preferring to simply go on record as supporting the Saint Louis Resolution. But with the arrests of Rose Stokes, the O'Hares, and ultimately Coldwell, he became convinced that he could not remain silent while so many of his old comrades were being prosecuted.

A speech Debs had delivered on 15 June 1918 at Canton, Ohio, was used by the government as the basis for its prosecution. Despite a sensational plea to the jury and attempts at intercession by such notables as Upton Sinclair and Helen Keller, Debs was sentenced to ten years at the penitentiary in Atlanta. Assigned to the same cell, Joseph Coldwell—now federal prisoner No. 10057—was with Debs when a delegation of Socialists visited the prison in an effort to mend a national party that had been torn apart by official repression and a serious split between moderates and pro-Soviet left-wingers. Coldwell attended the meeting as a representative of the latter group.²⁰

The armistice on 18 November 1918 brought an end to the fighting, but not to the hysteria. On 2 January 1920 hundreds of federal agents and local police seized twenty-three hundred persons in more than thirty cities throughout the country. In Rhode Island, police raids in Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, and Woonsocket netted just sixteen suspects, all of them foreign-born. In Providence, agents searched the Russian Socialist Club and boardinghouse in Randall Square, the Young People's Socialist League on Benefit Street, and the Socialist party headquarters in Olneyville's Textile Hall. Police also confiscated a cache of pamphlets from James Reid's home on Atwells Avenue and from his dentist office in Olneyville Square.²¹ Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer pronounced the campaign a success, but popular disgust with the hysteria and a growing sympathy for the prisoners of conscience welled up until even Palmer urged that Debs be released before Wilson left office.

In 1920 Debs conducted his fifth presidential campaign, this time from his prison cell. His total of 919,000 votes, or 3.5 percent of the total cast, was regarded by many as a sympathy vote for the release of the nation's political prisoners. President Harding's quest for "normalcy" required the healing of old war wounds, and America's political prisoners were an embarrassing reminder of the terrible toll exacted from civil liberties. On Christmas Eve, 1921, Harding pardoned Debs, Coldwell, and a number of others who had been imprisoned for political reasons.²²



Coldwell's return to Providence was marked by a reception at Textile Hall on 2 January 1922. At this and at subsequent receptions, Coldwell exhibited the same tenacity that had earned him his prison term. "The grand jury indicted me because they said I had said that war is organized murder and that soldiers are uniformed murderers," he declared. "Whether I said it or not, I still believe it. I repeat—war is organized murder, soldiers are uniformed murderers." After urging workers to insist upon the release of Sacco and Vanzetti, Coldwell discussed his prison experiences and reiterated his belief that capitalism was doomed. In a second speech, given at the Mayflower Theatre on 23 January, he responded to sensational stories in the *Providence Journal* regarding the deplorable conditions at the Georgia State Prison by commenting that conditions at the ACI in Cranston were no better. Expanding upon his earlier talk, Coldwell reminded his audience that "I went to jail for no other reason than daring to protest against my fellow man being used as cannon fodder. But I'll speak my mind, prison or no prison."²³

Coldwell's ideological position on the left wing allowed him to remain comfortable with the Red Socialists who organized the new Communist party. He was one of the first Socialists to break with the prewar Socialist party and align with the Communist party, as a majority of Rhode Island's Socialists did. However, membership in the Comintern had its price, and as Coldwell soon learned, Lenin was capable of as much violence and repression as Morgan and Rockefeller. Eventually Coldwell's objections to the Soviet slaughter of the kulaks resulted in his expulsion from the Communist party. Ever the dissenter, Coldwell refused to tolerate mindlessness and injustice for any cause. By the mid-1920s he had reentered the Socialist fold.²⁴

Battered by wartime hysteria and decimated by defections to the Communists, the Socialist party suffered another blow with the death of its founder and spokesman, Eugene Debs, in November 1926. While the party remained dormant nationally, with the exception of a few enclaves, Joseph Coldwell did not. He continued to involve himself in the interests of labor, though elderly and infirm,



When violence erupted in the Textile Strike of 1934, Governor Green called out the National Guard. Still frame from Fox Movietone Newsreel 23-209, "Textile Strikers Battle with National Guard, Saylesville." RIHS Collection (RHi X3 6881).

he frequently manned the picket line when striking unions were enjoined from doing so. With the collapse of Wall Street in 1929, the party experienced a modest national resurgence, with Norman Thomas inheriting Debs's mantle. As the party's state secretary, Coldwell invited Thomas to Rhode Island for a series of lectures and offered Socialist speakers to the state's trade unions. What the party had to say about the Depression, wrote Coldwell, was worth hearing "even if you do not agree with the Socialists' conclusions." Among the topics Coldwell was prepared to discuss were "The Roosevelt Program—Will It Work?" and "What the Bankers Have Done to Us." In July 1934 Joseph Coldwell received the Socialist endorsement for governor.²⁵

In September of that year the United Textile Workers struck in response to pay cuts. Although most of the mills in the Blackstone Valley agreed to close to avoid possible violence, the managers of the Sayles Bleachery in Saylesville and the Woonsocket Rayon Plant refused to be intimidated. Inevitably confrontations among scabs, strikers, and privately paid deputy sheriffs developed into skirmishes that left several persons injured and mill property damaged. The strike violence posed a particular dilemma to Governor Theodore Francis Green, who desperately wanted to quell the disorders without appearing to be antilabor. To deflect the possibility of a labor revolt at the polls, Green attempted to justify calling in the National Guard by declaring the strike to be a Communist uprising. The result was an exacerbated crisis that featured strikers battling with militiamen in the streets of Central Falls and Woonsocket. At least six persons were shot, three of them fatally. To bolster his "Communist uprising" assertions, Green ordered the arrest of an assortment of fifteen alleged radicals, Communists, and labor activists such as James Reid and Larry Spitz. Included on this list was Joseph Coldwell, whom police could not locate.²⁶

The gunning down of textile workers in a heavily blue-collar state one month before the election may have given the Socialists cause to expect, at the very least, some significant support for a labor champion such as Coldwell. But Rhode Island's workers continued to spurn new ideas, choosing instead to embrace a Democratic party thinly disguised as the workers' friend. Coldwell's total of 2,333 votes amounted to less than 1 percent of the total cast. Only in certain wards of Pawtucket and Central Falls did his support run as high as 4 percent.²⁷ Undaunted, Coldwell challenged the political system again in 1936 as the party's candidate for U.S. senator, and once again he received a negligible tally.

Following its revival in the first desperate days of the Depression, the Socialist party began a second, gradual decline. Nearing seventy as the decade drew toward a close, Coldwell continued to fulfill his role as state spokesman for the party and as a labor organizer. In April 1938 Coldwell responded to a misrepresentation of socialist ideology propounded by Wisconsin governor Robert M. La Follette, Jr.

According to La Follette, who should have known better, socialism proposed to reward all workers whether they toiled or not, thereby robbing them of incentive and ensuring economic collapse. "I have been a socialist for more than forty years," Coldwell retorted. "During that time I have read considerable literature on the subject of socialism, but, strange to relate, I do not recall having read or heard of a proposal to reward work and achievement on the same basis regardless of individual contribution."²⁸ In what may have been his last unionizing effort, Coldwell took advantage of the National Industrial Recovery Act to organize the Associated Employees of the Oil Burner Industry for oil burner installers and service mechanics. In February 1939 Coldwell noted sadly that the new union "died of malnutrition. A. F. of L. refused help, aid or assistance."²⁹

Coldwell also defended socialism from erosion within the party itself. Attempts to dilute its aims or a failure to live up to its principles provoked his scorn. Thus he sneered at the administration of Bridgeport, Connecticut, mayor Jasper McLevy, whose efforts toward effecting the Cooperative Commonwealth seldom rose above sewer projects and playground maintenance. McLevy also crushed a strike by sanitation workers, and the city's Socialist sheriffs evicted working-class families who could no longer afford exorbitant rents. When *Providence Journal* reporter and longtime friend Winfield Townley Scott suggested tongue-in-cheek that Coldwell campaign for mayor of Providence in 1942, Coldwell offered a facetious response. Among Coldwell's more McLevyesque suggestions were substituting plastic streetcar tokens for metal ones to save money, putting the city firemen to work cleaning streets "instead of playing checkers," and placing new sidewalks in the middle of city streets in parody of McLevy's construction of safety islands in Bridgeport.³⁰

With the rise of fascism in Europe, Coldwell's pacifism seemed much less pronounced. In his last public appearance, at a rally on Boston Common in 1938, Coldwell denounced the Nazi menace but declared that American workers had no reason to involve themselves in yet another senseless European conflict.

However, somewhat inconsistently, he offered free passport photographs to anyone willing to fight for the Loyalists in Spain.³¹ With the attack on Pearl Harbor, the threat of a fascist world dictatorship overwhelmed any remaining pacifist considerations. The man who denounced soldiers as "murderers in uniform" in 1918 invested his tiny savings in war bonds in 1942.³²

Perhaps heartened by this loyal stance, or perhaps because there was no longer anything to fear from this aging radical, the *Providence Journal*, which had howled for Coldwell's head in 1918, now provided a forum for his ideas. The *Journal* obligingly printed his many letters calling for American war solidarity and analyzing the struggle from a socialist

Armed national guardsmen on the streets of Woonsocket during the 1934 textile strike. Photograph by Raymond Ball. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 6466).





To Joseph M. Coldwell

The Sword on the Table

WHAT SAY YOU, PRISONER: WILL YOU BE TRIED
BY THAT JUROR OR NOT?

[April 30–May 6 1844]

Voices at the Trial:

'Have I no right to show the intent in which I acted?'

'The Court understands that the prisoner, Thomas Dorr,
Now desires to show that he was no usurper:
Taker of arms against his lawful State, but not a traitor.
Wilful seizer of governorship, but not a traitor.
Wrecker of peace and property and society, but—
So long as in his wisdom he thought this wise—no traitor.
So any John Smith might steal his neighbor's pig,
Then being haled to court cry "Yes, I stole it;
I admit the thievery, gentlemen, but let me show you
I felt it my inherent right!"—and think to acquit himself.
This is worse than folly—it is legal folly
As the accused should know.'

'When we gathered with Dorr at
Acote's Hill
To defend the people's rights, few of the people came.'

'As counsel for the State, I charge the prisoner
With the crime of levying war against the State. This Court
Properly holds by law this crime is treason.'

'The night

perspective. As a sometime *Journal* contributor, Coldwell established friendly contacts with several reporters, notably Winston Phelps, Winfield Townley Scott, and George W. Potter. Through the 1940s these men seem to have developed and shared an appreciation of Coldwell's courage and integrity. For Scott, Coldwell was "a giant of embodied conscience" who peppered him with letters denouncing the *Journal's* Republican bias, requesting funds for the War Resisters League and other radical organizations, and suggesting articles he felt Scott should write in defense of labor, the poor, and the disadvantaged. In 1942 Scott published a verse paean to Thomas Wilson Dorr entitled *The Sword on the Table* and dedicated the work to Coldwell. The old Socialist was deeply moved.³³ Winston Phelps honored Coldwell with a feature story in the *Journal* for Labor Day, 1946. Referring to him as an "Apostle of Socialism," Phelps offered an affectionate portrait of Coldwell's difficult life. Commenting on the strides labor had made since the days of Debs, Coldwell was quoted as agreeing that "we have come a long way. The laboring man has won a lot of advantages in a half century." Coldwell took no credit for these advances; he was, as Phelps observed, "a humble man."³⁴

"You are young and living in a very interesting period of the world's history," Coldwell wrote to Scott. "You have before you the experience of all those who lived from the Stone Age to the Electric Age. You have seen the mighty topple and fall, you have seen the insignificant man rise from oblivion to world wide power [a reference to Hitler], which should teach you that nothing is permanent, not even our present economic system. Classes change and demand changing conditions. Keep your ideals, they are the most precious things."³⁵



Recognition and belated accolades must have provided him with some comfort, but as Larry Spitz recalled, Joseph Coldwell was a lonely man in his last years. When he died on 3 April 1949, his body lay unclaimed for twenty-four hours in the morgue at Rhode Island Hospital. His retinue of mourners was small. Among the few who attended his funeral were Marguerite Dwight, a wealthy Providence woman who regularly provided bail money for radicals; the Reverend Robert Schacht; Drs. Gennaro Onorato and Eric Stone; Larry Spitz; Judge Luigi DePasquale, whom Coldwell named executor of his minuscule estate; and some anonymous Olneyville neighbors. After cremation, Coldwell's ashes were scattered in Narragansett Bay.³⁶ Larry Spitz remembers with some bitterness the conspicuous dearth of union officials at Coldwell's funeral. Having been a victim of the first Red scare, Coldwell died as a new Red scare was beginning. Whether fearful of being discovered attending obsequies for a notorious leftist, or whether simply indifferent, Rhode Island's union men stayed away. It was not their finest hour. On the other hand, one might suggest that these comfortable union leaders, lacking in courage, had no place at the funeral of a courageous unionist.

In attempting to sum up Coldwell's life, George Potter recalled an argument that had occurred between Coldwell and some *Journal* reporters. Coldwell was reacting to smug assertions about his advocacy of socialism when he encapsulated his philosophy in a memorable venting of spleen: "I am 70 years old," he thundered, "and I do not have a cent to my name. I own nothing in the world but a few rags and I may die in the poorhouse. But as long as I have lived, I have never tipped my hat to anybody or worn any man's collar. I can walk the streets with my head high and I can sleep in my bed at night, or in jail, without my conscience bothering me. I have paid for it, don't think that I haven't, but I am a free man and I think that's more than any of you can say!" The connection

Winfield Townley Scott dedicated *The Sword on the Table*, his celebration of Thomas Wilson Dorr, to Joseph Coldwell. Courtesy of Brown University Library.

between the crotchety labor hero's independence and Rhode Island's dissenter tradition was not lost on Potter: "He was of a breed that came to Rhode Island with Roger Williams and made the non-conformist conscience a power to reckon with in the world."³⁷ Potter extended the analogy farther afield by likening Coldwell to Thoreau and William Lloyd Garrison, but there is every indication that the world does not actually reckon with such men. In an age of flaccid unions, political bromides, and lazy conformity, the world has yet to reckon with Joseph Coldwell.



Joseph Coldwell and labor leader Larry Spitz outside the Woonsocket Rayon Company during a strike in 1939. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 6882).

Notes

1. Winston Phelps, "Joe Coldwell—Apostle of Socialism," *Providence Sunday Journal*, 1 Sept. 1946.
2. Brockton was the second city in the United States to elect a Socialist administration. The first was Haverhill, Massachusetts, the previous year. See Henry F. Bedford, *Socialism and the Workers in Massachusetts, 1886-1912* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1964).
3. Phelps, "Joe Coldwell."
4. *Labor Advocate* [Providence], 12 June 1913; *New York Times*, 6 June 1913; Coldwell to Winfield Townley Scott, 7 Dec. 1939, Winfield Townley Scott Papers, John Hay Library, Brown University.
5. Winfield Townley Scott, "Portrait of a Free Man," in *Exiles and Fabrications* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), 145.
6. Interview with Larry Spitz, 14 Sept. 1989. Spitz holds a deep admiration for Coldwell, whom he describes as unusually high-minded and honest, "a friend and mentor" for more than twenty years.
7. Scott, "Portrait of a Free Man," 146.
8. *Labor Advocate*, 12 Oct. 1912. Socialist support in Olneyville centered on the personal popularity of James Reid, who won a single term in 1911 and narrowly lost reelection in 1912, 1914, and 1916.
9. David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America: A History* (New York: Macmillan, 1955). Socialist leadership in Rhode Island tended to be atypical of the state's socioeconomic demography. Socialist candidates for office during this time (1912-18) included gubernatorial candidate Fred Hurst, who owned a shoe store in the Arcade, and Providence mayoral candidate John W. Higgins, who was a toolmaker. General Assembly candidates George Walsh and Edward Theinert were, respectively, a jewelry store proprietor and a dairy farmer. In Woonsocket the Socialist candidate for mayor, Eugene F. Morrissey, was a plumber; he shared the ticket with state Senate candidate Warren L. Fuller, an insurance agent, and House candidates Joseph T. Grimshaw, a chemist, and John W. Dunn, a machinist. In Cranston the Socialist candidate for mayor, Dr. Albert De Kort, was a veterinarian. As small-business owners or skilled independent tradesmen, many of these Socialists already owned the means of production, and as prosperous native-born Yankees or children of assimilated immigrants, usually Irish or Canadian, Socialist candidates in Rhode Island may have held little appeal to the state's vast ethnic, unskilled proletariat.
10. *Ibid.*, 112.
11. *Providence Journal*, 19 May 1917.
12. *Providence Journal*, 5 June, 9 June 1917.
13. 40 U.S. Stat., 230, 15 June 1917.
14. Shannon, *Socialist Party of America*, 166.
15. *Providence Journal*, 1 Dec. 1917, 14 Jan. 1918. The moderator of the People's Forum was another independent thinker, former (1902-4) governor Lucius F. C. Garvin.
16. *Providence Journal*, 26 Feb., 14 Mar. 1918.
17. *Providence Journal*, 15 Mar. 1918.
18. *Providence Journal*, 15 Mar. 1918. Bureau of Investigation records reveal that Coldwell was indeed under surveillance, as were the activities of the People's Forum. Investigative Case Files of the Bureau of Investigation, Record Group 65, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
19. *Providence Journal*, 19 Mar., 31 Mar., 31 Oct. 1918.
20. Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs, Citizen and Socialist* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 217.
21. *Providence Journal*, 3 Jan., 4 Jan. 1920.
22. Shannon, *Socialist Party of America*, 205.
23. *Providence Journal*, 2 Jan., 23 Jan. 1922.
24. George W. Potter, "An Independent Man," *Providence Journal*, 6 Apr. 1949.
25. Shannon, *Socialist Party of America*, 240; Spitz interview; Joseph M. Coldwell to All Trade Unions of Rhode Island, Scott Papers.
26. *Providence Journal*, 2 Sept., 10 Sept., 14 Sept. 1934. Textile union leader Joseph Sylvia cooperated with the state by providing police officials with the names of union activists he personally disliked. Larry Spitz was one of these.
27. *Providence Journal*, 7 Nov. 1934.
28. *New York Times*, 9 Apr. 1938.
29. Coldwell to Scott, 14 Feb. 1939, Scott Papers.
30. Coldwell to Scott, 28 Oct. 1942, Scott Papers. For more on the Socialists of Bridgeport, see Bruce M. Stave, "The Depression and Urban Continuity," in *Socialism in the Cities* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1973), 157-83.
31. Coldwell was among those who supported recruitment efforts for the "Debs Column," a Socialist volunteer military organization raised to fight for the Spanish republic. Absolute pacifists in the Socialist party opposed this move. The prointervention argument is presented by Edward Grove in *Why the Debs Column?* (New York: Friends of Debs Column, 1936), a booklet found in the John Wheelwright Papers, John Hay Library, Brown University.
32. Phelps, "Joe Coldwell."
33. Scott, "Portrait of a Free Man," 153.
34. Phelps, "Joe Coldwell."
35. Coldwell to Scott, undated (probably 1945), Scott Papers.
36. Scott, "Portrait of a Free Man," 152.
37. Potter, "An Independent Man."

Index to Volume 50

- Adams, John Quincy, 98
African-Americans: arts programs, 50;
voting franchise, 74, 86
Aimee (musical show), 45
Aldrich, Donald, 64
"Algerine Law" in Dorr Rebellion, 74-75,
77, 81-83, 85, 91-92, 94-95
Alias Stage troupe, 59
All Children's Theater, 59
Allen, Philip, 99
American Peace Society, 31
American Revolution, "The Uses of Law
and the *Gaspee* Affair," 3-21
Ames, Samuel, 89, 94
Ampersand (press), 59
Andrews, John, 4, 8, 16-18
Anthony, Burrington, 77-78, 81-83
Anthony, Henry Bowen, 72-73
Arnold, Lemuel H., 93
Art in the Workplace program, 54
Artists Internationale, 46-47
Arts and Aging program, 42
Arts and creativity, "A Silver Lining:
Twenty-Five Years of the Rhode Island
State Council on the Arts," 35-64
Arts and Cultural Times, 55
Arts Inc. of Rhode Island, 54
Arts in Corrections program, 42
Arts in Education program, 40, 42, 46, 49,
55-57
Atwell, Samuel, 75
Auchmuty, Robert, 9, 15
- Babbitt, Milton, 62
Baker, Thomas, 121
Baltimore Federal Republican, 25
Bancroft, George, 98
Bankhead, James, 85, 87, 90
Baumol, William, 62
Beaver (ship), 7, 10-12
Bellamy, Edward, 119
Benson, Richard, 57
Benton, Thomas Hart, 78
Berger, Victor L., 121
Berry, Robin, 44, 46-47, 49
Blodget, Leonard, 83
Bonaparte, Napoleon, 27, 30-31
Bontecou, Lec, 57
Boot and Shoe Workers Union, 117
Borden, Luther M., 98
Briggs, Aaron, 11-16
Brown, Anne Kinsolving, 57
Brown, Arthur, 122
Brown, Daniel, 82
Brown, John, 12-14
- Brown, John A., 75, 78
Brown, John Carter, 73
Brown, Joseph, 12-14
Brown, Moses, 31
Brown, Sherilyn, 56
Brown, William, 89-90
Brownson, Orestes, 82, 98
Bryant, William Cullen, 82
Buonanno, Vincent, 41, 44, 64
Burden, Abraham, 104
Burdick, Peleg, 106
Burgess, Walter S., 82, 86-87, 89-90, 95
Burgess, Thomas, 87
Burke, Edmund, 89, 92, 94
Burlison, Albert, 120
Burning Deck Press, 59
Business Volunteers in the Arts, 53
Button, Samuel, 106
- Calhoun, John C., 78, 80, 98
Callahan, Harry, 57
Carpenter, Thomas, F., 75
Causin, John, 92
Chafee, John, 38-39, 41
Channing, George, 25
Cheever, Bartholomew, 11
Chesapeake (ship), 23
Chihuly, Dale, 57
Church, Joshua, 106
Clarke, Cary, 104-5
Clay, Henry, 98
Cleveland, Chauncey, 85
Clifford, Nathan, 95
Clinton, DeWitt, 26
Coldwell, Joseph M., "A Giant of Embodied
Conscience": Joseph M. Coldwell and the
Socialist Party in Rhode Island," 117-29
Coles, Thomas, 26
Collins, Amos, 105
Colonial Rhode Island, "The Uses of Law
and the *Gaspee* Affair," 3-21
Commerce and trade, "Rhode Island and the
War of 1812," 23-32
Community Foundation Partnership
program, 53
Conley, Barbara, 57-58
Conley, Patrick T., "No Tempest in a
Teapot: The Dorr Rebellion in National
Perspective," 67-100
Constitutional government, Dorr Rebellion,
67-100
Constitutional party, 69
Cooley, Franklin, 73
Coolidge, Arlan, 57
Coon, Ross, 104
Coover, Robert, 57
- Copper Beech Press, 59
Coulter, Charles W., 117
Cranston, Henry, 92
Cumberland Company, 59
Cumming, Richard, 57
Currie, James, 26
Custer, Arthur, 40, 56
- Dance Alliance, 59
Danforth, Mrs. Murray S., 57
Danforth, Walter R., 73
Daniels, David, 86
Dart (ship), 28
Dartmouth, earl of (William), 9, 12, 15, 17
Deasy, Margaret T., 121
Debs, Eugene, 117, 119, 122-23
Democratic Review, 82, 92
DePasquale, Luigi, 118, 127
DeVaro, Lawrence, 16
Dickinson, William, 10-12
Diddley, Bo, 42
Digati, Joseph, 45
Diman, Byron, 96
Diman, John, 96
DiPrete, Edward, 54
Disney, Diane M., 47-49
Dobbins, Iona B., 49-50, 52-53, 60, 63
Dorr, Henry, 69
Dorr, Thomas Wilson, 117, 125; "No
Tempest in a Teapot: The Dorr Rebellion
in National Perspective," 67-100
Downing, Antoinette, 57
Draper Textile Machine Company, 118
Dudington, William, 5-18
Dudley, Charles, 4, 7
Duff, Henry J., 94
Dunn, John T., 121
Durfee, Job, 71-72, 75, 82, 90, 97-98
Dwight, Marguerite, 127
D'Wolf, Henry, 89
Dyer, Elisha, 89
- Earle, Patrick, 12
Education, Arts in Education program, 40,
42, 46, 49, 55-57
Edwards, Phinehas, 110
Eichenberg, Fritz, 57
Ellery, William, 26, 28
England: and autonomy of colonial Rhode
Island, the *Gaspee* Affair, 3-21; "Rhode
Island and the War of 1812," 23-32
Everett Dance Company, 59
Expansion Arts program, 59
- Fain, Barnet, 37, 39-41, 57, 64
Farrell, Eileen, 57

- Fazzano, Joseph, 39
 Feldman, Walter, 57
 Fenner, Arthur, 92
 Fenner, James, 24, 26, 76, 91-92
 First Night, 60
 Fleet National Bank, 53
 Fleischner, Richard, 57
 Folk Arts Program, 47, 55
 Ford Foundation, 38
 Fort Green, 28
 Fort William Henry, 28
 Foundation for Repertory Theater, 44
 Foundry Legislature, 77, 82
 Francis, John Brown, 74, 78, 80, 84, 86, 92
 Freemen's (Landholders') Constitution, 68, 72-75, 79-86, 100
 Frid, Tage, 57
 Frieze, Jacob, 75
 Frohnmayer, John, 61
- Garrahy, J. Joseph, 46
Gaspee (ship), "The Uses of Law and the *Gaspee* Affair," 3-21
 George III, king of England, 9
 Gibbs, Cora Lee, 57
 Gibbs, William, 92
 Gingrich, Arnold, 45
 Goddard, William G., 72-73, 92
 Goto, Joseph, 57
 Gould, Stephen W., 23
 Gray, Channing, 50-51
 Grear, Malcolm, 57
 Greeley, Horace, 98
 Green, Theodore Francis, 124
 Greene, Christopher, 108
 Gulley, Stephen, 13
- Haile, Levi, 71
 Hall, Adrian, 44-45
 Hallett, Benjamin F., 92, 94-95, 98
 Hanks, Nancy, 41
Hannah (ship), 18
 Harding, Warren G., 123
 Harper, Michael, 57
 Harris, John S., 81
 Hartford antiwar convention, 29-30
 Hartford Stage Company, 41
 Hawkes, John, 57
 Hazard, Edwin, 90
 Herndon, Ruth Wallis, "On and Off the Record: Town Clerks as Interpreters of Rhode Island History," 103-15
 Hiller, Theodore, 121
 Hillsborough, earl of, 4-5, 7-11, 14, 17
 History from town records, "On and Off the Record: Town Clerks as Interpreters of Rhode Island History," 103-15
 Hogan, Gary, 56
 Holloway, John H., 118
 Honig, Edwin, 57
 Hopkins, Stephen, 6, 10, 13-14, 17-18
 Hopkinton, "On and Off the Record: Town Clerks as Interpreters of Rhode Island History," 103-115
 Horsmanden, Daniel, 9, 12, 15
 Hotham, Henry, 28
 Hubbard, Henry, 89
Hunter (ship), 26
- Huntington, Jabez, 78
- Irish Catholics and voting franchise, 69, 72-73, 79, 86
 Island Moving Company, 59
- Jackson, Andrew, 84
 Jackson, Charles, 91, 93, 96
 Jackson, Richard, Jr., 25
 Jansson, Douglas, 47
 Javits, Jacob, 38
 Jefferson, Thomas, 23-24
 Jewish Home for the Aged, 44
 John Stevens Shop, 57
 Johnson, Diana, 52-53, 64
 Johnson, Philip, 62
 Jones, Brian, 46
 Jones, William, 24-29, 31
 Jordy, William, 39
 Joslin, Joseph, 82
 Junior Chamber of Commerce, Providence, 37
- Keeney, Barnaby, 38
 Keller, Helen, 122
 Kent, George, 57
 King, Samuel Ward, 74-76, 78, 80-82, 89-90, 92, 97
 Kinnell, Galway, 57
 Kiwanis Club, Providence, 37
 Kneeland, Richard, 57
 Krasner, Louis, 57
 Kurtz, Cleveland, 42
- Labor Advocate*, 119
 Labor unions, "A Giant of Embodied Conscience": Joseph M. Coldwell and the Socialist Party in Rhode Island," 117-29
 LaFollette, Robert M., Jr., 124
 Lambrecht, Winifred, 47, 55
 Landholders' Convention, 68, 73-74, 86, 100
 Lang, Bruce, 64
 Larkin, Eliisha, 106
 Larkin, Margaret, 107
 Larkin, Timothy, 105
 Latham, Richard, 46, 52
 Law and Order party, 69, 72, 74-75, 79-81, 84-86, 91-92
Leander (ship), 23
 Lecht, Daniel, 47-51, 53, 64
 Leckey, Hugo, 39-41
 Lee, Eugene, 57
 Lee, Marjorie, 50
Leopard (ship), 23
 Linzee, John, 10-12, 15-16
Lizard (ship), 7
 London, Jack, 119
 Lord, Henry, 87
 Lowry, Bates, 57
 Luther, Martin, 94-95, 97
 Luther, Rachel, 94-95, 97
 Lyman, Daniel, 29
- Macaulay, David, 57
 McClermand, John A., 92
 McKenna, David, 57
 McLevy, Jasper, 125
 McNeill, William Gibbs, 89-91
- McPherson, Aimee Semple, 45
 Madeira, Francis, 57
 Madison, James, 24-28, 31
 Mahoney, Jane, 56
 Man, Samuel F., 93
 Maritime rights, "Rhode Island and the War of 1812," 23-32
 Marshal, Joseph, 107
 Marshel, Mary, 106, 109-10
 Maxson, Jesse, 112
 Maxson, Samuel, 106, 109
 Mensel, Karen, 63-64
 Miller, Sarah, 110
 Montagu, John, 4, 6-7, 10-12, 16-17
 Moore, Ely, 82
 Mowry, Arthur May, 77, 91
 Muhly, Frank, "A Silver Lining: Twenty-Five Years of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts," 35-64
 Murray, John A., 119
 Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 36-37, 39, 41, 51-52, 57, 59
- National Committee, Arts for the Handicapped, 57
 National Endowment for the Arts, 38-41, 45, 47, 53-54, 56, 59
 Native Americans and the arts, 56
 Nativism in constitutional debates, 72-73
 Nero, Pat, 37
New Age, 69, 82
 New England Foundation for the Arts, 52
 Newman, Arthur, 43
Newport Mercury, 9
New York Evening Post, 82
New York Truth Teller, 73
 Noel, Philip, 44
 Nonintercourse Act in War of 1812, 24
 North, Lord (Frederick), 9-10, 16-17
 Notte, John, 37
- O'Hare, Frank, 120, 122
 O'Hare, Kate Richards, 120, 122
 Old Stone Development Corporation, 53
 Oliver, Peter, 9, 15
 Olney, Jeremiah, 108
 O'Sullivan, John B., 82, 92
- Pagliarini, John, 64
 Palmer, A. Mitchell, 123
 Palmer, Robert R., 98
 Partnership for Literacy in the Arts, 57
 Pearce, Dutee J., 68, 77-78, 81-82, 89, 91-92, 94-95
 Peckham, Sweet, 105
 Pell, Claiborne, 34, 38, 48, 57, 62
 Peloquin, C. Alexander, 57
 Penology, Arts in Corrections, 42
 People's Constitution, "No Tempest in a Teapot: The Dorr Rebellion in National Perspective," 67-100
 People's Forum, 121-22
 Perishable Theater, 59
 Perkins, Edward, 105
 Perkins, Phebe, 103-8, 110, 112
 Perry, Stephen, 104-5
 Pettine, Anthony, 121-22
 Phelps, Winston, 127

- Piracy, "Rhode Island and the War of 1812," 23-32
- Pitman, John, 74-75, 82, 95, 97-98
- Polk, James Knox, 95
- Pomone* (ship), 29
- Potter, Caleb, 108
- Potter, Elisha, 25
- Potter, Elisha, Jr., 74, 78, 80-81, 86, 92
- Potter, George W., 127-28
- Potter, Roger, 82
- Potter, Simeon, 12, 14
- Potter, Stephen, 107-9
- Potter, William, 107
- Preston, Jacob, 92
- Preston, William C., 78
- Prip, John, 57
- Providence Express*, 89
- Providence Foundation, 60
- Providence Gazette*, 9, 18, 25
- Providence Journal*: and Dorr Rebellion, 72-73, 87; on Socialist party, 120, 123, 125; and State Council on the Arts, 36-37, 41, 49-50
- Providence Journal Trust, 53
- Providence Preservation Society, 44, 57
- Public Arts Employment program, 44
- Public welfare, "On and Off the Record: Town Clerks as Interpreters of Rhode Island History," 103-15
- Purdy, Elijah F., 82
- Randolph, Richard K., 80, 84
- Rathbun, George, 92
- Rathbun, Joshua B., 73
- Reed, John, 119
- Reid, James P., 118-19, 123-24
- Reid, John Phillip, 14
- Revolutionary War, "The Uses of Law and the *Gaspee* Affair," 3-21
- Rhode Island Alliance for Art Education, 57
- Rhode Island Arts Fund, 53
- Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, 50
- Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities, 56
- Rhode Island Comprehensive Arts Planning Program, 57
- Rhode Island Constitutionalist*, 70
- Rhode Island Cultural Arts Commission, 39
- Rhode Island Foundation, 47, 53, 58-59
- Rhode Island Hospital Trust, 53
- Rhode Island Peace Society, 31
- Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra, 37, 51
- Rhode Island School for the Deaf, 44
- Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, 36-37, 39, 41, 51-52, 57, 59
- Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, "A Silver Lining: Twenty-Five Years of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts," 35-64
- Rhode Island Suffrage Association, 67-68, 98
- Richmond, Barzillai, 12
- Rind, William, 9
- Robbins, Daniel, 41
- Robinson, Franklin, 59
- Roman Catholic Church and Socialist party in Rhode Island, 119
- Russian Socialist Club, 123
- Sacco, Nicola, 118; and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, 123
- Sayles Bleachery, 124
- Sayles, Welcome B., 82
- Schacht, Robert, 127
- Schevill, James, 57
- Schmitt, Tom, 46
- Scott, Winfield, 91
- Scott, Winfield Townley, 127
- Sessions, Darius, 5-6, 8, 11-14, 16, 18
- Seward, William, 90
- Simister, Florence, 57
- Simmons, James Fowler, 78, 93
- Sinclair, Upton, 122
- Siskind, Aaron, 57
- Slamm, Levi, 82
- Slater, Agnes, 43
- Smith, Perry, 78
- Smuggling and colonial autonomy, "The Uses of Law and the *Gaspee* Affair," 3-21
- Smyth, Frederick, 9, 15
- Socialist party in Rhode Island, "'A Giant of Embodied Conscience': Joseph M. Coldwell and the Socialist Party in Rhode Island," 117-29
- Spencer, John C., 85, 87
- Spitz, Larry, 119, 124, 127
- Sprague, William, 75, 77-78, 81-82, 84-85, 87, 89, 92
- Staples, William R., 71
- Stevens, Roger, 38, 40
- Stewart, Rovena, 50-52, 64
- Stokes, Rose Pastor, 120, 122
- Stone, Eric, 127
- Story, Joseph, 71, 74, 82, 94
- Strum, Harvey, "Rhode Island and the War of 1812," 23-32
- Sullivan, Joseph W., "'A Giant of Embodied Conscience': Joseph M. Coldwell and the Socialist Party in Rhode Island," 117-29
- Sundlun, Bruce, 45
- Swan, Bradford, 45
- Sweet, Lebeus, 105
- Sweet, Thomas, 105
- Sylvester, Philip Carteret, 9
- Tallmadge, Nathaniel, 78
- Tammany Hall, 82-83
- Tammany societies in Rhode Island, 24-25
- Taney, Roger, 97
- Tanner, Abel, "On and Off the Record: Town Clerks as Interpreters of Rhode Island History," 103-15
- Theater, public support of, 37, 39, 44-45, 51-52, 54, 59
- Theinert, Edward, 120
- Thomas, Norman, 124
- Thurlow, Edward, 9, 17
- Thurston, Joseph, 103
- Tilden, Samuel J., 82
- Tilles, Norman, 41, 64
- Tillinghast, Joseph L., 87
- Titus, Jonah, 82
- Townley, Hugh, 57
- Trinity Persona Company, 45
- Trinity Repertory Company, 37, 44-45, 51-52, 54, 59
- Trinity Square Theatre, 57
- Turner, George, 94
- Tyler, John, 74-78, 80-81, 85, 87, 92, 97
- United Arts Fund, 46, 53
- Utter, Anne, 39, 42-43
- Van Allsburg, Chris, 57
- Vaughan, Daniel, 12
- Vermel, Anne, 41, 44
- Verte, Estelle, 43
- Very Special Arts Rhode Island, 58
- Vigilant* (ship), 28
- Virginia Gazette*, 9
- Vogel, Paula, 57
- Waldrop, Rosmarie, 7
- Walsh, Mike, 82, 89
- Wanton, Joseph, 4-17
- Warner, William, 57
- War of 1812, "Rhode Island and the War of 1812," 23-32
- War Resisters League, 127
- Washington Benevolent Society, Newport, 25
- Watson, Jeffrey, 107
- Weaver, Zebulon, 105
- Webster, Daniel, 72, 77, 80-81, 85, 95, 97-98
- Wedderburn, Alexander, 9, 17
- Weed, Thurlow, 90
- Weeden, Wager, 75
- Wells, Abigail, 108-9
- Wells, Cesar, 107-10, 112
- Wells, Edward, 103-4, 112
- Wells, James, Jr., 108
- Wells, Thomas, 105-6, 109
- Westerly Art Center, 42
- Wheeler, John, 83
- Whipple, John, 72, 74, 81-82, 84, 95, 97
- White, Aaron, 82, 95
- White, Christina, 49
- Wilbur, Benjamin, 105
- Witter, Joseph, Jr., 104, 112
- Witter, Samuel, 104
- Witter, William, 106, 109
- Wolff, Geoffrey, 57
- Woodbury, Levi, 78, 97
- Woonsocket Rayon Plant, 124
- World War I, 119-23
- Wright, C. D., 57
- Wright, Silas, Jr., 78
- WSBE (Channel 36), 49
- Yanyar, Adolph, 121
- York, Neil L., "The Uses of Law and the *Gaspee* Affair," 3-21
- Young People's Socialist League, 123