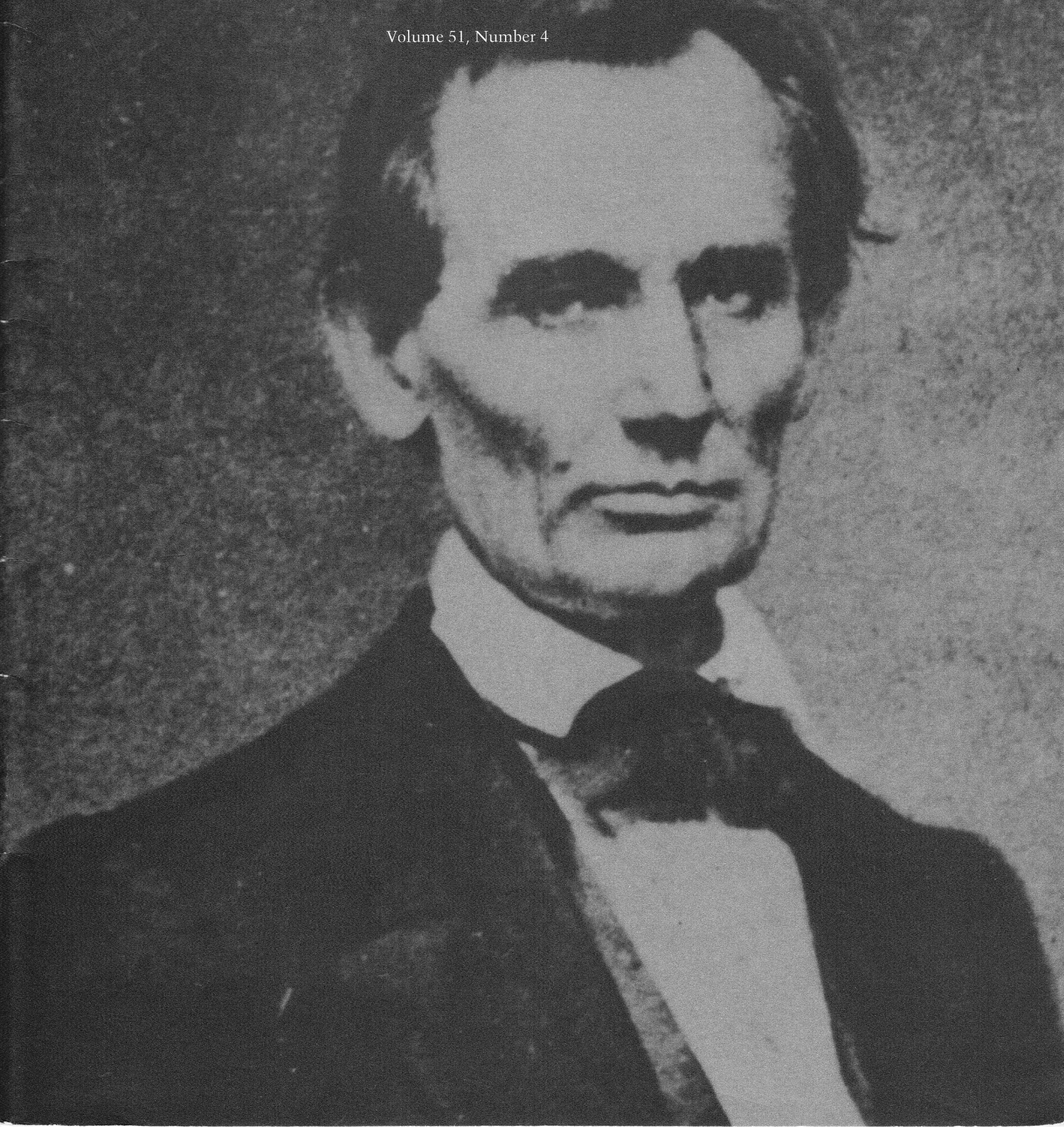


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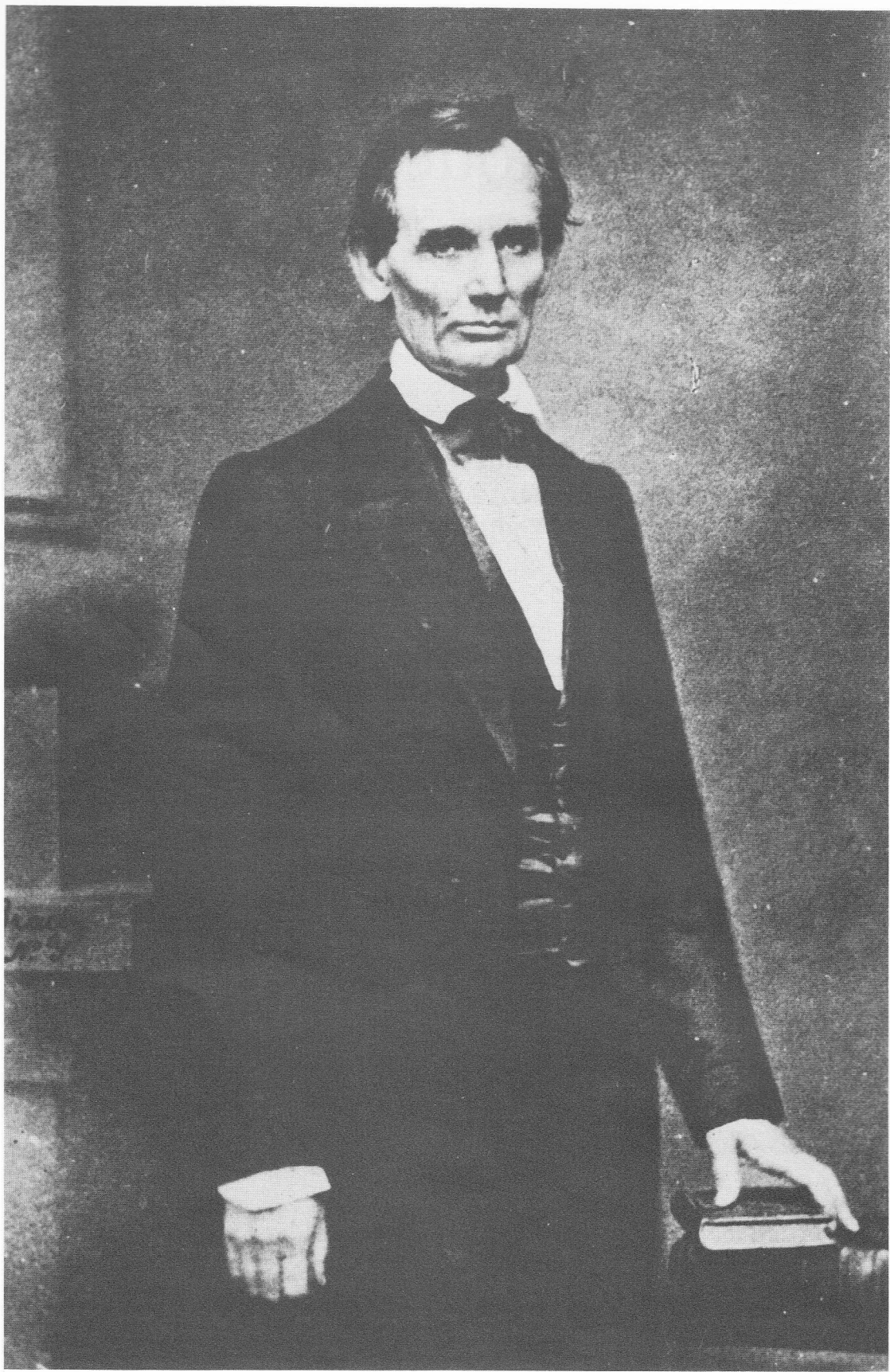
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A Candidate Speaks in Rhode Island: Abraham Lincoln Visits Providence and Woonsocket, 1860

FRANK J. WILLIAMS

Although Abraham Lincoln was in Providence four times and in Woonsocket once, and although he probably saw about all there was to see in the two cities, he certainly would not recognize either place if he were to make such a visit today. Aside from such modern features as motor vehicles, aials, new buildings, expressways, and shopping centers, he would find that all but one of the places where he was entertained and where he spoke have disappeared. The house at 265 Washington Street in Providence, where the candidate solemnly offered red gumdrops to little Alfred Eddy, is gone; it was there that Alfred's oversized daddy, John Eddy, provided the tall westerner with a large armchair and probably the only comfortable bed Lincoln found in all New England. Providence's Union Passenger Depot, with its two spires and its large hall on the second floor, where Lincoln spoke to an overflow crowd, burned and was demolished in the 1890s.

Oakley, the Edward Harris homestead in Woonsocket, was also demolished many years ago. It was there that the gangling foe of slavery took the diminutive Mrs. Harris in to dinner and tongue-in-cheek told her that the only thing to do with the slaves was to send them back to Africa. Only the Harris Institute, where Lincoln delivered a speech to whip up Republican enthusiasm and offset the "silly gabble about John Brown and Helperism," still exists, now as the Woonsocket City Hall.

Lincoln had visited New England in 1848, when he had supported "Old Rough and Ready" Zachary Taylor as the Whig candidate for president and attended the party's convention in Worcester on 13 September. The next day he had traveled from Worcester to New Bedford, changing trains at the Union Depot in Providence. It was Rhode Island's first contact with Lincoln, and it was brief and insignificant. Lincoln's second visit to Providence would be more substantial.

Photographic portrait of Abraham Lincoln by Mathew Brady, 27 February 1860. Original photograph in the collection of the Lincoln National Life Foundation, courtesy of Frank J. Williams.

Frank J. Williams, a Providence and Hope Valley attorney, is the current president of the Abraham Lincoln Association. He wishes to thank the staffs of the Rhode Island Historical Society Library and the John Hay Library, Brown University, who made their collections available to him and guided him in their use. This article is based on a paper presented by Mr. Williams to the Lincoln Group of Boston.

As a result of the prominence he had received in the Middle West following his senatorial debates with Stephen Douglas in 1858, Lincoln was invited by Henry Ward Beecher and the lecture committee of Plymouth Church in Brooklyn to give one in a series of weekly lectures that were planned for the 1859-60 season. The talk was to be on a nonpolitical theme, but in view of the excitement that followed John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in October 1859, it was agreed that Lincoln should be permitted to make a political address instead. With this change in plans the arrangements passed from the hands of the church's lecture committee to those of the Young Men's Republican Union of New York. The best available place for the address, it was decided, was the great hall of the new Cooper Union, which had been built by the philanthropist Peter Cooper for purposes of popular education.

Why did Lincoln come? Some say that his primary purpose was to visit his son Robert, who had arrived in the East in the fall of 1859 hoping to enter

Harvard. As a result of his disastrous performance on the entrance examination for that school, Robert was now enrolled in Phillips Exeter Academy at Exeter, New Hampshire. According to this view, the concerned parent was not wholly reassured that Robert would not fail a second time and hence thought it advisable to find out firsthand what progress his son was making.

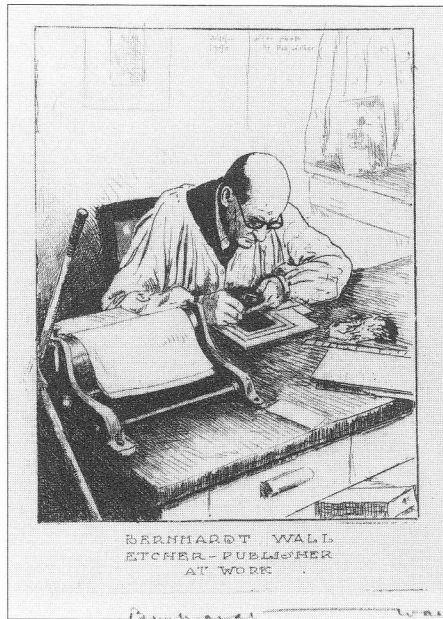
Another theory, which has since predominated over the first, holds that Lincoln considered such a visit essential to his presidential candidacy; it would provide him with the necessary exposure to the people in the East and give them an opportunity to hear him express his own views. However, some historians, like the late Elwin L. Page, believe that Lincoln did not visit New York with an eye to the presidency, since he was much slower than many of his admirers to see himself as a strong presidential candidate. Although friends like Jesse W. Fell assured Lincoln that he would make a formidable candidate for president, Lincoln thought that this was an overly enthusiastic view, and that the better-known William Seward of New York and Salmon P. Chase of Ohio were more deserving. According to Page, Lincoln was aiming not for the presidency but for the U.S. Senate.¹

But Lincoln was indeed a candidate for an office higher than that of senator from Illinois: he did not wish to oppose Lyman Trumbull for that office in 1860, and Senator Douglas's term would not end until 1864. Lincoln had his eye on either the presidency or the vice presidency.² In 1856 the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia had given him 110 votes for the vice presidential nomination, with 32 of those votes coming from eastern delegates. Lincoln had admirably suppressed any elation he might have felt, but that support had to have made some positive impression in his mind.

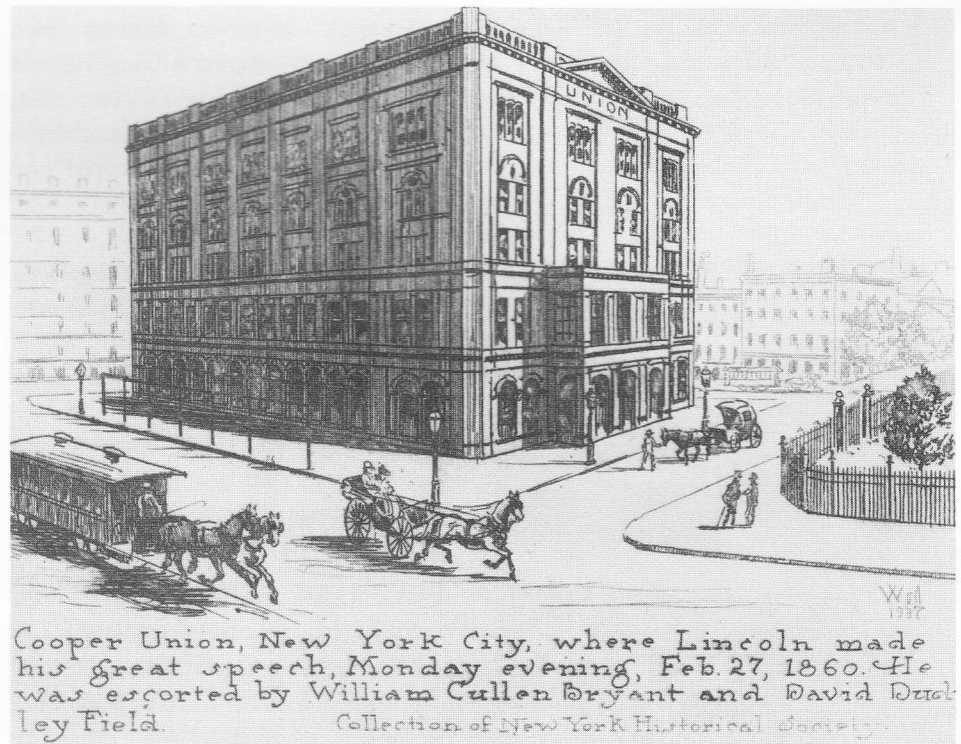
For whatever reason, Abraham Lincoln (who had just turned fifty-one) left Springfield, Illinois, for New York on Thursday, 23 February 1860. He arrived on Saturday, 25 February, carrying a leather bag, an umbrella, and the manuscript for his speech. On Sunday he went to hear Beecher's sermon at Plymouth Church, and on Monday, 27 February, he had his picture taken by Mathew Brady during the day and went to the Cooper Union by streetcar at eight o'clock that evening.

The audience's first impression of the man from the West did nothing to contradict the expectation that he would be some weird, rough, and uncultivated fellow. He was a long, ungainly figure, with large feet and clumsy hands, of which (at the outset, at least) he seemed unduly conscious; his long, gaunt head was capped by a shock of black hair that was not thoroughly brushed out; his clothes, while new for this trip, were the work of an unskilled tailor; his voice was at first not pleasant to the ear, the tone harsh and the key too high. He clearly did not fit New York's conception of a finished statesman, of which the polished William Seward was the model.

As he entered into the substance of his speech, however, it was evident that Lincoln was highly knowledgeable and well prepared. He thoroughly understood the constitutional history of the country; he had mastered the issues that had grown up about the slavery question; he fully knew and was prepared to respect the rights of his political opponents, while insisting too upon the rights of those men whose views he was helping to shape, rights that he believed should be unwaveringly protected. On the crucial issue of whether slavery should be extended into the territories, he made clear his conviction that the nation's continued existence depended upon restricting slavery



The illustrations reproduced with this article are from Bernard Wall's trial-copy portfolio "Following Abraham Lincoln," circa 1938, courtesy of the Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolniana. The etchings were to be issued to subscribers in serial form. Only eight copies of the portfolio—created by the artist to show potential clients—are known to exist.



within its present boundaries. Such restriction, he maintained, was just and necessary, as well as fair to both black and white people.

Lincoln declared that the voters in the present states of the Union had great responsibility in guiding the Republic. He insisted that war for the extermination of slavery could not be justified, but he believed that the national territories had to be defended against slavery, even at the risk of war, because it was only through such a commitment that the nation could be preserved. To him the preservation of the Republic was essential, not only for its own citizens but for democratic government throughout the world. He spoke with sympathy of the problems faced by the South, and he insisted that the matters at issue could be adjusted with a fair recognition of these difficulties. Aggression from either side of the Mason-Dixon line was to be resisted. Lincoln also presented an analysis of the Founding Fathers' opinions on slavery, demonstrating that of the thirty-nine signers of the Constitution, twenty-one were on record as believing that the federal government had the power to control slavery in the federal territories—a point that the United States Supreme Court had repudiated in its Dred Scott decision.

The way that Lincoln said these things was as important as what he said. The structure of his argument and its compelling logic, along with his use of appropriate historical background, were nothing less than brilliant. The fifteen hundred people who heard him that evening responded with frequent and enthusiastic applause. This diligently prepared address would provide the basis for the ten speeches that Lincoln would make in New England.³

During his stay in New York City, Lincoln was approached by John Eddy, a successful Providence attorney and high-ranking member of the state's Republican party. Hoping that Lincoln could help gain the Republicans the support of the powerful Rhode Island textile manufacturers, Eddy invited the candidate to speak in Providence on the evening after his appearance at the

Cooper Union. Some accounts claim that Eddy extended his invitation only after hearing Lincoln's Cooper Union address, but in fact the *Providence Daily Journal* reported the impending visit ("Honorable Abraham Lincoln of Illinois, will address the Republicans of this city tomorrow evening, at a place to be hereafter announced") on 27 February, the day Lincoln spoke in New York.



Lincoln had received scant mention in the Providence newspapers prior to 1860. In 1856 his name had appeared in only one issue of the moderate Republican *Providence Daily Journal*, where it was included in a list of candidates for the Republican vice presidential nomination. Only minor significance was attached to his senatorial candidacy in 1858, although dispatches in both the *Journal* and the conservative Democratic *Providence Daily Post* did mention that Lincoln had been selected to oppose the powerful and well-known incumbent, Stephen Douglas, and the *Journal* stated that Lincoln might well upset Douglas because of the great friction within the Democratic party between Douglas and the supporters of President Buchanan.

When Lincoln failed in his bid for the Senate, the *Journal* blamed his defeat on the unfair proportionment of voting districts in Illinois, since he had actually polled five thousand votes more than Douglas. The *Post* believed that Lincoln's defeat had been a foregone conclusion. Following the senatorial campaign Lincoln largely faded into oblivion as far as the Providence dailies were concerned; in 1859 his name appeared in fewer than fifteen issues of the two papers combined. There seemed to be no strong editorial opinions about him.

A careful study of these scattered references reveals Lincoln's strong faith in Republicanism and his steady rise in popularity in the Middle West. Throughout 1859, however, Lincoln remained a minor political figure in the Providence newspapers, while William Seward, James Buchanan, Stephen Douglas, John Brown, and Salmon Chase dominated these papers' national political news. Printed articles usually mentioned Lincoln as a leading Republican, but he was never cited as a potential national candidate. A *Post* article reported that Lincoln might receive a cabinet position if the Republican candidate were to win the presidency in 1860. For the most part, however, Lincoln's reputation had not yet developed to any great degree in Rhode Island.

By the time of Lincoln's visit, the local political climate in Rhode Island, reflecting the national climate, was tense. Thomas G. Turner, a Republican, was governor, having been elected by a landslide in 1858. The next election was to take place on 4 April. Pitted against each other were fusionist candidate William Sprague and Republican Seth Padelford. It was concern about this election, more than any attempt to enhance Lincoln's political image in Rhode Island, that led John Eddy to invite Lincoln to speak in Providence.

Things were not going well for the state's Republicans.⁴ The *Providence Daily Post* continually hammered away at the Republican party, portraying it as a party of abolitionists who wanted to see a breakup of the Union. The *Post* often associated John Brown with the Republican cause. A moderate Republican voice was needed to buoy the state's Republican party, a voice that would allay the fears of voters by restating the party's desire that the Union remain intact.

The Republicans' gubernatorial nomination had brought about a rupture in the party. By active canvassing, Padelford, a wholesale grocer, had secured the nomination at the party's state convention. He was supported, not unexpectedly, by the *Providence Daily Journal*, which was owned by Republican Henry B. Anthony, a former Rhode Island governor and now a United States senator. But Padelford's nomination was distasteful to a large number of prominent Republican textile manufacturers with ties to the South, and these men persuaded Sprague, the wealthy owner of the Cranston Print Works, to run against Padelford for the governorship. One of the principal arguments advanced against Padelford by Republicans was that he had given a hundred dollars to circulate Hinton Rowan Helper's *The Impending Crisis of the South*, a widely read attack on slavery as an economic evil. Padelford's apparent endorsement of the book (which he had not in fact read) was proclaimed as proof that he was an abolitionist and thus unfriendly to the South.⁵

On Tuesday, 28 February 1860, a tired but contented Lincoln took the 8:00 a.m. Boston express from New York's New Haven Depot at Fourth Avenue and Twenty-seventh Street, later the site of the old Madison Square Garden. He changed cars for the Shore Line at the Chapel Street Station in New Haven, and from New London he continued on to Providence on the New York, Providence, and Boston Railroad (popularly called the Stonington Road). The entire trip took over eight hours.⁶

John Eddy accompanied Lincoln from New York. According to Dr. Charles H. Leonard, a friend of Eddy's, during the trip the Providence attorney spoke to Lincoln about his possible nomination for the presidency by the Republican party. Eddy asked Lincoln a question: "Mr. Lincoln supposing you could win the nomination, do you suppose you could get elected? Abraham Lincoln in a high pitched voice said 'I do.'"⁷

Although some twenty inches of snow had fallen on Providence during the month of February, the weather on 28 February was generally mild and cloudy, with a high temperature of 43.7 degrees.⁸ After he arrived in the city, Lincoln went by carriage to Eddy's home for supper. Then he returned to the Union Depot to deliver his address, which was scheduled for 7:30 that evening in Railroad Hall, an auditorium on the second floor at the northern end of the station.

The hall was filled to overflowing with an estimated fifteen hundred people when Lincoln arrived—a good turnout, especially for an event arranged on such short notice. Former governor William Hoppin called the gathering to order. The Honorable James C. Jencks, a Providence attorney, was elected president of the meeting, and John Eddy was elected secretary. Regrettably, Eddy appears to have failed in his job that evening, as no copy of the candidate's speech exists. There are no notes of the Providence speech like those that Lincoln left on the speaker's table at Hartford six days later, nor is there any newspaper version of the speech like those that appeared in the *Hartford Daily Courant* and the *New Haven Daily Palladium* on 8 March.

On Wednesday morning, 29 February, the *Providence Daily Journal* reported that Jencks had spoken of the great responsibility resting on Rhode Island in the coming election and had then introduced the Honorable Abraham Lincoln of Illinois. "Mr. Lincoln began by alluding good naturedly to some remarks in the . . . *Post*, which he had read on his way hither in the cars," said the *Journal*."

"So Mr. Lincoln is to favor us with a speech," the *Post* had warned.

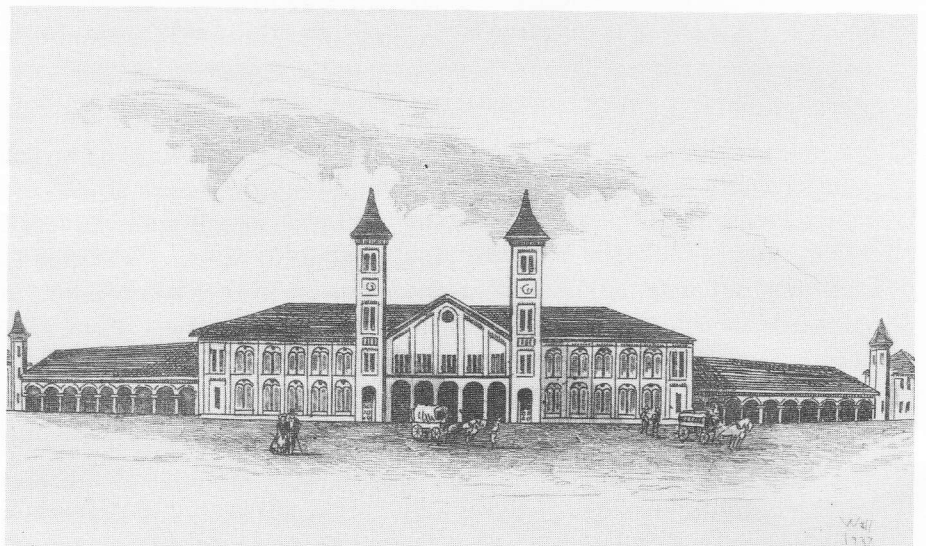
He is sent to us from Washington, or from Illinois or from somewhere; and comes in such haste that even a hall is not provided for him one day before the meeting comes off. Evidently enough of the people of Providence were not consulted at all with reference to the meeting which he is to address. . . . We hope Mr. Lincoln will not fail to define his position fully and intelligibly to-night. As an Illinois Republican, he differs essentially from the Republicans who have done our preaching in Rhode Island. *He is in favor of allowing foreigners to vote even before they are naturalized*; and in his own State, where, the *Journal* tells us, he 'carries the people with him,' they enjoy this privilege. Surely he should instruct our benighted citizens on this subject!⁹

The *Post* must have dug up from its archives all the information it had regarding Lincoln, including the peroration of his June 1858 speech in which he accepted the Republican nomination to the United States Senate: "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other." Quoting these words, the *Post* offered a very literal interpretation:

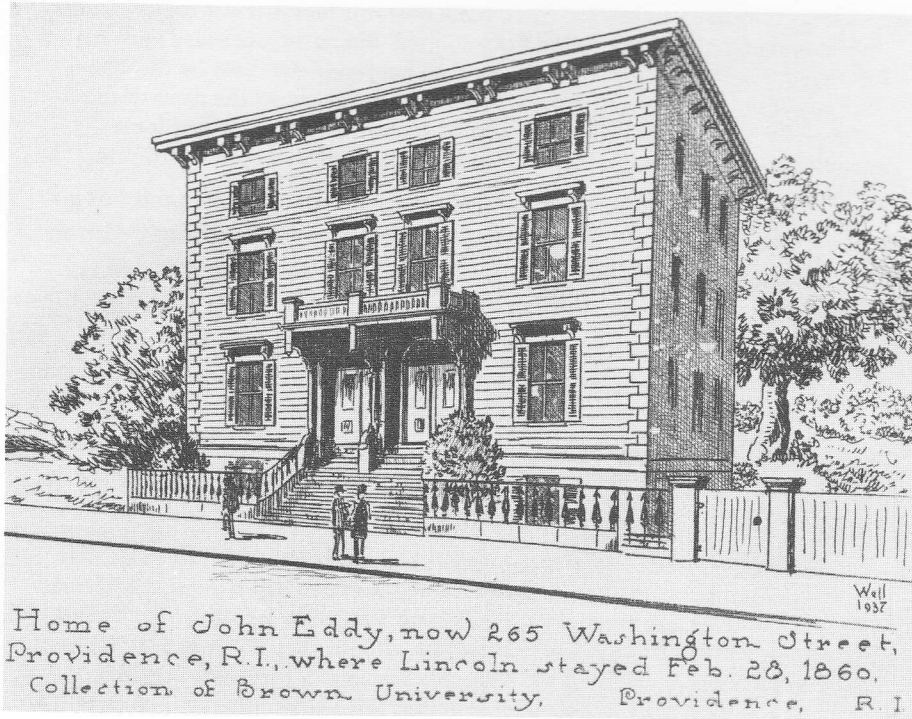
Mr. Lincoln said the founding fathers made a great mistake when they believed a nation could be composed of free states and slave states and get along harmoniously. Mr. Lincoln says this can not be. The North must conquer the South, or the South must conquer the North. Either South Carolina must establish slavery in Rhode Island, or Rhode Island must abolish slavery in South Carolina. It is a war of institutions, and *one must exterminate the other or the house falls to the ground*. In plain English—The Union is a failure.

This is Mr. Lincoln's doctrine; and Mr. Lincoln comes all the way from Illinois to enlighten Rhode Islanders teaching their duties to the present crisis. He comes to advocate the election of one of the endorsers of *Helper's Impending Crisis*. There is it must be admitted a strong resemblance between Lincoln and Helper. Mr. Lincoln talks about extermination, and so does Mr. Helper.¹⁰

The *Journal* indicated that Lincoln would defend his "House Divided speech" in Providence. The candidate in fact quoted from that speech to lead his



Railroad Depot, Providence, R.I.; on the second floor was located Railroad Hall, in which Lincoln delivered a speech on the evening of Feb. 28, 1860. Collection of Brown University. Providence, R.I.



audience and his *Post* critics into the substance of his Cooper Union address. This appears paradoxical if we accept the *Post*'s interpretation of the former speech, whose allegedly stark outlook would seem to be irreconcilable with the more conciliatory views expressed by Lincoln at the Cooper Union. An examination of the 1858 speech, however, reveals that Lincoln was not speaking of war or extermination; he was arguing, rather, that slavery should not be allowed to spread, and that arresting it would be sufficient to place it on the road to ultimate extinction. His convictions did not change between 1858 and 1860; at the Cooper Union he expressed the same concern that the federal government prevent the extension of slavery into the national territories. According to the candidate, this was the issue.

Referring to the controversy over Helper's *Impending Crisis* in his Providence speech, Lincoln declared that he had not read the book; "If there is anything good in the book, I endorse it and if there is anything bad, I condemn it," the *Post* quoted him as saying. A very political comment, certainly, but taken out of context it perhaps does not do justice to Lincoln, although it does sound like his brand of humor, honesty, and forthrightness. Unimpressed, the *Post* remarked that Lincoln was "tender-footed on the question [of slavery] now uppermost on the minds of the people of the State."¹¹

The impressions of those who listened to the two-and-a-half-hour talk were varied. The *Providence Daily Journal* could not say enough good things about the man and his forthrightness:

The most prominent impression Mr. Lincoln makes in his speaking is that of thorough honesty and of sincere earnest belief in all that he says. He abounds in good humor and pleasant satire, and often gives a witty thrust that cuts like a Damascus blade. But he does not aim chiefly at fun. He strives rather to show by plain, simple, cogent reasoning that his positions are impregnable but he carries his audience with him, as he deserves to.¹²

Amasa Eaton, of Brown University's class of 1861, attended the speech with several of his classmates. His opinion of Lincoln on that occasion, remembered many years later, was mixed:

I must confess that I was unfavorably impressed by his manner. It was grotesque and uncouth. He made faces at the audience and set them laughing. He was interrupted by a man in the audience who asked questions not always pertinent. The audience hooted and hissed trying to shut the man off, but Lincoln showed his skill by asking for fair play for him, and during the rest of the speech he would occasionally address himself to this particular man.¹³

James B. Angell, at that time the editor in chief of the *Journal*, recalled in his memoirs that the candidate

was an entire stranger in Providence; and when he appeared on the stage with his long, lank figure, his loose frock coat, his hair just cut rather close, his homely face, we were rather disappointed. But as he proceeded with his speech our solicitude disappeared. . . . It so happened that I sat by the side of the editor of the Democratic paper, Welcome B. Sayles. At the close of the address he said to me, "That is the finest constitutional argument for a popular audience that I have ever heard." And certainly I agreed with him.¹⁴

But Sayles was not so approving in later issues of his paper. He did not go into the substance of the candidate's speech in the next morning's edition (perhaps because of the lateness of the hour when the meeting ended, although the *Journal* was able to give the speech's highlights that day), but he told his readers that more would be said of the speech in later issues. On 1 March the *Post* accused the candidate of pussyfooting around the Helperism issue and the alleged Republican support of John Brown. Four days later the paper declared that Lincoln had disappointed all who had heard him, that he was not conciliatory enough to receive the support of the state's conservatives, and that it would have been better if he had not come to Rhode Island.

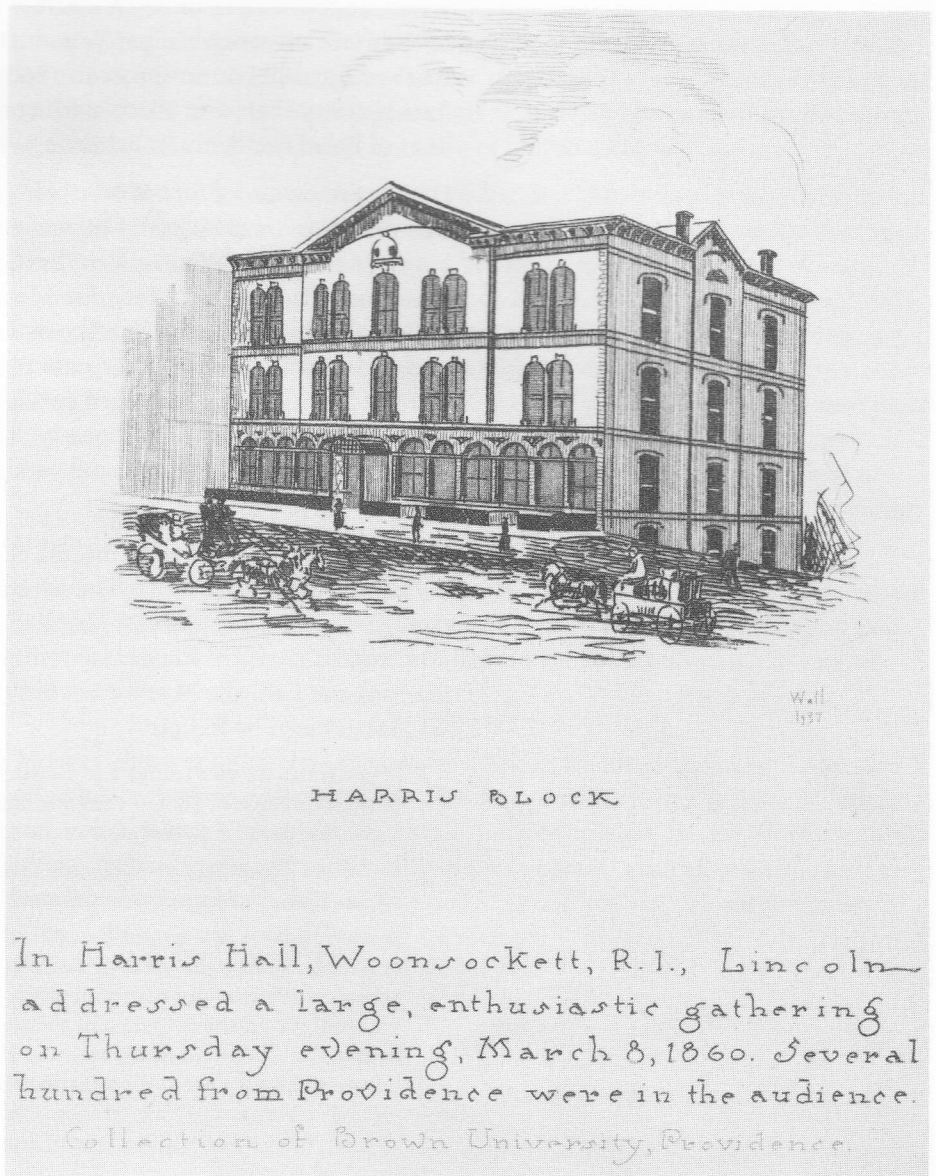
He was evidently unfortunate in his positions on slavery [said the *Post*]. The general government, he said, was not framed between half slave and half free. There was no such thing in the Constitution framed by our Fathers. "They found slavery existent and as they couldn't alter it, they left it as they found it." Precisely the platform of the Democratic party! Slavery was left to be regulated by each state as she pleased. It was left as our fathers found it; that is, it was let alone. This was an unwelcome thing to abolitionists whose motto is to extinguish it in the states peacefully or forcibly. How this squared with Gov. Padelford and his John Brown devotees, we leave them to reconcile as they may. The orator kindly informed us that the Constitution nowhere recognized slavery or slaves. The very next position assumed was that "three-fifths of all other persons meant slaves." . . . We think the Illinois orator would do well to revise his statistics on slavery and the Constitution before he addresses another abolition audience in the North lest his teachings drive them to let slavery alone as our Fathers did."¹⁵

After Lincoln had finished speaking that evening, there was a speech by former Rhode Island congressmen Thomas Davis. (An enthusiastic supporter of Helperism, Davis was peeved that Lincoln had not endorsed Helper's book.)¹⁶ Then the audience offered several cheers for Lincoln and Seth Padelford, and the meeting came to an end. Before leaving Railroad Hall to return to John Eddy's home for the night, Lincoln was invited by the locally prominent Latimer W. Ballou of Smithfield and Edward Harris of Woonsocket to speak in Woonsocket the following week, and he accepted the invitation.

The following story was related by Alfred U. Eddy, John Eddy's son:

Mr. Lincoln stayed in our home on the night of his visit, and gave me a few red gumdrops, probably intended for his own use. But he diplomatically turned them over to me, to keep the peace. I was only four years old at the time and quite a bit awed, although the matter of the gumdrops stands out very clearly in my mind. My father was a man of six feet two and one half inches in height, and had a chair especially made to accommodate his length and limb. My mother told me that at his departure Mr. Lincoln thanked her for her hospitality, not only for himself, but for his long legs, which seldom had any consideration paid them, but which had been most comfortable by my father's thoughtful foresight."¹⁷

Lincoln left Providence for Boston on Wednesday morning, 29 February. From Boston he went on to Exeter to visit his son Robert. Following that visit he



gave speeches in Concord, Dover, and Exeter, New Hampshire, and in Hartford, New Haven, and Meriden, Connecticut. The Hartford and New Haven speeches were printed in full by the local papers.¹⁸

On Thursday morning, 8 March, Lincoln took the 7:15 eastbound train from New Haven to New London, where he had lunch at the old City Hotel during a three-hour stopover. The 1:30 p.m. train from New London brought him to Providence at 4:15, and at 6:30 p.m. he took a special Providence and Worcester train to Woonsocket. Four hundred to five hundred people from the Providence area paid a fare of fifty cents each to accompany him on the last leg of the trip, and a band and members of the DuDah Club (forerunners of the "Wide Awakes," who would support him in his presidential campaign) provided music and campaign songs along the way and throughout the meeting that evening at Harris Hall.

The two men who had invited Lincoln to speak, Latimer Ballou and Edward Harris, were well known in Rhode Island. Ballou had learned printing at the University Press in Cambridge, Massachusetts, while he was working at farming, and he had established the Cambridge Press before moving to

Woonsocket in 1842 to begin a career as a banker. He was one of the founders of the state's Republican party, and he was to become a presidential elector on the Lincoln-Hamlin ticket in 1860 and later a representative in the Forty-fourth, Forty-fifth, and Forty-sixth congresses. He would also become president of Dean Academy in Franklin, Massachusetts.¹⁹

Harris, the owner of four Woonsocket mills, was probably the leading woolen manufacturer in the country at that time. He was a self-made man, having begun his working life as a farm hand. Most likely the largest landowner in the area, he had donated land for a local high school, a district school, and a church. He had also built the Harris Institute, which contained Harris Hall, one of the two largest auditoriums (with Providence's Railroad Hall) in the state. A proponent of advanced antislavery and temperance views, he had served as senator and representative in the Rhode Island legislature.²⁰ Harris was Lincoln's host the night the candidate stayed in Woonsocket.

The temperature that evening was about 42 degrees, with little or no wind, a great deal of fog, and a light drizzle that had appeared the evening before and continued during the day.²¹ The meeting at Harris Hall had been well advertised; notices had appeared in both the *Providence Daily Journal* and the *Woonsocket Patriot*. According to the *Journal*, fifteen hundred people jammed the hall; the *Post* estimated the audience at a thousand.²² Lincoln was introduced by Ballou:

"I congratulate you Ladies and Gentlemen, on this auspicious commencement of the campaign of 1860. I congratulate you on this gathering of the Friends of Freedom to ratify the Republican nomination of the State of Rhode Island.

Welcome Republicans—Welcome Democrats—and ye who are neither the one or the other, citizens of whatever name or party. We bid you welcome also.

For we all have one country, one constitution, one destiny, and we must all desire the success of these principles, which tend to our common prosperity, common renown and common glory. Therefore, do I especially congratulate you tonight on the presence of a statesman eminent throughout the country, beloved and honored in his western home and who cannot go so far from that home into no village or hamlet so retired, that his fame will not have preceded him as the champion of freedom, and the friend of man—It is a grateful duty I perform tonight in announcing the Hon. Abraham Lincoln of Illinois."²³

As Ballou concluded his introduction, Lincoln untangled his long legs from the chair and slowly rose. He was dressed in a black frock coat, with black ill-fitting trousers that were baggy at the knees. His face seemed interesting but melancholy; his hair was unruly and his necktie was all awry. Altogether he presented a very remarkable, almost disappointing appearance. "March 8th, Thursday, cloudy, sprinkled occasionally," Darius Farnum, a prominent Woonsocket manufacturer, noted in his diary. "Presidential campaign for Republican party for 1860 opened in Woonsocket tonight by Honorable Abraham Lincoln of Illinois—a very tall spare man."²⁴

As elsewhere, however, within ten minutes Lincoln's appearance was absolutely forgotten by the audience. With his cogent arguments, his style, and his humorous but pertinent illustrations, for an hour and a half the candidate held the close attention of his listeners. His face lit up as he spoke, and he seemed totally changed from the forlorn-looking man he had been as he waited to be introduced.

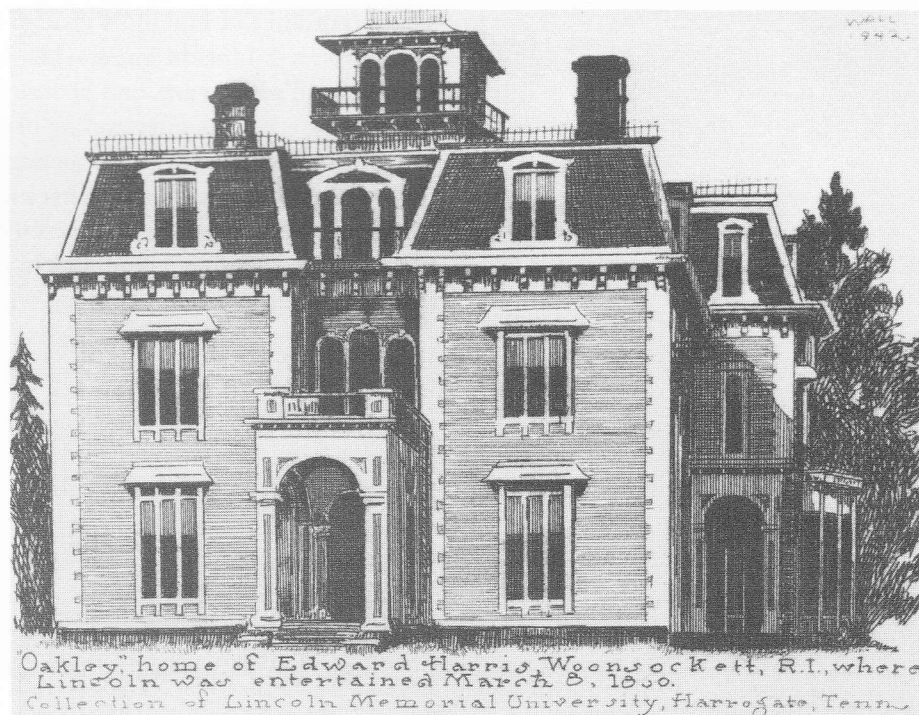
The account of the meeting in the *Patriot* was poor, perhaps because that newspaper's editor in chief, Samuel S. Foss, was a member of the Democratic

party. Also, like John Eddy before them, the meeting's two secretaries, Ruben Randall and Peleg Lippett, both failed to record Lincoln's speech. But it may be inferred from the meager newspaper accounts that the speech followed the pattern of the one the candidate had given in New Haven on 6 March, which in turn had closely paralleled his Cooper Union address.²⁵

After the meeting Lincoln went to Oakley, the Harris home, where he spent the night. Mrs. Harris later recounted a conversation about slavery that she had with her guest when he escorted her to the supper table that evening. "I see no way but to send the slaves back to Africa in case they are freed," said Lincoln. "That would be cruel," Mrs. Harris replied, "worse than keeping them in bondage." "What could we do with them should they be given their liberty?" asked Lincoln. And she answered, "They are needed here; hire them and pay them for their labor." Lincoln looked at her in a knowing, appreciative way but said nothing. She later remarked that she believed he had no more idea of sending four million slaves back to Africa than he had of going there himself.²⁶

The next day Harris accompanied his guest to the Woonsocket Depot, where Lincoln took the 8:25 a.m. train to Providence. He arrived at 9:15, and from there he started his journey home to Illinois on the 12:35 p.m. express to New London.

Most of those who had heard Lincoln speak in Rhode Island were impressed with his oratorical ability, but they did not consider him a serious presidential candidate. When he left the state after his Woonsocket speech, the *Post* curtly reported that "nothing in the future is more certain than that William H. Seward can have the nomination of the Chicago convention for the presidency, if he insists on it." Finding its initial low opinion of Lincoln confirmed,



the *Post* characterized him as an ill-appearing, confused, mediocre abolitionist speaker with no hopes for the presidential nomination.²⁷

The *Journal* took a dim view of the *Post*'s judgment and voiced its approval of Lincoln's speaking tour, but it too did not foresee Lincoln's selection as the Republican candidate for president. James Angell, the editor of the *Journal*, was not unlike the vast majority of Rhode Islanders and New Englanders in expressing surprise and shock when news of the nomination came. "We recalled that awkward figure which we had seen in Railroad Hall, and heard the commendations of him as a rail-splitter, and we wondered whether he was to prove the leader we needed for the trying days we were expecting," Angell later remembered. "So keen was the disappointment in the State that clearly an effort was needed to secure him earnest support."²⁸

In view of the enthusiastic response that Lincoln had elicited from his audience and from the Republican press with his performance in Providence, this reaction is somewhat surprising. Lincoln had shown himself to be a man of the people, an advocate of free labor, a supporter of industrial prosperity, and a proponent of a peaceful, progressive policy toward solving the problems facing the nation. During his New England speaking tour he had particularly impressed the working class with his belief in a system in which the worker could strike and was not bound to work under all conditions.²⁹

Despite the "cold-shower shock" that F. Lauriston Bullard says hit New England after Lincoln's nomination at the Chicago Wigwam,³⁰ New Englanders at least knew who Lincoln was; his speeches had given him the exposure necessary to allow party regulars to get out the vote for him in November, when he won all of the New England states. Although Lincoln's visit to Rhode Island failed to get Padelford elected—Republicans split their support between Padelford and Sprague, Sprague was elected governor by 1,399 votes, and Padelford had to wait nearly a decade before he finally won the governorship in 1869—Lincoln himself polled 12,244 votes to 7,707 for Democrat Stephen A. Douglas, carrying the state by a plurality of 4,537 votes.

The importance of Lincoln's visit to New York and New England cannot be overestimated. Lincoln knew when he arrived in the East that he was in William Seward's backyard, and he knew that the situation remained unchanged when he left; yet his outstanding performance in Seward's home state,³¹ and his continued success in Connecticut and Rhode Island, transformed him in the public's perception from a backwoods politician to a national figure. In Rhode Island, as elsewhere, Lincoln's nomination may have come as a surprise to many, but his visit had had its effect: Rhode Islanders had met the man, and most of them had liked what they had seen.

Notes

1. Elwin Page, *Abraham Lincoln in New Hampshire* (Boston, 1929), 4.
2. William F. Hanna III, "Abraham Lincoln's 1860 Visit to Rhode Island," *Lincoln Herald* 81 (Fall 1979): 197.
3. The text of Lincoln's Cooper Union address appears in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, N.J., 1933), 3:523-50.
4. See Hanna, "Lincoln's 1860 Visit," 197.
5. For a biography of Padelford, see *The Biographical Cyclopedia of Representative Men of Rhode Island* (Providence, 1881), 190-91.
6. For details about the trip and about railroad travel at the time, see *Lincoln Lore* (Lincoln National Life Foundation, Fort Wayne), no. 309 (11 Mar. 1935), and J. A. Crowley, "With Lincoln on the B & M," *Boston & Maine Employees Magazine* 9, no. 4 (February-March 1932): 13.
7. *Providence Daily Journal*, 12 Feb. 1933.
8. Weather information from the meteorological register maintained by astronomy professor Alexis Caswell at Brown University.
9. *Providence Daily Post*, 28 Feb. 1860.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, 1 Mar. 1860.
12. *Providence Daily Journal*, 29 Feb. 1860.
13. *Memories of Brown*, ed. Robert Perkins Bernard et al. (Providence, 1909), 188-89.
14. *The Reminiscences of James Burrill Angell* (New York, 1912), 117.
15. *Providence Daily Post*, 5 Mar. 1860.
16. *Providence Daily Post*, 1 Mar. 1860.
17. Kelsey Ballou Sweatt, "Lincoln in New England," *Boston Herald*, 26 Apr. 1928.
18. *Lincoln Lore*, no. 309.
19. *Biographical Cyclopedia*, 389-90.
20. *Ibid.*, 228-30.
21. Alexis Caswell's meteorological register.
22. *Providence Daily Journal*, 9 March 1860; *Providence Daily Post*, 10 March 1860.
23. Kelsey Ballou Sweatt, "Paper on Lincoln Read to Kiwanis and Lions Club," *Woonsocket Call*, 16 May 1928.
24. Sweatt, "Lincoln in New England."
25. J. Doyle DeWitt, *Lincoln in Hartford* (Hartford, 1960), 3-15.
26. Sweatt, "Lincoln in New England."
27. *Providence Daily Post*, 9 March 1860.
28. Angell, *Reminiscences*, 117-18.
29. See Lincoln's speech in Hartford, *Collected Works* 4:2-13.
30. F. Lauriston Bullard, "Lincoln's 'Conquest' of New England," *Abraham Lincoln Quarterly* 2 (June 1942): 50.
31. Lincoln later stated that his Cooper Union speech and the photograph that was taken of him that day probably made him president. Charles Hamilton and Lloyd Ostendorf, *Lincoln in Photographs: An Album of Every Known Pose* (Norman, Okla., 1963), 35.

HIST

form of the life described in
for it is most true that where anything is the tendency is towards
an intermediate place between religion and science as we find in the Roman
and some forms and dogmatism at its extreme end and means as
of it which is left is now gathering the power of god and the spirit of
man according to modern ideas and the possibility and power to
how

First page and verse from Samuel Gorton's treatise on the Lord's Prayer, an unpublished manuscript in the handwriting of Gorton's son. RIHS Collection (Mfilm VA 70 N55 1777).

Samuel Gorton's Commentary on the Lord's Prayer

PHILIP F. GURA

Samuel Gorton's commentary on the Lord's Prayer is one of the few major works by a first-generation New Englander to remain unpublished. Moreover, this treatise, which resides in the collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society, is of central importance as a document in the history of New England Puritan radicalism. Although many scholars of New England history now are aware of Gorton's *Simplicities Defence Against Seven-Headed Policy*, the fair copy of his commentary, 125 pages in the minuscule but clear hand of his son, also named Samuel, provides much-needed information about the contours of religious radicalism in seventeenth-century New England prior to the rise of Quakerism. Gorton's manuscript thus opens yet more vistas from which to view the cities on a hill that the various Puritan groups tried to build in America.

Before we turn to this unique manuscript, let us quickly sketch what we already know of Samuel Gorton.¹ Born about 1592 in Gorton, England, an area known from the 1580s on as a Puritan stronghold, he eventually found his way to London, where he worked as a clothier. In 1636/7 he arrived in Boston, at the height of the troubles with Anne Hutchinson and her followers. Remaining apart from the immediate controversy, by 1638 Gorton was within the boundaries of the Plymouth patent. Writing in the 1660s, that colony's historian, Nathaniel Morton, admitted that upon Gorton's first coming to Plymouth there was hope that he would be "a useful instrument," but all too quickly Gorton showed himself "a subtle deceiver, courteous in carriage to all, at some times (for his own ends) but soon moved to passion." The Plymouth records charge him not only with "misdemeanours in the open Court, towards the elders, the Bench, and [with] stirring up the people to mutinye in the face of the Court," but with heresy as well. His lay preaching evidently had alienated some colonists from the established ministry, and the elders tried him for religious and civil insubordination.

By 1639 Gorton had left the Plymouth Colony and arrived at the newly established settlement of Aquidneck (now Portsmouth), where William Coddington, John Clarke, and others forced from Massachusetts in the Antinomian controversy had joined the Hutchinsonians. Soon enough Gorton upset the delicate political alignment of the town, for after refusing to acknowledge the authority of the local government in a trespassing complaint, he behaved as he had at Plymouth, calling the town's magistrates "great asses" and its judges "corrupt." (Cotton Mather, always one to enjoy such spectacles as long as they did not reflect directly on his ancestors, sarcastically pointed out

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Our Father;

that Gorton had affronted "what little government [Plymouth] had.") For his seditious behavior Gorton was whipped and banished from the settlement.

Matters went no better in Providence. Within a few months of Gorton's arrival there, the usually mild-mannered Roger Williams wrote an exasperated letter to Governor John Winthrop of Massachusetts, complaining that Gorton, "having foully abused high and low at aquedneck [was] now bewitching and bemadd[en]ing poor Providence." Besides censuring "all the Ministers of this Countrey," Gorton was "denying all visible and externall ordinances," and his opinions seemed to be spreading, for "all most all suck in his poyson as at first they did at aquedneck." By 1641 some settlers in the area were ready to subject themselves to the Bay Colony's jurisdiction to rid themselves of this nuisance, and when Winthrop's warning to Gorton drew the usual immoderate reply, the Massachusetts magistrates did indeed move against him. An expeditionary force led by Captain Edward Johnson captured the Gortonists after a duplicitous attempt at negotiations and brought them to Boston for trial as heretics and enemies to civil government.

After hearing testimony and ordering Gorton himself to answer a set of hermeneutical questions, the court found the prisoners guilty and sentenced them to hard labor; but it overturned its own sentence within a few months in response to public pressure. Gorton thereupon sailed for England to bring complaint against Massachusetts. While he was in England, he found frequent opportunity to publish his theological doctrines, and he consequently left a paper trail that allows us to trace his radical activities there as we can those of no other New Englander save Williams.

Gorton's whereabouts were noted, for example, by the Presbyterian heresiographer Thomas Edwards. In the spring of 1646 Edwards located the New Englander in one of London's best-known conventicles, at "Lams Church, in Bell Alley, off Coleman Street," where Gorton "vents his opinions, and exercises in some of the meetings of the Sectaries." By 1644 Thomas Lamb's church had become synonymous with the most extreme forms of religious radicalism; and while Lamb himself is usually considered a member of the group loosely termed the "General Baptists," it is clear from the extant descriptions of the meetings at his church in the 1640s that the practice of adult baptism was only one of many radical principles espoused by him or his associates. "Universal Grace," "Arminian tenets," "universal redemption," lay preaching by men who were "mere mechanicks," and by women like Mrs. Attaway, "the mistresse of all she-preachers in Coleman Street," who preached a "general restauration" wherein "all men shall be reconciled and saved," and who ran off with another man when she divorced her husband as "unsanctified"—such was the heady air that Gorton breathed.

Gorton might have returned to Rhode Island as early as 1646, after he had received a favorable hearing before the parliamentary commission on plantations, but he remained in England and continued his association with the radical underground through the spring of 1648. In addition to publishing

Which art in Heaven;

Simplicities Defence (1646), his version of his difficulties with the Bay Colony, he further established his radical connections with *An Incorruptible Key to the CX. Psalme* (1647), in which he disputed the civil magistrates' power to interfere in matters of conscience. And from the "Epistle Dedicatory" to his *Saltmarsh Returned from the Dead* (1655), we learn that he also traveled "in and about Lynne in Norfolke," where he "perceived grave and joyfull Acclamations at the publication of the Gospel" by such preachers as himself.

In 1648, though, he returned to New England and settled into the process of colony building, and during the following years he and his descendants occupied many major offices in the settlement of Warwick, which he founded. He also continued to expound his own peculiar brand of radicalism to followers known as "Gortonians," and he pursued his dialogue with transatlantic Puritanism by publishing two lengthy treatises, *Saltmarsh Returned from the Dead* and *An Antidote Against the Common Plague of the World* (1657), both sharply anticlerical and antiauthoritarian works. Gorton never became a Quaker, but in 1656, when four of this group arrived in Boston and were imprisoned by the authorities, he dispatched a sympathetic letter offering asylum if they "had a mind to stay in these parts." In the spirit of toleration absorbed in England and taken up in *An Incorruptible Key*, he thus allowed no points of doctrine to prevent his hand from reaching out to those persecuted for beliefs that stemmed from the same spiritual fountain as his own.



What do we find in Gorton's unpublished treatise? Although undated, it probably was written in New England in the mid-1650s, when Gorton penned other lengthy works for publication in England. The Rhode Island Historical Society manuscript is a fair copy with hardly an alteration or cancellation, and it is likely that his son Samuel prepared it with an eye to its eventual transmission to England, where Gorton had connections to such radical printers as Giles Calvert, who brought out his *Saltmarsh Returned from the Dead*.² The manuscript is untitled and begins: "The text is Matthew the 1st Chapter; 9: 10: 11: 12: 13 verses: After this manner therefore pray yee, Our father which art in heaven hallowed be thy name &c." Lewis Janes excerpted generously from it in his *Samuell Gorton: A Forgotten Founder of our Liberties* (Providence, 1896), and more recently Sydney James used it to prepare his important essay "Ecclesiastical Authority in the Land of Roger Williams";³ but otherwise the document has gone virtually unnoticed.

Among Gorton's published works, this treatise most closely resembles *Saltmarsh* (subtitled *The Resurrection of James the Apostle Out of the Grave of Carnall Glosses . . . Appearing in the comely Ornaments of his Fifth Chapter*), in which Gorton attacked external ordinances, including the ordained ministry, as machinations of Satan. As Gorton glossed the Lord's Prayer on page after detailed page, he drew out a whole range of implications from his understanding that those who wrapped themselves in ordinances misunderstood what Christ intended when he asked all men to pray—indeed, such people misunderstood the very nature of God's revelation.

Hallowed be thy Name,

For example, Gorton argued in his commentary that "prophesie, prayer, and interpretation of the word of god" can never be separated, for "where the one is there is the other also, they are Co-insident and Co-aparent, the same learning brings forth prayer, the same learning brings forth prophesie."⁴ He insisted on this because he believed, concomitantly, that prayer is "nothing else but the true breath and spirit of the eternall word according to god's intent taken and received into the Soule[,] concocted and digested in the cauldron of man's necessities, breathing out it selfe unto the fountaine and originall of supply." Prayer, in other words, is a "conversing with god as Moses did face to face, having the glory of God's wisdom transfused into the soule which a carnall professor cannot behold without some carnall vail."

Those interested enough in radical religion to follow Gorton's circuitous language (Samuel Rutherford, we recall, noted that "Hee hath a good head that . . . can render the sense" of "Gortyn's" prose!)⁵ will recognize where such talk would lead: first, to the notion that God's revelation is not closed but continues among members of his true Church; second, to the idea that such revelation occurs when one understands that Christ is not to appear again at some particular future date but already has come again, in the hearts of his true believers. Against the typological understanding of the Second Coming expressed by the majority of nonseparating Puritans, who read the Old and New Testaments for their prefigurations of a millennium in *historical* time, Gorton read the Scriptures, as many radical Puritans did, *allegorically*, not as speaking of things in time but rather as describing the mystical union of Christ with each soul. "Yea, such as Strive to reforme a place or nation," Gorton wrote, no doubt with the Puritan settlements as well as England in mind, "in such sort as may be aproved of Christ, when he comes to reigne as a man, or as a monarch upon the earth for a certaine time, this is a carnall conception of Christ, as Idolatroass a peice of religion as any is taught in the Church of Roeme." "These things [that] men contest about," he added, "make great stirre in the world whilst the life and spirit of the gospell lies buried under humane ordinances, and carnall traditions."

Gorton here repeated arguments he first had made against the Bay Colonists in the early 1640s as they began to tighten the snare around him, arguments that called into question the Puritans' very purpose in coming to the New World. Some deluded people, he wrote, "go about, and make it the glory of their Religion to gather a company of people together such as will say as the cheife doe, and they will conforme themselves to the times of the apostles, and imitate them in building and governing Churches by planting them in carnall covenant, chosing of ignorant officers, exercising partiall, and cruell discipline." In contrast, Christ's true followers understood that "worship of god consists of a spiritual estate in which the worshipped and the worshipper are one individuall in the faith of the gospell." "True doctrine," he added, "is not confined to a few persons gathered together in a perticler congregation, nor to the people of one age to the world, but it extends it selfe to all ages . . . and terminates it selfe in every perticuler saint."

Thy Kingdome Come;

As this suggests, the congregationalism of Gorton's neighbors was on his mind throughout the treatise. Over and over again he turned from detailed etymological and doctrinal exegesis to attack those who "shuffle and cut and deale forth the word of God unto severall sorts of persons, offices, times, actions and events of things, as though a small and narrow scantling and poor pittance thereof did belong to the poore saints of god in these dayes," when in fact "there is not a word expressed in the Scriptures but every Saint of God [is] concerned in it," a notion smacking of the tenets of universal salvation Gorton might have heard in Lamb's church. And unlike his earlier published treatise *An Incorruptible Key*, in which Gorton had inveighed more against the civil magistrates than against the clergy, this commentary, like *Salt-marsh*, emphasized that believers should respond to the Gospel unimpeded by clerical intermediaries, in the understanding that the Scripture's promise was fulfilled in the heart of each saint, no matter in what age he or she was destined to live. "Neither are the wonders of god's works to be terminated in those outward miracles done in Egipt," Gorton rapturously declared, "at the red sea, in the wilderness, Canaan, and in the dayes of Christ and the apostles but are all to be Translated in the mystical body of Jesus Christ." Or, as he put it elsewhere, the doctrine "that hath not Christ for its fountaine and originall, and also terminates not in Christ, . . . is not the teaching of the spirit" but a "meere Philosophicall oration or Rhetoricall discourse for the inticing[,] inveigling and pleasing of a naturall eare."

Gorton's animus against those who understood the promise of a Second Coming in historical time suggests this treatise's origination in the 1650s, when the Fifth Monarchists replaced the Levellers as the ideological center of so much Puritan radicalism.⁶ And like those "Iscariots or hirelings of the world who ever propound Christ and the glory of the Church to come, as yet afarre off, that so their doctrine may not apeare to be false," so too were they in error who claimed the "like" doctrine—"of Christ's reighne upon the earth as a Monarch for the space of a thousand yeares[,] which spirit will never accept of Christ but in an earthly frame." By such erroneous interpretations of scripture, and with egotistical emphasis on their own role in the history of redemption, the clergy "feed men with vain and emptie hopes and expectations, and keep them in dilligent imployment as men chasing a feather blowne up and down by the wind."

In contrast, Gorton argued, Christ's true followers sought a "priesthood of such honour and dignity that all the schooles in the world by humane knowledge—all arts and sciences can never conceive, forme[,] nor bring forth, for it is propagated together with the son of god, and is ever in exercise by his owne Holy Spirit"—an experiential ministry, in other words, which did the will of God in presenting "the law in its purity and in the originall simplicity[,] free from "all carnall counterfeit Coniectures of men according to humane principles." One did not need wisdom "acquired by Academical arts and Sciences" to know and speak of spiritual things. Anyone, man or woman, could pray—that is, prophesy—if Christ came to his or her heart; "whereas men

in earth as it is in heaven;

contend about male and female in point of ruling or not Ruling, speaking or not speaking in the church," such notions were "impotent and beggerly Rudiments . . . by which men are under the bondage of the law."



This unpublished treatise thus suggests more fully the type of radical spiritism Gorton represented in colonial New England, and its derivation in his willingness to read the Scriptures allegorically, a habit of mind that set him apart from most of his fellow colonists. A remarkably charismatic individual, Gorton evidently was able to move listeners and readers to understand the Scriptures' promise through his own peculiar insight. His prose is often striking. Just as a "Geometrician," he wrote in his commentary on the Lord's Prayer, "can draw the structure of a building, but it is nothing unto the house habitable, A limner with his pencill can draw the portrature of a creature, but it is nothing to the life and properties of the creature; of such use is the historicall forme of the Scriptures." And though "Rhetoritians have taken care to come [comb] figures to bring the Scriptures into a Grammatical sense, to interpret the word of god according to Gramer rule," such activity is "the greatest barre to hinder an entrance into the Kingdom of god, that is under the Sun, it is like the walls of Jericho unto Israel till the trumpet of the gossell overthrow and beate them downe." This may not be immortal prose, but it is language colored by an imagination which ranks, say, with that of Shepard, Hooker, or other of the New England Puritan divines who also could turn a good similitude.

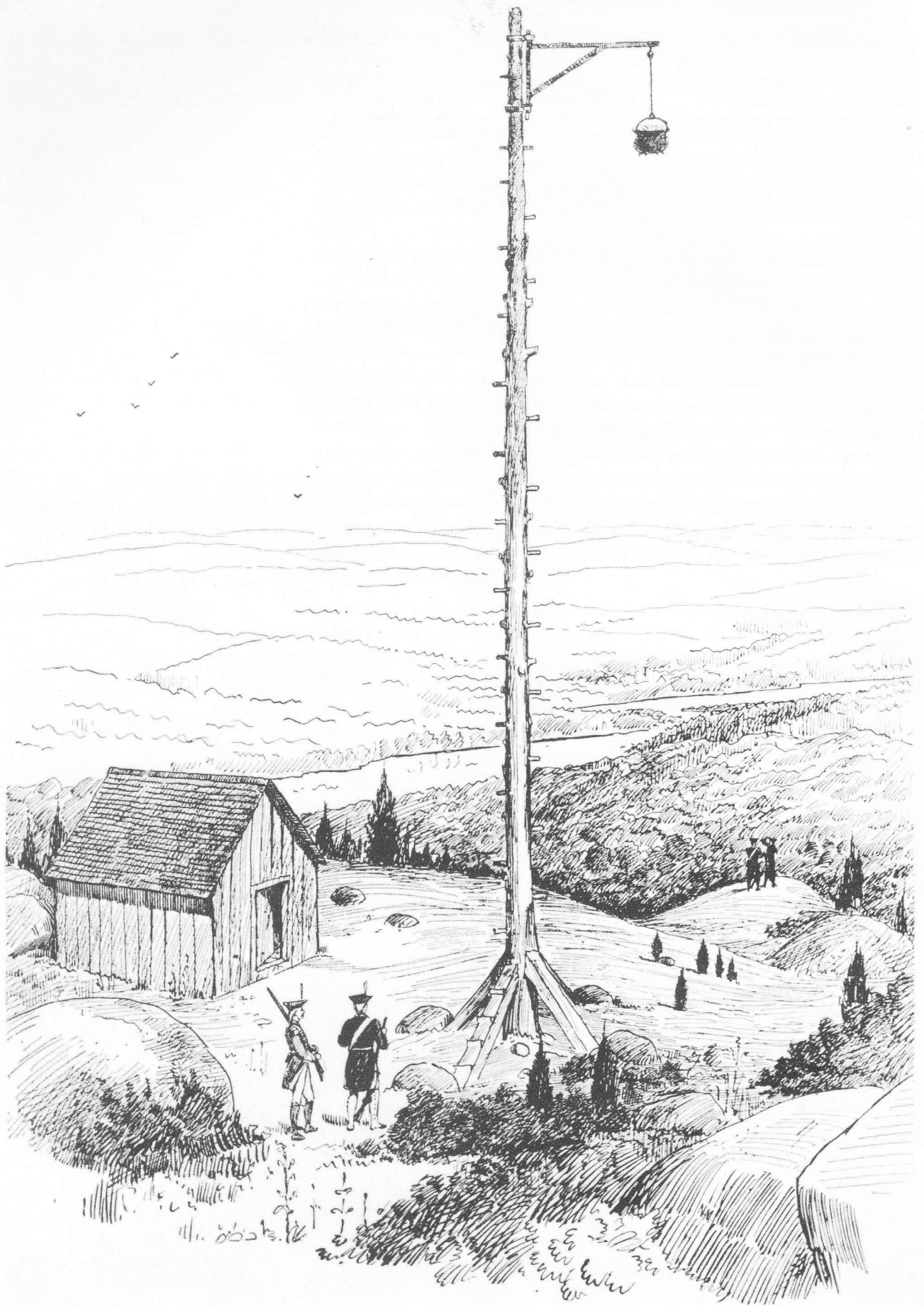
More Important, Gorton knew firsthand the exciting possibilities of a more tolerant, and democratic, ecclesiastical polity. It was through him, at least in part, that the "wranglings and disputes" of Bell Alley, and the radical ideology of men like John Saltmarsh, William Dell, and others, entered the religious and political discourse of Rhode Island, and eventually of all New England. Further, Gorton had suggested in his petition to the Commission for Foreign Plantations that many New Englanders paid little attention to English law, and he had sharply criticized the magistrates' repression of religious opinions not consonant with their own, a stance that found many sympathetic ears in England and cast further doubt on New England's claim to be the beacon for the course of Protestantism in the home country. The true significance of Samuel Gorton to the colonists who persecuted him is thus apparent if one understands him not just as a belligerent mystic but as a threat to New England's self-image and to the representation of that image in England. To English Presbyterians, the dominant party of the 1640s, Gorton offered vivid proof that an Independent or "Separatist" polity of the sort established in New England inevitably gave rise to such aberrant doctrine and behavior.

Give us, our daily bread; As we

Notes

1. The remainder of the first part of this essay derives from chapter 10 of my *Glimpse of Sion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620-1660* (Middletown, Conn., 1984). Rather than duplicate the lengthy citations, I hope that those interested will consult the documentation to that work.
2. On Calvert, see Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (New York, 1977), 301-2, and A. L. Morton, *The World of the Ranters: Radicalism in the English Revolution* (London, 1970), 309-10, 317.
3. Sydney James, "Ecclesiastical Authority in the Land of Roger Williams," *New England Quarterly* 57 (1984): 323-46.
4. Because I have not yet paginated a final transcription of the manuscript, I have decided against providing page references.
5. Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist* (London, 1648), 91.
6. See P. G. Rogers, *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (London, 1966).

forgive them that trespass against us;



PROVIDENCE BEACON

Revolutionary Cumberland: A Note on a Historical Controversy

RAYMOND PALIN

During the spring of 1897 Mrs. Abbie Rickard, the historian of a local Rhode Island chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, produced a paper on the town of Cumberland and the Revolutionary War. Parts of the paper were printed in Rhode Island newspapers, but it never made its way into any scholarly publication.¹ Nevertheless, Rickard's piece managed to set off a lively historical debate over the role of Cumberland in the war effort. In short, one side argued that the town played an active role in the war, while the other held that Cumberland was reluctant to join the cause of freedom. This dispute seems never to have been settled, and thus a fairly significant question on a matter of local Rhode Island history remains unanswered.

The 1897 controversy ignited over what Mrs. Rickard had to say regarding the operation of a beacon that once stood atop Tower Hill Road in Cumberland. This beacon was one of four that were erected in Rhode Island during the Revolutionary era as a signaling network. Relying heavily on family histories handed down from generation to generation, Rickard argued that the beacon was lighted during the Battle of Bunker Hill, and that upon seeing its glow against the night sky, a company of patriotic Cumberland residents "assembled and [were] on their way to Boston."²

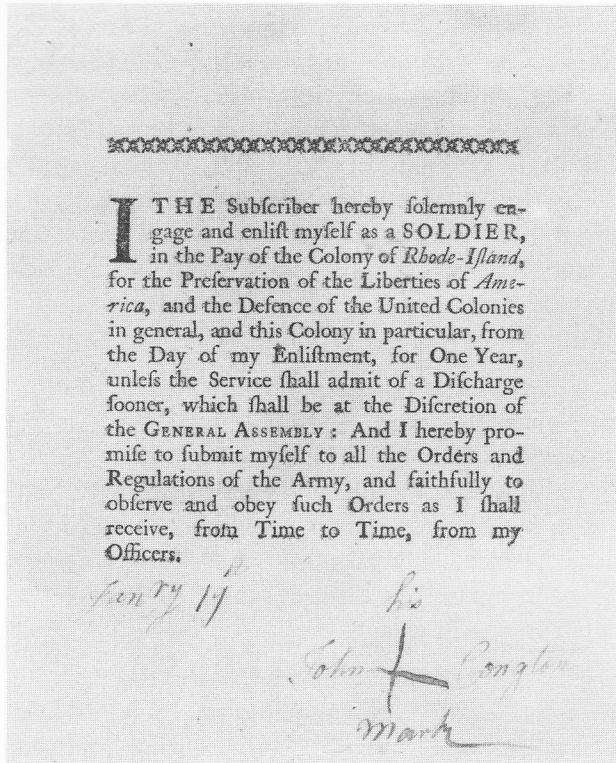
This claim was immediately disputed by Sidney S. Rider, one of Rhode Island's most outspoken historical and literary commentators. In the 10 July 1897 issue of his *Book Notes*, Rider explained that the General Assembly had designated the beacons for use "to alarm the country in case of an invasion." "Was Bunker Hill a case of invasion?" asked Rider rhetorically. "Well, hardly." Moreover, he wrote, "The battle was fought out and ended long before a light could have been seen forty miles away. No man left Rhode Island for the scene of the battle *after it was over*. Mrs. Rickard's story is tradition, and is positively worthless, recorded facts wholly overthrow it."³ Making good use of "recorded facts," Rider convincingly discredited Rickard's story of the beacon, but apparently he was not yet satisfied. In the 7 August 1897 issue of *Book Notes*, he declared that "the backwardness of the town of Cumberland in supplying men for the Revolutionary Army is a plain matter of record which no amount of tradition can overthrow."⁴

Although Rider never went so far as to label Cumberland loyalist, another writer drawn into the controversy was not so restrained. Commenting on the Revolutionary-era disposition of Cumberland in the *Woonsocket Evening Reporter* of 12 July 1897, Erastus Richardson, author of the *History of Woonsocket*, stated that "the records and traditions show a most alarming evidence of toryism hereabouts."⁵ Of what this "alarming evidence" consists, we do not know; neither in the article nor in his other published writings did Richardson support his contention. The claim of pro-British sentiment in Cumberland has been neither endorsed nor explicitly refuted by other historians, and we are therefore left with a charge of loyalism unsupported by published evidence. Can the assertion be substantiated?

Artist's rendering of the Revolutionary-era Providence Beacon. Frontispiece from Edward Field, *Revolutionary Defences in Rhode Island* (Providence, 1896). RIHS Collection (RHi X3 1360)

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It should be noted, first, that we must rely solely on written records in this investigation. Although Richardson claimed that both the records and the traditions of the area illustrate the prevalence pro-British sentiment, we have no good way of knowing what traditions he was referring to, nor is it likely that we could assess their reliability even if we did know. This is not the case with the written records, however, for it can be determined with reasonable certainty which records Richardson had in mind in forming his conclusions about Cumberland's Revolutionary loyalties.



A soldier's oath of enlistment, 19 January 1776. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 7023).

An examination of Richardson's *History of Woonsocket* indicates that he probably relied exclusively on local and state public records. Published in 1876 and representing the author's most thorough treatment of the history of Cumberland, the book serves as a guide to Richardson's sources of information.⁶ Although it does not address the topic of loyalism, the work does contain a section on the Revolution, and within this section public records are the only sources to which the author refers; there are no references to diaries or to other kinds of personal records. The records of the area's Quaker Society are mentioned, but only in relation to the town of Smithfield.⁷ If Richardson had access to written records other than what was available to the public, he evidently did not use them in composing his history.

The *History of Woonsocket* was published twenty-one years before Richardson's article appeared in the *Evening Reporter*, and it is possible that the author may have become aware of new historical materials during that time. The likelihood that that in fact happened, however, seems slim; someone as devoted to local history as Richardson surely would have wanted to record such documentation, but no such record exists. It thus seems reasonable to assume that if there is any evidence of Cumberland's devotion to the Crown, it would be found in the records of the town or the General Assembly.

Of the relevant public documents, the Cumberland town meeting records are the most useful for assessing the political climate in the town. With an entry for every issue voted upon, these minutes indicate what was of concern to the freemen at their town meeting and, by implication, what was not. As one might expect, the records reflect a greater interest in local affairs than in the general affairs of the colony. Like many other eighteenth-century towns, Cumberland was a parochial community.

The town meeting records of the 1760s and early 1770s show that the freemen of Cumberland were preoccupied with the issues of taxation and welfare.⁸ Meeting after meeting addressed the prospect of another "Rate or Tax" because "money [was] Wanting To Supply the Town Treasury for the Support and maintenance of the many Poor."⁹ There were other concerns as well: "Sheep Rams running at large," the laying out of highways, the selection of jurors. These matters were primarily of local importance; only occasionally does a larger issue appear in the town meeting records.

The struggle with Great Britain was such an issue. Despite its obvious significance, however, it was some time before the growing conflict gained the attention of the freemen. From the advent of the Crown's new imperial policies following the French and Indian War, ten years passed before the town

meeting gave any consideration to Great Britain's actions. Not until 1774 is there any mention of the struggle in the town meeting records.

By that time Parliament had passed no fewer than five acts designed to subordinate the interest of the colonies, and there had been reaction against British policies in other towns. In 1765, for example, a special town meeting had been called in Providence to express the town's opposition to the Stamp Act,¹⁰ and in Newport that same year a stamp distributor had been forced to resign his post by mob action.¹¹ In light of such occurrences, Cumberland's apparent apathy toward imperial legislation might seem almost to constitute tacit support for Great Britain. In reality, this indifference was typical of rural, agricultural communities like Cumberland, for British policy during these years impacted them less directly than it impacted commercial and maritime centers like Newport and Providence.¹² In all likelihood the Stamp Act seemed a less pressing matter to farmers in northern Rhode Island than it did to merchants and attorneys in Newport. As long as problems with Great Britain seemed remote, they received little attention in the countryside.¹³

Thus, although the freemen of Cumberland avoided imperial issues throughout the 1760s, their inaction does not necessarily indicate loyalist motives. Moreover, from 1774 onward the town meeting records present a very different picture, for the freemen now began to look beyond the borders of their town and to consider the struggle against Great Britain. No longer did issues like welfare and taxes monopolize town meetings. From March 1774 through October 1781, American political and military concerns received frequent attention. Indeed, during this period the freemen of the town discussed Revolutionary business at no less than thirty-six town meetings.¹⁴

This change did not take place in a vacuum. In Rhode Island and other colonies, communities began to pay closer attention to colonial developments. The Tea Act and subsequent events in Boston were the key to the change: the Intolerable Acts, passed by Parliament in the spring of 1774 in reaction to the Tea Party, were so blatant an attack upon the political autonomy of Massachusetts that they struck a sensitive nerve throughout colonial America. Colonists everywhere came to believe that if local government power could be taken away in the Bay Colony, then it could be taken away anywhere. Consequently, as Benjamin W. Labaree observed in his study of colonial Massachusetts, "During the summer of 1774 the cause of Boston became the cause of Americans throughout the continent."¹⁵

The freemen of Cumberland first considered the cause of Boston on 18 March 1774, when they discussed and then issued a protest against the Tea Act.¹⁶ Soon after, in direct response to the Boston Port Act, another meeting assembled to consider raising money "for the Relief of the poor of the Town of Boston under their present Distressed Condition occasioned by an Act of the British Parliament in Blocking up their harbour." After "Calm Debate and Deliberate Consideration . . . it [was] voted and Resolved unanimously [*sic*] that provision be made for . . . Boston by free Contribution."¹⁷

Although some of the earlier meetings were convened by order of the General Assembly, several subsequent meetings came about through the initiative of various freemen in the town itself. At least partially as a result of the townsmen's interest in the developing struggle, the number of town meetings increased sharply during the mid and late 1770s (see table 1). The calling of these meetings, and the measures enacted at them, seem to indicate that Cumberland was strongly committed to the cause of independence.

Table 1
Town Meetings Held in Cumberland
between 1747 and 1779

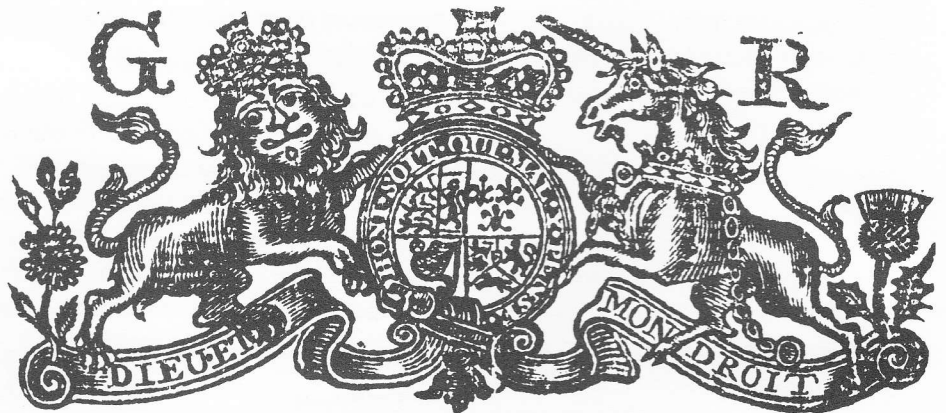
YEARS	AVERAGE NUMBER OF MEETINGS
1747-49	4.7
1750-59	3.7
1760-69	4.2
1770-73	3.8
1774-79	9.0

SOURCE: Cumberland Town Meetings and Vital Records, 1746-1759, and Cumberland Town Meeting Records, vol. 1, pt. 1, town clerk's office, Cumberland Town Hall.

Slightly more than a year after the Cumberland town meeting began showing an awareness of the conflict between the colonies and the mother country, word of Lexington and Concord generated additional concern. Throughout America the battles of April 1775 showed the seriousness of the situation. For Rhode Islanders, located so close to the fighting, it was clear that military precautions were necessary. In May 1775 the Rhode Island General Assembly passed legislation to raise an army of observation "for the defence of the colony." Then, the following January, the Assembly directed the colony's towns to "make order for the supplying [of all capable] persons with a good fire-arm, bayonet and cartouch box."¹⁸ The time for mere observation had passed; Rhode Islanders were now to take arms.

Cumberland residents moved swiftly and efficiently in response to the General Assembly's directives. Less than a month after the legislature's January order regarding firearms, for example, the freemen of Cumberland ordered the town council to "make Inspection into the Case and Circumstances of the Inhabitants of Said Town of Cumberland" in order "that Said Town [may] Take proper measures To provide fire arms bayonets and Cartouch Boxes for all persons Therein who are not able To provide themselves therewith."¹⁹ This kind of action was repeated again and again as the Assembly issued further orders and requests. Indeed, town records indicate that only once during the entire war effort did Cumberland refuse to comply with a legislative directive.²⁰

The town's readiness is also apparent in its military enlistments. Although Cumberland had difficulty raising its quota of soldiers, as did other towns throughout colonial America, its accomplishments in this area suggest a strong dedication to the Revolution.²¹ An examination of the Rhode Island military census of 1777 illustrates this point. When the General Assembly ordered all towns to enumerate their male residents sixteen years of age or older, and then to record "those who have enlisted into the Continental battalions, and into the service of this state,"²² the number of enlistments from Cumberland far exceeded those from most other towns; for instance, Cumberland supplied nearly five times as many men as Scituate, which had more than twice the number of eligible citizens (see table 2). In providing military manpower, Cumberland seems to have been a leader among Rhode Island towns.



Seal of the Crown of Great Britain.
Engraving from a 1772 broadside.
RIHS Collection (RHi X3 1253).

Although the precise number of Cumberland residents who served in the war against Great Britain is unknown, the number of veterans interred in the town's cemeteries can suggest a general estimate. According to a list compiled by the Rhode Island Graves Registration Committee, 114 Revolutionary War veterans are buried in Cumberland.²³ This number most likely includes soldiers from other communities, but it is similarly probable that there are Cumberland veterans buried outside the town.

These statistics, together with the actions taken by the freemen at their town meetings, do much to rebut the charge of loyalism that has been leveled against the town. It is true that Cumberland reacted lethargically to the offensive British legislation of the 1760s, but this lethargy disappeared when Parliament began an intensive legislative war against nearby Massachusetts. Beginning in 1774, when the Intolerable Acts were passed, Cumberland contributed more to the war effort than did many other towns in Rhode Island. While it is certainly possible that there was some loyalist sentiment in Cumberland, all the available evidence seems to indicate that the town as a whole strongly supported the cause of American independence.

Table 2
*Rhode Islanders in Military Service in
Selected Towns, 1777*

TOWN	NUMBER OF WHITE MALES, AGES 16 TO 60, ABLE TO BEAR ARMS	NUMBER OF WHITE MALES, AGES 16 TO 60, ENLISTED IN CONTINENTAL OR STATE FORCES	PERCENTAGE ENLISTED
Cumberland	340	28	8.2
Coventry	383	21	5.4
East Greenwich	427	19	4.4
Providence	674	27	4.0
Smithfield	397	12	3.0
Glocester	508	7	1.4
Scituate	686	6	0.8

SOURCE: Mildred M. Chamberlain, ed., *The Rhode Island 1777 Military Census* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1985), 15-96 passim.

Notes

1. The most complete account of the paper appeared in the *Woonsocket Evening Reporter* of 19 June 1897.
2. Ibid.
3. Sidney S. Rider, *Book Notes* 14 (10 July 1897): 159.
4. Ibid., 14 (7 Aug. 1897): 182.
5. It is clear that Richardson's "hereabouts" refers to Cumberland and does not include the neighboring town of Smithfield. His article in the *Evening Reporter* was written in reaction to the Rickard-Rider debate, which strictly concerned Cumberland.
6. Woonsocket was formerly part of Cumberland and Smithfield. It was incorporated in 1867. Richardson's book traces the history of the area from the seventeenth century through the early 1870s.
7. Erastus Richardson, *History of Woonsocket* (Woonsocket: S. S. Foss, 1876), 102-3.
8. Cumberland was not alone in this respect. Rising welfare costs became a major concern throughout Rhode Island during the mid-eighteenth century; see Bruce C. Daniels, *Dissent and Conformity on Narragansett Bay: The Colonial Rhode Island Town* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 76-90.
9. See, for example, Cumberland Town Meeting Records, vol. 1, pt 1, pp. 51, 62, 73, 82, 96, 106, 123, town clerk's office, Cumberland Town Hall.
10. William R. Staples, *Annals of the Town of Providence* (Providence: Knowles and Vose, 1843), 210-11.
11. David S. Lovejoy, *Rhode Island Politics and the American Revolution, 1760-1776* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1958), 109-10.
12. See, for example, Ancelin V. Lynch, *Foster, Rhode Island* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1982), 14, and Florence Parker Simister, *A Short History of Exeter, Rhode Island* (Exeter: Exeter Bicentennial Commission, 1978), 23. During the eighteenth century nearly all Cumberland residents practiced agriculture as a way of life. Robert V. Simpson, *North Cumberland: A History* (Chelsea, Vt.: Acorn Press, 1975), 32.
13. For a good example of this attitude in Concord, Massachusetts, see Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 10-29.
14. See John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England*, 10 vols. (Providence: A. Crawford Green, 1856-65), 7:278-79, and Cumberland Town Meeting Records, vol. 1, pt 1, pp. 140-209 passim.
15. Benjamin W. Labaree, *Colonial Massachusetts: A History* (New York: KTO Press, 1979), 266.
16. Bartlett, *Records* 7:278-79.
17. Town meeting of 30 Aug. 1774, Cumberland Town Meeting Records, vol. 1, pt 1, p. 140.
18. Bartlett, *Records* 7:317, 422-23.
19. Town meeting of 5 Feb. 1776, Cumberland Town Meeting Records, vol. 1, pt 1, p. 145.
20. On 2 Jan. 1779 the freemen of the town "Humbly" refused to fulfill the General Assembly's request for wood, arguing that the Assembly had "ordered a much Greater proportion of wood to be Delivered at Providence weekly for the Supply of the Army Quartered there than belongs to them To furnish when compaired with . . . other Towns in the County of providence." Cumberland Town Meeting Records, vol. 1, pt 1, p. 174.
21. For a discussion of the search for soldiers, see James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender, *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1982), 87-94.
22. Bartlett, *Records* 8:189.
23. Rhode Island Town of Cumberland Historical Cemeteries, town clerk's office, Cumberland Town Hall.

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