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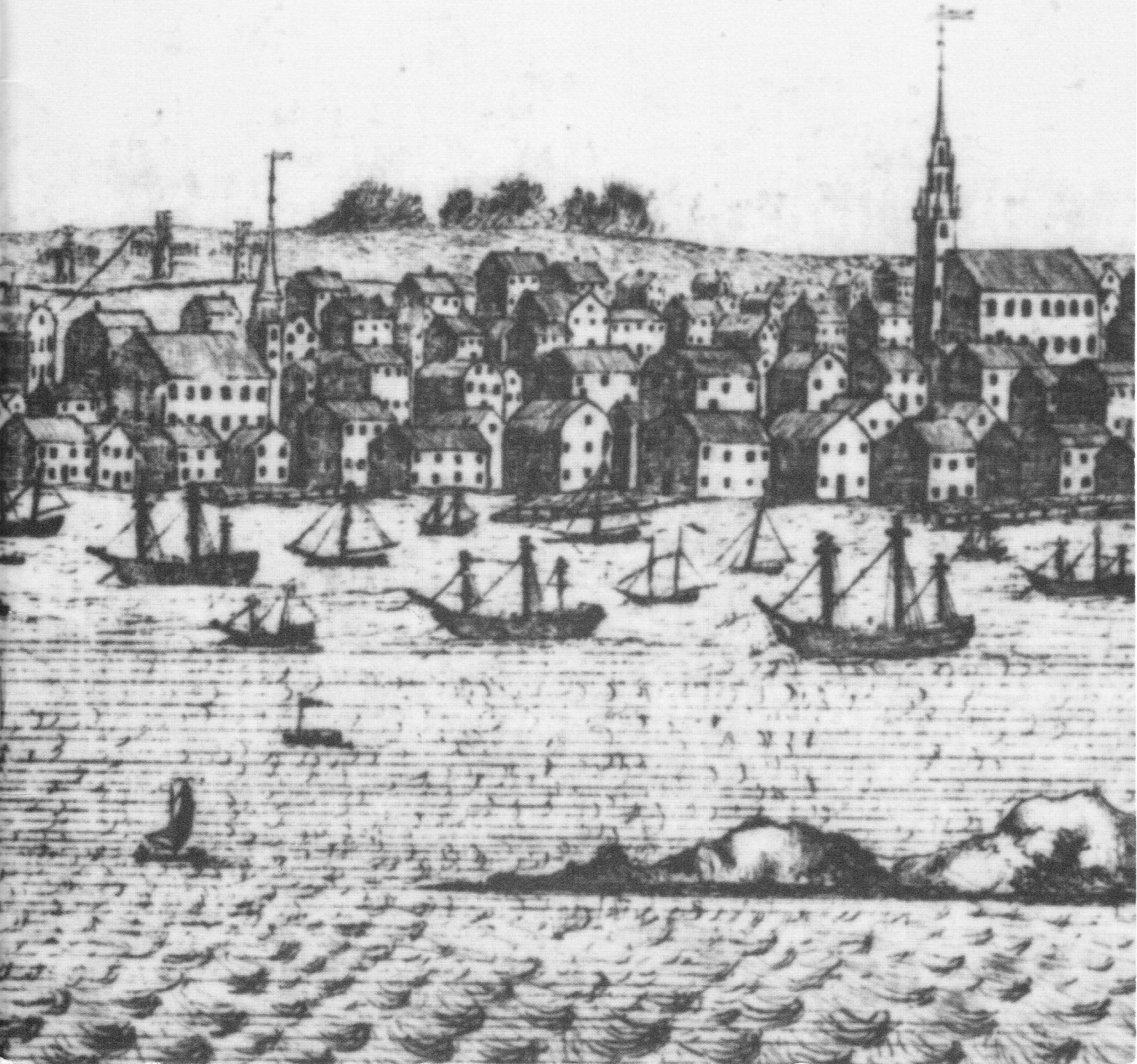

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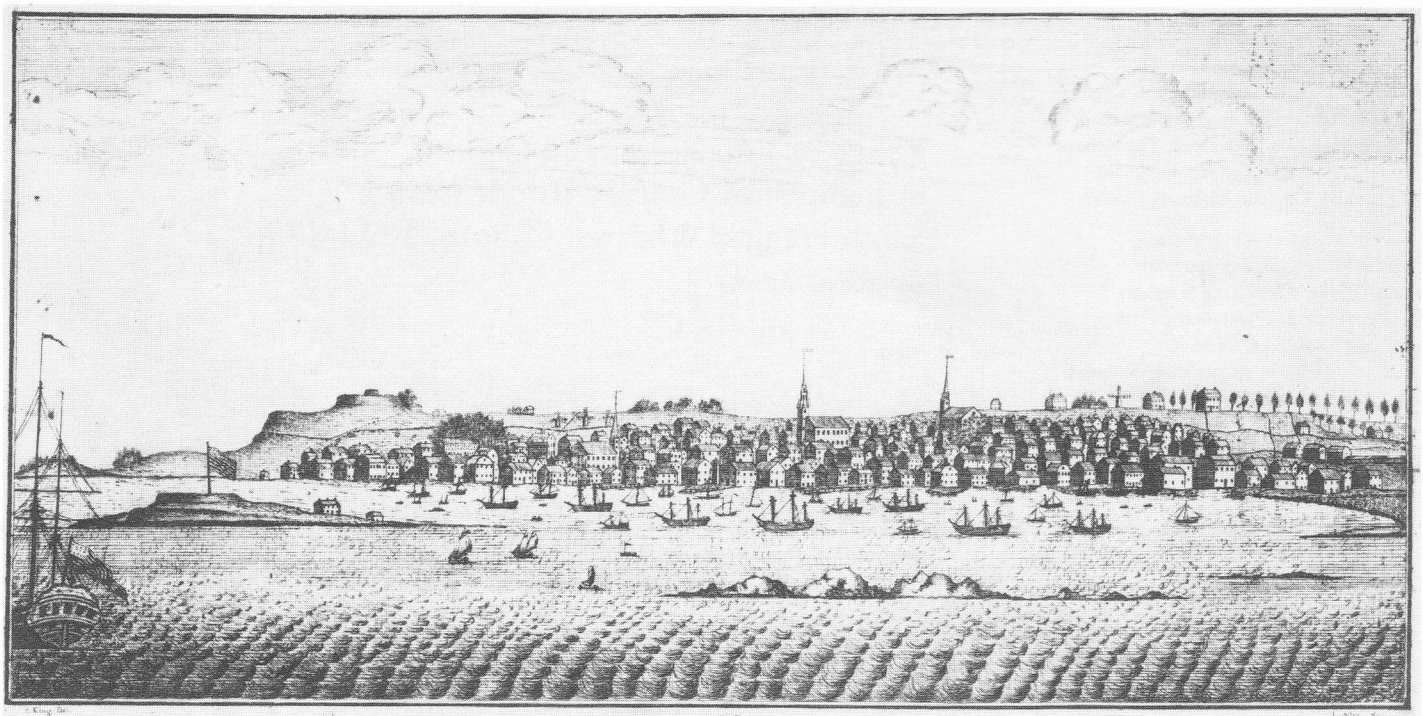


A South-West View of Newport.

Religion, Education, and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Rhode Island: Sarah Haggar Wheaten Osborn, 1714-1796

SHERYL A. KUJAWA

From the 1730s through the 1760s, waves of religious revival—known collectively as the Great Awakening—swept over the colonies, primarily in New England and Virginia. One of the major effects of these revivals in New England was the temporary removal of some of the constraints on eighteenth-century life: while a revival lasted, it gave an opportunity for those who took part in it both to transcend the ordinary routine of their lives and, as a central focus of their conversion (as the revival-inspired religious experience was called), to question the nature of authority, including that of the clergy. Along with the intensely private, individualistic, and emotional relationship with God brought about by conversion, the revivals of the Great Awakening fostered a strong belief in the role of the laity within the individual congregation, as well as a fierce sense of congregational autonomy.[1]

The intellectual and institutional questions generated by the Great Awakening gave it an educational dimension that would later be reinforced during the years of the early republic. Supported by the belief that God was with them, the movement's New Lights began to question not only religious orthodoxy but political orthodoxy as well. In combination with other changes occurring in the colonies—the increasing ethnic and racial diversity, the expanding economy, and the introduction of new forms of thought—the Great Awakening facilitated America's break from its colonial past. Although primarily religious, the movement had far-reaching consequences, calling into question traditional gender roles and modes of behavior in the social as well as the religious realm.[2]

During the peak of the Great Awakening in New England, Newport was visited by the revival preachers George Whitefield and Gilbert Tennent. Although less cosmopolitan than cities like Boston, during the first half of the eighteenth century Newport enjoyed a reputation for liberality and learning. Several theological libraries were available in the town for the use of both laity and clergy.[3] With residents of every denomination, Newport experienced religious tensions from time to time, but generally citizens tolerated religious diversity with equanimity.[4]

It was in this religious ethos that Newport resident Sarah Haggar Wheaten Osborn first participated in the Great Awakening and eventually became a focus of the local revivals of the 1750s and 1760s. As a revival leader and educator, Sarah Osborn embodied the dramatic way in which the Great Awakening transformed gender roles in eighteenth-century evangelical culture. Not only did her religious conversion offer her a context for dealing with the trials of her life; it also provided her with the socially acceptable vehicle of teaching as a means for pursuing her vocational and intellectual ambitions. Osborn's experience serves as a notable instance of how some eighteenth-century women were able to expand their roles as teachers to include public expression and action. Although it has been documented that there were many women converted dur-

"A South-West View of Newport." Color engraving by Samuel King, 1795. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 213).

Sheryl Kujawa is an Episcopal priest and an adjunct faculty member of Union Theological Seminary.

ing the Great Awakening, relatively little is known about the impact of these conversions on their lives. The example of Sarah Osborn—who went on to become an educator of both black and white children and adults of both sexes, an active leader in the revival movement, the organizer of a female religious group that survived her by over half a century, an intellectual influence upon prominent New England clergy, and a participant in the antislavery movement—suggests that that impact could be considerable.

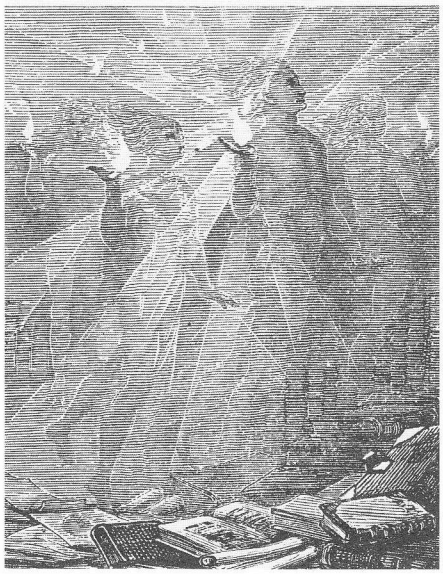
Sarah Haggar was born on 22 February 1714 in London, England, to Benjamin and Susanna Guyse Haggar, both Congregationalists. Her parents had no more than a modest income, but Sarah enjoyed an idyllic year in boarding school before emigrating with her family to New England in 1722. After moving to several different towns in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, the family finally settled in Newport in 1729, and it was there that Sarah would live the rest of her life.

Before she was eighteen years old, Sarah defied her parents' wishes and married a young sailor named Samuel Wheaten. Two years later her husband died at sea, leaving her with a small child to support and no apparent means of earning her bread. It was in these circumstances that she turned to teaching. Despite chronic health problems, caused by an overdose of mercury prescribed for her by a physician after her husband's death, she would operate a school almost continuously for over forty years.[5]

Still a young widow, Sarah Wheaten was already converted when the first revivals of the Great Awakening reached Newport in 1740. After years of intense soul searching, she had joined Newport's First Congregational Church in 1737, and by 1740 she was an active participant in the religious life of the town. Her associations with clergy, including Nathaniel Clap, the minister of her church, had given her a familiarity with religious discourse, and her natural zeal for religious learning helped her overcome an inherent shyness and pressures to conform to societal expectations. Through her participation in the revivals that took place in Newport in 1740 and 1741 under the direction of George Whitefield and Gilbert Tennent, Sarah's life was transformed. As throngs gathered at Clap's home to hear the great revival preacher George Whitefield, she found herself a part of the inner circle of pious admirers. "God in his mercy sent his dear servant Whitefield here," she wrote in September 1740, "which in some measure stirred me up."[6]

One of the immediate effects of the Great Awakening on Sarah Wheaten was an overwhelming desire to do something useful, so "that I might now be as exemplary for piety, as I had been for folly."[7] When a number of young women in her church "who were awakened to a concern for their souls" asked for her assistance in forming a female society, agreeing to commit their energies and pledge their faithfulness to each other and to the First Congregational Church if she would be their leader, Sarah felt unworthy of the honor, but she nonetheless "joyfully" consented to the society's organization in the late spring of 1741. With her child now four years old, her life had become more settled, and she could look toward other pursuits. From then on this group of women offered Sarah Wheaten an opportunity to exert her religious leadership as she gave the members her support and counsel.

The purpose of the female society (which would continue in existence well into the next century) was the promotion and nurture of its members' spirituality, as well as the interests of religion in general, through the reading of the Bible and other religious works, pious conversation, almsgiving, meditation, and prayer.[8] The group numbered over sixty members at its peak, and it still included thirty active members when Sarah died in 1796.[9] Sarah remained the acknowledged leader of the society from its beginning until her death. For much of that time meetings were held at least once a week in her home;[10] "And much sweetness we enjoyed in these meetings," she wrote.[11]



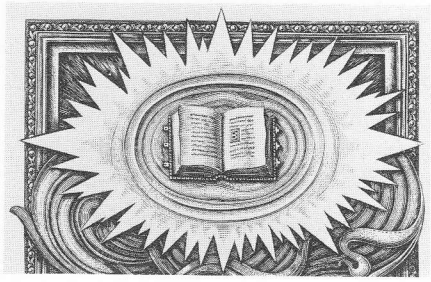
Detail of a bookplate designed for "Mr. Farnum as a labor of love by William J. Linton," circa 1870. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8022).

Sarah's leadership in the female society and her decision to open a school were intimately connected. It is true that teaching was one of the few occupations open to eighteenth-century women, and it provided a necessary means for Sarah to meet her economic needs, but it is also apparent that the religious impulse that motivated her participation in the society was an important factor as well in her work as a teacher. Most of all, she hoped that through her school God would make her "instrumental in promoting the good of souls."[12]

At the time she opened her school and founded the female society, Sarah's mentor was Nathaniel Clap, the minister of the First Congregational Church. Although seen by some in the Newport community as a bit of an eccentric, Clap encouraged Sarah's leadership in a way she had never experienced previously. His deep concern for the education of the poor, black and white, left a deep impression on her. Like other ministers of his generation, Clap did not question the social hierarchy or the morality of slavery; aside from discussions about the need to convert blacks and Indians (as well as Jews), antislavery issues were not in the forefront of religious discourse.[13] Yet Clap did expect a high level of morality from those he saw as having substantial responsibility for the welfare of the poor; such people, he believed, were answerable to God for their charges, body and soul. He was especially concerned about servants: "Instruct your servants in the purposes of Religion and the way of Life and Salvation," he wrote. Although single all his life, Clap considered Christian families the "nurseries" for church and commonwealth, and he placed great emphasis on the Christian home as the center of religious nurture and the foundation of good government.[14]

Eventually Sarah began to expand her school and board students in her home. At times her school enrolled as many as seventy students, male and female, black and white, from poor and affluent families. The identities of many of her students are unknown, but it is clear that they came from all sectors of Newport and New England society. She educated the children of ministers of different denominations, as well as the children of prominent Newport families, including one whose daughter later eloped with the school's music and French teacher.[15]

Consistent with the curriculum of many schools in the region, Sarah carried out her educational responsibilities in the spirit of the Gospel. Not only were students expected to participate in daily prayers, but they were instructed "in the principles of religion," "in their duty to God and man," and "in the way of salvation." Gaining a reputation as an effective teacher, Sarah was much loved by her students, who "never lost the serious impressions which they received by her instruction and admonitions."[16] Like many teachers, she was fond of her students, but she was also grateful at times for a respite. "Prepared the chil-



Detail of a bookplate designed by Edwin Davis French for Emma Stewart Bixby, 1905. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8023).

dren's clothes and things for going Home yesterday with more cheerfulness than I took them," she wrote shortly after opening her home to boarders.[17]

Soon after she founded the female society and began her school, Sarah accepted a proposal of marriage from Henry Osborn, a merchant trader, who was a widower with three sons of his own. The couple married in May 1742, after Sarah had been a widow for almost eleven years. Though anxious about marrying again, and concerned about the extra domestic responsibilities involved with the added care of his children, Sarah was consoled by the fact that Henry appeared to be a good Christian, for she "could not think of being unequally yoked with one who was not such."[18] A few months after the marriage Henry Osborn's business and health both failed, and he never worked steadily again. Sarah's work as a teacher thereupon became the primary means of financial support for her husband and his children and grandchildren. In September 1744 Sarah's own son died at the age of twelve.

A growing perception of herself as an educator prompted Sarah to adopt the practice of spiritual autobiography through journal writing. Regarding her journals (which she shared with others) as a vehicle for Christian education, she left a record of the evolution of her own spiritual and intellectual consciousness. By the time of her death she had written more than fifty volumes of diaries and biblical commentaries, ranging from one hundred to three hundred pages in length, as well as other occasional writings, a published tract, and voluminous correspondence.[19] Although she began to write in service to God and others, it is clear that in writing about herself she initiated a process of reflection and self-discovery.[20] Eventually she came to recognize that writing was a part of her vocation as a Christian and a teacher.

Sarah Osborn was strongly influenced in her work by her uncle John Guyse. a minister in England to congregations in Hertfordshire and London, where he was popular for his vigorous attacks on Arianism.[21] Among Guyse's colleagues was Isaac Watts, with whom he wrote an introduction to an edition of Jonathan Edwards's *A Faithful Narrative*.[22] Most likely influenced by Watts's close association with her uncle, Sarah espoused Watts's liberal views on education, and she was greatly impressed by his devotional writings.[23] Besides her commitment to Scripture study, she read theological works voraciously and wrote commentaries in her letters and diaries. (She found Jonathan Edwards's *Treatise concerning Religious Affections* "a lovely piece," for example, and quoted from the text in her journal.)[24] She also read devotional manuals, such as Joseph Alleine's *Heaven's Alarm to Unconverted Sinners*, which circulated among evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic as part of the Great Awakening's renaissance in religious learning.[25]

It was through her involvement with the female society that Sarah met Susanna Anthony, a woman who would become one of her closest friends and soul mates for over fifty years. Anthony, who was also the subject of a published memoir compiled by Samuel Hopkins after her death,[26] was recognized by the women of the group for her spiritual gifts, and Sarah undoubtedly found her a source of great strength. Their surviving correspondence shows much warmth and affection between the two women, who related to each other as spiritual and intellectual peers.[27]

Sarah Osborn's friendship with Susanna Anthony appears to have been the inspiration for a long letter that Sarah composed and published as an anonymous tract in 1755 through the advocacy of Thomas Prince, a minister at Old

South Meeting House in Boston.[28] *The Nature, Certainty, and Evidence of True Christianity* went through three printings in Sarah's lifetime. Although the recipient of the letter is not definitely known, the style of address and the content suggest it was most likely Susanna Anthony.[29]

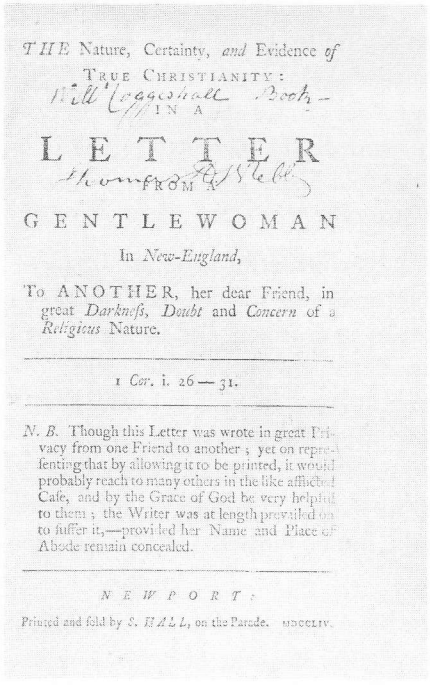
The tract constitutes a response to a troubled friend who is concerned about the health of her soul. Sarah's reply is based on her sense of what God has done for her own soul, a sense that suggests the availability of similar grace and mercy to other Christians as well. Declaring her belief in religion as a "substantial reality" working in the world, rather than as a product of the imagination, Sarah affirms her certainty about the workings of Providence in her life: "But God has taught me to live more by *Faith*, and less by *Sense*, than I us'd to do," she writes, "and therefore if he hides his face, I do not immediately raze Foundations as formerly, and draw up hard conclusions against my self."[30] She stresses her conviction that God loves each individual person, each in his own way, and while she hesitates to cite her own experiences as a standard, she shares them in the hope that they will serve as an example for others; "I know God by his SPIRIT works variously with his children," she writes.[31] Self-conscious about the length of the letter, and honest about her own need to vent her feelings on occasion, she commits its contents—"the very secrets of her soul"—to the "care and prudence" of her friend.[32]

The publication of her tract was significant for Sarah Osborn's career. Although it was published anonymously, many evangelicals assumed that Sarah was the author, thereby attesting to her growing reputation. Sarah was persuaded to publish the tract by the same rationale that convinced her to keep a journal—that is, because she believed it would be helpful in instructing others in the Christian life—but while she felt the need to act modestly in public in regard to her tract, she privately rejoiced in her accomplishment and felt legitimized by it. "The business of the day was pleasant," she wrote on the day she was informed that the work would be published; "I have enjoyed God in all."[33]

Although the tract was part of a larger trend that saw women publishing inspirational works with ministerial approval and assistance—a trend that became more pronounced in the nineteenth century—Sarah was pursuing a career that was not totally acceptable to all of her contemporaries, and she was no stranger to criticism. Not only was she compelled to keep a low public profile in regard to the tract's publication; she was also criticized for her work as a teacher by some members of her community who saw that work as interfering with her family duties. Still, these concerns were mild compared to the criticism she endured in regard to her role in the Newport revival of 1766-67.

‡ ‡ ‡ ‡ ‡

By the mid-1760s Sarah Osborn's home had become well known as a center of education and religious nurture for poor and marginalized residents of Newport. Seeing Sarah as an approachable and pious Christian teacher, hundreds of women and men sought her instruction and counsel. In addition to the female society, a number of other groups were formed under her leadership during the decade, including societies of young men, young women, Baptist men, Baptist women, Congregational men, and children; there was also an Ethiopian Society (probably consisting of free blacks) and a group that numbered as many as 42 slaves. In July 1766 over 300 persons were attending the weekly meetings for



THE Nature, Certainty, *and* Evidence *of*
TRUE CHRISTIANITY:
IN A
LETTER
FROM A
GENTLEWOMAN
In *New-England*,
To ANOTHER, her dear Friend, in great *Darkneſs*, *Doubt* and *Concern* of a *Religious* Nature.
1 *Cor.* i. 26—31.
N. B. Though this Letter was wrote in great Privacy from one Friend to another; yet on representing that by allowing it to be printed, it would probably reach to many others in the like afflicted Caſe, and by the Grace of God be very helpful to them; the Writer was at length prevailed on to ſuffer it,—provided her Name and Place of Abode remain concealed.
NEWPORT:
Printed and ſold by S. HALL, on the Parade. MDCCLIV.

Title page of The Nature, Certainty, and Evidence of True Christianity. *RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8024).*

instruction and prayer, and by the peak of the revival in January 1767 the attendance had swelled to 525. Sarah was initially astonished by the popularity of these meetings: "I was affrightened at the throng and Greatly feared that it would be as the river Jordan overflowing all its banks," she wrote.[34] This revival of 1766-67 was the first that was led by a woman and included both black and white people of both sexes and all ages; another such revival would not take place until the twentieth century.

In eighteenth-century New England, revival Christianity offered blacks opportunities for social interaction, as well as for continuing education, at a time when such opportunities were limited. While many blacks in the region, enslaved and free, were taught to read the Bible, perform simple arithmetic, and perhaps write a bit, education for blacks was restricted to these basic skills, which were taught primarily to children; education for black adults was practically nonexistent.[35] Such limited instruction undoubtedly served racist agendas, but education in the interest of spreading the Gospel—the kind of education that was offered at Sarah Osborn's home during the revival—also served to emphasize the need for basic literacy among the black population.

Detail of a bookplate designed by Sidney L. Smith for John Delahunty, 1896. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8026).

While it was considered socially acceptable for women like Sarah Osborn to teach women and children of both sexes, she was aware that in venturing to teach black adults, as well as men and older boys, she was moving beyond her traditionally permissible role. In her religious teaching she focused less on doctrine than on her own spiritual growth and the spiritual needs of her students; emphasizing doctrine would have made matters even worse for her. In an effort to curb criticism, Sarah pleaded with clergy to assist her in her work, but she gained only a limited response. A friend of many clergy, she corresponded for nearly forty years with Joseph Fish, a minister in Stonington, Connecticut. Although Fish was generally supportive of her work, he was concerned about her leadership of the revival and her work with blacks, and he encouraged her to develop more "feminine" interests. Sarah responded respectfully to Fish, but she nonetheless argued that her work was essentially an extension of the female role of Christian instruction; she would not give it up, for she believed that she would "starve" without the stimulation it provided. The meetings "refresh recruit and enliven my Exhausted spirits," she told Fish. "Would you advise me to shut up my Mouth and doors and creep into obscurity?"[36]

Not surprisingly, it was her involvement with blacks that became Sarah's most troubling concern during the later 1760s. Not only was this the part of her work to which Joseph Fish and other friends most objected, and in which she received the least assistance; she herself was well aware of the provocatively unconventional nature of what she was doing. Pressed by Fish to justify her actions, Sarah attempted to explain her association with blacks in terms of a parent-child relationship, but her arguments did little to assuage the criticisms. Her pastor, William Vinal, had a good rapport with the blacks who met at her home, and he tried to help her when he could, but he himself did not enjoy the total respect of the Newport community.[37]

Having developed a sense of compassion for black people through her work, Sarah felt morally bound not to turn them away for the sake of her own reputation. "The reproachful Sound of keeping a Negro House is too intolerable to be born—but the truth is such a one is not allow'd to Have one intimate friend in the world," she told Fish. "O the bitters that Lurk under the most splendid appearances."[38] On another occasion, when she explained to Fish the depth of

the blacks' commitment to their society, it is clear that her sense of justice was offended at the thought of turning faithful people away for the sake of appearances:

> Pray my dear Sir dont Look upon it as a rejecting of your council; that I have not yet dismist. It is such a tender point with me while the poor creatures attend with so much decency and quietness you Might almost hear as we say that Shaking of a Leaf when there is More than an Hundred under the roof at onece. . . . they cling and beg for the Privlege and no weathers this winter stops them from Enjoying it, nor Have I been once prevented from attending them.[39]

Most of the religious societies meeting at Sarah's home declined after 1767. "There is evidently a decline in every group," she wrote near the end of the year; "the young Lads and Children for catechizing Have almost done."[40] Aside from the female society, the only exceptions to this trend were the black and young women's groups, with the former, in particular, flourishing.[41] For blacks and young women—both of whom had few social and educational options and little control over their lives—the meetings with Sarah were not only a break from routine but also an opportunity to gain skills and to enjoy fellowship and acceptance as individuals. While other adults with more ability to control their own lives fell away after the peak of the revival, the more marginalized persons clung to the opportunities that the revival provided for transcending their societal roles.[42] Sarah herself was also changed by the 1766-67 revival, which left her with more confidence in her abilities and a broader religious and social perspective than she had had previously.

As a consequence of an arduous schedule, hard work, and emotional struggles, Sarah's already chronic health problems increased during the 1760s. Yet, although her revival work was undoubtedly taxing, she was reluctant to give it up because of the positive physical and emotional benefits she derived from it.[43] When Joseph Fish urged her to trim her schedule and narrow her activities so that she could spend more time with her family, she sent him a direct and reasoned reply:

> But I come now to answer your tender important Enquiry after approving of part of my work; viz. 'Have you Strength abillity and Time consistent with other Duties to fill a larger sphere by attending the various Exercises of other Meetings, in close succession too. . . .' As to Strength Sir it is Evident I gain by Spending; God in no wise suffer me to be a Looser by His Service. I am much confirm'd in My belief of that work.[44]

At least part of Sarah's success as an educator and a revival leader can be attributed to her ties to respected traditions. Throughout her relationship with Fish and other ministers, Sarah made it clear that she had no desire to usurp ministerial prerogatives.[45] Her initial attempts to get ministers to support the revival were partly motivated by her need to show the community that she was firmly rooted in the established church. Not all eighteenth-century evangelicals were New Lights; some, like Sarah Osborn, flourished within the established order. Always fearful of being suspected of separatism, Sarah was profoundly upset when ministers withdrew their support from her work, and she was hurt and angry when they ignored her. Some ministers may have been jealous of her success, and some may not have wanted to be associated with the people who met at her home, but it is possible too that some may simply have lacked her energy. "The pressure is so Great that I Have Lost Six whole Nights sleep out of Eleven without so much as one wink," she once told Fish.[46]

Although one historian has suggested that women in eighteenth-century Newport had "greater access" to activities usually restricted to men than their sisters did in other New England communities, he goes on to argue that this did not

hold true for Anglican and Congregational women, who supposedly had no voice in church affairs.[47] Sarah's religious leadership would seem to call this argument into question. Further, it is Sarah Osborn and Susanna Anthony, both Congregationalists, who are the most frequently mentioned women in church records from eighteenth-century Newport.[48]

It was through the advocacy of Sarah's female society that Samuel Hopkins was called to be the minister of the First Congregational Church in 1769. Hopkins not only supported the female society but also assisted Sarah in her school and her revival work. Hopkins took tea with Sarah every Saturday night, and he gave credit to her for her spiritual guidance and for shaping his Sunday sermons. He continued her work with blacks when she became limited by infirmity, and she supported him in his antislavery efforts.[49]

† † † † †

Like many religious women, Sarah Osborn saw the political events of the Revolutionary era through the lens of a providential view of history, one that merged the secular and the religious to the extent that all believers could be actors for the good of the larger society.[50] Congregational women of that time have been said to have created their own culture and shaped their own identities through religious activities.[51] Sarah supported the patriot cause through participation in spinning bees, several of which took place in Newport between 1769 and 1771; in 1770 and 1771 Samuel Hopkins hosted two of these at his home. As the Revolution approached, the spinning bees—public events at which women gathered to spin yarn as a demonstration of their religious and charitable intent—grew increasingly ideological and patriotic. It has been argued that these gatherings were the precursors of the women's missionary and educational societies of the nineteenth century.[52] The spinning bees represented a form of political expression characterized by piety and self-discipline rather than by the profanity and drunkenness common on both sides of the Revolutionary cause.[53] The gatherings were conducted not as an attempt to politicize the domestic realm but as an opportunity to build public policy upon the example of pious New England women.[54]

Together with their ministers, women like Sarah Osborn and Susanna Anthony were loyal to the patriot cause, yet horrified by the public profanity and violence of the military presence in their midst, and thus they urged moral reformation and patience, even in the face of the hated Stamp Act of 1765.[55] For these religiously oriented patriots, ideals of civil and spiritual liberty coalesced, associating England with tyranny and evil and pointing to the necessity of reforming American society.[56] While popular culture celebrated the military aspects of the American Revolution, ministers and religious women generally did not; both groups participated in all aspects of the Revolutionary struggle,[57] but they tended to view it in religious and spiritual terms, and they used the Bible and prayer as their primary weapons. Supported by their faith, religious women believed that their prayers, their fasting, and their personal sacrifices were as great a contribution to the war effort as military prowess.[58]

As one of those who tended to view contemporary events from a religious rather than a political perspective, Sarah Osborn wrote to Joseph Fish in 1760 to offer her condolences on the death of King George II—not because he was the English monarch, but because he was the "nursing father" of the church:

> Had I time I should want to console with you sir the Death of our gracious sovereign that Nursing father to the church of Christ—and also congratulate you on the accession of King George the third to the British throne . . . if reformation begins at the throne it will descend to the foot stool—thanks be to God for success in America and to the King of Prussia.[59]

But despite Sarah's personal feelings for the king as a religious symbol, her devotion to the American cause was evident in her reaction to the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766. Advocates and opponents of both the Stamp Act and the Sugar Act divided along denominational lines, with wealthier denominations tending to support the measures, and these separations intensified after 1765. Besides customs officers and British military officers, proponents of the regulations in Newport included "about one hundred gentlemen Episcopalians."[60] Overall, the repeal of the Stamp Act brought celebrations throughout Newport, if for no other reason than it apparently showed that Britain could be brought to change its policies under pressure.[61] Given her providential world view, Sarah Osborn recognized the political dimensions of the Stamp Act's repeal, yet she firmly believed that the real victory belonged to God; the repeal seemed to her to be proof that God would stand with the Americans if they hungered for righteousness.[62] "This the memorable day on which our sovereign King George the third gave his Royal ascent to the Repel of the Stamp Act," she wrote in her diary. "O [that] Liberty Precious Liberty were used for the glory of God. Let not this day be remembered only by way of reveling instead of thanksgiving."[63]

Sarah's distaste for irreligious reveling and profanity is evident in her reaction to the British military occupation of Newport during the war. She seems to have objected more to the profanity she heard (a common complaint at the time) than to the actual presence of the soldiers. On one occasion she wrote to Joseph Fish explaining her relief at not having been exposed to "hearing the hateful din of prophane swearing while many more righteous than I were vexed from day to day By the filthy conversation of the wicked." She especially resented such language when it was used by those who professed to be "on the side of Religion and Liberty . . . while we remain as people thus hardned and Impenitent."[64]

Sarah remained in Newport during the entire period of occupation, and although she suffered along with other Newporters from shortages of food and supplies, she was not seen as a political threat and therefore was subjected to little personal abuse by British troops.[65] No soldiers were quartered in the Osborn home, and those who lived in the vicinity were reported to be well behaved; "it was remarked by her and others that they made less disturbance and noise, than elsewhere," wrote Samuel Hopkins. The troops "were careful not to do any thing on the Sabbath to disturb that *good woman*, as they called her." Knowing her particular aversion to profanity, the men reportedly made every effort to avoid swearing when near her, "which she used to mention afterwards to her friends, as a remarkable instance of the tender care of heaven."[66]

In a letter to Joseph Fish that she dictated to a friend (because of her failing eyesight) when the town came under fire in 1779, Sarah revealed both the danger of her situation and her abiding faith:

> The strength and courage I mentioned, which God generously granted me in times of danger; was not the result of any confident persuasion that I should not be slain.—No! when the bullets were whistling around me, I realized the next might have a commission to reach *me*; and if this was the way, infinite wisdom had chosen, I had no objection to make.—I chose neither life, nor death, only that God might glorify himself in me; and that, whether I lived or died, I might be the Lord's.[67]

As the time of her death approached, Sarah Osborn spoke often and cheerfully of "going home."[68] Several months before her death she became dropsical, a condition that caused her great pain and labored breathing. "I have no reason to be apprehensive of the future state," she wrote. "It appears to be the will of God that I should go hence."[69] Despite her physical suffering, she retained her sense of humor; hearing the church bell toll a day or two before she died, she remarked "that somebody had got the start of her!"[70]

Sarah Haggar Wheaten Osborn died on 2 August 1796, in her eighty-third year. Her funeral, held two days later at the First Congregational Church, was attended by "an uncommon concourse of people." After her body was carried into the meetinghouse, Samuel Hopkins preached a funeral sermon from the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians 4:1ff: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."[71]

Much of what is known about Sarah Osborn's life and work is due to the efforts of the ministers she worked with, particularly Samuel Hopkins. After her death her papers—which constituted the bulk of her estate—were put into Hopkins's capable hands. Hopkins had previously compiled the memoirs of both their mutual friend Susanna Anthony and his mentor, Jonathan Edwards, and he now set about compiling Sarah's memoirs, enlisting the help of her supporter and antislavery advocate Levi Hart, a minister in Prescott, Connecticut.[72] *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn* was published in 1799. In 1807 a popular edition of some of Sarah's letters appeared, just as leaders of the Great Awakening were busy publishing devotional works of the 1730s and 1740s. Many of those involved in the Second Great Awakening in the early decades of the nineteenth century saw in Sarah's life a strong demonstration of the kind of evangelicalism that they themselves were seeking to emulate.[73]

There is a theological intensity in all of Sarah Osborn's writing, a fusion between the Calvinism of her ancestors and the urgency of evangelical religion.[74] For Sarah and her female contemporaries, teaching and the religious life were among the few public arenas for their intellectual ambitions, individuality, and self-expression; in fact, these were perhaps the only areas outside the home where ambitious women could apply their skills and talents. The story of Sarah Osborn's life supports the argument that evangelical religion contributed to a growing sense of autonomy in women, along with a growing flexibility in gender roles, rather than to the acceptance of women's confinement in the domestic realm.[75] The life and work of Sarah Osborn thus call into question the common contention that the most significant shifts in the history of American women originated in the nineteenth century.

Within evangelical circles the revival religion of the Great Awakening allowed women to exercise leadership skills in ways that were otherwise restricted to men. Whereas studies focusing on republicanism and the political realm have argued that gender distinctions were deeply embedded in eighteenth-century American society, an examination of women's roles within the religious context significantly challenges that thesis. A notable example of a women who was able to distinguish herself within the context of religion, Sarah Osborn received an exemplary education; she led religious revivals; she exerted considerable influence in her congregation and community; she founded a female society that

continued in existence well after her death; she carried out educational and benevolent work; she initiated antislavery efforts; and she served as a mentor to both laity and clergy.

Above all, Sarah Osborn was a teacher. It was in this role that she led revivals and addressed groups of women and men in Newport, and it was in the course of her religious instruction that she organized women into prayer groups and benevolent societies. It was also as a teacher that she had the freedom to continue her own quest for theological knowledge and spiritual sustenance. Her ministry of teaching provided her with a public forum to carry out a broad social agenda, including community organizing, benevolent activities, and antislavery agitation. As a teacher she was empowered, and she in turn empowered others. Initially involved with the education of children to meet her own economic needs, she eventually included children, youth, women, and men—both black and white—among her students. She assisted hundreds of blacks years before clergy adopted that ministry; many notable members of Newport's black community, including the poet Phillis Wheatley, found their first encouragement not with Samuel Hopkins or Ezra Stiles but with Sarah Osborn during the revivals of the 1760s.[76]

Through teaching, Sarah Osborn became a major proponent of the transformation of society according to an evangelical and communal vision. Not only the Second Great Awakening but such nineteenth-century reform movements as abolition, temperance, woman's rights, and prison reform were born out of this same communal vision and willingness of individuals to give of themselves in service for the love of God. Antebellum reformers involved in these efforts also organized themselves into societies of believers, as did Sarah Osborn and the women of the First Congregational Church a century earlier.[77]

More work needs to be done in exploring the connections between religion and education in the eighteenth century and women's reform work in the years since then. It is clear, however, that Sarah Osborn was an important precursor of those nineteenth- and twentieth-century religious women who began as teachers and later took up reform causes. Just as such women in the South during the era of the Civil War believed that they were doing God's work, and thereby atoning for the sin of slavery, so too a century earlier was Sarah Osborn motivated to improve the quality of life for blacks through the inculcation of religious values. While such education might well be seen as another means of social control on the part of the dominant white culture, it should nonetheless be recognized that Sarah had the ability, rare in her time, to forge lasting relationships that bridged the gaps of culture, race, and class, an ability later common among white women teachers in the nineteenth-century South, as well as among the civil rights workers in the 1960s who taught, ministered, and organized in the midst of racism, poverty, and violence.[78]

In order to do justice to her own conception of herself and her work, it must be admitted that Sarah Osborn would not have seen herself as a notable eighteenth-century woman, nor would she have suggested that her life might be worthy of critical study. Sarah saw herself, rather, as a pilgrim who was willing to give witness to the workings of Providence in her own life, sharing that life in the hope of serving others and of glorifying her Redeemer.

Notes

1. Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1981), 36.

2. Douglas Sloan, *The Great Awakening and American Education: A Documentary History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1973), 20-26. On overall changes in eighteenth-century society, see James A. Henretta, *The Evolution of American Society, 1700-1815* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1973).

3. Alan T. Schumacher, "Newport—Literature and Printing, 1700-1850," *Newport History* 50 (1977), 45-46.

4. Elaine Forman Crane, "'Uneasy Coexistence': Religious Tensions in Eighteenth Century Newport," *Newport History* 53 (1980), 104.

5. *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn, who died at Newport, Rhode Island on the second day of August, 1796, in the eighty third year of her age,* comp. Samuel Hopkins (Worcester, Mass.: Leonard Worcester, 1799), 5, 15-20, 51, 59 (hereafter cited as *Memoirs of Sarah Osborn*). Though some authors have used the spelling "Osbourne" for Sarah's surname, "Osborn" is the spelling she herself used in her diaries and correspondence.

6. Ibid., 43.

7. Ibid., 49.

8. Edwards Amasa Park, *Memoir of the Life and Character of Samuel Hopkins,* 2nd ed. (Boston: Doctrinal and Tract Society, 1854), 99 (hereafter cited as *Memoir of Samuel Hopkins).*

9. *Memoirs of Sarah Osborn,* 71.

10. Ibid., 70-74. Although Samuel Hopkins asserts in the Memoirs of Sarah Osborn that the female society met continuously during Osborn's life, Sarah herself claims that this was not the case. In a letter to Joseph Fish she says that "our female society broke up Many years" during the 1750s because the members were without a place to meet. See Sarah Osborn to Joseph Fish, 28 Feb.-7 Mar. 1767, Sarah Osborn (Mrs. Henry) Letters, American Antiquarian Society, folder 7. Yet, given the number of times Sarah met with the core members of the society during those years, and the frequency of their meetings, it appears that at least some remnant of the group held together for the entire period.

11. Ibid., 49-50. In 1800 a member of the First Congregational Church, William Gyles, gave the society "the south end of his house" so that it would have a permanent place to meet. The society was incorporated by the Rhode Island General Assembly under the name "Religious Female Society" in 1806, a name changed to "Osborn Society" in 1826. By the time Samuel Hopkins's memoir was published in the mid-nineteenth century, the Osborn Society had been meeting for over 110 years. *Memoir of Samuel Hopkins,* 99.

12. *Memoirs of Sarah Osborn,* 71.

13. Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 8-10; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 648-51.

14. John Callendar, *A Discourse Occasion'd by the Death of the Reverend Mr. Nathaniel Clap, Pastor of a Church at Newport Rhode-Island, on October 30, 1745* . . . (Newport: printed by the Widow Franklin, 1746), 34.

15. Among Sarah's students were Mary and Rebecca, the daughters of Joseph Fish, a Congregational minister in Stonington, Connecticut; Betsy, Sarah, and Eliza Thurston, the daughters of a Baptist minister in Newport; and the daughters of Ezra Stiles. Prominent Newport families who had their children educated at the school included the Robinsons, Clarkes, Coggeshalls, Anthonys, and Hammonds, the latter a prosperous merchant family. See Sarah Osborn, Diary, no. 29, 26 July 1769, Anonymous Diaries, 1748-1761, Connecticut Historical Society. See also Betty Ring, *"Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee": Needlework of Rhode Island Women, 1730-1830* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1983), 48, n. 45. For the story of the elopement of Sarah's student, see Alice Morse Earle, *In Old Narragansett: Romances and Realities* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1898), 10-11.

16. *Memoirs of Sarah Osborn,* 64.

17. Sarah Osborn, Diary, 1758 (incomplete), 15 Mar. 1758, Newport Historical Society Archives, vault A, box 218.

18. *Memoirs of Sarah Osborn,* 51.

19. Ibid., 358; see also *Memoir of Samuel Hopkins* 99-100.

20. Joanna Gillespie, "'The Clear Leadings of Providence': Pious Memoirs and the Real Problems of Self-Realization for Women in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5 (1985): 212.

21. "John Guyse (1680-1761)," in *Dictionary of National Biography,* eds. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 8:837. Guyse is first mentioned in connection with Sarah Osborn in *Memoirs of Sarah Osborn,* 5. Her lifelong devotion to him is indicated in a list of her possessions compiled after her death. Dying impoverished and at a great age, Sarah owned little, yet among her possessions was "Dr. Guise's likeness," the only portrait included in her estate. See Sarah Osborn[e], Will, 5 Oct. 1794, Probate Book no. 3, p. 11, Newport City Hall.

22. Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the surprising work of God in the conversion of many hundred souls in Northampton . . . written by the Reverend Mr. Edwards . . . and published, with a large preface, by Dr. Watts and Dr. Guyse* (London: printed for John Oswald, 1738).

23. For Watts's views, see "An Essay in Defense of Charity Schools," in Isaac Watts, *Works,* comp. George Burder (London: J. Barfield, 1810-11; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1971), 2:715-19. One of Osborn's references to Watts appears in *Memoirs of Sarah Osborn,* 143.

24. *Memoirs of Sarah Osborn,* 10, 39, 325.

25. Ibid., 65-67. For a discussion of the growth of religious learning during the Great Awakening, see Charles Hambrick-Stowe, "The Spiritual Pilgrimage of Sarah Osborn (1714-1796)," *Church History* 61 (1992): 414-15.

26. *The Life and Character of Miss Susanna Anthony, chiefly consisting in extracts from her writing,* comp. Samuel Hopkins (Worcester, Mass.: Leonard Worcester, 1799).

27. Sarah Osborn and Susanna Anthony, *Familiar Letters written by Mrs. Osborn and Miss Susanna Anthony, late of Newport, Rhode Island,* [comp. Elizabeth West Hopkins] (Newport: Newport Mercury, 1807). Although Hopkins's name is not on the title page of this collection, she is mentioned as the compiler in *Memoir of Samuel Hopkins,* 100.

28. Sarah Osborn, *The Nature, Certainty, and Evidence of True Christianity. In a Letter from a Gentlewoman in New England, to another, her dear Friend in great Darkness, Doubt and Concern of a Religious Nature* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1755; reprint, Massachusetts Historical Society, 1927). See also *Massachusetts Missionary Magazine* 12 (1804): 163-65, 178-82.

29. *Memoirs of Sarah Osborn,* 159. The tract is addressed to "My very dear, dear Friend!," a common salutation between Osborn and Anthony. Also, the text pre-

supposes a degree of doctrinal expertise possessed by few women other than Anthony. Anthony visited the Old South Meeting House in Boston and was likely the one who showed the letter to Prince.

30. Osborn, *The Nature, Certainty, and Evidence of True Christianity,* 2.

31. Ibid., 13.

32. Ibid., 15.

33. *Memoirs of Sarah Osborn,* 158-59.

34. Ibid., 82; Sarah Osborn to Joseph Fish, [ca. July 1766], Sarah Osborn Letters, folder 1.

35. William D. Pierson, "Afro-American Culture in Eighteenth Century New England" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1975), 61, 149. See also Lorenzo Greene, *The Negro in New England* (New York: Columbia University, 1942; reprint, New York: Athenaeum, 1969).

36. Sarah Osborn to Joseph Fish, [ca. July 1766], Sarah Osborn Letters, folder 6.

37. Sarah Osborn to Susanna Bannister, 7 Apr. 1767, Sarah Osborn Letters, folder 7.

38. Sarah Osborn to Joseph Fish, 9 Aug. 1766, Sarah Osborn Letters, folder 6.

39. Sarah Osborn to Joseph Fish, 28 Feb. 1767, Sarah Osborn Letters, folder 7; Mary Beth Norton, "'My Resting Reaping Times': Sarah Osborn's Defense of Her Unfeminine Activities, 1767," *Signs* 2 (1976): 523.

40. Sarah Osborn to Joseph Fish, 7 Dec. 1767, Sarah Osborn Letters, folder 7.

41. Sarah Osborn to Joseph Fish, 7 Apr. 1767; 28 Apr. 1768, Sarah Osborn Letters, folder 8.

42. For a discussion of the relative powerlessness of blacks and young women, see Norton, "'My Resting Reaping Times,'" 520.

43. Sarah Osborn to Joseph Fish, 7 Mar. 1767. Sarah Osborn Letters, folder 7; Norton, "'My Resting Reaping Times,'" 527.

44. Sarah Osborn to Joseph Fish, 7 Mar. 1767; Norton, "'My Resting Reaping Times,'" 526-27.

45. Sarah Osborn to Joseph Fish, 7 Mar. 1767; Norton, "'My Resting Reaping Times,'" 526.

46. Sarah Osborn to Joseph Fish, 9 Aug. 1766.

47. Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 248.

48. See Newport Historical Society, *Early Religious Leaders of Newport: Eight Addresses Delivered before the Newport Historical Society, 1917* (Newport: Newport Historical Society, 1918), 121-22.

49. David Grimsted, "Anglo-American Racism and Phillis Wheatley's 'Sable Veil,' 'Length-'ned Chain,' and 'Knitted Heart,'" in *Women in the Age of the American Revolution,* ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 378-89.

50. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "'Daughters of Liberty': Religious Women in Revolutionary New England," in *Women in the Age of the American Revolution,* 211-12.

51. Ibid., 214.

52. *Memoir of Samuel Hopkins,* 82.

53. Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), 168; Ulrich, "Daughters of Liberty," 225-27.

54. Ulrich, "Daughters of Liberty," 168.

55. Ibid., 228; Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to the Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953).

56. Ulrich, "Daughters of Liberty," 234-35; see also Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 196-98; 285.

57. For an indication of the various roles of women during the Revolutionary War, see Alfred F. Young, "The Women of Boston: 'Persons of Consequence' in the Making of the American Revolution, 1765-76," in *Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution,* ed. Harriet Applewhite and Darlene Gay Levy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 181-226.

58. Ulrich, "Daughters of Liberty," 236.

59. Sarah Osborn to Joseph Fish, 5 Feb. 1760, Sarah Osborn Letters, folder 4.

60. Elaine Forman Crane, *A Dependent People: Newport, Rhode Island, in the Revolutionary Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985), 128.

61. Ibid., 114-15; for Newport celebrations on the repeal of the Stamp Act, see *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles,* ed. Franklin B. Dexter (New York: Charles Scribner, 1901), 1:6-7, 42, 96, 217-18, 357, 437, 527.

62. For a discussion of the providential perspective on the Stamp Act crisis, see Johns Berens, "'Good News from a Far Country': A Note on Divine Providence and the Stamp Act Crisis," *Church History* 45 (1976): 313-14.

63. Sarah Osborn, Diary, no. 44 [1767], 18 Mar. 1767, Newport Historical Society Archives, vault A, box 218.

64. Sarah Osborn to Joseph Fish, 28 Dec. 1779, Sarah Osborn Letters, folder 8.

65. Osborn and Anthony, *Familiar Letters,* 133.

66. *Memoirs of Sarah Osborn,* 355.

67. Osborn and Anthony, *Familiar Letters,* 155-56.

68. Ibid.

69. *Memoirs of Sarah Osborn,* 361-62; see also "Sketch of the Character of Mrs. Sarah Osborn," *Theological Magazine* 2, no. 1 (September-October 1796), 1-4.

70. *Memoirs of Sarah Osborn,* 363.

71. Ibid.

72. For example, see Samuel Hopkins to Levi Hart, 26 Jan. 1793, Simon Gratz Manuscript Collection, case 9, box 10, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

73. Charles Hambrick-Stowe, "The Spiritual Pilgrimage of Sarah Osborn (1714-1796)," *Church History* 61 (1992): 421.

74. In regard to the style of her writing, it should be noted that the apparent submissiveness expressed in some of the language was a product not of gender but of contemporary social convention; such self-deprecating language appears also in the writing of religious men of the time. In Sarah Osborn's writing this ostensible submissiveness (which became increasingly rhetorical) exists in tension with the author's growing sense of Christian vocation and mission.

75. For an important article that discusses this thesis, see Gillespie, "'The Clear Leadings of Providence.'"

76. For an account of Sarah Osborn's connections with Phillis Wheatley, see Grimsted, "Anglo-American Racism."

77. Hambrick-Stowe, "Sarah Osborn," 422-21. See also Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America,* 1815-1846 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 204-8.

78. Nancy Hoffman, *Women's "True" Profession: Voices from the History of Teaching* (New York: Feminist Press, 1981), 90-99.

CONSTITUTION of the UNITED STATES of AMERICA.

WE, the PEOPLE of the UNITED STATES, in order to form a more perfect union, eſtabliſh juſtice, inſure domeſtic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and ſecure the bleſſings of liberty to ourſelves and our poſterity, do ordain and eſtabliſh this Conſtitution for the United States of America.

ARTICLE I.

Sect. 1. ALL legiſlative powers herein granted ſhall be veſted in a Congreſs of the United States, which ſhall conſiſt of a Senate and Houſe of Repreſentatives.

Sect. 2. The Houſe of Repreſentatives ſhall be compoſed of Members choſen every ſecond year by the people of the ſeveral States, and the Electors in each State ſhall have the qualifications requiſite for Electors of the moſt numerous branch of the State Legiſlature.

No perſon ſhall be a Repreſentative who ſhall not have attained to the age of twenty-five years, and been ſeven years a citizen of the United States, and who ſhall not, when elected, be an inhabitant of that State in which he ſhall be choſen.

Repreſentatives and direct taxes ſhall be apportioned among the ſeveral States which may be included within this Union, according to their reſpective numbers, which ſhall be determined by adding to the whole number of free perſons, including thoſe bound to ſervice for a term of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other perſons. The actual enumeration ſhall be made within three years after the firſt meeting of the Congreſs of the United States, and within every ſubſequent term of ten years, in ſuch manner as they ſhall by law direct. The number of Repreſentatives ſhall not exceed one for every thirty thouſand, but each State ſhall have at leaſt one Repreſentative; and until ſuch enumeration ſhall be made, the State of New-Hampſhire ſhall be entitled to chuſe three, Maſſachuſetts eight, Rhode-Iſland and Providence-Plantations one, Connecticut five, New-York ſix, New-Jerſey four, Pennſylvania eight, Delaware one, Maryland ſix, Virginia ten, North-Carolina, five, South-Carolina five, and Georgia three.

When vacancies happen in the Repreſentation from any State, the Executive authority thereof ſhall iſſue writs of election to fill ſuch vacancies.

The Houſe of Repreſentatives ſhall chuſe their Speaker and other officers; and ſhall have the ſole power of impeachment.

Sect. 3. The Senate of the United States ſhall be compoſed of two Senators from each State, choſen by the Legiſlature thereof, for ſix years; and each Senator ſhall have one vote.

Immediately after they ſhall be aſſembled in conſequence of the firſt election, they ſhall be divided as equally as may be into three claſſes. The ſeats of the Senators of the firſt claſs ſhall be vacated at the expiration of the ſecond year, of the ſecond claſs at the expiration of the fourth year, and of the third claſs at the expiration of the ſixth year, ſo that one-third may be choſen every ſecond year; and if vacancies happen by reſignation, or otherwiſe, during the receſs of the Legiſlature of any State, the Executive thereof may make temporary appointments until the next meeting of the Legiſlature, which ſhall then fill ſuch vacancies.

No perſon ſhall be a Senator who ſhall not have attained to the age of thirty years, and been nine years a citizen of the United States, and who ſhall not, when elected, be an inhabitant of that State for which he ſhall be choſen.

The Vice-Preſident of the United States ſhall be Preſident of the Senate, but ſhall have no vote unleſs they be equally divided.

The Senate ſhall chuſe their other officers, and alſo a Preſident pro tempore, in the abſence of the Vice-Preſident, or when he ſhall exerciſe the office of Preſident of the United States.

The Senate ſhall have the ſole power to try all impeachments. When ſitting for that purpoſe, they ſhall be on oath or affirmation. When the Preſident of the United States is tried the Chief Juſtice ſhall preſide: and no perſon ſhall be convicted without the concurrence of two-thirds of the members preſent.

Judgment in caſes of impeachment ſhall not extend further than to removal from office, and diſqualification to hold and enjoy any office of honor, truſt or profit under the United States; but the party convicted ſhall nevertheleſs be liable and ſubject to indictment, trial, judgment and puniſhment according to law.

Sect. 4. The times, places and manner of holding elections for Senators and Repreſentatives, ſhall be preſcribed in each State by the Legiſlature thereof; but the Congreſs may at any time by law make or alter ſuch regulations, except as to the places of chuſing Senators.

The Congreſs ſhall aſſemble at leaſt once in every year, and ſuch meeting be on the firſt Monday in December, unleſs they ſhall by law appoint a different day.

Sect. 5. Each Houſe ſhall be the judge of the elections, returns and qualifications of its own members, and a majority of each ſhall conſtitute a quorum to do buſineſs; but a ſmaller number may adjourn from day to day, and may be authoriſed to compel the attendance of abſent members, in ſuch manner, and under ſuch penalties as each Houſe may provide.

Each Houſe may determine the rules of its proceedings, puniſh its members for diſorderly behaviour, and, with the concurrence of two-thirds, expel a member.

Each Houſe ſhall keep a journal of its proceedings, and from time to time publiſh the ſame, excepting ſuch parts as may in their judgment require ſecrecy; and the yeas and nays of the members of either Houſe on any queſtion ſhall, at the deſire of one-fifth of thoſe preſent, be entered on the journal.

Neither Houſe, during the ſeſſion of Congreſs ſhall, without the conſent of the other, adjourn for more than three days, nor to any other place than that in which the two Houſes ſhall be ſitting.

Sect. 6. The Senators and Repreſentatives ſhall receive a compenſation for their ſervices, to be aſcertained by law, and paid out of the treaſury of the United States. They ſhall in all caſes except treaſon, felony and breach of the peace, be privileged from arreſt during their attendance at the ſeſſion of their reſpective Houſes, and in going to and returning from the ſame; and for any ſpeech or debate in either Houſe, they ſhall not be queſtioned in any other place.

No Senator or Repreſentative ſhall, during the time for which he was elected, be appointed to any civil office under the authority of the United States, which ſhall have been created, or the emoluments whereof ſhall have been increaſed during ſuch time; and no perſon holding any office under the United States, ſhall be a member of either Houſe during his continuance in office.

Sect. 7. All bills for raiſing revenue ſhall originate in the Houſe of Repreſentatives; but the Senate may propoſe or concur with amendments as on other bills.

Every bill which ſhall have paſſed the Houſe of Repreſentatives and the Senate, ſhall, before it become a law, be preſented to the Preſident of the United States; if he approve he ſhall ſign it; but if not he ſhall return it, with his objections to that Houſe in which it ſhall have originated, who ſhall enter the objections at large on their journal, and proceed to reconſider it. If after ſuch reconſideration two-thirds of that Houſe ſhall agree to paſs the bill, it ſhall be ſent, together with the objections, to the other Houſe, by which it ſhall likewiſe be reconſidered, and if approved by two-thirds of that Houſe, it ſhall become a law. But in all ſuch caſes the votes of both Houſes ſhall be determined by yeas and nays, and the names of the perſons voting for and againſt the bill ſhall be entered on the journal of each Houſe reſpectively. If any bill ſhall not be returned by the Preſident within ten days (Sundays excepted) after it ſhall have been preſented to him, the ſame ſhall be a law in like manner as if he had ſigned it, unleſs the Congreſs by their adjournment prevent its return, in which caſe it ſhall not be a law.

Every order, reſolution, or vote, to which the concurrence of the Senate and Houſe of Repreſentatives may be neceſſary (except on a queſtion of adjournment) ſhall be preſented to the Preſident of the United States; and before the ſame ſhall take effect, ſhall be approved by him, or, being diſapproved by him, ſhall be repaſſed by two-thirds of the Senate and Houſe of Repreſentatives, according to the rules and limitations preſcribed in the caſe of a bill.

Sect. 8. The Congreſs ſhall have power

To lay and collect taxes, duties, impoſts and exciſes, to pay the debts and provide for the common defence and general welfare of the United States; but all duties, impoſts and exciſes ſhall be uniform throughout the United States;

To borrow money on the credit of the United States;

To regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the ſeveral States, and with the Indian tribes;

To eſtabliſh an uniform rule of naturalization, and uniform laws on the ſubject of bankruptcies throughout the United States;

To coin money, regulate the value thereof, and of foreign coin, and fix the ſtandard of weights and meaſures;

To provide for the puniſhment of counterfeiting the ſecurities and current coin of the United States;

To eſtabliſh poſt-offices and poſt-roads;

To promote the progreſs of ſcience and uſeful arts, by ſecuring for limited times to authors and inventors the excluſive right to their reſpective writings and diſcoveries;

To conſtitute tribunals inferior to the Supreme Court;

To define and puniſh piracies and felonies committed on the high ſeas, and offences againſt the law of nations;

To declare war, grant letters of marque and reprisal, and make rules concerning captures on land and water;

To raiſe and ſupport armies, but no appropriation of money to that uſe ſhall be for a longer term than two years;

To provide and maintain a navy;

To make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces;

To provide for calling forth the militia to execute the laws of the union, ſuppreſs inſurrections and repel invaſions;

To provide for organizing, arming and diſciplining the militia, and for governing ſuch part of them as may be employed in the ſervice of the United States, reſerving to the States reſpectively, the appointment of the officers, and the authority of training the militia according to the diſcipline preſcribed by Congreſs;

To exerciſe excluſive legiſlation in all caſes whatſoever, over ſuch diſtrict (not exceeding ten miles ſquare) as may, by ceſſion of particular States, and the acceptance of Congreſs, become the ſeat of the government of the United States, and to exerciſe like authority over all places purchaſed by the conſent of the Legiſlature of the State in which the ſame ſhall be, for the erection of forts, magazines, arſenals, dock-yards, and other needful buildings;—And

To make all laws which ſhall be neceſſary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers, and all other powers veſted by this Conſtitution in the government of the United States, or in any department or officer thereof.

Sect. 9. The migration or importation of ſuch perſons as any of the States now exiſting ſhall think proper to admit, ſhall not be prohibited by the Congreſs prior to the year one thouſand eight hundred and eight, but a tax or duty may be impoſed on ſuch importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each perſon.

The privilege of the writ of habeas corpus ſhall not be ſuſpended, unleſs when in caſes of rebellion or invaſion the public ſafety may require it.

No bill of attainder or ex poſt facto law ſhall be paſſed.

No capitation, or other direct tax ſhall be laid unleſs in proportion to the cenſus or enumeration herein before directed to be taken.

No tax or duty ſhall be laid on articles exported from any State. No preference ſhall be given by any regulation of commerce or revenue to the ports of one State over thoſe of another: Nor ſhall veſſels bound to, or from, one State, be obliged to enter, clear, or pay duties in another.

No money ſhall be drawn from the treaſury, but in conſequence of appropriations made by law; and a regular ſtatement and account of the receipts and expenditures of all public money ſhall be publiſhed from time to time.

No title of nobility ſhall be granted by the United States:—And no perſon holding any office of profit or truſt under them, ſhall, without the conſent of the Congreſs, accept of any preſent, emolument, office, or title of any kind whatever, from any king, prince, or foreign ſtate.

Sect. 10. No State ſhall enter into any treaty, alliance or confederation; grant letters of marque and reprisal; coin money; emit bills of credit; make any thing but gold and ſilver coin a tender in payment of debts; paſs any bill of attainder, ex poſt facto law, or law impairing the obligation of contracts, or grant any title of nobility.

No State ſhall, without the conſent of the Congreſs, lay any impoſt, or duties on imports or exports, except what may be abſolutely neceſſary for executing its inſpection laws: and the net produce of all duties and impoſts, laid by any State, on imports or exports, ſhall be for the uſe of the Treaſury of the United States; and all ſuch laws ſhall be ſubject to the reviſion and controul of the Congreſs. No State ſhall without the conſent of Congreſs, lay any duty of tonnage, keep troops, or ſhips of war in time of peace, enter into any agreement or compact with another State, or with a foreign power, or engage in war, unleſs actually invaded, or in ſuch imminent danger as will not admit of delay.

II.

Sect. 1. The executive power ſhall be veſted in a Preſident of the United States of America. He ſhall hold his office during the term of four years, and together with the Vice-Preſident, choſen for the ſame term, be elected as follows:

Each State ſhall appoint, in ſuch manner as the Legiſlature thereof may direct, a number of Electors, equal to the whole number of Senators and Repreſentatives to which the State may be entitled in the Congreſs; but no Senator or Repreſentative, or perſon holding an office of truſt or profit under the United States, ſhall be appointed an Elector.

The Electors ſhall meet in their reſpective States, and vote by ballot for two perſons, of whom one at leaſt ſhall not be an inhabitant of the ſame State with themſelves. And they ſhall make a liſt of all the perſons voted for, and of the number of votes for each; which liſt they ſhall ſign and certify, and tranſmit ſealed to the ſeat of the government of the United States, directed to the Preſident of the Senate. The Preſident of the Senate ſhall, in the preſence of the Senate and Houſe of Repreſentatives, open all the certificates, and the votes ſhall then be counted. The perſon having the greateſt number of votes ſhall be the Preſident, if ſuch number be a majority of the whole number of Electors appointed; and if there be more than one who have ſuch majority, and have an equal number of votes, then the Houſe of Repreſentatives ſhall immediately chuſe by ballot one of them for Preſident; and if no perſon have a majority, then from the five higheſt on the liſt the ſaid Houſe ſhall in like manner chuſe a Preſident. But in chuſing the Preſident the votes ſhall be taken by States, the repreſentation from each State having one vote; a quorum for this purpoſe ſhall conſiſt of a member or members from two-thirds of the States, and a majority of all the States ſhall be neceſſary to a choice. In every caſe, after the choice of the Preſident, the perſon having the greateſt number of votes of the Electors, ſhall be the Vice-Preſident. But if there ſhould remain two or more who have equal votes, the Senate ſhall chuſe from them by ballot the Vice-Preſident.

The Congreſs may determine the time of chuſing the Electors, and the day on which they ſhall give their votes; which day ſhall be the ſame throughout the United States.

No perſon, except a natural born citizen, or a citizen of the United States at the time of the adoption of this Conſtitution, ſhall be eligible to the office of Preſident; neither ſhall any perſon be eligible to that office, who ſhall not have attained to the

"The Rhode Island Pillar": Rhode Island Newspapers and the Ratification of the Constitution

CAROL SUE HUMPHREY

On 17 September 1787 the Constitutional Convention, meeting in Philadelphia, presented its finished work to the public. Over the next several months Americans discussed and debated the proposed government contained in the Constitution, and by the end of June 1788 eleven of the thirteen states had ratified the document. Only North Carolina and Rhode Island held out for any length of time. When the new government took effect in April 1789, those two states remained outside the Union. North Carolina adopted the Constitution in November 1789, but Rhode Island delayed ratification until May 1790. Rhode Island had sent no representatives to the Philadelphia convention, and state leaders had taken very little interest in the new government it had proposed. If it had been possible, the state may well have charted an independent course; only a fear of being hemmed in or overrun by its stronger neighbors forced it to ratify the Constitution and rejoin the United States.

But Rhode Islanders did not totally ignore the Constitution during the years in which the state acted as an independent entity. As happened throughout the country, the local press reprinted it,[1] debated its pros and cons, and took an avid interest in the course of its ratification and implementation.[2] At least one historian, Patrick T. Conley, credits Rhode Island's newspapers with helping to bring about the state's ultimate vote for ratification,[3] but he does not study the press coverage of the Constitution in Rhode Island in any detail. This paper proposes to supply some of that detail through a close examination of the way the Constitution was covered in the state's newspapers.

During the 1780s Rhode Island was severely divided over the issue of the state debt. By 1786 paper-money advocates had won control of the government and instituted a system under which paper money had to be accepted as legal tender in the payment of debts. These men intended to completely pay off the state debt in this paper money, and therefore, not surprisingly, they opposed the new federal Constitution, which banned the issuance of state currencies. On the other hand, the merchants of Rhode Island, concerned about the impact of paper money on the state's economy, pushed for ratification. Both groups initially turned to the local press as a forum for their views.[4]

As the accompanying table shows, a variety of materials regarding the Constitution—news, essays, poetry, and notices—appeared in Rhode Island newspapers between the document's completion by the Philadelphia convention in September 1787 and its ratification by Rhode Island in May 1790. During this time the newspapers allotted a yearly average of approximately 25 percent of their available space to coverage of the Constitution, with most of this material consisting of news, which averaged 16.60 columns a year. Essays, however, represented

First page of a printing of the United States Constitution, Newport, 1790. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 5986).

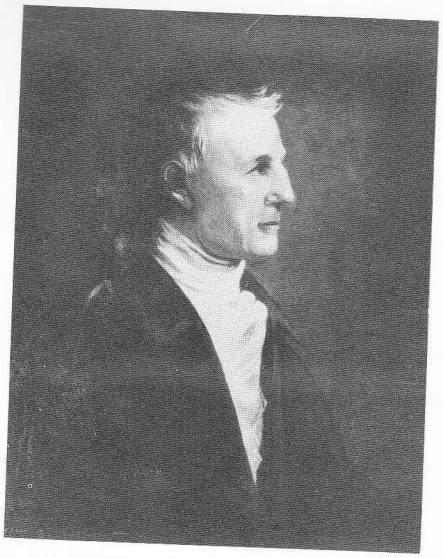
Carol Sue Humphrey is an associate professor of history at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

Constitution-Related Materials in Rhode Island Newspapers
(By Percentage of Total Space)

	United States Chronicle					*Providence Gazette*				
Date	Essays	Poetry	Notices	News	Total	Essays	Poetry	Notices	News	Total
September 1787[a]	0.00	0.00	54.17	4.17	58.34	0.00	0.00	52.08	0.00	52.08
October[a]	7.29	0.00	0.00	14.06	21.35	15.63	0.00	0.00	12.50	28.13
November	37.50	0.00	0.00	9.58	47.08	16.15	0.00	0.00	6.25	22.40
December	58.33	0.00	0.00	7.81	66.14	43.75	0.42	0.00	10.42	54.59
Sept.-Dec. 1787	32.14	0.00	3.87	9.97	45.98	24.70	0.15	3.72	9.08	37.65
January 1788	34.17	0.00	0.00	28.3	62.50	42.19	0.00	0.00	18.75	60.94
February[a]	19.79	0.00	0.00	50.52	70.31	15.11	0.00	0.00	59.37	74.48
March[a]	31.77	1.56	7.81	29.17	70.31	8.75	0.83	0.00	32.50	42.08
April	6.77	0.00	0.00	32.82	39.59	2.08	0.00	0.00	52.08	54.16
May[a]	17.92	0.00	0.00	22.08	40.00	6.25	0.00	0.00	26.67	32.92
June[a]	20.83	0.52	0.00	24.48	45.83	13.54	0.00	0.00	19.27	32.81
July	5.42	0.00	0.00	36.67	42.09	22.92	0.00	0.00	21.35	44.27
August	1.56	0.00	0.00	30.21	31.77	8.75	1.25	0.00	12.92	22.92
September	1.04	1.04	0.00	21.87	23.95	0.00	0.00	1.04	4.17	5.21
October[a]	5.00	0.00	0.00	13.33	18.33	6.25	0.00	0.00	2.09	8.34
November	6.23	0.00	0.00	3.65	9.88	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.75	3.75
December[a]	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.21	5.21	1.04	0.00	0.00	8.86	9.90
Jan.-Dec. 1788	12.54	0.24	0.60	24.41	37.79	10.22	0.20	0.08	21.59	32.09
January 1789	1.25	0.00	0.00	7.08	8.33	0.00	0.00	0.00	14.58	14.58
February	2.08	0.00	0.00	2.60	4.68	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.13	3.13
March[a]	1.56	0.00	0.00	5.21	6.77	2.08	0.00	0.00	4.17	6.25
April	1.25	0.00	0.00	22.50	23.75	1.04	0.00	0.00	21.87	22.91
May[a]	0.00	0.00	0.00	42.19	42.19	11.67	1.25	0.83	35.83	49.58
June[a]	2.61	0.00	0.00	14.58	17.19	0.00	0.00	0.00	33.34	33.34
July	3.33	0.00	1.67	22.50	27.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	35.42	35.42
August	8.86	0.00	0.00	28.13	36.99	0.00	0.00	0.00	48.33	48.33
September[a]	0.00	0.00	0.00	17.71	17.71	0.00	0.00	0.00	21.36	21.36
October[a]	13.75	0.00	0.00	18.75	32.50	1.67	0.00	0.00	19.58	21.25
November	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.08	2.08	0.00	1.04	0.00	14.06	15.10
December	1.67	0.00	0.00	3.75	5.42	23.44	0.00	0.00	5.73	29.17
Jan.-Dec. 1789	3.15	0.00	0.16	15.53	18.84	3.33	0.20	0.08	22.08	25.69
January 1790[a]	3.13	0.00	4.17	6.77	14.07	5.00	0.00	0.00	13.75	18.75
February	10.42	0.00	0.00	29.69	40.11	26.04	1.04	0.00	14.59	41.67
March[b]	1.04	0.00	0.00	30.73	31.77	0.52	0.00	0.00	39.59	40.11
April	0.83	0.00	0.00	14.59	15.42	5.73	0.00	0.00	23.96	29.69
May[ab]	1.04	0.00	0.00	20.83	21.87	9.58	0.00	0.00	31.25	40.83
June[ca]	0.00	0.00	0.00	35.42	35.42	0.00	0.00	25.00	35.42	60.42
Jan.-June 1790	3.03	0.00	0.76	20.93	24.72	8.79	0.18	1.09	24.91	34.97

[a] *Date of General Assembly session.*
[b] *Date of ratifying convention session.*
[c] *To announcement of ratification in each newspaper. The* Newport Mercury *printed the news on 31 May and therefore is not included in the June tabulation.*

Newport Herald					*Newport Mercury*					All Newspapers				
Essays	Poetry	Notices	News	Total	Essays	Poetry	Notices	News	Total	Essays	Poetry	Notices	News	Total
3.13	0.00	0.00	1.56	4.69		— — —	Missing	— — —		1.04	0.00	35.42	1.91	38.37
5.47	0.78	0.00	9.77	16.02		— — —	Missing	— — —		9.46	0.26	0.00	12.11	21.83
5.00	0.00	0.00	7.81	12.81		— — —	Missing	— — —		19.55	0.00	0.00	7.88	27.43
17.97	0.00	0.00	3.91	21.88	0.00	0.00	0.00	12.50	12.50	30.01	0.11	0.00	8.66	38.78
8.71	0.22	0.00	6.81	15.74	0.00	0.00	0.00	12.50	12.50	16.39	0.09	1.90	9.59	27.97
11.56	0.00	0.00	21.56	33.12	20.83	0.00	0.00	18.75	39.58	27.19	0.00	0.00	21.85	49.04
0.00	0.39	0.00	64.06	64.45	39.58	0.00	0.00	22.92	62.50	18.62	0.10	0.00	49.22	67.94
1.95	0.00	0.00	41.41	43.36	20.83	0.69	2.08	4.86	28.46	15.83	0.77	2.47	26.99	46.06
8.20	0.00	0.00	16.41	24.61	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.08	2.08	4.26	0.00	0.00	25.85	30.11
0.00	0.00	0.00	5.31	5.31	1.04	0.00	0.00	16.67	17.71	6.30	0.00	0.00	17.68	23.98
0.00	0.00	0.00	6.64	6.64	1.39	0.00	0.00	11.81	13.20	8.94	0.13	0.00	15.55	24.62
5.00	1.25	0.00	25.63	31.88	10.42	0.00	0.00	12.50	22.92	10.94	0.31	0.00	24.04	35.29
10.55	8.60	0.00	11.33	30.48		— — —	Missing	— — —		6.95	3.28	0.00	18.15	28.38
0.00	0.00	0.00	3.91	3.91		— — —	Missing	— — —		0.35	0.35	0.35	9.98	11.03
6.25	0.00	0.00	0.31	6.56	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.38	0.00	0.00	3.93	8.31
1.95	0.00	0.00	0.39	2.34	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.05	0.00	0.00	1.95	4.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	2.34	2.34		— — —	Missing	— — —		0.35	0.00	0.00	5.47	5.82
3.94	0.81	0.00	16.35	21.10	10.54	0.12	0.37	9.68	20.71	9.31	0.34	0.26	18.01	27.92
2.50	0.00	0.00	1.88	4.38		— — —	Missing	— — —		1.25	0.00	0.00	7.85	9.10
0.00	0.00	0.00	1.17	1.17	2.08	0.00	0.00	3.13	5.21	1.04	0.00	0.00	2.51	3.55
0.00	0.00	0.00	2.74	2.74	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.08	2.08	0.91	0.00	0.00	3.55	4.46
0.63	0.63	0.00	11.87	13.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	21.88	21.88	0.73	0.16	0.00	19.53	20.42
0.00	0.39	0.00	38.28	38.67	2.78	0.00	0.00	29.86	32.64	3.61	0.41	0.21	36.54	40.77
0.78	0.00	0.00	22.27	23.05	0.00	0.00	0.00	32.81	32.81	0.85	0.00	0.00	25.75	26.60
0.00	0.00	0.00	30.63	30.63	0.00	0.00	3.33	5.42	8.75	0.83	0.00	1.25	23.49	25.57
0.00	0.00	0.00	25.78	25.78	0.00	0.00	2.08	29.86	31.94	2.22	0.00	0.52	33.03	35.77
0.00	0.00	0.78	18.75	19.53	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.83	5.83	0.00	0.00	0.20	15.91	16.11
0.00	0.00	0.00	12.50	12.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.86	4.86	3.86	0.00	0.00	13.92	17.78
0.00	1.56	0.00	3.52	5.08	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.65	0.00	4.92	5.57
0.00	0.00	0.00	1.25	1.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.69	4.69	6.28	0.00	0.00	3.86	10.14
0.35	0.21	0.06	13.98	14.60	0.41	0.00	0.56	12.35	13.32	1.81	0.10	0.22	15.99	18.11
0.00	0.00	1.56	15.24	16.80	4.17	0.00	0.00	4.17	8.34	3.08	0.00	1.43	9.98	14.49
10.94	0.00	0.00	35.16	46.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	11.46	11.46	11.85	0.26	0.00	22.73	34.84
3.13	0.00	0.00	43.75	46.88	0.00	0.00	0.00	35.42	35.42	1.17	0.00	0.00	37.37	38.54
7.50	0.00	0.00	28.13	35.63	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.04	1.04	3.52	0.00	0.00	16.93	20.45
9.38	0.00	0.00	25.39	34.77	0.00	0.00	0.00	11.11	11.11	5.00	0.00	0.00	22.15	27.15
0.00	0.00	0.00	43.75	43.75		— — — — — — — — — —				0.00	0.00	8.33	38.20	46.53
5.97	0.00	0.28	30.12	36.37	0.89	0.00	0.00	15.18	16.07	4.67	0.05	0.53	22.79	28.04



John Carter (1745-1814). RIHS Collection (RHi X3 4464).

the most obvious attempt to influence readers' opinions. All of the Rhode Island newspapers published essays submitted to them in regard to the proposed Constitution, but the space allotted to these pieces differed greatly from paper to paper. Between the issuance of the Constitution and Rhode Island's ratification, the total amount of space allotted to such essays equaled 366.75 columns: 147.00 columns in the *United States Chronicle*, 130.00 in the *Providence Gazette*, 70.25 in the *Newport Herald*, and 19.50 in the *Newport Mercury*.[5]

No clear editorial stance toward the Constitution is discernible in either the *Newport Mercury*, which seemed to take very little interest in the ratification debate, or the *United States Chronicle*, which offered a remarkably balanced presentation of viewpoints—71.75 columns for the Constitution and 75.25 columns against it. The essays published in the *Newport Herald* and the *Providence Gazette*, on the other hand, indicate strong support for the Constitution. Although these papers did not ignore the arguments against ratification, their attitude was clear: the *Newport Herald* offered 64.25 columns in favor of the Constitution and only 6.00 columns against it; the *Providence Gazette* included 90.50 columns supporting the Constitution and 39.50 columns in opposition.[6]

The publisher of the *Providence Gazette*, John Carter, was in fact severely criticized for the imbalance of his paper's coverage. Defending himself in the *Gazette* in December 1787, Carter declared that his personal feelings did not affect what he did in overseeing the paper: "I have never suffered them to interfere with what I conceive to be the indispensable duty of an impartial Printer; nor have I at any time suffered myself to become the dupe or tool of a party. . . Although a Foederalist, . . . my conduct as a Printer would certainly merit the severest reprehension, were I impertinently to attempt the preclusion of 'free enquiry.'"[7] "On the subject of the proposed Constitution and other interesting political questions," he said two weeks later, he "faithfully and impartially handed to the Public every Performance, pro and con, that has been committed to him . . . persevering in this Line of Rectitude, and discharging what he conceives to be the indispensible Duty of an impartial Printer."[8]

Masthead of the Providence Gazette. *RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8029).*

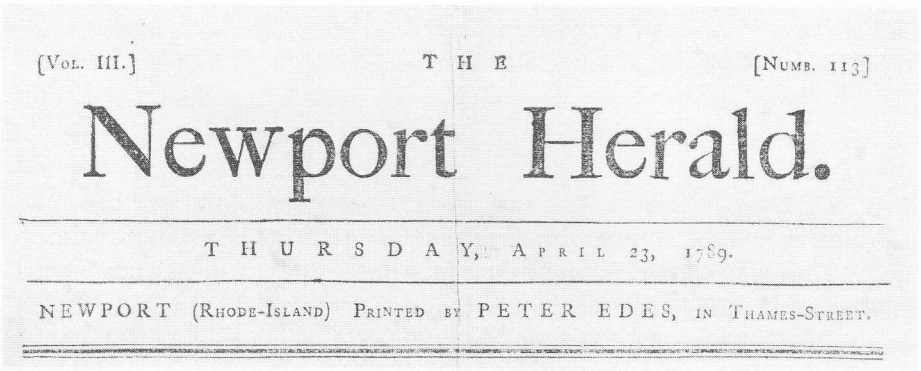
In point of fact, Carter's insistence that the *Gazette* was dealing with the ratification debate impartially was justified during the early months of the struggle. With the passage of time and the failure of Rhode Island to ratify the Constitution, however, the paper's coverage changed. The last Antifederalist piece published in the *Gazette* appeared on 19 July 1788, twenty-two months before Rhode Island voted for ratification. Carter claimed that no further Antifederalist essays were submitted to his paper for publication, but if this was true, it may well have been because writers doubted that they would be printed. Antifederalist pieces appeared in the other Rhode Island papers until 13 May 1790, just prior to Rhode Island's vote for ratification.[9]

Support for the Constitution took a number of different forms. Several essays urged Rhode Island to support the proposed new government because it was strongly supported elsewhere in the United States.[10] According to an essay in the *Newport Herald*, for instance, "the public prints from every quarter of the United States are filled with accounts of the unanimity with which the new federal constitution has been received, and the great happiness the people feel in

the glorious prospect of being speedily relieved from their present feeble and declining state."[11] How could Rhode Island not adopt the Constitution when it was so popular everywhere else!

Newspapers also urged support for the Constitution by presenting the opinions of the delegates who had helped to write the document. Of particular interest were the opinions of Revolutionary patriots Benjamin Franklin and George Washington. Much comment was provoked by Franklin's speech at the end of the Constitutional Convention, a speech in which Franklin stated that the proposed government, while not perfect, was necessary.[12] Washington, too, recognized "the imperfections in the constitution I aided in the birth of, . . . but I am fully persuaded that it is the best that can be obtained at this time, . . . and that it, or disunion, is before us to choose from."[13] Just prior to signing the Constitution, Washington expressed his fear that "should the States reject this excellent Constitution, the probability is an opportunity will never again offer to cancel another in peace—the next will be drawn in blood!"[14] Most Rhode Island papers hoped that this "direful catastrophe" could be averted through ratification by all of the states.[15]

The Rhode Island press often reported the praise the Constitution was drawing outside the United States.[16] Because of the likely success of the proposed government in America, said the *Newport Herald*, "the philosophes will no longer consider a republic as an impracticable form of government."[17] A report from the West Indies stated that many planters there were planning to move to the United States to establish citizenship in order to avail themselves of the benefits offered by the new government.[18]


[Vol. III.] THE [Numb. 113]

Newport Herald.

THURSDAY, April 23, 1789.

NEWPORT (Rhode-Island) Printed by PETER EDES, in Thames-Street.

Masthead of the Newport Herald. *RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8029).*

When severe criticism of Rhode Island's recalcitrance came from other states, Rhode Island newspapers did not ignore those denunciations. Immediately after the Philadelphia convention presented its proposed Constitution to the public, the *Newport Herald* carried an article maintaining that "should any state reject this salutary system, unbiased posterity will consign their names to an infamous immortality."[19] It quickly became apparent that Rhode Island might indeed subject itself to that fate. Already seen as guilty of damaging the nation by failing to ratify the Impost of 1781, Rhode Island received even more abuse for its failure to accept the Constitution.[20] Many contended that the state was insane for not supporting the new government; "A Landholder" from Connecticut declared that Rhode Island's craziness was by Divine Purpose, for "the little State of Rhode-Island was purposely left by Heaven to its present madness, for a general conviction in the other States, that such a system as is now proposed is our only preservation from ruin."[21] A correspondent from New York prayed that Rhode Island would "no longer be blinded to its true interest,"[22] while another New Yorker complained that "no reasonable man can find any apology for such obstinacy and perverseness."[23] In a letter written in the summer of 1789, a congressman summed up the view that many held of Rhode Islanders: "They prefer Danger to Safety, Poverty to Opulence. It is thus that Fear makes Men blind: To avoid one Danger, they often rush upon another; and to escape Pain, suffer Death."[24]

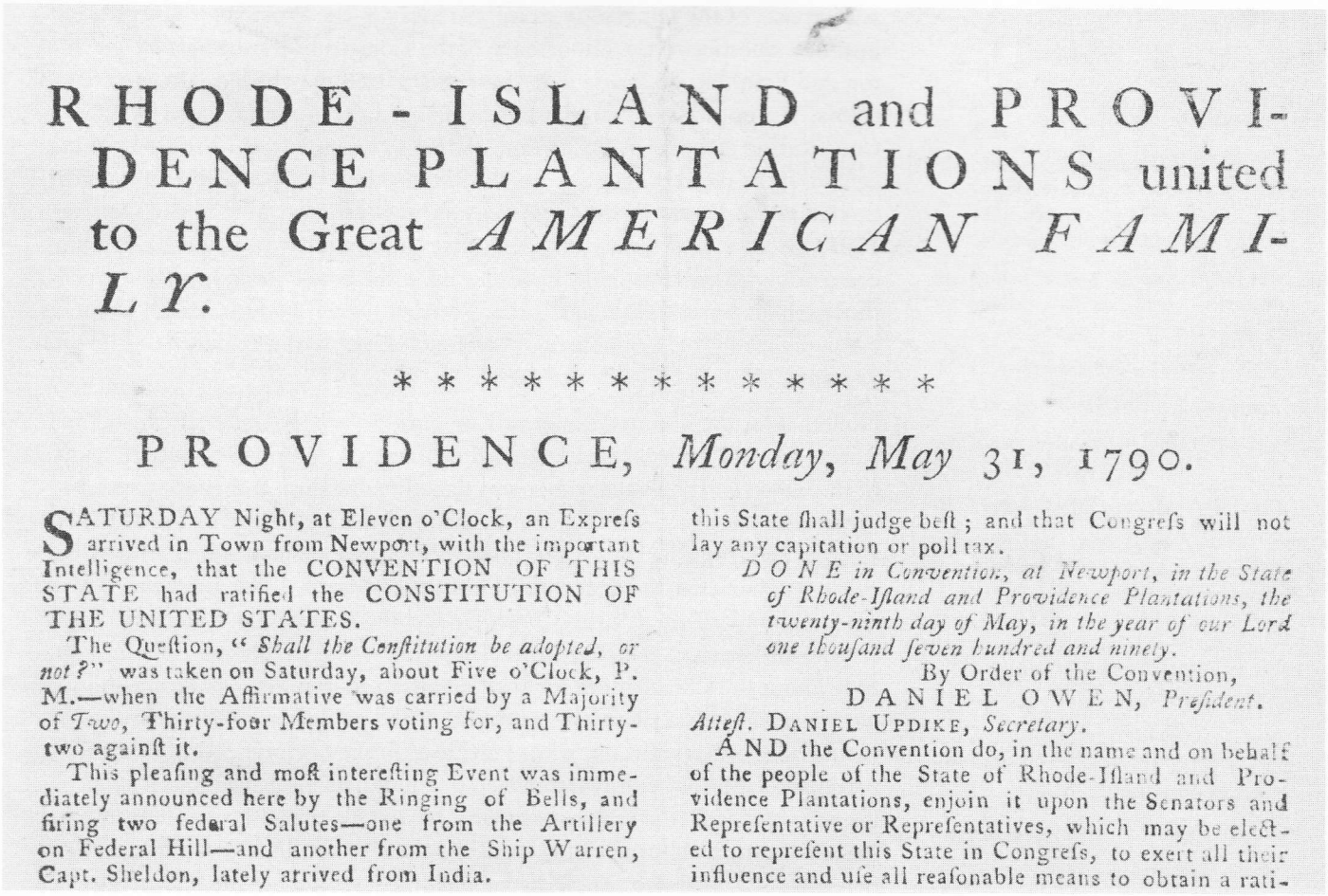
Local writers expressed concern over the damage that Rhode Island was doing to its reputation. A correspondent of the *Providence Gazette* feared that failure to ratify would mean that the state "must remain to the other States and the World at large a Spectacle of Reproach and Derision."[25] Only the ratification of the Constitution would restore the state's character to a reputable level, it was claimed.[26] One author urged the people of Rhode Island to consider the possibility "that we 'may' have erred" and to move to ratify the Constitution before it was too late.[27]

On numerous occasions writers in the Rhode Island press expressed surprise that anyone could have any serious objections to the Constitution. One essayist commented that "to reject this constitution, is little short of reverting to a state of nature, and every man's saying, 'to your tents, O Israel.'"[28] Several worried about current conditions in Rhode Island and claimed that ratifying the Constitution was the only viable solution to the state's problems.[29] "A Freeman" urged his fellow Rhode Islanders to at least try the proposed new government, feeling sure that they would not regret their decision.[30] A writer in the *Newport Herald* asserted that if "the people have a fair chance for information, reflect seriously and judge calmly upon this subject," then "they will conclude that the happiness, nay the very existence of this State depends upon its accession to the New Constitution."[31]

What worried Rhode Island newspaper writers the most was the future that faced the state if it remained outside the Union. How could Rhode Island survive "without an Ally, surrounded by jealous Neighbours, and our Credit (in Case we should undertake to fight the World) not in the most prosperous Situation?"[32] Failure to accept the new government would result in the "deepest distress" for Rhode Island.[33] It was feared that the port towns of Providence and Newport would secede from Rhode Island if the state did not vote for ratification.[34] The greatest concerns grew out of the possibility that the United States government would pass impost duties that would hurt Rhode Island's commercially based economy.[35] One congressman declared that "there can be no Medium: Enemies they [Rhode Islanders] must be, or Fellow-Citizens, and that in a very Short Time."[36] Although the state legislature promised to match whatever imposts and levies the United States government passed,[37] many felt that such retaliatory measures would have little significant effect.

The General Assembly's February 1788 vote to hold a public referendum on the proposed government the following month—a referendum in which the Constitution was soundly defeated, partly because the Federalists boycotted the balloting[38]—drew condemnation from several newspaper writers, who insisted that the Constitution should be considered and acted upon at a state convention, as its framers had specified.[39] Earlier a correspondent to the *United States Chronicle* had declared "that the General Assembly of this State [had] 'no Right' to refuse calling a convention of the People, to consider of the proposed Federal Constitution—as the People at large have 'a Right' to judge of the Propriety or Impropriety of adopting it, however the present Members may be opposed to it."[40] Such protests continued as the Assembly rejected proposals to call a ratifying convention on eleven different occasions.[41]

When the legislature finally voted in January 1790 to convene a state convention, the editor of the *Newport Herald* rejoiced that "it affords us no small



RHODE-ISLAND and PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS united to the Great *AMERICAN FAMILY.*

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

PROVIDENCE, *Monday, May* 31, 1790.

SATURDAY Night, at Eleven o'Clock, an Expreſs arrived in Town from Newport, with the important Intelligence, that the CONVENTION OF THIS STATE had ratified the CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES.

The Queſtion, "*Shall the Conſtitution be adopted, or not?*" was taken on Saturday, about Five o'Clock, P. M.—when the Affirmative was carried by a Majority of *Two*, Thirty-four Members voting for, and Thirty-two againſt it.

This pleaſing and moſt intereſting Event was immediately announced here by the Ringing of Bells, and firing two federal Salutes—one from the Artillery on Federal Hill—and another from the Ship Warren, Capt. Sheldon, lately arrived from India.

this State ſhall judge beſt; and that Congreſs will not lay any capitation or poll tax.

DONE in Convention, at Newport, in the State of Rhode-Iſland and Providence Plantations, the twenty-ninth day of May, in the year of our Lord one thouſand ſeven hundred and ninety.

By Order of the Convention,
DANIEL OWEN, *Preſident.*

Atteſt. DANIEL UPDIKE, *Secretary.*

AND the Convention do, in the name and on behalf of the people of the State of Rhode-Iſland and Providence Plantations, enjoin it upon the Senators and Repreſentative or Repreſentatives, which may be elected to repreſent this State in Congreſs, to exert all their influence and uſe all reaſonable means to obtain a rati-

Detail from a broadside announcing Rhode Island's ratification of the Constitution. RIHS Collection (RHi x3 6672).

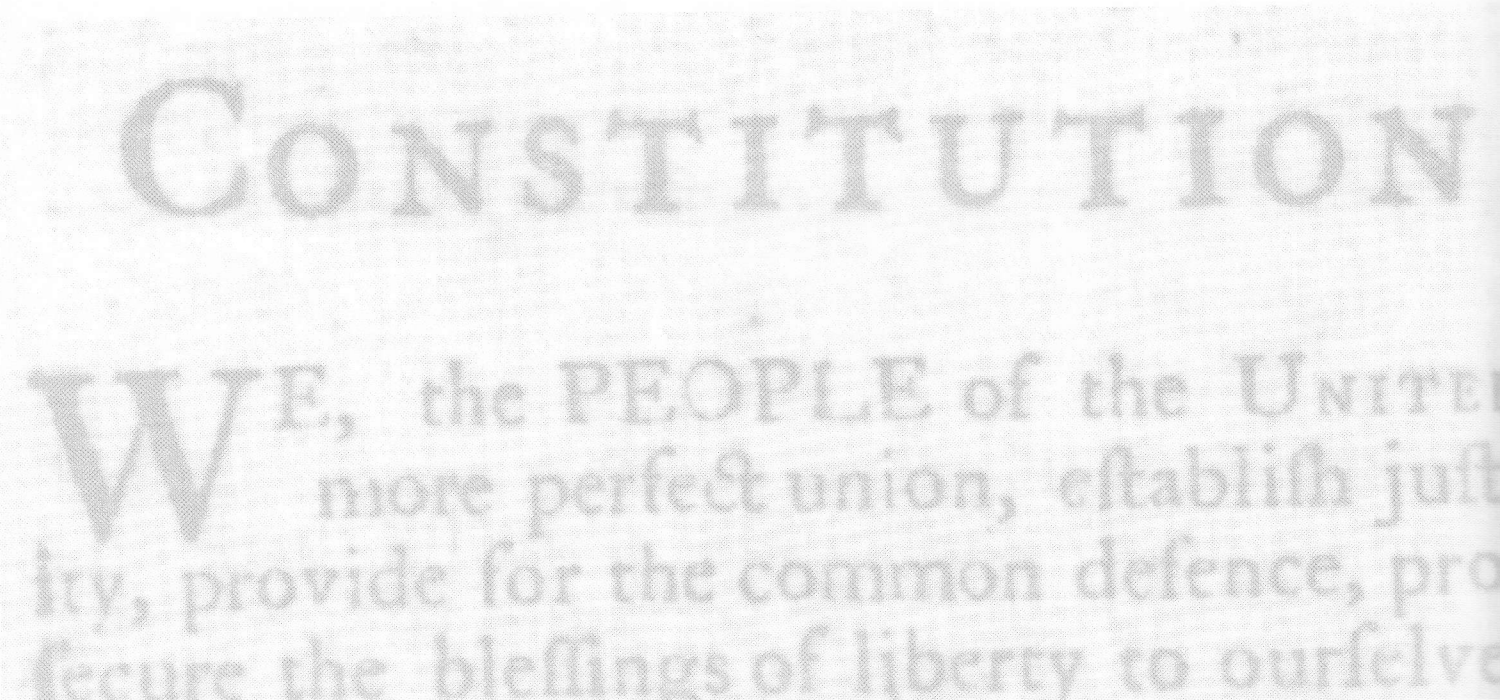
degree of pleasure, to return from scenes of discord, to tread the pleasing paths of returning union, and to announce to our Fellow Citizens the GLAD TIDINGS, that the long wished-for ERA of LIBERTY and ORDER, PEACE, and PROSPERITY, is not far distant!"[42] The following month "A Freeholder" urged the Constitution's opponents to "examine . . . with coolness, what you have opposed from prejudice—Consider that you tread on dangerous ground, and that if you persevere in opposing the adoption of the Constitution, you may entail misery on yourselves, or cause the annihilation of the government of the State."[43] With the convention in progress, a writer borrowed from Shakespeare to urge it to rescue Rhode Island from its impending peril with a vote for ratification:

> Adopt or Reject, that is the question.—Whether it is better, to make one Star in the bright Constellation, and reciprocate light, or like the small meteor, blaze but a moment, and then go to that [illegible] from which nations, as well as travellers, never return.—By the Adoption, we have nothing to lose, but every thing to gain;—By a Rejection we stab Commerce at its vitals, force the Farmer to hide the fruits of his labour in a napkin, and leave our Government like an isolated column, tottering at the smallest breeze, and exposed to be thrown from its base, by every tempest.[44]

Not everything printed in the Rhode Island newspapers about the Constitution was favorable; the papers also published material critical of the Constitution

and reports of the opposition to it.[45] An essay in the *Providence Gazette*, for instance, questioned the importance of the Constitution's support by Washington and Franklin, declaring that "patriotism itself may be led into essential errors."[46] Another essay in that paper reported that John Jay described the Constitution as being as "deep and wicked a conspiracy as has ever been invented in the darkest ages against the liberties of a free people."[47] In a report carried in the *United States Chronicle* and the *Newport Mercury* in October 1789, Rhode Island legislators, defending their failure to call a state ratifying convention, stated that "they have viewed in the new Constitution an Approach, tho' perhaps but small, towards that Form of Government from which we have lately dissolved our Connection, at so much Hazard and Expence of Life and Treasure."[48]

Nonetheless, the preponderance of Constitution-related material carried in Rhode Island's newspapers supported ratification. A month-by-month analysis of this material shows that more was usually published in the months and weeks just prior to a meeting of the Rhode Island legislature or the state convention and less after the General Assembly voted against calling a ratifying convention or after the convention recessed in March 1790, a pattern most pronounced in the *United States Chronicle* and the *Providence Gazette* and only somewhat less so in the *Newport Herald* (the *Newport Mercury* published too little about the Constitution for such a pattern to develop). In all likelihood this pattern was at least partly the reflection of the publishers' desire to influence voting on the Constitution, whose ratification they favored. Although a direct correlation cannot be drawn between the materials published and Rhode Island's ratification, it seems reasonable to assume that the press helped bring that ratification about not only by dealing with the Constitution in a generally favorable way but also simply by keeping the issue before the public. The newspapers would not let the Constitution be forgotten, and thus they helped keep the debate going until Rhode Island finally accepted the new government and rejoined the Union.


CONSTITUTION
WE, the PEOPLE of the UNITE
more perfect union, eſtabliſh juſ
ty, provide for the common defence, pro
ſecure the bleſſings of liberty to ourſelv

Notes

1. The text of the Constitution appeared in at least two of the four newspapers in Rhode Island: the *United States Chronicle* on 27 Sept. 1787 and the *Providence Gazette* on 29 Sept. 1787. The *Newport Herald* did not publish it, and the September 1787 issues of the *Newport Mercury*, in which it may have been printed, are missing.

2 *Providence Gazette*, 13 Oct., 17 Nov., 15, 22, 29 Dec. 1787; 19 Jan., 9, 16 Feb., 15 Mar., 10 May, 14, 28 June, 12 July, 2 Aug. 1788; 21 Mar., 11 Apr., 12 Dec. 1789; 5 June 1790. *United States Chronicle*, 18, 25 Oct., 1, 22, 29 Nov., 13, 20, 27 Dec. 1787; 3, 17, 24 Jan., 7, 21 Feb., 8 May, 5, 26 June, 10, 31 July 1788; 8 Jan., 17 Dec. 1789; 3 June 1790. *Newport Herald*, 11 Oct., 1, 15, 29 Nov., 27 Dec. 1787; 17 Jan., 14, 21 Feb., 15 May, 12, 26 June, 10, 31 July 1788; 8 Jan., 17 Dec. 1789; 21 Jan., 3 June 1790. *Newport Mercury*, 22 Dec. 1787, 4, 25 Feb., 26 May, 16, 30 June, 14 July 1788; 16 Dec. 1789; 31 May 1790. All of the Rhode Island newspapers began publishing the proceedings of the United States Congress as soon as it began meeting. See *Providence Gazette* from 18 Apr. 1789, *Newport Mercury* from 20 Apr. 1789, *United States Chronicle* from 23 Apr. 1789, and *Newport Herald* from 23 Apr. 1789.

3. Patrick T. Conley, "Rhode Island in Disunion, 1787-1790," *Rhode Island History* 31 (1972): 110.

4. Irwin H. Polishook, *Rhode Island and the Union, 1774-1795* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 163-206.

5. The figure for the *Newport Mercury*, and consequently the total, were probably in fact somewhat higher, since several issues of the Mercury are no longer extant; see the accompanying table.

6. Newport and Providence both had mercantile economies and were strongly Federalist, so it is not surprising to see strong support for the Constitution in the local press. It is somewhat surprising, however, that two of the four Rhode Island papers avoided treating the ratification issue in a totally partisan way. Like most American newspapers of the eighteenth century, those of Rhode Island depended heavily on merchants for advertising, and most merchants strongly supported the Constitution. Conley, "Rhode Island in Disunion," 109.

7. *Providence Gazette*, 29 Dec. 1787.

8. Ibid., 12 Jan. 1788.

9. *Newport Herald*, 20 Nov. 1788, 25 Feb., 25 Mar., 1 Apr., 13 May 1790; *United States Chronicle*, 22 Jan., 5 Feb., 1, 8 Oct. 1789; *Newport Mercury*, 16 Feb. 1789.

10. *Newport Herald*, 4, 11 Oct., 8 Nov. 1787; *Providence Gazette*, 6, 13 Oct. 1787.

11. *Newport Herald*, 19 Nov. 1787.

12. *United States Chronicle*, 8 Nov., 6 Dec. 1787; *Providence Gazette*, 10, 24 Nov., 8 Dec. 1787, 8 Jan. 1788; *Newport Herald*, 20 Dec. 1787.

13. *Newport Mercury*, 28 Jan. 1788.

14. *Newport Herald*, 6 Dec. 1787.

15. Editorial phrase used when Washington's comments were published in the *Newport Herald*, 6 Dec. 1787.

16. *Providence Gazette*, 13 Oct. 1787, 15 Mar. 1788; *United States Chronicle*, 13 Nov. 1788.

17. *Newport Herald*, 25 Oct. 1787.

18. Ibid., 17 Jan. 1788. Also published in *Providence Gazette*, 19 Jan. 1788.

19. *Newport Herald*, 27 Sept. 1787.

20. *Providence Gazette*, 2 Aug. 1788; *Newport Herald*, 17 Dec. 1789.

21. *United States Chronicle*, 20 Dec. 1787.

22. *Newport Herald*, 31 July 1788.

23. Ibid., 16 July 1789.

24. *United States Chronicle*, 25 June 1789. Also published in *Providence Gazette*, 27 June 1789.

25. *Providence Gazette*, 1 Aug. 1789.

26. *Newport Herald*, 26 June 1788; *Providence Gazette*, 28 June 1788, 19 Dec. 1789.

27. *Providence Gazette*, 12 Dec. 1789. Also published in *Newport Mercury*, 16 Dec. 1789, and *Newport Herald*, 17 Dec. 1789.

28. *Providence Gazette*, 20 Oct. 1787.

29. Ibid., 20 Oct. 1787, 20 Mar. 1788, 2 Jan., 22 May 1790.

30. *United States Chronicle*, 20 Aug. 1789.

31. *Newport Herald*, 23 Oct. 1788.

32. *United States Chronicle*, 1 Nov. 1787.

33. *Newport Herald*, 30 Apr. 1789.

34. *United States Chronicle*, 31 Dec. 1789, 27 May 1790.

35. *Newport Herald*, 30 Apr. 1789; *United States Chronicle*, 1 Oct. 1789, 20 May 1790; *Providence Gazette*, 3 Oct. 1789; *Newport Mercury*, 23 Dec. 1789.

36. *United States Chronicle*, 1 Oct. 1789. Also published in *Providence Gazette*, 3 Oct. 1789; *Newport Mercury*, 23 Dec. 1789.

37. *Providence Gazette*, 16 May 1789.

38. Conley, "Rhode Island in Disunion," 101.

39. *Newport Herald*, 8 Nov. 1787, 14 Feb. 1788, 19 Mar. 1789.

40. *United States Chronicle*, 1 Nov. 1787.

41. *Providence Gazette*, 10 Nov. 1787, 1 Mar., 13 Dec. 1788; 14 Mar., 31 Oct. 1789; 16, 23 Jan. 1790. *United States Chronicle*, 6 Mar. 1788; 19 Mar., 18 June, 5 Nov. 1789. *Newport Herald*, 10 Apr. 1788. *Newport Mercury*, 15 June 1789, 20 Jan. 1790. Conley, "Rhode Island in Disunion," 100-103.

42. *Newport Herald*, 21 Jan. 1790.

43. *Newport Herald*, 18 Feb. 1790.

44. *Newport Herald*, 27 May 1790.

45. *Providence Gazette*, 17 Nov. 1787; United States Chronicle, 22 Jan. 1789.

46. *Providence Gazette*, 24 Nov. 1787.

47. Ibid., 15 Dec. 1787.

48. *United States Chronicle*, 1 Oct. 1789; *Newport Mercury*, 7 Oct. 1789.

Rhode Island and the Embargo of 1807

HARVEY STRUM

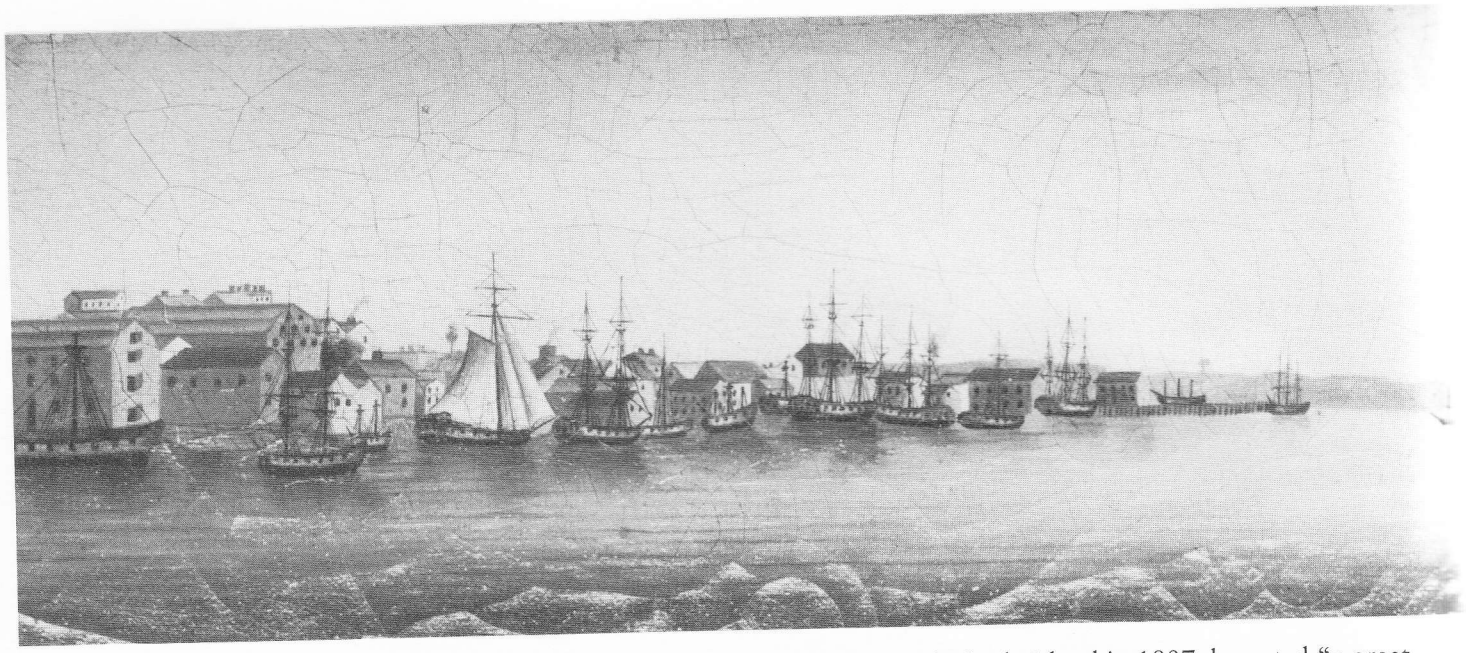
During the early years of the Napoleonic wars, both major adversaries, Great Britain and France, seized American cargoes and ships. Americans were more incensed at the British actions, however, because the British also impressed former British subjects who were serving in the American merchant marine, and they often seized other American seamen as well. Then, in June 1807, the British warship *Leopard* fired upon the American frigate *Chesapeake* when the latter's captain refused to permit the British to search his vessel for deserters. Three Americans were killed and eighteen injured in the incident.

The attack on the *Chesapeake* provoked protests throughout the nation. In Rhode Island, outraged citizens gathered in Providence on 14 July 1807 to condemn the attack "as a flagrant insult to our national honor."[1] Rhode Islanders of all political persuasions pledged to support whatever action President Jefferson might take. With war appearing imminent, plans were proposed for training the militia; but these proposals proved unnecessary, since Jefferson did not want war with England. Instead, in retaliation for the *Chesapeake* attack and for the continuing British violations of America's neutral rights, Jefferson asked Congress for an embargo on all foreign trade, a measure aimed at preventing the capture of American vessels, stopping impressment, and coercing the British into settling the outstanding problems in Anglo-American relations.

Jefferson's plan backfired. The Embargo of 1807 seriously harmed the American economy. In Rhode Island, merchants, sailors, and workers in shipping-related industries were devastated. Farmers, too, felt the embargo's effects, for markets dried up and agricultural prices dropped; "I am now deprived of any market for my surplus produce," one Newport County farmer complained.[2] Although the state's manufacturers benefited from the embargo, taking advantage of the increased demand for domestically produced goods (especially cotton products), and merchants with idle capital were able to move from shipping and trade into manufacturing, this industrial growth did not compensate for the considerable distress that the embargo caused.

The embargo also had a corresponding political impact on Rhode Island. The loss of jobs and the sharp drop in agricultural prices led to a mass defection of workers and farmers from the state's Republican party and brought about a strong Federalist resurgence. Prior to the embargo the Federalists had been unable to challenge the Republican domination of the state, and in 1806 they had formed an alliance with one faction of the Republican party in order to get a share of the state's patronage and elected offices. But the 1807 embargo disrupted the existing balance of political power; and while the embargo remained in effect, Rhode Island politics was dominated by American foreign policy. In Rhode Island, as elsewhere, the embargo demonstrated that foreign policy issues could influence local politics and alter existing patterns of political allegiance.[3]

Harvey Strum is an associate professor of history and political science and the chairman of the Social Science Division at Sage Junior College of Albany in New York.



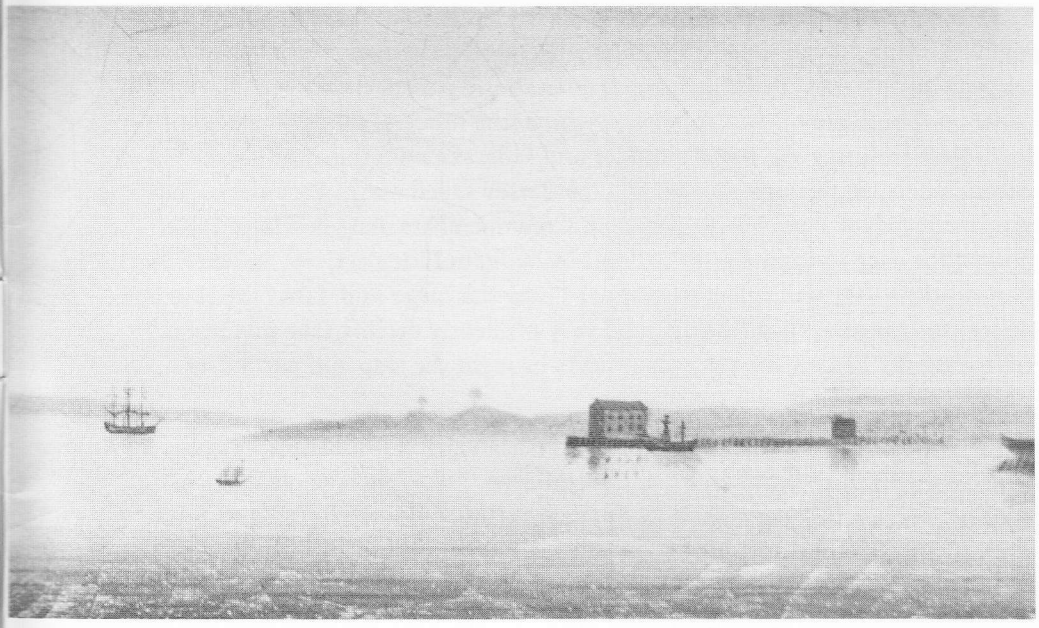
Wharves on the Providence River, circa 1800. Painting by an anonymous Chinese artist, oil and gold leaf on canvas, from an original painting by Thomas Young of Providence. Detail from a Providence Marine Society membership certificate issued to John Updike, 1800. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 3028).

When Englishman John Melish visited Rhode Island in 1807, he noted "a great quantity of shipping" in Narragansett Bay.[4] Had he returned to Rhode Island a year later, he would have found a different picture. With the embargo in effect, Rhode Island's domestic exports had dropped 81 percent and its foreign exports had fallen to one-ninth of their preembargo value. Seamen were losing their jobs as shipowners watched their vessels rot at the wharves. The embargo was bringing Newport "down to commercial death" (as one historian puts it) and severely injuring the economy of Providence.[5] By the fall of 1808 prices of farm produce had dropped by half, and even the price of wood had fallen by a quarter. Because of the embargo Rhode Island farmers had lost their markets for surplus pork, beef, butter, cheese, corn, potatoes, and rye.

Some merchants, shipowners, and workers refused to bear the economic distress and resorted to smuggling. In Newport and Providence, smugglers succeeded "in conducting a lively clandestine trade via the Maine coast" with Canada.[6] "They have families who feel the hand of want," reported a sympathetic Federalist newspaper, "and their only means of subsistence is cut off by the embargo."[7] Violating the embargo did not bring social disapproval, for many Rhode Islanders believed that the embargo was violating their rights as American citizens.

Providence customs collector Jeremiah Olney reported several incidents of smuggling in the summer of 1808. Sometimes Olney took preventive measures, as he did in July when he put men aboard the brig *Jolly Robin* to prevent its leaving Providence. But he could not stop the smuggling, and he appealed to Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin to send armed vessels to Narragansett Bay. Gallatin responded by dispatching two revenue cutters to Rhode Island. But the illicit trade continued, with efforts by Olney to enforce the law frequently frustrated by some of his subordinates who were working with the smugglers. In late August four vessels carrying illegal goods evaded the law with the connivance of an inspector of customs.[8]

Some smugglers traded with the British merchant vessels that hovered off the New England coast from Nantucket to Block Island. The more daring loaded their cargoes aboard American ships for Canada, Europe, or the West Indies.



To apprehend these smugglers, the federal government sent the frigate *Chesapeake*, the brig *Argus*, the sloop of war *Wasp*, and several gunboats to cruise between Martha's Vineyard and Block Island. Commanded by Stephen Decatur, in August 1808 the fleet captured three Providence vessels—the *Hiram*, the *John*, and the *Mount Vernon*—that were violating the embargo. A search of the *John*, for example, revealed a cargo of provisions hidden beneath the ballast. By the end of 1808 customs officers had captured over a dozen Rhode Island ships evading the embargo. Olney reported incidents of smuggling in Providence, Newport, Bristol, and Pawtuxet.[9]

Most smugglers escaped capture, however, sometimes by outwitting the customs officials. In October 1808 Newport customs collector William Ellery heard rumors of smuggling activities involving the *John* of Tiverton, and he appointed an inspector to question the *John*'s master and one of its owners. Both denied any intent to evade the law; they were only preparing their vessel in case Congress lifted the embargo, they said. To Ellery's consternation, at the first fair wind the *John* illegally left Newport "without provisions, without a clearance and without being . . . inspected."[10]

Smugglers also outsmarted Olney. Under the Force Act of January 1809, aimed at preventing coastal trading vessels from violating the law, shipowners engaging in the coastal trade had to post bond; those unable to do so were required to remove any cargo on their vessels. The owner of one coastal trading schooner agreed to bring his ship to the Providence wharf for unloading, but after approaching the wharf the schooner continued past and headed on toward sea. Since Olney had no armed vessel in port at the time, "it was impossible for me to arrest her."[11]

Probably the most notorious smuggling incident took place in January 1809, when the sloop *Betsey*, owned by Beriah Williams of Cranston, was seized with a cargo of illegal goods by the customs surveyor at Pawtuxet. The vessel (but not its crew, which managed to escape) was sent to Providence, where Olney removed its sails and rudder. Because of the unpopularity of the embargo, however, the district attorney in Providence decided not to bring smuggling indictments against those connected with the *Betsey*.

Two weeks after the sloop arrived in Providence, a large body of men "in a riotous manner assembled" near the vessel and began to cut a passage through the ice "to run off" with the *Betsey* "to a foreign port."[12] With customs officials unable to disperse the rioters, Olney sent a message to Ellery at Newport asking him to dispatch a gunboat to intercept the *Betsey* if it sailed down the bay. This precaution proved unnecessary, however, for the mob dispersed when it could not free the *Betsey* from the ice. Olney then retook possession of the vessel, facing down the angry onlookers who threatened him.

A few days later another mob, this one of two hundred to three hundred people, broke into the building where Olney had stored the *Betsey*'s sails and rudder. A confrontation between customs officers and rioters ended with the mob's leaders ordering the officers to leave, "which [the officers] thought prudent to do."[13] After refitting the vessel's rudder and sails, the mob this time succeeded in cutting a passage through the ice, and the *Betsey* sailed out of Providence harbor; but near Newport it went aground. Crew members managed to unload most of the cargo before a gunboat sent by William Ellery arrived. Assisted by local residents, the smugglers stood guard over the cargo and dared the customs officers to retake it, "but [the officers] very prudently declined the invitation."[14] Refloating the *Betsey*, the customs officers brought the ship and part of its cargo to Newport.[15]

The involvement of large numbers of Rhode Islanders in the *Betsey* incident suggests the widespread hostility to the embargo. "All classes of citizens are much exasperated by the operation of the Fatal act," Olney admitted to Secretary Gallatin.[16] Public hostility to the embargo enforcement acts convinced Olney that violations could be prevented only by military force, and that such force could be applied only by regular army troops, since the local militia would never fire upon fellow Rhode Islanders. Instead of trying to enforce the embargo, which would "deluge this once happy land in Blood," Olney urged that the embargo be repealed.[17] This disenchantment with the embargo led Olney and his brother, also a customs officer, to resign their posts in late January 1809.

William Ellery also grew increasingly disenchanted with the embargo, but unlike the Olneys he did not resign his position. Ellery walked a tightrope between his obligation to carry out his official duties and his reluctance to enforce a measure that "was obnoxious to his state and detrimental to his friends."[18] His problems increased when the Jefferson administration appointed him commodore to command a gunboat stationed at Newport. When the junior officer under him vigorously sought to enforce the law, he got less than full cooperation from Ellery, who wanted to avoid seizures that would antagonize his fellow Rhode Islanders.

William Ellery (1727-1820). RIHS Collection (RHi X3 695).

Many federal and state officials in Rhode Island shared Ellery's reluctance to compel compliance with the embargo. "We cannot enforce the embargo in Rhode Island," Albert Gallatin informed President Jefferson, "with [David] Howell for District Attorney and [David L.] Barnes for Judge."[19] State courts tried to prevent the detention of alleged smugglers, grand juries refused to hand down indictments, the district attorney would not prosecute cases, and local juries refused to convict those charged with smuggling.

Growing opposition to the embargo led to public protests. At a town meeting in Providence in August 1808, citizens condemned the use of American warships to enforce the embargo. "Our ships return silently to port, are stripped, moored, and left to perish at the wharves," they told President Jefferson; the embargo was depriving workers of their jobs and forcing seamen to beg for food, they said.[20] Public discontent reached a peak in early 1809 after congressional passage of the Force Act.[21] At a public meeting in Providence, Federalist merchant Moses Brown denounced the act as "the most oppressive and tyrannical {law} he had ever read."[22] After Brown's speech the citizens of Providence passed resolutions calling for repeal of the embargo and opposing war with

England. Mobs roamed the streets protesting against the Force Act with songs that had been sung by the Sons of Liberty in Revolutionary days.[23]

Rhode Islanders were infuriated when Republican governor James Fenner called out four companies of militia to help enforce the law after the Force Act was passed. "The sensations excited among the inhabitants [of Providence] are not to be described," noted an observer.[24] People filled the streets of Providence to protest the governor's action. The commanding officer of one militia company refused to call out his men, and three other companies met and voted to go home, since they would not use force against their fellow citizens. Rhode Islanders refused to sell cannon to federal officials; one cannon owner asked a customs officer to post a bond six times the cannon's value as a guarantee that it would not be fired at Rhode Islanders.[25]

In February 1809 the citizens of Barrington met and passed resolutions denouncing the embargo as a violation of American constitutional principles. Cumberland petitioned the state legislature to ask Congress to repeal the "present oppressive restrictions upon our trade." North Providence, Warwick, East Greenwich, South Kingstown, Exeter, Richmond, Hopkinton, and Westerly sent similar petitions to the legislature.[26] Public opposition to the embargo was vigorously encouraged by the Federalists; in Newport, for example, the Federalist newspaper called upon Rhode Islanders to resist the embargo the way their fathers had resisted the Stamp Act.[27]

Some Rhode Islanders, Republican followers of Jefferson, remained loyal and tried to rally public support for the law. In August 1808 a group of proembargo Republicans held a rump town meeting and passed resolutions endorsing Jefferson's foreign policy. The president involved himself in the conflict directly when he defended the embargo in a reply to the Providence town meeting's antiembargo petition.[28] Early in 1809, as public discontent surfaced all over Rhode Island, Republicans organized a series of proembargo meetings; in Bristol, for instance, local Republicans endorsed the embargo and blamed opposition to the law on a "junto of traitors aided by the corrupt hand of the British government."[29] But such meetings failed to sway public opinion.

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Public discontent with the embargo soon became evident at the polls. From 1801 through 1807 the Republicans had dominated Rhode Island politics, and with no Federalist threat to face, they had fought among themselves. In 1806 they split into two factions competing for control of the governorship and the state's patronage. After the three-way 1806 gubernatorial race turned into a stalemate,[30] in 1807 James Fenner's faction made a tacit alliance with the Federalists. Fenner won reelection annually until 1811, but the embargo alienated enough voters to allow the Federalists to gain control of the General Assembly and to elect congressional candidates and presidential electors.

In the spring 1808 elections the Federalists won a majority in the state House of Representatives, and they collaborated with the Fenner faction of Republicans in the Senate to form a working legislative majority. By that summer Rhode Islanders felt the full impact of the embargo-caused depression. During the congressional races in the summer of 1808, Federalists Richard Jackson, Jr., and Elisha Potter ran on a clear antiembargo platform, while Republican candidates

Isaac Wilbour and Jonathan Russell endorsed the embargo. While the Republicans denounced the Federalists as pro-British, the Federalists stressed the economic hardships that the embargo had created, reminding the farmers, for instance, that "it has reduced the value of your corn, potatoes, rye . . . about one half" and virtually eliminated the demand for farm produce.[31] Rhode Islanders heeded the Federalist appeals and elected Jackson and Potter. Federalists also gained full control of both houses of the Assembly in this election.

A few months later the state's voters went to the polls to choose presidential electors. In their campaign Federalists had compared the golden age of prosperity under Federalist George Washington to the dark days under Republican Thomas Jefferson; criticizing Jefferson for allegedly waging war on the American people under the guise of enforcing the embargo, they linked the Republican presidential candidate James Madison to Jefferson's discredited policies.[32] Republicans countered by charging that the Federalists represented the interests of the state's rich merchants and not those of the common people. This Republican campaign strategy failed, and the voters chose Federalist presidential electors. Nationally, however, Republican James Madison defeated Federalist Charles C. Pinckney in the presidential election.

The embargo and the reinvigorated Federalist party produced a surge of public interest in politics. "Politics raged in every house, office, shop, bank, and church," George Channing of Newport remembered, and "lines of separation were rigidly drawn between Federalists and Republicans." Partisan animosities disrupted business relations, and the "party strife which ran so high in Newport" was also "expressed as freely" in the state House of Representatives and in "town and county meetings." Bitter words between Federalists and Republicans could even lead to violence; town meetings, Channing recalled, "offered easy opportunities for fisticuffs."[33]

Newspaper editors added to the bitter partisanship of the time. A newspaper war developed between the proembargo Republican *Columbian Phenix* and the antiembargo Federalist *Providence Gazette*. The *Columbian Phenix* claimed that the Federalists received British gold to attack President Jefferson, while the *Gazette* charged that the Republicans were "hirelings of Bonaparte."[34] The editors of the two Providence papers exchanged charges of treason. Angered by the *Gazette*'s attacks on the president, Republican members of a Providence grand jury tried to stop the publication of the Federalist newspaper, but the jury's Federalist majority prevented it.

A similar newspaper war developed in Newport, where the Republican Association of Newport established a paper to counter the influence of the Federalist *Newport Mercury* and to stimulate public support for the embargo. "How can a virtuous government endure," Newport Republicans asked in their appeal for subscribers, "unless its virtues are protected from the blighting influence of calumny, perversion, and falsehood."[35] Although the Republicans succeeded in establishing the *Rhode Island Republican* in March 1809, their efforts do not seem to have significantly altered the public's attitude toward the embargo.

Sentiment against the embargo continued to run high during the spring 1809 elections, and the Federalists gained an increased majority in the state House of Representatives. With solid control of the legislature, the Federalists pushed through a series of antiembargo resolutions by a vote of 7-4 in the Senate and 35-28 in the House and sent them on to Congress.

The resurgence of Federalism, the widespread evasions of the embargo, and the embargo's failure to obtain concessions from the British forced President Jefferson to lift the embargo in March 1809. Congress replaced it with a watered-down measure, the Nonintercourse Act, which restricted American trade only with France and England. When President James Madison lifted all trade restrictions in mid-June, Rhode Islanders "celebrated . . . with much hilarity." Pealing church bells, a parade, and copious drinking marked the festivities in Providence.[36]

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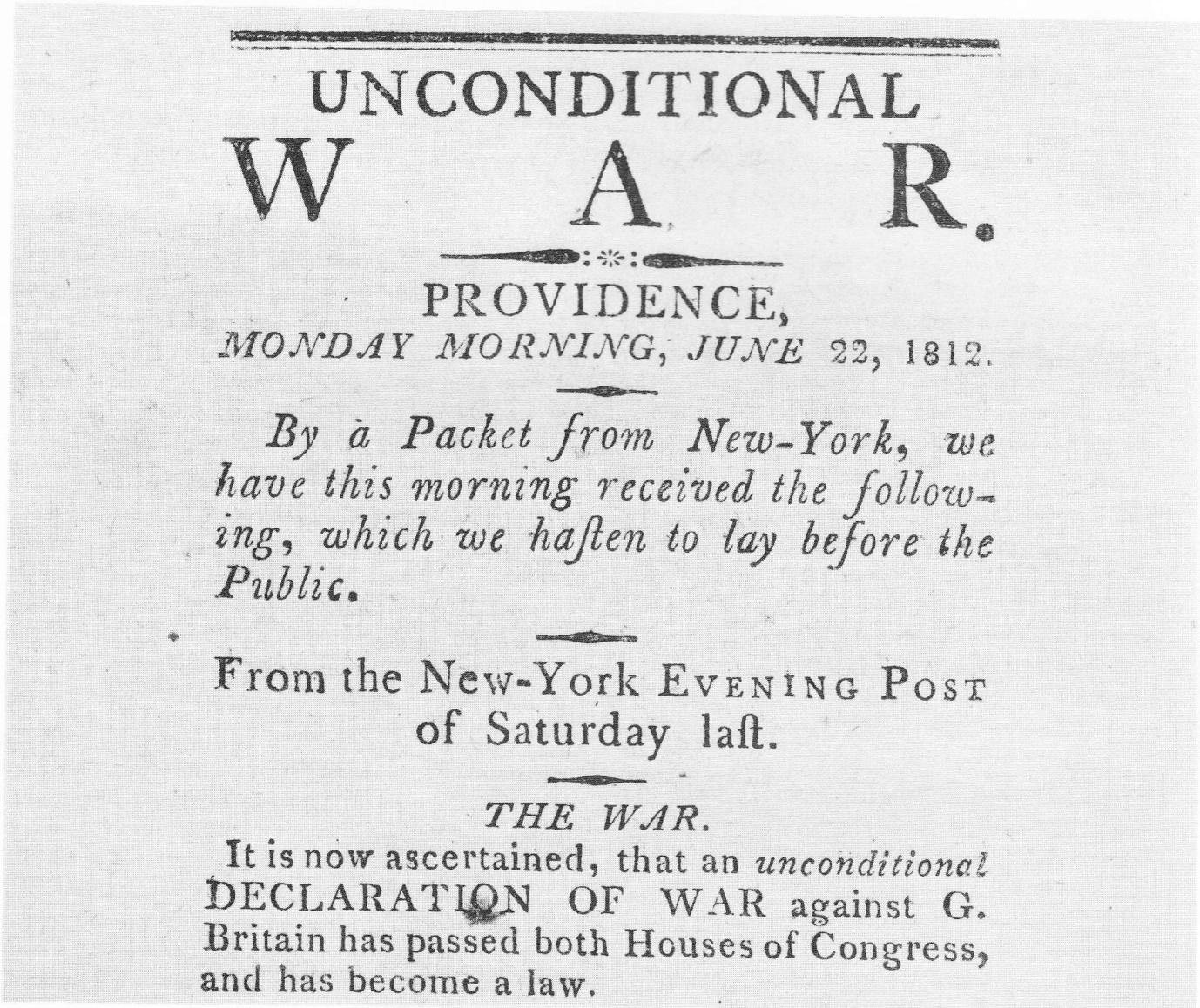
On 18 April 1809 the British minister to the United States, David Erskine, signed a treaty with the Madison administration to reconcile outstanding Anglo-American differences. Unlike Jefferson, the new president quietly dropped American objections to impressment in order to achieve a partial accord. Erskine's Agreement went into effect on 10 June 1809, and in exchange for a suspension by the British of their orders in council restricting American neutral trade, the United States suspended the Nonintercourse Act.

Unfortunately, this proved a false dawn. British foreign secretary George Canning rejected the agreement because Erskine had exceeded his instructions. Word of Canning's actions reached the United States in July, and on 9 August 1809 President Madison reimposed the Nonintercourse Act against Great Britain. But nonintercourse failed to persuade the British to compromise, and the Madison administration had difficulty enforcing the law. Both Jefferson and Madison believed that commercial retaliation—the embargo and nonintercourse—could be an effective means of pressuring the British to change their objectionable policies, but they were wrong.

Efforts to reach an understanding with the British failed throughout 1810 and 1811. Congress removed all restrictions on commerce in May 1810 with the passage of Macon's Bill No. 2, a measure that authorized Madison to reimpose sanctions against either France or Great Britain if the other agreed to respect American neutral rights. France issued an ambiguous note, the Duc de Cadore Letter, which Madison interpreted as French acceptance of American rights, but the president's reimposition of an embargo on trade with the British did not lead to British capitulation. Since neither commercial retaliation nor diplomacy had proved effective, Madison decided during the winter of 1811-12 that war was the only option open to the United States to force the British to respect American maritime rights. In response to his request, Congress declared war on Great Britain on 18 June 1812.



UNCONDITIONAL
WAR.

PROVIDENCE,
MONDAY MORNING, JUNE 22, 1812.

By a Packet from New-York, we have this morning received the following, which we haſten to lay before the Public.

From the New-York EVENING POST of Saturday laſt.

THE WAR.

It is now ascertained, that an *unconditional* DECLARATION OF WAR against G. Britain has passed both Houses of Congress, and has become a law.

Detail from a broadside reporting the declaration of war against Great Britain. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8021).

Notes

1. *Providence Gazette*, 18, 25 July 1807.
2. *Newport Mercury*, 4 Feb. 1809.
3. The embargo sparked Federalist resurgences also in New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, and the other New England states. Harvey Strum, "Impact of the Embargo on New York Politics," *Journal of Historical Studies* 5 (Spring 1982): 20-29; Rudolph Pasler and Margaret Pasler, *The New Jersey Federalists* (Rutherford, N.J., 1975), 128-29; L. Marx Renzulli, Jr., *Maryland: The Federalist Years* (Rutherford, N.J., 1972), 240-52; Louis Sears, *Jefferson and the Embargo* (Durham, N.C., 1927); David H. Fischer, *The Revolution in American Conservatism* (New York, 1965). For earlier studies of this period in Rhode Island, see Marcus W. Jernegan, *Tammany Societies of Rhode Island* (Providence, 1897), and Samuel Allen, "Federal Ascendency of 1812," *Narragansett Historical Register* 7 (1889), 381-94.
4. John Melish, *Travels through the United States of America in the Years 1806 and 1807, and 1809, 1810, and 1811* (London, 1818), 69.
5. Irving Richman, *Rhode Island: A Study in Separatism* (Boston, 1905), 278.
6. Peter Coleman, *The Transformation of Rhode Island* (Providence, 1963), 48.
7. *New York Evening Post*, 30 Jan. 1809.
8. Jeremiah Olney to Albert Gallatin, 15 Nov. 1808, reel 18, Albert Gallatin Papers, New York University. See also William Freeman Galpin, "American Grain Trade under the Embargo," *Journal of Economic and Business History* 11 (November 1929), 99-100.
9. For additional details of these smuggling incidents, see Olney to Gallatin, 13 July, 22 Aug. 1808, reel 28, Correspondence of the Secretary of the Treasury with Collectors of Customs, 1789-1833, General Records of the Department of the Treasury, Record Group 56, National Archives.
10. William Ellery to Gallatin, 8 Nov. 1808, reel 18, Gallatin Papers.
11. Olney to Gallatin, 23 Jan. 1809, reel 28, Correspondence of the Secretary of the Treasury.
12. *New York Evening Post*, 30 Jan. 1809; Providence *American*, 30 Jan. 1809.
13. *New York Evening Post*, 30 Jan. 1809.
14. Olney to Gallatin, 30 Jan. 1809, reel 28, Correspondence of the Secretary of the Treasury.
15. *Newport Mercury*, 11 Feb. 1809.
16. Olney to Gallatin, 30 Jan. 1809.
17. Olney to Gallatin, 25 Jan. 1809, reel 28, Correspondence of the Secretary of the Treasury. See also Olney to Thomas Jefferson, 20 Jan. 1809, reprinted in the *New York Evening Post*, 24 Feb. 1809.
18. William Fowler, *William Ellery* (Metuchen, N.J., 1973), 177.
19. Gallatin to Jefferson, 6 Aug. 1808, reel 41, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.
20. *Providence Gazette*, 20 Aug. 1808.
21. The Force Act, or Embargo Enforcement Act, of 9 Jan. 1809 increased the penalties for violating the embargo, expanded the enforcement powers of customs officers, authorized the president to use military force to detain ships suspected of seeking to violate the law, required coastal traders to obtain customs officers' permission before loading their vessels, increased the bonds for each voyage to six times the value of cargo and vessel, reduced the time allowed for each voyage, restricted legal defenses, and increased the rewards to informers.
22. *Proceedings of the Town of Providence*, January 28, 1809 (Providence, 1809), broadside.
23. Providence *American*, 27, 28 Jan., 4 Feb. 1809; Burton Spivak, *Jefferson's English Crisis* (Charlottesville, Va., 1979), 170.
24. *New York Herald*, 27 Jan. 1809.
25. *Connecticut Courant*, 1, 15 Feb. 1809; *New York Herald*, 27 Jan., 4 Feb. 1809. See also Olney to Gallatin, 23 Jan. 1809; Providence *Columbian Phenix*, 28 Jan. 1809; Providence *American*, 3 Feb. 1809.
26. Thomas Bicknell, *A History of Barrington, Rhode Island* (Providence, 1898), 418-19; *Newport Mercury*, 11 Mar. 1809. A copy of the East Greenwich resolutions can be found in the William Merchant Papers at the Rhode Island Historical Society.
27. *Newport Mercury*, 11 Mar. 1809.
28. Jefferson to the Citizens of Providence, 26 Aug. 1808, reel 42, Thomas Jefferson Papers.
29. *Providence Gazette*, 9 Feb. 1809.
30. Although Federalist Richard Jackson, Jr., won a clear plurality over Republicans Peleg Arnold and Henry Smith, the Republican-dominated legislature ruled that since no one had gained a majority, the Republican lieutenant governor, Isaac Wilbour, should serve as acting governor for 1806. See Patrick T. Conley, *Democracy in Decline* (Providence, 1977), 174-77.
31. *Providence Gazette*, 5 June 1808.
32. Federalist Party, *Address to the Citizens of Providence* (Providence, 1808), 4.
33. George Channing, *Early Recollections of Newport, 1793-1811* (Newport, 1868), 185, 189-90.
34. *Providence Gazette*, 28 May 1808. See also the Providence *Columbian Phenix* of the same time period for Republican charges.
35. *Republican Association* (Newport, 1808), cited in Noble Cunningham, *Jeffersonian Republicans in Power* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1953), 242.
36. *Providence Gazette*, 17 June 1809.

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Detail from "A South-West View of Newport." Color engraving by Samuel King, 1795. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 213).