

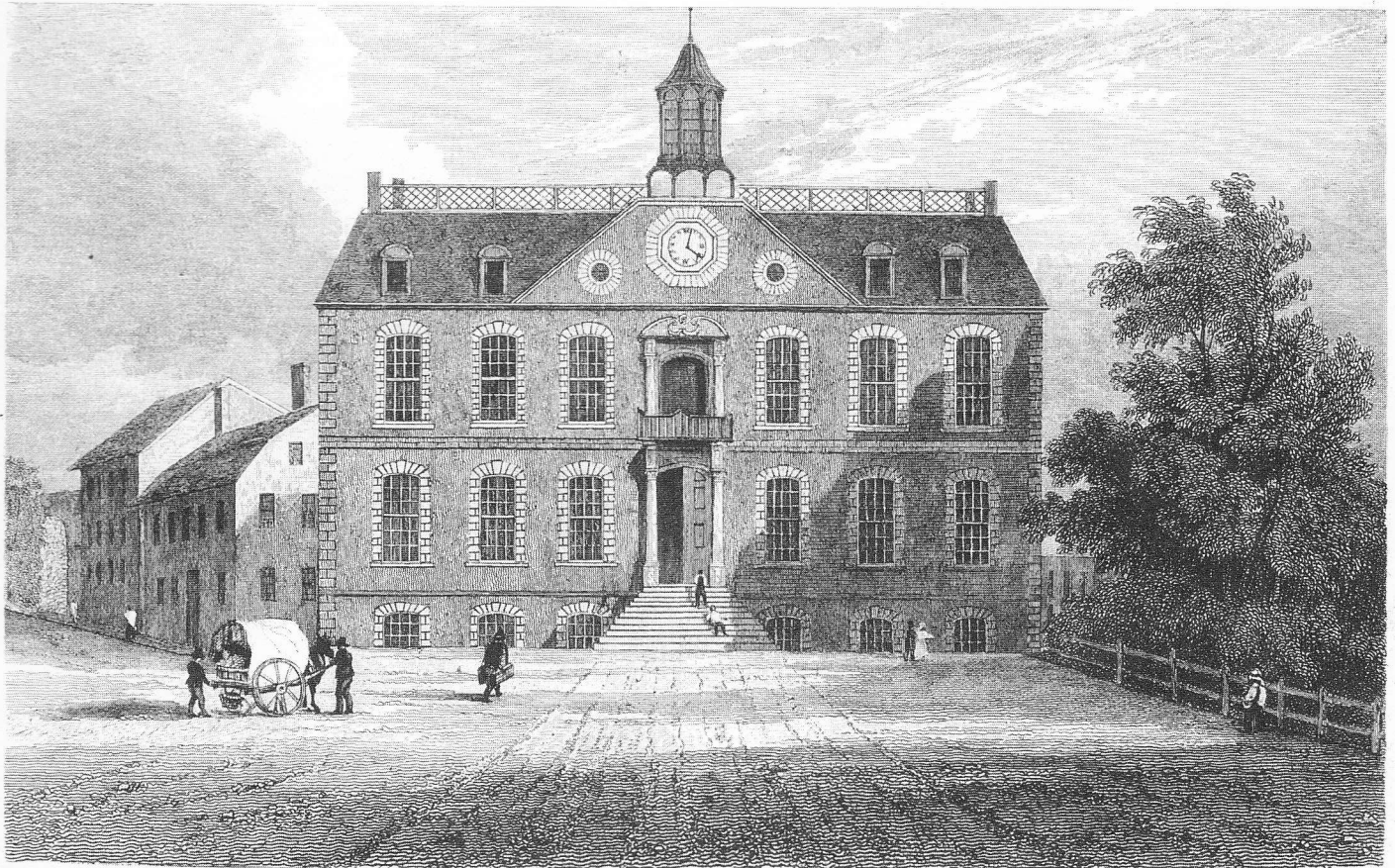
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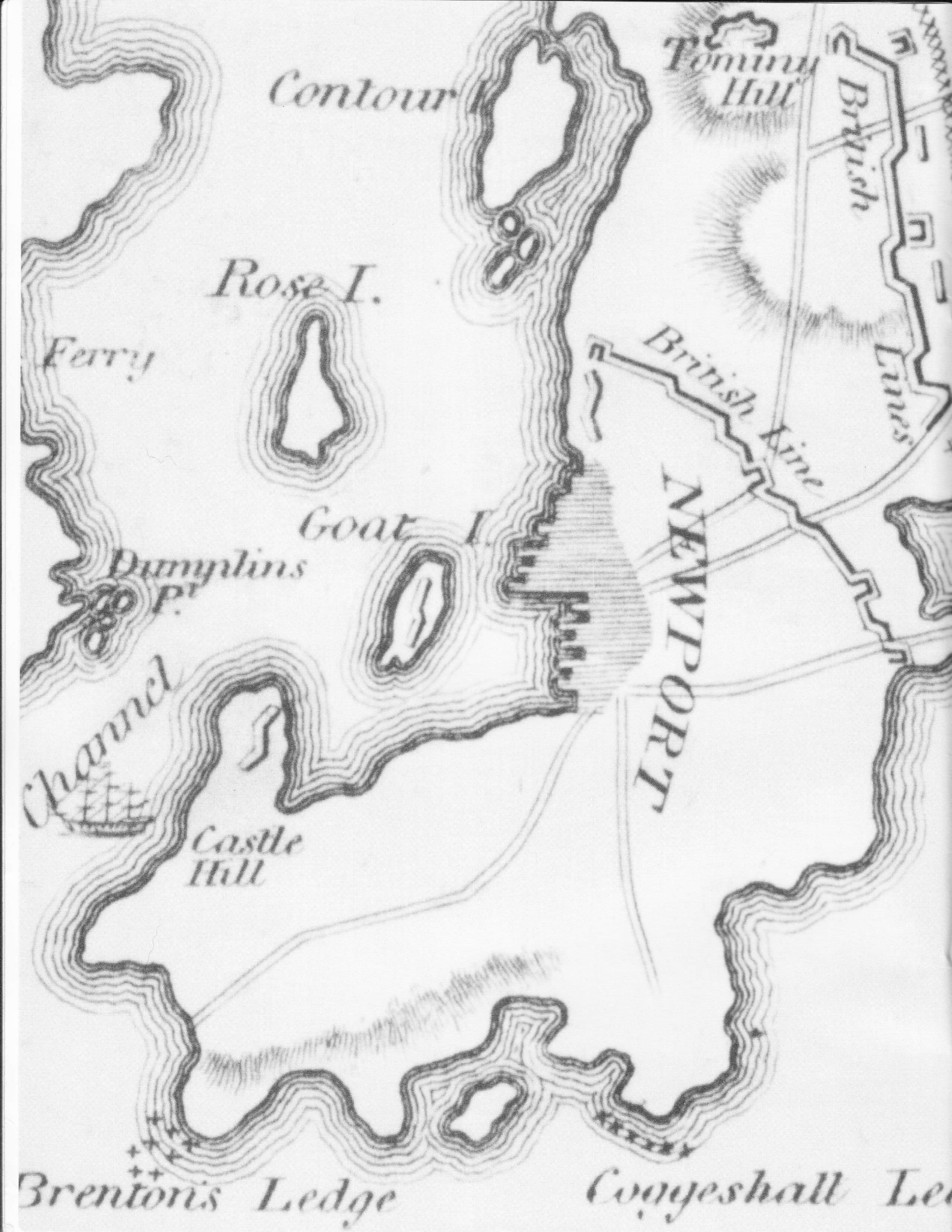
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Localism in Portsmouth and Foster during the Revolutionary and Founding Periods

Yet, once the Revolution was won, Rhode Island wanted to go it alone. Exhausted by the higher taxes of the war effort, impoverished by loss of trade, and thoroughly dislocated by the long British occupation of Newport, the obstreperous state wanted nothing to do with any new centralized control from New York or Philadelphia. United in war, but separate in peace, was its motto. Laissez faire free enterprise and local self-government constituted the state's understanding of the pursuit of happiness.

WILLIAM G. McLOUGHLIN, *Rhode Island: A Bicentennial History*

WILLIAM M. FERRARO

Localism was clearly revealed as the bedrock of the Rhode Island's political culture during the Revolutionary and founding periods. The majority of people in all towns loathed British efforts to impose imperial rules and regulations and sacrificed self and property to gain independence.

Once that goal was achieved, a great many cringed at the specter of a consolidated government of new states renewing intrusive policies insensitive to local desires. Many Rhode Islanders—particularly those living in the nonmercantile, agricultural towns like Portsmouth and Foster—identified much more naturally and readily with local concerns than with imperial or continental visions.¹ Republicanism, an ideology emphasizing the entire body politic and calling for “constant sacrifice of individual interests to the greater needs of the whole,” rang hollow among the members of communities so deeply committed to home and personal interests.²

Rhode Islanders began expressing their distaste for aggressive British imperial rule shortly after the conclusion of the French and Indian War. Like other colonists, they refused to acknowledge the validity of the Sugar and Stamp acts of the mid-1760s, but they additionally showed a greater inclination to maltreat enforcement officials. During that decade Rhode Islanders Stephen Hopkins and Silas Downer wrote influential pamphlets that overtly denied the authority of Parliament over the colonies.³ The celebrated burning of the British revenue cutter *Gaspee* in 1772 by a hastily gathered band of men from Providence made plain that these sentiments were more than intellectual abstractions.

The suffering of Bostonians under the Intolerable Acts of 1774 prompted sympathy and support from Rhode Islanders, who formed local committees to collect food and supplies for the citizens of the garrisoned port town.⁴ The freemen of Scituate assembled in a town meeting on 26 September 1774 and prefaced an act establishing a local relief committee with a striking resolution expressing the communal state of mind:

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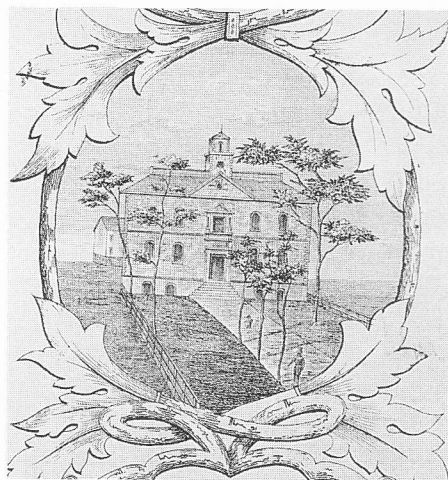
Having taken into consideration, the dark and gloomy clouds that seem to threaten a total destruction of the liberties of this, our native country, in general; the distressing circumstances of the town of Boston, in particular . . . charters which we once doated on, which we considered as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, and gloried in as the bulwark of the constitution of these colonies, now seem failing to protect the liberty of the subject, and altering at pleasure; taxes levying, revenues raising without our consent obtained, or even asked; in short, slavery herself, protected and guarded by tyranny, advancing with hasty steps towards this land of freedom and liberty.⁵

By the end of 1774 the General Assembly had ordered monthly drills of all militia companies in the colony, with full preparations for war. Rhode Islanders were ready both to protect their own liberties and soil from British rule and to march to the assistance of their sister colonies.⁶

Unanimously voting to send Stephen Hopkins and Samuel Ward as delegates to the Second Continental Congress, the General Assembly expressed its determination "to co-operate with the other colonies in every proper measure for obtaining a redress of the grievances, and establishing the rights and liberties of all the colonies, upon an equitable and permanent foundation." For Rhode Islanders, such a foundation included a large component of local autonomy. The Assembly emphasized the great importance it placed on proper representation of local interests when it authorized special elections for people living in the island towns occupied by the British in December 1776. Passed in August 1777, this act allowed seven or more men "who were known to be freemen" in any of the occupied towns—Newport, Portsmouth, Middletown, and Jamestown—to convene at designated sites on the mainland on the third Wednesday in September and elect deputies to represent the towns in the Assembly.⁷ The Articles of Confederation, submitted by Congress to the states for ratification in November 1777, received the General Assembly's swift approval in February 1778, since this framework of united government expressly reserved to each state its "sovereignty, freedom, and independence" and backed up the assertion with clauses granting the states full freedom in the areas of trade and tax levies. Further, any change in the Articles of Confederation required the unanimous agreement of all states, with each state holding one vote.⁸

Many Rhode Islanders eventually supported, or at least acquiesced in, the ratification of the federal Constitution to replace the Articles of Confederation in the belief that the new governing instrument would better protect and promote local economic fortunes. Threats of trade sanctions and financial penalties by the national government hastened movement in this direction. But other Rhode Islanders remained unshaken in their attachment to complete local autonomy, and they moderated their hostility to the federal Union only after they found that it did not significantly interfere with local self-rule.

Town meeting government, as practiced in colonial Rhode Island, allowed for the dissemination of ideas, wrangling among competing groups, and shifts in majority sentiment. Maneuvering within this "open" political culture resulted in final victory for the friends of the federal Constitution in the state. A close examination of Revolutionary and ratification politics in two towns, Portsmouth and Foster (one, bordering on Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island's second oldest town; the other, inland, the newest), will help to show both the nature of town governance during these years and the many sides of the convoluted process that brought Rhode Island into the United States.



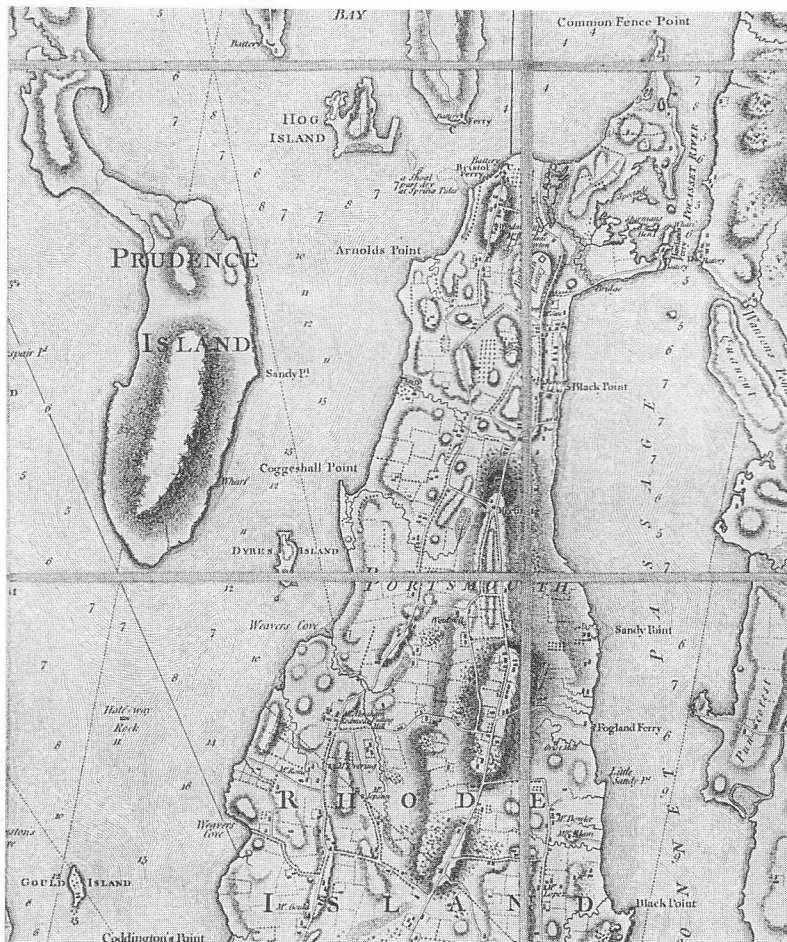
The Old State House in Providence. Meeting here on 4 May 1776, the General Assembly became the first colonial legislature to renounce allegiance to the British crown. Cartouche drawn by Charles Reen, from Henry F. Walling's Map of Providence County, Rhode Island, 1851. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 422).



The majority of people in Portsmouth and Scituate (Foster would be set off from the latter town in 1781) demonstrated their enthusiasm for independence from Great Britain by their ready support of the war effort. At a town meeting on 5 June 1775 the freemen of Portsmouth allowed Jonathan Brownell six shillings "for carrying this Town's proportion of Powder and Balls from Bristol Ferry," and on 29 August 1775 they voted "that David Gifford Draw the Sum of Eighteen Shillings out of this Town Treasury . . . for bringing . . . this Town's Proportion of Powder & Balls from Providence." At the latter town meeting the freemen also appointed eight men as a "Court of Inspections for the Town of Portsmouth" and empowered "any three of said Court . . . to act, agreeable to the Resolves of the Continental Congress."⁹

Military preparations increased in urgency as rumors of an imminent British invasion of Narragansett Bay spread. At the town meeting of 20 February 1776 the Portsmouth freemen ordered their town council to "give in a List of all persons who are not able to provide for them Selves fire Armes, &c," the list to be prepared for the next town meeting. When that gathering occurred the following week, the freemen voted that "240 Dollars or 75 Pounds Lawfull Money be hired upon the Credit of the Town for purchasing fire arms & other accoutrements." A committee of four men was assigned to hire the money and purchase "twenty small arms." On 17 April 1776 the freemen selected David Gifford, one of the committeemen, "to Receive all the arms that the Government is [has] provided for this Town."¹⁰

Portsmouth, Rhode Island's second oldest town, appears in this detail from Charles Blaskowitz's A Topographical Chart of the Bay of Narragansett in the Province of New England with all the Isles contained therein. Engraving, 1777. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 2122).



Portsmouth mustered men as well as arms in the opening stages of the war. In May 1775 a company of approximately sixty men from Portsmouth marched to the support of Boston with a regiment raised in Newport County, while a contingent of militia remained on guard within the town. Receptive to the state's calls for additional troops, on 17 September 1776 the freemen voted that "seventeen able bodied men be Enlisted into the servis of this State being the Town's proportion, and that forty shillings Lawful Money be paid for every such person so Inlisted if they provide themselves with Arms & Accoutrements and that Capt. David Gifford provide the Money for said use & that he be Repayed out of this Town's Treasury as soon as possible." On 2 December 1776 the freemen of Portsmouth responded to a call for sixteen troops by choosing an enlistment officer, authorizing a bounty of "Four Pound Ten Shillings Lawfull Money" for each "Inlisted Solder," and ordering the town treasurer "to hire the sum of 240 Dollars to supply the offices for the Bounty Money."¹¹

Suppression of Loyalist sentiment among the local population showed another facet of Portsmouth's prevailing commitment to independence. During the fall of 1775, patriots in the town forced two residents of Prudence Island, John and Arthur

Dennis, to present humiliating memorials to the General Assembly admitting and renouncing their past allegiance to the British. John Dennis expressed patriotic sentiments undoubtedly congenial to a majority in Portsmouth:

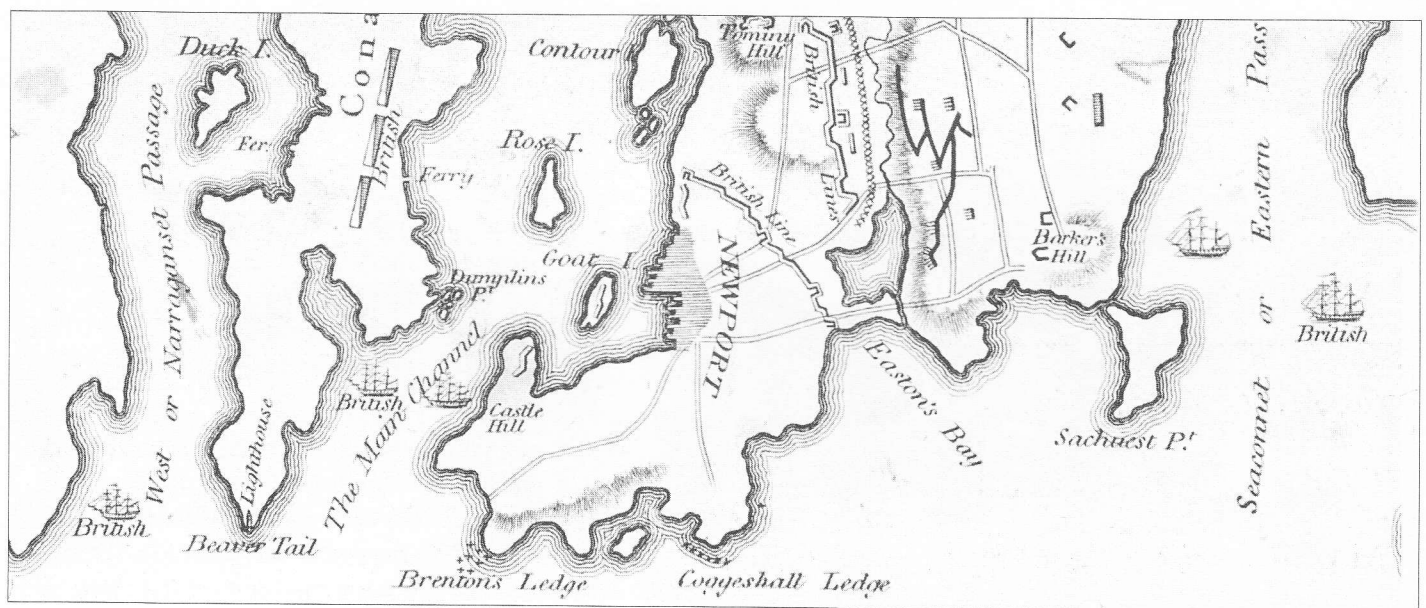
Your memorialist deems it his greatest happiness to have been born and educated in a country where the love of liberty, to an eminent degree, is the characteristic of its inhabitants; and rejoices that he is allowed the favor of making application to this Honorable Assembly, who have nobly exerted themselves, in a most just and patriotic opposition to that system of tyranny and despotism designed for enslaving the American colonies. He has ever gloried in being a freeman of this colony, and a warm friend and well wisher to the liberties of America.

The memorial of Arthur Dennis echoed these sentiments, and the General Assembly, deeming both declarations "satisfactory," discharged the men without censure.¹²

The war came to Portsmouth in December 1776. On 8 December British forces landed in great strength at Newport, and within two days they had occupied all of Aquidneck Island. Badly outnumbered militia retreated without contesting the occupation. The ensuing British presence disrupted the town government of Portsmouth and later prompted a plaintive minute in the town meeting records: "On Sunday ye 8th Day of December A.D. 1776—About Eight Thousand of British Troops Landed & took possession of this island and Remained on untill Monday the 25 Day of October A.D. 1779, for which time the Inhabitants were greatly Opressed."¹³

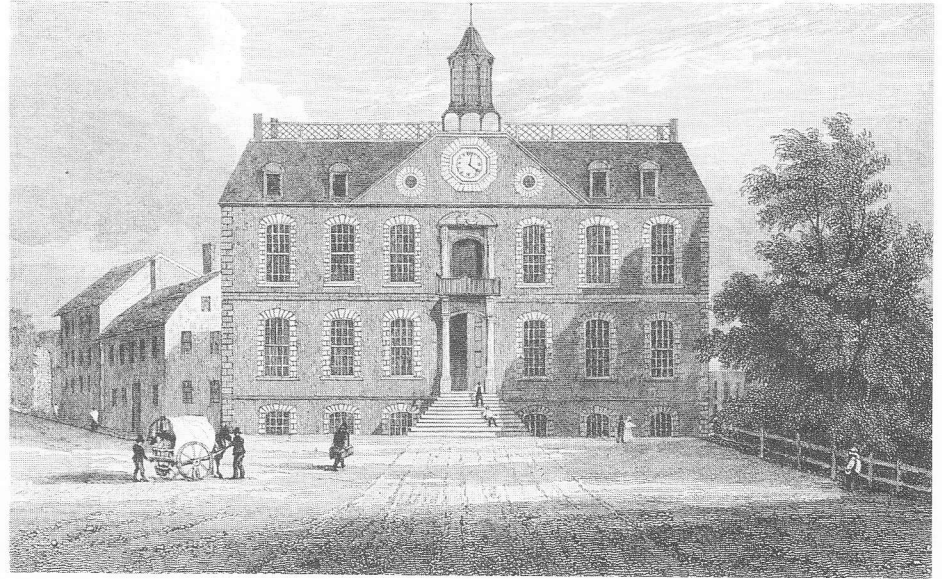
The British ignored Prudence Island until 11 January 1777, when they landed a 250-man reconnaissance party there. Meeting much stiffer resistance than the main body of British forces had encountered on Aquidneck, it managed to drive off the small American garrison and proceeded to secure provisions and ransack property on the island. But the next day reinforcements from the towns of Bristol and Warren arrived on Prudence, and together with local militia they inflicted heavy losses on the British contingent and forced its withdrawal to Newport. The British wasted no time in avenging their defeat. On 14 January they dispatched a more powerful force, which scattered the patriot troops on Prudence and burned almost all the buildings there. During that same month the British destroyed or confiscated property on Patience and Hope islands as well.¹⁴

The British invasion of Rhode Island spread across the East and West passages of Narragansett Bay and the Sakonnet River, as shown in this detail from A Map of Part of Rhode Island, Showing the Position of the American & British Armies at the Siege of Newport, & the subsequent Action the 29th of August 1778, drawn by S. Lewis and published in 1806. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8528).



The government of Rhode Island worked diligently to gather troops from neighboring colonies and Continental sources to dislodge the British from Aquidneck Island, but its attempts were ultimately unsuccessful. The only army actually raised and committed to battle landed on Aquidneck in August 1778, pressed the British for a short time, and then was forced to retreat to the mainland. Most of the serious fighting in this campaign took place in Portsmouth. The residents of that town, and of all the islands in Narragansett Bay, endured subjugation and harassment until the voluntary evacuation of British forces in October 1779.¹⁵

Built in 1739, Newport's Colony House hosted the yearly organizational meetings of the General Assembly. The British occupation of Newport temporarily interrupted that custom. Engraving, 1832, from a drawing by G. Walls. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 5982).



Located at a distance from the coast, Scituate did not face any direct threat from British troops. Nonetheless, like patriots across Rhode Island, its townspeople actively aided the war effort during the early years of the Revolution, meeting troop requisitions, paying taxes in support of the war, and supplying provisions for the armies. In November 1777 the town meeting appropriated money for needy families of those in Continental service. There was some hesitancy in dealing with a special appeal for supplies before the Battle of Rhode Island in August 1778, but no one protested loudly when the town council commandeered kettles and axes from the local population for military use.¹⁶



A harsh winter came to Rhode Island in 1778-79, and the weather contributed to the war-related hardships that were then beginning to burden townspeople across the state.¹⁷ Residents of Scituate showed the strain by balking at the payment of taxes. At the town meeting of 1 February 1779 freemen discussed measures to free the town treasurer, who had been imprisoned for not collecting state-authorized levies. A committee of three men was appointed "to give Bonds in behalf of said Town" sufficient to obtain the treasurer's release, and the committee was directed "to Confer with any Committee that may be appointed by the Town of Gloucester or any other Town who think themselves aggrieved in like manner & Enter into such agreement in behalf of this Town as said Committee may Judge Proper for the Mutual Advantage of said Town in

Procuring Relief for said Town Respecting a late Tax . . . wherein they are Over Bourn & Illegally Taxed.”¹⁸ The freemen of Scituate had begun to see demands placed on them by the state government in support of the war as improper and unfeeling exercises of power.

A similar sentiment surfaced in Portsmouth shortly after the British evacuation. At their 27 November 1779 town meeting the freemen chose Thomas Shearman and George Cornell “to Draught a petition or Memorial to be preferred to the General Assembly by setting forth the Destressed Situation of the Town and present the same to the Inhabitation to by them Signed.” Through this memorial the freemen hoped to secure a lower tax assessment. But the General Assembly, desperate for funds to balance the budget, anticipated the collection of both back taxes and new levies from Newport County’s recently freed towns, and the people of Portsmouth received no tax relief.¹⁹

A law passed in the General Assembly in May 1781 demonstrated the growing financial desperation of the state government. Singling out those possessors of large real estate holdings in Newport, Portsmouth, Jamestown, and Middletown who refused to pay assessed taxes and “lacked sufficient visible personal estate to satisfy the same,” the law subjected these people to the confiscation and sale of their land to the extent of their tax liabilities. Those whose land was sold under this law were to lose all “right, title, and interest” to the purchaser. The state government’s willingness to seize the property of people who had supported the war and been subjected to British occupation must have rankled residents of these towns.²⁰

An empty state treasury and demands from the Continental government brought heavy tax levies on the towns of Rhode Island during the first years of the 1780s. Popular resentment grew and became increasingly shrill. At their 7 December 1781 town meeting the freemen of Foster (which had been set off as a town the preceding August) directed the town clerk to draw up instructions for their General Assembly deputies to request the formation of a committee charged with “obtaining some Relief in future taxation.” Such a committee never came into being; instead, the Assembly laid over twenty-five thousand pounds in state and Continental taxes on the towns through the first months of 1782.²¹

These assessments vexed the people of Portsmouth and Foster and resulted in a widespread refusal to acknowledge the levies. The treasurers of both towns were jailed by the state for their inability to collect the assessments. On 11 July 1782 the Foster town meeting voted to borrow sufficient money on the credit of the town to have its treasurer, Jonathan Hopkins, released from prison.²² Considering the situation of its own town treasurer on 8 August 1782, the Portsmouth town meeting chose to come down hard on delinquent taxpayers: besides being responsible for their unpaid taxes plus interest, delinquents would be required to shoulder “in Proportion to their Respective Sums . . . Expenses and Time and all Damages” arising from the incarceration of a town treasurer or tax collector for deficient collections. Penalties applied to delinquents would cease on the day of payment. These penalties did not “Extend to any of the People that from Consciousness Principles Have not Pay’d Taxes,” but the property of Quakers could still be distrained. The majority of freemen responsible for enacting this ordinance hoped that it would supply “the Relief of the Collector and Town Treasurer For the Futur.”²³

The majority posture changed quickly in Portsmouth. The week after the ordinance was passed, freemen convened another town meeting and postponed all payments on the "Last Town Tax" for three months. Solicitude over local economic distress persisted for the next few years. At town meetings in February, April, and June 1784, for example, Portsmouth freemen voted against assessing any town tax. When they finally accepted a town tax of \$1,200 at their 31 August 1784 town meeting, they simultaneously appointed a committee of five men "to Draw up a Petition & Remonstrance Setting forth the Distresses of this town & Praying for some Releaf . . . and to Draw up Instructions for their Representatives in General Assembly."²⁴

Local efforts to relieve tax burdens culminated with the adoption of a petition to the General Assembly at the town meeting of 4 October 1784. This long document detailed the grim economic circumstances arising from the British occupation, questioned the increase in the recent state valuation of property in the town ("being persuaded that it must have proceeded from the committee's not being a Quainted with the Present scituation of the Town"), and asked for relief "from the additional sum that is added to this Town in the present Tax."²⁵ The humble rhetoric of the petition barely masks the frustration and exasperation coursing through its substantive language.

The freemen of Foster found themselves in a similarly difficult position by the end of 1783. Despite being granted an additional two months to complete his collections by a town meeting vote on 14 December 1782, tax collector John Cole had failed to fulfill his obligations under the law. Grudgingly the freemen ordered execution against Cole's property and estate to satisfy the shortfall. Events took a decidedly ludicrous turn at the town meeting of 15 December 1783, when the assembled freemen voted "27 pounds Lawful Money" out of the town treasury to "Mr. John Cole a former Collector of Taxes for said Town for his Extra Expenses as Collector in having his Estate Sold at Vendue."²⁶

Dissatisfaction with the course being followed by the General Assembly easily expanded into suspicions regarding the wisdom and intentions of the national government. Many of the taxes being levied on the towns by the state originated from the central government's demands for funds. Popular suspicions may originally have been aroused in 1781, when the Continental Congress recommended an impost of 5 percent on all goods imported into the country. In the eyes of many Rhode Islanders, this measure was an intrusion by the national government into individual enterprise, a threat to both state sovereignty and local autonomy. Upon the recommendation of the General Assembly, the Rhode Island delegation to the Continental Congress voted against the impost bill, and with its sole dissenting voice it prevented the measure from taking effect. A second 5 percent impost bill, proposed by the Confederation Congress in 1783, also drew opposition in Rhode Island, but unlike its predecessor this bill provided for locally appointed collection officials and limited the duty to twenty-five years. These clauses made the measure more palatable and helped it secure the approval of the Confederation Congress's Rhode Island delegation in February 1786. By then, however, the political geography of the state had been radically influenced by the rise of a new party, a party committed to local control as the surest way to secure the public good.²⁷



The members of the new political group referred to themselves as the Country party. A distrust of centralized power distant from the people being governed formed the core of the Country ideology.²⁸ The party had taken shape during the early 1780s, and it emerged in sweeping victories over the sitting Mercantile party in the state and General Assembly elections of April 1786.²⁹ In those elections John Collins of Newport, a minor merchant and sea captain and a leading figure in the Country movement, defeated incumbent William Greene for the governorship, and Country party candidates won five of the ten assistants' seats in the Assembly's upper house and thirty-eight of the seventy deputies' seats in the lower house. The party gained adherents in all parts of the state, but its greatest strength centered in the inland and most-agrarian towns. Besides Collins, leaders of the party included Daniel Owen, a blacksmith from Gloucester; Elijah Cobb, a farmer and small merchant from Portsmouth; and Abraham Barker, a farmer from Little Compton. Also prominent in the party were Jonathan Hazard of Charlestown and South Kingstown, Samuel Allen of Barrington, Job Comstock of East Greenwich, Nicholas Easton of Newport, and Arthur Fenner, Jr., of Providence. Most of these men had held significant offices in their hometowns.³⁰

The Country party encapsulated its appeal to the people of Rhode Island in the slogan "To Relieve the Distressed." This message struck both political and economic chords. The political meaning centered on the return of the process of government to the people, with the end of rule by callous or isolated officials.³¹ The Country party's commitment to close contact with the people and deference to popular sentiment took concrete form in the reliance of Country leaders and representatives in the General Assembly on instructions from their constituencies. During the period of Country party dominance between 1786 and 1789, the Assembly sent at least nine significant pieces of legislation to the townspeople for their consideration before taking final action on the basis of these local referenda.³²

A second sign of the Country party's concern for popular rule was its advocacy of reapportionment in the General Assembly. The charter granted to Rhode Island by King Charles II in 1663 had designated a legislature with six deputies from Newport, four each from Providence, Portsmouth, and Warwick, and two from every other town. Population changes through the decades had made this apportionment patently inequitable, and in 1777 Scituate freemen aired a formal complaint against the overrepresentation of the four favored towns. Their plea attracted support from other inland agrarian towns limited to two representatives, and it resulted in serious agitation for reform in the Assembly during 1779. But the movement was stunted by conflict between two plans of reapportionment, one that would give each town the same number of representatives and one that would apportion representation according to population and taxes paid. The Country party revived the issue as a means both to augment the party's appeal to agrarian sympathizers and to weaken its mercantile and commercial opposition, which was located primarily in Newport and Providence. Concerted efforts were made to pass a revised reapportionment plan in the Assembly between 1787 and 1789, but they were unsuccessful.³³

The economic resonance of the Country party's message stemmed from the enactment of an innovative paper-money program. Based on real estate mortgage loans, this program increased the amount of currency in the state and eliminated both burdensome taxes and the state debt. The legislation was

passed by the General Assembly in the spring of 1786, immediately after the Country party rose to power.³⁴ For the overwhelming majority of agrarian freemen who supported the measure, a compelling feature of the program was the provision that made the paper currency legal tender for private as well as public obligations.³⁵

Surprisingly, but not inexplicably, the paper-money program was accepted by many prominent merchants and others of substantial means, who themselves took out loans to assist their financial dealings. The resulting infusion of currency stimulated trade and economic activity across the state. Despite harsh allegations from various quarters within and beyond Rhode Island, the paper-money program was widely popular, and in 1789 it reached its successful conclusion with the elimination of the state's Revolutionary War debt and the restoration of the state economy.³⁶

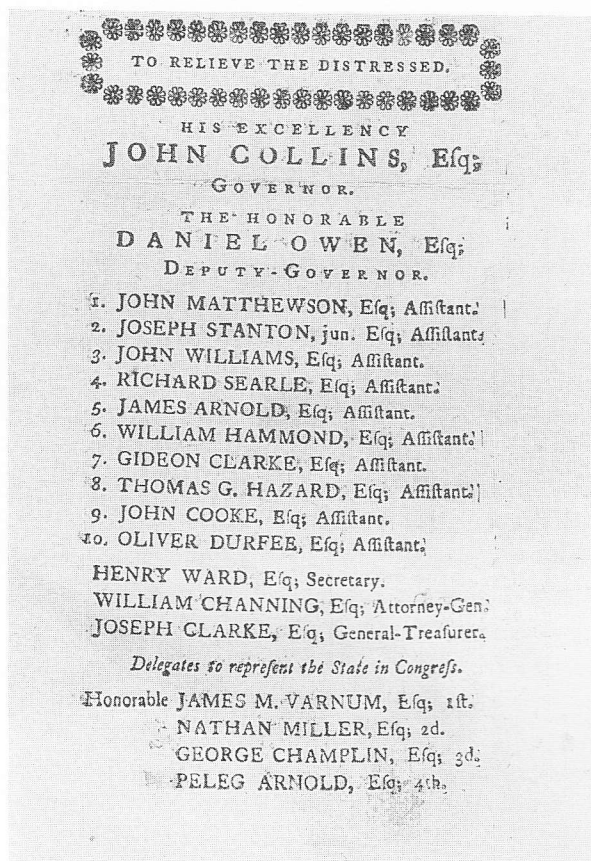


The records of Foster and Portsmouth can provide some sense of the appeal and the constituencies of the opposing Country and Mercantile parties. In Foster the Country party generated tremendous enthusiasm between 1785 and 1786. Gubernatorial voting reflected this surge of popularity. In the proxing of April 1785, incumbent governor William Greene of the Mercantile party received all 61 votes cast by the town's freemen; the following April, Country candidate John Collins overwhelmed Greene by a vote of 178 to 7. Collins and the Country party inspired new political interest in the freemen and eroded Greene's former base of support.³⁷

Fervor for the Country party in Foster rested largely upon support for paper money. In the winter and spring of 1786 the town's freemen instructed their deputies to advocate a paper-money emission. At a town meeting on 30 September 1786 they went a step further, appointing Jonathan Hopkins, John Westcott, and William Howard "a committee to correspond with the other Towns in the State & Meet with Committees to be appointed by other Towns if they shall see fit to come into Like Measure & with them to (complete at once) speedy & Effectual measures to suppress the opposition to the Acts of the Legislature of this State Respecting the paper Currency." Shortly after that the freemen pressed for passage of the harsh "Test Act," a measure designed to guarantee full cooperation with the paper-money program. Supported by a majority of freemen in only two other towns, the proposed law failed in the General Assembly. The freemen of Foster showed another side of their sup-

port for the Country party at their town meeting of 17 June 1786, when they instructed their deputies to push for enactment of laws that would limit each town in the state to two representatives in the General Assembly and prohibit any "sworn Attorney" from being "Chosen a Member of the upper or Lower House of the Assembly."³⁸

Although most of the town's freemen supported the Country party, biographical information can be found on only a few. John Williams, a minister, tavern-keeper, and prominent political figure, staunchly upheld the principles of the



Rhode Island freemen voted in statewide elections during this time by choosing the "prox" of a particular party (a ballot listing that party's candidates), marking it with any desired deletions or substitutions, and handing it in at a town meeting. This was the Country party's prox in 1786. RIHS Collection (RH1 X3 5995).

party as the town moderator from 1786 to 1789 and as a representative to the state conventions that considered ratification of the federal Constitution. He took out a loan of £370 18s. from the land bank, easily the largest sum borrowed by any individual in Foster. John Westcott, Foster's town clerk from 1781 through 1795 and a fierce promoter of the Country program, gained statewide notoriety for being one of the men who nearly provoked an outbreak of violence while protesting a May 1789 Providence celebration commemorating the vote that implemented the Constitution. The descendant of an original proprietor of Providence Plantations, Westcott, the son of a weaver and farmer, was a Baptist minister and an active figure on the political scene. Supervising the granting of mortgage loans in Foster under the land bank scheme, he himself took a loan of £60 18s. Jonathan Hopkins and William Howard, the two men who joined Westcott on the committee to seek full enforcement of the paper-money program, both served in important town offices throughout the period of Country dominance. Together with Williams, Howard also represented the people of Foster at the ratification conventions. Despite being a substantial property holder, he borrowed only £11 11s. from the land bank. Hopkins assumed a large mortgage amounting to £111 13s.³⁹

Some support for the Mercantile party existed even in a Country party bastion like Foster. In February 1786 a citizen of Foster signing himself "A. Z." published an article in a Providence newspaper complaining that the onset of paper money would be worse for the town "than fifty ravenous wolves let loose among our sheep and cattle." The writer castigated Country sympathizers by placing them on a par with the "the horse-jockey, the mushroom merchant [and] the running and dishonest speculator." A. Z. urged greater industry on the part of the people, an increase in exports, and a drop in imports as the proper methods for restoring the economy.⁴⁰

The identity of A. Z. cannot be determined, but some Mercantile advocates may be discovered among officeholders who sat out the period of Country dominance between 1786 and 1789. William Tyler seems likely to have been such a man. Tyler held a seat on the town council from the inception of Foster in 1781 until 1786; then followed a hiatus, after which he rejoined the council in May 1790 for many more years. The owner of a very popular tavern on the Plainfield Pike in Moosup Valley, Tyler took from the land bank the third highest mortgage (£138 19s.) of any person in Foster. Another possible Mercantile supporter was Christopher Colwell, who served continuously in major town offices, first as a council member and then as a deputy, from 1781 to 1787. He then disappeared from the ranks of the officeholders. Colwell had operated a successful salt works in Pawtucket during the Revolutionary War and seems to have been commercially oriented. Simeon Seaman and Zabin Hopkins, who both joined the town council for the first time in May 1790, after the hold of the Country party had loosened, may also have been Mercantile proponents.⁴¹

The proportion of Country to Mercantile adherents in Portsmouth was never quite as lopsided as in Foster, but for the latter half of the 1780s the Country party also held a firm grip on the local population in that town. The strength of this grip derived in large part from support for the paper-money program. Portsmouth's freemen initially expressed their enthusiasm for paper money at their town meeting of 28 January 1786, where they instructed their deputies "to use their Influence at the next session of the Assembly to have an Emission of paper currency struck as soon as may be." Reiterating their commitment to

paper money, freemen at a town meeting on 28 August 1787 issued instructions to their deputies to "oppose any Scale on the paper Money Emittid by this State that may be offered . . . and likewise to oppose any bill that shall be offered for takeing off the Tender on former contracts." At their town meeting of 24 March 1788 freemen instructed their deputies to maintain the paper money as a tender at par and to promote laws easing the availability of credit. Commitment to the paper money as legal tender was again affirmed at the Portsmouth town meeting of 1 June 1789.⁴²

Portsmouth's support for the Country party did not extend to reapportionment of the General Assembly, where the town was granted four deputies under the charter of 1663. The freemen preceded their 28 August 1787 instruction regarding currency with a directive that their deputies "Use their Votes and Influence to oppose the altering of the Constitution wherein it Respects curtailing Representation." Opposition to legislative reapportionment had been firmly established among the freemen of Portsmouth earlier in the decade. Among a set of seven instructions staking out local positions against leniency toward Loyalists and for a "Speedy Revifall" of autonomous political arrangements at the state level, freemen at a town meeting on 16 April 1783 had sharply instructed their deputies to "carefully attend to the Liberties & Priviledges of this Town and see that non of them are Violated, Infringed or Curtailed." A statewide convention gathered during the fall of 1784 to discuss representation drew an immediate and hostile response from the freemen in Portsmouth. Lengthy instructions contained in the record of a town meeting on 4 October 1784 castigated the movement for reapportionment as "unjust and unequal in its Nature a Violation of the Constitution of the State an Infrengement upon the Liberties & Priviledges of the People at Large & Pointedly Stricking at the Liberties & Priviledges of the Charter Towns in Peticular" and "as tending to sow the Seeds of Discord Disunion & Enmity in this now peaceable State" in a manner that would "Involve this State in Domestick Broils & Quarrels but Little inferior in their Consequences to the Ravages of War."⁴³ The Country party's support for more equal legislative representation blunted the natural appeal of the party in Portsmouth, and it opened the first crack in the party's supporting foundation in the town.



From the convening of the national Constitutional Convention during the summer of 1787 until the ratification of the new plan by the state in May 1790, the issue of a federal constitution tested the localistic orientation of Portsmouth and Foster residents and charged the political atmosphere across Rhode Island. Rhode Islanders were generally content with the Articles of Confederation, and they sent no delegates to the Philadelphia convention. When the Constitution arrived for consideration by the state in early autumn 1787, the Country party majority in control of the state government, opposed to ratification, proceeded with caution. Instead of calling a ratifying convention, as the Philadelphia convention had recommended and Mercantile party adherents favoring ratification desired, the General Assembly at its October 1787 session ordered a thousand copies of the document printed and distributed among the towns (Foster received fifty-five copies, Portsmouth twenty-five). This decision ensured that people across the state would have a firsthand opportunity to review the proposed plan.⁴⁴

Then, in February 1788, "conceiving themselves representatives of the great body of the people at large" and thus unable to "make any innovation in a Constitution which has been agreed upon . . . without the express consent of the freemen at large, by their own voices individually taken in town meetings assembled," the legislators called for a statewide referendum on ratifying the Constitution. Town meetings were ordered to be convened for the voting on the fourth Monday in March, with up to three days of adjournments provided for in case of "strong or boisterous weather" on the designated day. Provisions of the Assembly's act urged the most thorough warning of "freemen and freeholders" and outlined a special method of voting: each freeman and freeholder would voice his "yea or nay" aloud and have his name and vote entered in his town's permanent record by the town clerk, who would then transmit "a true and fair certified copy of the register" to the General Assembly for the final statewide tally.⁴⁵

This mode of ratifying or rejecting the Constitution angered the Mercantile minority, which had sought a statewide ratifying convention of delegates chosen by each town. Powerless before the superior political force of the Country party, Mercantile adherents called for a boycott of the referendum. The result was an overwhelming defeat of the Constitution by a vote of 2,711 to 243.⁴⁶ Freemen in Foster contributed to this defeat by voting 177-0 against the Constitution. In Portsmouth the vote for rejection was 60-12.⁴⁷ Since many Rhode Island advocates of ratification abstained from casting ballots, it is possible that the vote in the two towns overstated the size of the Country majority but there is little doubt that the Country party enjoyed a comfortable advantage in both Foster and Portsmouth.

No record of the names of the voters in Foster has survived, but a listing of Portsmouth voters appears in William Staples's *Rhode Island in the Continental Congress*. Of the sixty Portsmouth men who expressed affinity with the Country party by voting against adoption of the Constitution, fifteen held major town offices between 1781 and 1800. Nine of these fifteen men took out loans from the land bank; six assumed modest loans of £36 or less, while Joseph Brownell (£162), William Hall (£111), and David Gifford (£91) secured larger loans. Fifteen of the remaining forty-five men who voted against ratification also borrowed money from the land bank. Only one of these men, George Lawton, borrowed more than £100; three borrowed more than £36, and the rest borrowed £36 or less. This modest record of borrowing, coupled with the fact that half of those voting against ratification took no loans at all under the paper-money program, suggests that support for the Country party in Portsmouth went beyond financial concerns.⁴⁸

Readily available records provide only the sketchiest biographical data on the sixty opponents of ratification. Giles Slocum, the fifth man of this name in his family to live in Portsmouth, was thirty-seven years old in March 1788. He built and operated a gristmill in the southeastern corner of the main part of town. Slocum served as a deputy in the General Assembly in 1784 and as a member of the town council from 1787 to 1789. A representative of Portsmouth at the state conventions considering adoption of the Constitution, he opposed ratification to the end. George Hall, a year older than Slocum, earned his livelihood as a farmer and shoemaker. He served on the town council from 1784 to 1789 and returned to the council for another year in 1796.⁴⁹

George Sisson, another voter against ratification in the 1788 referendum, labored as a blacksmith. Burrington Anthony, David Gifford, and Cooke Wilcox were all soldiers in the Revolutionary War. Anthony was a representative of Portsmouth at the state's ratification conventions, and he eventually cast his vote in favor of the Constitution. Elijah Cobb, who stood high among the leadership of the Country party, served in the General Assembly as a deputy from Portsmouth from 1785 to 1789. Apparently a man of very modest means, he paid only £1 2s. in town taxes in 1788, when the average tax in Portsmouth was £1 11s. 10d., and he did not borrow money from the land bank. Cobb's claim for reparation for £290 of wanton damage inflicted on his personal property during the British occupation was one of the smallest of such claims brought by Portsmouth residents.⁵⁰

The twelve men who aligned themselves with the Mercantile party in 1788 by voting in favor of ratification seem to have been of a substantial sort. Nine of these men served in major town offices between 1781 and 1800, but only one, Giles Lawton, Jr., managed to hold onto his office through 1787 and 1788, the period of greatest enthusiasm for the Country party in Portsmouth. Four men—Alexander Thomas, Rubeon Taylor, Henry Lawton, and Holder Chace—relinquished major town offices upon the emergence of strong local sentiment for the Country party and resumed their posts after the party's decline in Portsmouth late in 1789. John Thurston, Portsmouth's town clerk through most of the Revolutionary War, was elected to a term as deputy in the Assembly for the first half of 1785, but he never served the town in another major office. Three other men—Tillighast Almy, Andrew McCorrie, and Pardon Sisson—gained major town offices for the first time late in 1789 or during the 1790s.⁵¹

Holder Chace, who claimed £4,619½ in damages at the hands of the British during the Revolutionary War, and John Thurston, who claimed £3,230 in damages, took out two of the three loans from the land bank assumed among those voting to adopt the Constitution. Chace's loan of £288 was the largest taken by anyone in Portsmouth. Thurston borrowed only £18, and the remaining borrower, Andrew McCorrie, took a similarly conservative loan of £36. In 1783 Chace and Thurston paid taxes that were well above the norm in Portsmouth; apparently they were two of the wealthiest men in town. The others voting for ratification enjoyed less munificent means. Only four of those ten men claimed any war damages: two sought between £600 and £700 in reparations, one sought £354, and the other claimed but a meager £42.⁵²

Samuel Pearce, Jr., Robert Lawton, Thomas Potter, Joseph Cundall, and William Anthony, Portsmouth men with terms of service in major town offices broken by gaps in the late 1780s, were probably Mercantile party adherents. After declining election to the town council in 1787, Pearce served on the council from 1790 to 1794. Lawton left the office of deputy after 1783 and returned to it in the second half of 1789. Anthony, who borrowed £36 from the land bank, sat in the General Assembly for Portsmouth during the first term of 1786 and did not again hold a major office until 1791, when he became town moderator. Potter, who borrowed £72 from the land bank, was a town council member from 1781 to 1783 and a deputy for several terms between 1789 and 1800. Four of these men claimed more than £1,000 in war damages (Lawton claimed £4,040½), and each appears to have lived comfortably.⁵³



Opposition to the Constitution prevailed in both Foster and Portsmouth for nearly two years following the March 1788 referendum. Concern over the extent of power granted the national government by the Constitution and essential commitment to the program of the Country party sustained the opposition in each town.⁵⁴ Responding to a circular letter from Governor Clinton of New York in December 1788, the freemen of Portsmouth stated a desire "to support and uphold the Union whensoever the United States do hit upon a form of Government which shall be consistent with the Constitution of this State," and they declared that they favored sending delegates from Rhode Island to any convention convened "to amend the new Constitution" in a manner that "shall tend to the happiness of the people and the uniting of the States in a good just and Righteous Government." But at their town meeting of 1 June 1789 the Portsmouth freemen instructed their deputies "to Vote and use their Influence . . . against the calling of a state convention" to consider ratification of the Constitution during the next session of the General Assembly. Elaborating on these instructions at a town meeting on 19 October 1789, the freemen observed that the Constitution's mode of laying taxes on the states "must prove ruinous to this state." The freemen of Foster never wavered in their commitment to the Country party or against the Constitution. Assembled in a town meeting on 19 October 1789, they unanimously voted to instruct their representatives to the Assembly to work against calling a ratifying convention for the state.⁵⁵

All efforts at calling a ratifying convention in Rhode Island failed until Sunday, 16 January 1790. Ironically, on that date the upper and lower houses of the General Assembly were able to concur on a bill authorizing a convention because John Williams of Foster, a Baptist minister and Assembly assistant, was absent, allowing Governor John Collins, a leader of the Country party, to cast the deciding ballot in the upper house for a convention.⁵⁶ Displeased by this turn of events, at their 8 February town meeting the freemen of Foster selected John Williams and Captain William Howard as their delegates to the forthcoming South Kingstown convention and instructed them "to use their uttermost Influence and Abilities to Reject the said proposed New Constitution that the Same be not Adopted and that they Perform in their Endeavors till the final Close of the Said Convention."⁵⁷

In Portsmouth the freemen also elected convention delegates on 8 February, choosing Giles Slocum, Burrington Anthony, Job Durfee, and Peter Barker to represent the town. Then, at "a large Town Meeting" assembled on 27 February, a majority of freemen withdrew support from the Country party and ended their opposition to the Constitution. Marking the shift in sentiment, the town meeting chose as its moderator Giles Lawton, Jr., a man who had voted for the Constitution in the referendum almost two years earlier. A five-man committee—John Thurston (who had also voted for the Constitution in the referendum), Robert Lawton and Thomas Potter (two former holders of major town offices who had left their posts upon the emergence of the Country party), and Thomas Shearman and Joseph Sisson—composed a lengthy set of instructions to the town's four delegates detailing the position of the new majority in favor of ratification.⁵⁸

Sensing the gravity of the occasion, the freemen prefaced their instructions by noting a "most ardent desire to avert the 'Evils which a Rejection of this Constitution, and thereby our Union with the General Government—would

entail on us, and our posterity." These evils and other "Disadvantages and Injuries attendant on a Separation from the Common Natural Union" were enumerated as "languishing Commerce—Decayed Trade—and laid up Vessels . . . the Drooping state of our seaports—and the Depreciating Value of our lands." Decisions about agreeing to a temporary adjournment of the convention and adding amendments to the Constitution for "further Checks or additional Powers" were left to the discretion of the delegates, but the primary direction in the instructions was clear and emphatic: "proceed as speedily as may be to the said convention to be held at South Kingstown . . . then and there to use all your Influence & Ability in order to accomplish the adoption of the said Constitution, and that in as short a time as the Nature of the Business will admit—so that the Town you Represent—and the state at large may no longer suffer."⁵⁹

What accounted for the surge of Federalist sympathy among the people of Portsmouth between October 1789 and February 1790? Because of Rhode Island's antifederal stance, the national Congress was threatening with increasing stridency to impose sanctions on commercial traffic between Rhode Island and the other states. These threats led to an exodus from the Country party by those Portsmouth farmers who prospered through trading associations with Mercantile and Federalist merchants in Newport. The freemen's instructions to their convention delegates indicated both a fear of harsh economic sanctions being imposed on an independent Rhode Island by the national government and a growing confidence among the local population that the central government would not use its powers invidiously or rapaciously. Noting the "extensive Commerce & flourishing State" of neighboring states, the instructions deemed this situation "the consequence of a well-founded Union, under one fixed and permanent Government." Furthermore, the entrance of Rhode Island "into the General Union" would enable all to share "the Benefits & Advantages of the Peace—along with that safety & propriety which a General Government alone can give to this and the United States."⁶⁰



Support for ratification may also have been spurred by residents' hopes of having their claims for war damages paid by the national government. On 9 November 1789 the Portsmouth Town Council revived the process of seeking final settlements by ordering the town clerk to "notify all those who sustained Damage by the British Troops to bring forward their Accounts that they may be certified by the committee who appized the same." Town officials had lost the original estimate of damages, and the committee had to compile a new list. This list enumerated 166 people, whose total claims amounted to more than £160,000.⁶¹ Women accounted for 16, or 10 percent, of the claimants. These women sought a total of £15,124, or an average of £945¼ each. With their claims representing nearly 10 percent of the total damages claimed by the townspeople, the women must have exerted some influence on the local political debate.⁶²

Quaker influence may have been another factor in Portsmouth's shift from antifederalism and Country party support to Federalism. The Constitution's recognition of slavery had caused the Friends to oppose ratification, but in early 1790 the influential Moses Brown worked to change that stance. In a lengthy letter of 4 February 1790 to the leaders of the Rhode Island Monthly

Meeting in Portsmouth—where Friends made up a politically significant part of the population—Brown urged his fellow Quakers to “manifest our opinion as a people of some influence in the state” and convince skeptical neighbors that “the time is come when our acceptance of the new government will be better for us than to any longer stand out being alone [with] no possibility . . . of any advantageous alteration in our favor.” “The nature of the new government would depend more upon the caliber of the men who were sent to administer it than on the Constitution,” Brown observed in the conclusion of his letter. He was now stating his views, he declared, “strictly in the interests of order and good government.”⁶³

By early 1790 attitudes toward the Constitution were changing throughout the state, but these changes did not produce immediate ratification. Constitutional provisions accepting slavery and allowing tax levies by the national government divided delegates at the March session of the ratifying convention, where discussion centered as well on the method of adopting future amendments, the merits of the congressionally proposed Bill of Rights, and even the convention’s authority to adopt the Constitution. Apprehensions that the Constitution and the national government threatened the cherished local autonomy and personal liberty of Rhode Islanders suffused all the debates.⁶⁴ Common ground could not be reached, and the delegates—split roughly between those from the agrarian interior towns, who opposed ratification, and those from the commercial coastal towns, who favored it—voted on 6 March to adjourn the convention until a May session in Newport.⁶⁵

As a representative of Foster, John Williams resolutely upheld the opinion of the majority of the town’s freemen during the March session. Having voted for the adjournment without a vote on ratification, he justified his action with this proclamation to the assembled delegates:

I did not think of say[ing] any thing on this Matter but we have been so repeatedly called on by Gentlemen who have been Candid as we and we as candid as they. These Gent have called for our Reasons. But they are hardly to be persuaded that we have any Reasons. . . . We are on the side . . . of the People. We are to Act for them. . . . this Convention originates from the choic[e] of the Body . . . of the Peopl[e] and we know coming from them that it is the Sentiments of the Great Body of the People that this Constituti[on] Should be rejected.

Williams closed his speech by indicating that he would change his vote only after a change in popular sentiment. Earlier in the convention he had seconded a motion to refer a Rhode Island-promulgated “Bill of Rights and Amendments” to the freemen assembled in town meeting in each town on the third Wednesday of April for their review. These proposed amendments to the Constitution encapsulated the Country concern for the preservation of individual liberty, states’ rights, and local prerogatives, and they expressed opposition to slavery.⁶⁶

Records of the debates during the March session of the convention include no utterances by any delegate from Portsmouth and show only that all four voted for the successful motion to adjourn. Divisions and uncertainties among the town’s delegates may explain their reticence. Giles Slocum and Burrington Anthony had voted against ratification at the referendum in March 1788, and perhaps they were now uncomfortable about switching positions to conform with the change of opinion in the town. Job Durfee, who had not voted in the referendum, was a Quaker who had become the first inhabitant of Portsmouth to emancipate a slave under the manumission law passed by the General

Assembly in February 1784. His recent conversion to antislavery sentiments may have heightened his moral sensibilities and disinclined him to heed the instructions of his fellow freemen, which were rooted principally in economic concerns.⁶⁷ Peter Barker, the remaining delegate, appears in none of the pertinent records of the period and may have been chosen for the delegation because his lack of a political background made him acceptable to both the still-competing Country and Mercantile factions in the town.

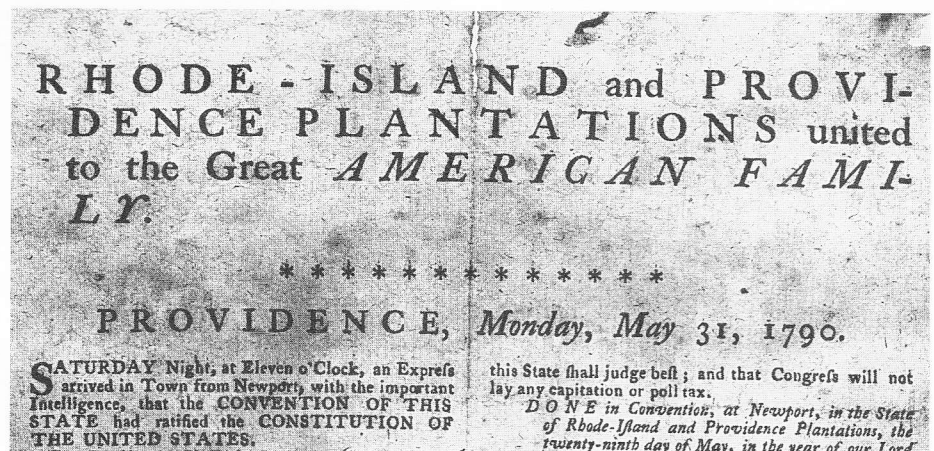
On 26 April the reigning Mercantile and Federalist elements in Portsmouth convened a town meeting to end any remaining diffidence and equivocation by the town's delegates. A majority of the assembled freemen reiterated their prior instructions in support of ratification, and in very clear language they prohibited their delegates from agreeing to another adjournment. Inexplicably, and perhaps testifying to an accommodation with still-active Country party adherents, the freemen did not select a new group of delegates committed to ratifying the Constitution.⁶⁸

Severe external and internal pressures confronted the ratifying convention when it reconvened at Newport on 25 May 1790. The national government had postponed long-threatened trade and economic sanctions against Rhode Island for the last time. People in some circles outside of Rhode Island were calling for dismemberment of the state and redistribution of its territory to neighboring states. On 24 May the freemen at a Providence town meeting had voted to secede from Rhode Island and make an independent arrangement with the United States unless the Constitution was approved. Newporters also spoke of secession.⁶⁹

These urgent concerns resulted in five days of frenetic debate and maneuvering among the convention's delegates. On 28 May a vote for yet another lengthy adjournment failed to carry by a majority of nine. When the question of ratification was finally brought to a vote the next day, the delegates approved the measure by the narrow margin of 34 to 32. John Williams and William Howard, the delegates from Foster, steadfastly represented the wishes of their fellow townspeople and voted with the losing side.⁷⁰

Steadfastness did not characterize the behavior of the delegates from Portsmouth. One of them moved for an overnight adjournment late in the afternoon of 28 May in order to have "liberty to go home and state to his constituents the situation of affairs."⁷¹ This erratic action prompted the hasty assembly of a town meeting the following morning, when angry Portsmouth freemen again declared their instructions calling for ratification; "any Delay in

On 29 May 1790 Rhode Island became the last of the original thirteen states to ratify the United States Constitution. Detail from a broadside, 1790. RIHS Collection (RH X3 1953).



Ratifying . . . by an adjournment or Rejection thereof will in the consequences be very injurious to this State, and particularly to the interests of the Town of Portsmouth." Choosing, for unknown reasons, not to unseat the reluctant representative and send a replacement, the freemen instead absolved themselves of responsibility for the consequences of any recalcitrant actions by their delegates

Should they the [delegates] obstinately persist in measures opposed to the Declared and repeated sentiments of the Town—then the good People thereof do and will hold themselves clear of the Evil consequences and Distruction which must evince to the State at large on such Delay or Rejection by having thus acted their part as far as in them lays to advert those Evils.

To ensure that these instructions reached the convention, the freemen assigned a messenger to deliver one copy to Burrington Anthony, the head of Portsmouth's delegation, and another copy to the convention's president. Only Burrington Anthony and Peter Barker followed the instructions and voted for ratification. Giles Slocum continued his long-standing opposition to the Constitution and voted against ratification. Job Durfee, evidently torn between his moral principles and political obligations, absented himself from the convention at the time of the decisive vote.⁷²

The election of town council members in Portsmouth that spring resulted in the turnover of all six council seats, effectively purging the council of its Country party supporters (including Giles Slocum). Most of the new members had been prominent in local Federalist ranks. On 21 June 1790 the new councilmen took "solemn Engagements to support the Constitution of the United States" and settled into the routine of business.⁷³ The open political culture in Portsmouth had allowed control to pass from the Country party to the Federalist party, reflecting a distinct change in the town's sense of how its particular needs could best be served.

The agitated state of politics in Rhode Island calmed quickly after the Constitution was ratified. A visit to the state by President George Washington in August 1790 served to welcome Rhode Islanders into the Union.

In December 1791 the Bill of Rights became part of the Constitution, codifying the safeguards to personal liberties that many Antifederalists had deemed essential. Arthur Fenner of Providence, a former Country party adherent committed to reconciling Country and Mercantile differences, had been elected governor April 1790. His candidacy attracted a unanimous vote of 176 proxies in Foster 70 more than Country party incumbent John Collins had drawn the preceding year. Fenner balanced political interests so ably that he would remain governor until his death in 1807. The General Assembly played a role in settling political

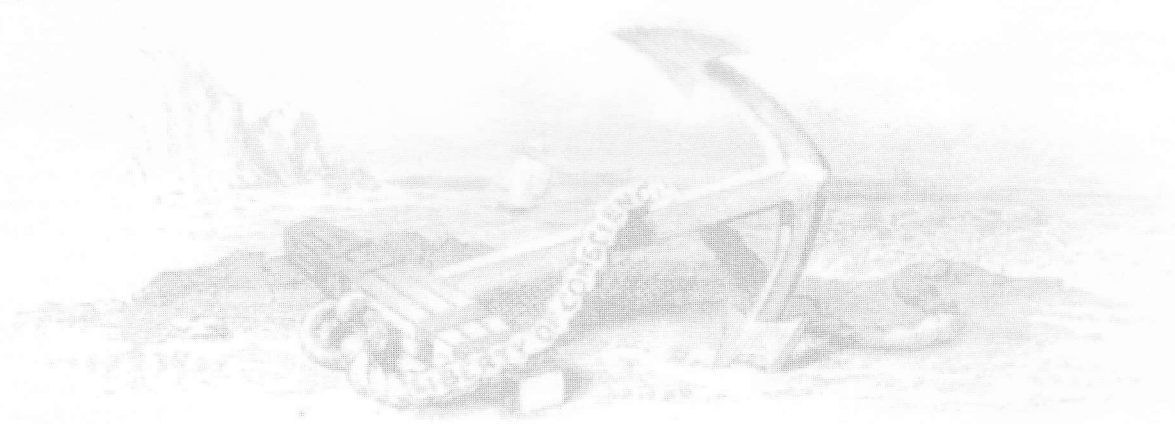


President Washington visited Rhode Island in August 1790, after the state had ratified the Constitution. Mezzotint portrait by William Hamlin, 1799. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 4013).

affairs in Rhode Island by electing a former member of the Country party, Joseph Stanton of Charlestown, and a former member of the Mercantile party, Theodore Foster, then of Providence, as United States senators.⁷⁴



A simple calculus guided the behavior of people in Portsmouth and Foster throughout the tumultuous period stretching from the Revolutionary War to the ratification of the Constitution. Considerations of local interests and local control consistently motivated the chosen courses of action. Sharing in a widespread resentment of overbearing British rule, the two towns initially offered their enthusiastic support to the war for American independence. Growing economic burdens related to the war effort later tested the townspeople's commitment to independence and nurtured suspicions regarding the American central government. Such suspicions, prevalent especially in the state's agricultural towns, contributed to the rise of the Country party after a nationalist element in the central government showed itself willing to pressure the states for taxes under the Articles of Confederation and then sought a new plan of government that would strengthen the national government's power at the expense of state prerogatives. Unable to see how this new Constitution would benefit their localities, the majority of townspeople in both Portsmouth and Foster initially opposed its ratification. By late 1789, however, growing confidence in local economic prospects under a united government helped to persuade a majority in Portsmouth to change their position. This new majority may well have provided the decisive votes in favor of ratifying the Constitution in Rhode Island, bringing all Rhode Islanders, for better or worse, into the federal Union.⁷⁵



Notes

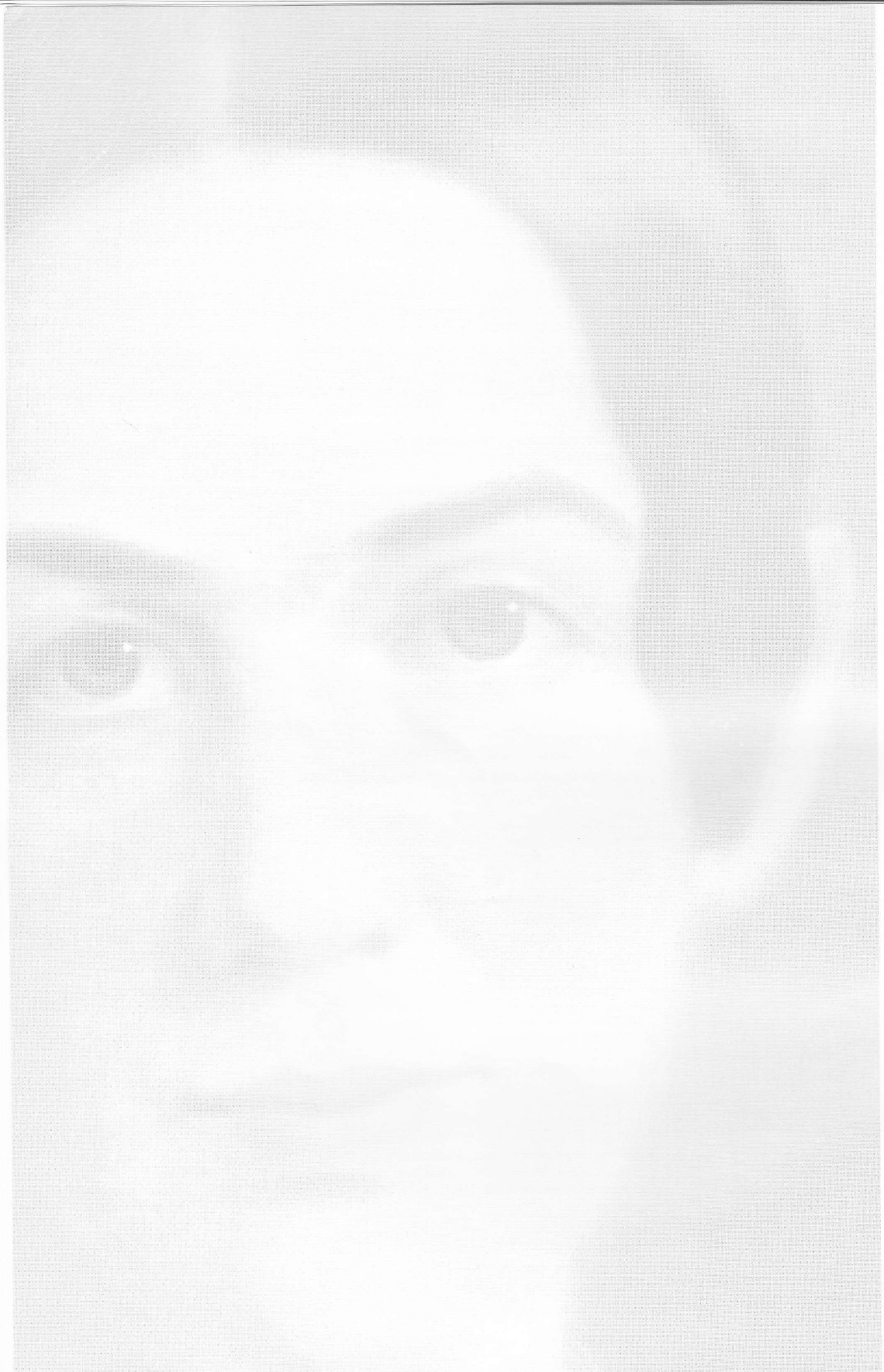
1. Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1978), 78-83; Forrest McDonald, "The Anti-Federalists, 1781-1789," in Jack P. Greene, ed., *The Reinterpretation of the American Revolution, 1763-1789* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 366-67; Cecelia M. Kenyon, "Men of Little Faith: The Anti-Federalists on the Nature of Representative Government," *ibid.*, 535; Charles M. Andrews, *Our Earliest Colonial Settlements: Their Diversities of Origin and Later Characteristics* (1933; reprint, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966), 92.
2. Robert E. Shalhope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of An Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 29 (1972):72. For the fullest discussion of the ideology of republicanism during the Revolutionary and founding periods, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972).
3. William D. Metz, "The Road to Rebellion," *The 1965-1966 Rhode Island Yearbook* (Providence: n.p., 1965), H40; William G. McLoughlin, *Rhode Island: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 82-84; Stephen Hopkins, *The Rights of Colonies Examined* (1764), reprinted in John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England*, 10 vols. (Providence: Knowles, Anthony, 1856-65), 6:416-27; *Silas Downer, Forgotten Patriot: His Life and Writings*, ed. Carl Bridenbaugh (Providence: Rhode Island Bicentennial Foundation, 1974).
4. Marion I. Wright and Robert J. Sullivan, *The Rhode Island Atlas* (Providence: Rhode Island Publications Society, 1982), 137; Portsmouth Town Meeting Records, Portsmouth town clerk's office, 1:322 (30 Aug. 1774); William Franklin Tucker, *Historical Sketch of the Town of Charlestown, in Rhode Island, from 1636 to 1876* (Westerly, R.I.: B. B. & J. H. Utter, 1877), 46.
5. Bartlett, *Records* 7:283.
6. *Ibid.*, 269-71, 283.
7. *Ibid.*, 267, 8:294. The General Assembly moved to restore regular elections in Portsmouth, Middletown, and Jamestown in October 1779, when the British evacuated the islands. The act excluded "every person within said towns, who hath signed the association, or taken an active part with the enemy . . . from electing or being elected to any office . . . or of voting or acting in the said town meetings." *Ibid.* 8:603-4.
8. Irving B. Richman, *Rhode Island: A Study in Separatism* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1905), 241; George H. Kellner and J. Stanley Lemons, *Rhode Island: The Independent State* (Woodlands Hills, Calif.: Windsor, 1982), 39; Patrick T. Conley, "Rhode Island Constitutional Issues during the Early National Period," in *Federal Rhode Island: The Age of the China Trade, 1790-1820*, ed. Linda Lotridge Levin (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1978), 2; Richard B. Morris, *The Forging of the Union* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 88.
9. Portsmouth Town Meeting Records 1:326 (5 June 1775), 329 (27 Aug. 1775), 329 (29 Aug. 1775).
10. *Ibid.*, 309 (20 Feb. 1776), 310 (27 Feb. 1776), 311 (17 Apr. 1776).
11. Arthur A. Ross, *A Discourse Embracing the Civil and Religious History of Rhode-Island . . .* (Providence: H. H. Brown, 1838), 37; Portsmouth Town Meeting Records 1:332 (17 Sept. 1776), 333 (2 Dec. 1776).
12. Bartlett, *Records* 7:399-402.
13. Wright and Sullivan, *Rhode Island Atlas*, 140; Portsmouth Town Meeting Records 1:334 (an undated minute probably recorded shortly after the British evacuation).
14. Samuel Greene Arnold, *History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (1860; reprint, New York: D. Appleton, 1878), 2:366, 396. A similar story with different dates is recounted in Wright and Sullivan, *Rhode Island Atlas*, 140.
15. Most general histories of Rhode Island include an account of the Battle of Rhode Island. See, for example, McLoughlin, *Rhode Island*, 97-98, and Wright and Sullivan, *Rhode Island Atlas*, 141-43. A letter of 6 April 1777 from William Ellery, a representative from Rhode Island at the Continental Congress, to Rhode Island governor Nicholas Cooke indicates the distress felt by Rhode Islanders at not being able to organize the military means to drive the British off Aquidneck Island. William R. Staples, *Rhode Island in the Continental Congress, with the Journal of the Convention that Adopted the*

- Constitution, 1765-1790* (Providence: Providence Press, 1870), 125. For an account of the destruction left by the British on Aquidneck Island, see Arnold, *State of Rhode Island* 2:446.
16. [Ancelin V. Lynch], *Foster, Rhode Island*, Statewide Historical Preservation Report P-F-1 ([Providence]: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1982), 14; Wright and Sullivan, *Rhode Island Atlas*, 141-42.
 17. Wright and Sullivan, *Rhode Island Atlas*, 143.
 18. Scituate Town Meeting Records, 1731-1787, Scituate town clerk's office, entry for 1 Feb. 1779.
 19. Portsmouth Town Meeting Records 1:335 (27 Nov. 1779); Jackson Turner Main, *The Sovereign States, 1775-1783*, (New York: Franklin Watts, 1973), 366-67.
 20. Bartlett, *Records* 9:430. I have found no evidence of estates being claimed and sold by the state under this law. The estates of Loyalists had been confiscated by the Rhode Island government and used as collateral to support the value of specie bills before being sold to raise funds directly for the state treasury. Main, *Sovereign States*, 283-84. For a summary of the various efforts of the state to sustain its treasury between 1775 and 1781, see Main, *Sovereign States*, 364-68.
 21. Foster Town Meeting Records, Foster town clerk's office, 1:2-3 (7 Dec. 1781); Charles Carroll, *Rhode Island: Three Centuries of Democracy*, 4 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing, 1932), 1:347.
 22. Foster Town Meeting Records 1:6 (11 July 1782).
 23. Portsmouth Town Meeting Records 1:362-63 (8 Aug. 1782). The final clause in this act directed the town clerk to "Immediately Cause Four or more Copies of this Act to be Posted up in the Most Publick places in this Town so all the Inhabitants may be apprized thereof."
 24. *Ibid.*, 364 (27 Aug. 1786), 373 (21 Feb. 1784), 377 (21 Apr. 1784), 379 (7 June 1784), 381 (31 Aug. 1784).
 25. *Ibid.*, 384 (4 Oct. 1784).
 26. Foster Town Meeting Records 1:7 (14 Dec. 1782), 9 (26 May 1783), 10 (15 Dec. 1783).
 27. For fuller accounts of the two impost confrontations and the extreme vituperation visited upon the people and government of Rhode Island for their contrary stances, see Richman, *Rhode Island*, 244-48; Merrill Jensen, *The New Nation: A History of the United States during the Confederation, 1781-1789* (New York: Vintage Books, 1950), 64; Josiah B. Bowditch, "Legislative History of Rhode Island: A Brief Account of Legislation from 1640 to 1900," in *Legislative History and Souvenir of Rhode Island, 1899 and 1900*, ed. William Harrison Taylor (Providence: E. L. Freeman & Sons, 1900), 186; Kellner and Lemons, *Rhode Island*, 39; 'Morris, *Forging of the Union*, 41.
 28. The appellations *Country* and *Court* had been applied to contending political groups in England during the late seventeenth century, and the composition and beliefs of these groups corresponded to the contending parties in late eighteenth-century Rhode Island. James H. Hutson, "Country, Court, and Constitution: Antifederalism and the Historians," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 38 (1981): 337-68.
 29. Frank Greene Bates, *Rhode Island and the Formation of the Union* (New York: Macmillan, 1898), 119-20.
 30. Bowditch, "Legislative History," 187; John P. Kaminski, "Democracy Run Rampant: Rhode Island in the Confederation," in *The Human Dimension of Nation Making: Essays on Colonial and Revolutionary America*, ed. James Kirby Martin (Madison, Wis.: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1976), 249; Carroll, *Rhode Island* 1:389; Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 368; John P. Kaminski, "Rhode Island: Protecting State Interests," in *Ratifying the Constitution*, ed. Allan Gillespie and Michael Lienesh (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1989), 369-70; Irwin H. Polishook, *Rhode Island and the Union, 1774-1795* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 124-25.
 31. Polishook, *Rhode Island and the Union*, 124-25; John Kaminski, *Paper Politics: The Northern State Loan Offices during the Confederation* (University Microfilms, 1975), 177-78. Governor Collins expressed the central feature of Country party ideology in his letter to the national Congress explaining the decision of the Rhode Island legislature not to send delegates to the Constitutional Convention: "Our conduct has been reprobated by the illiberal, and many severe and unjust sarcasms propagated against us; but, sir, when we state to you the reason, and evince the cause, the liberal mind will be convinced that we were actuated by that great principle which hath ever been the characteristic of this state,—the love of the true constitutional liberty, and the fear we have of making innovations on the rights and liberties of the citizens at large." Bartlett, *Records* 10:258.
 32. Kaminski, "Democracy Run Rampant," 246; Hillman Metcalf Bishop, "Why Rhode Island Opposed the Federal Constitution," *Rhode Island History* 8 (1949): 118; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 369.
 33. Main, *Sovereign States*, 184; Bowditch, "Legislative History," 186; Polishook, *Rhode Island and the Union*, 44, 148; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 369; Kaminski, "Democracy Run Rampant," 243-44.
 34. The General Assembly failed to pass a paper-money law in March 1786 despite expressions favoring such a measure from the town meetings of twenty-seven of the thirty towns in the state. Kaminski, "Democracy Run Rampant," 249; Forrest McDonald, *The Formation of the American Republic, 1776-1790* (1965; reprint, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967), 124-25; Polishook, *Rhode Island and the Union*, 120.
 35. The most offensive feature of the law to its detractors was its "lodgement" provision that allowed a debtor to force a creditor to accept payment in the inflated paper currency or forfeit the debt. Rhode Island's Supreme Court nullified this provision in the case of *Trevett v. Weeden* (1786), but the General Assembly reinstated the clause. Few people placed lodgements. Kaminski, *Paper Politics*, 204.
 36. Kaminski, "Democracy Run Rampant," 265. The most onerous proposal associated with the paper-money program was a measure known as the Test Act. This act would have required Rhode Islanders to take an oath in support of paper money, with refusal to take the oath carrying stiff penalties: citizens would be disfranchised, lawyers disbarred, merchants prohibited from sending or receiving vessels, and any sitting government officials removed from office. After debates in town meetings across the state during the fall of 1786, the Test Act was approved by only three towns, and the General Assembly voted down the measure decisively. Kaminski, "Protecting State Interests," 373. For further information on the paper-money program, see Kaminski, *Paper Politics*, 43-45, 179, 205, "Protecting State Interests," 371-73, and "Democracy Run Rampant," 252-53, 262-63; Polishook, *Rhode Island and the Union*, 127-28, 161-62; Morris,

Notes continued

- Forging of the Union*, 157; Carroll, *Rhode Island* 1:389; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 367; Bates, *Formation of the Union*, 150; McLoughlin, *Rhode Island*, 100, 104; Patrick T. Conley, "Rhode Island," in *The Constitution and the States: The Role of the Original Thirteen in the Framing and Adoption of the Federal Constitution*, ed. Patrick T. Conley and John P. Kaminski (Madison, Wis.: Madison House, 1988), 280, and "Rhode Island Constitutional Issues," 3, 10-11.
37. Foster Town Meeting Records 1:16 (19 Apr. 1786); Polishook, *Rhode Island and the Union*, 125n.
 38. Foster Town Meeting Records 1:17-18 (17 June 1786), 20 (30 Sept. 1786), 20 (21 Oct. 1786); Kaminski, "Democracy Run Rampant," 259-60.
 39. Bates, *Formation of the Union*, 167-68; *Representative Men and Old Families of Rhode Island: Genealogical Records and Historical Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens and of Many of the Old Families* (Chicago: J. H. Beers, 1908), 748; data on officeholding derived from Foster Town Meeting Records, vol. 1, 1780s and 1790s; information on loans from the land bank taken from Foster's "Record of Mortgage Deeds with principal bonds, 1786-1787, in accordance with provisions of an act passed May 1786 entitled 'An Act for raising £100,000,'" in Grand Committee Office Account Books A and B, 1786-1803, Rhode Island State Archives, 31-32.
 40. A. Z., *Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, 26 Feb. 1786, as cited in Kaminski, *Paper Politics*, 171.
 41. Foster's "Record of Mortgage Deeds," 31-32; Foster Town Meeting Records, vol. 1, 1780s and 1790s; Lynch, *Foster, Rhode Island*, 70.
 42. Portsmouth Town Meeting Records 1:396 (28 Jan. 1786), 2:17 (28 Aug. 1787), 21 (24 Mar. 1788), 39 (1 June 1789). The vote in favor of easing credit restrictions was 63 to 8.
 43. Ibid. 1:367-68 (16 Apr. 1783), 2:17 (28 Aug. 1787), 1:384 (4 Oct. 1784).
 44. Staples, *Continental Congress*, 584; Polishook, *Rhode Island and the Union*, 198.
 45. Bartlett, *Records* 10:271-72. For details on the debates and votes leading to this enactment, see Bates, *Formation of the Union*, 163-64.
 46. These figures have been taken from the corrected count of vote totals found in Kaminski, "Democracy Run Rampant," 268-69. Most sources record the vote as 2,708 nay, 273 yea; see, for example, Bartlett, *Records* 10:275. Because of the boycott, Providence and Newport—mercantile towns eager to see Rhode Island join the federal Union—together produced only one vote in favor of ratification. Bates, *Formation of the Union*, 163-64; Polishook, *Rhode Island and the Union*, 198-99.
 47. Bartlett, *Records* 10:275; Staples, *Continental Congress*, 591-92.
 48. Portsmouth's "Record of Mortgage Deeds" in Grand Committee Office Account Books A and B, 1786-1803, 3-4; Staples, *Continental Congress*, 591-92.
 49. *Representative Men and Old Families*, 809-10, 1215-16; "Historic Building Sheet, Southeastern Portsmouth Rural Estates, Rhode Island Statewide Survey," folder at Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Providence.
 50. Bartlett, *Records* 7:349; Portsmouth Tax Book, 1788, Portsmouth town clerk's office; Richard M. Bayles, ed., *History of Newport County, Rhode Island . . .* (New York: L. E. Preston, 1888), 659-63; Staples, *Continental Congress*, 591; information on officeholding derived from Portsmouth Town Meeting Records, vols. 1 and 2, 1780s and 1790s.
 51. Portsmouth Town Meeting Records, vols. 1 and 2, 1780s and 1790s.
 52. Portsmouth's "Record of Mortgage Deeds," 3-4; Portsmouth Tax Books, 1783 and 1788, Portsmouth town clerk's office. No information has been found on the occupations of the twelve minority voters, but it is safe to guess that most, if not all, were farmers.
 53. Portsmouth Town Meeting Records, vols. 1 and 2, 1780s and 1790s; Portsmouth's "Record of Mortgage Deeds," 3-4; Bayles, *History of Newport County*, 659-63.
 54. "The generality and brevity which made the National Constitution a model of draftsmanship and a viable fundamental law," observes Cecelia M. Kenyon, "inspired in the Antifederalists only fear." Kenyon, "Men of Little Faith," 564-65.
 55. Portsmouth Town Meeting Records 2:33 (20 Dec. 1788), 39 (1 June 1789), 42 (19 Oct. 1789); Foster Town Meeting Records 1:30 (19 Oct. 1789).
 56. Historians have debated the motives of the Country party leadership and Governor Collins in acquiescing in a ratifying convention. Explanations have ranged from the successful completion of the paper-money program of debt reduction and economic relief to fear of sanctions from the national government and outside hostility against the state to admirable personal attitude on the part of Collins. See Polishook, *Rhode Island and the Union*, 211-12; John P. Kaminski, "Political Sacrifice and Demise—John Collins and Jonathan J. Hazard, 1786-1790," *Rhode Island History* 35 (1976): 91-93; Patrick Conley, *Democracy in Decline: Rhode Island's Constitutional Development, 1776-1841* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1977), 110-12.
 57. Foster Town Meeting Records 1:31 (8 Feb. 1790).
 58. Portsmouth Town Meeting Records 2:44-45 (8, 27 Feb. 1790).
 59. Ibid., 44-49 (27 Feb. 1790). The freemen chose Samuel Elam to deliver these instructions to the town's delegates and the president of the convention. Elam was a transplanted Newport Quaker merchant who owned a four-hundred-acre farm in southwestern Portsmouth. He served a pair of terms as a deputy in the General Assembly from Portsmouth in the early 1790s. Duk of La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, extract from *Travels through the United States of North America in 1795, 1796, and 1797*, in *Pictures of Rhode Island in the Past, 1642-1833, by Travellers and Observers*, ed. Gertrude Selwyn Kimball (Providence: Preston & Rounds, 1900), 132-33; Thomas R. Hazard, *Recollections of Olden Times . . .* (Newport, R.I.: John P. Sanborn, 1879), 91-95; Portsmouth Town Meeting Records, vol. 2, 1790s.
 60. Portsmouth Town Meeting Records 2:44-49 (27 Feb. 1790).
 61. Portsmouth Town Council Minute Book, Portsmouth town clerk's office, 7:151 (9 Nov. 1789). Officials in Portsmouth completed this task on 26 April 1790. Portsmouth Town Meeting Records 2:52 (26 Apr. 1790). The town council in Foster, sitting on 27 March 1790, directed an official to notify all persons within the town with any claims against the national government arising from the war. Few people in Foster had such claims, and the council's action amounted to nothing. Foster Town Council Minute Book, Foster town clerk's office, 1:70 (27 Mar. 1790).
 62. Six women claimed damages over £1,000, and seven women claimed damages under £200. Bayles, *History of Newport County*, 659-63. For other assessments of damage claims and their role in the politics of Rhode Island and Portsmouth, see McLoughlin, *Rhode Island*, 102-4; Patrick

- T. Conley, "Rhode Island in Disunion, 1787-1790," *Rhode Island History* 31 (1972): 109, "Rhode Island Constitutional Issues," 19, and "Rhode Island" (in Conley and Kaminski, *Constitution and the States*), 285-86.
63. Thompson, *Moses Brown*, 241-42. For another account of Moses Brown's efforts to influence Quakers, see Robert N. Cool et al., *Rhode Island Quakers in the American Revolution, 1775-1790* (n.p., 1976), 21-22. For Quaker antislavery sentiments, see McLoughlin, *Rhode Island*, 74, 78-79, 106-7; Cool, *Rhode Island Quakers*, 29; Arline Ruth Kiven, *Then Why The Negroes: The Nature and Course of the Anti-Slavery Movement in Rhode Island, 1637-1861* ([Providence]: Urban League of Rhode Island, 1973), 31-32; Conley, "Rhode Island Constitutional Issues," 15-16; Rufus M. Jones, Isaac Sharpless, and Amelia M. Gummere, *The Quakers in the American Colonies* (1911; reprint, New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 164-65; Sydney V. James, *A People among Peoples: Quaker Benevolence in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 140, 220, 228-29; Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 175-78, 185-86.
 64. For a summary of the issues contested at the March 1790 convention, see Conley, "Rhode Island" (in Conley and Kaminski, *Constitution and the States*), 277, 280-85. The fullest account of transactions at the convention appears in *Theodore Foster's Minutes of the Convention Held at South Kingstown, Rhode Island, in March 1790, Which Failed to Adopt the Constitution of the United States*, ed. Robert C. Cotner (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1929).
 65. The delegates seeking an adjournment claimed that such an action was necessary so that the freemen could consider the proceedings of the convention and issue new instructions. Historians, though, believe the move for a lengthy adjournment was merely a political ploy by Country party leaders to guarantee the party's success in the spring elections. Polishook, *Rhode Island and the Union*, 223; Kaminski, *Paper Politics*, 245.
 66. *Minutes of the Convention*, 77, 89-90. Benjamin Bourne of Providence ridiculed Williams for not supplying "a single Reason" for his position against a vote on ratification and expressed hope for a change of heart among "the Inhabitants of Foster and all the other Towns." Rhode Island was the only state to suggest an amendment related to the slavery provisions in the Constitution. Patrick T. Conley and Albert T. Klyberg, *Rhode Island's Road to Liberty* (Providence: Rhode Island Bicentennial Foundation, 1987).
 67. Staples, *Continental Congress*, 659. Durfee emancipated a twenty-nine-year-old female slave named Lear. At least nine other inhabitants of Portsmouth freed slaves over the next fifteen years. See Portsmouth Town Council Minute Book 7:86, 89, 96, 107, 125, and 8:34, 46, 99, 101.
 68. Portsmouth's freemen authorized payment of the accounts presented by each delegate at a town meeting on 21 April 1790. The sums amounted to £2 8s. for each man. Portsmouth Town Meeting Records 2:50 (21 Apr. 1790), 51 (26 Apr. 1790).
 69. Conley, "Rhode Island Constitutional Issues," 22-24, and "Rhode Island" (in Conley and Kaminski, *Constitution and the States*), 287-89; Kaminski, "Protesting State Interests," 385; Bates, *Formation of the Union*, 196-97.
 70. Staples, *Continental Congress*, 667-73; Polishook, *Rhode Island and the Union*, 229-30.
 71. *United States Chronicle*, 3 June 1790, as quoted in Staples, *Continental Congress*, 669.
 72. Portsmouth Town Meeting Records 2:54-55 (29 May 1790); Staples, *Continental Congress*, 672-73.
 73. Portsmouth Town Meeting Records, vol. 2, 1789 and 1790 voting returns; Portsmouth Town Council Minute Book 7:158 (21 June 1790).
 74. Conley, "Rhode Island" (in Conley and Kaminski, *Constitution and the States*), 292; Foster Town Meeting Records 1:28 (19 Apr. 1789), 31 (21 Apr. 1790). Benjamin Bourne of Providence, a Federalist, won the general election for the sole Rhode Island seat in the United States House of Representatives.
 75. Ratification brought about no immediate change in local life; in both Portsmouth and Foster, localism remained the dominant political philosophy, enduring essentially unchallenged until the Civil War. For further consideration of town government practice, see William M. Ferraro, "Lives of Quiet Desperation: Community and Polity in New England over Four Centuries, The Cases of Portsmouth and Foster, Rhode Island" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1991).



FROM THE COLLECTIONS

“Not Just Another Pretty Face”

LINDA EPPICH

From 22 February to 9 June 1996 the Rhode Island Historical Society's Museum of Rhode Island History at Aldrich House presented an exhibition entitled “Not Just Another Pretty Face.” Focusing on paintings and photographs from the Society's collections, this exhibition explored portraiture from a number of perspectives, including those of dating, symbolism, artistic attribution, relationships and family genealogy, dispelling long-standing myths, conservation-treatment discoveries, twentieth-century portraiture, and the early development of photography. The following is a selection of portraits, with commentary, illustrating a few of these themes.

Portraiture has changed significantly over the three-plus centuries of American art. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries it was the primary art form, affordable only by elite and wealthy patrons. Portraits were usually in the English traditional style. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with the newly prosperous middle class now able to commission images of family members, the demand for portraits grew. Artists, both trained and untrained, were more numerous, and the style of painting shifted away from English techniques. Regional styles of portraiture took on a distinctive American quality. The fact that portraits were treated like ornamental decor did not diminish their importance as symbols of status.

Customers of portraiture demanded true likenesses. Rufus Porter advertised “No Likeness, No Pay” in the Haverhill, Massachusetts, *Gazette* of 31 March 1821 (quoted in *Meet Your Neighbors: New England Portraits, Painters, and Society, 1790-1850*, ed. Caroline Sloat [Sturbridge, Conn.: Old Sturbridge Village, 1992], 37). However, artists who could produce true likenesses that were also flattering to their subject were especially successful. With the advent of photography in the last half of the nineteenth century, less costly images were available to all, and photography became the choice of the populace for capturing images of family members.


The portraits included here, which were chosen for their thematic importance, are not necessarily among the most beautiful in the Society's collections. In any case, standards of beauty differ from one century to another, and the ideal Hollywood or model beauty of today is not represented. Some of the selected portraits may indeed be “not just another pretty face.”

Portraits can be dated reasonably well when information about the artist or the sitter is known. If such information is unavailable, a costume historian can often determine an approximate date from the style of dress depicted.

Little Girl in Blue
 Unidentified artist
 Oil on canvas, 1845
 RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8546)



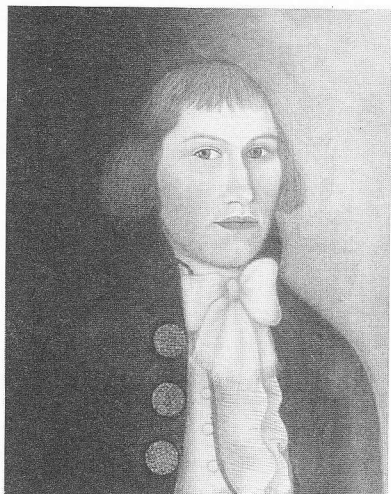
The artist and subject of *Little Girl in Blue* remain unidentified. The name comes from the color of the girl's dress, but it is clearly not the original title of the painting. The portrait can be dated to the approximate period 1840-45 because the subject is shown wearing dress typical of that time. Her skirt is pleated at the waist, and she is wearing pantalettes. Little boys would have worn the same kind of clothing until they were "breeched," or began to wear long pants, but the subject's gender is established by the center part in her hair and the straw bonnet that she carries on her arm. A boy's hair and accessories would have been portrayed differently.

 Gaining the knowledge necessary to attribute paintings to a particular artist takes many years of study of the artist's entire body of work. An art historian must examine many images, know the regions where the artist worked, understand stylistic changes over the span of the artist's career, peruse diaries, wills, and probate inventories, study family histories and genealogies, and follow every lead to new evidence.

The portrait of Julia Pinckney, circa 1820, was attributed to Robert Peckham by a descendant of her family, but it has since been identified as the work of William Massey Strode Doyle (1769-1828) of Boston. This identification was verified by comparison of its style and medium to those of other works signed by or attributed to Doyle. Julia Treadwell (1797-1845) of Providence married Isaac Pinckney (1796-1860) of Philadelphia. They made their residence in the Treadwell family home on North Court Street in Providence. Isaac was in the retail jewelry business in Providence from 1824 to 1848.



Julia Pinckney
 William M. S. Doyle (1769-1828)
 Pastel on paper, circa 1820
 RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8547)



James Burrill, Jr.
Attributed to Sarah Perkins (1771-1831)
Pastel on paper, circa 1800
 RIHS Collection (RHi X3 3026)

Genealogical records, images, and other items associated with a family can be important resources for a museum, as they can help to establish relationships between otherwise disparate collections. The Burrill family of Providence is well represented in the Society's collections through objects, manuscripts, and portraits. James Burrill, Jr., was probably the best-known member of the family. His portrait is attributed to Sarah Perkins, circa 1800.

James Burrill, Jr. (1772-1820) was born in Providence, graduated from the College of Rhode Island (now Brown University), and married Sally Arnold in 1797. They had four daughters; portraits of two of them (and their husbands) are in the Society's collections. James Burrill served in several state offices and was in his first term as a United States senator at the time of his death.

Sometimes the identity of a portrait's subject remains a mystery. The two young ladies depicted here in miniature portraits are Harriet and Catherine DeWolf of Bristol, Rhode Island. Harriet DeWolf (1804-1863) married Jonathan Probst Hall in 1822; her sister, Catherine DeWolf (1806-1853), became the wife of Andrew Jackson Davis. Harriet and Catherine were the daughters of Anna (Bradford) DeWolf and James DeWolf, a merchant, shipowner, manufacturer, and U.S. senator. The miniature portraits, dated circa 1820, may possibly be the work of William Lewis, who painted several other members of the DeWolf family in the early 1820s. But the fundamental problem regarding these likenesses remains: which is Harriet and which is Catherine? The donor of the portraits did not know, and without additional documentation this will probably continue to be one of the mysteries of the Society's collections.

Harriet and Catherine DeWolf
Possibly by William Lewis (1788-after 1838)
Watercolor on ivory, circa 1820
 RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8545)



Artists frequently had the task of indicating a sitter's occupation or station in life. Women were portrayed in rich clothing, holding books or sewing equipment, or with other symbols of womanhood considered genteel (items of household drudgery, like pots and pans, were not shown). Both dress and the objects included in portraits of men could represent the sitters' occupations or accumulation of wealth.

The paisley shawl, fashionable hairstyle, cameo brooch, and serene countenance indicate that the portrait of Mary Ann Foster Pitcher Ingraham (1808-1852) represents a woman of refinement. Mary Ann Foster Pitcher married Luke Parmenter in 1826, and the couple lived in the Providence area. Mary Ann gave birth to a daughter, Almira, in 1827 and a son, Luke, in 1828, three months after her husband's death. Following a lengthy period as a single parent, she was married a second time, to Horatio Nelson Ingraham, in 1845.

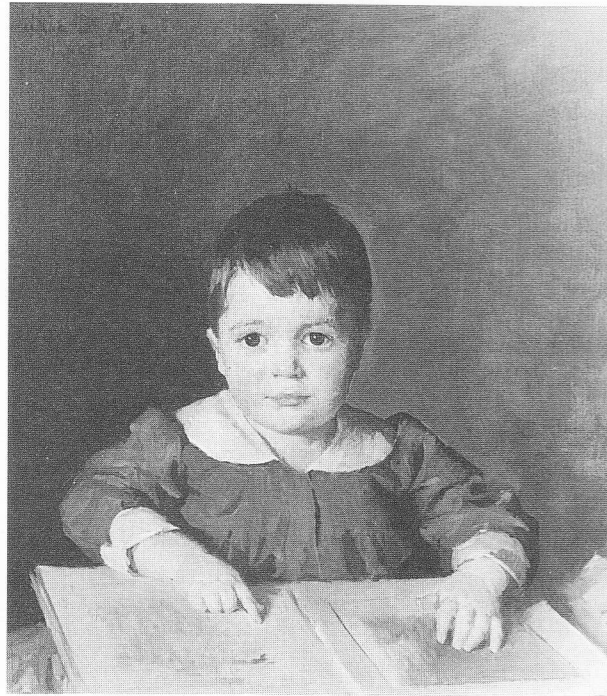
Her portrait is attributed to Cephas Giovanni Thompson (1809-1888). Born in Middleboro, Massachusetts, Thompson lived in Bristol, Rhode Island, from the mid-1830s to 1850. The painting has been erroneously dated to 1830 and also, as a posthumous portrait, to 1852. But the sitter's age, hairstyle, brooch, and rich shawl all seem to date it more closely to 1845, when Mary Ann was thirty-seven and married for the second time.



Mary Ann Foster Pitcher Ingraham
Cephas Giovanni Thompson (1809-1888)
Oil on canvas, circa 1845
RIHS Collection (RHi X3 3076)

✿ The portrait declined as the primary art form in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as realistic landscape, impressionism, and, later, abstract modernism came to dominate the art market (as they still do today). Nevertheless, wealthy families and public figures continued to commission portraits, and children were still often the subject of interest.

George Aldrich
 Maria (Davenport) Page (n.d.)
 Oil on canvas, 1919
 RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8548)



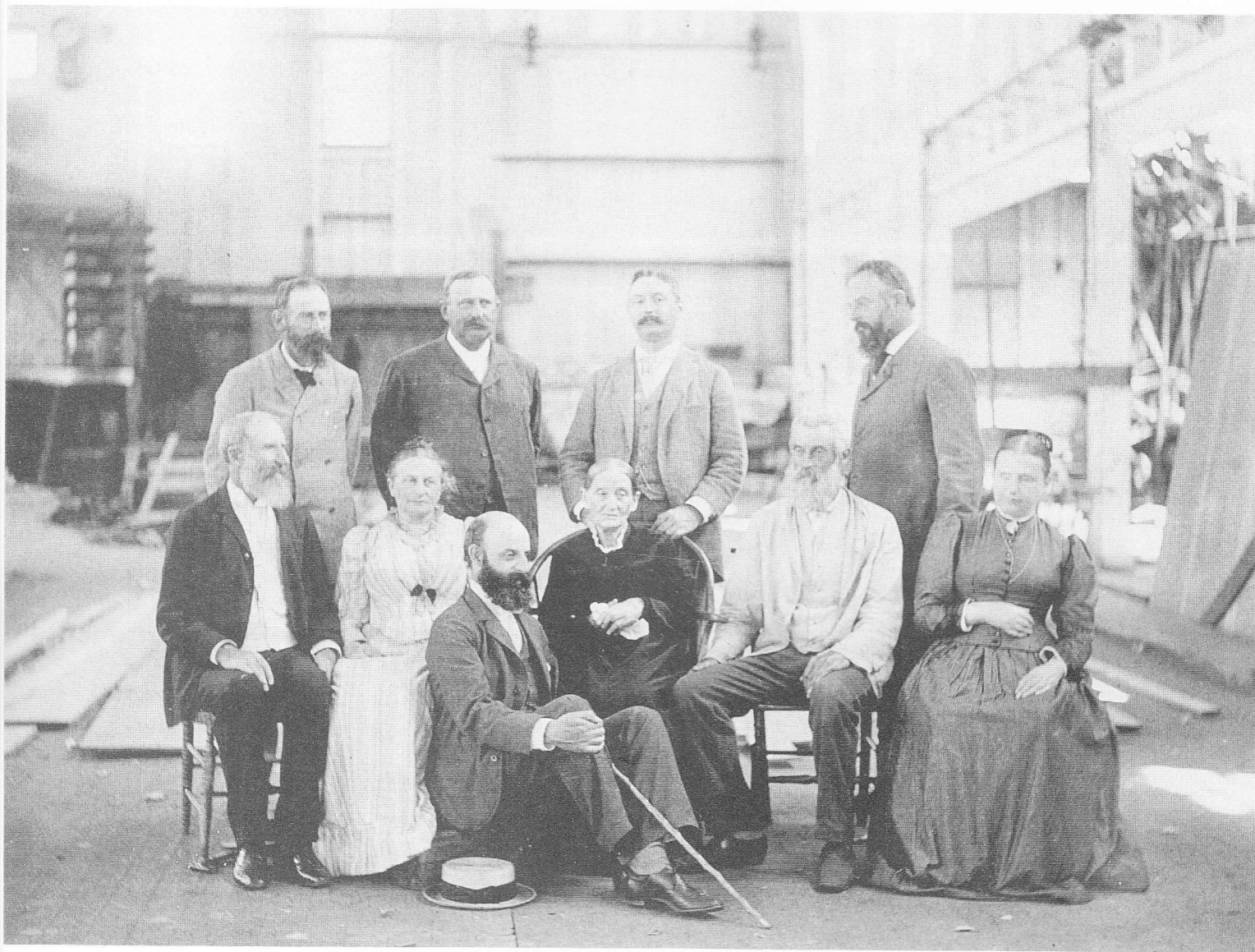
George Aldrich, the son of William Truman Aldrich and the grandson of Senator Nelson Aldrich, was born in 1916. He undoubtedly visited the Aldrich House when his uncle, Winthrop Aldrich, lived there. George married Alice Burrage, and they had two children. The 1919 portrait of George Aldrich is signed by Boston artist Maria (Davenport) Page, who worked and studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

✦ In 1840 the young artist George Fuller (1822-1884) visited the studio of M. Gourand in France and correctly predicted that the new medium of photography would have great appeal for the American public (see *The Life and Works of George Fuller* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1886], 14-15). The technology progressed rapidly, and photographic studios sprang up in American cities and even small towns. The advantages of the medium were its comparative speed in producing likenesses and the lower cost of the images produced.

In the photograph of the Herreshoff family in 1892, Julia Ann (Lewis) Herreshoff (1811-1901) is shown with all nine of her children. Julia Lewis married Charles Frederick Herreshoff, a grandson of John Brown of Providence, in 1833 and moved to the Brown family's Point Pleasant residence in Bristol by 1856. In the front row, left to right, are John Herreshoff, Carolyn Louise (Herreshoff) Chesebrough, Julian Lewis Herreshoff, matriarch Julia (Lewis) Herreshoff, James Brown Herreshoff, and Sally Brown Herreshoff; in the back row, left to right, are Nathanael Greene Herreshoff, Charles Frederick Herreshoff, John Brown Herreshoff, and Lewis Herreshoff.

The nineteenth-century artists who embraced photography were the ones who remained financially solvent. One of these was James Sullivan Lincoln (1811-1888) of Providence, who enhanced his early black-and-white photographic images with oil paints. Lincoln appealed to a varied clientele by embracing photography while continuing to paint formal portraits. Today photography remains the medium of choice for capturing images of loved ones, both in everyday life and on special occasions like birthdays, weddings, graduations, and vacations.

The Herreshoff Family
Unidentified photographer
Albumen print, 1892
RIHS Collection (RHi X3 2764)



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*The Colony House in Newport. Engraving, 1832,
from a drawing by G. Walls. RIHS Collection
(RH: X3 5982).*