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The Society Celebrates Its 175th Anniversary

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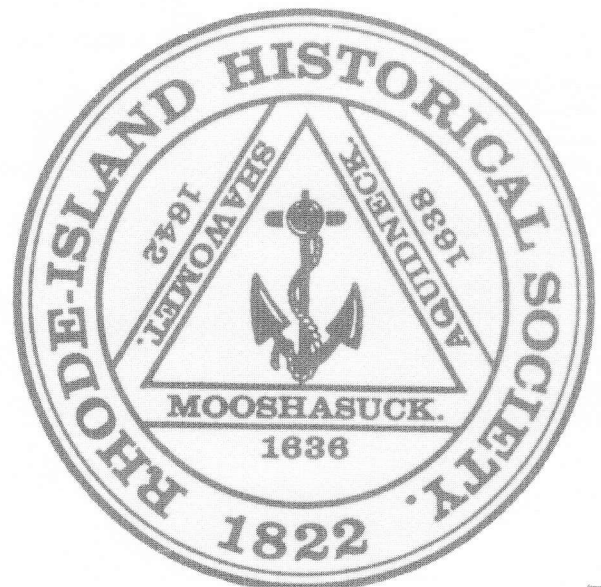
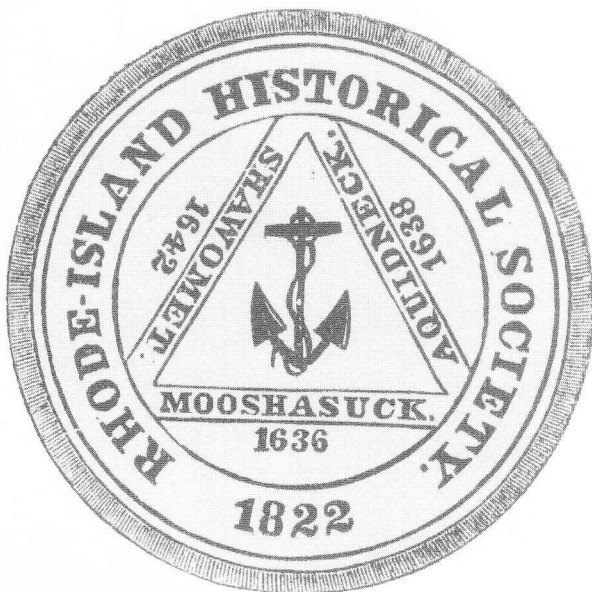
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*Be it enacted by the General Assembly
thereof it is enacted...*



*...The purpose of procuring and preserving whatever relates
to the civil and ecclesiastical history of this state...*

embly, and by the authority

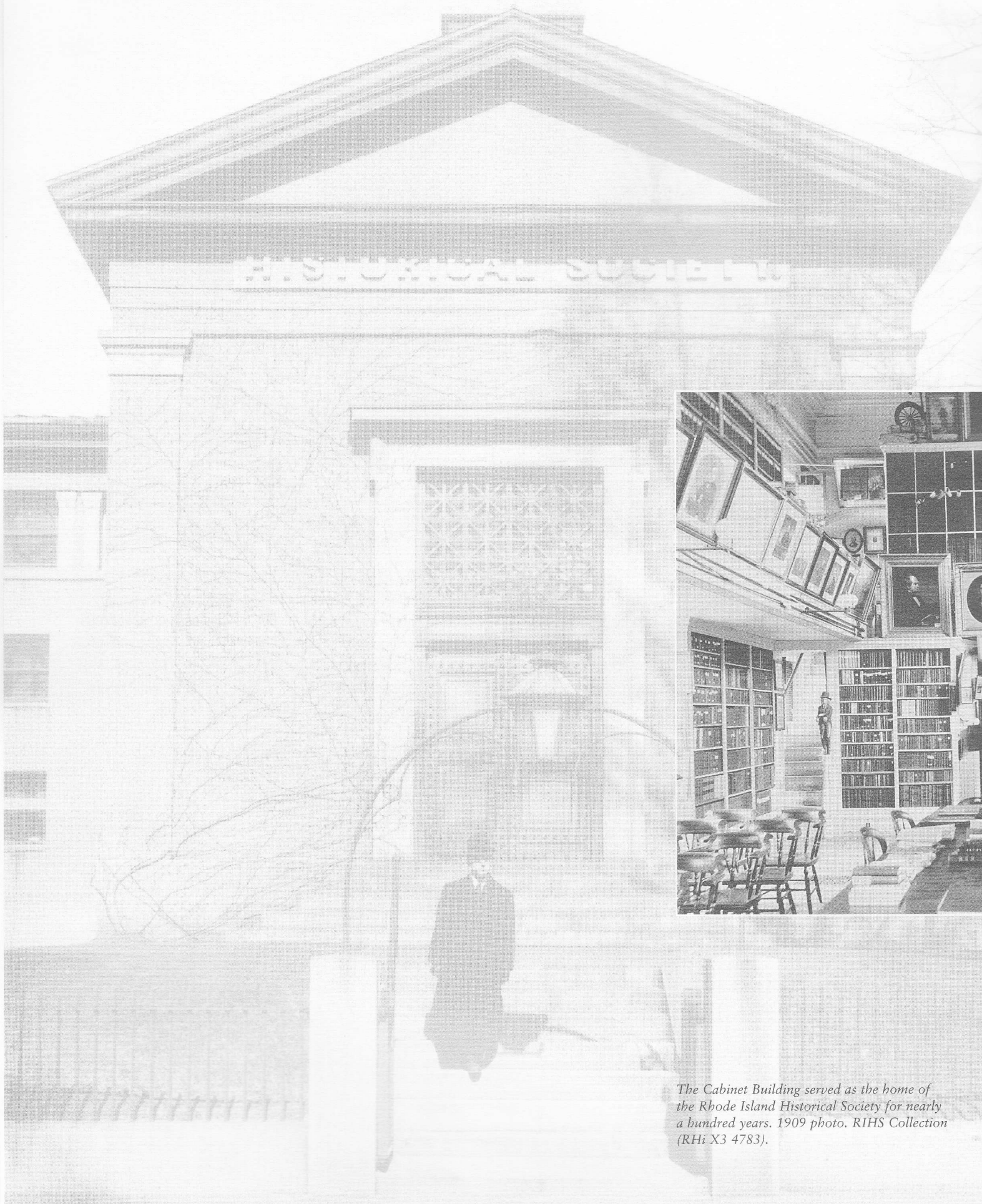
Introduction



*W*ith this issue of *Rhode Island History* we celebrate the Rhode Island Historical Society's 175th anniversary. In our lead article, Albert T. Klyberg, the Society's executive director, traces the history of the Society—its plans, its projects, and its achievements—from its inception in a Providence law office in 1822 to its projected relocation to Heritage Harbor, the state's new heritage center, after the turn of the next millennium. Further details of the early years are provided by Amos Perry, the Society's secretary from 1873 to 1899. Next we take a look at William D. Ely's 1890 proposal that women be admitted to Society membership. Finally, in a speech delivered at the Society's anniversary gala at Heritage Harbor, Al Klyberg recalls some notable past voyages, literal and figurative, and looks forward to the next great voyage the Society will undertake. "By celebrating Rhode Island's rich and various history," he declares, "Heritage Harbor will prepare our people to continue embarking on such voyages."

"The spirits of our founders and of the people who have supported the Society are present . . . in this new undertaking," he told that gathering. "They are here not in some ghostly, paranormal sense but in our ability to use history to understand where we have come from, and from that understanding to be able to make judgments and critical choices for the future." We hope that this issue contributes to that understanding, and to the anticipation of what is to come.

*hode Island Historical Society, for the purpose
to the topography, antiquities, and natural,*



The Cabinet Building served as the home of the Rhode Island Historical Society for nearly a hundred years. 1909 photo. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 4783).

Collecting, Preserving, and Sharing Rhode Island History: 175 Years

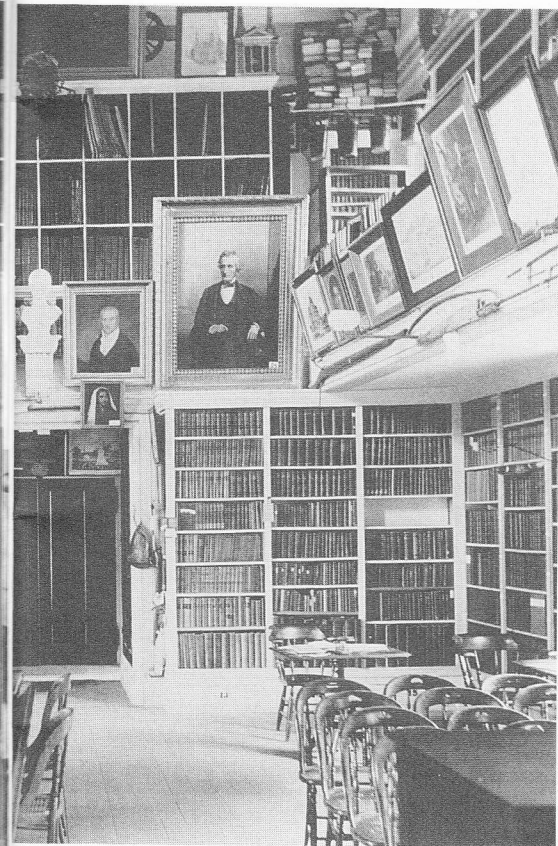
ALBERT T. KLYBERG

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, lotteries were used as a means to fund all manner of public projects: bridges, public market buildings, schoolhouses, even churches. It was therefore not thought unusual for the newly formed Rhode Island Historical Society to resort to the use of a lottery to raise money to build itself a headquarters. Having secured the state's permission, the Society launched its lottery around 1837 and went on to raise about three thousand dollars toward its five-thousand-dollar goal. At first it conducted the lottery itself, but the results were less than expected, so it hired professional lottery agents, as was the custom of the day.

All did not go well. The 1820s and 1830s were a yeasty time for all sorts of reform in America. In religion there was the Second Great Awakening among the Protestant churches. Out of this swirl of energy came campaigns against intemperance, gambling, and breaking the peace of the Sabbath. Reforms in public education, public welfare, and the treatment of criminals flourished alongside efforts to broaden the right to vote and to abolish slavery. Though lotteries were popular, they were a form of gambling, and many considered them wrong. One of these was the Reverend Francis Wayland, the president of Brown University. On 17 July 1837, upon learning that "the Rhode Island Historical Society is deriving pecuniary advantage from the sale of lottery tickets," Wayland resigned his membership in the organization. With its building-fund drive falling short of its goal, the Society eventually had to make up the balance through private contributions.

The Society's building project encountered another close call in 1842. At the annual meeting of the Society in July that year, President John Howland was forced to explain the absence of the organization's treasurer, Thomas Wilson Dorr. Dorr was in fact a fugitive at the time, hiding in New Hampshire, with a price on his head and an indictment of treason against him for having attempted to assume the governorship of Rhode Island under the ill-fated People's Constitution. Howland assured the members assembled that none of the Society's building funds had been "dissipated in the purchase of rebel muskets." Dorr had led an armed attack on the state arsenal in May and had convened an army in Chepachet the following month, but he had fled the state when his cause melted away.

The Society's new headquarters—the Cabinet Building, on Waterman Street in Providence—was finally dedicated in November 1844. Leading the ceremonies was Brown University professor William Gammell. Gammell's address that day struck the appropriate notes of perspective and commitment: "We dedicate [the Cabinet Building] to the muse of history. . . . We wish it to be a place of secure and perpetual deposit . . . beyond the reach of accident, or the approach of decay." "We may hope, too," he added, "that within its alcoves, 'rich with the spoils of time,' may at length be seen the features and forms of the men, who in



The south end of the Cabinet Building's reading room, 1904. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 7045).

Al Klyberg has been the director of the Rhode Island Historical Society since 1969. This article is adapted from his three-part series on the Society in the December-January 1993/94, February 1994, and March 1994 issues of *Old Rhode Island*.

peace and in war, have reflected honor on the State, by the wisdom they have carried to the councils, or the glory they have added to the name of the country.”

The Cabinet was the first American building specifically designed for a historical society. As was the fashion in architecture at the time, it was built in the style of a little Greek temple, just fifty by thirty feet. Its architect was James C. Bucklin, who had earlier designed Brown University’s Manning Chapel and codesigned the Arcade in downtown Providence. Expanded by the addition of wings in 1891, the Cabinet would remain the headquarters of the Rhode Island Historical Society until 1942, when it would be sold to Brown University and the Society would move to the historic John Brown House at 52 Power Street. Today the Cabinet Building is used as Brown University’s photo lab.

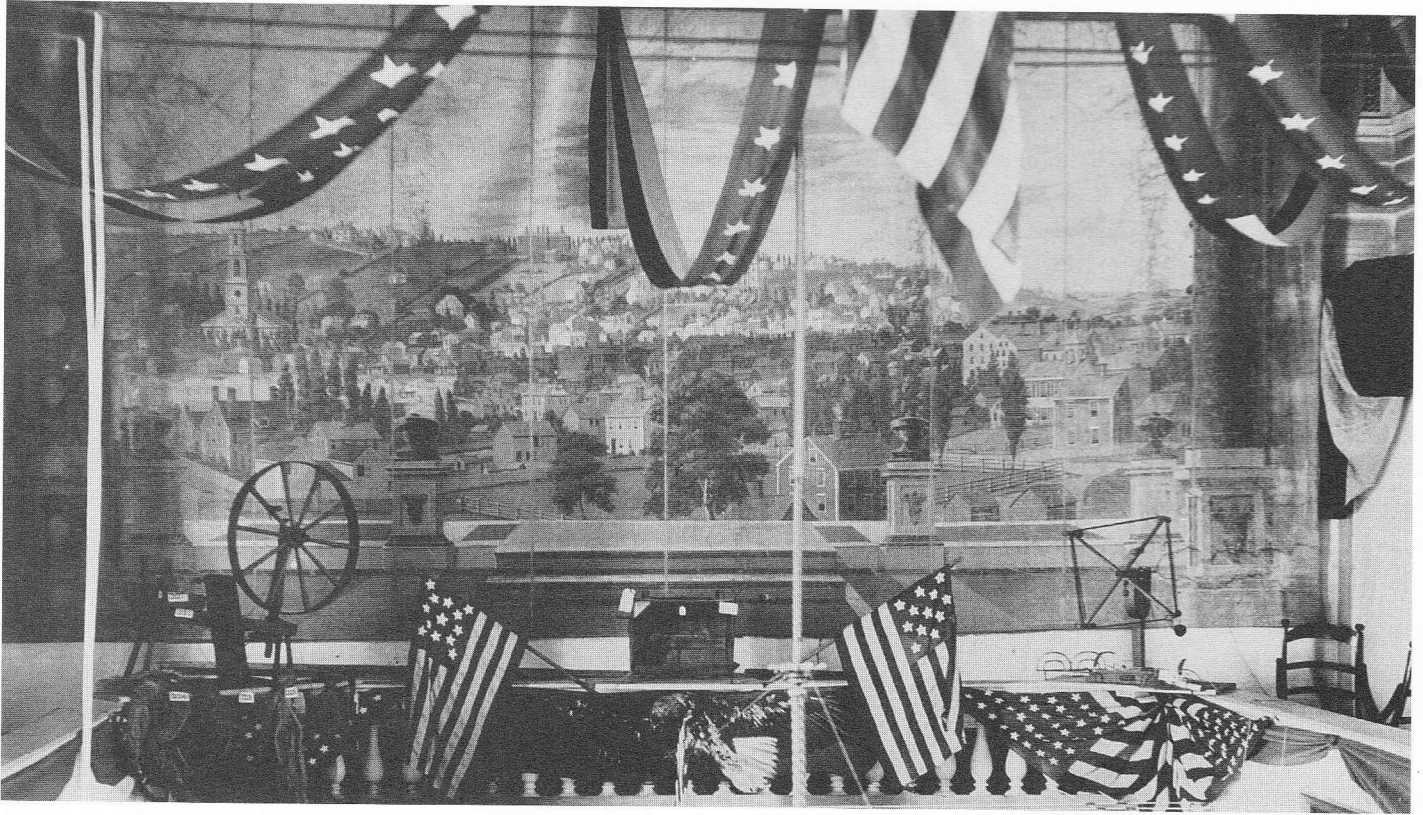


The construction of its Waterman Street home had come none too soon for the Society, which had been a gypsy for twenty-two years. With the fiftieth anniversary of American independence approaching, the Society had been founded at a meeting in the law offices of Justice of the Peace William Aplin and prominent attorney William R. Staples on 19 April 1822, the anniversary date of Paul Revere’s ride and the Battle of Lexington and Concord. After a bill of incorporation had been put through the June session of the General Assembly, the group held its first formal meeting on 19 July, the anniversary date (allowing for the calendar change in the eighteenth century) of Rhode Island’s charter of 1663.

The new organization immediately began to gather materials relating to the history of the state, and thus it had a pressing and growing need for space. At first it housed its collected artifacts and records on shelves in the Senate chamber of the Old State House on Benefit Street; then it used rooms at the firm of Brown and Ives at the corner of South Main and Hopkins streets; later it moved its collections to space donated by industrialist Cyrus Butler on the third floor of the Arcade. But these were only temporary accommodations until the Society was able to occupy its own building.

Among the Society’s early acquisitions were a British grenadier’s cap found at the foot of Bunker Hill, the “bunch of grapes” trade sign from Benjamin Thurber’s Providence store, and a bullet from the gun that killed Rhode Island textile magnate Amasa Sprague. The most spectacular acquisition during these early years was a theater drop scene depicting Providence in 1810. These and other items were intended to be displayed, but that was not the principal motive of the members’ aggressive efforts in collecting. It was, rather, a concern over the continued loss of documents from Rhode Island’s colonial past that convinced a number of professional men—editors, lawyers, physicians, teachers—that the state’s history was fast disappearing. (From this group of men, most then in their late twenties or early thirties, would come two governors, two chief justices, a United States senator, and a mayor.)

Without any permanent location to call its own, the Society sent out invitations to potential members and a circular requesting the gift of historical materials. One of the first to respond was the venerable Moses Brown, the last surviving member of the famous Brown brothers; another was Theodore Foster, formerly a Providence town clerk and United States senator. Not only had Moses Brown kept his own personal papers and those pertaining to his business relations with Samuel Slater, but he had collected documents dating back to Roger



A theater drop-scene curtain with a view of Providence was displayed as part of a loan exhibition organized by the Gaspee Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and held at the Cabinet Building on 19 and 20 April 1892. The curtain now hangs in the ballroom of the Society's Aldrich House. Courtesy of Henry L. Beckwith. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 4092).

Williams as well. Senator Foster, also an enthusiastic collector, had thousands of documents from colonial Providence. The Society bought the Foster papers (more than fifty volumes) for three hundred dollars in 1837, and the heirs of Moses Brown began depositing his papers two years later. From the estate of Dr. Solomon Drowne (who had been a neighbor of Foster's in the town named for the senator), the Society acquired an extensive run of the *Providence Gazette*, an important newspaper in whose pages Stephen Hopkins had published a long series on the colonial history of Rhode Island. Thus, by the time it took up lodging in the Cabinet Building, the Society had acquired the three major building blocks of Providence colonial history: the papers of Moses Brown and Theodore Foster and the lion's share of the *Providence Gazette*. By then the Society had also visited the print shops of Providence and supplemented its copies of the *Gazette* with back issues of about fifteen other newspapers.

But the Society was not content to be only a rescuer of library research materials. In 1827 it issued its first publication, Roger Williams's *Key into the Language of America*. In 1835, as part of its building-fund drive, it launched a series of lectures on Rhode Island history, a series that continues today, over 160 years later, as one of the longest in North America. In a less successful effort, the Society attempted to save the seventeenth-century Newport home of William Coddington, one of the founders of Rhode Island, but it managed only to salvage a sash of leaded glass for its collections. It was more effective in its next venture into historic preservation, when it succeeded in having Whitehall, the home of Ezra Stiles in Middletown, refurbished by its owners, the trustees of Yale College.

The scholarly interests of the Society's members were expressed in a number of ways. In the 1830s the Society corresponded with the Royal Society for

Northern Antiquities in Denmark; the issue was Viking contact with America, and the item in question was the inscribed rock at Dighton, Massachusetts. A decade later the two organizations corresponded again, this time about the Old Stone Mill in Newport. Papers on a variety of subjects were delivered at the Society: some defended the reputation of the state's founders against the slanders of historians of the Puritans and Pilgrims; some defended the reputation of Metacomet (King Philip) and paid tribute to the memories of Canonicus and Miantonomi; some took issue with James Fenimore Cooper, who had attacked the valor of Oliver Hazard Perry at the Battle of Lake Erie. When the Dorr Rebellion was the current event of the day, lectures were delivered by speakers on both sides of that conflict.

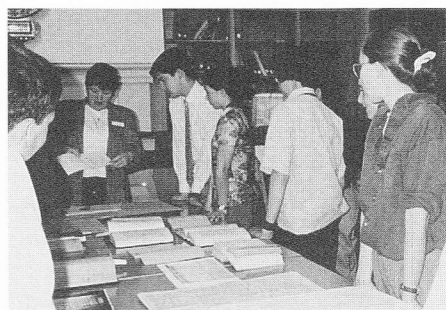
Library assistant Anthony McCabe lectures to a group of grammar school students in 1913. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 5122).



The Society's outlook was statewide. Until 1878 a cabinet was kept at both Newport and Providence. The Southern Cabinet holdings were in space donated by the Redwood Library. When the state's second historical society was created

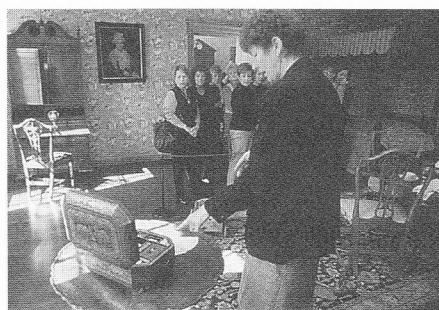
at Newport in 1854, the zeal to cover that important venue waned, and with the death of Southern Cabinet keeper Benjamin Howland, it was decided to consolidate everything in Providence. Volunteer curators were appointed for the towns around Rhode Island.

After the Civil War the Society focused its energies on researching Indian sites and genealogy and on publishing town histories and biographies of famous Rhode Islanders. A collection of paintings, principally portraits, was gathered, and a painting gallery was opened at the Cabinet Building in 1891. Women began delivering lectures to the Society even before they became eligible for Society membership in 1890. A school program was begun in 1913, with children introduced to Rhode Island history by library assistant Anthony McCabe.



Reference librarian Meredith Sorozan explains the use of historical resources to LaSalle Academy students visiting the Society's library in 1996. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8869).

Right: Volunteers like June Barbour are the backbone of the Society's guide program at the John Brown House. Tours of the eighteenth-century mansion are held five days a week.



Of all the Society's accomplishments during its first hundred years, the greatest was the outpouring of books that resulted from the use of the Society's collections. Documentary editions from these years abound, including John Callender's centennial sermon on the history of Rhode Island, Elisha Potter's *History of Narragansett*, William Staples's *Annals of Providence*, John Russell Bartlett's *Rhode Island Colonial Records*, *Early Town Records of Providence*, and *Narragansett Club Papers*. Multivolume histories of the state were produced by Society members Samuel Greene Arnold, Edward Field, Thomas Bicknell, and Charles Carroll. Town histories were written by many of the Society's town curators, including Erastus Richardson of Woonsocket and Frederic Denison of Westerly.

By the end of the nineteenth century the Society began hiring professional librarians to supplement its volunteer staff. Amos Perry, the Society's first such librarian, was succeeded by Clarence Brigham and Howard Chapin. Salaries were low and additional help was scarce; assisted mainly by his near-perfect photographic memory, Chapin was virtually alone on the job during the 1920s and 1930s. The Society operated under stringent financial limitations during these years, but in 1936 it nonetheless managed to play a major role in celebrating the state's 300th anniversary.



One day in 1972 the doorbell rang at the side entrance of the John Brown House, the Society's headquarters. There was a lot of traffic to the door that year; it was the Society's 150th anniversary. This day there were three people at the door. By way of explanation they handed the director a letter—an old, faded letter that had been written on behalf of the Society in 1847. The writer was ninety-year-old John Howland, a veteran of the American Revolution and an advocate of public school reform, who presided over the affairs of the Society from 1833 to 1854. Addressing his letter to the family of Henry Marchant of South Kingstown, Howland was writing to ask that Marchant's papers be donated to the Society. Now, 125 years later, the family was at the side door of John Brown House, apologizing for being a little behind in its correspondence.

The Society received both Marchant's papers and his eighteenth-century library. Marchant's letter book recounts the affairs of a Newport lawyer and patriot during the American Revolution. When the British seized Newport in 1776, Marchant removed to his farm in West Kingstown, and the following year he became a delegate to the Continental Congress. Later he was a prominent advocate for Rhode Island's ratification of the United States Constitution. Thanks to the availability of his papers, in 1990 Marchant became a local television star in a Channel 6 documentary about ratification. The rescue of such historical materials as the Marchant papers is a continuing and constant process at the Rhode Island Historical Society.

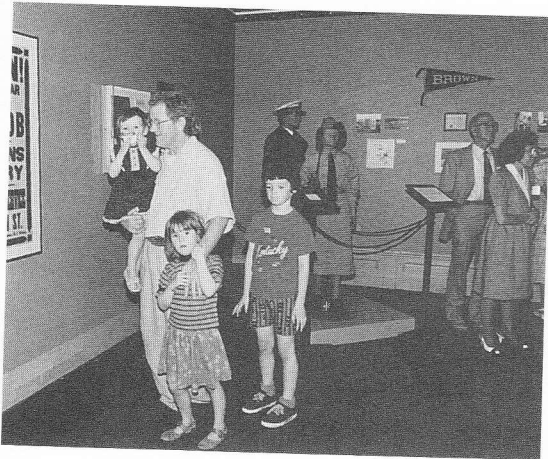
Sometimes that effort is dramatic. John Howland poked at a packet of letters lying in the mud of Market Square one day and discovered that they had belonged to Roger Williams (perhaps they had been washed out of the first floor of Stephen Hopkins's house during the Great Gale of 1815). Society librarian Clarkson Collins III took a diary that had belonged to James Brown (son of Providence's illustrious John Brown) out of the mouth of a dog. Early in the 1970s the Society received a frantic phone call from Mrs. J. H. N. Potter of Jamestown, who had discovered that trucks from the Department of Public Works were carting off the records of the recently closed Jamestown Ferry. A call to the state librarian put a stop to the trucks, and on a hot, dusty summer morning a hundred years of ferry records were removed from the airless loft of the ferry house. Deposited first at the Jamestown Historical Society, the log books eventually went to the Redwood Library and the papers to the University of Rhode Island's Special Collections.

Less dramatic, but no less important, was the saving of thousands of feet of television news film from local stations in the early 1970s. Another major rescue was carried out with the removal, during several bitterly cold days in December 1971, of about five hundred running feet of industrial records of the Sayles Finishing Company. Sayles, the parent company of about thirty-five sep-



Knocker on the front door of the John Brown House. Photograph by John Miller.

As we approach the twenty-first century, the Society's exhibitions have focused more and more on the events of the twentieth century. Home from the Front, a 1995-96 exhibition, explored life in Rhode Island just prior to the end of World War II and in the years that followed. Like several previous Society exhibitions, Home from the Front won a national Certificate of Commendation from the American Association for State and Local History. RIHS Collection (RH1 X3 8872).



arate manufacturing entities, had records stretching back into the 1840s. These were scattered throughout the company's headquarters building in Lincoln, but they were mostly on the third floor and in the attic, filed in sturdy wooden boxes about three feet long. After lugging several hundred of these boxes down three flights of stairs, Society librarians had an idea: they would rest a ladder against the building and lower the boxes down on a rope, using the ladder as a kind of chute. After several days of this process there was only one box left to be removed. It was at this point that near disaster ensued. As the final box started down the ladder, it jumped the track and began to swing like a battering ram against the side of the building. On the first two swings it thumped harmlessly against the brick wall, but with the third swing it struck dead center on a three-foot plate-glass window of the company president's office. Fortunately the president had recently retired, and the office was unoccupied. The Society conducted similar record-rescuing operations at the Peace Dale offices of the Hazard family, and these were completed without mishap.

One other rescue worth mentioning involved the Society's intervention to preserve a building, in this case the Pomham Rock Lighthouse on the East Providence side of the port of Providence. A phone call from an East Providence member in 1974 informed the Society that the Coast Guard was going to abandon the lighthouse in a couple of days, and that it would surely suffer the fate of the Bullocks Point Light—which had been vandalized and torched within hours of its abandonment—unless a nonprofit organization could take responsibility for it and sponsor residents to live there until the prolonged process of government-property decommissioning could be carried out. The Society accordingly took temporary possession of the lighthouse, an event that the Society's newsletter reported under the headline "Historical Society Rescues Coast Guard!" When the decommissioning was finally completed several years later, ownership of the lighthouse was transferred to a nearby oil-tank farm. Thanks to the Society, the Pomham Rock Lighthouse still stands.



On 9 December 1941 the Rhode Island Historical Society voted to accept John Nicholas Brown's generous offer of the John Brown House, and the following year it moved the contents of the Cabinet Building to its spacious new headquarters and sold the old building to Brown University. But the Society's collections continued to grow, and the John Brown House soon seemed as inadequate for housing them as the Cabinet had been. After a decade or more of agonizing over how library space at the John Brown House might be increased or a new building constructed on the side lawn, the Society decided to divide its quarters, and in 1961 it purchased the Providence Public Library's former Tockwotton Branch at 121 Hope Street to serve as its library. The gift of the Aldrich properties at Cooke and Benevolent streets in 1974 gave the Society still another facility, one that could include a lecture hall and gallery space for temporary exhibits.

Once the demands placed on the John Brown House were lightened with the establishment of a separate library, the Society's trustees decided to restore the house and reassemble its contents on a scale appropriate to one of the major historic houses in America. The John Brown House Loan Exhibition of Rhode Island Furniture, staged in 1965, testified to the beauty and importance of the Rhode Island tradition in decorative arts.



The Society held its last meeting at the Cabinet Building on 21 April 1942. Flanked by Assistant Secretary Westcote H. Chesebrough (left) and President Harris H. Bucklin, Dr. John Bell Rae read a paper on the centennial of the Dorr War. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 7049).

John Sterling, Society volunteer and creator of the Rhode Island Cemetery Transcription Project database, leads a tour at Providence's North Burial Ground in 1996, one of a series of cemetery tours he has conducted for the Society during the past two years. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8871).



In 1972 an exhibition of paintings from the Society's collection was presented at Brown University's Bell Gallery. Since the Society opened its own galleries for temporary exhibits at Aldrich House in 1979, thirty-six such exhibits have been mounted. Eight of these have received national awards. The topics explored have included the history of Rhode Island banking, the history of Rhode Island fire fighting, the story of the Providence waterfront, child rearing in Rhode Island, Rhode Island folk art, Rhode Island black history, Rhode Island schoolgirl needlework samplers, the Dorr Rebellion, biographical insights into Roger Williams, Moses Brown, and artist James Sullivan Lincoln, and steamboat travel on Narragansett Bay.

Since 1941 both the membership and the endowment of the Rhode Island Historical Society have tripled. Today

there are some two thousand members and an endowment of \$5.4 million. The professional staff has grown from two to twenty full-time and twenty-two part-time members. But the Society's basic programs have remained unchanged almost from their beginnings in 1822: a research library, a museum of Rhode Island history, public lectures, and publications.

What has changed is the scale and scope of the way the programs are now carried out. In the 1890s the Society failed in its efforts to buy the wartime letters of Nathanael Greene, which were then sold at public auction. Not only have those letters now been recovered in copy form, but the Society is publishing thirteen volumes of Greene's correspondence. Similarly, in 1988 it brought out the most complete collection of Roger Williams's correspondence. And the scale and scope of the Society's programs are about to change in another way as well: with projects currently under way in Woonsocket and Providence, the Society is preparing to reach out to bring the state's history to a much wider audience.



You might reasonably assume that with more than 120 historical organizations in a state the size of Rhode Island, it would be impossible to leave out half of the state's history. After all, 120 organizations among thirty-nine cities and towns amounts to 3 organizations per town!

These groups, of course, come in all shapes and sizes: historical societies, museums, historical district commissions, archives, and advocacy groups. It would take about four weeks to visit all the historic sites and museums open to the public, but even if you did visit them all, you would see only about half of our heritage. What you would see are the dwellings of the great and the small: the



In one of the Society's many educational programs held throughout the community, Executive Director Al Klyberg speaks on the development of downtown Providence and its waterways at the city's new Waterplace Park in 1994. RIHS Collection (RH1 X3 8870).

Gilbert Stuart Birthplace, Cocumscussoc, the Joy Homestead, the Smith-Appleby House, the John Brown House, the Sprague Mansion, Linden Place. You would find the sites of early industry: lime kilns, grist mills, jonnycake mills, the Slater Mill. Turnpike tollhouses, a canal towpath, and train depots amply represent early transportation systems. Entire mill villages dot the landscape.

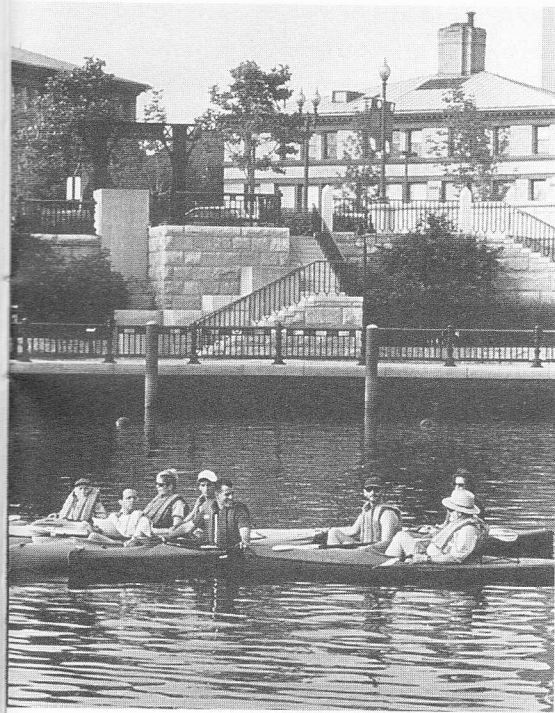
But you would be hard-pressed to find any exhibits or depictions of our history from the Civil War to the present day. With the exception of Blithewold, the Lippitt House, and the magnificent Newport mansions, the last 150 years of Rhode Island history have been left out; and when you leave out those years of the state's past, you also leave out the story of about 80 percent of the people who live here today. The omissions are, of course, unintentional, but the implications are substantial. Can we really afford to tell people whose families came here since the 1860s that their story is of no significant or consequence, or, worse still, that they have no history? Is it really any wonder that vandals can run

through historic cemeteries, spray-painting and tipping over stones, if history is just something that belongs to a few or is irrelevant to the present and the current population?

To be sure, the state's 120 historical organizations have dealt with our recent history in publications, lectures, and festivals; yet something is missing. If it is true—as many believe it is—that one must have his or her story preserved and presented in a museum setting of three-dimensional artifacts and memorabilia in order to be fully a part of history, then much of our history has indeed been left out. Museums are said to be the mirror of what is considered important, representative, or memorable in a community. What is the impact upon those who visit that community mirror and do not see themselves reflected there?



Just what history is it that is left out? It is the story of Rhode Island in the Civil War, of Burnside's amphibious invasion of North Carolina and the Rhode Island artillery at Gettysburg. It is the immigration of the Irish, French Canadians, Italians, Portuguese, and others to swell the work force that made machines, silverware, steam engines, jewelry, and rubber shoes in the state's mills, and it is the story of how these mills became the largest of their kind in the nation. It is the rise of urban Rhode Island, the growth of industrial Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, and Woonsocket. It is the story of how Narragansett Bay became the Coney Island of New England, and Newport the social capital of the nation. It is the coming of the consumer age to Rhode Island, with its department stores and its automobiles. It is the story of Rhode Island and the wars, hot and cold, of the twentieth century: Rhode Island and the nuclear age; depression and deindustrialization; environmental politics; and the rise of a service economy paced by tourism, education, health care, and government. One can read about these things, but nowhere are they commemorated in an artifactual exhibition.



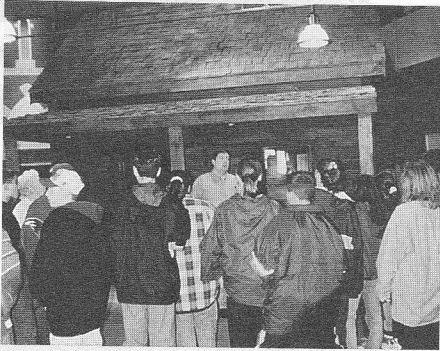
The Society has recently inaugurated kayak tours of downtown Providence via the Providence River and Waterplace Park. Photograph by Paul Darling.

Creating a new mirror for Rhode Island is what the Rhode Island Historical Society has been about for the last fifteen years. Beginning about 1980, the Society launched several programs to include what has been left out. Both the library and the museum put a premium on twentieth-century collecting. Hundreds of oral-history interviews were conducted on various themes: memories of the Hurricane of '38, World War II eyewitness accounts, tales of the twenties and thirties, inquiries into the postwar migration from Providence to the surrounding suburban towns. Collections of manuscripts pertaining to labor union history were acquired, as were the archives of the Audubon Society, which help document the environmental movement. The institutional files of the Providence Preservation Society and the personal files of Antoinette Downing, reflecting the impact of the historical preservation movement, were also acquired. Even more to the point was the Society's acquisition of museum objects like the pushcart of a Federal Hill knife and scissors grinder, a midwife's tools of her trade, a model of a Liberty ship built at Field's Point, and uniforms from members of the Women's Army Corps.

More recently the Society has undertaken two projects designed to expand museum offerings of recent Rhode Island history: the Woonsocket Visitors Center/Museum of Work & Culture and Heritage Harbor. With contracts first with the Woonsocket Industrial Development Corporation and now with the City of Woonsocket, the Society is creating an exhibit entitled "La Survivance" at the former Lincoln Textile Building at Market Square in Woonsocket. The exhibit will be devoted to tracing the persistent French Canadian heritage in the region and the rise of the labor movement in the textile industry there. It will depict Quebec farm life and the habitants' migration to New England during



In 1995 the Society and the American Diner Museum joined forces in an exhibition entitled Sandwiches, Pies, and Coffee: Origins of the Diner in New England. Marking the occasion, the Haven Brothers diner paid a visit to Aldrich House, where the exhibition was being held. Here on the steps of the locally renowned diner are Al Klyberg and Jane H. Civins, deputy director of the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities. RIHS Collection (RH: X3 8874).



The Society's newest branch is the Museum of Work & Culture in Woonsocket. A permanent exhibit there focuses on the experiences of the French Canadians and other ethnic communities of the city. Here staff guide Bob Sherman shows a group the museum's replica of a Quebec farmhouse. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8903).

Right: Like most collecting institutions, the Society has always struggled with problems of collection storage. Although it has dedicated two of its buildings and five of its departments to the care and storage of its collections, it is once again facing a lack of storage space, as shown in this recent photograph of the library's fourth floor. Photograph by Paul Darling.

The Graphics Division houses a film base and a paper base, the two-dimensional artifacts of the Society. Photograph by Paul Darling.



the 1860s and 1870s to work in the textile mills. Laid out in more than eight thousand square feet will be a church facade, a triple-decker house, a parochial school classroom, and a labor union hall. Using film and interactive computer techniques, the show promises to fill a large gap in the history of the northern part of the state, just as the recently opened Museum of Newport History does for the island communities. The Woonsocket project has a number of partners, including the Woonsocket Historical Society, the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, and the City of Woonsocket.

The Society's other effort to depict "the rest of the story" also involves a partnership. To create a state heritage center, several years ago the Society banded together with the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, the Providence Jewelry Museum, the Rhode Island Indian Council, the Portuguese Cultural Foundation, the American Diner Museum, the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, the Italian American Historical Society of Rhode Island, the Steamship Historical Society of America, the Roger Williams Park Museum of Natural History, the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame, and the Rhode Island Military Collection. For years an effort was made to establish a museum center at the former Shepard's department store building in downtown Providence. In the end it was determined that that enterprise would cost more than the consortium could afford, but the idea of establishing a heritage center was kept alive, and efforts continued to bring it to fruition.

In April 1997, during the week when the Society was marking its 175th anniversary, the Narragansett Electric Company announced that it was turning over its deactivated South Street electric-generating plant to the consortium for its planned center. The new facility will be known as Heritage Harbor. When work on it is completed, it will afford the Society and its partners 260,000 square feet of museum and library space in a remarkable rehabilitated building on the newly revived Providence River waterfront, at the key transportation intersection of Interstate Highways 95 and 195. The development of the center is expected to take up to fifteen years and \$50 million to complete, and a capital campaign is now under way.

At Heritage Harbor the Society will be able to bring all its major functions together at one location. Moreover, for the Society as well as for the other consortium partners, sharing facilities with similar organizations is a logical eco-



conomic efficiency measure. But the advantages go much further: beyond the economics are the benefits of gathering together all the appropriate images into the same mirror. You cannot tell the complete story of the Portuguese in Rhode Island unless you include their relationship with the Sephardic Jews and the African heritage of the Cape Verdeans. You cannot tell the African American story without talking about the Narragansett Indians or the neighborhoods of South Providence that were common turf for the city's black and Jewish communities. To have all these stories under one roof, each with its own independent voice, will be the best of both collaboration and multiculturalism.

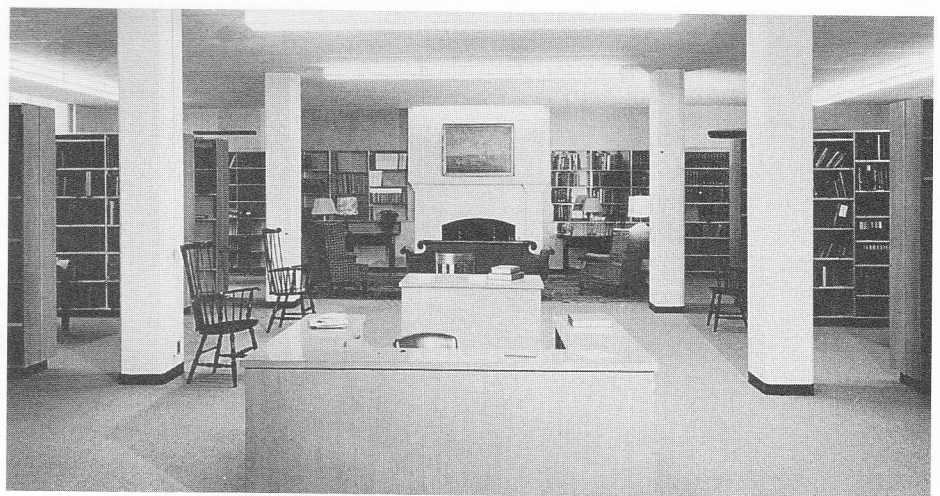
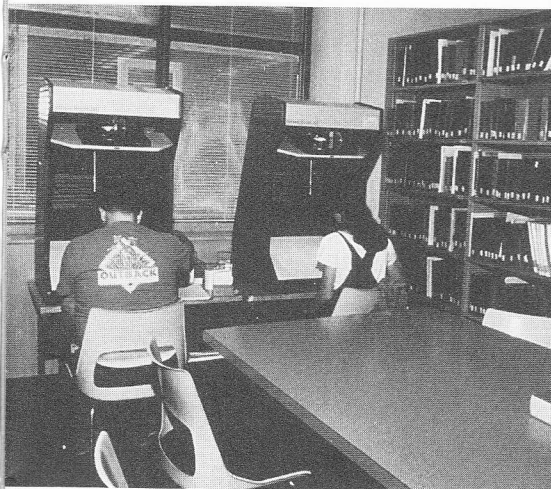


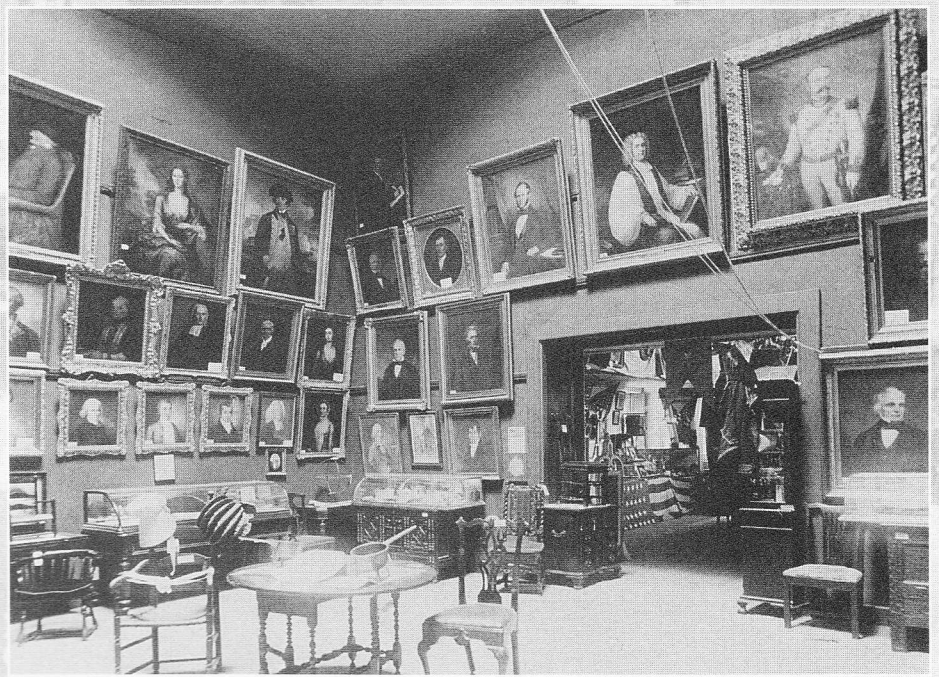
In an effort to raise its own profile in the community, the Society is uniting with a dozen or more other organizations to ensure Heritage Harbor's success. The center will be a project unlike anything the Society has undertaken to date. More than a museum and library complex, it will be a place for festivals and events celebrating the state's history as well. In its partnership of mainstream and minority museums under one roof, it will avoid the "them" and "us" often found in other collaborations; at Heritage Harbor there will be only "us." Instead of one Rhode Island story there will be many, and that, we believe, is the way it should be. Offered an abundance of documentary evidence, often diverse and apparently conflicting, the thoughtful viewer will be challenged to analyze and synthesize in order to arrive at informed judgments about what that evidence means.

And judgment, after all, is part of what the Society is about. Studying history fosters the development of the critical skill of making wise judgements, a skill that free democracies like our own depend on among their citizens. Historical societies like ours do not give the gift of time, for we cannot extend it. We can, however, affect the *quality* of time, and we can, even more importantly, give the gift of *knowing time*; and knowing time is just another term for studying history. Enabling the citizens of the state to know time is what the Rhode Island Historical Society is about, and what it has been about for the past 175 years.

Right: *The library's reading room in 1964.*
RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8885).

The Reference Division has now grown from a collection of books and periodicals to one also containing various forms of microtext and computer database materials. The library will soon be offering access to the Internet.
Photograph by Paul Darling.





Historical Sketch of the Society

[Reprinted from Proceedings of the Rhode Island Historical Society, 1889-90]

AMOS PERRY

The origin of the Rhode Island Historical Society, the circumstances which led to its formation, and the aims of its founders, all well understood forty or fifty years ago, were thrown into comparative obscurity by the pressing events of our Civil War. To bring these matters again to view, and thus promote a better understanding of the success of the Society, and also of the duties devolving on its members and citizens of the State, is the object of this paper.

The Society owes its origin to a spirit of inquiry and research manifested long before steps were taken for its formation. The need of such an institution was felt and the way was prepared for it by men who early entered the historic field and labored without the advantages of associate action.

The founders of the State and the men of their day were followed in due time by men who appreciated their work and strove to perpetuate their memory by making a record of what they did. Of the latter class, were notably the Rev. John Callender, Governor Stephen Hopkins, Friend Moses Brown, Senator Theodore Foster and their compeers. They led the way to a connected and truthful history of the State, and their services are appreciated by their successors in this line of labor.

The Society's records and public journals show that there was, in 1822, a newly-awakened interest in historical pursuits, and that there was then earnest inquiry after authentic documents belonging to various periods of these Plantations. A Revolutionary soldier, who became the second president of this Society, is reported to have spoken as follows:

"From the settlement of the Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, more than a hundred and eighty years ago, valuable historic material has been wasting away year by year without any concerted effort being put forth to save it and use it in the interest of veritable history."

It was stated that through ignorance or other causes some valuable historical records had been converted into pulp for paper, some had been used for kindling fires, and some had been accidentally burned; and the hope was expressed that the Society might prevent similar losses in time to come, and secure for historical purposes the valuable family, town and State records then in existence.¹

After deliberation, a meeting was called and held at No. 3, South Main Street, Providence, on the 19th of April, 1822, the time being noted as the anniversary of the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord. Jeremiah Lippitt was elected chairman and William R. Staples secretary of that meeting, and measures were then and there adopted for the formation of this Society and for its incorporation by the General Assembly. On the 29th of the following June a meeting of the corporators² of the Society was held at the old Manufacturers' Hotel (kept then by John Wilde, at No. 65 North Main Street, opposite the First Baptist Church). The charter introduced into the General Assembly at its May session

A loan exhibition organized by the Gaspee Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution was held at the Society's Cabinet Building on 19 and 20 April 1892. Courtesy of Henry L. Beckwith. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 4093).

Amos Perry (1812-1899) became the Society's secretary in 1873 and its librarian in 1880 and served in both positions until his death. This article is taken from his "Historical Sketch of the Society, with a Chronological List of Lectures and Papers, Read at Stated Meetings from 1835 to 1889, Inclusive," in *Proceedings of the Rhode Island Historical Society, 1889-90*, pp. 51-85.

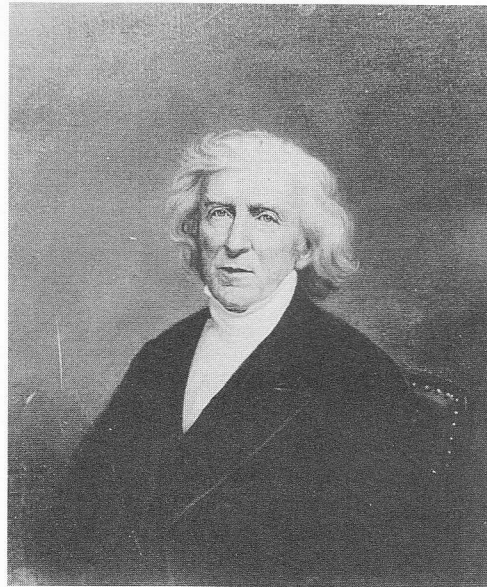


Moses Brown (1738-1836). Engraving by John A. J. Wilcox. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 2765).

William R. Staples (1798-1868). RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8876).

and passed in June was received and adopted, and measures were taken to secure a constitution embodying suitable by-laws and rules of action. It was voted at this meeting that the annual election of officers should take place on the anniversary of the granting of the charter of 1663, viz., July 19, corresponding to July 8, old style. Accordingly, on that historic day, in the hotel before named, the first annual officers were elected, the venerable Moses Brown serving as chairman and William R. Staples as secretary, and for twenty-six years the anniversaries of the charter of 1663 and of the establishment of this Society were observed together. The names of the distinguished members enrolled and officers elected from that time down to January, 1888, may be found in the "Proceedings of the Society, 1887-88."

Thus organized, the Society promptly issued a circular, informing the people of the State of the objects it had in view, and inviting them to co-operate in collecting and turning to account such manuscripts, printed works and other material as might serve to illustrate State, family and local history. One of the earliest responses to this appeal was an autobiographical sketch from Col. Christopher



Lippitt, of Revolutionary memory, and this was followed by contributions from Moses Brown, Theodore Foster, Henry Bull, John Brown Francis, William Giles Goddard, William Aplin, Zachariah Allen, and other like-minded citizens, who, with their successors down to the present time, merit the honor of having their gifts kept in a safe, commodious and attractive building.

The records show that the Society was early nursed and encouraged by the State, receiving from it \$500 when that sum was more to it than \$5,000 would be to-day. From 1822 to 1834 the Society was the guest of

the State, holding its meetings, with the manifest approbation, if not by invitation, of the General Assembly in the Senate chamber, and keeping its collections on one side of that room in cases furnished gratuitously by the Providence Library Company. In the course of twelve years the Society outgrew its quarters in the Senate chamber, and was cramped for the lack of room for its collections. When this fact became known to Messrs. Brown & Ives they offered the free use of what is termed in the records "a spacious room (their present counting room) in their brick block on South Main street." The Society gratefully accepted the offer. At the end of two years Mr. Cyrus Butler expressed his appreciation of the Society as a conservator of the material interests of the community, and offered it still ampler accommodation in the upper story of the Arcade, which offer it gratefully accepted, and held its meetings and kept its collections in room 53 of that building for the next eight years, when it removed (in 1844) to its present Cabinet; and now, after having occupied this building forty-five years, it finds itself more cramped for room than ever

before. With its renewed life and the general interest awakened in historical pursuits, it now painfully realizes its need of means to carry forward the work for which it was organized. In Newport the Society was for a long time generously cared for by the Redwood Library Company.

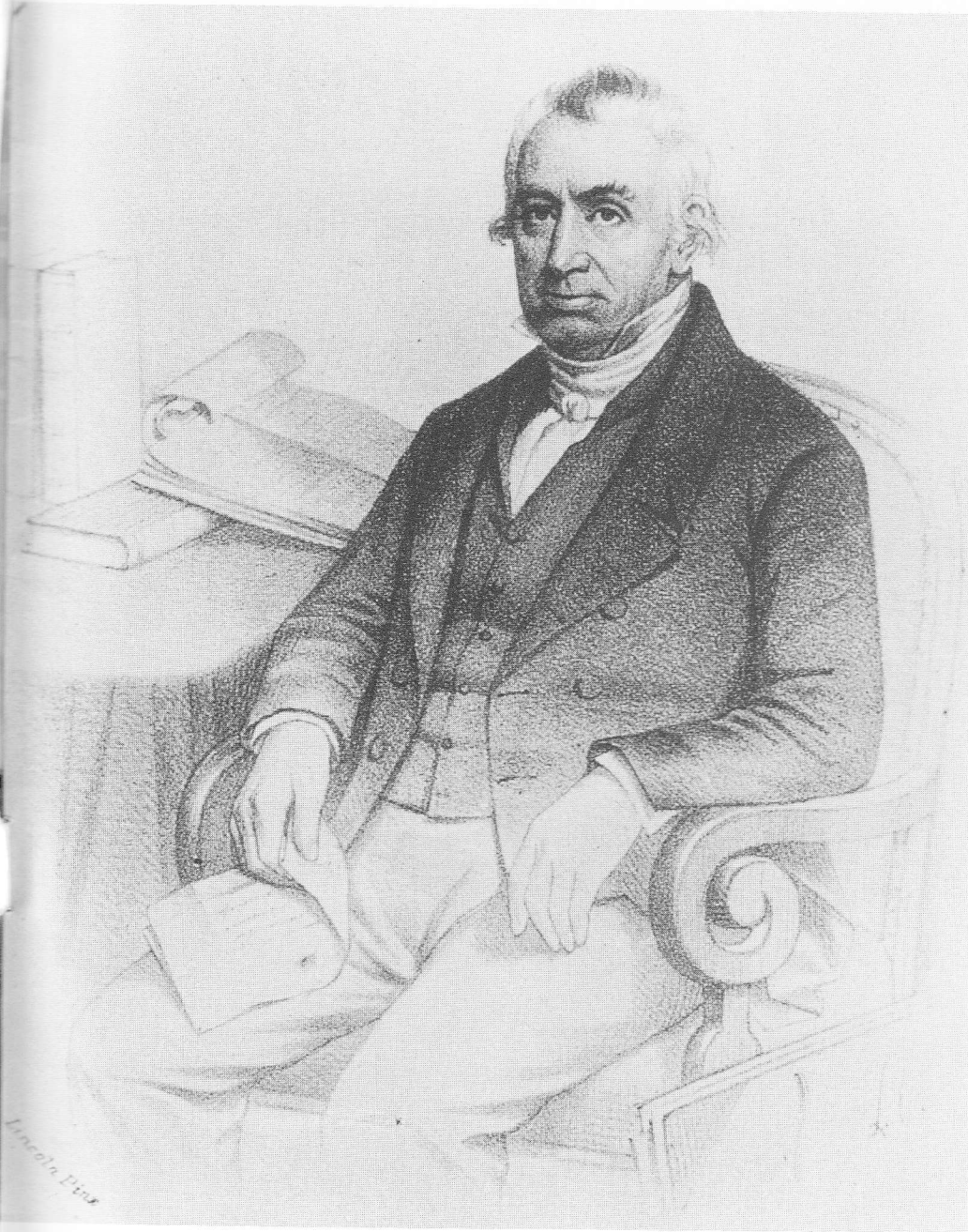
During the first twenty-seven years of its existence the business of the Society was mainly transacted through the agency of a board of trustees and of its committees. Its early records contain long and elaborate reports and letters, furnishing ample evidence of interest and diligence in collecting material for local history and in preparing for the publication of the first volumes of its "Collections"; but they fail to show that any lectures or papers (other than reports or letters) were given or read before the Society during a period of thirteen years. The first record on this subject was to the effect that the Hon.

William Hunter, of Newport, would address the Society at the State House on the 30th of October, 1828, and a subsequent record shows that on Mr. Hunter's failing to appear at the appointed time, the members consoled themselves therefor by a festive and social entertainment. In 1834 an earnest but unsuccessful effort was made to have lectures that would awaken interest in the objects of the Society and enrich its treasury.

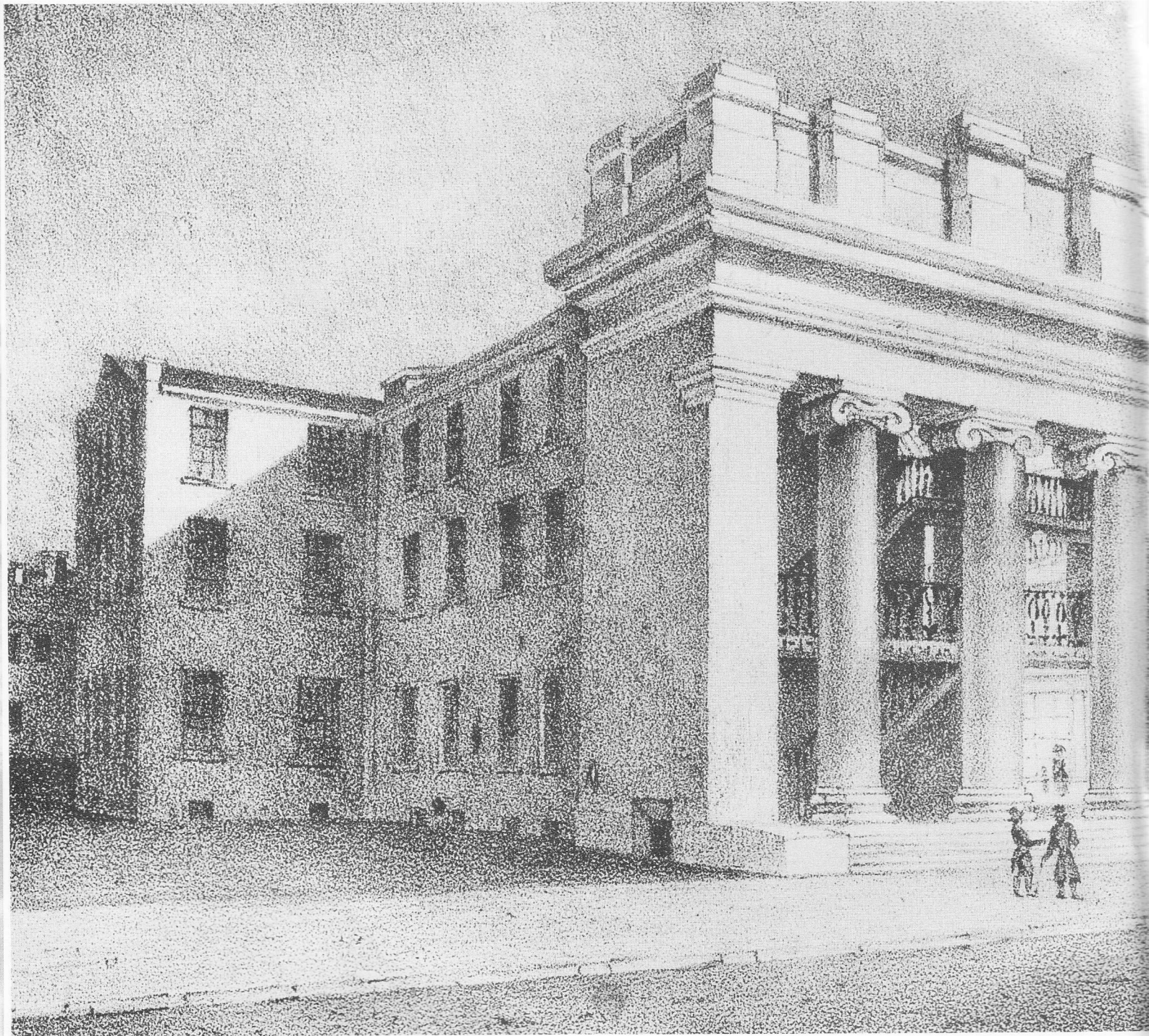
In 1835-36, however, twelve lectures were given in Franklin Hall, the efficient President of the Society, John Howland, presiding on each occasion and reading the first paper. Many of the tickets to these lectures are still preserved, having upon them the printed name of T. H. Webb, secretary, and the clear autograph of T. W. Dorr, treasurer. . . .

[The original article concludes with a listing of lectures and papers read before the Society through 1889.]

John Howland (1757-1854). Engraving. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8877).



The Arcade in Providence was the Society's home from 1837 to 1844. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8862).



Notes

1. It is a matter of regret that the hope thus expressed has not been realized. Many losses have occurred since that time. Some valuable documents have been destroyed because they were kept in unsafe places; some because their historic value was not understood by those who owned them or had them in charge, and some for other reasons that need not be stated. It is proved that stores, shops, dwelling-houses, and even some buildings called town-houses or town halls, are not fire-proof. The following losses, of which the secretary of this Society has authentic information, are a few of the many that have occurred:

The town records of North Kingstown were injured and narrowly escaped complete destruction from an accidental fire, December 16, 1870. The numerous manuscripts of United States Senator Elisha Mathewson, including autograph letters of Thomas Jefferson and other historic men who lived in the latter part of the last century and in the early part of this,—these, with Mr. Mathewson's library and portraits of himself and wife (partially promised for the archives of this Society) were all destroyed February 6, 1870, together with the house in which they were kept in the town of Scituate. The many exceedingly valuable records of the proprietors of the Providence Plantations, kept in a wooden chest in a paper and twine warehouse, were all reduced to ashes in the Aldrich House fire that occurred February 15, 1888. A large collection of manuscripts left by the late Deputy Governor and Chief Justice Daniel Owen, who presided over the convention that adopted the National Constitution in 1790, were kept in Judge Owen's family mansion in Glocester till about a third of a century ago, when one of his grandsons submitted them to the flames, assigning as a reason for this act that they never had been wanted and probably never would be. Another considerable collection of manuscripts, left by Col. John Singer Dexter, a distinguished officer of the Continental army,—manuscripts, some of which were personal sketches, entitled "Memoranda Concerning the Society of the Cincinnati," of which Colonel Dexter was successively treasurer, secretary, vice-president and president,—were burned by a descendant of Colonel Dexter to get them out of the way. Still another lot of manuscript, left by Captain Daniel Singer Dexter, who, on account of his remarkable skill as a penman served as clerk or secretary for many organizations during and subsequent to the Revolution, were burned a quarter of a century ago by a descendant of his to get possession of a trunk in which they were kept.

But though fire has made sad havoc of historical documents, paper-makers are of late reputed to be more efficient agents of mischief. During the War of the Rebellion the registers of the public schools of Providence, some of them dating back to 1840 and containing records that would have promptly settled more than one legal controversy, were all delivered over to the paper-makers, and thus used up. Among the tons of materials annually sent off from dwelling-houses to pass through junk shops on their way to paper mills, are usually some books, pamphlets or manuscripts which, if saved, would greatly enrich the library of this Society: and to this end an appeal is here made to the public, in the hope of having valuable material rescued from destruction and the interests of history thereby promoted.

Bearing in mind the principle that historical records should not only be preserved, but be put in such order that they can be readily consulted, we give, in illustration of this principle, the following extract from a letter lately written by a gentleman who is deeply interested in this his ancestral State: "The people of Rhode Island should not only guard against the destruction of their early town records, but should have such classified and indexed copies of them made as will render their lessons available to all who wish to be instructed thereby."

2. The following are the names of the twelve corporators: Jeremiah Lippitt, William Aplin, Charles Norris Tebbitts, Walter R. Danforth, William R. Staples, Richard W. Greene, John Brown Francis, William G. Goddard, Charles F. Tillinghast, Richard J. Arnold, Charles Jackson, William E. Richmond.



The lecture hall at the Society's Cabinet Building, where Martha J. Lamb and Esther Bernon Carpenter addressed the Society in 1885. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8878).



FROM THE COLLECTIONS

On Admitting Women to the Society:
An Address by William D. Ely

RICK STATTLER

Rick Stattler is the Rhode Island Historical Society's manuscripts curator.



Born in Hartford to an old Connecticut family, William Davis Ely (1815-1908) attended Yale and went on to a distinguished career in railroad law. In 1854 he came to Rhode Island after marrying Anne Crawford Allen (1818-1888), a descendant of Gabriel Bernon and Welcome Arnold, and the daughter of renowned Providence industrialist Zachariah Allen (the Rhode Island Historical Society's president from 1880 to 1882). Ely soon found a place in his father-in-law's Allendale Company, and by 1890 he had succeeded Allen as the company's president. Ely's main historical interest seems to have been the Allens' Bernon ancestry.¹

In what might be seen as a memorial to his recently deceased wife, on 14 January 1890 Ely addressed the Rhode Island Historical Society's annual meeting to argue for the eligibility of women for Society membership.² The following text of that speech is transcribed from a handwritten manuscript in the RIHS Archives (box 25).

It has been frequently suggested that the Charter of this Society should be changed, so as to admit the election of women to its membership. Women have for years been constant attendants at its meetings & lectures, & they have by liberal gifts of money and of books shown their warm interest in its prosperity. *One*, at least, in person, and *two* by proxy have presented very able and instructive papers in the Lecture courses, at regular meetings of the Society. The general consensus of opinion in the Society, seems now to be, that any obstacles to their admission as members should be removed without delay.

As whatever is done must be in strict conformity with the organic law of the Society, a careful examination of its Charter and Constitution has been made. The conclusion is, that there is no necessity, nor sufficient reason for making any change therein. The language of the Charter is of the broadest & most comprehensive character; there is nothing in it which limits the membership to either sex. Membership is limited by the term "*person*" only. The whole tenor of the Charter, its *letter* as well as its spirit, declares any one eligible as a member, who can properly be described as a "*person*." In this Society it will hardly be contended that a *woman* is not a "*person*."

The language of the *Charter* is remarkably clear & explicit. It is free from ambiguity, and so unmistakably consistent, from beginning to end, as to indicate that it was drawn by a master hand, & with the exactness which the Genl. Assembly is bound to use in all its enactments.

When we examine the *Constitution* of the Society, there is at one point the absence of equal exactness of language. In Article 7, the pronoun "*he*" occurs, the only word in either instrument, indicative, of *sex*. The article reads "No person shall be admitted a member of this Society, unless by a ballot, at the Annual Meeting, by a majority vote of the members present, and unless *he shall be* recommended by the Board of Trustees." Looked at in a *literary* point of view, the words, "*he shall be*," are mere surplusage, useless to the real object of the Article, & cumbering it with words, without which it would be better language and better law.

In a legal point of view, the Statutes and the construction constantly by the Courts to similar language assure us how little legal significance attaches to the word "*he*" thus used; how interchangeable in legal documents, are the terms "*he*" and "*she*";

and how far this incidental use of the masculine pronoun is, from working any limitation of the membership of the Society to either sex.

I will, however, remark that the word "he" was used either *with* or *without* an intent thus to limit the membership in this respect. If used *without* such intent (as was doubtless the case), it is, as suggested above, mere surplusage, & the article is to be read & construed exactly as if the words "he shall be" were blotted out. If used *with* an intent to limit the membership to men only, and to exclude women, then the language not only may be rejected as surplusage, but must be rejected for the weightier reason, that it is a flagrant attempt to violate the Charter of the Society, and the very conditions on which it has any existence itself.

The Charter absolutely knows no sex, recognizes no sex; it gives all *persons* whom the Society shall, by regular forms, "choose to associate with themselves," the rights of membership, without qualification, or distinction as to race, color, condition or sex.

This is the length and breadth of the Charter; and the Society has no power to add to, or take away therefrom.

[In a different hand: "Mr. Ely then offered the following motion which was recorded and unanimously adopted."]

Resolved.

That there is nothing in the Charter, or in the Constitution of the Rhode Island Historical Society, which excludes, or is designed to exclude women from its membership.

As Ely noted, women had contributed to the Society's series of lectures "in person, and . . . by proxy." In 1847 Albert G. Greene read Sarah Helen Whitman's poem "Tribute to Roger Williams" before the Society. In 1876 Zachariah Allen read Mrs. Caroline Gallup Read's "Historical Sketch of Capt. John Gallup." In 1885 two women were permitted to address the Society directly: Mrs. Martha J. Lamb spoke on "The Framers of the Constitution," and Esther Bernon Carpenter spoke on "Huguenot Influence in Rhode Island." Carpenter delivered another lecture—"What Are the Willett Papers, and Where Was the Home of Miantonomi?"—in 1886.³

Following the adoption of Ely's resolution, five women were admitted to Society membership at the next quarterly meeting in April 1890. These were Miss Julia Bullock, Mrs. Mary H. Knowles, Miss Candace Allen, Mrs. Emily A. Hall, and Miss Esther Bernon Carpenter.⁴

Julia Bullock (1814-1894) was the daughter of merchant Richmond Bullock and Rhoda (Peckham) Bullock. She was a lifelong resident of Providence. An obituary noted that "nearly every prominent charitable society and institution in Providence . . . received generous donations from her."⁵

Mary Howland (Everett) Knowles (1814-1899) was the granddaughter of John Howland (president of the Society from 1833 to 1854) and the widow of John Power Knowles, who had been a judge of the United States District Court in Providence for many years.⁶

Candace Allen (1822-1901) was Zachariah Allen's daughter, the sister of Anne Crawford Allen Ely. Interested in science as well as history, she published a pamphlet titled *The Hyperbolic Curve and the Law of Progression of Rotating Bodies* in 1882. She served as president of the Board of Lady Managers of St. Mary's Orphanage and made the initial contribution toward the fund to construct the Providence Public Library.⁷

Emily Ann (Jones) Hall (1817-1901) was the daughter of Providence merchant Jenkins D. Jones and the widow of George Washington Hall. She was the author of several short historical pamphlets written for the benefit of charitable



Rhode Island Historical Society.

MISS ESTHER BERNON CARPENTER,
of South Kingstown, will give a Paper

Tuesday Evening, November 17, 1885,

AT 8 O'CLOCK,

On "THE HUGUENOT INFLUENCE IN RHODE ISLAND."

AMOS PERRY, Sec'y.

RIHS Collection (RH: X3 8880).

organizations, including *The History of Lanterns* (1876), *The History of the Umbrella* (1883), and *The History of the Fan* (three editions, one 1886, two undated). A member of the Board of Visitors to the State Institutions, she was an active advocate for women in the state prison.⁸

Esther Bernon Carpenter (1848-1894) was the daughter of James Helme Carpenter and Mary Hoxie (Hazard) Carpenter. A resident of Wakefield, she was an accomplished local historian, the author of *The Huguenot Influence in Rhode Island* (1885) and *South County Neighbors* (1887).⁹ She was the first of the Society's women members to be mentioned further in the minutes: in November 1890 she read a paper on John Saffin, a Puritan of Bristol, Rhode Island.¹⁰ As a researcher and a descendant of Gabriel Bernon, she was undoubtedly familiar with the Elys, who owned a significant collection of Bernon papers.



Rhode Island Historical Society.

MRS. MARTHA J. LAMB, Author of the History
of New York City, and Editor of the Magazine of American
History, will read a paper,

Tuesday Evening, February 10, 1885,

AT 8 O'CLOCK,

On THE FRAMERS OF THE CONSTITUTION.

AMOS PERRY, Sec'y.

RIHS Collection (RH: X3 8881).

Notes

1. Moses Beach et al., *The Ely Ancestry: Lineage of Richard Ely of Plymouth, England . . .* (New York: Calumet Press, 1902), 311-12.

2. *Proceedings of the Rhode Island Historical Society*, 1889-90, p. 14.

3. See *ibid.*, 64-85.

4. *Ibid.*, 1890-91, p. 8.

5. *Publications of the Rhode Island Historical Society*, 1895, p. 55.

6. *Ibid.*, 1899-1900, p. 53.

7. *Proceedings*, 1900-1901, pp. 47-48.

8. *Ibid.*, 1901-2, pp. 69-70.

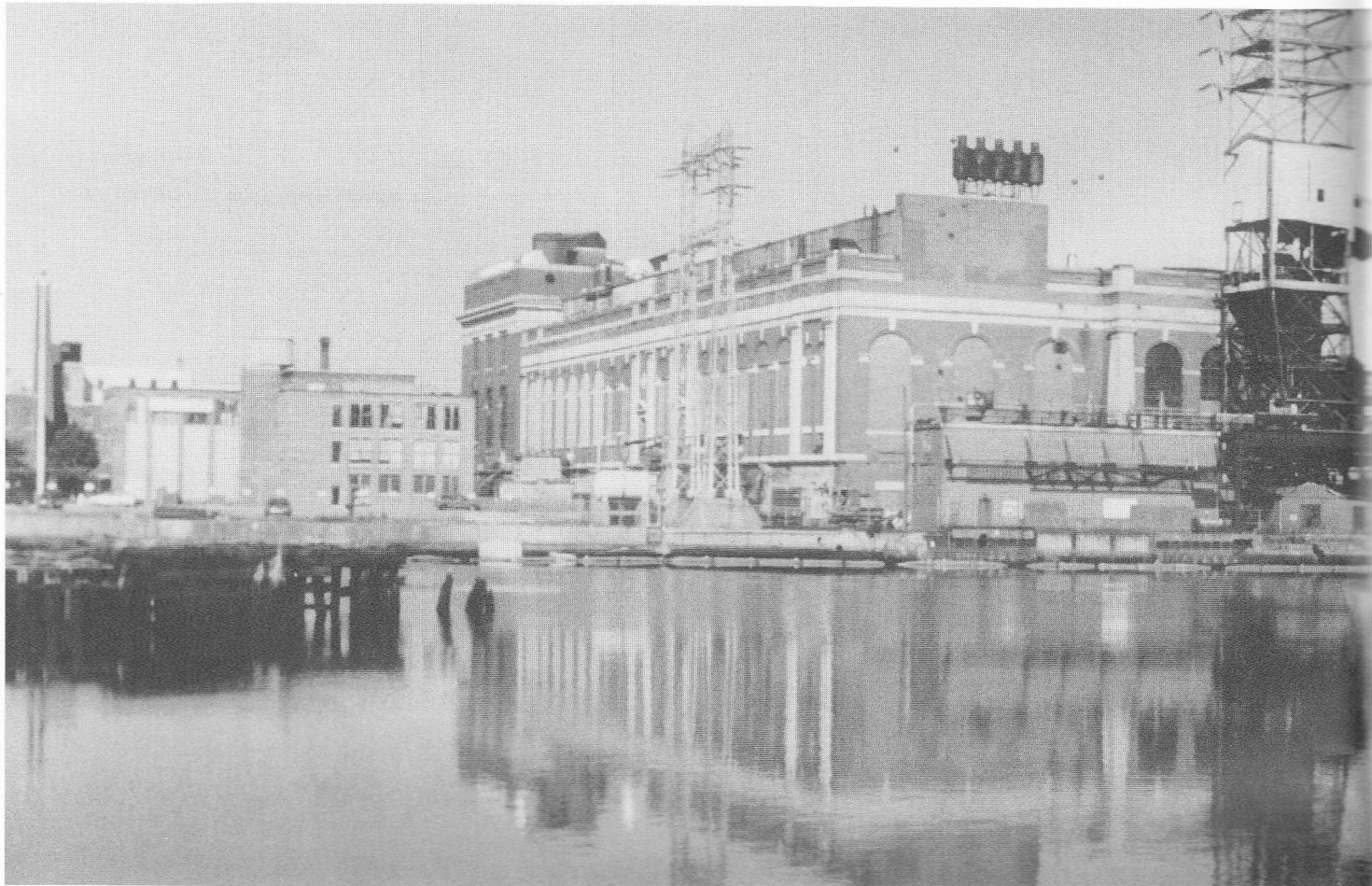
9. *Publications*, 1894, pp. 90-95.

10. *Proceedings*, 1890-91, p. 15.



The Landing of Roger Williams. Engraving published by Johnson & Fry Company, New York, 1866. RIHS Collection (RH*i* X3 844).

A panoramic view of Narragansett Electric's South Street Power Station, the future home of the Heritage Harbor Museum. 1995 photo. RIHS Collection (RH*i* X3 8883).



The Mind's Eye

[A speech delivered at the Rhode Island Historical Society's 175th anniversary gala at Heritage Harbor, 7 June 1997]

ALBERT T. KLYBERG

Allow me a few words about this evening, our organization, and the direction in which we are headed.

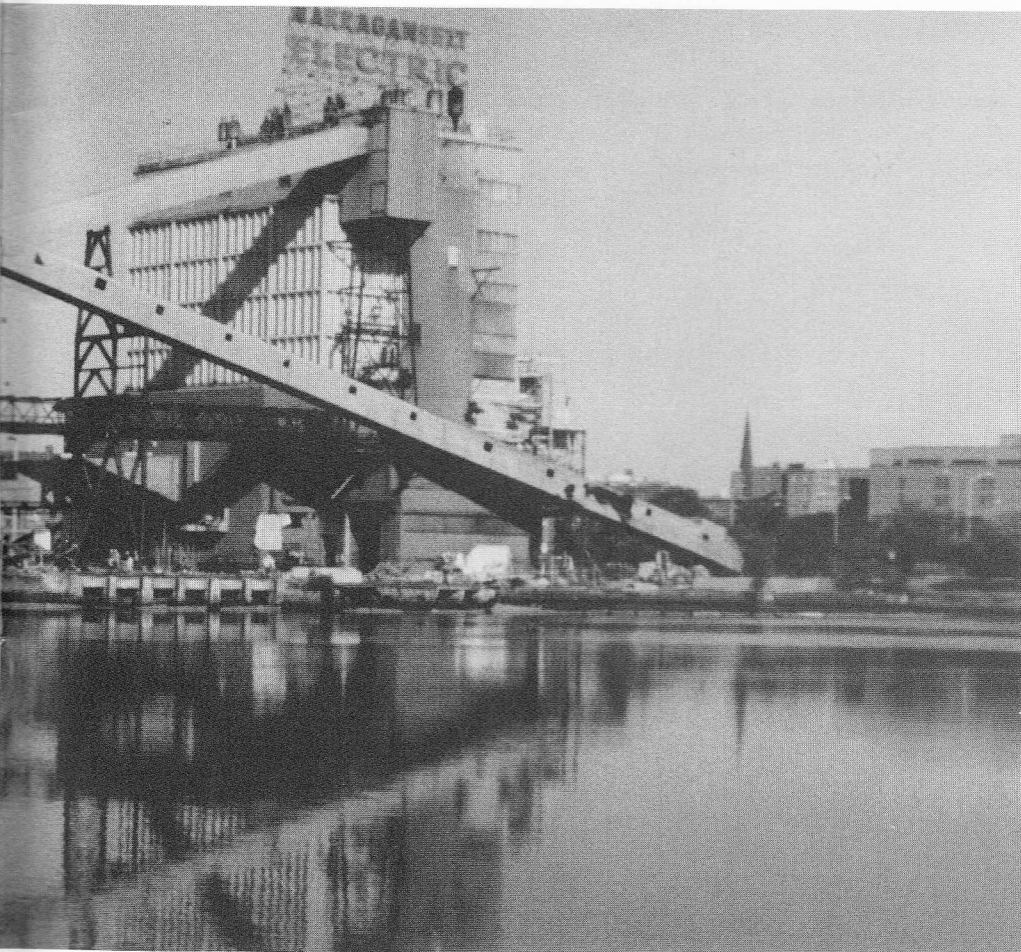
As a statewide historical organization at age 175, gathered here at the wharfside and about to begin an incredible voyage, we have much to reflect upon and much to anticipate. In a sense it has taken us a long time to cross the river, for we were founded in 1822 in a law office just across the way.

One hundred and seventy-five years is a respectable tenure. For twenty-two years we were gypsies, with donated space at the Old State House and in rented space with Brown and Ives and on the third floor of the Arcade. We then spent ninety-eight years at the Cabinet Building at 68 Waterman Street on the campus of Brown before going to the John Brown House. In the early 1960s and 1970s we branched out to the library at 121 Hope Street and to Aldrich House. Some

would say that by spreading out that way we lost visibility in the community. If nothing else, that problem ought to be corrected here at 360 Eddy Street.

It would be a mistake, however, for us, or anyone else, to judge the Historical Society by way of its buildings. Though each one—the State House, Brown and Ives, the Arcade, the Cabinet, John Brown House, the Library, and Aldrich House—in its way is grand, we are not about buildings, and never have been. One might find a better clue by looking at the symbolism in the street names: Benefit, Power, Benevolent, and Hope.

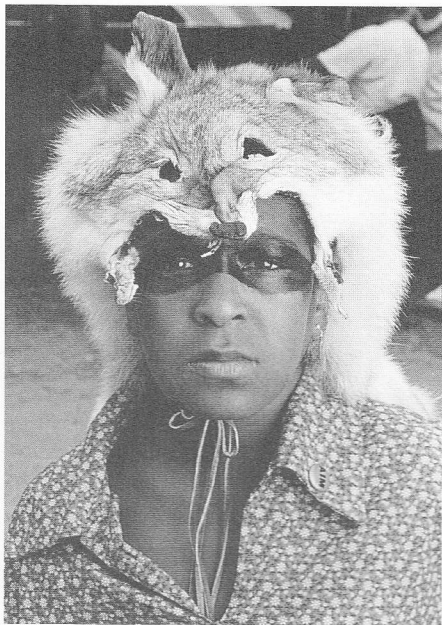
People in Rhode Island have not, in the main, supported us to care for architecture, though we have done so and shall continue to do so. People support us to do much more than that. At the heart of what we do is our care for the community's significant symbols, emblems, trophies, and keepsakes. We are about *stuff*, though the Society is more than a safety deposit vault; it is an energy force





People welcoming the Ernestina, a sailing vessel that brought many Cape Verdeans to Rhode Island. The ship was docked at South Water Street south of the Point Street Bridge in Providence. Photograph by Charlotte Estey, circa 1950. RIHS Collection (RHi E79 1175).

Max Garcia at a Narragansett powwow in Charlestown. Photograph by Jonathan Sharlin, 1993. RIHS Collection (1994.98.1.5).



that processes isolated facts of our story into information. This information is used by the community in hundreds of ways, such as where to move rivers and where to find old prisons. The information thus becomes knowledge, and knowledge, in the perspective of time, becomes wisdom.

Communities value wisdom in their public business. As a community we study history because it trains us in a valuable skill, the skill of critical judgment. This is a skill we need in all areas of our national life: in government, in business, and in our private lives as well.

History allows us to see with the mind's eye, with our imagination. Historical collections prompt and enhance our ability to see. That is what we are all about; it is the "vision thing."

It would be enough to dwell on the past 175 years this evening. But the

Roman god of beginnings and endings, Janus, from whom we derive the name of the first month of the year, has a head that looks forward as well as backward. So tonight we look ahead too.

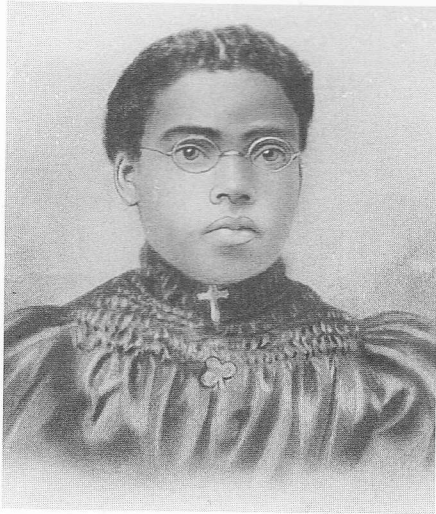
We look ahead to transforming this onetime electric power plant into a new public utility, one with a different form of electricity, a new form of empowerment. Make no mistake: a broad sense of history and tradition can be a powerful force in society. It was a sense of history that transformed a worn-out and poorly regarded waterway into a scintillating and exciting front-door address for Providence.

It was a sense of history also that gave Rhode Island another voice in Congress a few years ago when Michigan congressman Bob Carr visited his ancestral home on Jamestown. At that time Carr was chairing the committee responsible for breathing financial life into the seemingly doomed Quonset Point rail-line project. When Congressman Carr cast his vote for Quonset, the spirit of Governor Caleb Carr was present in that vote as well. As G. K. Chesterton observed, tradition is the "democracy we grant to the dead."

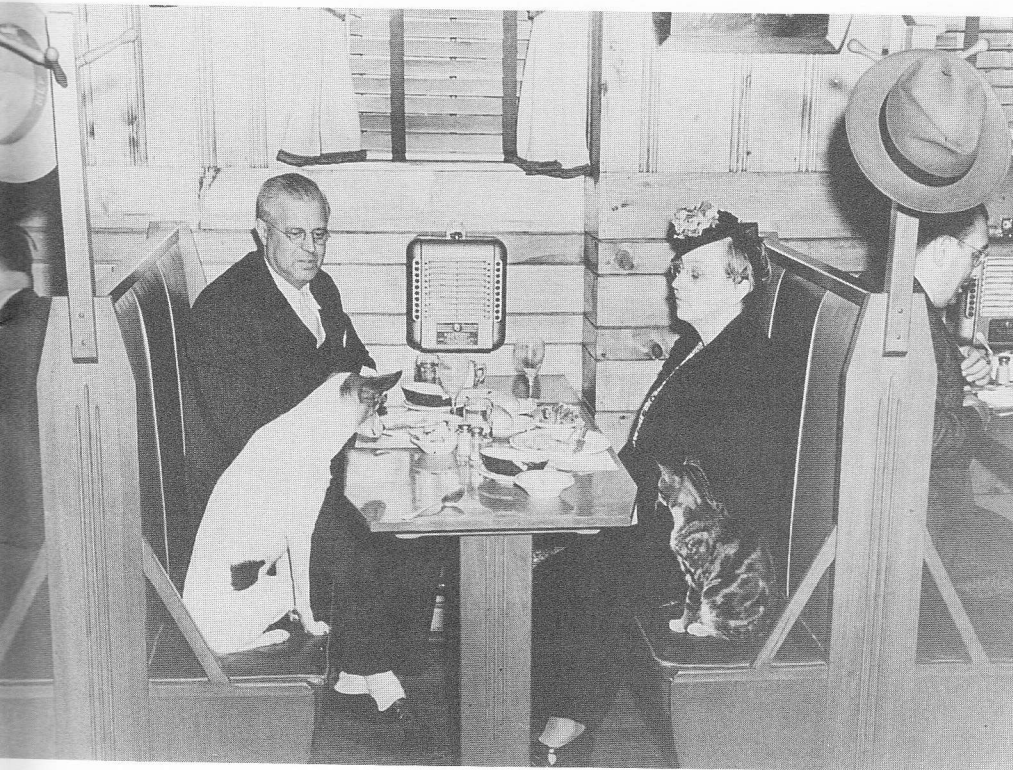
The spirits of our founders and of the people who have supported the Society are present too in this new undertaking. They are here not in some ghostly, paranormal sense but in our ability to use history to understand where we have come from, and from that understanding to be able to make judgments and critical choices for the future—and to do so without fearing the future, because we know the past.

History informs us about the place where we are now gathered. It was here that the Eddy family had its shipyard, right at the end of Ship Street. It was

A staff member of the Watchman Industrial School, founded by the Rhode Island Association of Freewill Baptists to prepare common-school graduates for college. Photo circa 1885. RIHS Collection ((RHl X3 8882).



Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Bassett, with dog and cat, at a local diner, circa 1955. RIHS Collection (RHl X3 3117).



here that Benjamin Tallman built boats for John Brown and for Brown and Ives. One of the Tallmans was a partner of James Bucklin; Bucklin, with Russell Warren, designed the Arcade, and it was Bucklin who was the architect of the Society's Cabinet Building. It was from this wharf, and from India Point, that incredible voyages to the East were launched. There was little more than stout ships, good crews, and the imagination of the mind's eye.

It is history that tells us of the key role this location has played in the progress of Providence. This is the crossing point at the head of Narragansett Bay, the location that put Providence on the map. People have to go through this point. It is a good place to be.

History also tells us something else, something that informs what we are about to do. Although the Providence of Roger Williams drew one of the most remarkable collections of individualists, outcasts, and otherwise-minded prima donnas ever assembled, it succeeded because together they formed what they called "the Combination." The heads of households signed a compact to govern themselves in civil matters only. No one was denied participation on religious grounds, and all who were willing to work were welcome. Williams tried to deal fairly with Indians, and he defended the rights of women. The colony admitted Quakers and Jews. There was power in combination then, and there is power in combination now.

To bring our new powerhouse on line, we are joining with eleven other groups: the Rhode Island Indian Council, the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame, the Portuguese Cultural Foundation, the Italian American Historical Society of Rhode Island, the Roger Williams Park Museum of Natural History, the American Diner Museum, the Providence Jewelry Museum, the Steamship Historical Society of America, and the Rhode Island Military Collection. There is room for other groups as well.

Our new combination will create a hundred new jobs here, attract 200,000 people annually, and contribute \$15 million to the local economy. It will be the centerpiece of the Museum Mile. But as important as all that is, we shall be more than an economic engine.

Our real power will lie in what we can do for the spirit of our people, in how we can help them see through the lens of history in the mind's eye. A community that knows its past is a community that is secure in its place in history. A community that is at peace with its identity is one that moves forward with assurance, that takes risks, that embarks on bold adventures.

Such a community can be achieved only when all are included. Everyone



Young girl in her confirmation dress in front of 36 Wickenden Street, Providence. Photograph by Charlotte Estey, circa 1950. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 6081).

They call themselves militia. They distrust all and are bitter. They retreat into themselves. And in their isolation and hostility, they do a disservice to the tradition of the Independent Man.

Here at Heritage Harbor we have another vision in the mind's eye. It is a vision of a tradition that goes back to one of the first presidents of the Rhode Island Historical Society, John Howland. At the second battle of Trenton in 1776, Howland was literally brushed by history when he was pressed against the railing of a bridge by George Washington's horse. It was not a threatening contact but a touch of greatness, a physical manifestation of a noble cause.

needs to see his or her face in the mirror. No community in history has ever succeeded when 80 percent of its members have felt left out, disconnected from their past, or unimportant. In our new combination we shall embrace a history that will include all. We shall recognize the individual accomplishments of every segment of our society, and we shall celebrate ingenuity and enterprise, because it has always been the Rhode Island way to overcome adversity by using our wits.

So we now begin preparing for the next voyage of the next quarter century of the Historical Society. Buoyed by the company we keep, and energized by the diversity we shall radiate in combination, we are excited by our discoveries of the intersections of the many stories we shall tell together. We seek a new vision of community for a new century.

We are forged and fused by the common searing experiences of Irish famine, of Armenian massacres, of volcanic disasters in the Azores, of black bondage, of Jewish holocaust, of Indian heartbreaks, of the killing fields of Southeast Asia and Latin America. We are now beyond the comparisons of tragedy. Aware of how talents and dreams are squandered by locking people out, we are committed to including people in. There is enough room in this building for all.

There are some in this country who approach the new millennium with a dark vision of strife and conflict.

When he returned to Rhode Island, Howland, the militia man, committed himself to the vision of a country made up of everyday people and ordinary lives. He became a leader in the movement to create public schools; he advocated technological progress through the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers; and he became one of the founders of the Rhode Island Historical Society.

Howland's vision was not of an armed state but of citizens empowered by education and opportunity, a community in touch with its past and thereby equipped with the confidence to sail out and to see clearly with the mind's eye. By celebrating Rhode Island's rich and various history, Heritage Harbor will prepare our people to continue embarking on such voyages.

A woman beats seeds out of cilantro at the Southside Community Garden in Providence. Photograph by Rebecca Sears, 1996. RIHS Collection (1997.99.18).



Haru Lao, at the Tokyo Restaurant, Wickenden Street, Providence. Photograph by Jill Brody, 1990. RIHS Collection (1992.115.23).



"History Has Many Faces": Some members of the Rhode Island community gather for a group portrait in the garden of the John Brown House in 1997. Photograph by Stephan Brigidi.



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Class of 1914 at the Thayer Street School in
Providence, RIHS Collection (RH 33 8861).



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