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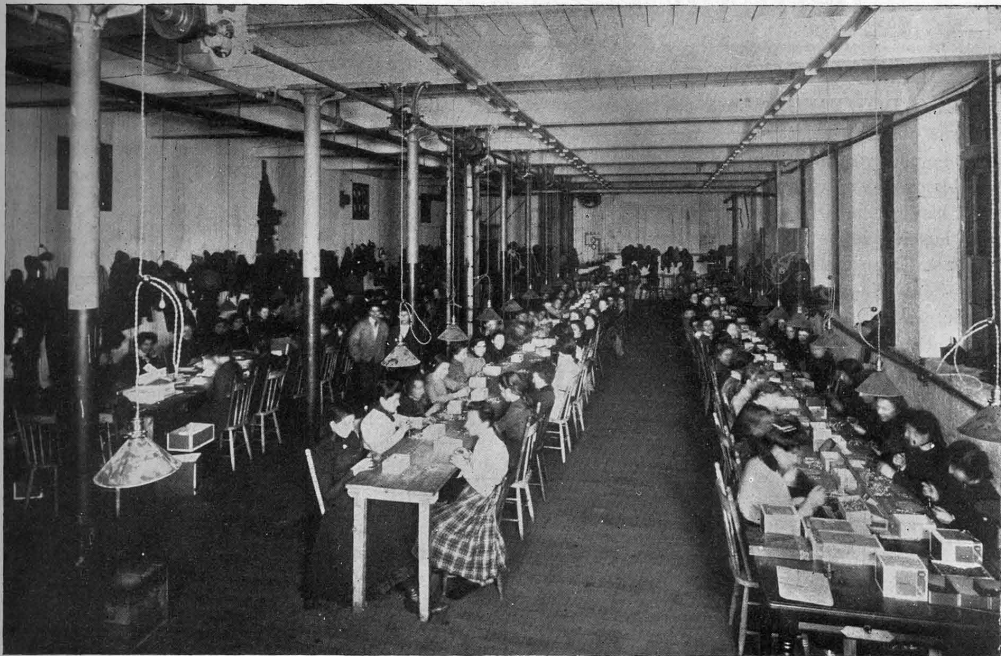
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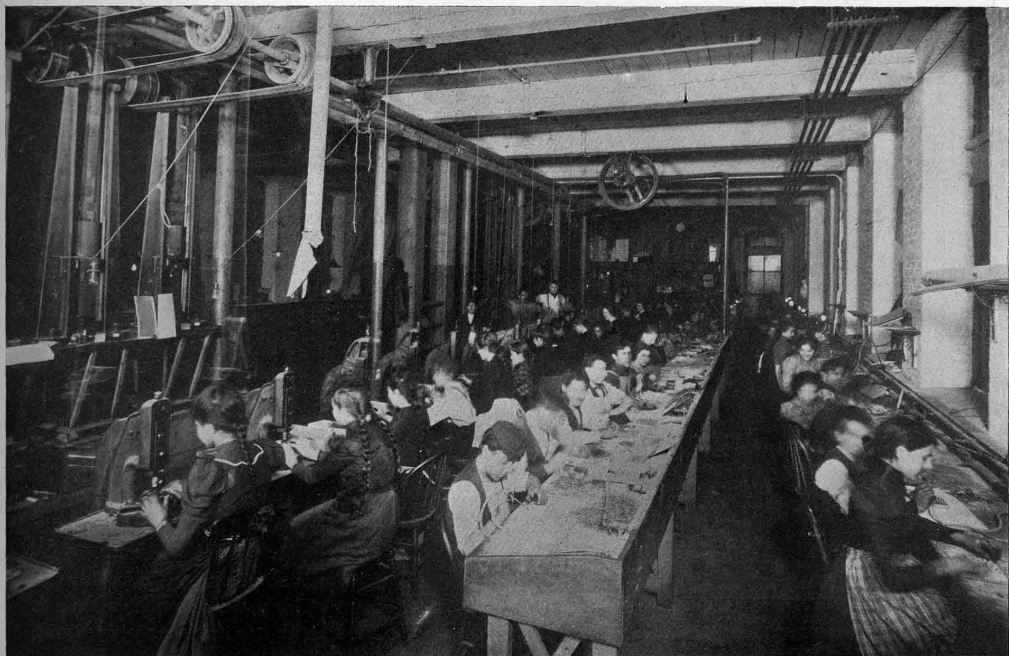
Francesca Carnevali is an associate professor in economic history and director of the Centre for Birmingham and Midlands History at the University of Birmingham, England. She would like to thank the librarians at the Rhode Island Historical Society for access to the early issues of the *Manufacturing Jeweler*; Margaret Chevian and Betty Fitzgerald, at the Providence Public Library, for their help, patience, and encouragement; Stan Lemons and Pat Malone for sharing their knowledge of Providence

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Views in Factory of T. E. Bennett & Co., 7 Beverly Street, Providence, R. I.



STONE SETTING AND CARDING ROOM.



PRESS WORKING AND SOLDERING DEPARTMENT.

Just a Dining Club?

Community and Competition in

Providence's Jewelry Trade, circa 1860-1910

FRANCESCA CARNEVALI

In 1897 the Sears, Roebuck and Company catalog dedicated more pages to jewelry than to any other item.¹ The pages of this mail-order catalog offered a veritable Aladdin's cave of precious and pretty things: rings, brooches, locket, neck and watch chains, chatelaines, earrings, bracelets and bangles, scarf and hat pins, belt and shoe buckles, hair combs and barrettes, charms, and fraternity and Masonic emblems. Sears offered the chance to adorn clothes and flesh with an almost inexhaustible range of silver, gold-plated, gold-filled, and solid gold accessories, with prices ranging from as much as \$120 for a diamond ring to 35¢ for a pair of gold-filled hoop earrings.²

Much of the jewelry sold by Sears, and through other mail-order catalogs of the time, was made by the hundreds of firms that clustered around the streets of the jewelry district in Providence. The origins of jewelry making in Providence date back to the eighteenth century, but it was the expansion of the middle classes during the nineteenth century that induced a gradual transformation of jewelry from exclusive items for the wealthy to consumer goods for the masses, increasing jewelry production both in the United States and in Europe. Technological changes and an expanding market meant that from the end of the Civil War, the trade morphed from a craft into an industry, one that employed almost 10,000 Americans on the eve of the First World War.

ABOUT 75 JEWELRY MANUFACTURERS operated in Providence in 1860, employing 1,750 workers and making products worth \$2.2 million (22 percent of the value of the jewelry that was produced nationally). Although the Civil War depressed the industry for two years, an increase in demand for ornaments with a patriotic, martial, or funerary style fashioned in brass and other base metals

revived employment. The census of 1880 reported 148 jewelry workshops in Rhode Island, of which 142 were in Providence. With Rhode Island then producing one-fourth of all the jewelry manufactured in the nation, the Providence trade employed more than 3,000 people and accounted for products worth more than \$5 million.³ Internationally, Providence vied with Birmingham, England, as well as New York and London, for the title of "jewelry capital of the world."⁴

This was a trade with few barriers to entry. Craftsmen who had served five to seven years of apprenticeship and had some design skills, a set of tools, some savings, and a good reputation could easily become proprietors. With die presswork replacing slower casting methods, workshops produced brooches, cuff links, pins, and locket, decorated with stones, wirework, or enamel and fitted with clasps and chains.⁵ Many firms made and sold rings, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, hair ornaments, and brooches; others made goods more commonly worn by men, such as watch chains, tie pins, and cuff, shirt, and collar buttons and studs. A dozen firms specialized in badges for fraternal and religious organizations and unions. Other firms produced shellwork and stonework, while still others made only rings. Some shops turned out findings and provided jewelry manufacturers with components from machine-stamped brass to plated chain to customized settings. There were also platers, die-cutting shops, enamellers, tool and machinery specialists, and precious-metal refiners, and jewelry manufacturers could buy jewelry boxes and sample cases made locally.⁶ Most firms were small in the 1880s, with some employing no more than a handful of workers; only a few had more than fifty employees.⁷

The U.S. Census of Manufactures of 1910 shows that by 1899 Rhode Island's jewelry trade employed

BROWN & SHARPE MFG. CO.
PROVIDENCE, R. I.



No. 2
Surface Grinding
Machine

For Finishing
Jewelers'
Dies.

This machine grinds
work to 18" long,
6" wide and 5"
high.

Manufacturing Jeweler 18 (1896): 284; RIHS Collection (RHi X17 356).

more than 7,000 people in more than 200 firms. Since only a handful of these firms were located outside Providence, this number of workers can be taken as a good approximation of the number employed in the city. At the turn of the century the jewelry industry was the fourth largest employer in the state, but it was the largest employer in the city. By 1909 the total number of jewelry workers in Providence had increased to almost 10,000, in more than 290 establishments.⁸ These figures take into account only employment in those firms that actually made jewelry, without considering such allied trades as refining, plating, die making, tool making, and jewelry-box manufacturing. If all of these trades were taken into account, it is very probable that on the eve of the First World War the employment generated by the jewelry trade was closer to 18,000.⁹

This picture of steady growth, however, masks a more complex reality. Philip Scranton has detailed how

the prosperous 1880s and 1890s were followed by decades of turmoil as the industrial jewelry district suffered under the pressures of “opportunism, design copying, interfirm suspicion and price shaving . . . defenseless against the flow of workers-entrepreneurs who fuelled these abuses.” These pressures, the consequence of “the evils of overcompetition, derived from the jewelry sector’s own structure and technical capabilities,” destroyed the craft basis of the industry.¹⁰

Until the economic crash of 1873, jewelry goods in Providence had been sold to jobbers (wholesalers) for cash, but the economic

downturn changed this arrangement. After the mid-seventies jobbers were able to buy jewelry from manufacturers on credit and sell it on a consignment basis or with long delays in settling accounts. The new arrangement, which favored the jobbers, promoted the growth of Providence’s jewelry trade from the mid-1870s onward. Seeking business, Providence manufacturers accepted small orders, returns of unsold goods, cancellation of confirmed orders, and the cost of huge inventories of all styles. Jobbers also showed one firm’s samples to other manufacturers, inviting them to duplicate the styles at a lower price. Copying was made easy, even for smaller firms, by the presence in the city of a large number of diesinkers and findings firms (makers of chains, clasps, and other small ornamental jewelry parts). Copies could be made so quickly, in less than two weeks, that the more established firms were always attempting to create additional novelties as their stocks were being devalued. Design patenting was ineffectual, and established firms

would either agree to lower their prices or see jobbers go to the shops (usually newer and smaller) of the imitators.¹¹

According to Scranton, it was the structure of the industrial district, its specific technological capabilities, and the very nature of the product it made that brought about the decline of the industry's emphasis on craft. Too much flexibility and spatial concentration facilitated the "knockoff game," and as a consequence of overcompetition most of Providence's firms turned their backs on specialty and the skilled crafting of style. By 1914 the trade had descended into sweatshop conditions; tending to concentrate and become bigger, firms replaced skilled workers with machinery and employed women and children for repetitive and poorly paid jobs, while at the same time outwork (performed by women and children in their homes) and piecework proliferated. The working conditions of the thousands of immigrant women and children who were entering the Providence trade were so poor that a report by the International Jewelry Workers Union characterised the industry as being like a "black hole in Calcutta."¹²

THE HISTORY OF THE Providence jewelry industry has been told as a story of failure in terms of how overcompetition destroyed the industrial district as firms grew in size, took to doing certain processes (like enameling) internally that had earlier been done by other specialized firms within the district, and failed to retain their skilled workers and craft basis.¹³ Many of these developments have been seen as a failure of cooperation, with jewelers unable to regulate the jobbers and the manufacturers continually cutting prices and copying designs. Scranton minimizes the importance of the main representative body of the trade, the New England Manufacturing Jewelers and Silversmiths Association (NEMJSA), established in 1883. According to his analysis, the organization was just a dining club, created by jewelers who could not act collectively to address the problems that afflicted the trade.¹⁴

This interpretation implies that it was Providence's specific industrial structure that generated a specific set of reactions and responses among the jewelers and

brought about the conditions for the industry's decline. According to Scranton, spatial concentration was the problem; what made the district also unmade it, for specialist networks allowed start-up firms to be created with minimal expense. "[F]urther segmentation arose as veteran firms and novice firms warred to the benefit of distributors," Scranton finds, and in such a climate all that the trade association could do was to "nibble at the corners of key problems."¹⁵

But this explanation needs to be considered in the light of a different but parallel reality, one that existed across the ocean, in Birmingham, England, where there was a jewelry district very similar to Providence's. Faced with circumstances like those in Providence, Birmingham's jewelers responded in a similar way, creating a trade organization, the Birmingham Jewellers Association, in 1887. Although overcompetition plagued Birmingham as much as it did Providence, the BJA's role was not that of a hapless bystander; instead, it was able to effectively regulate competition and foster cooperation.¹⁶ That segmentation in Birmingham's jewelry industry did not make cooperation impossible suggests that "structural" explanations of the industry's decline in Providence may not be totally accurate.

However, when studying the history of Providence's jewelry trade, we are faced with the undeniable fact that during the second half of the nineteenth century the nature of the industry changed. This change was reflected, in part, by the workers who were now employed and by the kinds of work that they did. With mail-order houses and department stores ensuring substantial orders, the American market rewarded economies of scale, and as firms became bigger and internalized processes, many entrepreneurs gave up on craft, preferring to concentrate on producing large quantities of cheap goods, made by unskilled, low-wage workers. From the 1890s onward such production was supported by the steady supply of cheap labor that came with the sizable numbers of Irish, Italians, and Russian Jews who were arriving in Providence.

It should be recognized, however, that there was another important factor at work in shaping the industry

during this time: the jewelers' trade association. Far from being just a dining club, NEMJSA was an example of community building, using sociability as a tool to forge bonds between the members that would at least temper some of the more undesirable effects of competition. Sociability was also aimed at creating occupational identity and a stronger voice within the politics of the state and the city, at a time when the social structures of Providence were changing.¹⁷

Our understanding of this world is crucially influenced by the nature of the sources available. With no other archival material surviving from NEMJSA, our best sources for understanding the Providence jewelers and jewelry industry of the time are in the pages of the *Manufacturing Jeweler*, the association's official weekly publication, which reported on NEMJSA meetings and other matters of interest to jewelers. Although the reports of the meetings were very detailed and included long quotations, it should be remembered that these reports are nonetheless a step removed from the actual voice of the jewelers themselves, representing them but not necessarily saying what the jewelers themselves might have said.

DURING THE 1880s organizations such as NEMJSA represented what Robert H. Wiebe has called "the indispensable declaration of independence" of local professional and trade communities that were trying to encourage a sense of belonging among their members. Men who felt they had special skill or knowledge formed both local and national organizations to establish their own "class" and to forge links with others like them. This was part of the process that gave rise to a new middle class in the 1890s, with groups not only of professionals in medicine, law, administration, economics, and social work but also of men in business, labor, and agriculture. These groups demonstrated their skills and functions "by a proud identification with their category, by a determination to improve the procedures of a particular business, by an eagerness to join others like themselves in a craft union, professional organization, or trade association."¹⁸

Businessmen also formed organizations to gain a political voice both to lobby for their own specific interests and to influence the process of reforming what was perceived to be a corrupt and poorly organized federal government.¹⁹ Belonging to such organizations gave individuals a legitimacy and a status that they might not otherwise have had. Expanding in the second half of the nineteenth century, these businessmen's associations, like those of professionals, should be understood in large part as a means of status acquisition, to be viewed in the broader context of the development, in both Europe and the United States, of a public sphere where such organizations challenged established institutions. While it is easy to pigeonhole and dismiss trade associations as simply concerned with the defense of narrow economic interests—those of a small minority (owners) against those of a larger group (workers)—these organizations are better seen as a means for facilitating civic discussion between state and individual, providing businessmen a place in the public sphere.²⁰ In this perspective, what matters about the organizations created by the jewelers is both the context in which they came into being and what might be considered the larger moral order that they codified and expressed.²¹

The New England Manufacturing Jewelers and Silversmiths Association was created in 1883, but its origins are to be found in the Providence Jewelers Club, a social organization that developed in 1879 from the excursions of some of the members of the craft to New York to play baseball with the jobbers and manufacturers there. Dinners and baseball games continued to bring together the club's broad membership of jobbers, manufacturers, and clerks in the following years, but in 1881 the club's membership started declining.²² In 1883 a decision was taken to create a new body, one that would admit only manufacturers, and NEMJSA was born.

The new organization, like its predecessor, was a social club, but it was through its gatherings that the jewelers started talking about the instability of the jobbing firms and how this affected the manufacturers. On October 18, 1884, a meeting was held in the "spacious" rooms

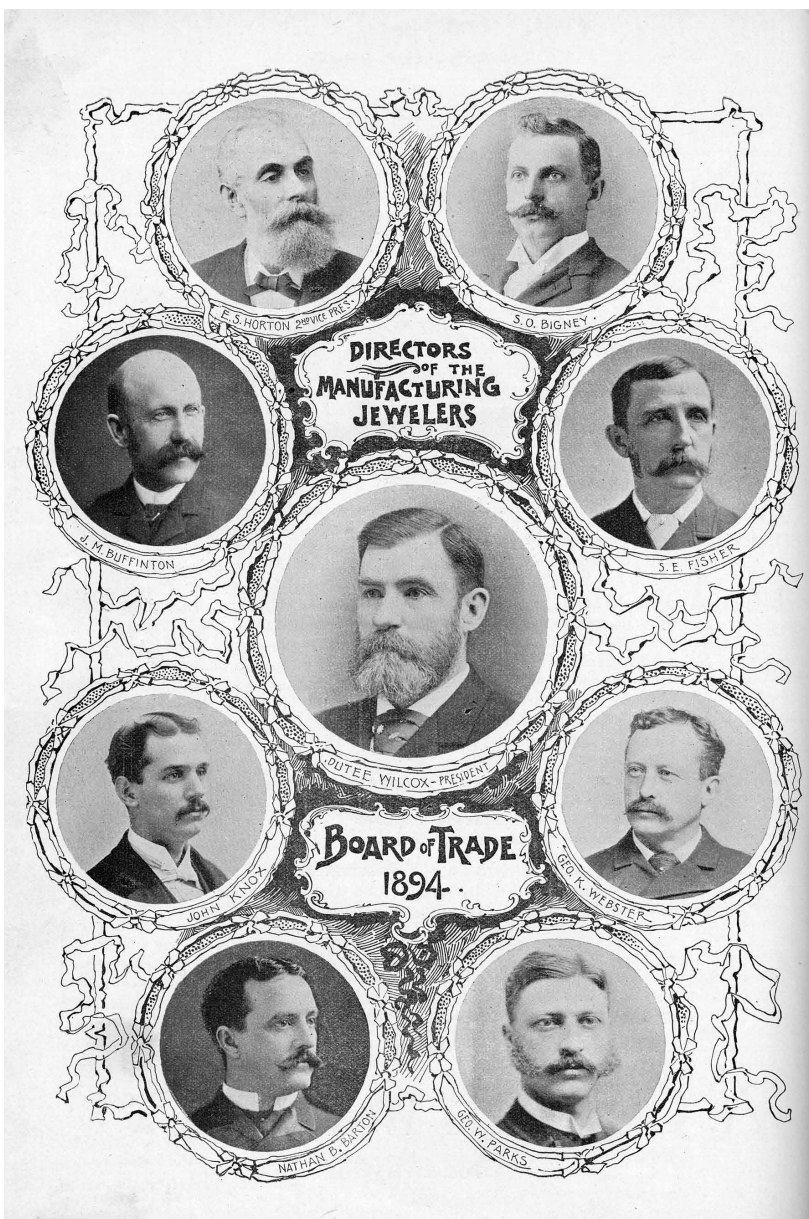
of NEMJSA at 151 Broad Street in Providence, with attendees overflowing into the hall.²³ The *Manufacturing Jeweler* reported that “the earnestness of the conversation and the serious determined air of all, gave token that the manufacturers were ready to take definitive steps towards improving the condition of affairs. . . . Most of the largest and most influential houses in Providence were present.”

Manufacturing Jeweler 15 (1894): 55; RIHS Collection (RH1 X17 355).

What brought the jewelers together was a sense that there was “excessive competition” in the trade.²⁴ As the jewelers saw it, this was a problem because the extreme volatility of the jewelry trade meant that jobbers often went bankrupt, leaving manufacturers with the burden of unpaid credits. To deal with this situation, the meeting voted unanimously to create a sister organization, a jewelers’ board of trade, and the constitution and by-laws of the board were enacted at another NEMJSA meeting the following week.²⁵

As declared by its by-laws, the aims of the Manufacturing Jewelers Board of Trade (MJBoT) were ambitious, suggesting the scale of the problems facing this community. The object was to foster the interests of the manufacturing jewelers; to protect the jewelers from fraud; to reform abuses in the trade (such as the practice of dating bills ahead and the consignment of goods); to provide accurate information among the board’s members about the financial standing, credit, and character of dealers in jewelry; to promote uniformity in the trade’s customs and practices; and to encourage friendly relations among manufacturers.²⁶ However, despite its ambitious manifesto, the main function of the MJBoT was to provide manufacturers with trade reports about jobbers. “When the members cooperate readily with the secretary, the standing, reputation for prompt payment or otherwise and amount of indebtedness to manufacturers of a buyer can be ascertained in two days, and if it is found that he is going in the wrong direction, well to be forewarned is to be forearmed.”²⁷ Cooperation was seen as crucial, capable of relieving the trade of many of the annoyances and burdens that afflicted it.²⁸

Cooperation went hand in hand with sociability. Like many other such organizations, NEMJSA staged banquets, picnics, baseball games, and other sociable activities for its members.²⁹ The October 1884 meeting of the manufacturing jewelers, at which the constitution and by-laws of the board of trade were enacted, was followed that evening by a concert in the NEMJSA hall. At that time the association had 204 members, and although it acted mostly as a social club, its role as a trade



organization should not be underestimated. Reporting on the concert, the *Manufacturing Jeweler* remarked that “the steps taken by the association to encourage social gatherings and furnish an opportunity to members to meet outside the routine of business duties and to become acquainted with one another’s families cannot be too highly praised.”³⁰

During its early years NEMJSA organized quarterly dinners and dances, as well as events such as the “Ladies’ Day” outing held on September 7, 1888. On that occasion more than seventy men, women, and children attended, boarding the steam yacht *Florence*, which was all decked out with banners, for a cruise to Read’s Palace at Cowesett, with the Baker Brothers band playing on board. A meal was served on their arrival: chowder, baked clams, clam cakes, sweet potatoes, corn, tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, baked fish, Indian pudding, coffee, and watermelon. Next there was bowling, football, baseball, and dancing, after which refreshments of cake, coffee, fruit, and melon were served before the attendees boarded the yacht to return to Providence.³¹

Financial concerns eventually led to the association’s 1889 decision to focus its efforts on a midwinter dinner and a summer outing, normally in June. These events, which were reserved for men, became progressively more serious and formal; at the first midwinter dinner, in November 1889, there was much storytelling and singing,³² but at subsequent dinners there were fewer songs and longer speeches, as more and more prominent businessmen and politicians were invited to attend. The rising prominence of the jewelers and their association can be measured by the caliber of the speakers they were able to invite. In 1892, when NEMJSA was organizing an exhibit for the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the jewelers were addressed by Colonel J. C. Wyman, the executive commissioner of the exposition’s Board of Managers for Rhode Island, whose talk was meant to encourage more members of the association to participate in the project.³³ In 1898 NEMJSA’s guest was the Honourable Adin B. Capron, one of Rhode Island’s representatives to Congress, who spoke of such important

political matters as the protective tariff, the revision of the bankruptcy law, and the monetary gold standard, all of which directly concerned the jewelers.³⁴

By 1900 the association had become a force to be reckoned with. That year its annual dinner was attended by more than 250 men, almost 200 of whom were association members, and by the state’s governor, Elisha Dyer. “You represent an immense amount of brains and capital,” Dyer told the audience, “and you cannot be relegated to a back seat. I should be false in my duty as chief executive if I did not do all in my power to put this magnificent industry where it shall never know defeat.” Dyer was thus announcing that he would support the association’s effort to convince Congress to reject a proposed French tariff treaty that would reduce the protective tariff on jewelry, which had been increased from 35 percent to 60 percent in 1897 through the efforts of NEMJSA and Rhode Island senator Nelson W. Aldrich.³⁵ At the association’s 1904 dinner, held at Providence’s Wellington hotel, more than 550 men—more than 300 of them members—saw the attendance of Aldrich, U.S. secretary of commerce and labor George B. Cortelyou, and Rhode Island lieutenant governor George H. Utter. At the top of the jewelers’ agenda at that time was the problem posed by trade unions: the manufacturers wanted to be reassured that they had the government’s support against organized labor.³⁶

The apex of NEMJSA’s success came in 1910, when its annual banquet was attended by more than 500 people, including President William Howard Taft, Senator Aldrich, all the congressmen from the Providence district, Rhode Island governor Aram J. Pothier, and Providence mayor Henry Fletcher.³⁷ By then the association represented 412 factories, which gave employment to 19,000 employees and manufactured more than half of the jewelry made in the country. The organization had been active in a number of issues at both the state and national levels. In 1907 it saw the adoption of a measure it supported, a Rhode Island stamping law guaranteeing the quality of gold goods.³⁸ Through 1908 and 1909 it campaigned successfully against U.S. tariff concessions to Germany.³⁹



Flashlight View Taken from the South Gallery.

NEMJSA's 1901 winter banquet. *Manufacturing Jeweler* 28 (1901): 204; RIHS Collection (RHi X17 358).

THE ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL midwinter dinners were formal events, where the jewelers affirmed their political position and aired their staunchly Republican collective voice. Disseminating the views expressed on these occasions, the reports in the *Manufacturing Jeweler* are especially striking because of the photographs accompanying them, photographs showing hundreds of tuxedoed men sitting at elegantly laid tables. The palpable sense of purpose and respectability that these photos convey is reinforced by the publication's reprinting

of each year's menu. From year to year this menu varied little, but the number of courses increased. In 1906 the dinner began with martini cocktails and bluepoint oysters, followed by a consommé, olives, celery, and radishes. Next came the main course, chicken halibut normande, served with sauterne wine and followed by filet of beef with mushrooms, served with Mumm's extra dry champagne and accompanied by potato croquettes, green peas, and gratin potatoes. At this point cigarettes were passed around as attendees sipped punch. Then,



SCENES AND INCIDENTS OF THE DAY.

Manufacturing Jeweler 31 (1902): 666; RIHS Collection (RHi X17 360).

after a savory dish of roast stuffed larded squab, followed by ice cream, cheese, and liqueur, the dinner closed with coffee and toasted crackers. An orchestra serenaded the diners as they ate, and there were speeches when the meal was over.⁴⁰

Although NEMJSA's summer outings were much less formal than the dinners, the ritualistic element in the outings was, if possible, even stronger, since the outings were very public affairs. The association's 1906 summer outing, described in the *Manufacturing Jeweler* as a "day off for pleasure and general jollification," may be taken as typical. On a sunny June morning more than 350 men assembled at the unfinished Masonic Temple on the

corner of Dorrance and Pine Streets in Providence, and led by David Wallis Reeves's twenty-six-piece American Band, the association's president, officers, and members paraded through the city's jewelry district, through Dorrance to Westminster, through Mathewson, down Weybosset, through Custom House Street and South Water Street, and then across the bridge to the Crawford Street wharf, all the while receiving (according to the *Manufacturing Jeweler*) "the usual hearty" applause from crowds on the streets and from the windows overlooking the parade. According to their custom on such occasions, the men wore straw boaters and carried opened Japanese paper sunshades. As the band continued to play, the men

boarded the steamer *Warwick* and sailed to Field's Point, where they debarked and proceeded to enjoy a meal of clam chowder, baked bluefish, eels, lobster, soft-shelled crabs, clam cakes, baked clams, and chips, followed by Indian pudding with cream, all accompanied by spring water and Narragansett lager beer. After this repast the men reboarded the steamer and were conveyed to Rocky Point, where they spent the rest of the afternoon watching and playing baseball.⁴¹

It was through such dinners and outings that the jewelers found the means to "become better acquainted."⁴² Social networking mattered to these men. "There is a disposition among many to regard this organization as purely a social one," was the way the *Manufacturing Jeweler* put it. "This is undoubtedly the general purpose of the association, but intercurrent with an informal program comes the opportunity of making and strengthening friendships and the informal interchange of business opinions which mutually benefit the members and in a measure, lessen antipathies and petty rivalries."⁴³ Although the association's concerts, banquets, picnics, and clambakes might be regarded as just the leisurely pursuits of an aspiring middle class, they had, in fact, a more fundamental purpose: they were meant to create a sense of occupational identity, one that would forge ties among individuals and encourage all involved to act for the collective good. Sources show that the jewelers saw their organization not just as a social club but rather as one with moral value: "To the casual observer, these annual banquets may mean little beyond good fellowship. But there is a much deeper significance in the coming together of these manufacturers and their friends around the banquet table. . . . The thinking man realizes that this [association] is a great and living force, potent for good and capable of exerting a vast influence and thus working for the happiness of thousands of people. . . . This association stands for honorable business dealings. . . . It is a vital force for good government . . . and its individual members are active and important in state and municipal government."⁴⁴

Some of the jewelers were, indeed, men of consequence. The leading spirit behind the creation of

the Providence Jewelers Club in 1879 was thirty-five-year-old John McCloy. A native of Newburgh, New York, McCloy came to Providence in 1870, where for ten years he worked as a partner with his uncle, drumming up business for the Gwinn and McCloy Company, makers of rolled gold locket.⁴⁵ Described as a "smart, active man, but with no practical knowledge of the business" when he arrived in the city, by 1880 McCloy had learned enough and accumulated enough capital to set up his own successful business, making imitation diamond jewelry.⁴⁶ He served as president of the Providence Jewelers Club until 1881, and staying on as a member of its executive committee, he participated in the club's reincarnation as NEMJSA in 1883. The following year he helped bring about the creation of the MJBoT before retiring from his business to dedicate himself to managing the *Manufacturing Jeweler*. A popular man with a large circle of friends, McCloy was active in many local societies, including the What Cheer Masonic Lodge, the Olive Branch Lodge of Odd Fellows, the Sterling Division of the Knights of Pythias, the Golden Rule Lodge of the Knights of Honor, the Unity Council of the Royal Arcanum, the Royal Society of Good Fellows, and the Providence Lodge of the Ancient Order of United Workmen.⁴⁷ Clearly both a joiner and a leader, McCloy used his network of friends and associates to gain members for the MJBoT and subscribers for the *Manufacturing Jeweler*.⁴⁸

Another notable leader of the jewelers was Dutee Wilcox. Born at Douglas, Massachusetts, in 1834, at sixteen Wilcox went to work as an apprentice for the Providence jewelry firm of Wheeler and Knight. In 1856 he formed a partnership with Horace and Olney Thayer, and in 1859 another partnership with Henry Battell, Wilcox and Battell (which became D. Wilcox and Company in 1880). An enterprising man, Wilcox invented several articles of jewelry, one of which, the Wilcox and Battell button stud, gained annual sales of as much as a hundred thousand dollars. In addition to his success as a businessman, Wilcox was deeply involved in the city's municipal affairs as a member of the Providence Board of Aldermen from 1877 through 1879 and as a member of the Providence



The Dutee Wilcox Building.

Manufacturing Jeweler 19 (1896): 4; RIHS Collection (RHi X17 359).

School Committee from 1876 to 1878. He also served as a director of the National Bank of Commerce (one of the state's largest banks), a trustee of the City Savings Bank, and a director of the Providence Board of Trade, and he was a member of the Young Men's Christian Association and the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1875 he erected one of Providence's most costly and magnificent building at the time, the Wilcox Building, fronting on Weybosset and Custom House Streets.⁴⁹ When the Manufacturing Jewelers Board of Trade was created in 1884, NEMJSA's executive committee recognized that the board would need a strong leader, and it chose Wilcox, then one of the city's wealthiest jewelers, worth at least \$300,000 in his business and in real estate holdings.⁵⁰ Wilcox served

in the MJBoT position until 1906. His standing in the city was such that he gained a listing in that symbol of its elite society, the *Providence Society Blue Book*, and he earned a long article in the *Providence Journal* at his death in 1918.⁵¹

The first president of NEMJSA was Alfred S. Potter. A Rhode Islander, he was born in 1828 in Fiskeville, Scituate, one of seven brothers who all engaged, with various degrees of success, in the jewelry business, Alfred Potter himself as a partner in the Fanning and Potter Company. Like most of the officers of NEMJSA, he was also active in Providence's civic and social affairs: he was a Sixth Ward member of the Providence Common Council for six years and chairman of its committee on police for five, a member of the fire department, the Marine Artillery, Freemasons, Odd Fellows, and Squantum and Hope Clubs, and president of the Warwick Club.⁵²

Potter served as the president of NEMJSA until his death in 1888. Following the presidency of Edwin Lowe (about whom little is known aside from his membership in the Odd Fellows), Joseph H. Fanning became the association's president in 1891 and continued in that office until 1898. A member of the Providence Common Council from 1882 to 1887, Fanning was also a member of the Board of Aldermen, the chairman of the Committee on Parks, and a vestryman of St. James' Episcopal Church in Providence, and he was a member of the Central Club and the St John's Lodge of Masons.⁵³

This pattern of engagement with the social and/or political life of the city was carried out by most of the association's presidents. Fanning's successor, John M. Buffington (1898-1900), of the Potter and Buffington Company (the Potter here was Col. Isaac M. Potter), was a Republican like his predecessors, and he represented Providence in the lower house of the state assembly in 1888-89. He was also a director of the Roger Williams National Bank, a Mason, and a member of the Pomham Club, the Providence Central Club, the Long Meadow Golf Club, the Narragansett Boat Club, and the First Universalist Church of Providence.⁵⁴ In the early 1880s, with his firm prospering, Buffington was able to purchase

real estate on Broadway valued at \$19,000, and by 1901 he was one of the wealthiest jewelers in Providence.⁵⁵

By 1900 NEMJSA represented more than two hundred Providence firms. With the beginning of the new century marked by labor unrest throughout the country, the association was successful in overcoming the power of the jewelry workers' trade union; in 1903 the *Manufacturing Jeweler* could proudly report that NEMJSA was "in absolute control of the Eastern jewelry shops in case of a strike."⁵⁶ During this difficult period the association was led by Frank T. Pearce (1900-1903). At the time of his election he was the chairman of the executive committee of the West Side Club and a member of the Long Meadow Golf Club.⁵⁷ It was during these years that the association finally shook off its reputation as "a purely social organization of good fellows and stepped out into the open as the hope and the defense of the jewelry trade."⁵⁸

Although he was instrumental in bringing about this change, Pearce was not a politician, as was his successor, Henry G. Thresher (1903-1907). Thresher, of Waite-Thresher and Company, had served for four years in the state legislature and was mayor of Central Falls in 1898 and 1899, and his political experience may well have been useful when he took the NEMJSA's tariff committee to Washington in 1909 to lobby, successfully, for higher tariffs against the importation of German jewelry.⁵⁹

Until 1907, when Thresher stepped down as president, NEMJSA had been led by men of Anglo-Saxon origins; reading the pages of the *Manufacturing Jeweler*, one might have thought that the whole trade was exclusively composed of men whose forbearers were British. But this was not the case; other sources reveal that Jews were also strongly represented in the jewelry trade.⁶⁰ The most prominent of these was Harry Cutler, who served as the association's president from 1907 to 1909. Cutler's rise among the ranks of the Providence jewelers and the city's society was truly meteoric. He was born in 1875 in Yelisavetgrad, Russia, where most of his family perished in pogroms, but from which his mother managed to flee with him and a daughter and reached America in 1885. The Cutlers lived in Buffalo, where Harry sold papers, peddled matches, and worked for

a dyer, until he moved to Fall River, Massachusetts, where he worked in a mill as a "doffer boy."⁶¹ Having relocated to Providence in 1890, he was employed by various jewelry firms until 1899, when he started his own firm, with only limited capital, making gold shell rings. Beginning with only two employees, by 1901 his business employed seventy-five to one hundred people.⁶²

Before being elected NEMJSA president, Cutler had served on the association's advisory committee and was regarded as one of the successful men in the industry. In 1907 he was also elected to the General Assembly as a representative from the Fifth District in Providence on a Republican ticket, a position that he held until 1911, when he was elected to the Rhode Island Senate. In his role as president of NEMJSA, he urged the jewelers to support the training of jewelry apprentices, not just at the Rhode Island School of Design but also through the classes set up by the Young Men's Christian Association and by the Technical High School in Providence.⁶³ "Although a Jew, located in a community containing a vast majority of Christians," said a 1911 article in the *Manufacturing Jeweler*, "he has won his way to many positions of trust and honor. . . . He has never lost any ground owing to his religion."⁶⁴ A prominent member of Providence's Congregation Sons of Israel, by 1911 he had been elected as codirector of the educational department of the YMCA and was serving as a director of St. Joseph's Hospital in Providence. He was also a director of the Union Trust Company and a lieutenant colonel in Rhode Island's eminent First Light Infantry.⁶⁵

In 1911, at the invitation of the Boston Chamber of Commerce, Rhode Island governor Aram J. Pothier appointed Cutler as his representative on a visit to European cities for the purpose of studying the commercial, industrial, and municipal conditions there, and Providence mayor Henry Fletcher (another prominent jeweler, who had been elected the city's mayor three times) also asked Cutler to be his representative on that occasion. As a consequence of Cutler's trip, many foreign chambers of commerce accepted invitations to send representatives to Massachusetts and Rhode Island.⁶⁶



PHOTOGRAPH BY GENERAL PHOTO CO., 131 WASHINGTON ST.

THE JEWELERS "LOOKING PLEASANT" BEFORE THE CAMERA AT FIELD'S POINT

NEMJSA's 1903 summer outing. *Manufacturing Jeweler* 32 (1903): 666; RIHS Collection (RHi X17 361).

For his service on the Council of National Defense and the Jewish Welfare Board of the Army and Navy, Cutler received both the Distinguished Service Medal and the Medal of Honor. His commitment to Jewish welfare was further shown by his role as vice president of both the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the American Jewish Committee, and by his work as a Zionist in behalf of the movement that formed the American-Palestinian Improvement Company. In 1918—two years before his death in Paris at the age of forty-five—Cutler represented Jewish interests as a delegate at the peace conference at Versailles, where he sought to protect the racial, linguistic, and religious rights of Jews in eastern and central European states.⁶⁷

George H. Holmes, Cutler's successor as NEMJSA president (1909-1911), did not have as distinguished a

political career as some of his predecessors, but he was nevertheless active as a contributing member of the Rhode Island School of Design and as a member of the General Assembly in 1908 and 1909.⁶⁸

These early NEMJSA leaders shared a commitment to their trade and to public life, and they were active in the social life of the city. In this they were not unusual among their association's colleagues, many of whom shared the same commitment and involvement. The annual dinners and summer outings brought together men who not only had economic interests in common but also were connected politically and socially. They were a *community*—a point that matters when we look more closely at the work of the Manufacturing Jewelers Board of Trade.

READING THE *MANUFACTURING JEWELER* makes it clear that the jewelers' overriding concern during this time was with jobbers' bankruptcies and the effect these were having on the trade. The impact of these bankruptcies could be devastating: as jobbers went bankrupt, their stock was sold without proper supervision at low prices, with disastrous consequences for manufacturers who were still solvent. Left with an inventory of products that were daily losing value, affected firms would continue to put their goods on the market, giving them to any jobber in the hope of some return, and their extending credit and their inability to determine the solvency of jobbers often led to the manufacturers' own bankruptcy. Insolvent jobbers and retailers sometimes resorted to paying their debts by pawning goods that they had bought on credit; moreover, when a jobber or retailer went bankrupt, the value of its remaining assets was normally determined by their sale at auction, often without a proper evaluation. Legal recourse to deal with such situations could be costly for manufacturers, and the time and money involved were often not worth the effort.

During much of this period these problems were compounded by the absence of a federal bankruptcy law. Although such a law had been in place between 1867 and 1878, it had been repealed, and it was only in 1898 that a new law took its place.⁶⁹ The absence of a national bankruptcy law made it very difficult for firms to recover money from bankrupt jobbers in other states, each of which had its own bankruptcy law. Rhode Island itself had what the *Manufacturing Jeweler* termed a "grab law," by which the first creditor on the ground could satisfy his own claim in full, at the expense of the claims of all other creditors.⁷⁰ This law, of course, hampered the MJBoT in its efforts to promote cooperation among manufacturers.

The effects of the "long credit system" were especially hard for firms that were too small to afford agents or attorneys, and matters got worse over time. "The failure recently of several Eastern manufacturers has emphasized the increasing difficulty of transacting business on a small capital," said the *Manufacturing*

Jeweler in 1888. "The time has been when a bench hand, with no capital beyond his hand tools and a name for paying his debts, could have bench room, get a little stock on credit, make up goods and sell them profitably and in time establish a large business. That time has gone by. The long credit system now in vogue has made the chances of success and failure about even for a firm possessing as much as several thousands dollar in cash when they begin operation; in the case of those who have little or no capital, disaster is almost certain."⁷¹

The absence of a national bankruptcy law also made it difficult to pursue the opportunities offered by the size of the market. California, for example, was potentially a very large market, with no jewelry manufacturers west of the Rocky Mountains, but that state's bankruptcy law discriminated against creditors from beyond its borders. The failure of a large Californian wholesaler in 1895 left many eastern manufacturers badly hurt, as there was nothing left once the claims of local creditors had been satisfied.⁷²

Without a national bankruptcy law and in the clear absence of enforcement of creditors' rights, the MJBoT performed important work for the manufacturers: it acted as a representative for small creditors in the pursuit of defaulting debtors, paid the legal costs of the prosecution, and assessed the value of the debtors' assets.⁷³ The board also placed the name of bankrupts on a "suspended" list, and during their time on this list no member was to have dealings with them. If a member did have such dealings, he would receive no help from the board, and if an investigation established that a bankruptcy had been the result of fraud, the bankrupt was "repudiated," and any member who had dealings with that bankrupt was expelled from the association.

The federal bankruptcy law that came into effect in 1898 was biased in favor of debtors, allowing them in most cases to be discharged immediately, and thus it was of little help to jewelry manufacturers.⁷⁴ This meant that the weight of screening between the honest and the dishonest, the competent and the incompetent, was placed on the shoulders of associations such as the MJBoT, which provided its members with credit checks

on potential customers, and of publications such as the *Manufacturing Jeweler*, which included weekly lists of bankrupt jobbers and of the uncollected accounts that manufacturers were dealing with, warning manufacturers and possibly using “name and shame” tactics against defaulting jobbers.⁷⁵

The kind of difficulties faced by the jewelers’ board of trade were exemplified in 1886 when a Chicago jobber named Gratz, with more debts than capital, absconded, selling his stock and accounts valued at \$30,000 to another jobber, named Shakman, for only \$9,000. Reporting this case at length, the *Manufacturing Jeweler* called Gratz’s conduct “rascally,” but Shakman’s “an outrage.” The MJBoT issued an edict stating that its members would refuse to sell further goods to Shakman until he had come to Providence to explain his conduct, and in the meantime it would pay a pro rata assessment of its members’ claims for the purpose of prosecuting Gratz.⁷⁶ But although the MJBoT could issue such an edict, it had no formal powers to stop any of its members from dealing with dishonest jobbers, and this happened time and time again.⁷⁷

Nonetheless, the MJBoT’s continued existence suggests that to some extent it must have been successful in fostering cooperative collective behavior among manufacturers. In 1886 the board had 95 members; nine year later its membership had increased to 110, during which time it had collected \$173,840 for 1,477 claims by its members.⁷⁸ The enactment of the 1898 national bankruptcy law meant that there was less need for services of the board in recovering debts, while screening became more important. In 1904 the MJBoT collected more than \$35,000 for 295 claims in bankruptcy cases; about 70 percent of these were at no expense to its members, with the rest collected, for a small fee, on behalf of nonmembers. During that year the board also replied to more than three thousand credit inquiries lodged by 73 members.⁷⁹ By 1910 the board’s membership had grown to 250 after a year when the organization had handled its largest number of claims, which totaled more than half a million dollars.⁸⁰

“Fortified by age, by a strong treasury, and by able management,” Dutee Wilcox declared in his 1905 annual

address, “the Board of Trade has decided to go out into the field and solicit membership. . . . One hundred of the leading manufacturing firms of the East allied together, and acting together for the common object, would make a power which the dishonest jobber would fear, and which the honest jobber would be glad to co-operate with.”⁸¹ However, for this threat of economic sanctions to carry any substantial weight, the jewelers would have to act collectively, and to do so in an environment that in fact gave them incentives to behave individually, if not dishonestly. Such individualistic behavior could mean expulsion from the trade association, but unless the individual had something to lose, this would not matter. What was there to be lost?

The answer to this question becomes obvious if we think of NEMJSA as a community, a community with an explicit moral code that often found expression in the pages of the *Manufacturing Jeweler*. The actions of the defaulting Gratz, for instance, were “rascally”; those of Shakman, who acquired Gratz’s assets and depressed their market value, were even worse, “an outrage,” for they spread substantial harm among the jewelers’ community. Being cast from this community, with its shared interests and values, would have consequences that would ripple through a man’s other networks—his social clubs, Masonic lodges, and such—damaging him socially and politically. There was, indeed, much more to lose than the occasional dinner.

AMONG THE AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN who came together in local and national trade associations during the second half of the nineteenth century, the jewelers of Providence created an organization that represented their economic interests and, in the process, became a powerful political lobby. The men who belonged to NEMJSA were connected in other ways as well, and they were deeply embedded in the city’s middle class. Yet, considering the prominence of the jewelry trade and the multifaceted impact it surely had on Providence, it seems remarkable how little has been written about that trade, and about NEMJSA, which in 1956 became a national organization, the Manufacturing Jewelers and Silversmiths of America, that still exists today.⁸² It is hoped that this essay will pave the way for further study.

Notes

1. Not even women's clothing received as much coverage in the catalog's 773 pages. Jewelry was similarly represented in that year's Montgomery Ward catalog, while Marshall Field's "Jewelry and Fashions" catalog of 450 pages dedicated 55 of its pages to jewelry.
2. In today's money \$120 would be worth about \$3,000; 35¢ would be worth about \$9.00. In 1890 a female bookkeeper could earn up to \$20 a week and a cotton weaver up to \$9 a week, while a domestic servant's weekly wage could be as little as \$2. See the statistics relating to women's wages in State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, *Third Annual Report of the Commissioner of Industrial Statistics* (Providence, 1890).
3. *Manufacturing Jeweler* 1 (1886): 215 (hereafter cited as *MJ*).
4. For a historical overview of worldwide jewelry styles, consumption, and production, see Shirley Bury, *Jewellery, 1789-1910: The International Era* (Woodbridge, England: Antique Collectors Club, 1997), vol. 2.
5. Philip Scranton, "The Horrors of Competition: Innovation and Paradox in Rhode Island's Jewelry Industry, 1860-1914," *Rhode Island History* 55 (1997): 47-48.
6. *Ibid.*, 53-54.
7. *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Industrial Statistics*, 1888, Jewelry Manufacturing, 30, Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS).
8. *Thirteenth Census of the United States* (1910), vol. 8, Manufacturing, 605-6.
9. *MJ* 45 (1910): 878.
10. Philip Scranton, *Endless Novelty. Specialty Production and American Industrialization, 1865-1925* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 326, 244.
11. Scranton, "Horrors of Competition," 48-50.
12. Richard A. Meckel, "The Jewelry Industry, Industrial Development, and Immigration in Providence, 1790-1993," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* 13, no. 2 (2000): 254; Scranton, *Endless Novelty*, 121; Nina Shapiro-Perl, "Labor Process and Class Relations in the Costume Jewelry Industry" (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1983), 60-77.
13. Dario Gaggio, *In Gold We Trust: Social Capital and Economic Change in the Italian Jewelry Towns* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007); Scranton, "Horrors of Competition."
14. Scranton, *Endless Novelty*, 247. The Sherman Act of 1890 was not the factor that made it difficult for the association to control competition among manufacturers. The act was poorly enforced; and, in any case, in 1895 the Supreme Court ruled that it did not apply to local trade associations as they were not involved in interstate commerce. See Louis P. Galambos, *Competition and Cooperation: The Emergence of a National Trade Association* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 29, and Richard F. Bensel, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 344.
15. Scranton, *Endless Novelty*, 121.
16. For more on the history of the jewelry trade in Birmingham and the BJA, see Francesca Carnevali, "'Crooks, Thieves and Receivers': Transaction Costs in Nineteenth-Century Industrial Birmingham," *Economic History Review* 57, no. 3 (2004): 533-50.
17. See John S. Gilkeson, *Middle-Class Providence, 1820-1940* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).
18. Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 112.
19. Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

20. Mary P. Ryan, "Civil Society as Democratic Practice: North American Cities during the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29, no. 4 (1999): 563.
21. Kenneth Lipartito and David B. Sicilia, eds., *Constructing Corporate America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 17.
22. *MJ* 15 (1894): 65.
23. The offices of NEMJSA's predecessor, the Jewelers Club, were in the Wilcox Building on Weybosset Street. When NEMJSA was founded in 1883, it established its offices on Broad Street.
24. *MJ* 1 (1884): 53, 9.
25. *Ibid.*, 27, 55.
26. The board of trade was open to all jewelry manufacturers and related trades, but membership was by election through a ballot, and thus firms might be excluded. Manufacturing Jewelers Board of Trade, Constitution and By-laws, 1884, RIHS.
27. *MJ* 1 (1886): 215.
28. *Ibid.*, 202.
29. Gilkeson, *Middle-Class Providence*, 104; Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, 112-23.
30. *MJ* 1 (1884): 55.
31. *MJ* 5 (1888): 16.
32. *MJ* 6 (1889): 222.
33. *MJ* 11 (1892): 946.
34. *MJ* 22 (1898): 96.
35. *MJ* 26 (1900): 191-92, 201; *MJ* 21 (1898): 67; *MJ* 26 (1900): 201. Congress did ultimately reject the proposed treaty.
36. *MJ* 34 (1904): 260.
37. *MJ* 46 (1910): 625.
38. *MJ* 41 (1907): 664.
39. *MJ* 43 (1908): 126; *MJ* 45 (1909): 269-70.
40. *MJ* 38 (1906): 320.
41. *Ibid.*, 830-31.
42. *MJ* 1 (1884): 17.
43. *MJ* 25 (1899): 96.
44. *MJ* 36 (1905): 259.
45. Alfred M. Williams and William F. Blanding, eds., *Men of Progress: Biographical Sketches and Portraits of Leaders in Business and Professional Life in the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations* (Boston: New England Magazine, 1896), 245.
46. Providence (City), 3:66, 78, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard Business School.
47. Williams and Blanding, *Men of Progress*, 245.
48. *MJ* 35 (1904): 10.
49. *The Biographical Cyclopedia of Representative Men of Rhode Island* (Providence: National Biographical Publishing, 1881), 554.
50. Providence (City), 3:167.
51. *Providence Society Blue Book: Elite Family Directory, Club Membership, 1902* (New York: Dau Publishing Co., 1902), 106; *Providence Journal*, Feb. 20, 1918.
52. *MJ* 3 (1887): 367.
53. *MJ* 46 (1910): 924.
54. *Representative Men and Old Families of Rhode Island* (Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1908) 1:436-37; *MJ* 15 (1894):58; *Providence Society Blue Book*, 39.
55. Providence (City), 2:391; *MJ* 29 (1901): 193.
56. *MJ* 33 (1903): 408.
57. *Providence Society Blue Book*, 83; *MJ* 26 (1900): 223.
58. *MJ* 33 (1903): 408.
59. *Ibid.*, 422; *MJ* 45 (1909): 772-74.
60. These were probably more prominent in retail and as workers in jewelry workshops. It is not an easy task to identify workshops and firms owned by Jews, especially since these owners often changed their names. However, the following names from the trade directory *The Jewelers Weekly* for 1897 have been identified as manufacturing businesses with Jewish partners: Jacob Abisch; Eckhart & Cohen; Henry Lederer & Bro.; S. & B. Lederer; William Loeb & Co; A. H. Schreiber Co. See "Jews and the Textile Industry," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* 6 (1972): 301.
61. *MJ* 49 (1911): 862.
62. Joseph D. Hall, ed., *Biographical History of the Manufacturers and Businessmen of Rhode Island* (Providence: J. D. Hall & Co, 1901), 302.
63. *MJ* 43 (1908): 710.
64. *MJ* 49 (1911): 862.
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Ibid.*
67. Bartholomew Schivo, "Parnosseh: Jewish Life in Rhode Island, 1880-1920," typescript, 9-10, RIHS; Louis Marshall, "Memorial Address on Harry Cutler," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* 6, no. 11 (1971): 130-35.
68. *MJ* 45 (1909): 878.
69. Charles J. Tabb, "The History of Bankruptcy Laws in the United States," *American Bankruptcy Institute Law Review* 3 (1995): 13-14. For an overview of the role of commercial organizations in lobbying the government for a national law, see Bradley Hansen, "Commercial Associations and the Creation of a National Economy: The Demand for a Federal Bankruptcy Law," *Business History Review* 72 (1998): 86-113.
70. *MJ* 1 (1884): 57.
71. *MJ* 5 (1888): 554.
72. *MJ* 26 (1895): 263-64.
73. *MJ* 1 (1886): 202, 230.
74. Tabb, "History of Bankruptcy Laws," 24-25

75. *MJ* 2 (1886): 202; *MJ* 18 (1896):195, 201.

76. *MJ* 1 (1886): 202, 230.

77. *MJ* 18 (1896): 140, 201, 286.

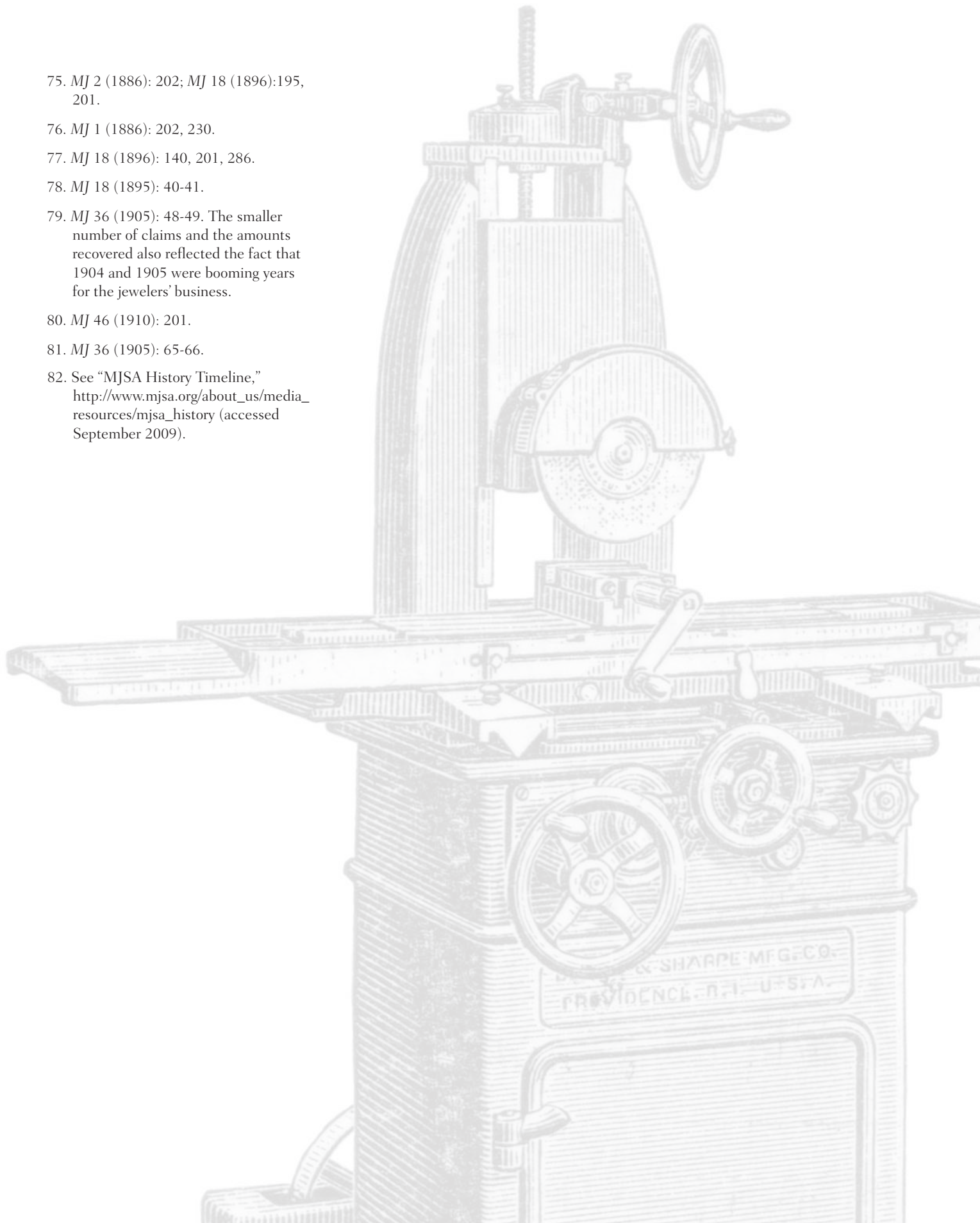
78. *MJ* 18 (1895): 40-41.

79. *MJ* 36 (1905): 48-49. The smaller number of claims and the amounts recovered also reflected the fact that 1904 and 1905 were booming years for the jewelers' business.

80. *MJ* 46 (1910): 201.

81. *MJ* 36 (1905): 65-66.

82. See "MJSA History Timeline," http://www.mjsa.org/about_us/media_resources/mjsa_history (accessed September 2009).



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The main pond at the Perryville fish hatchery in South Kingstown remains much the same as it was when the hatchery was operated by the American Fish Culture Company. Here the pond is shown being mechanically aerated to keep midsummer dissolved oxygen at an acceptable level for fish survival. Photograph by the author, 1994.

A Brief History of the American Fish Culture Company:

Rhode Island's Pioneering Trout Aquaculture Farm, 1877-1997

MICHAEL A. RICE

Aquaculture—the rearing or farming of fish or other aquatic organisms under controlled conditions—is frequently equated in Rhode Island with the cultivation of oysters. Indeed, the very substantial oyster aquaculture industry in Narragansett Bay from the mid-1800s to the mid-twentieth century contributed mightily to the state's economy, and the considerable growth of oyster cultivation in recent years is testimony to the importance of this segment of Rhode Island aquaculture.¹

But while shellfish as a commodity have been most prominent in its aquaculture production and sales, the state also contributed significantly to the development of the nation's trout-farming industry, introducing a number of technical innovations in production and marketing. At one time in the 1920s Rhode Island boasted the country's largest freshwater fish farm in terms of gross production and sales of brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*). Yet despite this farm's commercial success, which extended to the 1970s, and its expansion into the farming of brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) and rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), the American Fish Culture Company ultimately failed to innovate, modernize its facilities, realize the advantages of environmental legislation, or partner with the scientific community; and as a result the company disappeared entirely in 1997.²

THE APPROXIMATELY 570 ACRES of land on which the American Fish Culture Company would become established were purchased by Rowland Gibson Hazard I (1801-1888) in 1843 as part of his acquisition of a textile mill on the Pawcatuck River in the town of Richmond. Hazard expanded the mill shortly thereafter and founded the village of Carolina, naming it for his wife, Caroline Newbold Hazard of South Kingstown.³

By the mid-1850s fish culturists had become concerned about the loss of anadromous fish runs, the natural habitat of trout, to dams and industrialization throughout New England, and they turned to the farming of brown trout for stocking streams and rivers.⁴ Beginning in 1856 in Massachusetts, fishery commissions were set up in the Northeast to restock their states' depleted waterways, and by 1870 all the New England states, as well as Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey, had established such commissions.⁵ The Rhode Island commission, known formally as the Commissioners for Inland Fisheries, was instituted in 1870.⁶ With freshwater fisheries depleted and a strong demand for trout in seafood markets, Rhode Island entrepreneurs recognized the economic incentive for the development of fish farms.

The first fish farmer in Rhode Island was John W. Hoxie of Richmond (1828-1903), who in 1877 established the Clearwater Trout Farm on land acquired in Carolina on a ten-year lease from Rowland Hazard I. Owing to his careful study of the habits of the brook trout, during his first year of operation Hoxie was able to sell the state's Commissioners of Inland Fisheries some 40,000 eyed eggs (fertilized eggs with developing fish embryos) for stocking Rhode Island waters; and his production quickly climbed to some 2 million fish fry (young fish hatched from eggs) annually, most of which were sold out of state.⁷ In 1879 Charles A. Hoxie started his own brook-trout farm, White Brook Trout Hatchery, on a plot of land, also leased from Hazard for ten years, adjacent to his brother John Hoxie's farm.⁸ By 1890 Charles Hoxie, too, was selling 40,000 eyed eggs to the Rhode Island commissioners. By 1900, after the commissioners had determined that yearling brook trout were superior for stocking waterways, Charles Hoxie was annually

supplying 40,000 yearling trout, rather than eyed eggs, to the state.⁹

Water usage rights were a major concern from the earliest days of the farms. A mill and dam owner downstream from the farms, Abel Tanner, could potentially flood the farms if his millpond behind his dam were to be filled to capacity. The matter was apparently settled when an agreement between Tanner and Charles Hoxie, with a fifteen-year term and a monetary payment, was signed in May 1881. (The issue of water rights would later reappear with Tanner's descendants, and at that time it would be settled by a similar agreement, executed in 1928 between Elias Tanner and the American Fish Culture Company.)¹⁰ Both Hoxie brothers continued in the brook-trout culture business through the 1880s, with John Hoxie renewing his lease with Rowland Hazard I in



Rowland Hazard II. Photograph by the author of the 1869 portrait in the Hazard Memorial Reading Room of the South Kingstown Library.

1887. When his own lease expired in 1889, Charles Hoxie purchased the land on which his White Brook Trout Hatchery stood, with a \$1,400 mortgage held by Rowland Hazard II (1829-1898).¹¹

The Hazard family began to take a direct interest in the business of the White Brook Trout Hatchery in 1892, when, at the urging of Rowland Hazard II, the American Fish Culture Company (AFC) was incorporated in Maine, with an office in Saco. Charles A. Hoxie was the principal stockholder in the new company, and Rowland Hazard II and others were minority shareholders.¹² Upon the death of Rowland Hazard II in 1898, his interest in the AFC was transferred to the R. Hazard Estate, which consisted of Rowland's children: Rowland Gibson Hazard II (1855-1918), Caroline Hazard (1869-1945), Helen Hazard Bacon (1861-1925), Margaret Hazard Fisher (1867-1947), and the estate of Frederick R. Hazard (1858-1896). The R. Hazard Estate gained a controlling interest in the corporation in 1899 with an agreement between the estate and Charles Hoxie that also canceled Hoxie's 1879 mortgage.¹³

Ozias C. Goodwin (1850-1921), who had been the estate's secretary, was now appointed its president, maintaining his offices at the Hazard office block on Kingstown Road in Peace Dale. Charles Hoxie remained on the farm as manager, with his son Fred Dean Hoxie (1871-1944) as assistant manager and on-site bookkeeper. The five years during which Goodwin served as president were a time of considerable activity and growth for the AFC. Several extant letters between Goodwin in Peace Dale and Charles and Fred Hoxie at the fish farm detail a major effort to develop canned trout as a product to augment the company's sale of fresh brook trout and eggs and fry for stocking purposes. Goodwin first discussed the canning of fish in a letter of July 31, 1899, and on August 29 and September 2, 1901, he discussed the methods of cost accounting for canned fish in comparison to those for live fish.¹⁴

With the company selling cans containing two-thirds of a pound of fish for fifty cents a can, the same price per pound as it charged for whole fresh fish, its production of canned fish grew considerably during 1902 and 1903. On

May 16, 1903, Goodwin wrote to Hazard family business associate Armand Solvay (the son of famed industrial chemist Ernst Solvay) in Brussels, Belgium, informing him that the accompanying case of canned trout, packed in Bordeaux olive oil, was an example of the American Fish Culture Company's best product, and that the AFC's production of canned trout was then exceeding 30,000 pounds a year. But despite such attempts to market in Europe, the company engaged in sales of canned trout for only a relatively short time, until 1909.¹⁵

Although Goodwin spent most of his time in Peace Dale, he seems to have kept a very tight watch on farm operations in Carolina. Examples abound in the outgoing letters file, including a letter dated February 25, 1901, in which Goodwin provided detailed guidance for setting up the water supply and plumbing within a new hatch house. In other letters he provided guidance on accounting procedures, kept tabs on farm expenditures, and was always looking for marketing opportunities. While serving as the estate's secretary-treasurer after his service as its president, Goodwin was responsible for developing lucrative markets for fish in the Detroit area, as evidenced by a letter to Goodwin dated March 1, 1915, from Hazard family business associate J. D. Sanders, in which a number of contacts with major fish wholesalers were established.¹⁶

The R. Hazard Estate acquired full interest in the Clearwater Trout Farm when John Hoxie died in 1903, and the farm was leased to the American Fish Culture Company shortly thereafter.¹⁷ Between 1903 and 1926 the two farms were operated separately under the American Fish Culture Company's name, with the Clearwater Trout Farm known informally as the Upper Works and the White Brook Trout Hatchery as the Lower Works; fish were mainly produced in a series of raceways along the White Brook stretching from the Upper to the Lower Works. After the death of Charles Hoxie in 1904, his son Fred D. Hoxie became vice president of the corporation and general manager of the operations in Carolina.

Administered primarily by Rowland Gibson Hazard II, the R. Hazard Estate was maintained as an

unincorporated family trust into the second decade of the twentieth century, but after Hazard fell ill in 1915, a decision was made to incorporate the trust and divest some of its very extensive financial holdings. When the estate was incorporated in Rhode Island in 1917, the controlling interest in the American Fish Culture Company (a Maine corporation) was transferred to the newly incorporated estate trust.¹⁸ Goodwin served as the secretary-treasurer of the estate corporation until his death in 1921, when he was succeeded by John R. Carpenter, who would continue in that position until the corporation was dissolved in 1950.¹⁹

After the death of Rowland G. Hazard II in 1918, his son, Roland Hazard III (1881-1949), assumed the management of the R. Hazard Estate holdings and became the president of the AFC.²⁰ During this time the company's operations had grown considerably, as reported in the *Providence Journal* in 1921: "For annual shipments as high as 18,000,000 trout fry, and of full grown fish, as many as 60,000 pounds are being made from the hatchery of the American Fish Culture Company, which has by far the biggest trout hatchery in this country at its estate in Carolina. State authorities as far west as Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota depend for their stocking supplies on the Rhode Island product, while millions of the fry have been used for replenishing the depleted native stock in other states, including New York, New Jersey and Connecticut."²¹

For its substantial fish production, the company required a reliable source and amount of fish feed. Prior to the early 1950s, when the first practical prepared fish diets were produced widely on a commercial scale, trout farms used a variety of feeds that consisted mostly of animal byproducts, including pork and sheep plucks (lungs, hearts, and windpipes), other animal entrails and livers, fish meal (dried and ground-up trash fish), condemned canned salmon (spoiled and unfit for human consumption), and fish processing wastes.²² A 1907 contract provides some insight into the volume of feed the AFC required. On a specified schedule between September 7, 1907, and August 22, 1908, the North

Packing and Provision Company of Boston agreed to ship to Carolina a total of 1,160 iced barrels, of 216 pounds net weight each, containing hog plucks for fish feed, at a price of sixty-five cents per dozen hog plucks—a total of 250,560 pounds of feed for that period, which appears to be a reasonable amount of feed for the production of about 60,000 pounds of trout.²³ The 1921 *Providence Journal* article explains how the feed was prepared and fed to the fish: “Another use for [the farm’s] machinery is in the preparation of food for the fish. For this purpose, lamb and sheep’s livers are used. They are ground to a pulp by a food chopper for the smallest fish, and to a larger size, somewhat resembling worms, for the bigger fish. ‘Feeding the fish’ is simply the process of carrying this ground meat



The American Fish Culture Company’s *Jane Elizabeth*, captained by Walter Eddy. Photo, circa 1942, courtesy of the Eddy family.

in a pail and throwing it by dipperfuls into the water. The fish are always ‘hungry’ and will dash wildly to the point where the food is thrown into the water.”

The *Westerly Sun* reported in 1929 that the company had produced 60,000 pounds of three species of trout (brook, brown, and rainbow) the previous year. By 1929 the entrails and other meat byproducts used for feeding these trout were replaced by herring, menhaden, and other abundant “trash fish.” In that year the AFC built a freezing plant-ice house at Carolina capable of making ice and freezing

2.5 tons of trash fish a day.²⁴ Most of the fish feed used during the 1930s and 1940s was the by-catch, or trash fish, that came from Point Judith and was frozen into 300-pound blocks and stored in the Carolina ice house. The company employed a fishing boat and a crew of four at Point Judith, Galilee, for supplying the feed.²⁵ The AFC’s 32-foot eastern-rigged trawler *Jane Elizabeth*, built in Narragansett by Clifford Whaley in 1937, was sunk at Galilee harbor during the great hurricane of 1938, after which it was salvaged and repaired. In addition to catching fish by boat, beach seines were used by the AFC crew during spring fish runs to supplement the trout feed supply.²⁶

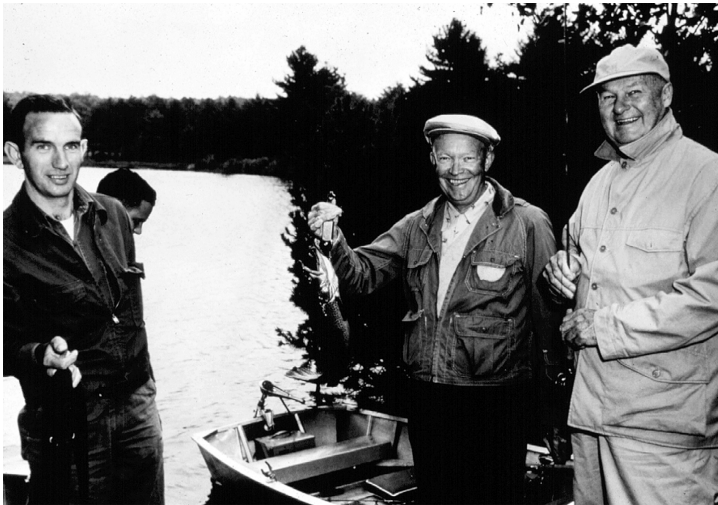
An administrative reorganization of the American Fish Culture Company occurred in 1926 while Rowland Hazard



An AFC feed acquisition crew—left to right: Gus Rathbun, Slim Tourgee, Walter Eddy—use a beach seine to catch alewives (locally known as “buckeyes”) at the northern end of the Narrow (Pettaquamscutt) River in North Kingstown. Photo, 1940, courtesy of the Eddy family.

III was its president. At that time the principal investors in the R. Hazard Estate began the process of liquidating and distributing the estate trust’s assets.²⁷ As part of that process it was decided at a November 1926 meeting of the AFC’s board of directors that the Maine corporation would be dissolved and the company reincorporated under the laws of Rhode Island, with an authorized capital of 5,000 shares of common stock without par value.²⁸ Corporate papers were filed in Rhode Island on November 10, 1926, and six days later the old Hoxie leaseholds of the Upper Works

and the Lower Works were joined and transferred from the R. Hazard Estate to the American Fish Culture Company, now a Rhode Island corporation.²⁹ Rowland Hazard III remained as the company's president until 1928, when he was succeeded by his younger brother Thomas Pierrepont Hazard (1892-1968).³⁰ Rowland Hazard III nevertheless remained active as a stockholder with the company from his residence in New York City, where, until his death in 1949, he oversaw the AFC's sales of fish at the Fulton Fish Market and other market outlets in the city and served as the manager of the Eastern Trout Growers Association, an organization that was begun in the 1920s with the AFC as one of its founding members and that remained active through the 1930s and 1940s.



President Dwight D. Eisenhower (center) holds a speckled brook trout at Hianloland, the fishing retreat of W. Alton Jones (right), circa 1955. The person at the left is unidentified. Courtesy of the University of Rhode Island's Special Collections.

Sales reports from 1928 to 1934 indicate that there were substantial sales of whole iced brook trout to New York and several notable restaurants and hotels throughout the Northeast. However, most of the company's sales were of live trout for stocking ponds. These were bought by fishing clubs and private individuals, including former president Herbert Hoover, Rhode Island senator Peter Gerry, and boxing champion Gene Tunney, all of whom enjoyed fly fishing and maintained their own trout ponds.³¹ One of the AFC's Rhode Island clients in the

1930s was "Hianloland" in West Greenwich. The fishing retreat of Cities Service Petroleum Company chairman W. Alton Jones, in 1962 Hianloland became the W. Alton Jones Campus of the University of Rhode Island.

Through the 1930s the company employed a crew of traveling salesmen whose pay was based upon commissions from their sales. With company president Thomas Hazard classifying customers according to the frequency and size of their purchases, salesmen were paid commissions of 1 percent for sales to "Certain" customers, 5 percent for sales to "Doubtful" customers, and 10 percent for sales to "Open/New" customers.³² Despite the generally abysmal economic conditions during the 1930s, the AFC received a "Satisfactory" financial rating in 1936 from Dun & Bradstreet: "This company has a well equipped plant for this type of business, is well stocked, and controls a good sized following. Those interested are highly regarded, have good means, and watch the company's affairs closely. Expenses are well in hand, and it has sufficient capital to properly finance affairs."³³

Business during the 1930s was brisk enough for the company to develop a satellite fish-production facility in 1938 at the village of Perryville in South Kingstown. The Perryville hatchery consisted mainly of a large artesian spring-fed pond that provided supplemental water and space for adult fish production. This facility operated as part of the AFC for about seventeen years, until it was transferred to the Rhode Island Department of Fish and Wildlife in 1955 to serve as a state hatchery.³⁴ Another development of the time was the establishment of the Carolina Black Bass Hatchery in April 1935 by William F. Tanner and AFC manager Roland E. Eddy on land leased from Tanner's father, Elias, downstream from the Carolina Lower Works. Although it was not directly connected with the American Fish Culture Company, the new hatchery was welcomed by the AFC because it relieved the company's long-standing concerns about the possibility of flooding behind the Tanner family's mill dam. In 2001 this hatchery was also sold to the state.³⁵

During the late 1940s it was recognized that access to water supplies was the largest impediment to expanding

the company's production. Despite having facilities in Carolina and Perryville, in 1949 the AFC began to look toward purchasing the Cross Mills Pond and associated buildings in Charlestown. The purchase of this property, near the southern end of the state's Route 2 near its intersection with U.S. Route 1, was made in February 1951. With springs at the site producing about 200 gallons a minute at a steady temperature of 48°F throughout the year, the Cross Mills property was used as a satellite fish production facility, mainly for rainbow trout until it was deeded to the Nature Conservancy in 1995.³⁶

BY ALL ACCOUNTS the decades of the 1940s and 1950s were the zenith of the American Fish Culture Company's



Built by Roland E. Eddy about 1939, this broodstock house was designed with interior window shutters and doors to exclude sunlight, and it was fitted with banks of electric lights to simulate sunlight during the dark winter months. Brook trout held here spawned months earlier than their normal spawning season. Photograph by the author, 1994.

success and expansion, as the demand for cultured trout increased throughout the country with the growth of interest in sportfishing after World War II. Even more significantly, the company boosted its production in 1939 and the 1940s, when it became the first trout farm in the nation to commercially apply the technique of photoperiod manipulation, artificially controlling the number of daylight hours to induce brook trout to spawn four months earlier than their normal spawning period in

November.³⁷ This photoperiod manipulation was carried out in a specially designed building with window shutters and an internal electric lighting system constructed over a concrete raceway for holding broodstock fish. The spawning of the fish out of season allowed for the more efficient use of raceway space and water resources on a year-round basis, and thus for greater sales in the off season.³⁸ Prior to its use of photoperiod manipulation, the company was producing about 260,000 fish annually; by 1950 its annual production had increased to about 750,000 fish.³⁹ In 1944, during the initial experimental work, Roland E. Eddy (1910-1972)—a skilled fish culturist, a long-time farm employee, and the key person responsible for the photoperiod manipulation project—became the AFC's farm manager.

A major development in the early 1950s was the introduction of a practical pelleted dry diet for trout.⁴⁰ The AFC was a very early adopter of pelleted feeds, as evidenced by a photo in the South County-Westerly edition of the *Providence Evening Bulletin* in 1955 showing Roland Eddy stacking 100-pound bags in the feed storage barn at Carolina.⁴¹ By reducing costs, this early adoption of pelleted feeds was undoubtedly a major factor in the company's increased profits. The previous practices of maintaining a fishing boat and crew at Galilee to catch and freeze trash fish or of using raw slaughterhouse wastes as feeds were instantly rendered obsolete, and substantially fewer laborers were now required on site in Carolina.⁴² Not only are pelleted feeds more cost effective than so-called wet feeds; with pelleted feeds the feed conversion ratios (i.e., the pounds of feed required to produce a pound of fish flesh) are generally much more favorable than that with meat and fish diets, thereby decreasing the amount of food-waste pollutants in the effluent water of downstream farms.⁴³

By the late 1950s the AFC was growing concerned about the marketing of trout because of increasing competition from trout farms in the West, particularly in the Hagerman Valley of Idaho, which had considerable water resources in terms of flow rate and quality. For example, Idaho's Snake River Trout Company, purchased

by Robert Erkins in 1952, grew to be the most productive trout farm in the world by 1969, although it was situated on only ten acres of land. Using concrete raceways with high water-flow rates, it was able to produce 400,000 pounds of marketable fish annually per acre, which was roughly equivalent to AFC's entire annual production output.⁴⁴ The Snake River Trout Company was only one of the dozens of producers in Idaho that began marketing trout in the 1950s and 1960s. Aided by their use of flash freezing to market their output nationwide, western trout producers posed a serious threat to producers in the Northeast.

In an effort to build strength in the northeastern market, and recalling his brother's efforts and moderate success with the Eastern Trout Growers Association in the 1930s and 1940s, in October 1955 Thomas Hazard called together a number of trout producers from around New England and New York, and a new trade group—the Trout Growers Cooperative Association—was organized. According to the minutes of its initial meeting, the cooperative was formed to stabilize prices in the southern New England and New York markets and to attempt to keep Pennsylvania growers out of the lucrative trout market in New England, where the State of Connecticut was the major purchaser. The association was incorporated in Rhode Island in 1957, with Earl W. G. Howard, a Hazard family administrator, serving as its secretary-treasurer. As a sales cooperative for its twelve members, the organization was to take a 15 percent commission on all sales in order to cover its expenses; but despite high hope at the onset, the cooperative failed to meet expectations of stabilizing trout prices, and a number of the member farms refused to contribute commissions and withdrew their memberships in 1961 and 1962. The remaining members voted to dissolve the group at their meeting in August 1962, and the corporation was formally dissolved in 1963.⁴⁵

A major blow to the American Fish Culture Company occurred in 1971 when the State of Connecticut, which had been its largest and most reliable customer, developed its own state-of-the-art facility for stocking trout into the

state's waters. Operated by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, the Quinebaug Valley Hatchery, at Central Village at the confluence of the Moosup and Quinebaug Rivers, was able to produce about 600,000 two- or three-year old trout annually when it opened, and it was said to be the largest hatchery east of the Mississippi.⁴⁶

From time to time the AFC utilized a small but important supplementary stream of income from fees charged the general public for permission to fish on the Carolina property. The first report of such fee fishing appeared in a March 1921 article in the *Providence Journal*, in which farm manager Fred Hoxie explained that the four-acre pond between the Upper and Lower Works would be stocked beginning in April of that year and that the public could buy admission to fish there.⁴⁷ This practice was apparently discontinued later, but beginning in 1963 the four-acre pond and other ponds on the property were again stocked with trout as part of a "Fishing Valley" fee-fishing operation. For an annual fee of \$200 (which would rise to \$400 by 1990), fishermen were allowed to fish the various stocked ponds on the property and were allowed to keep 100 pounds, per year, of the fish they caught, with a record of these weights kept on the permit cards they were issued.⁴⁸

In 1982, when the company's sales of 34,535 pounds of live trout provided \$104,442 in gross income, the Fishing Valley operation took in \$19,800 in fees. Although these constituted 15.9 percent of the company's total income, calculations showed that the Fishing Valley was actually operating at a financial loss.⁴⁹ The company's gross profits that year were in fact very low, as was confirmed in a letter from the firm handling AFC's insurance coverage.⁵⁰

RECORDS SHOW THAT fish production from 1977 to 1991 ranged from 42,410 to 62,744 fish, which was roughly equivalent to the company's production in the early part of the twentieth century but well below the peak production levels of 500,000 to 750,000 fish in the company's heyday of the 1950s.⁵¹ Gross sales figures for these fifteen years varied from a low of \$59,902 in 1977

to a high of \$171,299 in 1989, and although these figures might seem to reflect considerable financial growth, regulatory costs and substantially escalated feed costs during these inflationary years were leaving the AFC financially weak. Further, the extent and value of the company's approximately six hundred acres of taxable real estate in Carolina and Cross Mills were barely supported by the modest level of sales.

In addition to shrinking markets for privately produced live trout purchased for state stocking programs in the 1960s and 1970s and the relative high value of the hatchery's taxable lands in comparison to its annual sales, the passage of the Federal Clean Water Act in 1972, as well as other environment-protection legislation, had a profound affect upon the AFC's viability as a sustainable business enterprise.⁵² Initially contacted in April 1974 by the Region 1 office of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Boston, the company began work to obtain the proper wastewater permits (required by the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) for the Carolina and Cross Mills fish farms.⁵³ It was quickly determined by the EPA that the fish production at Cross Mills was below the 20,000 pounds per year threshold adopted by the agency, so no NPDES permit was required at that time.⁵⁴ However, calculations by Walter Eddy (who became the manager of the AFC facilities at his father Roland's death in 1972) showed that there were 39,000 pounds of fish at Carolina, necessitating a discharge permit.⁵⁵ The first NPDES permit for the AFC, valid for five years, was issued in July 1974, and it was subsequently renewed in June 1980.⁵⁶

During the early 1980s the EPA delegated responsibility for regulating discharges under the Clean Water Act to the Division of Water Resources of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM). While permitting a more local review process, the state-run system was financed by user fees levied on the permittees, and from July 1, 1984, to June 30, 1985, the state levied a total of \$2,229.50 in monitoring and permitting fees on the AFC.⁵⁷ Despite the change in permitting from federal to state and increased fees, in

1986 a Rhode Island Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit was issued to AFC as a renewal of its expired 1980 NPDES permit.⁵⁸

As a secondary source of income, between 1971 and 1987 the AFC leased gravel extraction rights on its property to outside contractors. In December 1987 a complaint to RIDEM culminated in a formal cease-and-desist order from RIDEM's Division of Groundwater and Freshwater Wetlands halting the wetland alteration attendant to the gravel extraction operations.⁵⁹ Although this relatively minor matter was quickly resolved by consent agreement and sanctions were promptly lifted, the incident appears to have led Oliver C. Hazard—Thomas P. Hazard's son and the last AFC president—to investigate alternative uses for, or sale of, the AFC properties.⁶⁰ Coincident with the wetland alteration complaint, a December 1987 letter to Oliver Hazard, marked "Confidential," from Hidell-Eyster Technical Services president Henry R. Hidell III committed Hidell's Accord, Massachusetts, company to engage in a major study of water resources (both quantity and quality) on both the Carolina and Cross Mills fish farm properties.⁶¹

In August 1988 Hidell-Eyster Technical Services submitted a very extensive report on the water output levels from all the wells on the Carolina property, ranging from 1,700 to 2,000 gallons per minute at 48° to 50°F.⁶² The quality of water from the wells, as tested by two subcontracting laboratories—Resource Analysts of Hampton, New Hampshire, and Skinner and Sherman Laboratories of Waltham, Massachusetts—was found to be excellent, with most contaminants tested for well below analytical detection limits.⁶³ In February 1989 Oliver Hazard sent a memorandum to AFC shareholders developing ideas for closing down fish production and leasing the Carolina property as a site for bottling water:

O. C. Hazard (40.75%) and his brother Thomas P. Hazard [Jr.] (39.75%) together control 80.5% of the outstanding stock of AFC. TPH is 64, single and has no children. He currently plans to leave his estate to a charitable trust or organization, and OCH is currently his executor. Both have agreed to add a cross-buy-out clause to their wills to allow the survivor to maintain majority control, but this has not yet been

implemented. TPH wants to phase out of any active role with AFC and would like to sell his interest. OCH feels that a higher future value for the company may be achieved after the viability of the water source has been established. OCH would therefore prefer to lease or sell water under long term contract, and have AFC keep title to the land. However if a high enough value was offered for the entire company now, OCH would go for sale as well. The main problem therefore, is how to buy out the 40% and be able to enter into an attractive long term lease agreement.⁶⁴

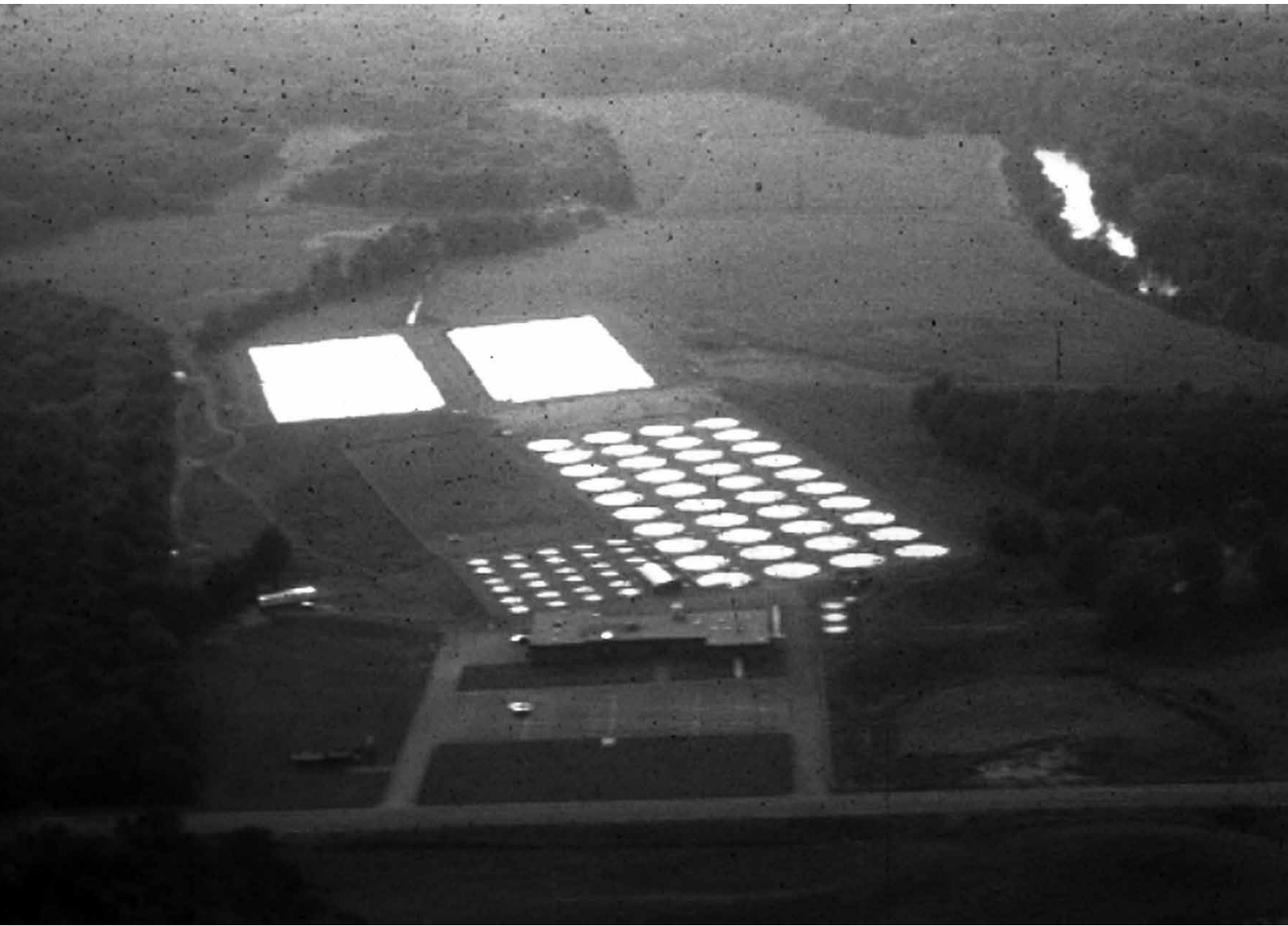
Shortly after the water-quality report was issued, Hidell-Eyster consultants began contacting various companies engaged in the bottled-water business to explore possibilities for sale or lease of the Carolina property.⁶⁵ However, after several years of negotiations the decision was made in 1994 to sell the Carolina property to the State of Rhode Island for \$2.54 million.⁶⁶ Town officials in Richmond had mixed emotions about the sale, since the hatchery—which was to pay Richmond \$10,502.90 in property taxes for 1994—would be removed from the town tax rolls.⁶⁷ The actual transfer of the lands involved was carried out in a phased process as individual details were agreed upon. The hatchery and its immediate grounds were transferred to RIDEM in February 1995.⁶⁸ The house and one-acre lot of manager Walter Eddy were transferred to RIDEM in August 1995, after an employment and lifetime residency agreement for Eddy was worked out with the state.⁶⁹ The AFC lands at Cross Mills were transferred to the Nature Conservancy in December 1995.⁷⁰ The final transfer of remaining AFC lands in Carolina to the state occurred in August 1997.⁷¹

WHY IS IT THAT the one-time largest trout farm in America fell into decline and was eventually dissolved? From its founding, the AFC had established a track record of experimentation and innovation that paid off well for the company, with attention directed both to production and to marketing. The Hoxie brothers' early experiments in spawning fish led to the development of raceway production on a commercial scale; Ozias Goodwin's experiment with selling canned fish helped to establish the company's marketing niches; Roland Eddy's development

of out-of-season fish spawning in the 1940s, and the constant improvements in feed technology employed by the company from its earliest days through the 1950s, served to cut costs and improve production efficiency and capacity. The period from the late 1920s through the 1940s, when Rowland Hazard III was overseeing AFC sales at the Fulton Fish Market and managing the Eastern Trout Growers Association cooperative from his office in New York City, appears to have been the high point for the company's marketing efforts.

But beginning in the late 1950s the company seemed to move toward less experimentation and innovation, despite considerable growth and innovation elsewhere in the trout industry. When trout sales contracts were lost in the New York City markets to lower-priced fish coming in from Idaho and elsewhere, the AFC did little to boost its production, which might have decreased its unit production costs; instead, it simply elected to focus on the relatively small niche market of live-fish stocking, a market that became even smaller when Connecticut and other states established their own large-scale hatcheries in the 1960s and 1970s. For the AFC, the emphasis was apparently on the kind of trout production it had been engaging in since the early 1950s, directed toward markets with a long-term client base. Further, company managers were reluctant to interact with aquaculture trade associations, although such groups provided valuable information about the latest industry practices; for instance, Oliver Hazard seems not to have responded to a May 1989 letter from Joseph P. McCraren, of the Harpers Ferry-based U.S. Trout Farmers Association, explaining the benefits of USTFA membership and inviting the AFC to join that century-old organization.⁷² Neither is there any evidence that the company was involved with any scientific group, such as the Fish Culture Section of the American Fisheries Society.

During the 1970s, when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was first charged with developing regulations and enforcing the provisions of the Federal Clean Water Act, a great deal of research was undertaken to develop techniques aimed at decreasing the amount



This aerial view shows Connecticut's Quinebaug Valley Trout Hatchery shortly after its opening in 1971. At the center of the photo are the hatchery's forty main production ponds; the two large rectangular ponds nearby are used for treating the facility's effluent waters before their discharge into the Moosup River. Photograph courtesy of Professor Emeritus Wayne K. Durfee of the University of Rhode Island.

of water used in trout farming and reducing the amount of suspended solids that such farming released into its effluent waters. One research project, conducted from 1969 to 1975 at the University of Rhode Island by Professors Thomas L. Meade and Lewis T. Smith, showed that trout could be successfully grown in relatively low volumes of water if adequate systems for converting toxic ammonia to relatively nontoxic nitrate were utilized.⁷³ In another example of pollution-control technology, the high-production Quinebaug Valley Hatchery, built in 1971, was designed such that suspended solids could be collected and effluent waters treated in two treatment ponds prior to discharge into the Moosup River.

Except for limiting the biomass of fish held in its raceways, the American Fish Culture Company never used direct methods to manage its effluents. With the 1972 passage of the Clean Water Act, this failure to upgrade its facilities limited the AFC's fish production and eventually made it unprofitable, leading to the company's demise.

But despite the ultimate failure of the American Fish Culture Company, its 120-year history demonstrated the feasibility of culturing fish in Rhode Island's freshwaters, and it suggests the possibility of a resurgence of commercial freshwater fish culture in the state. With current pressures for Rhode Island government to justify the economic value of the services it provides, it is not

unreasonable to explore the value of using private-sector contract growers, rather than state-owned facilities, for stocking waters with trout and other fish. The system of state purchasing of fish for stocking from private growers appears to have worked well, and cost effectively, in the days of the old Rhode Island Commissioners of Inland Fisheries, and rising fuel and transportation costs may make locally produced fish still more economically attractive in the future.

Ironically, the largest publicly owned fish farm in Rhode Island is the former AFC farm in Carolina, and the fish-producing techniques used there today, in 2010, have remained completely unchanged from the AFC's methods of the early 1950s, including the flow-through use of water at the rate of about 2,000 gallons per minute. Although the authority for Rhode Island Pollution Discharge Elimination System permits rests with the same state agency that operates the farm, RIDEM, the requirements for discharge permitting, as set by minimum federal EPA standards, must be followed. The biomass fish production of the Carolina Fish Hatchery is as limited as it was when the farm was under private ownership, and the hatchery still lacks even the most rudimentary of effluent control systems. It is thus highly doubtful that the fish production there is any more cost-effective now than it was when the farm was sold to the state in 1995.

Notes

1. Michael A. Rice, "A Brief History of Oyster Aquaculture in Rhode Island," in *Aquaculture in Rhode Island: 2005 Yearly Status Report*, ed. David Alves (Wakefield: Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, 2006), 24-38.
2. Substantial primary documents from nearly the entire history of the American Fish Culture Company are housed at the library of the Rhode Island Historical Society as MSS 483. These include a collection of American Fish Culture Company records (14.25 linear feet) from 1891 to 1996 at sg (subgroup) 17; records between 1990 and 1996 that cover the dissolution of the corporation and sale of its farm to the State of Rhode Island are to remain closed until 2010. Additional records and correspondence concerning the farm are found in the Hazard Family Papers, donated by members of the family (the most recent donation in 2001 by Oliver Cope Hazard, the last president of the American Fish Culture Company): these include the Rowland Hazard II Papers, 1845-1918, at sg 6; R. Hazard Estate Records, 1917-1953, at sg 41; Thomas P. Hazard and Anne F. (Cope) Hazard Papers, 1893-1979, at sg 9; Ozias C. Goodwin Papers, 1881-1921, at sg 52; and Trout Growers Cooperative Association Records, 1957-1962, at sg 44. All subgroup (sg) references in the following notes are to materials in the RIHS's MSS 483 collection.
3. Lucy Rawlings Tootell, ed., *Driftways into the Past: Local History of the Town of Richmond, Rhode Island* (Westerly: Richmond Historical Society, 1977), 49-59.
4. An American fish culturist movement that began farming brown trout for stocking streams and rivers followed the practices first established in 1741 by Stephen Ludwig Jacobi in the village of Hohenhausen, which was part of the municipality of Kalletal in the Prussian state of Nordrhein-Westfalen. Earl Leitritz and Robert C. Lewis, *Trout and Salmon Culture (Hatchery Methods)*, California Fish Bulletin no. 164, University of California, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1976.
5. G. Brown Goode, "Epochs in the History of Fish Culture," *Transactions of the American Fish Culturists Association* 10 (1881): 34-57.
6. An Act for Encouraging and Regulating Inland Fisheries," chap. 848, passed Mar. 26, 1870, *Rhode Island Acts and Resolves, 1870*.
7. 1890 Annual Report of the Commissioners of Inland Fisheries to the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island, January Session, 1891.
8. Minutes of the Richmond Town Council, Mar. 31, 1879, Richmond Town Hall.
9. 1890 Annual Report of the Commissioners of Inland Fisheries to the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island, January Session, 1891; 1900 Annual Report of the Commissioners of Inland Fisheries to the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island, January Session, 1901.
10. Agreement between Abel Tanner and Charles A. Hoxie, May 5, 1881, Richmond Land Evidence Records, 12:304-5, Richmond Town Hall; water rights agreement with Elias Tanner, 1928, Agreements, 1899-1965, sg 17, box 1, folder 15.
11. Agreements and Accounts of R. Hazard II with J. W. Hoxie, 1879-1902, sg 6, ser. 2, box 12, folder 3; deed and mortgage for land purchase by C. A. Hoxie from R. Hazard for \$1,400, June 19, 1879, Richmond Land Evidence Records, 11:167.
12. Stock Certificate Book, 1892-1917, 483, sg 17, box 1, folder 19; deed of land to American Fish Culture Company by Charles A. Hoxie, Sept. 29, 1892, Richmond Land Evidence Records, 13:167.
13. Mortgage cancellation transferring controlling shares in American Fish Culture Company from C. A. Hoxie to

- the R. Hazard Estate, May 10, 1899, Richmond Land Evidence Records, 11:581; lease of C. A. Hoxie property in Carolina to American Fish Culture Company, May 10, 1899, Richmond Land Evidence Records, 15:245.
14. Ozias C. Goodwin Papers, Book of Outgoing Correspondence, 1886-1921, sg 52 (oversized volume 1).
 15. Sales Records, 1895-1909, sg 17, box 6, folder 25.
 16. Correspondence file, 1915, sg 17, box 1, folder 1.
 17. Ninety-nine year lease of lands owned by R. Hazard Estate to American Fish Culture Company, Sept. 14, 1903, Richmond Land Evidence Records, 16:22.
 18. Articles of Incorporation, 1917, R. Hazard Estate Records, sg 41, ser. 1 (Corporate Records), box 1, folder 1.
 19. "Death of Ozias C. Goodwin," *Narragansett Times*, Mar. 18, 1921, p. 1; R. Hazard Family Trust Agreements, 1917-1950, sg 41; ser. 1 (Corporate Records), box 1, folder 5. Goodwin was buried at Oakdell Cemetery in Peace Dale.
 20. Annual corporate reports filed with the secretary of state in Saco, Maine, in 1919 and 1920 stated that the officers of the American Fish Culture Company were Roland Hazard III, president; Ozias C. Goodwin, secretary-treasurer; and Fred Dean Hoxie, superintendent.
 21. "South County Boasts of Country's Largest Trout Hatchery," *Providence Sunday Journal*, Mar. 13, 1921, sec 5, p 1.
 22. M. C. James, "More about Fish Food," *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society* 59 (1928): 268-71.
 23. Contract, Aug. 27, 1907, sg 17, box 1, folder 1.
 24. "American Fish Culture Company to Enlarge Plant at Carolina," *Westerly Sun*, Sept. 17, 1929.
 25. "750,000 Trout A Year," *Providence Sunday Journal*, Apr. 16, 1950, sec. 5, p. 3.
 26. This information was supplied to the author by Walter E. Eddy, the AFC's last farm manager, who is currently employed on the same site by the State of Rhode Island.
 27. An Oct. 26, 1926, letter to Rowland Hazard III from Roger T. Clapp, an attorney with the Providence law firm of Hinckley, Allen, Tillinghast, and Phillips, outlined the process for incorporation in Rhode Island. Sg 17, ser. 1, box 1, folder 3.
 28. Minutes of the Board of Directors meeting, Nov. 5, 1926, sg 17, box 1, folder 17.
 29. Quitclaim deed, Nov. 16, 1926, sg 17, box 1, folder 15.
 30. Correspondence file, 1928, sg 17, box 1, folder 5.
 31. Monthly sales records, 1928-1934, sg 17, box 7 folder 4.
 32. Undated sales commission guidelines, 1928-1934, signed by T. P. Hazard, sg 17, box 7, folder 4.
 33. Dun & Bradstreet, Report on American Fish Culture Company, Aug. 6, 1936, sg 17, box 7, folder 4.
 34. Quitclaim deed transferring property at assessor's plat 79-2, lot 3, Town of South Kingstown, from American Fish Culture Company to State of Rhode Island, May 5, 1955, South Kingstown Land Evidence Records, 76:434, South Kingstown Town Hall.
 35. Title to this hatchery was transferred to the Carolina Black Bass Hatchery upon the death of Elias Tanner in 1952, and then to Walter E. Eddy upon the deaths of William Tanner and Roland Eddy in 1972; the hatchery was finally sold to the state by Walter E. Eddy, Roland Eddy's son. Lease of land from Elias Tanner by Roland E. Eddy and William F. Tanner (dba Carolina Black Bass Hatchery), Apr. 3, 1935, Richmond Land Evidence Records, 20:333; deed of land transfer, Aug. 8, 1952, *ibid.*, 23:154; land transfer history in quitclaim deed, Nov. 9, 1998, *ibid.*, 112:369; land transfer title from Walter E. Eddy to State of Rhode Island, Nov. 28, 2001, *ibid.*, 150:774.
 36. Cross Mills land acquisition files, 1949-1952, sg 17, box 1A, folder 3; deed of sale by Vinton G. and Anne D. McLaughlin of Branford, Conn., to American Fish Culture Company, Feb. 2, 1951, Charlestown Land Evidence Records, 32:495, Charlestown Town Hall; deed of transfer of Mill Pond property from American Fish Culture Company to the Nature Conservancy, 6 Dec. 6, 1995, *ibid.*, 149:152. Details of the land transfer to the Nature Conservancy in the AFC records (sg 17, box 4B, folder 30) are closed until 2010.
 37. "The Trout Get Fooled," *Providence Sunday Journal*, Apr. 16, 1950.
 38. Thomas P. Hazard and Roland E. Eddy, 1951. "Modification of the Sexual Cycle in Brook Trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) by Control of Light," *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society* 18 (1951): 158-62.
 39. "This 'Farm' Raises Trout," *Providence Evening Bulletin*, South County-Westerly edition, Oct. 26, 1955, p. 1.
 40. Donald R. Brockway, "Fish Food Pellets Show Promise," *Progressive Fish-Culturist* 15 (1953): 92-93; Harvey Willoughby, "Use of Pellets as Trout Food," *ibid.*, 127-28.
 41. "This 'Farm' Raises Trout."
 42. "Originally, when they were feeding them wet food, as we used to call it—meat and fish—we had 14 men working here. Now we're running the place with three men." Farm manager Walter Eddy, quoted in "102-Year-Old Hatchery: A Trout Fisherman's Dream," *Charlho Times*, 13 Dec. 13, 1978.
 43. For a comprehensive discussion of fish feeds and aquaculture effluent waters, see Jennifer Mugg, Augusto Serrano, Angelo Liberti, and Michael A. Rice, *Aquaculture Effluents: A Guide for Water Quality Regulators and Aquaculturists*, NRAC Publication 00-003 (North Dartmouth: Northeastern Regional Aquaculture Center, University of Massachusetts, 2000).

44. "World's Largest Fish Farm" *American Fish Farmer* 1 (1970): 6-9.
45. Trout Growers Cooperative Association, minutes of meeting, Oct. 14, 1955, sg 44, box 1, folder 13; articles of incorporation, sg 44, box 1, folder 1; charter and by-laws, sg 44, box 1, folder 1; records of membership withdrawals, sg 44, box 1, folder 12; minutes of meeting, Aug. 15, 1962, sg 44, box 1, folder 13; articles of dissolution, sg 44, box 1, folder 8.
46. David Sumner, manager, Quinebaug Valley Trout Hatchery, personal communication to the author, 2008. Upgrades to the Quinebaug Valley Trout Hatchery from 2001 to 2005, costing about \$10 million, have increased its production capacity to about 1.2 million fish annually.
47. "Country's Largest Trout Hatchery."
48. Fishing Valley Records, sg 17, box 2A, folders 73 (Policies and Procedures, 1963-1985) and 70 (Financials, 1962-1990).
49. Profit-loss calculation worksheet, 1982, sg 17, box 5, folder 54. Calculations for the Fishing Valley in this worksheet—based on an estimated 6,600 pounds of trout caught, with feed costs and such overhead expenses as salaries taken into account—showed that the Fishing Valley was losing about \$0.02 for every pound of fish caught.
50. Deborah L. Saccocia, Babcock and Helliwell Insurance Agency, Wakefield, R.I., to Oliver C. Hazard, Nov. 22, 1982, sg 17, box 1A, folder 21. In calculating the insurance, the agency assumed AFC sales of \$120,000 and a payroll of about \$42,000 for that year.
51. Production reports prepared by Walter E. Eddy, sg 17, box 5, folder 54.
52. Federal Water Pollution Control Act 33 U.S.C., sections 1251 et seq., 1972.
53. EPA Region I, Boston, to Oliver C. Hazard, Apr. 22, 1974, sg 17, box 2A, folder 1.
54. Edward C. Conley, chief of Permits Branch, EPA, Boston, to Oliver C. Hazard, June 6, 1974, sg 17, box 2A, folder 1.
55. Handwritten notes by Walter E. Eddy, sg 17, box 2A, folder 1.
56. National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit RI0001007, issued July 29, 1974, renewed June 12, 1980, sg 17, box 2A, folder 1.
57. Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Rules and Regulations Pertaining to User Fees, December 1983, sg 17, box 2A, folder 2; James W. Fester, chief of RIDEM Division of Water Resources, to Oliver C. Hazard, June 14, 1984, sg 17, box 2A, folder 2.
58. Rhode Island Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit RI0001007, issued Dec. 31, 1986, sg 17, box 2A, folder 2.
59. Dean Albro, chief of DEM Division of Freshwater Wetlands, to Oliver C. Hazard, Dec. 19, 1987, sg 17, box 2A, folder 3; notice of violation, Dec. 18, 1987, Richmond Land Evidence Records, 61:628.
60. Dean Albro to Oliver C. Hazard, Feb. 25, 1988, sg 17, box 2A, folder 3; release of violation, Mar. 11, 1988, Richmond Land Evidence Records, 64:104.
61. Henry R. Hidell III to Oliver C. Hazard, Dec. 17, 1987, sg 17, ser.6, box 3A, folder 12. The letter expressed initial concerns about possible groundwater contamination from pesticides used at nearby turf farms and leachates from septic systems from nearby housing developments.
62. Hidell-Eyster Technical Services, "The Water Resources on Property Owned by American Fish Culture Company, Richmond, R.I.," Aug. 11, 1988, sg 17, ser 6, box 3A, folder 11.
63. Resource Analysts, subcontract report, Dec. 8, 1988 (results: pH = 6.25; nitrate = 1.2 mg/l; nitrite <0.05 mg/l; orthophosphate <0.2mg/l; chloride 16mg/l; sulfate 6.1 mg/l; bromide <0.1mg/l; 2,4D = BDL [below detection limit]; silvex = BDL; dalapon = BDL; dinoseb = BDL; pentachlorophenol = BDL; picloram = BDL); Skinner and Sherman Laboratories, subcontract report, Dec. 22, 1988 (results: gas chromatographic analysis of suite of 42 common organic groundwater contaminant compounds were all BDL). Sg 17, ser. 6, box 3A, folder 16.
64. Memorandum to American Fish Culture Company shareholders, dated Feb. 27, 1989, sg 17, ser. 6, box 3A, folder 12.
65. Among the companies initially contacted were Perrier, Suntory International, Blue Hill Spring Water Company, Anjou International, Clorox, Pokka Corporation, McKesson Corporation, Simmons Enterprises, Coca Cola Corporation—Belmont Springs Division, Evian Waters, Pleasant Valley Investments, BSN Group, Adolph Coors, and Kirin, USA; Hydell-Eyster Technical Services. Invoice to Oliver C. Hazard, Mar. 10, 1989, sg 17, ser. 6, box 3A, folder 12. When word of the AFC's willingness to sell the land became generally known in the business community, a letter from the Downing Corporation (a real estate development company whose president was Richard Baccari of Cranston) expressed a strong interest in purchasing the property for residential development. Salvatore D. Pandozzi to Walter Eddy, July 27, 1989, sg 17, box 1A, folder 22.
66. "DEM to Buy Venerable Fish Hatchery, Land in Richmond," *Providence Journal*, Nov. 2, 1994, sec D., p. 5.
67. "Hatchery Purchase Bothers Town Officials," *Westerly Sun*, Nov. 3, 1994; tax certificate, Jan. 10, 1995, Richmond Land Evidence Records, 98:215.
68. Warranty deed, Feb. 8, 1995, Richmond Land Evidence Records, 98:453.

69. Warranty deed, Aug. 29, 1995, *ibid.*, 101:193. Since 1995 Mr. Eddy has been serving as the manager of the RIDEM Carolina Fish Hatchery, as it is has been known since the sale to the state
70. "American Fish Sells Land to State of R.I. and Donates Wetlands to the Nature Conservancy," press release from North American Realty Advisory Services of New York City, Jan. 4, 1996, sg 17, box 4B, folder 42. NARAS vice president Seamus Gilson served as Oliver C. Hazard's agent in negotiations with RIDEM and with the Nature Conservancy, to which the land was transferred on Dec. 6, 1995. Details of the current disposition of the Mill Pond Preserve at Cross Mills can be found online at <http://www.southcountyconservancy.org/MillPond.asp> (accessed July 3, 2008).
71. Deed, Aug. 20, 1997, Richmond Land Evidence Records, 112:880.
72. Joseph P. McCraren to Oliver C. Hazard, May 2, 1989, sg 17, ser 1, box 1A, folder 22.
73. Thomas L. Meade, *Technology of Closed System Aquaculture of Salmonids*. Marine Advisory Service Technical Report no. 30 (Narragansett: Rhode Island Sea Grant College Program, 1974); C. R. MacDonald, Thomas L. Meade, and John M. Gates, *A Production Cost Analysis of Closed System Culture of Salmonids*, Marine Advisory Service Technical Report no. 41 (Narragansett: Rhode Island Sea Grant College Program, 1975).



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Whereas the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island at their Sessions held at Providence on the Last Monday of February A^D 1784 Did pass an Act of Assembly that any Person in said State that was the Master or owner of any Negro or Negro Slaves, should be Inocited with power to Manumitt and free such Slave or Slaves at Liberty the Slave or Slaves being at such ages as in said Act is Expressid and after such Manumission or freedom for such Slave or Slaves should become free or Manumitted the Slave or Slaves should become as one of the Town Inhabitance Where the Master lived at the Time of the Manumission by him signed Now by Virtue of the Above Mentioned act of the Generall Assembly

Know all men by these presents that I Henry Reynolds of South Kingstown in the County of Washington Do Manumitt and Set free my Negro Woman Named Nab aged About Thirty Years and Do by these presents fully and Absolutely Manumitt and Set free my said Negro Woman called Nab so that neither I my self my Heirs Executors or Adors or either of them shall have any Right or Claim against the said Negro Woman so Manumitted but she shall for ever hereafter remain a free Agent for her self as fully and Absolutely as tho she was born of the free Woman In Wales Whereof I have hereunto set my hand and Seal the first day of March A^D 1784

Signed Sealed
Wth Deed in the presence of
Nathl Holmes
Rother

Henry Reynolds

Washington Co Personally Appeared the within Subscriber Henry Reynolds and Acknowledged the within written Instrument to be his Voluntary Act and Deed with hand and Seal thereunto Affixed March y^e Second 1784 Before
Rother J. Copley

Rec^d 16th Sep 1785

Henry Reynolds, Manumission of Woman Named Nab, 1 March 1784, Reynolds Family Papers (MSS 663), Rhode Island Historical Society; RIHS Collection (front [top], RHi X17 353; reverse [bottom], RHi X17 364).

The Manumission of Nab

JOANNE POPE MELISH

When Henry Reynolds of South Kingstown manumitted Nab, his female slave, on the first day of March 1784, he probably had no idea that he was inaugurating a new era in the relationship between Rhode Island cities and towns and their African-descended residents. Nab's manumission was one of the earliest—possibly the first—enacted in the state under “An Act authorizing the Manumission of Negroes, Molattoes & others, and for the gradual Abolition of Slavery,” passed by the General Assembly in February 1784 to go into effect on the first day of the following month.¹ Often described incorrectly as the statute that abolished slavery in Rhode Island, this act did not actually free anybody, nor did it “authorize” any manumissions that could not have taken place legally before its passage. Besides making certain that all legal enslavement would end with the death of the youngest slave born before March 1, 1784, what the act did do was alter the conditions under which legal manumissions could take place, changing those conditions in a way that dramatically transformed the triangular social and political relationship of slave, slave owner, and local government.

AN UNEASY TENSION between the ideal of liberty and the practical advantages of bound labor had existed in Rhode Island since the very early years of the colony, when the General Assembly passed a law in 1652 which limited the time that “blacke mankind” could be bound to ten years or to a slave's attainment of age twenty-four.² The passage of this act demonstrates that the notion of hereditary lifetime bondage for Africans was initially repugnant, to some degree, to Rhode Island colonists. This aversion may have had more to do with distaste for the potential introduction of large numbers of Africans into Rhode Island society than

with hostility to the institution of slavery itself, since Indian slavery was already well established in the colony.³ But the irresistible lure of the profits to be made from the trade in African slaves on the one hand and the use of enslaved labor to produce agricultural products for provisioning the Caribbean slave societies on the other led to widespread disregard for the law. A century after its passage, enslaved Africans constituted about 11 percent of the Rhode Island population, with about one-quarter of these slaves laboring on the large agricultural plantations of the Narragansett Country, including those in South Kingstown.⁴

Along with the growth of the enslaved population, however, came the emergence of a small but growing population of free blacks. Slaves became legally free in Rhode Island in a variety of ways. Some slaves struck bargains with their masters to hire out some of their own time and thereby eventually buy their freedom.⁵ Some masters manumitted their slaves in gratitude for long and faithful service, others for a single extraordinary act, such as rescuing the master's beloved child from drowning; such “grateful manumissions” were often arranged in a master's will and were carried out after his death as part of the probate of his estate. As moral opposition to slavery grew stronger during the second half of the eighteenth century, an increasing number of slave owners in fact began to manumit their slaves for reasons of conscience. The moral condemnation of slavery was consonant with the emerging natural-rights argument that would undergird the Revolution, but in the early 1770s the most outspoken opponents of slavery were Quakers. In 1773 their Rhode Island Yearly Meeting stated that “it is our sense & judgment that Truth not only requires that the young of capacity & Ability, But like wise the Aged & Impotent; And also all in a State of Infancy and non age

Manumission of Nab

Whereas the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island at there Sessions Held at Providence on the Last Monday of February A D—1784 Did pass an Act of s^d Assembly that Any Person in Said State that was the Master or oneur [owner] of any Negro or Negros Slaves Should be Invested with power to Manimitt and Set free Such Slave or Slaves at Liberty the Slave or Slaves Being at Such ages as in Said Act is Expresed and after Such Mannimison or freedom for Such Slave or Slaves Should be So Set free or Mannimited the Slave or slaves Should Become as one of The Town Inhabitance Where the Master Lived at the Time of the Mannimision by him Signed Now by Virtue of the Above Mentioned act of the General Assembly.

Know all men by these presents That I Henry Reynolds of South Kingstown in the County of Washington Do—Mannimit and Set free my Negro Woman Named Nab Aged About Thirty Years and Do by these presents fully and Absolutely Mannimit and Set free my Said Negro Woman Called Nab So that Neither I my Self my Heirs Executors or Adm's or Either of them Shall have any Right or Claim against the S^d Negro Woman So Mannimited but She Shall for Ever hereafter Remain a free Agent for her Self as fully and Absolutly as tho She was Born of the free Woman In Witness Whereof I have hereunto Set my Hand and Seal the First Day of March A:D 1784

Signed Sealed
& Del'r [Delivered] in the precence of
Nath'l Helme
R Potter

Henry Reynolds
[Following Reynolds's signature is a seal]

[On reverse] Washington Co Personaly Appeared the within Subscriber Henry Reynolds and Acknowledged the within written Instrument to be his Vollentary Act and Deed with hand and Seal thereunto Affixed March y'e Second 1784 Before

R Potter D: C.ples

[In a different hand] Rec'd 17th Sept 1785

Transcribed by Elizabeth C. Stevens, 2009. Capitalizations and "misspellings" are transcribed as written. (Spellings were not regularized until the nineteenth century.) Superscripts are indicated by an apostrophe (e.g., "s^d"). The transcriber has added clarifications in square brackets.

among friends [Quakers] be Discharged & set free from a State of Slavery." The minutes went on to require those who manumitted their slaves to continue to provide for the ones who could not care for themselves.⁶

But non-Quakers did not always share this concern for the welfare of the manumitted; indeed, so many masters cynically manumitted slaves who had become aged and no longer productive that every New England colony passed laws to discourage the practice. A 1728 law in Rhode Island required slave owners to post a £100 bond to manumit any slave, an amount that was later increased to £200.⁷

The motivation for these laws was not compassion for indigent former slaves so much as concern for the public purse. All indigent legal residents of any Rhode Island town were entitled to support from local tax revenues, administered by the town's overseer of the poor at the direction of the town council. Councils consequently spent much of their time interrogating people they regarded as "likely to become chargeable" to ascertain whether those people might in fact "belong" to another town that could be held legally responsible for their care and support.⁸ In Henry Reynolds's home town of South Kingstown, when Joseph Barber "manimitted [*sic*] and set free" his "Negro man Named Plato" in May 1781, and when Mary Congdon freed "my negro woman slave call'd Binah, & her daughter call'd Phoebe" in October 1783, both owners posted bonds with the town.⁹

But not all slave owners who wished to free their slaves were willing or financially able to post such a bond, and for them the passage of the 1784 act offered welcome relief. Under the new act, to be overseen by town councils, "all Persons held in Servitude or Slavery, who shall be hereafter emancipated by those who claim them, shall be supported as other Paupers and not at the Separate Expense of the Claimants, if they become chargeable, provided they shall be between the Ages of Twenty one years, if Males, and Eighteen Years, if Females, and forty Years, and are of sound Body and Mind, which Shall be judged of, and determined by the Town Councils aforesaid."¹⁰

The act thus protected the public coffers from an obligation to support superannuated slaves who were over forty years of age. In October 1785 the upper age limit was reduced from forty years to thirty in response to the growing number of indigent former slaves between thirty and forty who were becoming "chargeable."¹¹ The modification created some confusion and not a little heartbreak. For example, the September 1787 manumission of an enslaved woman named Lucy, authorized by the Providence Town Council, was revoked a month later when Daniel Stillwell, her former owner, who had been unaware that the age of eligibility had been reduced from forty to thirty, discovered that he would be liable for the support of his over-thirty former slave and asked the council to revoke Lucy's manumission. After a month of freedom Lucy was returned to slavery.¹²

That the bond requirement must have been an obstacle for many slave owners who wanted to free their slaves but could not afford to do so is evidenced by the veritable rush of manumissions recorded after March 1, 1784, the effective date of the manumission act. Henry Reynolds may have been the first, or one of the first, to emancipate a slave under the new authorization, but others followed closely on his heels. In Providence, for example, Amaziah Waterman freed Eve, Phillis, and Violet on April 5, and Quaco and Hannah were freed by two other slave holders on May 3. All told, thirty-two slaves were manumitted in Providence alone in the first five years following the passage of the act.¹³

While the passage of the 1784 statute may have served as a welcome opportunity for Reynolds, Waterman, and other slave owners to relieve themselves of both the moral and the financial burden of slaveholding, it performed quite a different purpose for slaves. Not only did it give a greater number of slaves the opportunity to become free; it also transformed the character of the freedom they obtained.

When Joseph Barber and Mary Congdon of South Kingstown posted bond to free their slaves before the passage of the act, Plato, Binah, and Phoebe became free residents of the town, but they were not residents

who truly “belonged” to South Kingstown in the same way that their former owners and other whites did. The word “belong,” frequently used in connection with legal-settlement interrogations and determinations of entitlement to town support, suggests the intimate, personal character of the mutual obligations between legally resident citizens and their local government in colonial and early national New England. The bond requirement for manumitting slaves excluded former slaves from this relationship of civic responsibility and belonging, for it was slave owners, rather than the public, who remained financially responsible for the manumitted slaves. Former slaves thus remained in a permanent relationship of “belonging” to their former owners and could never fully belong to a town as members of a mutually responsible body of free citizens.

The passage of the 1784 Act, stipulating that manumitted slaves of eligible age “shall be supported as other Paupers and not at the Separate Expense of the Claimants, if they become chargeable,” meant that henceforth these former slaves would truly belong to their town: they would stand in exactly the same relationship to other townspeople, town government, and their former owners as any other free residents. This was a crucial legal, social, and political step toward citizenship, a citizenship that blacks would struggle to realize over the next seventy-odd years. It would be an uphill battle; categorically denied by the Dred Scott decision in 1857, black citizenship would finally be confirmed only with the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment at the end of the Civil War.

OF COURSE, WHEN Henry Reynolds seized the first available opportunity to manumit Nab on the day after the passage of the gradual abolition act, it is unlikely that either of them gave much thought to the more philosophical implications of his action. We have no idea whether Nab had felt a longing for freedom, a fear of it, or a little of both, and we do not know what she made of her freedom once she had it. As for Henry Reynolds, we can speculate that manumitting Nab at the time and

in the way that he did may have reflected a difference of opinion about slaveholding within the Reynolds family. The eagerness with which Henry manumitted Nab may suggest a rebellious impulse beyond the exercise of conscience and a desire for relief from financial liability. Was Henry Reynolds thumbing his nose a bit at his slaveholding family?

Henry’s father, Elisha Reynolds, was a prosperous South Kingstown landowner whose estate around the time of the passage of the 1784 act was valued at a hefty £2,400, and at least part of his wealth was derived from the labor of slaves.¹⁴ In December 1790, a little more than a year before his death, he wrote a will in which the future of five adult slaves and the child of one of them figured prominently. To his daughter Elizabeth he left “my two Negroes viz Giffe and Ceasar so long as my sd Daughter shall live”; at her death, Ceasar would be given to his grandson Thomas Potter and Giffe to his grandson Elisha R. Potter. He bequeathed “my Negro Girl Named Nancy” to his granddaughter, Sarah Gardner, with instructions that Nancy should be manumitted at the age of twenty-five. He manumitted “my Negro woman Lydia,” apparently a favorite slave, since he also bequeathed her own bed to her along with “the time” of her child Genny “until the said Genny shall Arrive to the Age of Eighteen Years, at which time I hereby Manumit and Set Free the said Genny.”¹⁵ He also instructed that if “either of my Negroes Thomas or Lydia become uncapable [*sic*] of Supporting themselves . . . they be Supported by my Son Henry and Grandsons Henry and Jesse.” Finally, he named his grandson, Elisha Reynolds Potter, as his executor.¹⁶

There are several clues in these arrangements suggesting that Henry Reynolds’s attitudes toward slaves and slaveholding may have been distinctly out of step with those of the rest of his family, and that this may have alienated Henry from the family to some extent. Elisha Reynolds left land, buildings, and slaves to his daughter Elizabeth and to his grandchildren, but he left only land and a building—and no slaves—to Henry. He did, however, “Order” that Henry should share the support of

“either of my Negroes, Thomas or Lydia,” with grandsons Henry and Jesse if the former slaves became “incapable of Supporting themselves.” Elisha’s will thus deliberately placed upon Henry precisely the sort of liability from which he had sought relief by manumitting his own slave Nab under the 1784 manumission act.

The way in which Elisha Reynolds summarily arranged these lives reflects the paternalistic assumptions about obligation, entitlement, and authority that had sustained slaveholding social relations in Rhode Island for a century and a half, assumptions that the 1784 act was beginning to dismantle. While the “Negro” Thomas was neither bequeathed to a family member nor manumitted in Elisha’s carefully drawn will, indicating that he may already have been a free man, Elisha arranged for his future support as one of “my Negroes,” a demonstration of precisely the sort of perpetual “belonging” by a former slave to his former owner, with its attendant obligation on the latter’s part, that Henry had attempted to sever by manumitting Nab under the manumission act. Surely Elisha placed Henry under this kind of obligation to Thomas and Lydia with more than a little sense of irony. It seems significant that Elisha named his grandson rather than his only living son as his executor. Perhaps Henry had told his father that he did not want to execute a will that confirmed the heritable lifetime enslavement of people like Giffe and Ceasar; perhaps, given Henry’s

apparent interest in shedding responsibility for Nab, Elisha did not trust Henry to carry out his wishes with respect to the perpetual support of Lydia and Thomas; or, of course, there may have been other reasons.

In any case, it is obvious that Elisha did not see slaveholding itself as a dying practice, despite the passage of the 1784 act and Henry’s use of it. The fact that Elisha left slaves to his daughter and grandchildren suggests that he believed such an inheritance would be welcome, or at least acceptable, not only to another family member in his son’s generation but also to those a generation younger. Thus Elisha Reynolds seems to have taken for granted a future that looked very much like his present, a future in which white men and women would continue to manage the lives and labor of people of color like Ceasar and Giffe, Thomas and Lydia, who would “belong” to them in freedom as well as in slavery.

Henry Reynolds, on the other hand, appears to have imagined a different future. Whether he was satisfying his conscience or simply shedding liability, in manumitting Nab under the new “Act authorizing the Manumission of Negroes, Molattoes & others, and for the gradual Abolition of Slavery,” Henry was taking the first step toward freeing himself and Nab from the bonds of mutual obligation and the assumptions about black dependence and white authority that defined his father Elisha’s world.

Notes

1. *Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England*, ed. John Russell Bartlett (Providence: Providence Press Company, 1865), 10:7-8.
2. *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England*, ed. John Russell Bartlett (Providence; A. Crawford Greene and Brother, 1856), 1:243.
3. Indian captives had been sold to households throughout southern New England as well as to the Caribbean after the Pequot War of 1637. Later, notwithstanding the law, hundreds of Wampanoag and Narragansett captives were auctioned in Portsmouth and Providence during King Philip's War.
4. Rhode Island Census of 1755, in Everts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, *American Population before the Federal Census of 1790* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 67.
5. See, for example, Venture Smith's self-purchase in *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa . . . Related by Himself* (New London: C. Holt, 1798), 22-24.
6. Rhode Island Yearly Meeting Minute Book for 1773, p. 300. I wish to thank Betsy Cazden for providing the information from the Quaker records for this article.
7. *Records of the Colony* 4:415-16, 5:472.
8. See Ruth Wallis Herndon, "Who Died an Expenditure to 'This Town': Poor Relief in Eighteenth-Century Rhode Island," in *Down and Out in Early America*, ed. Billy G. Smith (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 135-62.
9. Manumission and Bond of Indemnification, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Pettaquamscutt Historical Society, Kingston, Rhode Island.
10. *Records of the State* 10:8.
11. *Ibid.*, 133.
12. Providence Town Council Records, 6:18, Sept. 14, 1787; 6:22, Oct. 1, 1787; Providence City Hall Archive.
13. *Ibid.*, vols. 5-7, passim.
14. South Kingstown, Valuation Bill for State Tax, Aug. 26, 1782, South Kingstown Town Hall.
15. Reynolds was bequeathing Genny to Lydia only until Genny reached the age of eighteen, possibly in recognition of the 1784 act's stipulation that children born to enslaved women after March 1, 1784, would be free at eighteen if female and twenty-one if male, but would be bound to their mother's owner, who also would be responsible for their support, until that time. See *Records of the State* 10:7. We do not know how old Genny was at the time the will was written. If she had been born after the enactment of the statute, then she would automatically have become free at eighteen (making Reynolds's arrangement for her manumission at that age unnecessary), but he still would have had to make arrangements for her care by her mother, now no longer owned by anyone, until she reached that age. If that was the case, Reynolds may have included manumission instructions simply because he was in the habit of exercising authority over "his" people. On the other hand, Genny may have been born shortly before the enactment of the statute, requiring Reynolds to bequeath her to Lydia as a slave and then, if he wanted her to become free at some point, to explicitly authorize her future manumission in his will.
16. South Kingstown, Probate Records, 6:240-44, South Kingstown Town Hall.

Rhode Island Book Notes

A Selection of Recent Titles

Benjamin L. Carp, *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
A study of prominent eighteenth-century colonial cities in the era leading up to the Revolutionary War, including Boston, New York, Charleston, Philadelphia, and Newport. In addition to the chapter “And Yet There is Room’: The Religious Landscape of Newport,” the volume contains appendices about Newport denominations and religious leaders, 1740-1783.

Patrick T. Conley and Paul Campbell, *South Providence* (Mount Pleasant, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2006).
An account of a historic and vibrant Providence neighborhood, with photographs, from the popular Arcadia series “Images of America.” Another recent title in the series is *Rocky Point Park*, a photographic history of the amusement park by David Bettencourt and Stephanie Chauvin (2009).

Charles H.W. Foster, ed., *Twentieth-Century New England Land Conservation: A Heritage of Civic Engagement* (Cambridge: Harvard Forest/Harvard University Press, 2009).
A selection of writings about initiatives in New England land conservation, including an essay by Peter B. Lord, “The Rhode Island Conservation Story: Back from Crisis.”

Robert Grandchamp, *The Boys of Adams’ Battery G: The Civil War through the Eyes of a Union Light Artillery Unit* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2009).
An account of a Civil War unit whose soldiers, many of them Rhode Island farmers and mill workers, served from 1861 until the close of the war. Grandchamp has also authored the recent regimental history *The Seventh Rhode Island Infantry in the Civil War* (McFarland, 2008).

Carolyn Livingston and Dawn Elizabeth Smith, *Rhode Island’s Musical Heritage: An Exploration* (Sterling Heights, Mich.: Harmonie Park Press, 2008).
An anthology of twenty-six historical articles relating to the musical heritage of Rhode Island from the eighteenth century to the present. Topics include the story of Newport Gardner, the first African-American music educator in the state; traditional music of Native Americans in Rhode Island; the American Band; singer Sissieretta Jones; Dixieland

cornetist and Rhode Island native Bobby Hackett; music educator Abraham A. Schwadron; the Newport Jazz Festival; and the Rhode Island Philharmonic Youth Orchestra.

Joanne Pope Melish, ed., *The Life of William J. Brown of Providence, Rhode Island*, with a preface by Rosalind C. Wiggins (Hanover, N.H.: University of New Hampshire/University Press of New England, 2005).
A reprint of the 1883 memoir of William J. Brown, a son and grandson of Rhode Island slaves, chronicling life in nineteenth-century Providence. Historian Joanne Pope Melish has written a scholarly introduction to this edition.

Les Rolston, *Long Time Gone: Neighbors Divided by the Civil War* (Buena Vista, Va.: Mariner Publishing, 2009).
An account of cousins and next-door neighbors who grew up together in Pawtuxet and who fought on opposing sides in the Civil War. James Rhodes Sheldon moved from Rhode Island to Georgia as a young man and served in the 50th Georgia Regiment of the Confederate army; his cousin Elisha Hunt Rhodes was an officer in the 2nd Rhode Island Regiment of the Union army.

Worcester Historical Museum, *Landscape of Industry: An Industrial History of the Blackstone Valley*, with a forward by Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2009).
This history of the Blackstone Valley of Massachusetts and Rhode Island contains essays on the valley’s mills, transportation networks, the role of enslaved people in mill production, the struggle for workers’ rights, the creation of the National Heritage Corridor, and other related topics. The volume includes reproductions of old maps, prints, and photographs.