On the Cover:
Detail of late 17th-century domestic artifacts excavated from the Jewett Bull House as displayed in Norman Isham's personal collection, including a hoe, a strainer, scissors, keys, a ladle, horse and ox shoes, spoons in a wall, European-colonial ceramics (front, center), and a broken potlet (front, left) possibly of Native American manufacture. Most of the artifacts are now curated in the collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society. (Rhode Island Historical Society Collection; photograph taken in 1917; RHI XI7 1695)
"Uncomfortable Consequences":  
Colonial Collisions at the Jireh Bull House in Narragansett Country

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Tower Hill, in what is today South Kingstown, Rhode Island, rises sharply from the western bank of the Pettaquamscutt River providing a sweeping vista across marsh grass, still waters, and Boston Neck beyond. During the mid-1660s, Jireh Bull, a young land speculator from Newport, together with his family and new neighbors, constructed a small, stone house atop the hill. Eventually, Bull’s “farme,” as his sons referred to the plantation after their father’s death in 1684, comprised a complex of three small stone houses with adjoining walls forming an enclosure, and orchards, fields, and forests. Today, Bull’s former estate comprises a small community of waterfront cottages and overgrown fields, where stone walls still serve as property dividers. Tensions between residential development and environmental conservation come home on this landscape, echoing historic collisions over space and place. An engraved rock monument supported by a small brick base reports this local history to cars crossing the river:

A FEW RODS WEST
OF THIS SPOT
STOOD THE STONE HOUSE
OF
JIREH BULL
BURNED BY THE INDIANS
DECEMBER 15, 1675.

The whole story, at least the parts of it that are known, is more complicated: Jireh Bull wasn’t home when the raid commenced, the exact date of the attack is vague, and the number of persons killed is disputed. Despite these uncertainties, the monument reminds passers-by that this was—and continues to be—a contested cultural borderland: both the ancestral homeland of the Narragansett Indian Tribe and a territory colonized by Rhode Island settlers.

King Philip’s War engulfed New England between the summer of 1675 and the autumn of 1676; related conflicts continued in northern and western New England into the eighteenth century. During the war, New England colonists designated private dwellings in strategically important locations to serve the collective defense. Histories written during and immediately after the conflict referred to these expedient fortifications as “garrisons,” “garrison houses,” or “fortified houses.” When war broke out, the United Colonies of New England—Connecticut, New Plymouth, and Massachusetts Bay—feared that the Narragansett

Monument to Jireh Bull house on Middlebridge Road, South Kingstown. (Photograph by author.)
Indians were secretly supporting the Wampanoag sachem Metacomet (called "Philip" by the English), and that the Narragansets would outwardly join the war against the colonies.  To guard against this possibility, a deputy of the Connecticut governor chose Bull's house to maintain a military presence in Narragansett Country. In the winter of 1675, the United Colonies initiated a plan to muster more than twelve hundred soldiers, including several hundred allied Mohegan and Pequot Indians, at the Bull house in anticipation of a military strike against the Narragansets at Great Swamp between seven and eight miles west of the Bull settlement. However, after one file of soldiers razed several Narragansett villages en route to the rendezvous at South Kingstown, a group of Narragansett Indians sacked Bull's house before the colonial armies arrived. Nonetheless, the colonial army went on to strike Great Swamp resulting in the deaths of more than one thousand Narragansett and Wampanoag, primarily women, children, and the elderly. The colonists and their allies destroyed the fortifed village and a winter's worth of grain. By war's end, demographers estimate, several hundred colonists and many thousands of Natives—between fifty-six and sixty-nine percent of the indigenous inhabitants of New England—had died.  

During the past decade, historians and archaeologists have begun to reconsider longstanding claims about the scope, conduct, and consequences of King Philip's War. This reassessment is due, in part, to increasing recognition of Native American oral histories about the conflict and alternative Native-centered interpretations of colonial documents.  Archaeological research, often conducted in collaboration with Native peoples, has likewise unearthed evidence of indigenous cultural continuity reflected by material culture and spatial organization in the decades following King Philip's War.  

Recent research has disclosed the interrelationship between Anglo-American practices of monumentalization and collective amnesia involved in disappearing Native peoples and displacing Native histories from colonized spaces.  As sites of violence from King Philip's War, houses like the Jireh Bull house identified as former garrisons remain prominent sites of collective remembrance celebrating triumphal conquest into the twenty-first century.  Although garrison houses were central to engagements between Natives and colonists in New England during the seventeenth century, the history of these sites as places of encounter remains largely unstudied. This article situates the Jireh Bull house in the context of a colonial borderland, a "space-in-between" of negotiation between Narragansett Indians and Rhode Island colonists. It argues that the site was central to a history of intercultural relations—or, perhaps more accurately, it argues that the site was central to a long history of intercultural collisions—not merely relations—between Narragansett Indians and English colonists living near Pettaquamscutt. This history of tension—and later, violence—began long before the seminal raid of December 1675.

Narragansett Country keeps, in its broadest sense, to the ancestral homeland of the Narragansett Indian Tribe. It is not only a territory, but also a source of identity separating the Narragansets from the neighboring Pequot, Nipmuck, and Wampanoag tribes.  When seen through the cartographer's lens, Narragansett Country comprises nearly all of mainland Rhode Island except for the town of Cumberland and those towns on the eastern shore of Narragansett Bay, the so-called East Bay. Radiocarbon dates derived from archaeological features indicate Native peoples have lived across the homeland for at least 13,500 years. Narragansett oral traditions place inhabitants here millennia earlier, perhaps as early as 30,000 years before present.  However, rising sea levels since the last glaciations, and the inundation of river systems to create Narragansett Bay would have submerged any archaeological sites of this antiquity lying along the ancient coastline. Although the acreage of Narragansett Country owned by Narragansett Indians has dwindled since the first colonial settlement in 1636—through land sales, conquest, adverse possession, the settlement of debts, and illegal detribalization, among other means—contemporary Narragansets maintain an alternative geography of "ceremonial landscapes" across the entirety of their ancestral homeland.

The place-name, Narragansett Country, appeared in English colonial documents during the seventeenth century to denote an area to be mapped and brought under colonial control.  As John Winthrop observed in 1634, with a mixture of anxiety and expectation, "The country on the west of the bay of Narragansett is all champaign for many miles, but very stony and full of Indians."  Roger Williams and fellow exiles established Providence two years later, initiating the process of permanent European settlement in the region. By 1650, the fledging colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations had added towns at Portsmouth, Newport, Pawtuxet, and Warwick. During the latter half of the seventeenth century, English colonists seized on the remaining Narragansett Indian land as the next province for settlement.  This territory, running south from the Pawtuxet River, between what are now the towns of Warwick and Cranston, and west to the Pawcatuck River, in what is now the town of Westerly, represented the border between Connecticut and Rhode Island. It linked the English colonial settlements in New England extending from Boston to New York. Jurisdiction over the land was so fiercely contested by representatives of the various New England colonies that a royal commission from England attempted to settle the dispute in 1665; it did so by resolving to claim the Narragansett Country region for Charles II and renaming it the King's Province thereby prohibiting further colonization. However, the resolution was accepted by none except the commission itself. Rhode Island colonists continued to populate the region under their own laws.  By the early eighteenth century, colonists living in New England considered Narragansett Country to be synonymous with the King's Province.  The earliest colonial settlements in Rhode Island, from 1636 to approximately 1650, cropped up along the periphery of Narragansett Country, an historically contested area between Narragansett and Wampanoag tribes where the presence of English settlements may have provided a buffer. By contrast, the later, second-stage settlements, from circa 1650 to 1675, in what would become the King's Province struck at the heart of the Narragansett Indian homeland: Aquidnessett called Wickford by the colonists; Misquamicut, called Westerly; and Petaquamsutt, called Kingstown. Groups of several dozen colonists lived in each settlement, which were surrounded by Narragansett villages populated by hundreds of individuals. Colonists living in the more southern settlements continued to use Narragansett place-names to identify their respective villages acknowledging that they were interlopers in Indian country. Indeed, the so-called Pequot Path or Trail, a thoroughfare for movement across Native New England, connected these colonial settlements to each other and to Narragansett places.  For decades after European settlement, Natives carried messages between Rhode Island and the surrounding colonies, leaving the settlers there largely ignorant of the surrounding countryside and its Native villages.  In recognition of the precarious position of these intrepid settlers and traders, some early land purchases granted indigenous bands long-term rights to land for planting corn. However, ever increasing numbers of English colonists who populated the region not only ignored these rights, but also brought with them livestock that rotted through Narragansett fields and clam banks.
Pettaquamscutt, the second of the major English settlements established in what would become the King's Province, bore the Narragansett place-name for the region along the western shore of the Pettaquamscutt (Narrow) River. The name perhaps derived from the large rock ledge known as Pettaquamscutt Rock, in present-day South Kingstown, which was and continues to be a significant cultural site in the Narragansett Indian homeland. Also known as Treaty Rock, this vertical rock face served as a place of interaction between Narragansett sachems and English colonists beginning in 1618. Somewhere near the ledge Roger Williams secured permission to settle Aquidneck Island. Between 1638 and 1662, a corporation of five men from Boston and Newport, the so-called Pettaquamscutt Proprietors, convened near the ledge on several occasions to buy land from Kachanaquant, Wemosit, Quequakanot, Wanomachin, Samattock, and Soccahan, many of the principal sachems living nearby.\(^\text{20}\) The Pettaquamscutt Purchase, as this land sale is known today, was not a single act but the result of many meetings between and among various parties of colonists and Indians. Through this process, the corporation procured and secured legal title to the land to perfect an ever larger and more firm claim to portions of Narragansett Country that could withstand legal challenges raised by either Narragansetts or rival Englishmen. By 1674, the full extent of land acquired totaled twelve square miles and included all mineral rights therein. This territory was so expansive that its northwest boundary was not surveyed and mapped until the eighteenth century. An initial survey was only attempted after King Philip's War, in 1687 and surveying efforts continued through 1727.\(^\text{21}\) The proprietors paid a total of £151 and extended thirteen coats and and a pair of breeches on credit, after which they determined Kachanaquant was in their debt for £13 15s.\(^\text{22}\)

From the outset, the Pettaquamscutt Purchase produced tension between and among Native bands and between Native bands and English groups. Reflecting intra-tribal dispute over the legitimacy of the Purchase, the earlier of two deeds between the Pettaquamscutt Proprietors and Kachanaquant was appended with a "confirmation" made between the proprietors and Kachanaquant's three sons.\(^\text{23}\) This undated appendix states that the sons purchased land in March 1657 and in April 1662 from two other Narragansett sachems, Ninigret and Wanomachin, respectively. These purchases conveyed to Kachanaquant's sons nearly all of the land lying south of Pettaquamscutt Rock to the Atlantic coast, and extending westward beyond the Great Swamp, an area referred to as "Point Judith" or "Jude." The existence of this appendix in colonial land documents suggests that the Proprietors feared that Kachanaquant's sons might hold legal rights to a large portion of the Pettaquamscutt Purchase. Yet, three other English settlers contested the sachems' claim by declaring that in April 1661, Wanomachin had "delivered seizin in the English form"—i.e., brought them a branch or some other physical piece of the land—thereby conveying to them the land immediately south of Pettaquamscutt Rock. The Proprietors favored this second claim, which supported their own deeds, despite its dubious authority over written land deeds in seventeenth-century New England. However, the dispute was not settled legally until 1674, when the Proprietors somehow induced Kachanaquant's sons to sign a document quittance claiming any prior interest in the land.

When English settlers appeared south of Pettaquamscutt Rock in the 1660s, four of the Narragansett Indian sachems in the immediate vicinity appealed to the surrounding colonies to intervene on the Narragansetts' behalf. In 1661, Wemosit, Ninigret, Stulcop, and Quequakanot appealed first to Plymouth Colony over the incursion into their territory. Plymouth warned the Rhode Island governing council in response, "keep your people from Injuring the heathen or others which they may draw upon your selues and us uncomfortable consequences."\(^\text{24}\) Yet, after failing in an initial attempt to peacefully disperse settlers at Pettaquamscutt, the Narragansett sachems sent a formal protest to the United Colonies of New England at Boston in September 1662, accusing the Proprietors of "pretending title to Point Jude and other lands adjoyning." The document was probably drafted by an Englishman, perhaps an associate of the rival Aberton Company who was working as much in his own self-interest as on behalf of the sachems. The protest continues:

"[The Proprietors] have endeavoured to possess themselves forcibly of the same both by building and bringing cartell, we having given them warning to the contrary, and they not taking warning, nor endeavoured to drive their cartell from off[fl the lande, but they resisted and one of them presumed to shot off[l a gun at us."\(^\text{25}\)

The sachems claimed none had "sould them [the colonists] any land there."\(^\text{26}\) Accordingly, the sachems demanded that the Pettaquamscutt Proprietors be brought before a "faire trial, either before yourselves or some other indifferent judges." Should their claim
go unheard, the sachems warned that they would begin to remove the settlers by other means.

Jireh Bull came to adulthood on the cusp of the English colonization of Narragansett Country. Born at Portsmouth in 1638, he was the eldest living son of Elizabeth and Henry Bull, who was governor of the Rhode Island colony from 1685 to 1686 and once again in 1690. The family moved to Newport in 1639, but nothing else is known about Bull's childhood or early adulthood.

His eldest surviving son, Jireh Bull, Jr., was born in 1658. By then, the twenty-year-old had likely completed an apprenticeship and presumably had married. His wife, whose name is thought to be Katharine, bore three more sons, Henry, Ephraim and Ezekiel, and a daughter, Mary, all survived to adulthood. Like many of his peers, at an early age Bull realized the potential profit to be earned in speculation on Indian land. On March 22, 1661, at the age of twenty-two, Bull signed the Misquamicut Purchase. The proprietors of this land purchase, who were different from those involved with the Pettaquamscut Purchase, laid out thirty-six acres on his behalf, but Bull's name does not appear on any other documents relating to the settlement. The Misquamicut Purchasers found great difficulty in encouraging settlers from Rhode Island to either pay for their designated land or to settle on it permanently. The Purchasers eventually offered payment—first £5, then £8—to anyone willing to relocate there. Like many of those who originally signed onto the Misquamicut Purchase, Bull probably never intended to move his family to the incipient settlement, and instead viewed the land as an opportunity for investment.

Bull realized his ambitions of land ownership in the Narragansett Country in 1663 when he purchased a twenty-acre house lot at Pettequammucut from William Bandy. Five years later, he received title from the Pettequammucut Proprietors to an additional 480 acres further inland to create a five-hundred acre share, one of the largest occupied allotments at Pettequammucut. Although the language of the deed is ambiguous as to the exact timing of the purchase, Jireh Bull paid for the additional land sometime between 1663 and 1668. Bull appears to have maintained a home at Newport—either full or part-time—until around March, 1667 when his name first appears in legal documents as a resident of Pettequammucut. His estate in the fledgling village represented the most southerly extent of English settlement on Tower Hill, far south of Pettequammucut Rock. The land immediately south of Bull's plot was then undivided, but later became part of the Hazard family plantation. Some speculation suggests Bull's first house was built by William Bandy before 1663, but this scenario is unlikely given the Proprietors' primary interest in the land as a speculative venture. Rather, Bull probably began construction of a home on the house lot in 1666 or 1667. By 1671, when the Governing Council of Rhode Island assembled at Jireh Bull's house, nineteen freemen and their families lived at Pettequammucut.

One of the earliest occupants and largest landowners at Pettequammucut, Bull quickly rose in prominence and assumed political office as the first Co-Conservator of the Peace on May 21, 1666. In a display of political one-upmanship, the Connecticut Colony, which advocated for its jurisdiction over Narragansett Country, later appointed him to the same position. This dual role thrust Bull in a mediating position between the various New England colonies and the Narragansett Indians. In the summer of 1669, the governor of Rhode Island received intelligence from a Long Island Indian, sent from the governors of Connecticut and New York. The messenger related that Ninigret and seven other men from his band of Narragansetts had been at a dance at Mount Hope [Bristol] with the Pokanoket Wampanoag, Metacom's band, for more than a week. Rhode Island subsequently issued a warrant for Ninigret's arrest on suspicion of brewing a plot against the English. Bull probably served the warrant to Ninigret or one of his associates. The Narragansett sachem eventually appeared before the Rhode Island Council on July 28, and testified that the tribes were simply celebrating a bountiful harvest. After a "brol" next occurred between the colonists and Indians at Pettequammucut, on August 19, 1669 the Rhode Island governor appointed Bull and two other colonists to compel Ninigret to reappear before the Governing Council, with the sachem, Wemosit. The sachems were to answer for their role in another alleged plot to attack the settlement. The two sachems appeared before the Council at Newport a week later, on August 26, 1669. Similar intimations of Native hostility occurred again in 1671 and 1673; Bull likely continued to serve as one of the primary mediators between the sachems and the Rhode Island government.

When King Philip's War erupted in June 1675, Connecticut assumed direct control over
the King's Province to secure the neutrality of the Narragansett Indians in the burgeoning conflict. The Connecticut governor dispatched his son, Wait Winthrop, to garrison the King's Province should a military campaign become necessary. Winthrop placed conscripted soldiers from Stonington and New London, and perhaps Pequot Indian guards, at Bull's house and at Richard Smith, Jr.'s house, twelve miles north of the Pettequaquscutt settlement at Wickford. (Connecticut did not fortify Westerly, which was firmly allied with Rhode Island; Connecticut viewed the alliance as an illegal incursion of its territory. Residents of Westerly abandoned the settlement.) On July 9, 1675, Winthrop described Bull's house as "a convenient large stone house, with a good stone-wall yard before it, which is a kind of small fortification to it." At that time, Winthrop wrote that sixteen of the "neighbors" were then in the Bull house, a number that represented the majority of settlers at Pettequaquscutt. While a small group of settlers remained under the watch of the garrison, Bull and some others chose to send their families to Newport where they stayed for the duration of the war. From Richard Smith, Jr.'s house, on August 14, 1675, Roger Williams observed, "Just now comes in Sam Dyer in a catch from Newport, to fetch over Jireh Bull's wife and children and others of Pettequaquscutt." The Bull family probably stayed either with Jireh's father or his eldest son, Jireh Jr., who owned adjacent farms in the town.

With his family better protected, Bull remained in Pettequaquscutt for several weeks. He continued to promote further settlement in Pettequaquscutt by Rhode Island colonists. On September 6, 1675, he witnessed a sale of land six miles west of Pettequaquscutt Rock near the edge of Great Swamp and very close to the Narragansetts' winter encampments. The land sold for a price three hundred percent higher than it had sold for a month earlier. Concurrently, Bull worked as an intermediary between the Narragansett Indians and the Connecticut colony. Several Narragansetts, including a representative of the sachem, Canonicus, met with Jireh Bull at his house to ask him to negotiate with colonial officials on their behalf. On one occasion, Bull sent a missive to Connecticut's governor requesting that the colony permit a band of Indians to safely harvest corn. The colony's governing council responded to Bull on September 30, 1675, but the contents of the reply—and the colony's determination of the particular matter—are unknown. By late fall, Bull had followed his family to Newport where he remained for the duration of the conflict. The reason for the timing of Bull's journey to Newport is unknown. As war with the Narragansetts appeared ever more likely, his pacifist sympathies (Henry Bull was a Quaker, although Jireh Bull was not) may have guided the decision. Or perhaps he was following the advice of his Narragansett neighbors who warned the colonists to leave before a war pushed them out. Bull may also have disliked the presence of the garrison from Connecticut, whose jurisdiction he disfavored despite working on the behalf of the governor. Whatever the reason, Bull remained in Newport through the summer of 1676.

Jireh Bull's decision to abandon his home for safe harbor in Newport proved fortuitous. During the autumn of 1675, the United Colonies of New England determined to wage a strike against the Narragansett Indians. Their governors believed that the Narragansett Indians were already secretly engaged in the war against the English colonists in central Massachusetts (as evidenced by the capture of several men allegedly from Wemoset's band). The colonies believed that it was a matter of time before the Indians would wage open war. A Council of War decided to mobilize more than 1,200 soldiers to strike against the Narragansett Indians during the upcoming winter when a lack of undegrowth would enable a European-style military engagement against the Indian encampments. The plan was simple, but depended on a series of well-timed and independently executed maneuvers. A combined army from Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay would march south from Dedham, Massachusetts to Richard Smith's house at Wickford, where an advance party of scouts would root out Narragansetts living nearby. Meanwhile, the Connecticut army, accompanied by several hundred Pequot and Mohegan Indians, would assemble in Stonington and then march eastward via the Pequot Path into Narragansett Country. The armies would rendezvous at Jireh Bull's house before making their final strike against the Narragansett Indian encampment in the Great Swamp.

Once the northern army reached Wickford, mounted scouts rode the twelve miles south to Bull's house to ascertain whether the Connecticut army had arrived. The advance party discovered the Jireh Bull house in ruins. No eye-witness accounts of the attack on the colonists at Bull's house or the scene of destruction survive. Moreover, the histories of King Philip's War, which probably relied on reconnaissance drafted in the field, diverge over the exact date of the incursion and the scope of the attack. Based on the scant documentation available, it appears that the attack on the Jireh Bull house occurred either on December 14 or 15, 1675, and that between seven and fifteen colonists died. Some accounts indicate that two neighbors escaped during the raid, and historians have speculated that they were two local boys who fled north, and that one of them was killed as he fled. This scenario is plausible, although the exact number of individuals killed and their identities have not been corroborated by other documents. In cases of other attacks on garrison houses in New England during King Philip's War, those who were thought to be sheltering inside were often found to be outside the garrison when raids commenced. For seventeenth-century New England colonists, the attack on the Bull house and the murder of those sheltering inside provoked alternative interpretations. One Rhode Island colonist, John Eaton, who was living on Aquidneck Island during the war, blamed Connecticut and Massachusetts for intruding into Narragansett Country. Eaton held Rhode Island colony's neighbors responsible for inciting the raid by the Narragansetts, and for failing to provide advance warning to the settlers so they could properly prepare for an attack.

[The war (began) without proclamation and sum of our peop'el did not kno' the English had begun mischief to the indians and being Confident and had Case therefore, that the indians wold not hurt them exactly, but the indians having reveved that mischief Came unexpected upon them destroyed [1/4] of them beside other gret lose, but the English army say they supposed conertic forses had bine there.]

Early New England antiquarians blamed the colonists residing in the Bull house garrison for their own destruction. "A want of Watchfulness was probably the Cause of this sad Butchery. The House was of Stone, and might easily have been defended; but the People probably thought the Presence of the Army warranted Security."
With the passage of more than three centuries, it is impossible to ascertain how much warning, if any, the colonists received in advance of the raid.

An indistinct Narragansett Indian perspective on the attack survives in several testimonies recorded near the end of King Philip's War. On 29 April 1676, Wemosit sent a messenger, Wutawawpgauesuek Sucquench, to Connecticut officials to seek a peace agreement. On examination, the messenger revealed that Wemosit had participated in the attack on Bull's house as a reaction to the capture and execution of sixty Narragansetts four days prior to the raid. The minutes from the court martial of Native captives from the war held at Newport in August 1676 (attended by Jireh Bull), further report that Quonaehewacowit, a Narragansett Indian, "saith, that he was informed that all the Sachems was at the taking and burning of Ireh Bull's garrison." Although the sachems in attendance at the raid are not identified, the term, "all," suggests that those present included not only Wemosit, but also the other three sachems referenced repeatedly in documents concerning Bull's house: Ninigret, Stukop, and Quequakanut. Two other testimonies from the court martial by Quanopen and John Wecopeak mention the attack on the Petaquamscutt settlement, but do not provide any additional information or identify Bull's house by name. These examinations support Easton's version that Narragansett Indian sachems destroyed Bull's house and killed those sheltering inside as a measured response to acts of violence perpetrated against Narragansett peoples—that is, these were the "uncomfortable consequences" initially foreseen by officials in Plymouth arising from incursions into the Narragansett homeland.

Jireh Bull returned to Narragansett Country to rebuild his house sometime between August 1676 and May 1677, when his name reappears in historical documents from Petaquamscutt. Bull died intestate several years later, in 1684. The next December, his four sons agreed to distribute their father's "farme," as they called it, which they calculated at 392 acres. Jireh Bull, Jr., the eldest son, agreed to pay his three younger brothers £1,000 and to vacate his right to the property on the condition that he alone would inherit their grandfather's farm in Newport, which adjoined his own. Yet, Jireh Bull, Jr. soon renegotiated on the agreement by first claiming his lawful inheritance to his father's farm and then selling off the land. In 1692, he sold two hundred and sixty acres to his brother, Ezekiel, and one hundred and eighty acres to a neighbor, Rouse Helme. The next year, he sold two hundred and sixty-eight acres to his brother, Ephraim. (Henry Bull, Jr., son of Jireh Bull, died in 1691.) Jireh Bull, Sr.'s wife, Katharine, likely continued to inhabit a ninety-two acre portion of the original house lot, a privilege commonly afforded to widows, until her death in 1714. The year after Katharine Bull's death, her grandson, Benjamin Bull, the eldest surviving son of Jireh Bull, Jr., sold ninety-two acres of land and housing—the identical extraneous acreage specified in the broken 1684 agreement among the Bull brothers—to his cousin, Henry Bull, Esq., the orphaned son of Henry Bull, Jr. The eldest son of the eldest son of Jireh Bull, Benjamin Bull probably gained the right to sell the land when his grandmother died.

After purchasing his grandparents' house lot, Henry Bull, Esq. commissioned the construction of a new, larger house built in the northwest corner of Jireh Bull's lot along the Post Road. A practicing lawyer in Newport, later appointed Attorney General of Rhode Island, Henry Bull operated the property as a tenant farm. Like many of the Narragansett plantations of the eighteenth century, it became a successful dairying operation that probably relied on enslaved African and Indian labor. In February 1729, Bull petitioned the General Assembly to nullify a record of a highway running through his land because South Kingstown had failed to give "notice to said petitioner, or his tenant." In response to what he viewed as the town's incursion onto his property, Henry Bull, Esq. commissioned a new survey of the farm by James Helme, a surveyor living nearby. The survey identified the physical remains of the "Old Garrison House," as well as the newer two-story Georgian house at the edge of the Post Road. In 1735, Henry Bull, Esq. sold the property to another Narragansett planter, John Watson, who deconstructed the Georgian house in 1811. Rediscovery of the Helme plat map of the Bull farm during the twentieth century, after excavation of the site had already been completed, confirmed the identity of the site as having been the location of Jireh Bull's house.
This legal argument over land ownership persisted between the Narragansett sachems and the Pettaquamscutt Proprietors until 1674, although conflict over space and place persisted long after the 1674 agreements. I suggest that the Native attacks on garrison houses during King Philip's War were, in part, fulfillment of threats to drive English colonists from particular, local places of longstanding tension.

Historical documents convey that cultural engagements between Natives and colonists at Pettaquamscutt frequently involved Jireh Bull and occurred at or around his home in the years leading up to King Philip's War. Before Jireh Bull purchased his twenty-acre lot from William Bundy, its location—south of Pettaquamscutt Rock indeed, the southern extent of the colonial settlement at Pettaquamscutt—was already a source of tension among the Narragansett sachems and between the sachems and the Pettaquamscutt Proprietors. The intercultural significance of his home undoubtedly increased when Jireh Bull was appointed to intervene between the Rhode Island colony and the Narragansett Indians during several years leading up to King Philip's War. Any ill-feelings between the colonists and Narragansetts would have increased when Bull demanded that several sachems appear before the General Assembly at Newport to answer for supposed threats against the settlement. Nonetheless, Narragansetts' requests for Bull's intervention on their behalf, after the war had already begun, indicate the Narragansett's desire to remain neutral despite increasing violence across Native New England. Circumstantial evidence suggests that some or all of the Narragansett sachems who presented petitions complaining of incursions by the colonists were also involved in the orchestrated assault on Bull's house—a garrisoned site. Even so, the questioning of Wemosit's messenger revealed that the assault on the Bull house was also a measured response to attacks by the colonial armies on Narragansett as the armies crossed into Narragansett Country several days prior. According to the messenger's testimony, the attack on the Bull house could be interpreted as an effort to warn the colonial army against further escalation.

The journey down Tower Hill from the Jireh Bull House ends where it began: at the monument at the base of the hill. This marker represents an early twentieth century effort to lay out a geography of historically significant sites to guide and instruct future generations. The monument serves as a frontispiece to a narrative of warfare on the colonial borderland, inviting passers-by to reflect upon the scars left by an historical conflict, and ultimately the triumph of colonists and defeat of Narragansetts. A critical reading of documents relating to the site and its history as a space of colonial interaction calls into question many of the presumptions about the causes of the Indian raid. As I have argued, the location of Bull's house was central to long-term engagements between Narragansett Indians and Rhode Island colonists at Pettaquamscutt beginning before King Philip's War. The site of Bull's garrison house is no less significant for the shift toward sustained interaction between Native and colonial peoples in Narragansett Country. Its history presents a case study in the complex interpersonal and highly localized disagreements over space and place leading to—and indeed, extending from—incidents of violence.
Notes


2. The Narragansett Campaign, as this military enterprise has come to be called, is detailed in Douglas Edward Leach, Flintlock and Tomahawk: New England in King Philip’s War (New York: Macmillan, 1958); James D. Drake, King Philip’s War: Civil War in New England, 1675-1676 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999); and Eric B. Schultze and Mike Tougias, King Philip’s War: The History and Legacy of America’s Forgotten Conflict (Woodstock, Vt.: Countryman Press, 1999).

3. For a general description of the Great Swamp Fight, or “Massacre,” see, for example, Leach, Flintlock and Tomahawk, 128-135. Alternative interpretations emphasizing long-term, and Native-centered perspectives on the massacre can be found in Christine DeLucia, “The Memory Frontier: Uncommon Pursuits of Past and Place in the Northeast after King Philip’s War,” Journal of American History 98, no. 4 (2012): 975-97; Ruth Wallis Herron and

the Journal of the Council of War, 1675 to 1678; Transcribed and Edited, in Accordance with a Resolution of the General Assembly, with Notes and an Appendix (Hartford: F. A. Brown, 1832), 196.


37. Potter, Early History of Narragansett, 72.

38. Records from this occurrence give the alias "Incubus" for Wemuson. Potter, Early History of Narragansett, 72; Bartlett, Records of the Colony of Rhode Island, 2:281.


42. Trumbull, Public Records, 372.


45. Potter, "Monuments to a Nation Gone By," 34-71.


50. Franklin B. Hough, A Narrative of the Causes which led to Philip's Indian War, of 1675 and 1676, By John Easton, of Rhode Island. With other Documents concerning this Event in the Office of the Secretary of State of New York. Prepared from the Originals, with an Introduction and Notes (Albany: J. Munsell, 1858), 181.

51. Potter, Early History of Narragansett, 288.

52. The reason for the discrepancy between the acreage reported by Bull in 1678 (five hundred acres) and by his sons in 1684 (592 acres) is unknown. No land deeds indicate that Bull acquired additional property. However, the specificity of the latter number indicates it may have been surveyed sometime between the two dates to provide a more accurate calculation.


54. How Jereh Bull Jr. came into possession of a total of 708 acres remains uncertain, but this total may represent the surveyed area of Jereh Bull's 500- sucking plot deeded in 1668. When the land was first laid out, it was partitioned into hundred-acre tracts with little attention given to the boundaries, none of which were surveyed at that time. Thus, the title to Jereh Bull's estate was much larger than he knew.

55. Researchers have argued that Euphrais Bull came into possession of Jereh Bull's house and lot. See Elizabeth Reid, "The Jereh Bull Site Reanalyzed: The Formation of a Seventeenth-Century Frontier." (M.A. thesis, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, 1987), However, the location of Euphrais Bull's land can be ascertained from a 1693 land deed between Ezekiel Bull and Joseph Case, which specifies the location of Ezekiel Bull's holding as immediately north of Euphrais Bull's land. Washington, Rhode Island Land Evidences: Abstracts, 1648-1696, 1:231. The location of Joseph Case's farm is well-established in documentary records as having been a short distance west of the original Jereh Bull house site. Insofar as Euphrais Bull did not acquire any additional land, he cannot have lived at the Jereh Bull house site.


57. A Plat of the land of Capt. Henry Bull at Petaquaquacst drawn by James Helme, surveyor, January 8, 1729. (Providence Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 1928); J. B. Cole, History of Washington and Kent Counties, Rhode Island, Including their Early Settlement and Progress to the Present Time; A Description of their Historic and Interesting Localities, Sketches of Their Towns and Villages; Portraits of Some of their Prominent Men, and Biographies of Many of their Representative Citizens. (New York: W. W. Preston, 1889), 552.
The War of 1812 and Rhode Island:
A Bicentennial Bust

Patrick T. Conley

Rhode Island's observance of the bicentennial of the War of 1812 has been about as enthusiastic as the state's support for the war itself. The current commemoration of the conflict, hailed by historians as "America's Second War for Independence," is in sharp contrast to Rhode Island's enthusiastic observance of our first War for Independence—the American Revolution. As the volunteer chairman of the Rhode Island Bicentennial Commission (1776-1976), I had the pleasure and good fortune to be involved in the myriad of activities associated with America's birthday. These included the largest gathering of Tall Ships in our history, huge parades and reenactments, numerous historical publications, a comprehensive commemorative athletic program, the refurbishing and ground-level display of the Independent Man, dozens of cultural events staged by the eighteen specially created Rhode Island ethnic heritage committees, and innumerable local bicentennial activities in the only American state where every municipality became an official bicentennial community. And these were merely the highlights!

The commemoration of the War of 1812, our country's "Second War for Independence," was not enhanced or coordinated by a volunteer state bicentennial commission and elicited very little interest in the state. There were a few notable exceptions: the war exhibit prepared at the Woonskucket Museum of Work and Culture, the reenactments at Lincoln's Hearthside Mansion, and a Newport-based nonprofit group's construction of a 132-foot steel-hulled sail training vessel named the Oliver Hazard Perry. Launched in July, 2013, it will endure as a suitable (and expensive) reminder of the famed Rhode Island commodore's crucial victory in the Battle of Lake Erie on September 10, 1813.1

Other events in Rhode Island also commemorated the two-hundredth anniversary of the War of 1812. In the late summer of 2013, fifteen months into the war's bicentennial era, Commodore Perry provided another cause for contemplation, if not for celebration. The 200th anniversary of Perry's Lake Erie victory prompted the Rhode Island Department of the Military Order of Foreign Wars to stage an observance at Eisenhower Park in Newport, Perry's boyhood home. The event featured a talk by Professor John B. Hattendorf, chairman of the maritime history department at the Naval War College. Dr. Hattendorf noted that the September 10, 2013 ceremony was "a far cry from Newport's centennial celebration of the event."

Newport's Redwood Library prepared a long-running Perry exhibit, also in the summer of 2013; and the Pemaquidscut Historical Society of South Kingstown, the place of Perry's birth, organized an exhibit, "War of 1812: A Nation Forged by War," that was fittingly broader in scope. On September 10th, the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame voted to induct Captain William Henry Allen, another naval hero, whose exploits in waters around the British Isles during the conflict have largely gone unnoticed. Allen joined other subjects of this essay (slave trader James DeWolf excepted) on the Hall of Fame's roster of eminent Rhode Islanders.2

Although Rhode Island's commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the War of 1812 to
date has been somewhat muted, this article serves as a commemorative essay of sorts. Despite strong opposition to the War of 1812 in Rhode Island, there were several key individuals from the state who made significant contributions to the war effort. While this article will address the state's disinclination to support the War of 1812, it will also highlight the actions of a handful of Rhode Islanders who made substantial and even heroic contributions to the federal war effort despite the opposition of the state's civil leaders and its people to the conflict.

Two centuries ago most Rhode Islanders opposed the War of 1812 and derisively called it "Mr. Madison's War." The unsuccessful policies of economic coercion employed by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison from 1807 onward, aimed at pressuring warring England and France to respect American neutral rights on the high seas, crippled Rhode Island's commerce. England's impressment of American seamen into the Royal Navy and seizures of American merchant vessels by both England and France nonetheless persisted. This deliberate violation of American rights prompted Madison to propose, and Congress to approve, a declaration of war against England, the greater and more vulnerable offender, in June 1812.

The agrarian based Democratic-Republican Party of Jefferson and Madison generally supported the vote for war in the U.S. Congress. The commercially oriented Federalist Party opposed it. Federalists feared war with England, the "Mistress of the Seas," would destroy all American commerce and expose its eastern coastline to English raids.3

In Rhode Island's elections of 1811, the Federalist Party seized control of state government from the Democratic-Republicans in reaction to the commercial and allegedly pro-French policies of Jefferson and Madison. Under the Federalist leadership of Governor William Jones and the powerful, like-minded General Assembly, Rhode Island opposed the war in various ways, beginning with a demonstration in the coastal towns where flags were flown at half-staff, church bells were tolled, and stores closed for a day, and later by refusing to provide militia until late in the war, and only with many conditions, or to give financial assistance to aid the American military effort. In November 1813 Jones delivered a Thanksgiving Day message that urged the president and American supporters of war to repent "for all their personal and national sins." In February 1814 the General Assembly voted against assuming the state's share of the federal tax to finance the war, rejecting an arrangement that "would release the general government from the odium of collecting the tax which their own mad policy has brought upon the country."4

Governor Jones's strong opposition to a second war with England is surprising in view of his distinguished record during the American Revolution. Jones first served as a captain in Colonel Daniel Hitchcock's Rhode Island Continental regiment. His active military term included a winter at Valley Forge. After serving in the army, Jones volunteered for duty as a Captain of Marines under the command of Commodore Abraham Whipple. It was an assignment that began with Jones's delivery of instructions to the American delegation in Paris in June 1778 after the ratification of the treaty of amity and commerce with France and ended with his capture by the British at the Battle of Charleston, South Carolina, in May 1780. Jones was a proud original member of the military Society of the Cincinnati. He held a diploma signed by George Washington and America's first secretary of war, Henry Knox. Jones's extreme patriotism during the War of Independence rendered his obstructionist policies during the War of 1812 and his subsequent pacifism even more perplexing.

In the years after the Revolutionary War, Jones gained political eminence in Rhode Island. During the Revolution the Jones family had moved from British-occupied Newport, Jones's birthplace, to the relative safety of Providence, where William Jones married Anne Dunn, maintained a profitable hardware business, and became active in politics as a Federalist. Prior to his election to the governorship, Jones had served as a representative from Providence in the General Assembly, and in May 1809 he was named Speaker of the House. His legislative leadership position facilitated his subsequent rapport with the General Assembly during the hotly disputed engagement with England that simmered during the early years of the nineteenth century and erupted into the War of 1812.5

Historian Harvey Strum has closely chronicled Rhode Island's history of official opposition to the War of 1812. He has also documented the fact that some Rhode Island shippers actually supplied goods to the British navy in the waters off Block Island during the war. A few resourceful merchants even arranged to have their ships "captured" by the British and then gave a portion of their cargo as ransom. Others carried on a brisk commercial relationship with Canada's maritime provinces. Such actions made some Rhode Islanders traitors as well as traders, but none were ever prosecuted to such extent.6

As the conflict continued, Rhode Island's Federalist political leaders moved from reluctance and defiance to action that bordered on disloyalty to the Union. In December 1814, Federalist delegations from the New England states (Rhode Island included) met in convention at Hartford, where they approved a series of states' rights proposals that would have seriously crippled the national war effort. Before these resolutions could be presented to Congress, however, news of Andrew Jackson's resounding victory at New Orleans and the signing of a peace treaty by our negotiators at Ghent discredited the Hartford conventionists and their demands. Defiant to the end, the Rhode Island General Assembly tabled a resolution congratulating General Jackson for his success.7

Individual Rhode Islanders did make contributions to the War of 1812, principally, although not entirely, on the home front. Rhode Island recruits of the Democratic-Republican persuasion, mostly farm boys, joined with Connecticut volunteers in a few regular units, notably the 25th Infantry Regiment. The unit distinguished itself in battles against the Duke of Wellington's Peninsular veterans on the Niagara frontier in 1814 at Chippewa, Lundy's Lane, and Fort Erie. For the most part, the men of the Ocean State (as it is now called) built and manned coastal fortifications from Newport to Providence. Stay-at-home regular forces in Rhode Island were called "sea-fencibles" in the language of the time, because they defended the coastline. Rhode Island militia activity (and it was considerable) consisted of helping these regulars staff the state's defenses.
These protective facilities extended from the future site of Newport’s Fort Adams and the more heavily garrisoned Fort Wolcott on nearby Goat Island to the head of Narragansett Bay, where Fort William Henry on Fish’s Island guarded the entrance to Providence’s harbor. Further northward, fortifications were constructed by militia and apprehensive citizen-volunteers on Fox Point and Kettle Point, the latter on what was then the Massachusetts bank of the Providence River.

The militia’s only foreign foray came in September 1814, when Jones sent five companies to defend Stonington, Connecticut, from a threatened British attack. The militia’s march was not long; Stonington is a coastal community located just across the Pawcatuck River from Westerly. As England took a more aggressive stance, Governor Jones did comply with Madison’s 1814 draft call for 500 Rhode Island volunteers. Although the state corps was to serve under federal control, Jones mandated that the men would at no time leave the state, and that he would appoint the officers. Despite a recruitment bounty offered by the General Assembly, less than a third of the federally requested requisition was met by war’s end.4

Given this historical scenario, Rhode Island’s reluctance to memorialize the conflict in 1812 is understandable. The depth and persistence here of the current Great Recession also damps enthusiasm for extended civic celebrations. Nevertheless, Rhode Island’s situation in the war and the heroic exploits and achievements of a few Rhode Islanders during the War of 1812 should be appropriately noted and remembered.

**Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry** is first and foremost of Rhode Island’s heroes of the war. He was born in South Kingstown, Rhode Island, on August 23, 1785, the eldest son of Christopher Perry, a Revolutionary War sailor from an old-line Rhode Island family, and Sarah Wallace (Alexander) Perry, an immigrant from Ireland. Christopher Perry met Sarah Alexander when he was confined to a British internment camp in Kinsale, Ireland, as a war prisoner. After the conflict Christopher sailed back to Ireland and brought Sarah to America to be his bride. Oliver Hazard Perry and his younger brother, Commodore Matthew C. Perry (1794–1858), who opened Japan to Western trade and influence, both received an educational foundation from their mother. The boys learned maritime sciences from their father and from schoolmasters in Newport, where the family eventually moved.

The newly created Navy Department (established in 1798 under Federalist auspices) appointed Oliver Hazard Perry a midshipman in April 1799 and assigned him to the Warren-built frigate General Greene commanded by his father. Perry saw combat during the limited naval war with France in 1799–1800. Then he served in the Mediterranean Sea and engaged in various skirmishes with the Barbary pirates of North Africa to prevent them from raiding American shipping. From 1807 until the outbreak of the War of 1812, Perry was assigned to duty along America’s east coast. In 1811 he married Elizabeth Champlin Mason, a member of a prominent Newport family, with whom he had four sons and a daughter.

When the War of 1812 was declared, the experienced Perry sought a naval command, and in early 1813 his request was granted. Perry was given instructions to build, assemble, and lead a fleet on Lake Erie that would prevent the British and Canadians from launching an amphibious attack on the coastline of western New York, Pennsylvania, or Ohio. By September 1813 Perry commanded a squadron of ten ships, mounting fifty-five guns, which he stationed at Put-in-Bay,
located off an island just north of present-day Port Clinton, Ohio.

From this base Perry engaged a British fleet under Captain Robert H. Barclay on September 10, 1813, in the famous Battle of Lake Erie. Lasting almost five hours, the encounter was marked by bitter fighting and heroic determination. Perry's flagship Lawrence was in the thick of the action, and when it was disabled, Perry jumped to the Niagara to complete his triumph. At 2:30 p.m., when Barclay surrendered his entire Lake Erie squadron, Perry sent his famous message to General William Henry Harrison (known as "Old Tippecanoe"), commander of the northwestern theater of war: "We have met the enemy and they are ours! Two ships, two brigs, one schooner, and one sloop." It is notable that three of Perry's nine ships were commanded by Rhode Island sailors—Thomas Brownell, Stephen Champlin, and Thomas Almy—and many of his seamen were Rhode Islanders.

Perry's great strategic victory transformed the twenty-eight-year-old sailor into an immediate American hero, elevating him to national prominence and earning him a captaincy and command of the frigate Java, which he sailed until war's end in 1815. Following a tour of duty in the Mediterranean with the Java, Perry was dispatched by President James Monroe to South America to open diplomatic relations with Simon Bolivar (called "the Liberator"), the leader of the colonial revolt against Spanish rule. After a journey into the interior of Venezuela, Perry contracted yellow fever. He died in August 1819; his crew buried him at Port-of-Spain on the island of Trinidad. In December 1826, Perry's remains were brought to Newport and reinterred there in Island Cemetery. Oliver Hazard Perry's death at the age of thirty-four cut short a most promising naval and diplomatic career.

Perry's Lake Erie victory earned him an enduring place in the history of American military engagements. The success of Perry and his fleet in 1813 enabled the American invasion of western Ontario by General Harrison, allowing Harrison's American army to defeat the British in the region thereby securing the Northwest Territory and opening the West to future American settlement. Gerard Altff, former chief ranger at Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial on Lake Erie, near Port Clinton, has become the leading authority on the crucial skirmish, while former Rhode Island Historical Society curator Nathaniel Shipton has documented the role of Rhode Islanders in that fateful encounter.

The battle on Lake Erie also produced another Rhode Island naval hero, albeit one of lesser rank and renown than Perry. Although not a native of the state, Usher Parsons was destined to become Rhode Island's foremost physician of the early nineteenth century. Born in Alfred, Maine on August 18, 1788, Usher was the youngest of nine children born to Abigail Blunt and William Parsons, a farmer and trader. Although Usher had little formal schooling, he began the study of medicine as an apprentice to a physician in Alfred and then trained with Dr. John Warren of Boston. Parsons was licensed to practice by the Massachusetts Medical Society in 1812. He immediately joined the navy where he gained valuable experience as a surgeon's mate for Oliver Hazard Perry in the Battle of Lake Erie. Parsons's distinguished naval service earned him not only a medal and prize money, but also a promotion to the rank of surgeon as well as Commodore Perry's praise and friendship.

Parsons's performance in the pivotal battle was extraordinary. At the time of the engagement, a temporary illness afflicted his two associate medics on Perry's flagship Lawrence. Twenty-five-year-old Parsons undertook the entire duty of attending to
prominent English and French physicians, Parsons earned his M.D. at Harvard in 1818. He became a professor of surgery and anatomy at Dartmouth College in 1820, staying in New Hampshire for a brief period before coming to Providence in 1822 to assume a professorship at Brown University's short-lived medical school. Also in 1822, Parsons married Mary Holmes of Cambridge, Massachusetts, elder sister of Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., the eminent poet and father of the noted jurist. Mary died in 1825, leaving Usher with one son, Charles, who also became a prominent physician. His wife's death so devastated Parsons that he never remarried.

At a time when the field of medicine was becoming professionalized, Parsons was active in national as well as local Rhode Island medical circles. In 1829 Parsons published *Sailor's Physician*, a manual of sea medicine for use on merchant vessels. Re-titled *Physician for Ships*, the volume went through four editions and remained a standard work in its field for decades. Dr. Parsons was president of the Rhode Island Medical Society from 1837 to 1839, a founder and president of the Providence Medical Society, and one of the organizers of the American Medical Association, serving as its acting president in 1834. He also led the campaign for the establishment of Rhode Island Hospital and lived just long enough to see his dream realized when the hospital opened in the autumn of 1868. Usher Parsons's eventful life is the subject of a biography written by Dr. Sebert Goldowsky, entitled *Yankee Surgeon* (1988). Parsons's War of 1812 diary has been edited and published by prominent military historian John C. Fredriksen.10

The Ocean State's third U.S. naval hero is less known locally than either Perry or Parsons, but he was no less intrepid. Captain William Henry Allen was born in Providence on October 21, 1784. His mother, Sarah Jones Allen was the sister of Governor William Jones. His father, Major William Allen of Providence, had been a distinguished Revolutionary War soldier who was a brigadier general of militia and sheriff of Providence County.

From an early age, William Allen sought a naval career. Little is known of his education, but his surviving journals and letters reveal a skilled penman and artist whose sketches in his writings were well executed. Despite serious misgivings, Allen's influential parents prevailed upon U.S. Senator Ray Greene to secure his appointment as a midshipman in April 1800. The purpose of the fifteen-year-old Allen's first cruise—a voyage from Philadelphia to North Africa aboard the *George Washington*—was to bring tribute to the Dey of Algiers so that the Dey's pirates would not attack American shipping. In June 1802, as an officer on the U.S.S. *Chesapeake*, Allen allegedly fired the only shot at the H.M.S. *Leopard* when the British warship boldly impressed American seamen from the decks of Allen's U.S. naval vessel. The incident precipitated the crisis with England that led to President Jefferson's December 1807 embargo.

During the early part of the War of 1812, Allen served as Captain Stephen Decatur's first lieutenant on the frigate *United States* the American vessel that gained a decisive victory over the British ship * Macedonian*. Allen himself brought the British warship into Newport as a prize on December 6, 1812. For his distinguished service, Allen soon earned his own vessel, the brig *Argus*, a two-masted light cruising vessel, 95½ feet long on the upper deck, where eighteen 24-pound cannon and two 12-pound long guns were mounted.

Allen and his ship have been memorialized by naval historian Ira Dye in a meticulously researched book entitled *The Fatal Cruise of the Argus: Two Captains in the War of 1812* (1994). As Dye recounts, Allen boldly sailed his new command into the waters off the British Isles, where he became a scourge to England in the summer of 1813. By mid-August he had attacked twenty vessels—burning, sinking, or destroying the cargo of all but two of them. This tally, asserts Dye, "was more than any other single American warship of any size had done or was to do" during the War of 1812.

Then, in the summer of 1813, Allen made a fatal decision. On August 14, he rashly chose to turn and fight, rather than easily evade, a larger pursuing British warship, the H.M.S. *Pelican*, under the command of Captain John Maples. In a pitched battle the out-gunned *Argus* was beaten, and the *Pelican* took ninety-seven prisoners. Twelve American sailors were killed, including
Allen, who succumbed to wounds four days after the encounter. Ironically, the foes of the heroic Captain Allen gave him a huge military funeral in Plymouth, England, where he now lies buried in St. Andrew’s Churchyard, despite the wishes of some to return his remains to Rhode Island for reinterment, as Commodore Perry’s body had been returned to Newport from Trinidad.11

Captain Allen’s prowess as a naval officer in the 1812 conflict was matched by Bristol merchant James DeWolf. In wars during the age of sail, it was common for a government to issue “letters of marque and reprisal” to private shipowners. These documents permitted the owners to outfit and arm their vessels—then called “privateers.” These quasi-warships were thus empowered to attack commerce of the enemy. The most famous and successful privateer of the War of 1812—fittingly named the Yankee—belonged to James DeWolf.

“Captain Jim,” as he was known locally, was a most unlikely hero. He was born in Bristol in 1764, the son of Mark Antony DeWolf and Abigail Potter, daughter of Simeon Potter, the town’s preeminent merchant. James, who served on a privateer during the American Revolution, was destined for a career in commerce. However, while Providence merchants of his era engaged in the China trade, DeWolf preferred Africa. Prior to 1808, when Congress banned the foreign slave trade, DeWolf brought hundreds of slaves from Africa to Charleston, South Carolina. After 1808 he carried his black cargo to his sugar plantations in Cuba.

When the War of 1812 interrupted his usual and nefarious activity, DeWolf outfitted several privateers including the 160-ton brigantine Yankee, which he armed with sixteen-six-and-nine-pound guns. During her six voyages under four different captains, the Yankee seized thirty-six enemy prizes, though some were retaken by the British. These captures inflicted approximately five million dollars of losses upon England and brought about one million dollars in prize money to DeWolf’s home port. According to pioneer Bristol historian Wilfred A. Munro, the Yankee “inundated Bristol with her golden stream.”

In 1821, the Rhode Island General Assembly, undisturbed by its unsavory past, chose the very wealthy and powerful DeWolf to be a United States senator. At the time of his election, he occupied the position of Speaker of the state’s House of Representatives. DeWolf resigned from the U.S. Senate on October 31, 1825, and he returned to the state legislature in 1829, where he served until his death on December 21, 1837.12

Despite the state’s official disapproval of the War of 1812, Rhode Island produced one of the war’s most persuasive legal defenders, Henry Wheaton. A Providence-born editor, lawyer, court reporter, jurist, diplomat, and expounder of international law, Henry Wheaton was the son of Seth Wheaton, a merchant, civic leader, and banker; Henry’s mother was Abigail Wheaton, Seth’s distant cousin. Henry Wheaton graduated from the College of Rhode Island (later Brown University) in 1802. He studied civil law in France in 1803–6, and then practiced law in Providence. In 1814, Henry Wheaton’s legal defense of the maritime policies of Jefferson and Madison prompted Democratic-Republicans in New York City to offer him the editorship of the National Advocate, their local party newspaper.

Henry Wheaton wrote forcefully and with erudition on questions of international law growing out of the War of 1812. He was considered the mouthpiece of the Madison administration during his three-year wartime tenure with the National Advocate. Edward Everett, governor of Massachusetts and later, Gettysburg orator, recalled that the complex issues and duties created by the War of 1812 “were elucidated by him [Wheaton] with the learning of an accomplished publicist and the zeal of a sincere patriot.” Wheaton’s demeanor did not go unrecognized by his contemporaries. In October 1814, the United States Senate unanimously approved attorney Wheaton’s appointment as Division Judge Advocate of the Army in an exceedingly rare display of unison from that deeply divided body.

In the aftermath of war, Wheaton received an additional reward when he was appointed as the first U. S. Supreme Court reporter. He performed his job with ability, garnering praise from jurists and lawyers alike from 1816 until 1827, when he embarked upon a long and successful diplomatic career. In 1847, Harvard offered him a distinguished lecturership in civil and international law, but he died before he could begin his duties in Cambridge.

Wheaton’s most enduring achievement was his work as an expounder and historian of international law. His classic study Elements of International Law (1836) went through numerous editions and translations. His excellence has prompted historians to rank Wheaton with John Marshall, James Kent, and Joseph Story as major architects of the American legal system. In addition to his landmark study of international law, Wheaton also translated the Code Napoléon into English and wrote a notable essay on the African slave trade in 1842 after the Amistad incident.13

Jonathan Russell was yet another Rhode Island luminary who achieved prominence during the War of 1812. He was born in Providence on February 27, 1771, the son and namesake of merchant Jonathan.
Russell and his wife Abigail. After his graduation from the College of Rhode Island in 1791 at the top of his class, the young Russell spent several years in the mercantile business. He also became an activist in politics, publishing several pamphlets in support of the Democratic-Republican party of Jefferson and Madison. Impressed by Russell's political advocacy, President James Madison appointed him American diplomatic chargé d'affaires in Paris in 1811, replacing U.S. minister John Armstrong. Soon after, Madison named Russell chargé in London when U.S. Minister William Pinkney departed in frustration. As chargé when the War of 1812 began, Russell had the honor of informing the British ministry of America's declaration of war. Later, he was one of the five American commissioners who negotiated the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the conflict, doing so while also serving as U.S. Minister to Sweden from 1814 to 1818. Upon his return to America, Russell settled in Mendon, Massachusetts, and secured election to Congress in 1821. Despite serving only one term, Russell was selected as the chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs based upon his European experiences. He died in Milton, Massachusetts, on February 17, 1853, and was interred there in the family plot on his estate.16

When the contentious and stalemated conflict was over, North Kingstown-born artist Gilbert Stuart painted portraits of its heroes. Among Stuart's subjects were President and Commander in Chief James Madison and his wife, Dolley, who courageously saved a number of White House valuables when the British burned Washington, D.C., in August 1814, including Stuart's famous portrait of George Washington that had been commissioned by Charles Cotesworth Pinckney. Stuart also painted portraits of Secretary of War, and later President, James Monroe; Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin; Major General Henry Dearborn, who commanded troops both in the Revolution and on the Niagara frontier during the War of 1812; Commodore Thomas MacDonough, hero of the 1814 Battle of Plattsburgh on Lake Champlain; Commodore William Bainbridge, commander of the U.S.S. Constitution ("Old Ironsides"); and Captain James Lawrence of the ill-fated Chesapeake, whose dying words, "Don't give up the ship!" have echoed through American naval history, Stuart even painted portraits of Congressman John Randolph of Virginia, Madison's most vocal and acerbic Democratic-Republican critic, and Harrison Gray Otis, a leading Massachusetts Federalist, who was a voice of moderation at the infamous Hartford Convention.17

With the coming of peace, Americans—especially Democratic-Republicans—hailed the victories of Perry, MacDonough, and Jackson as proof of triumph and denounced the Hartford Convention as evidence of treason. Both claims were partisan and exaggerated. However, the bold confrontation with England gave rise to a burst of national pride, and the encounter was soon regarded as "the Second War of American Independence." In his recent book Empire of Liberty, Gordon Wood of Brown University, the most eminent and thoughtful historian of the American founding, concludes that "the War of 1812 did finally establish for Americans the independence and nationalism of the United States that so many had recently doubted."18

Certainly this war had its vehement doubters and opponents, in Rhode Island as well as elsewhere in the nation. Federalist politicians, merchants, and anti-administration Democratic-Republican congressional malcontents were not the only ones to take contrary stances during this very unpopular conflict. Many recent immigrants from England legally classified as "alien enemies," as well as apprehensive Native Americans, from the Shawnee of the northwest southward to the Creeks, who saw their lands threatened by the war's supporters, also opposed the War of 1812. It is small wonder that historian Alan Taylor has titled his new book about this struggle The Civil War of 1812 (2010).17

Clearly the War of 1812 had a profound impact upon life in America. Among its many effects, the war vindicated America's national honor; reaffirmed the country's independence, intensified national pride, and earned America respect among the nations of the world. On a more mundane level the war dealt a death blow to the dissenting Federalist Party, even as its economic program—a national bank, a protective tariff, and federally financed internal improvements—was embraced by a majority in the opposition party who soon came to be known as "National Republicans." The conflict also dissolved the northwest Indian confederacy, whose leader, Tecumseh, was killed in the 1813 Battle of the Thames. The demise of the Native American coalition and its leader facilitated western expansion by white settlers and the admission of five trans-Appalachian states to the Union by 1821. Conversely, the nation's reluctant involvement in the Napoleonic Wars led America to embrace an isolationist foreign policy towards Europe for the remainder of the nineteenth century. The 1812 conflict also had a profound effect on the nation's military and diplomatic policy. The war revealed the inadequacy of state militias and the defensive gunboat policy of the Jeffersonians, prompting the federal government to support a regular professional army and a seagoing navy. Ironically, changes in the military and
Years may have further dampened enthusiasm for an anniversary celebration, the war will continue to be recognized as it has been during this bicentennial period, with modest exhibits and reenactments, and with a re-telling of the neglected stories of the state’s foremost notables—Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry and his loyal Rhode Island seamen, Dr. Usher Parsons, Captain William Henry Allen, James DeWolf, Henry Wheaton and Jonathan Russell.

This essay is an expanded and revised version of an address delivered on Veterans’ Day, November 11, 2012, to Infantry Lodge Associates at the Squamicut Club, East Providence, at the invitation of Brigadier General Richard Valente, commanding, and Thomas Frazer, administrator. The speech was delivered again at the Fabre Line Club in Providence on December 12, 2012.

Notes


11. Ira Dye, *The Fatal Cruise of the Argus: Two Captains in the War of 1812* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1994). I am indebted to Rhode Islander John C. Fredrikson, a leading historian of the War of 1812 and my former student, for bringing Allen's exploits to my attention. In November 2013, Allen was honored for his exploits by his induction into the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame, where he joins Oliver Hazard Perry, Usher Parsons, Henry Wheaton, Jonathan Russell, and Gilbert Stuart, but not slave trader James DeWolf. For the tally of Allen's prizes, see Dye, p. 275.


Patrick T. Cooley, *People, Places, Laws and Lore of the Ocean State* (East Providence: Rhode Island Publications Society, 2012) A compilation of forty-six essays grouped into four sections. Written by Rhode Island’s first Historian Laureate, the volume includes profiles of individuals and immigrant groups, essays on Rhode Island neighborhoods and institutions, the state constitution and various interesting statutes, as well as a collection of miscellaneous writings on various topics relating to the Ocean State.


J. Stanley Lemons, ed., *Baptists in Early North America—First Baptist, Providence, Volume II.* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2013). Reproduction of a dozen original manuscript record books of the First Baptist Church in Providence, with annotations and an historical introduction by J. Stanley Lemons, emeritus professor of history at Rhode Island College. Also included in the volume are eighteenth-century pew rental lists and membership rosters.

