# RHODE ISLAND HISTORY



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A scene from the siege of Rhode Island, August 1778: the French fleet, after a storm and heavy fighting with the British, retreats for repairs to Boston. Sepia wash drawing from Pierre Ozanne's illustrated journal of the French expedition.

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## RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

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#### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Murder of an Indian, 1638 by Glenn W. LaFantasie 67

A British Account of the Siege of Rhode Island edited by John F. Millar 79

John Francis Smith, Heterodox Yankee Printer *by Carl Gersuny* 87

From the Collections 96

VOLUME 38 NUMBER 3 AUGUST 1979

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Courtesy John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

Seventeenth-century manuscript map of New England (detail) from the Blathwayt Atlas, an early collection of maps of the British overseas empire on four continents. The uncharted territory between Plymouth and Providence was, in 1638, a wilderness.

## Murder of an Indian, 1638

#### by Glenn W. LaFantasie\*

The expanse of forest between Plymouth and Providence was, in the 1630s, a no-man's land and a perfect scene for murder.

Separating the established Pilgrim town at Plymouth harbor from the fledgling settlement founded by Roger Williams at the head of Narragansett Bay, a wilderness stretched for forty miles. So deserted was this country that no English colony asserted jurisdiction over the land. For whites who ever stopped to think about it, the wilderness loomed as a danger to be avoided, at least while their own settlements remained small enough to provide plenty of elbow-room. For Indians, the land offered abundance and a source of survival in the form of prime hunting grounds.

Trees and brush covered this land with a density broken only by occasional swamps, narrow rivers, and meandering brooks. Some cleared land, mostly near marshes in the interior, stood in stark contrast to the woodlands. A white man could get easily lost in this tangle of woods and fen, as John Billington learned in July 1621. He wandered five days in the forest and survived by eating berries and anything else he could find. By chance, he stumbled upon an Indian plantation at Manomet, south of Plymouth. Finally, the governor of the Pilgrim settlement learned of Billington's whereabouts and sent a boat to bring him safely home.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the sheer desolation of this wilderness, a number of Indian paths and trails traversed the interior and by the late 1630s both Indians and whites used these primitive highways for travel and trade. From Plymouth a main trail twisted west through the forest to a place called Titicut by the Indians, then on to Cohannet, through Misquamsqueece and Seekonk, and across the Seekonk River to Pawtucket — the place of the falls. From Pawtucket, the small settlement of Providence stood only four miles south. This trail, winding and rough, linked Plymouth and Providence together, though as a means of communication the Indian path only may have reminded the Separatists at Plymouth and the religious dissenters in Providence of the great distance existing between them, both physically and ideologically.

In the summer of 1638 along this trail an Indian was murdered by a group of white men. And although the Indian victim held no great office among his people, though he personally wielded no power or authority in his lifetime, his death sent sudden shockwaves rippling throughout southern New England and brought Indians and whites into a confrontation that nearly erupted in a war of revenge and pride.

In July 1638, Mixanno, the son the the sagacious Canonicus, chief sachem of the Narragansett Indians, decided to send a gift to the English magistrates at Plymouth. He intended the gift as a symbol, an expression, of Narragansett friendship with the whites.<sup>2</sup> Indians in seventeenth-century New England shared a lively fascination for white man's goods — material items that were sometimes practical (such as knives and cloth), sometimes ornamental (such as trinkets and clay

<sup>\*</sup>Mr. LaFantasie is the editor of this journal and the associate editor of the Correspondence of Roger Williams. He wishes to thank Paul R. Campbell for research assistance and Professor Maury Klein, University of Rhode Island, for reading an earlier version of this article.

pipes). One sure way to receive English commodities was to first offer a token in Indian goods.<sup>3</sup> Mixanno, however, chose not to bring his gift to Plymouth himself. For the job he selected an Indian named Penowanyanquis, a personal messenger or a man-servant. Whatever his status, he was not a Narragansett; Penowanyanquis was a Nipmuck Indian.<sup>4</sup>

The Nipmucks were, like the Narragansetts, part of the Algonquin family of nations. They inhabited lands that today comprise central Massachusetts and northwestern Rhode Island. During the years 1616 to 1621, a catastrophic plague struck the natives of southern New England - including the Nipmucks and the Wampanoags and decimated the Indian population. But this epidemic of unknown origin and variety left the already powerful Narragansetts unscathed. Realizing the plague presented opportunities better than war ever could, the Narragansetts simply expanded their domain and exerted control over their less fortunate neighbors who were in no position to resist the incursion. Thus the Nipmucks became tributaries of the Narragansetts, conquered people governed by the leaders of a traditional enemy.5

Mixanno entrusted Penowanyanquis, the Nipmuck, with the task of delivering his gift to the English. Carrying three beaver skins and some Indian beads, Penowanyanquis left Narragansett country (the southern part of present-day Rhode Island) and followed the Indian trail toward Plymouth.<sup>6</sup>

Penowanyanquis faced a number of dangers traveling alone in the forest between Narragansett country and Plymouth colony. This land was the hunting grounds of the Wampanoags - enemies of both the Narragansetts and the Nipmucks. Massasoit, the wily chief sachem of the Wampanoags, resented the audacious Narragansetts for their expanding empire and showed only contempt for the Nipmucks, whom he considered weak and unworthy. Intertribal feuds and the possibility of meeting unfriendly Indians were not the only danger, however, During the 1630s, incidents of white malevolence toward Indians increased steadily. Some unsavory English did not think twice about whipping Indians they thought impudent or robbing goods and property from Indians they considered push-overs.7

As a result, Penowanyanquis probably felt a certain uneasiness when he encountered a group of four white men on the trail as he traveled toward Plymouth. When no interchange occurred, the Indian continued his journey unmolested and unharmed. Penowanyanquis finally arrived in Plymouth safely and he completed his appointed duties without mishap.<sup>8</sup>

But on the trail where he had left them, the four white men — Arthur Peach, Thomas Jackson, Richard Stinnings and Daniel Cross — devised a plan, a scheme that included Penowanyanquis as their victim. These men were already fugitives, only one step ahead of the law. All four had fled Plymouth and their positions as indentured servants.

Indentured servants in Plymouth colony formed the backbone of the settlement's labor force. Although contracts were usually voluntary, working conditions were often strenuous and demanding. A laborer might be compensated with a sum of money or might work to pay off a debt, to educate a child, or even to learn a trade as an apprentice.<sup>9</sup> Stinnings in 1635 hired himself out to Robert Bartlett for nine years and the contract terms specified that upon completion of his indenture he would receive from his master two suits of clothing and a modest sum of money. Stinnings was known as an "apprentice" but the exact nature of his work is not revealed in the records of Plymouth colony.<sup>10</sup>

Even less is known about the terms of indenture for the other three men who comprised the motley group along the trail, probably because contracts for servants were usually executed informally as verbal agreements. This may have been the nature of Peach's contract with his master Edward Winslow. The historical records do not mention the names of Jackson's or Cross's employers, although one of these servants was apparently bound to master John Barnes of Plymouth.<sup>11</sup>

Runaway servants disrupted the organization of the Pilgrim work force and frequent desertions represented the worst and most chronic problem with which masters had to contend.<sup>12</sup> As a result, returned runaways faced the prospect of severe discipline and punishment. In 1633, for example, Thomas Brian, a servant of Samuel Eddy, had run away for five days but had turned up lost in the woods. He was tried for this offense and sentenced to be "privately whipped before the Governor and Council" of the colony. Later that same year, Will Mendlow had received a similar punishment for running away and "attempting uncleanness" with a maid servant.<sup>13</sup> Abandonment of servitude involved only grim rewards unless, of course, a servant escaped for good.

Having broken the terms of their agreements, the four fugitives from Plymouth realized that they would be safe from the long arm of Pilgrim justice only when they reached sanctuary beyond New England's borders. But it is not clear, except in the case of Peach, why these men left Plymouth in the first place.

Peach had good reason to flee Plymouth. A respected member of the community, he had served the English well as a member of the militia in the Pequot Indian War of 1637. Because Plymouth colony took no active role in the war (a force of fifty men raised to fight the Indians received word that the war had ended just as the men were ready to march), Peach's militia service meant that he probably had settled first in neighboring Massachusetts Bay sometime in the 1630s. After the war he made his way to Plymouth and became indentured to Edward Winslow, a former governor of the colony. Contemporary opinions differed, but it seems that Peach was initially wellliked in the Pilgrim settlement. Governor John Winthrop of Massachusetts Bay described Peach as "a young man of good parentage and fair condition."14 Soon after Peach's arrival in Plymouth, however, trouble began.

Though he made arrangements to work for Governor Winslow, Peach demonstrated a remarkable lack of enthusiasm for manual labor. He became lazy, even at times idle, yet he also enjoyed lavish spending and his debts soared. Bad as this was, Peach managed to get himself involved in even worse trouble — and scandal.

He took a liking to Dorothy Temple, a house servant indentured to Stephen Hopkins, one of Plymouth's admired leaders. Hopkins's wife Elizabeth disapproved of Peach and suspected that he and Dorothy were having an illicit love affair. Elizabeth Hopkins convinced her husband that Peach should be forbidden to see Dorothy. So the dutiful Hopkins warned him to stay away from both the young woman servant and the Hopkins



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Edward Winslow, former governor of Plymouth, to whom Arthur Peach was indentured.

#### homestead.15

The warning came too late. Dorothy was pregnant and she informed Peach that she carried his child. Faced with certain punishment for the crime of fornication, he decided to desert this hapless girl, the indignant Hopkins, his master Winslow, and the entire Plymouth colony.

Somehow he pursuaded Stinnings, Jackson and Cross to accompany him in his flight. Whether these men had also violated Plymouth law or whether they had grown tired of their working conditions and surroundings is not known. Whatever their circumstances, the three servants followed Peach out of town in the dead of night and the four fugitives tried to find their way along the Indian trails to the west. Peach, ringleader for the group, had set their course for the Dutch colony of New Netherlands on the Hudson River, an area where they would be free from Pilgrim authority.<sup>16</sup>

When these men encountered Penowanyanquis on the trail, they had already grown desperate and worried. For one thing, they were not quite sure of their whereabouts and they had already succeeded a number of times in getting lost. For another, the appearance of an Indian in the woods was not particularly comforting to any white man, especially runaway servants. The English magistrates often employed Indians as agents to track down fugitive servants. In 1633, both Thomas Brian and Will Mendlow had been captured and returned to Plymouth by Indians working for the colony.<sup>17</sup>

The fears of Peach and the others did not diminish as they watched Penowanyanquis pass on his way toward Plymouth. If they no longer wondered about this Indian's mission, they still had to face the uncertainty of the wilderness beyond. With no money, their journey would be arduous, perhaps even impossible. They needed a plan some way to insure their effort to move further west.

Peach provided the solution. Obviously the Indian they had met was on his way to trade the beaver skins and beads for English goods. And after completing his barter, the Indian would probably follow this trail on his journey home. Peach then conceived his plan to wait at a point along the trail for the Indian to return. The four men could easily overpower the native, steal his goods, and be quickly gone. As originally formulated, Peach's plan may or may not have included premeditated murder.

At a place the Indians called Misquamsqueece (present-day Seekonk, Massachusetts), Peach and his partners in crime made camp and waited. Peach probably had no idea that they camped only twelve miles east of Providence or that technically he and his compatriots were already beyond the recognized legal jurisdiction of Plymouth. The place they had chosen to commit their nefarious deed was, by chance, a virtual noman's land. It was a spot described by Roger Williams as "fit for an evil purpose."<sup>18</sup>

The four white men waited two days for Penowanyanquis's return. Finally the Indian approached laden with English treasures — three bolts of cloth (called "coats") and five fathom of wampum (Indian money made from shellfish that was also used as a medium of exchange by English colonists).<sup>19</sup>

As Penowanyanquis neared the camp, Peach

beckoned him to join them around their campfire. The Nipmuck obliged, Peach offered him a pipe, and the group shared a brief interlude of tobacco smoking. Suddenly the prevailing cordiality changed and Peach abruptly informed Penowanyanquis that he was about to be murdered and robbed.

This outburst by Peach surprised his companions and they quickly argued against killing the Indian. Peach, however, felt no pangs of conscience. He boasted that he had previously killed many Indians, implying that the murder of this one would involve no great loss to humanity. Stinnings, Jackson and Cross continued their protests, however. When they could not dissuade Peach from killing the Indian, the three followers retreated from camp and left the ringleader to do his handiwork.

Peach drew his rapier from its scabbard and lunged toward Penowanyanquis. The sword pierced the Indian's leg and punctured his stomach. Peach removed his weapon and made another thrust. This time he missed and Penowanyanquis sprang backwards out of Peach's reach. One white man with rapier in hand came to Peach's assistance and lunged at Penowanyanquis from behind. This second assailant also missed the struggling Indian and instead plunged his blade firmly into the ground.

Penowanyanquis saw his opportunity and took it. In seconds he was upon his feet and he threw himself into the swamp at the edge of the white men's camp. The four Englishmen were right at his heels and they cornered him. As one white man jabbed with his sword, Penowanyanquis quickly rolled aside. Without delay the Indian bounded to his feet and ran deeper into the swamp. Seriously wounded and almost totally exhausted, Penowanyanquis collapsed in the murky marsh. He heard his white pursuers approaching slowly. Using all his remaining strength, he pulled himself to cover and lay silently in the recesses of the swamp.

Frantically Peach and his accomplices roamed the bog in search of their victim. But in this thickest part of the woods, there was no sign of the wounded Indian. He had disappeared without a trace.

Back at their camp, the Englishmen packed their gear in haste and snatched the Indian's



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Colonists often relied on Indians as guides through unknown territory. This wood engraving, depicting Roger Williams crossing the Blackstone River near Pawtucket Falls, is similar to engravings of Williams's landing at Slate Rock in Providence in 1636.

three coats of cloth and wampum. They resumed their journey west along the Indian trail toward the Seekonk River and the fields of Pawtucket.<sup>20</sup>

Though only a few miles from Pawtucket, the white men somehow wandered off the main trail. Lost and running low on supplies, they finally emerged from the forest maze at Pawtucket Falls on the Seekonk (Blackstone) River and they camped nearby. Desperate and unsure of how long they could last without replenishing their supplies, the men hailed some passing Indians and inquired about local white settlements where they might find some help. This time Peach restrained himself and treated these Indians without threats of violence.<sup>21</sup>

One Indian, unaware the Englishmen had committed a crime, soon passed through Providence and reported the plight of the four lost white men to Roger Williams, the leader and founder of the small settlement of religious dissenters and exiles. Williams had been cast out of Salem in 1635. As a member of the Puritan ministry, he had advocated the implementation of new religious duties, and on specific points, an overhaul of Puritan religious and civil practices. As a voice crying in the wilderness, he also stood apart from other Puritans by espousing a belief that title to land in New England belonged to the Indians and that the only way whites could own land was for them to buy it. Williams respected the natives and found them endlessly fascinating. He learned the Narragansett language, studied Indian customs, and became a trusted friend of most Indian leaders residing in southern New England.

Despite the harsh sentence and treatment Williams had received from his kindred whites in Massachusetts Bay, he characteristically turned the other cheek and maintained a close friendship with Governor John Winthrop of Boston. Williams also offered Christian kindness to all travelers, red and white, who passed by or near his modest house in Providence.

When word came that four Englishmen teetered on the brink of starvation at their camp four miles north of Providence, Williams immediately dispatched messengers (probably Indians) to deliver food and provisions. Williams also sent along an invitation for the men to visit him in Providence. Peach and his associates were grateful for the unexpected supplies but they were curt and evasive in answering Williams's inquiries. They declined his invitation to Providence. Peach concocted a ruse for Williams's benefit by saying that he and his friends had traveled from Pascataquack (Maine) and had been lost for five days.<sup>22</sup>

Not easily discouraged, Williams sent another messenger with a second invitation. Again Peach refused by explaining that he and his colleagues were tired and badly in need of rest. The fugitives remained at their camp but Peach probably realized he would soon run out of excuses for Williams. So far, no one knew about their dastardly crime, but if the Indian's death became known, Williams would surely be among the first to hear about it. It seemed that Peach and the others could not avoid a brief visit with the Providence preacher.

The four men appeared on Williams's doorstep the following day. Peach explained that the men had not accepted Williams's invitations because William Blackstone, an Anglican clergyman who had settled in the Pawtucket area, had warned them of hostile Indians known to be prowling the woods between Pawtucket and Providence. When Blackstone informed them it was safe to travel, they made their way to Providence to pay their respects and to thank Williams for his kindness.

Williams accepted their story. Actually he was preoccupied, engaged in some letter writing when the men arrived. He paid more attention to finishing his compositions than he did to their explanations. Williams, in fact, was a prolific correspondent and his letters were carefully constructed tomes that spared not even the slightest detail. Completing this current batch of letters, he realized that the arrival of Peach and his friends might provide a convenient means for delivering the correspondence to Connecticut, where these men said they were destined. Williams gave his letters to Peach for delivery and he promised to find someone to guide them to Connecticut in return for their service as postmen.<sup>23</sup> Unsuspectingly, Williams provided these men with an escorted escape from justice. But their crime was about to be revealed.

As darkness fell over the swamp on the evening of the assault, Penowanyanquis - wounded and tired - mustered all his strength and began to drag himself back to the path. The next morning three Indians discovered him. Still alive, though badly hurt, Penowanyanquis related the story of the four Englishmen who had attacked and robbed him. The three Indians immediately set out for Pawtucket and inquired there about the white men. The Indian communications line began to hum with news of the attack and Peach somehow learned, even before Williams did, that he and the others were being sought. That night, while Williams still had no cause for suspicions, Peach and his accomplices "got on hose and shoes" and left Providence.

After Williams discovered that the four men had gone, an Indian brought him word of the attack on Penowanyanquis. With his usual burst of energy, Williams relayed the message to the Narragansett sachems Canonicus and Miantonomi and he requested their assistance in apprehending the four Englishmen. At the same time he gathered a few townspeople together and sped into the forest to help the wounded Indian.

Penowanyanquis was still alive when Williams arrived and the preacher dressed the wounds as best he could. With the help of friends who accompanied him, Williams carried the dying Indian to Providence. Penowanyanquis suffered severe pain and he continuously cried out "Muckquachuckquand," the name of a god who had appeared to him in a vision during his youth.<sup>24</sup>

In Providence, the Indian was attended by Thomas James and John Greene. But there was little they could do. Penowanyanquis had lost too much blood and had contracted a fever. Weak and hardly able to speak, the Indian related his story in minute detail and identified his assailants. He may have then requested his Indian friends to take him from Providence so he could die elsewhere. Here the historical records are annoyingly incomplete. Williams left no account of Penowanyanquis's death, so it appears that he was not present when the Indian died. This added a further complication to events that transpired.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, Peach and his accomplices arrived at the Indian village of Miantonomi, the chief sachem who lived about twenty miles south of Providence and not far from the western side of Narragansett Bay. Knowing their escape plan had been seriously jeopardized, the Englishmen asked the sachem for transportation across the bay to the white settlement of Antinomians on Aquidneck Island, Perhaps they hoped the religious differences between Aquidneck and Plymouth would be enough to make extradition impossible. They told Miantonomi nothing about why they wanted to go to Aquidneck, although Peach showed the sachem the packet of letters Williams had given him to deliver to Connecticut. Peach let Miantonomi think the letters were addressed to Aquidneck and that he was Williams's official courier.

The Narragansetts, by all appearances, were only too happy to assist a friend of Williams. Miantonomi ordered the outfitting of a canoe and instructed some Indians to escort Peach and his followers across the bay. After landing on Aquidneck, the Indians did not depart. Instead they brought Peach and the others directly into the tiny Portsmouth settlement.

After the four Englishmen had been introduced to the Portsmouth leaders, the Indians demanded that Peach and his followers be immediately arrested and charged with Penowanyanguis's murder. Obviously Roger Williams's messenger had reached the Narragansett chiefs before the four murderers arrived at the Indian village. The transportation provided by the Indians had actually been part of a plan to turn the four Englishmen over to the nearest white authorities. William Bradford, one of the Plymouth magistrates, later noted with admiration that the Indians had carried out the plan with such "subtlety" that Peach and his accomplices never suspected "their fact had been known" all along. The Aquidneck residents complied with the Narragansetts' demands. Peach and the others were held in custody as the Portsmouth leaders tried to figure out exactly what was going on.26



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John Winthrop, former governor of Massachusetts Bay, was asked by Williams for advice about what to do with the captured murderers.

As the situation became obvious, the Portsmouth leaders resented being stuck in the middle. Williams informed the island residents that the men should be returned either to Plymouth or Massachusetts Bay for trial. But he was not sure under which colony's jurisdiction these men came. First, the murder had been committed in an area that he knew did not belong to Providence, but he did not know if it belonged to Massachusetts Bay or Plymouth. Second, the men had last resided in Plymouth, which meant they had broken Plymouth law. It was a confusing mess with no precedent upon which to rely and Williams, in frustration, appealed to Governor Winthrop for an opinion.<sup>27</sup>

Aquidneck was left the problem of what to do with the prisoners. Moreover, the people of Portsmouth grew increasingly concerned about Indian threats of reprisals against the English in revenge for Penowanyanquis's death. Slowly tremors began to shake and threaten the English living within the vicinity of the Narragansett Indians.



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Narragansett Indians feared that Penowanyanquis's murder was the first step toward the kind of slaughter committed a year earlier against the Pequot Indians of Connecticut.

The murder of Penowanyanguis aroused the Narragansetts to a fever pitch. At first the Indians grew fearful because they believed that Penowanyanquis's death was the first step in an English plot to commit wholesale slaughter of Indians around Narragansett Bay. This fear was not as preposterous as it might sound. A year earlier a combined force of English from Connecticut and Massachusetts Bay had marched against the Pequot Indians. On the banks of the Mystic River, the English soldiers - assisted by Narragansett and Mohegan allies - surrounded a stockaded Pequot fort. The fort was burned and the allied force annihilated the Pequot defenders - men, women and children. Those not killed by musket ball or arrow were burned in the inferno of the fort's interior. Pequot casualties totaled between three hundred and seven hundred. Most Narragansetts

at the Pequot fort refused to fight because they disagreed with the noxious English commanders and their merciless tactics. For those who stayed to watch the devastation, the results were sickening. After the battle the Narragansetts were heard to moan "mach it, mach it," words that becried the wickedness and waste of the slaughter.<sup>28</sup> The Narragansetts needed no better lesson in how far English ruthlessness could go.

Now, a year later, with the Pequot nation virtually exterminated, the Narragansetts feared it was their turn to experience the wrath of the English. Williams informed the Indians they had nothing to fear and assured them they were safe. Still, rumors raced through the Narragansett country and many Indians thought it might be wise to attack the English before any more time passed. A crisis and a potential for war loomed over southern New England.

Finally cooler heads prevailed. Miantonomi warned the English that some Narragansetts wanted revenge and that it would be best for every white man to be a little more cautious than usual. Yet he also learned who among his people had circulated threats against the English and he let it be known that any violence against the whites would be regarded as a breach of Indian law. He also spread the word that he believed the English would see justice done.<sup>20</sup>

Winthrop replied to Williams's inquiry about which colony had actual jurisdiction over the prisoners. He believed the easiest way out of the tightening vise would be to turn Peach over to the Indians and allow the natives to dispose of him in whatever manner they chose, short of torture. The other three, Winthrop suggested, could then be tried at a later date. He hoped this solution would satisfy the Indians and put an end to Narragansett threats of reprisal. Winthrop's recommendation became moot, however, when Plymouth sent word to Aquidneck that the prisoners should be moved to the Pilgrim community.

Although Governor Thomas Prence of Plymouth agreed to accept the prisoners, he, like everyone else, was not particularly happy with the notion that his colony would become solely responsible for deciding the accused murderers' fate. Prence worried about rumors that the four prisoners might appeal their case directly to England, which would leave Plymouth powerless to bring swift justice. If the trial took place in England, the Narragansetts might blame the Pilgrim colony for allowing the murderers to leave New England unpunished. Winthrop, however, assured Prence that the men could not be tried in England (presumably because the New England colonies were sovereign entities with, as yet, no established procedures for appeal to the crown). So Prence informed the residents of Aquidneck that the prisoners should be transported to Plymouth as soon as possible.30

When they received Prence's message, the Aquidneck Island settlers probably breathed a sigh of relief. They too had suffered from the pressure created by the crisis. The leaders of Aquidneck, seeking to rid themselves of the suspected Englishmen's unwanted presence, had made persistent pleas to Williams for the prisoners to be transferred to Providence for temporary incarceration. But Williams shared the fears of most whites and he wanted nothing more to do with Peach and his accomplices.

The crisis grew to unwieldy proportions. Throughout southern New England whites trembled at Indian threats, while Indians quaked at the thought of English attacks similar to the one leveled against the Pequots at the Mystic River fort. When Roger Williams described the crisis as a "great hubbub in all these parts," his characteristic understatement conveyed little of the actual confusion, paranoia and terror that pervaded the entire countryside.<sup>31</sup>

Some uneasiness dissipated, however, when Plymouth finally requested the delivery of the prisoners. Arrangements were made quickly to transport the men, but somehow precautions and plans went awry. One of the prisoners, Daniel Cross, escaped from Aquidneck by boat. Only three men arrived in Plymouth to await trial.

Shortly, reports came to Plymouth that Cross had found sanctuary with some English settlers in Maine. How he managed to travel such a great distance safely is still a mystery. It is possible that his escape was planned and executed by persons who also provided some means of safe passage to Maine. Governor Prence sent a warning to the English harboring Cross that the fugitive had to be returned to Plymouth. Defiantly, the settlers of the northern province refused. John Winthrop was not surprised. He believed the English residents of Maine represented the worst element in New England (even far exceeding the "heretics" who inhabited Aquidneck Island, for instance). Refusal to extradite Cross typified their manner to "countenance . . . all such lewd persons as fled from us to them."32

By early September the trial of Peach, Jackson and Stinnings began. The court selected twelve men to sit on the jury and hear testimony. The records of the proceedings are sketchy and provide only a miniscule amount of detail. As soon as the trial began, all three defendants confessed to committing the murder of Penowanyanquis, yet these admissions did not completely satisfy the court. Consequently, the Plymouth jurists summoned various individuals to testify. Overriding every other concern, the court worried about its authority to hear the case at all. And the court magistrates confronted a rather knotty question — no one had actually seen Penowanyanquis die. No one could be sure if these men should be tried for murder or a lesser charge of assault.

The testimony soon ended any doubt. Roger Williams, taking time from his busy schedule and activity as a diplomatic mediator between the colony of Connecticut and the Narragansetts, went to Plymouth to give testimony. Thomas James, who had examined the wounded Penowanvanguis in Providence, accompanied Williams and together they convinced the jury that the Indian indeed had been mortally wounded. Desiring corroborative evidence, the court tried to persuade two Indian friends of Penowanyanguis to present further evidence. At first these two unidentified Indians refused to attend the court sessions in Plymouth because they still believed the English were conspiring to slaughter Indians. Finally Plymouth authorities convinced them to appear at the trial and assured their safety. Before the court, the Indians swore that if Penowanyanguis had not truly died from his wounds, then they would be willing to give up their own lives at the hands of the English.33

Now no questions remained. On September 4, 1638, the court declared Peach, Jackson, and Stinnings guilty of murder and robbery. And following the tenets of Pilgrim law, the jury sentenced the guilty parties "to be hanged by the neck until their bodies were dead."

Some people in Plymouth were shocked and others were saddened by the severity of the sentence. Bradford observed that "some of the rude and ignorant sort" were incredulous that Englishmen would be "put to death for the Indians." Others in Plymouth may have simply regretted that men of their own kind, despite their obvious ruthlessness, had come to such an end. Only one execution had occurred in Plymouth during the eighteen years of the settlement's existence. In 1630 a jury had found John Billington — the same man who had once lost himself in the forest guilty of "wilful murder" and he was subsequently hanged.<sup>34</sup>

Now the same fate awaited Peach, Jackson and Stinnings. On the day the trial concluded, the three men were led to a hilltop (later known as "Gallows Hill") and were publicly hanged. Winthrop reported that "two of them died very penitently, especially Arthur Peach." The third, unnamed in the surviving records, must have resisted his executioners or perhaps in some way broke the solemn demeanor of the occasion.<sup>35</sup>

In the crowd that gathered on Gallows Hill, Roger Williams and some Narragansett Indians witnessed the execution. When it was over, the Indians displayed great satisfaction and remarked to Williams that the execution helped to prove English sincerity and trustworthiness.<sup>36</sup>

For the time being, the execution served a practical purpose by maintaining the peace. The deaths of Peach, Jackson and Stinnings averted the eruption of a frontier war. And for the first time in the annals of American history, white men had been brought to justice for committing a heinous crime against an Indian. Unfortunately the trial and execution of Peach and his accomplices set no lasting precedent.

The trial and execution did reveal that whites could recognize the necessity of enforcing equal justice under the law, even if as in this case the enforcement of justice resulted, in large part, from white fear of Indian reprisals and anxieties caused by the inherent pressure of the crisis. Still, it appears that the court, jurors, and residents of Plymouth acknowledged — if only in this fleeting instance — that justice was an end for which to strive, no matter if that justice served whites or Indians.

Ironically this point was best expressed at the time not by any Englishman, but by a local Indian. During a visit with Williams just before the trial commenced, Massasoit, sachem of the Wampanoags, proclaimed that all four Englishmen were guilty. Williams, however, replied philosophically that only one of them was truly guilty, the one who had actually committed the murderous deed. Massasoit disagreed. True, he said, only one man wounded the Indian, "but all lay in wait two days, and assisted."<sup>37</sup> The guilt had to be shared by all.

- William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York, 1952), 87-88.
- 2 John Russell Bartlett, ed., "Letters of Roger Williams, 1632-1682," Publications of the Narragansett Club, 6 v. (Providence, 1866-1874), 6: 112 (hereafter cited as NCP).
- 3 Alden T. Vaughan, New England Frontier. Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675 (Boston, 1965), chap. 6.
- 4 NCP, 6: 116; Nathaniel E. Shurtleff and David Pulsifer, eds., Records of the Colony of New Plymouth, 12 v. (Boston, 1855-1861), 1: 96 (hereafter cited as New Plymouth Records).
- 5 Vaughan, New England Frontier, 28, 55-56.
- 6 NCP, 6: 112.
- 7 Vaughan, New England Frontier, 54-55, 70, 72-73, 99; NCP, 6: 116.
- 8 Bradford notes that the four white men met the Indian "the day before" the murder took place. Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, ed. Morison, 299. Actually they crossed paths two days before. NCP, 6: 116.
- 9 Edmund S. Morgan, The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England (Revised ed., New York, 1966), 109-110; John Demos, A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony (New York, 1970), 69-70, 107-110.
- 10 New Plymouth Records, 1: 35.
- 11 Demos, A Little Commonwealth, 71; NCP, 6: 111, 116.
- 12 Demos, A Little Commonwealth, 112.
- 13 New Plymouth Records, 1: 7, 15.
- 14 Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, ed. Morison, 295, 299; John Winthrop, Winthrop's Journal, "History of New England," 1630-1649, ed. James K. Hosmer, Original Narratives of Early American History, 2 v. (New York, 1908), 1: 274.
- 15 Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, ed. Morison 299; Margaret Hodges, Hopkins of the Mayflower: Portrait of a Dissenter (New York, 1972), 237.
- 16 Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, ed. Morison, 299.
- 17 NCP, 6: 111; New Plymouth Records, 1: 7, 15: Winthrop's Journal, 1: 193.

- 18 New Plymouth Records, 1: 96; Winthrop's Journal, 1: 273; NCP, 6: 111, 113.
- 19 NCP, 6: 112.
- 20 NCP, 6: 113; Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, ed. Morison, 299-300.
- 21 NCP, 6: 111, 113.
- 22 NCP, 6: 111.
- 23 NCP, 6: 111-112.
- 24 NCP, 6: 112-113; Roger Williams, A Key Into the Language of America (London, 1642; reprinted Providence, 1936), 124-125.
- 25 NCP, 6: 112; William Bradford, History of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647, ed. W. C. Ford, 2 v. (Boston, 1912), 2: 265n.
- 26 Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, ed. Morison, 300; NCP, 6: 113.
- 27 NCP, 6: 113.
- 28 NCP, 6: 112; Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, ed. Morison, 300; Francis Jennings, The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1975), 220-225, quoted at 223.
- 29 Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, ed. Morison, 300; NCP, 6: 116.
- 30 Winthrop's Journal, 1: 273.
- 31 NCP, 6: 111, 113-114.
- 32 Winthrop's Journal, 1: 274; Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, ed. Morison, 299; NCP, 6: 123.
- 33 Winthrop's Journal, 1: 274.
- 34 New Plymouth Records, 1: 97; Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, ed. Morison, 234, 300-301.
- 35 Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, ed. Morison, 301; William Bradford, Bradford's History of Plymouth Plantation, ed. William T. Davis, Original Narratives of Early American History (New York, 1908), 346n; Winthrop's Journal, 1: 274.
- 36 Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, ed. Morison, 301; NCP, 6: 123.
- 37 NCP, 6: 116.



A Map of Part of Rhode Island Showing the Positions of the American and British Armies at the Siege of Newport, and the subsequent Action on the 29th of August 1778 (detail). Drawn by S. Lewis, engraved by Benjamin Jones, Philadelphia, 1807.

## A British Account of the Siege of Rhode Island, 1778

Rhode Island, as one historian has explained, was only a "small theater of war" during the American Revolution, a battleground "where a great local effort brought no dramatic results."1 Although it is true that the siege did not dislodge the British from their occupation of Newport, it can at least he said that the confrontation that occurred between British, French, and American forces in the summer of 1778 produced countless moments of drama for the participants. For them, it certainly mattered little whether or not the struggle for possession of Aquidneck Island was a major or minor conflict; the realities of warfare were for them as real, as traumatic, and as dramatic as any experienced by soldiers and sailors throughout the war.

The siege of Rhode Island encompasses the stories - some told, many never to be told - of the men and women who witnessed the events as they transpired, who remembered these events not as landmarks in history but as personal experience. Luckily - at least for students of the siege - John Peter Reina, a young British midshipman aboard the Frigate Juno, left behind his account of what happened during the summer of 1778. The account (an excerpt from his journal) reveals his experiences, thoughts, and personal involvement in the events as they unfolded. His eyewitness report is significant because it complements other documentary sources about the siege written from the British point of view, as well as offering some new information.

The son of Peter Anthony Reina (1725-1806) and Sarah (1726-1793), John Peter was born in

#### edited by John F. Millar \*

1761. He was thus about seventeen years old at the time of the siege. He survived the war, returned to England, and in 1797 he married Mary Nock (1763-1823). Reina died in 1833.

Reina's journal is now owned by Mr. Anthony Holt of England, a family descendant. The journal excerpt is printed here for the first time; it was not previously known to anyone outside the Reina family. Mr. Holt kindly sent me a photocopy of the original manuscript from which I prepared a transcript. Original punctuation, capitalization and spelling in some instances have been modernized for clarity.

On Wednesday the 29th of July 1778, about 10 in the morning, the signal for an enemy's fleet was displayed on the flagstaff at Brenton's Neck, when the Flora,<sup>2</sup> 32 guns, and ships in the harbour got under weigh and stood in between Goat Island and the town, where they came to anchor; at the same time, the Lark, 32 guns, Juno, Orpheus and Cerberus frigates,<sup>3</sup> 32 guns each, ran in close to the westerly shore<sup>4</sup> of Rhode Island, where, agreeable to orders, they began to get out their guns, ammunition and provisions, etc.

Meanwhile the fleet, which proved to be the Toulon Squadron under the command of le Count d'Estaing,<sup>5</sup> of 12 sail of the line and 5 frigates, etc., kept off and on the mouth of the harbour, seemingly irresolute whether to come in or not, and about 4 in the afternoon came to anchor to the southward of the harbour,<sup>6</sup> except 3 frigates

<sup>\*</sup> John Fitzhugh Millar of Newport was largely responsible for the full-size reconstructions of the Revolutionary War ships Rose and Providence; he is the author of Rhode Island; Forgotten Leader of the Revolutionary Era (1975) and American Ships of the Colonial & Revolutionary Periods (1979).

which were detached up the Seconnett Passage, probably with an intention to destroy the King's Fisher sloop and Pigot galley, which was prevented by their being seen on shore and burnt by their crews.

The Town of Newport was by this time in great agitation and confusion; the loyal hearts were depressed, while those of the Rebels and disaffected party were highly elated, nor did they conceal their joy, but publickly declared their hopes of the success of the enemy; and such was the situation of His Majesty's forces that it was thought proper to take no notice of them for the present.<sup>7</sup>

On the Island, some of the troops retired nearer the Town, and the Commander in Chief8 a few days after thought it advisable to draw his whole force in as near a compass as possible from a compleat chain of forts, batteries, redoubts and abatis, from Tommyny Hill across the Island to Easton Beach by which means the northern part of the Island was entirely exposed to the invasion of the Rebels. At 7 o'clock in the morning of the 30th, 2 large French ships of the line appeared coming up the Narragansett Passage; soon after, our fort on Conanicut Island fired at them, which they returned, and our people finding the fort untenable fired the magazine and retired to Rhode Island; every preparation was made on board the frigates for firing them, but we were agreeably disappointed on seeing the enemy bring to, to the northward of Conanicut.

The frigates' crews were still employed in getting out the stores, and were much fatigued all the preceding night and this day; orders were sent in the evening to embark everything on board of the Lark, Orpheus and Cerberus and then to proceed to Newport. Those orders were executed with all imaginable despatch, and on the morning of the 1st of August they got under weigh and turned down to the Town in the face of the whole French fleet.

Previous to this, the 2 French ships above mentioned had dropped some distance between Conanicut Island and the Mainland; at noon, the 3 frigates anchored between Goat Island and the Town, being in a state of perfect security, where they lay unemployed till the 3rd, when they were ordered to return to their stations.

This surprising and unexpected order was ef-

fected,<sup>9</sup> and about 3 o'clock they anchored to the northward of the small island called Dyer's. In the mean time, the Juno having kept her berth in Coddington Cove, her crew were employed in getting her stores and guns on shore and raising three batteries with water butts, which by this time was well nigh compleated; which, though covered by Tommyny Hill was far from sufficient, either from its situation or force, to defend the ships against the fire of the enemy's ships of the line.

This evening of the proceeding we passed in safety; in the evening of the 4th, observing another large ship from the other two in the Narragansett Passage, we began to have the most gloomy apprehensions; from the time of [?] the 3 frigates were ordered back to their stations, everyone looked upon himself as sacrificed, well knowing how much inferior we were to the enemy in view.

The evening of the 4th proving very foggy, we were apprehensive the enemy would take advantage of it and come upon us unawares, which had they done, must have taken all the survivors prisoners. But they were more generous than we expected, for after a very tedious night of anxiety and care, at day-break 2 of them were perceived to be under sail coming round the south end of Prudence Island, and so near that it was in vain to save anything or even scuttle the ship; the Cerberus being the southermost of the ships from Prudence cut her cable and endeavoured to work down, but in tacking one of the enemy's ships nearing her so close as to be within half gunshot she was forced to bear away and land on shore between Dyer's and Rhode Island, as did the Lark and Orpheus, who could not with the least probability try to escape.10 The crews were landed with utmost expedition, and materials having been prepared the three ships were set on fire and in 3/4 of an hour blew up. Also, the batteries which were erected by the crew of the Juno being found very insufficient to protect her, she was with two transports and the Spitfire galley set on fire, after having a broadside fired at her from one of the French ships. Fire was likewise set to a considerable group of stores which had been landed from her, directly above the battery (it being supposed by the motions of the French they intended to land, which had they done they must

have fallen to their prey). However, all the provisions and ammunition was saved.

Though pleased we were to save our lives (a number of which must have been forfeited had the French acted with vigilance and spirit)<sup>11</sup> the loss of our good ships and the little properties on board of them gave us no small concern, and was still more aggravated by the triumph our implacable enemys enjoyed on this occasion; great numbers were seen on Prudence [Island] waiting (probably to plunder the wrecks).

The French ships having oblidged us to do for them what their most sanguine expectations fell short of return'd to Narragansett Passage.

Such was the event of the 5th August a day much to be lamented by every lover of his country as it gave our enemies every cause of triumph: vexation and troublesome dishonour on the British name, which however was soon erased by the most prudent measures, and shame and reproach justly returned on our united foes.

The seamen were now formed into a brigade; the Commodore,<sup>12</sup> Captains and Lieutenants, etc. ranked with the Army, Secretary, Quarter Master, Commissary and Adjutant General, etc. appointed, and the crews with their officers were encamped in large tents made for that purpose with sails, about a quarter of a mile from the north end of the Town.

The greater part of the seamen and officers were posted in the different batteries and redoubts; the rest remained in the camp in good order. In this situation we remained till the 8th, when the enemy's fleet, having kept off the mouth of the harbour all this time, at 12 o'clock PM were perceived coming round Brenton's Neck. The alarm was instantly spread, and everybody stationed at the forts and batteries commanding the harbour were at their posts waiting with impatience to give the perfidious French a good reception.

Upon the first appearance of the enemy's fleet off the harbour care had been taken to sink a number of transports abreast of the north and Goat Island batteries to prevent their bringing up so near as to oblige us to retire from those batteries, which had not that precaution been taken they would have effected.

As soon as Brenton's Fort could bring a gun to bear on the headmost ship, which was a Rear Admiral, they played with great spirit and alacrity.<sup>13</sup> The enemy did not return it for some time, but when they did such a peal was rung as never before rent the air entended over the New World.



The French fleet entering Newport harbor under fire from the batteries and forcing a passage, August 8, 1778. From Pierre Ozanne's journal of d'Estaing's expedition. Library of Congress

The ships coming in under their topsails, one after the other, a succession of broadsides continued for two hours without intermission. The North and Goat Island batteries vied with Brenton's which should more annoy the enemy, who fired their united force ineffectual to silence not more than 20 guns (though opposed to 9 ships of the line). and not choosing to bring up against the batteries (for what reason no one can conjecture) they ran up between Rose Island and Conanicut out of the reach of our guns and came to anchor. The Rear Admiral formed the van and Monsieur the Compte d'Estaing making the rear of the line ahead. It was something amazing that not one shot out of so many hundreds that the enemy fired should do the least execution, as not a man was hurt in either the Town or batteries. The officers and seamen in the batteries behaved in a gallant and fearless manner, yet we well knew how insufficient all our force should be against so many and such large ships should they have come to against the Town, and notwithstanding the fatigue of the day we waited all night for the event of the succeeding day, expecting very soon a second attack. In the mean while, upon perceiving the enemy coming in, the signal was hove out from the Commodore for scuttling and cutting away the masts of the ships between Goat Island and the Town. The Flora frigate and Falcon 20 gun ship and a number of transports were scuttled and their masts cut away, but by some very unaccountable conduct not till the enemy were out of reach of gun shot the Grand Duke of Russia (a large Indiaman) was by mistaking the signal set on fire, and it was with difficulty that the fire was prevented from communicating to [the] general Town. Our expectation of an attack proved meerly imaginary. The morning came no attack, and to enhance the value of the mistake a large fleet was seen in the offing about 10 o'clock.

It is impossible to describe the joy this infused into the troops, seamen and Loyalists in the Town, when we heard from certain intelligence that it was Vice Admiral Lord Howe's fleet; suffice it to say, the enemy was no longer looked upon as formidable, nay even pitied them as devoted to death and destruction.<sup>14</sup> Every idea of danger vanished in the prospect of immediate defeat or complete conquest, nor was there 1 Briton amongst us but what looked upon any one of our ships as a match for the largest of the enemy, nor were they much mistaken, as will appear hereafter.

As the wind was tight in and also pretty fresh, the enemy could not get out. They were, therefore, employed this day in forming themselves into a half moon from the extremity of Pest Island quite across to Conanicut, commanding the entrance of the Harbour, but not so as to prevent our ships coming in under cover of the batteries:15 they also got their sick on shore to the amount of some hundreds, and made the best disposition their situation could admit of under expectation. as well as we, that his Lordship would have been in by 3 o'clock. How surprized we were to see him come to anchor off the harbour. Our friends being so near and our enemies still nearer, we had every reason to expect an attack that night, as on it seemed to depend the fate of the Island. A good look out was kept during the night, and we learned afterwards that the Rebels did not land till that very evening, and were therefore in no situation to attack our lines at day break. In the morning, the French appeared in motion warping close in to the Conanicut shore, and the wind a short time afterwards (unfortunately) chopping to the northeast that by 8 o'clock they got under way and proceeded down the Harbour.

The North Battery gave them the first salute. and quickly commenced a furious cannonade: for two whole hours did the North. Goat Island and Brenton's batterys sustain the heavy fire of 11 ships of the line (the other one going through the Narragansett Passage where she got aground and unluckily got off after laying 2 hours) passing very slow (there being but little wind), each of them firing not less than 9 or 10 broadsides, and yet not a soul was hurt in either of the batteries. Many shot entered the Town and produced much terror and confusion among the women and children; some passed over and lodged in the seamen's encampment. At this time, Lord Howe's fleet got under weigh and stood to the southeast. crowding all sail to deceive the enemy with the notion of his flight; we expected to see them engage but not a little disappointed when the two fleets run out of our sight.

However, as it relieved us from very disagreeable neighbours we esteemed it a very happy circumstance, and we rested in a little more safety, though nothing was left undone that could make us secure from our internal foes the Rebels, who, we were informed, were coming up in great numbers and intrenching themselves very fast and strong. They continued their approaches till the 18th, when they open'd several batteries and fired with little intermission; all day and night and many after, a constant cannonade was kept up between the opposed parties with little or no loss on our side, numbers of deserters coming in every day.

The day after the departure of the French fleet proving very tempestuous, both were drove out to sea, and we heard no more of them till the 20th, when we were again disagreeably disappointed at the sight of Monsieur le Compte d'Estaing's fleet, in appearance much shattered and disordered, two of them dismasted. The seamen in the camp, on passing one or two who were not employed, were ordered on board 2 transports in the harbour on the 16th; the enemy being now in sight, tents were again erected for their [the seamen's] reception should they [the French] enter the harbour.

As the Rebels were so numerous and so well posted on the Island within 2 miles of our lines, we made no doubt but that the return of the French fleet was to act in conjunction with them for the reduction of the Town (little else remaining for them), nor had we any expectation of relief or hopes of conquest. Dispondency took place amongst our people in general, and we looked upon the next day, the fatal one to decide the contest.

The enemy anchored to the eastward of the entrance of the harbour, and at day break next morning, instead of entering the harbour, they were perceived crowding all sail to the eastward. This was a pleasing sight and a relief much more satisfactory as it was entirely unexpected. We now conjectured that they had intelligence of our fleets being near them, and were they in no condition to cope with them.16 This or some more substantial reason could alone account for their flight, when their Allies waited only for their assistance. From the time they left 'em, the Rebels were more slow in their approaches; their fire slacked daily, and by deserters from them we learnt they were retreating, getting off their heavy cannon and making every disposition to evacuate the Island.

We also learnt that the French fleet had been severely buffeted in the last storm, 2 of 'em dismasted and others much damaged; that His Majesty's ship Isis of 50 guns, Captain Riner,17 had the undaunted valour to attack the Zela, a French Rear Admiral of 80 guns<sup>18</sup> and fought her for an hour and a half, but being much damaged in her rigging and seeing two of the enemy's ships bearing down, she was oblidged to make off.19 It afterwards proved absolute fact, and that if the Isis could have kept way with her she certainly would have taken the Admiral. The Preston and Renown, 50 gun ships, had both an opportunity of annoving the enemy in the course of an action they had with the Vice Admiral in the Languedoc.20

Reports arriving by deserters: the enemy were retreating to the north end of the Island. The Commander in Chief, Sir Robert Pigot, on the morning of the 29th ordered the Light Infantry and Grenadiers with Brown's and Fanning's Corps to march out of their lines and attack them, as were the 22nd and 43rd with the Hessian and Anspach Corps from Easton's Beach.

They marched without opposition for some miles till meeting with a considerable body of the enemy on Quaker Hill. A severe fire took place; the van of our small army, for some time being not supported by the rear, suffered considerably, but the foreign troops advancing to the support of the 22nd and 43rd, the Rebels were repulsed and drove from their works with considerable slaughter on their part.<sup>21</sup> They then took post on Wind-mill Hill, an eminence commanding every other and very strongly defended.

Our troops took post on Quaker's Hill. Great numbers of wounded coming into the Town gave the Rebels there no small satisfaction; their countenances shew'd it while they at the same time seek'd to administer relief.

The Sphynx 20 gun ship and Vigilante galley, which arrived on the 27th, were sent up the River to cut off the retreat of the Rebels, but they could not effect it, not getting past the batteries at Bristol Ferry.

However, the Rebels being quite dispirited by the loss of their Allies, they could not remain longer, and on the night of Sunday 30th totally evacuated the Island to our great satisfaction and ease.



Dismasted by the previous night's storm, the Languedoc is attacked by the fifty-gun Renown on August 13. From Pierre Ozanne's journal.

Thus ended Mr. Sullivan's third expedition on Rhode Island, much to his dishonour and disgrace to his magnanimous allies, who with 25,000 men and a fleet of 12 ships of the line made a shameful retreat from before a small army not exceeding 6000 troops, and those but ill provided with artillery.<sup>22</sup>

On the 2nd of September, a fleet of 56 sail with Sir Henry Clinton and 6000 troops arrived here to our assistance, though now needless, and at 10 o'clock the proceeding night set sail to the westward, supposed for New London. Next day arrived the Venus frigate with some ordnance ships, and on the 5th Commodore Hotham in the Preston with the Centurion and St. Albans arrived here, and the officers and seamen belonging to the frigates that were destroyed embarked aboard the 3 ships and proceeded for New York.<sup>23</sup>

1 Sydney V. James, Colonial Rhode Island — A History (New York, 1975), 357.

2 The frigate Flora was the squadron leader. She had one of the most interesting histories of any ship that fought in the Revolution. She had been built in France as La Vestale in 1756, captured by the British and renamed; she sought and helped capture two out of three Continental Navy frigates in June 1777 (see the set of four excellent contemporary oil paintings by Francis Holman at the Peabody Museum, Salem). To avoid capture by the French, she was scuttled in the inner harbor at Newport and was not raised until July 1780 by American engineers. She was then fitted out as a large privateer in Providence by Jacob and Griffin Greene; in August 1781 she was commanded by Henry Johnston. After the Revolution, the American owners sold this aging ship back to the French king, whose navy renamed her La Reconnaissance, but in 1792 she was sold to a French nobleman for use as a privateer again. In 1798 the British captured her once more and sold her immediately. Sources on the history of the Flora are located in the collections of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England; Peabody Mu-

Library of Congress

- 3 The University of Rhode Island in 1973 mounted a successful expedition to locate the wrecks of these ships and salvage parts of them. For reports on this project see *Providence Journal*, Mar. 23, 1973, Sept. 17, 1973, Apr. 13, 1975.
- 4 The western shore of Middletown and Portsmouth.
- Charles Hector Theodat, Comte d'Estaing (1729-94) was given 5 the ranks of both general and admiral. D'Estaing's expedition to America was dogged by a combination of bad luck and poor leadership: he failed to catch Howe's rich fleet of transports as they evacuated Philadelphia; he then failed to attack Howe's weak fleet at New York. He failed to accomplish anything positive at Newport (which left a bad taste in the mouths of the Americans) and he failed in 1779 to capture the lightly-defended British base at Savannah. E. Chevalier, Histoire de le Marine Francaise pendant la Guerre de l'Independance Americaine (Paris, 1877); Mark Mayo Boatner, III, Encyclopedia of the American Revolution (New York, 1966), 349-350. D'Estaing had two junior captains in the Newport squadron - Bougainville and Suffren - whose reputations suggest that they could have done a far better job than he. Bougainville, who had made an epic voyage around the world on a small frigate in 1767-1769. was later entrusted by De Grasse with one of the divisions of the French fleet; he is credited with rescuing 8 ships of that division

in the Battle of the Saintes in 1782, thus preventing that French disaster from being even worse. Suffren was later given command of a weak French squadron with which he inflicted considerable damage to British fleets of greater strength off the coast of India in 1781-1783. Suffren himself frequently made known in official communications his strong disapproval of d'Estaing's timid tactics. Boatner, Encyclopedia, 1069-1070; Alfred Thayer Mahan, The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783 (Boston, 1890); Mahan, The Major Operations of the Navies in the War of American Independence (London, 1913); Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1910 ed., s.v. "Suffren."

- 6 This journal uses the word "harbour" quite loosely; sometimes it means the inner harbor of Newport, and sometimes it means Narragansett Bay. In this case, it means that the French anchored near the present location of the Brenton's Reef Light Tower.
- 7 This is probably the most explicit account anywhere of the extent of Rebel sympathies within the fortifications of Newport.
- 8 Major General Robert Pigot.
- 9 The standard British account of the siege of Rhode Island is the journal of Frederick Mackenzie, Captain in the Royal Welch Fusiliers. Mackenzie, Diary of Frederick Mackenzie, Giving a Daily Narrative of his Military Service as an Officer of the Regiment of Royal Welch Fusiliers During the Years 1775-1781 in Massaschusetts, Rhode Island and New York, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1930), II, 319-392. Mackenzie says that there was a very good reason for sending the frigates northward: it was to intercept Rebel supply boats that were by now sailing the waters of Narragansett Bay with impunity. Diary of Frederick Mackenzie, II, 325-326. Incidentally, "Welch" is the accepted spelling for the name of Mackenzie's regiment, rather than the more modern "Welsh."
- 10 If the four frigates had acted in concert, there is a possibility that they could have escaped from the two French battleships. The French ships easily outweighed the British in firepower, but the British had maneuverability and local knowledge on their side, in addition to the knowledge that French gunnery was notoriously ineffective. In fact, the French whose crews had had very little gunnery practice this early in the war, had clearly demonstrated their poor marksmanship when they sailed into Narragansett Bay with guns blazing and totally failed to damage the British batteries. Pigot needed the seamen to help guard the town, but they would probably have been of more use to him if they had their ships with them.
- 11 The French felt restrained from acting with "vigilance and spirit" because they had an agreement with the Continental forces that any landings on Aquidneck Island would be made simultaneously, for the sake of honor. Of course, it is well known that Sullivan ignored this agreement when a good opportunity arose, thus greatly offending the French. Boatner, *Encyclopedia*, 789.
- 12 Captain John Brisbane of the frigate Flora.
- 13 The Comte de Breugnon aboard the 80-gun battleship Le Tonnant
- 14 Howe had not pursued d'Estaing from New York because his fleet was vastly weaker than the French. However, he had in the meantime been reinforced by the 74-gun ship Cornwall that had strayed from Admiral Byron's large fleet, which was expected to

arrive any day; in spite of the reinforcement, Howe still only had the one 74-gun ship while d'Estaing had 8 ships of that strength or greater. Ira Gruber, *The Howe Brothers and the American Revolution* (New York, 1972), 310-312.

- 15 Pest Island was a temporary name for Coasters Harbor Island, the present site of the U. S. Naval War College; it then had a hospital on it.
- 16 The French probably had intelligence that Byron's fleet was due to arrive at any moment. Byron, nicknamed "Foul-Weather Jack" because he frequently seemed to be delayed by terrible weather, had left England at about the same time as d'Estaing had left France in order to counter the latter, but had sailed into two storms of hurricane strength. The French rightly did not wish to be caught in disrepair at Newport by the combined fleets under Howe and Byron. Peter Shankland, Byron of the Wager (London, 1975).
- 17 J. Raynor.
- 18 Le Zele had only 74 guns (still a formidable battleship) and was only commanded by a captain, Monsieur Barras de Saint-Laurent.
- 19 The rigging damage had been caused by the hurricane. Gruber, Howe Brothers, 317-318.
- 20 This is an understatement. The French freely admitted that the small British ship Renown came within a hair's breadth of capturing their commander-in-chief. The French artist Pierre Ozanne wrote an illustrated journal of d'Estaing's expedition. He said: " 'Le Languedoc' was dismasted of all her masts and her rudder completely broken. Two little sails were set on her longboat [on deck] but this could neither steady her nor steer her. She kept up a fire with her 5 stern-chasers, one 36-pounder having been dismounted in the first broadside of the enemy. The enemy's cannonballs swept the ship from one end to the other, piercing the stern cabin, the weakest part of the ship, and going up to the bow. The 'Renown' ceased combat against 'Le Languedoc' all by herself with nothing preventing her from continuing, for the evening was long and the night very clear." The 80-gun French ship had, of course, been dismasted by the hurricane, not by the Renown, while the smaller British ships had weathered the storm in better condition. Journal of Pierre Ozanne, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.
- 21 Reina's account of heavy American casualties is in disagreement with other estimates. Although most casualty figures are only approximate at best, no one has yet disputed those given by Paul Dearden in "The Siege of Newport: Inauspicious Dawn of Alliance," *Rhode Island History*, 29 (Feb. and May 1970), 32. Dearden says the British lost 38 killed, 210 wounded and 12 missing, while the Americans lost only 30 dead, 137 wounded and 44 missing.
- 22 Reina's figure of 25,000 obviously combines the total number of allied forces, American and French, before d'Estaing's departure. According to the most reliable estimates, including that of Nathanael Greene, Sullivan probably launched his attack on the British with a total strength of 5,000 to 6,000 men.
- 23 By the time Reina had left Newport, Byron had still not arrived. Byron showed up a few days later aboard his enormous flagship, the 98-gun *Princess Royal*. Byron's much greater force was ample proof of the wisdom of d'Estaing's retreat to Boston.



Private collection

## John Francis Smith, Heterodox Yankee Printer

When he introduced Eleanor Marx to a Providence audience in 1886, John Francis Smith, who presided over the program sponsored by the Rhode Island Central Labor Union, said that "next to the great pleasure of listening to Karl Marx would be that of hearing Karl Marx's daughter." Neither the mere rhetoric of a polite host nor an affirmation by a votary of Marx, Smith's remarks bespoke a nonconformism that today defies facile classification. A substantial record of his thought on a wide range of issues during the last quarter of the nineteenth century reveals a remarkable man, all the more interesting because he fits no ready-made pigeonhole.

Born on April 17, 1833 in Slatersville, Rhode Island, John Francis was the youngest of thirteen children born to John and Celinda Rounds Smith. After attending school in Slatersville he moved to Springfield, Massachusetts, where he attended high school. Before and after his graduation from Springfield High School he worked as a reporter and typesetter for the Springfield Republican. Later he worked on the Morning Star, a Dover, New Hampshire newspaper, but in 1856 he was back in Springfield as the assistant editor of the short-lived Daily Argus. During that year he married Sarah Anna Myers, five years his senior and a native of Montgomery, New York. A justice of the peace performed the wedding ceremony at Springfield city hall, beginning a marriage that endured nearly forty-eight years. After the Daily Argus failed in its first year, Smith turned to farming for the next three years.<sup>2</sup>

### by Carl Gersuny\*

In July 1862 while he and Sarah were living in Bloomfield, Connecticut he responded to President Lincoln's call for troops after the Union military setback of the Peninsula campaign. He enlisted for a three-year term as a private in the Fourteenth Regiment, Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, and he received a bounty of twenty-five dollars. The records of Company F described the new recruit as five feet six inches tall, light complextion, with brown hair and hazel eyes. He reported for duty at Camp Foote in Hartford on July 30, 1862. Within a week of his arrival at the encampment he "was taken sick with typhoid fever." Sufficiently recovered to accompany the regiment when it left Connecticut three weeks later, he and his comrades arrived at Arlington, Virginia on August 28. The regiment - 1,015 strong - proceeded to Fort Ethan Allen, "there holding the defenses during the alarm caused by the second battle of Bull Run." On September 17 the unit "plunged into the battle of Antietam, losing heavily, but winning the encomium of 'behaving like veterans.' " One of the battle's casualties was Private Smith, who suffered a gunshot wound on the hand caused by the premature discharge of his own rifle. Evacuated to Mount Pleasant U.S.A. General Hospital in Washington, he remained there until March 11, 1863, when he was transferred to the Master Street army hospital in Philadelphia. He was discharged for disability on April 28 with a diagnosis of chronic spinal rheumatism.3

After his discharge, Smith and his wife moved

\*Professor Gersuny is a member of the Department of Sociology, University of Rhode Island at Kingston. to Worcester, Massachusetts, where their two children were born — Jessie in 1864 and George in 1869. Until 1868 he was employed as a bookkeeper. The following year he went into business as a printer with a shop at 24 Front Street. While in Worcester he became a prominent member of the Anthropological Society.

At the end of 1874 he returned with his family to his native Rhode Island, where he lived for the rest of his life. Proprietor of the J. F. Smith Printing Company in Providence from 1875 until 1893, Smith also operated the Home Publishing Company at his house in Oak Lawn. He continued that enterprise for the rest of his life after retiring from his Providence shop. Smith published a number of pamphlets which he wrote himself and printed on his own press. In 1885, 170 stockholders - a majority of whom were Knights of Labor members - founded the weekly labor newspaper. The People.4 Smith became its first editor and a frequent contributor. By 1900 he was secretary of the Rhode Island State Employment Assurance League, an organization that disseminated propaganda favoring guaranteed employment in the public sector for everyone who applied. During his last years he also became a member of the Providence Radical Club, a debating and lecture society that took up issues ranging from municipal ownership of traction companies and legislative redistricting to the nature of feudalism and imperialism. Members of the club included Dr. Lucius Garvin who served as governor of Rhode Island from 1903 to 1904, a young student named Zechariah Chafee, Jr., and numerous lawyers, teachers, clergymen and printers.

During the last ten years of his life, he received a veteran's ten-dollar monthly disability pension and ran the printing and publishing business in his home in Oak Lawn. A pension affidavit described his increasing ill health — heart trouble, weakness of the eyes, shortness of breath and dizziness, urinary trouble, muscular rheumatism and partial paralysis of the right side. When he died of kidney failure on May 17, 1904 at Rhode Island Hospital, he left no life insurance and his widow — who outlived him by four years — collected his Civil War pension.

On the surface, John Francis Smith led an unremarkable life. But close examination of his writings reveals his significance as a heterodox thinker, an advocate of unorthodox beliefs that set him apart from most of his contemporaries.

Smith's thoughts were, of course, derivative part of the culture he inherited. Yet he drew upon unconventional sources for the ideas he disseminated in print. While he felt unconstrained by canons of documentation and used no footnotes to cite sources, he did acknowledge his debt to other thinkers. Smith listened to different drummers, defied the dominant conventions of his community, and dismissed the comforts of conformity to assert his beliefs. Since his writings spanned a quarter century, he sometimes changed his mind about issues that concerned him.

His views on the class structure and on exploitation were consistent with socialist tradition. though he later abandoned socialism in favor of a mixed economy. He opposed strikes as a means for solving labor's problems and urged political solutions through the electoral process. Although strikes might lead indirectly to settlement of "the labor question," he wrote in 1887 that judicious voting "would directly accomplish the same thing, in greatly shorter time, for less than a thousandth part of the money cost of strikes." Toward the end of his life he became even more vehement in his denunciation of strikes as a tactic for influencing distributive patterns. "Until working people learn to use power more wisely than to strike for what they want instead of voting for it," he observed, "it is as well or better that they are not in control of the country."5 Despite this hostility, he was a strong partisan of labor against capital. Responding to editorials in "predatory class journals" dealing with labor issues, he quoted the aphorism "you can't reply to a bad smell."6

Smith believed "predatory classes make wages low, rents high, commodities dear and paying work hard or impossible to get, all in manipulating the means, methods and instruments of production and exchange, for their own pecuniary benefit." He voiced objection "not to particular Jay Goulds" but to the system that made them possible. As for the clash of opposing class interests, he thought the interests of labor and capital would be identical only when "labor owns the capital." He denounced exploitation in many of his publications. "The self-styled 'better classes,' " he asserted, "steal from labor, in rent, interest and profits, and then assume to be better than those from whom they have stolen by reason of possession of the proceeds of their thefts."<sup>7</sup> He depicted the privileged class as beasts of prey:

How did the wealth originate which your mushroom millionaires acquired almost in a day? ... Why, labor, somebody's labor, not theirs, for it is manifestly impossible that they could have done it! No man, whatever his "mind," "industry," "frugality," or whatnot, ever created one million dollars worth of wealth in a year, in two years, in a lifetime. Hence these men must have got the wealth which somebody else, a good many somebody elses, created .... To a man, not creators of wealth at all, but a sort of commercial beasts of prey stretched in their lairs near the springs, waiting for unsuspecting toil to come down to drink when they will spring upon it.<sup>8</sup>

He blamed private ownership of productive property for perennial unemployment problems. "As industry is now organized, on the exclusive basis of private ownership of the means of production and of life," he wrote, "it follows necessarily that either all workpeople will be out of work part of the time or part of them will be out of work all of the time." He perceived that a majority of Americans favored a system "likely to last until killed by its own self-destroying tendencies."<sup>9</sup> He was neither the first nor the last to expect the capitalist system to destroy itself because of contradictions or flaws inherent in its structure.

Among his contemporaries, some cited the postal service as an example of socialist enterprise, while others noted instances of postal corruption as an argument against socialism. Smith rejoined to postal critics that "it would appear that the revealed rascalities are directly due to *anti*-socialist influences suffered to remain in the post office .... Under socialism, employment would be every citizen's right, without voting for anybody's rascal."<sup>10</sup>

Opposed to consumer cooperatives, he believed, as did socialists, that lower living costs would depress wages. He observed, "that wages tend to approximate the cost of living is one of the most familiar social economic phenomena," adding that "it follows that if wage-workers diminish the cost of living, their wages will fall. This is the meaning of . . . soup-bone economy: Live cheaper, and you will be able to work cheaper, and so American manufacturers . . . will be able to sell as cheap, or cheaper, than the European manufacturer." He used this argument also as a rationale to oppose Chinese immigration, which he viewed a "menace to American labor" because the "Chinese live cheap, hence work cheap."<sup>11</sup>

While he favored some aspects of socialism, he took issue with egalitarian wage proposals and attacked a socialist editor who had advocated equal wages on a time rate. "If the justice or injustice of a given wage is to be determined by a produce relation it is a manifest injustice to the more productive workman to pay alike according to time employed."<sup>12</sup> Supporting meritocratic pay scales, he clearly sided against leveling propositions.

Smith foreshadowed the later concerns of environmentalists. In an address entitled "High Life for a Few the Hindrance to the Higher Life for All," delivered in 1887 at a Providence socialist meeting, he struck a remarkably prescient note when he called for harnessing solar energy to replace fossil fuels, recycling sewage instead of dumping it into the ocean, and improving sanitary conditions to reduce mortality rates. He contended that the sun, which "radiates into space enough heat to melt 287,200,000 cubic miles of ice every second," seemed potentially useful, but he noted that if society "had conserved and developed the mass of human mind doubtless somebody would have discovered . . . a practical method of utilizing it." As for sewage, he observed that municipal debts were incurred to "construct conduits through which to pour the fertility of our soils beyond recall into the ocean, because nobody is able to tell us how to return it to the gradually starving land." The average life expectancy was less than half the proverbial three score and ten, he continued, because "ignorance of sanitary conditions is such that half the children born die under 5 years of age."

He optimistically believed that these and other problems could be solved with the creation of a societal dispensation under which the "aim of the world's most active spirits will not... be to amass wealth and spend it in vulgar display," but to achieve the "unfoldment of what is best and highest in themselves; not to get, by monopoly, by preventing service, but to give, to serve." His astute identification of problem areas and imaginative approach to possible remedies were more noteworthy than his naive faith in easy solutions.<sup>13</sup>

On crime and corrections, Smith recommended preventive measures for problems which he attributed to the defects of society. "The best prison reform," he argued, "would be abolishment of the evils which make criminals and which therefore make prisons necessary." He identified these evils as "involuntary idleness of persons who wish to work and the burden upon the workers supporting those who wish to be idle ..... In other words, rent and interest are the principal criminal makers." A decade later he more explicitly blamed the system and pointed out the hypocrisy of its beneficiaries. "Society itself makes economic conditions that breed prostitution, crime, social outcasts, and then men who have got rich from such economic conditions set up rescue missions, watch and ward societies, slum settlements, etc. Abolish the causes instead of trying to suppress effects."14

While he vigorously advocated temperance, he argued that "the masses are poor not because they drink rum but because they have to pay for the rum drunk by the wealthy." Total abstinence would not end poverty, but it was "the only safe-guard . . . from the curse of brutality and drunkenness." Drunkenness could best be abolished by eliminating conditions that drove people to drink: long work days, a hurried work pace, insecurity, and "the hope-destroying burden of supporting a multitude of idlers through rent, interest, profits, etc., etc."<sup>15</sup>

An interesting inconsistency occurred in his newspaper column when he objected to a bill introduced in 1887 for licensing and regulating medical practitioners. He evoked the laissez-faire principle arguing that if "the 'Medical Bill' were really a measure for protecting the people from quack imposition there would still be against it the objection formulated by Herbert Spencer: 'To protect people from the consequences of their own folly would be to fill the world with fools."" Why he endorsed Spencer's brand of social darwinism while despising William Graham Sumner's similar philosophy remains a mystery. He described Sumner as "manifestly bound to cling to his special social theories even if he has to sacrifice every fact of sociology to do it." Later he referred to Sumner as "professor of this and that in Yale College" and attacked his tract on "The Absurd Effort (of social reformers) to Make the World Over." Sumner, wrote Smith, thought the

world could not be changed except "by discovery and invention. There, dear professor, you gave away your whole case. What is a new concept of social conditions but a discovery? and means for making those conditions but an invention?" Not only one professor in one college, but the whole system of higher education troubled Smith, who questioned whether colleges were "among the dangers menacing free institutions . . . since the practice came in of subordinating instruction in them to the influence of rich men in exchange for endowment funds." Still, he agreed with Sumner on some points, especially when he observed that "between the trusts on the one hand and 'organized labor' on the other, liberty of the individual falls to the ground."16

Smith advocated public sector employment by the state to solve unemployment and to force private sector employers to meet state standards of wages and working conditions. Deploring the waste brought about by unemployment, he suggested the reason why "the states, as states, do not prevent this waste by giving employment . . . is because certain persons think it would be 'socialistic' to do so." Rhode Island, he proposed, should establish a State Industrial Refuge where every resident "should be given employment on application, and no questions made about it."<sup>17</sup>

Later he recommended a dual economy with both public and private employment as an alternative to socialism. "Optional state employment," he wrote, "made the legal right of every citizen, would yield every benefit that socialism promises, and without socialism's bureaucratic features and contemplated interference with personal liberty.<sup>18</sup> At the time of his death, he was secretary of the Rhode Island State Employment Assurance League, which sought support of a program to transform the state into a model employer. The program, outlined in a pamphlet printed at his home, called for the formation of local league branches that would seek the election of state legislators who favored public sector employment.

During the 1884 congressional campaign in the second district, Smith printed a brochure responding to a call for labor support of the Republican candidate. He prefaced his statement by citing his early opposition to slavery and his support for the Republican party at its inception, adding that he stood by that support "with a musket in the strife

that followed." Although the Republican party had attracted the best people in the free states because of its principles, it later experienced a transformation when "another and very different class of men entered it ... as a hyprocrite joins a church to use it." According to Smith, these men used the Republican Party as a means "to employ the machinery of government in colossal schemes for private money-making, and the aggrandizement of a class." In the twenty-four years since the party's establishment, American labor had created "a surplus more than twice as great as it created during the two hundred and fifty previous years," but was in fact "worse off than ever before, much of the time in actual distress." Smith perceived "that Republican rule ... makes a few enormously rich, and the many poor." He felt "constrained to withhold the ballot asked for." Two decades later he pronounced that workingmen who voted for Republican candidates were akin to "mice choosing the tom cat as protector and friend." He saw political process dominated by "a predatory class . . . whose role is to use the machinery and personnel of government as an instrument in their schemes of private money-making." In choosing wealthy men for public office, the American electorate foolishly expected that " 'men who have been conspicuously successful in the management of their private affairs' by their invariable habit of looking out for number one. will, in office, reverse the whole bent and action of their natures and seek only the common good."19

Skeptical about the judicial system's fairness, particularly because of the high cost of litigation, Smith wrote that the "poor man or woman who has no assurance of securing justice but by a suit at law stands little chance of getting it. Even when attainable that way, it costs more than it comes to. The law, that ought to be their shield and buckler, is the instrument of those who prey upon them." Another aphorism epitomized his disdain for lawyers. "Common sense," he wrote, "will have to rescue law from the lawyers just as it is rescuing theology from the theologians."<sup>20</sup>

Foreign policy first engaged his interest around the turn of the century. He argued that the Spanish-American War "was begun ... to put money in the pockets of certain of our predatory classes" in a way he considered analogous to the "war for the slaveholders with Mexico." He was particularly concerned about American occupation of the Philippines: "An imperialist newspaper says . . . that a petition has been received from the Philippines, signed by the natives there, asking that American troops be kept in those islands to protect Philipinos friendly to the United States from their own countrymen. The British ministry received similar petitions from America, signed by Tories here, during our Revolutionary war." Among the political figures prominent during the years that he wrote for publication, he singled out Theodore Roosevelt for severe criticism, viewing him as a vice presidential candidate whose "strenuosity itself makes him a biased partisan and unfair and unjust in nature. Such a man, in the presidential office," he wrote, "would almost certainly enmesh himself and the country in disputes leading to turmoil at home ... and war with other countries."21 Smith distrusted those who proposed to wave a big stick, notwithstanding their pretensions to speaking softly.

His concern for women in nineteenth-century American society placed him in the company of feminists. Rejecting the idea of motherhood as a duty, Smith declared that "woman owes no obligation to anyone or anything to bear children if she don't want them." He also stated editorially in The People that paying women less than men for the same work was unjust. He based his early advocacy of women's suffrage not on the premise that women shared equal capacities with men, but on the notion that "with the masculinity of man in government and law should be mingled the femininity of woman" to improve the political process. Opposed to special treatment of women in the work place, he believed that "the more woman is 'protected' by requiring her employer to provide her a seat at her work ... the harder she will find it to get an employer, and the lower her wages will go."22

Less seriously, he thought that only women guilty of "child abuse" should be subject to capital punishment:

Women who walk fast in the street when holding a child by the hand, and so keep the little thing running at its full speed, for two or three miles, occasionally stimulating its effort to "keep up" by a savage jerk or reproof, they should be hung. Women who come into a car in cold weather and open the window near you, and nearly freeze you to death while they gossip out of it... should merely be imprisoned for life. Women acting as clerks or assistants in libraries, or similar places, who receive their friends... there, and keep you waiting till they finish talking and giggling together, should get about seven years, the first six months in solitary.<sup>23</sup>

Undoubtedly intended as ironic, his comments revealed his underlying misogyny. Women service employees who kept him waiting were an enduring source of irritation and in 1904 he noted that one male waiter was "enough to put six waiter girls 'out of business,' who keep old men customers waiting for their breakfast till the girls have finished their giggle."<sup>24</sup>

An outspoken foe of child abuse, Smith's attitude toward coercive child rearing practices perhaps reflected memories as the youngest of thirteen children. He decried comedians' jokes about child-beating and thought the only people who deserved to be whipped were those who advocated whipping as punishment. He once applauded authorities in Providence for rescuing "six children from a brutal parent, to whom God had committed them." In his last publication he berated scriptural justification for corporal punishment: "The bible, with its ignorant and brutal 'spare the rod and spoil the child,' makes a hell for childhood in many a household."<sup>25</sup>

Smith's earliest surviving publication, *Is the Universe Governed by a Devil?* (1878), reveals strong secularist influence in the shaping of his thought. Enumerating the evils of the world in the pamphlet, Smith conceived "that an almighty Devil might, perhaps, get up a world on some such principles as these, but a benevolent God, never." The universe, he wrote, "is NOT governed by a devil — not governed at all." Nor did he equivocate labeling his posture on supernatural belief:

Atheism does not "discharge life of meaning;" it rather invests life with its highest significance, as if Gods ourselves. While it is believed there is a God, somebody will always be pretending to know all about him, — making respectability, civil privileges, life itself, depend on belief (real or simulated), of the fables or absurdities they may be pleased to invent regarding him .... Without the support afforded them by the delusive consolations of religion . . . the worst evils which afflict humanity could not exist a year. Deprived of the hope of compensation for evil, in a God-arranged hereafter, men would insist that this life be made worth having by arresting abuses. Thought, freed from the nightmare of superstition, would waste no more time trying to find out "purpose" where there is no purposer .... Men would look back upon present views of evil as something to be transmuted into good, by the alchemy of a God, much as we now do upon the supineness of an age which deemed it blasphemous to do anything to stop pestilence other than to mark a sign of the cross . . . upon the street door . . . . Instead of those words of delusion. "In God we trust," let us rather write upon our standards these. Self Reliance! Courage! Forward! and advance to the achievement of a felicity in this life transcending the wildest dreams of the devotees' impossible heavens!26

Resources expended on organized religion, in his view, could be put to more constructive use. "If as much money was spent in Providence, yearly, in teaching true economics, as it costs to maintain one first-class church, it would do more for social betterment than all the churches put together." He thought "the model pastor carefully picks his way over or around the favorite sins of the pursepowerful members of his flock" and he would have "more confidence in Rev. Poundtext's exposition of my duty and relation to God if he was not so often wide of the mark respecting the duty of man to man."<sup>27</sup>

Smith dismissed the widely accepted theological belief in virgin birth because it seemed preposterous "in an age of science, and of acquaintance with rational rules of evidence." Questioning the tenets of original sin and anti-semitism in one sentence, he asserted that "to hold mankind guilty of a sin by Adam is an absurdity of the same kind as the ignorant rabble holding Jews in general guilty of the crucifixion." Religious opposition to theories of evolution, he argued, attempted to capitalize on Darwin's failure to "account for the origin of life. No, he had the modesty and good sense not to adopt the theological habit of attempting to dogmatise about things nobody knows anything about." Organized religion was a "great engine for compelling men to be hypocrites - to wear a cloak over opinions and feelings of which

170 PRICE . . . . 15 CENTS. . ATHEISM does not "discharge life of meaning;" it rather invests life with its highest significance, as if Gods ourselves. -p. 13, s the Universe Governed by a Devil ? BY JOHN FRANCIS SMITH. OAK LAWN, R. L : HOME PUBLISHING COMPANY. 1878. Mailed on receipt of Price by the Publishers.

Courtesy Brown University Library

John Francis Smith's earliest surviving publication (1878).

it has taught the multitude to be intolerant. At the same time, church property is exempted from taxation 'because the church is so useful.' "28

Just before his death, he concurred with the Providence school superintendent's desire to restore bible reading in public schools. Apparently giving no thought to separation of church and state, he suggested that:

Many who are hostile to the claims of the bible, that it is a revelation of the will of a divine being, would be glad to have the bible in the schools. To have it there would be an effective way to bring the book into disrepute. It might seem that it cannot be unknown to [the school superintendent]... that it is common practice in schools where the bible is used, for children to pass the book from one to another in order to exhibit passages in it which Mr. Small himself would not approve of having read, at least aloud . . . . Perhaps Mr. Small contemplates use in the schools only of an expurgated edition of the bible. In that case it might become embarrassing to answer ... such searching questions as childhood is prone to ask: as, for example, whether portions of "the word of God" are too indecent to be read.29

Four months after this tongue-in-cheek support of bible reading in classrooms, two clergymen presided over Smith's funeral. Both of the clergymen who officiated at the funeral had been associates of Smith in the Providence Radical Club. The Reverend Clay MacCauley, who conducted the service, had returned in 1902 from Japan to succeed Anna Garlin Spencer as minister of the Bell Street Chapel, where "all shades of opinion, from the most 'orthodox' Christian to the most pronounced 'atheist' " were equally welcome. He was assisted by the Reverend Willard C. Selleck, pastor of the Church of the Mediator (Universalist). The Radical Club also provided a link to posterity. One of Smith's other fellow members, Harry Lyman Koopman, the librarian of Brown University, had in 1902 obtained copies of many of Smith's pamphlets for deposit in the library.30

Five months after burial, John Francis Smith was eulogized in a memorial address at the Radical Club. Edwin C. Pierce praised the departed brother as a man of unusual intellectual ability, possessed of "rare gifts of forceful, persuasive, even captivating oratory ...," adding that "I call our brother a religiously moral man, regardless of any peculiar economic or political opinions he may have held." Agreeing with those who had found Smith a source of satisfaction, Pierce praised him "because he cherished the ideal of a better state of human society, because under whatever discouragement, whatever pressure of adverse circumstances, he did not leave the ranks but stood to his colors."<sup>31</sup>

The surviving published works of John Francis Smith are a kaleidoscopic mixture of socialist, populist, libertarian and secularist ideas derived from the culture of the time. A man who held a great variety of heterodox opinions, he might have lived for seventy-one years without leaving a trace of his thought, except for the fact that he had a printing press and edited a newspaper. The tools of his trade provided the means for avoiding the obscurity that is most men's fate. The output of his pen and press as well as those facets of his biography that have proved to be retrievable reveal him to have been a man eminently worth remembering.

His life and thought are memorable notwithstanding the elusiveness of accurate assessment of his direct influence on his contemporaries. No surviving records reveal the circulation of his pamphlets and newsletters. Largely ignored by adversaries, even his eulogist characterized Smith's economic and political views as peculiar. Nevertheless, as editor and frequent contributor to the short-lived Knights of Labor newspaper, The People, which served for a time as official voice of the Rhode Island Central Labor Union, Smith certainly influenced the early development of Rhode Island trade unions. That he was chosen to preside over the meeting addressed by Eleanor Marx in 1886 indicates his high esteem among Central Labor Union leaders.

In a society where dissent enjoys greater constitutional protection than in any other, this dissident of an earlier age serves as a reminder not only of long-standing critiques but of the accomodation of critics. Rediscovery of his writings discloses the continuity of social concerns. Public sector employment programs acquired significance during the depression of the 1930s, although not to the extent that Smith had proposed. Energy conservation and environmental protection are current issues that Smith had earlier identified, even if he was overly sanguine about their solutions. Similarly, Smith wrote about child abuse and subordination of women, issues of current public concern. John Francis Smith's significance is demonstrated by the extent to which he addressed issues in the last quarter of the nineteenth century that still concern us in the last quarter of the twentieth.

- 1 The People, Providence, Oct. 30, 1886.
- 2 Sources for biographical data include an obituary, Providence Journal, May 20, 1904, and twenty-two pages of Civil War military and pension records from the Navy and Old Army Branch, Military Archives Division, National Archives and Records Service (GSA), copies of which have been deposited in the RIHS Library.
- 3 Record of Service of Connecticut Men in the Army and Navy of the United States During the War of the Rebellion (Hartford, 1889), 549.
- 4 The People, Dec. 5, 1885.
- 5 Ibid., Feb. 12, 1887; John Francis Smith, Daybook and Ledger, (Oak Lawn, 1900-1904), 126, copy in Rider Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University.
- 6 The People, Dec. 25, 1886.
- 7 John Francis Smith, Chips (Oak Lawn, 1886), 2, copy in Rider Collection; The People, Sept. 18, 1886.
- 8 John Francis Smith, Land and Labor (Providence, 1882), 8, copy in RIHS Library.
- 9 Daybook and Ledger, 7.
- 10 Ibid., 45.
- 11 The People, Jan. 8, 1887.

- 12 Daybook and Ledger, 146.
- 13 The People, July 30, 1887.
- 14 John Francis Smith, Free Thoughts (Oak Lawn, 1890), 19, copy in Rider Collection; Daybook and Ledger, 46.
- 15 The People, June 26, 1887, July 23, 1887.
- 16 Ibid., Mar. 5, 1887; Free Thoughts, 13; Daybook and Ledger, 7, 80, 127.
- 17 Free Thoughts, 16.
- 18 Daybook and Ledger, 131.
- 19 John Francis Smith, A Public Letter (Oak Lawn, Oct. 21, 1884), copy in Rider Collection; Daybook and Ledger, 145; Free Thoughts, 17.
- 20 The People, July 2, 1887; Free Thoughts, 16.
- 21 Daybook and Ledger, 25, 78.
- 22 The People, Sept. 10, 1887, Aug. 27, 1887; Chips, 6; Free Thoughts, 24.
- 23 The People, Feb. 12, 1887.
- 24 Daybook and Ledger, 148.
- 25 Free Thoughts, 15; Daybook and Ledger, 148.
- 26 John Francis Smith, Is the Universe Governed by a Devil? (Oak Lawn, 1878), 13-14.
- 27 Daybook and Ledger, 44; The People, Feb. 12, 1887; Free Thoughts, 15.
- 28 Daybook and Ledger, 118, 134, 139; Chips, 7.
- 29 Daybook and Ledger, 145.
- 30 Providence Radical Club, List of Members, 1903, RIHS Library; Anna Garlin Spencer, The History of the Bell Street Chapel Movement (Providence, 1903), 8.
- 31 Edwin C. Pierce, John Francis Smith Memorial Address at Radical Club (Providence, n.d.).

## From the Collections



Photo by Morgan Rockhill

These historic brass and woodwind instruments were used by the American Brass Band of Providence, a group organized in 1837. Several of the instruments in the Society's collection were made around 1850 by Thomas D. Paine, a renowned craftsman from Woonsocket.

"Strike Up the Band," an exhibit celebrating the American Brass Band and its present-day revival, will be on view at the Gallery of the John Brown House, 52 Power Street, Providence, September 9, 1979 to March 1980.

## A Gift for the Future

The Board of Trustees of the Rhode Island Historical Society would like you to consider making the Society a beneficiary when you are preparing your will. Such a bequest would help insure the Society's continuing efforts to collect, preserve, protect and interpret Rhode Island's unique heritage. A bequest to the Society is truly a gift to future generations of Rhode Islanders so that they may share in the Society's services and programs.

Should you desire to include the Society as a beneficiary of an unrestricted bequest when preparing your will, the following wording is suggested:

I give and bequeath to The Rhode Island Historical Society in Providence in the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations,......dollars (\$), for its general uses and purposes.

The Director of the Society will be happy to discuss this matter with you. Gifts to the Society are deductible from federal estate and income taxes.

The Rhode Island Historical Society 52 Power Street Providence, Rhode Island 02906 (401) 331-8575

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