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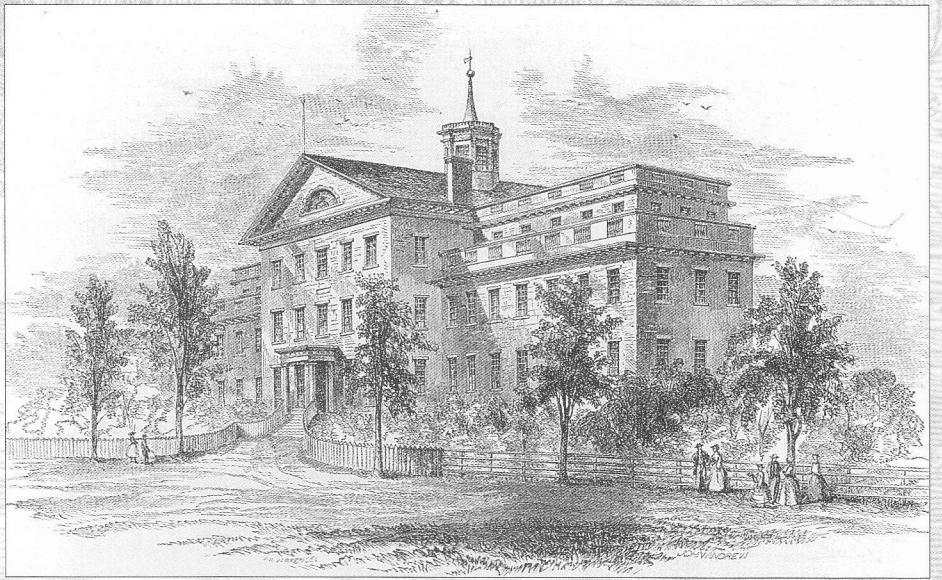
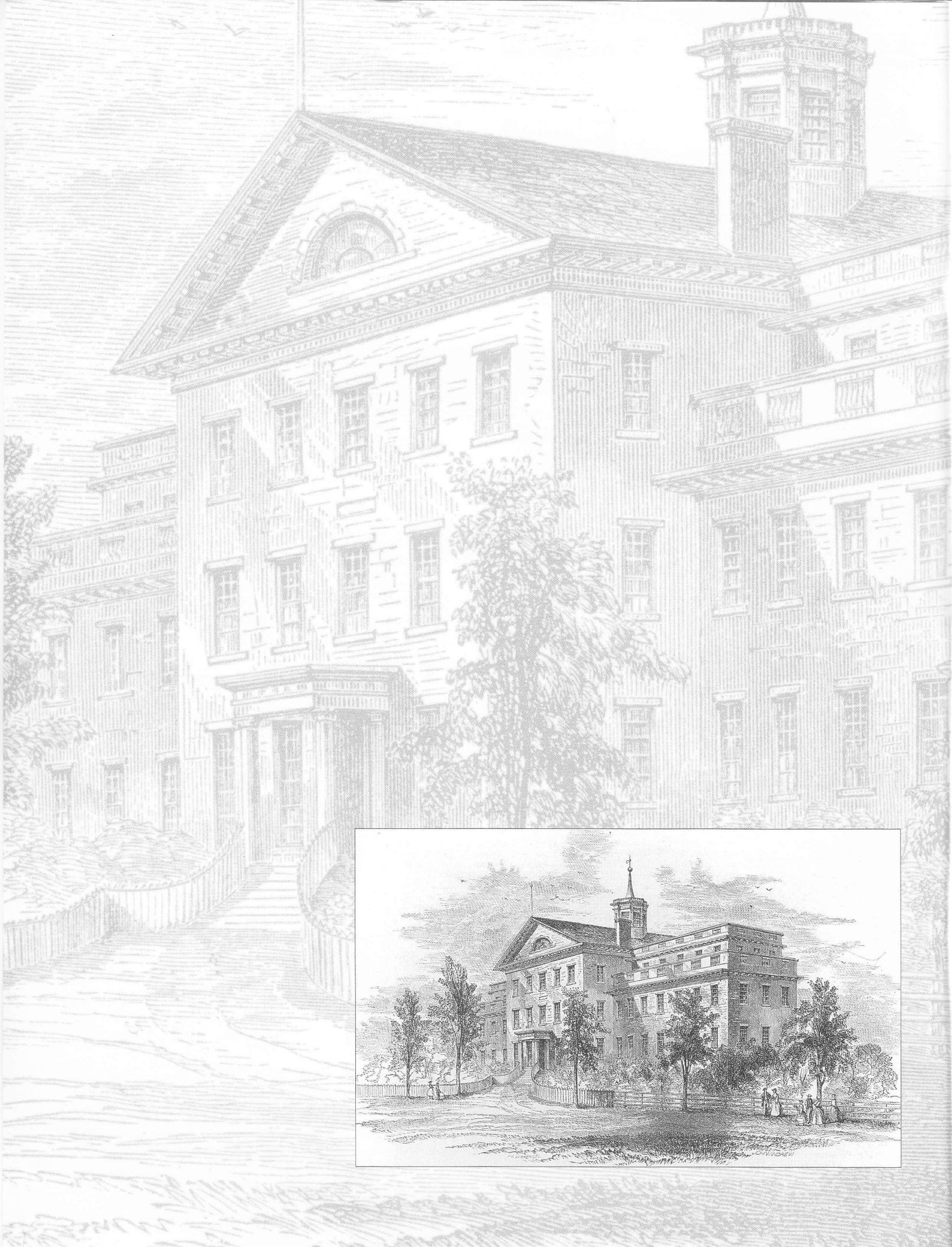
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The Problem of Poverty: Public Relief and Reform in Postbellum Providence

ANDREW MORRIS

“The greatest deficiency in our mode of charity,” said Providence mayor Jabez C. Knight in his annual address of 1859, “is, that we do not furnish regular labor for such as are able, but not anxious to work.”¹ George W. Wightman, who had just submitted his first report as the city’s overseer of the poor, could not have agreed more. On the eve of the Civil War, Providence was enjoying a slight economic upsurge after several sluggish years, and it had seen the amount it was spending on poverty relief drop accordingly. But city officials were troubled by a continuing problem: how to provide direct aid to the needy without encouraging perpetual dependency. Dealing with this problem in the years after the Civil War, when the relief rolls had grown again, Wightman and the city government turned to labor as a test to determine whether a person truly deserved aid: the truly needy, they believed, would be willing to exchange work for relief, while drifters and freeloaders would not. Labor thus came to be the centerpiece in the crazy quilt of Providence institutions designed either to deter or to succor the needy. At a time when many cities were eliminating direct relief outright, the labor test was seen as a progressive solution, a middle way between encouraging mendicancy and refusing aid to those deserving temporary relief.

Providence was similar to other American cities in its attitude toward the care of its poor. Ambiguity and mixed intentions characterized American poor relief from earliest times. As Michael Katz emphasizes in his history of welfare in America, “Decent care for the poor conflicted with the objective of deterring the poor from asking for relief and making them work hard for low wages. Indeed, of all [the] contradictions, the most glaring and debilitating has been the incompatibility of policies which simultaneously preach compassion and deterrence.”² In its early stages American policy leaned heavily toward the side of deterrence. Widespread reliance on English poor laws as models for poverty statutes supported the conception of poverty, or “pauperism,” as a criminal condition. In Rhode Island, observes Margaret Creech in her study of the state’s poverty statutes, the blurring of the lines between compassion and deterrence “indicated the inheritance of the seventeenth century English idea of the poor law as preventing or stopping begging and not as a means of formulating a constructive social program.”³ Rhode Island’s statutes owed much to such laws; the initial poverty statute of the colony merely referred to “43 Elizabeth,” taking the entire text of England’s law as its own. A reluctance to assume responsibility for the poor was the common thread in relief practice both in Rhode Island and throughout America in the early nineteenth century.

The harsh policies administered early in the 1800s reflected the widespread negative attitude toward the poor. As in many states, towns in Rhode Island were directly responsible for their resident poor; the state had more or less stopped providing any direct aid to the towns for poor support by 1800.⁴ Towns had several methods of dealing with the impoverished. One method was to evade responsibility by “warning out” of town any nonresidents who might become “chargeable” to the town if they fell into poverty, or, if

Dexter Asylum was Providence’s poorhouse for nearly a century. Engraving, 1830. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8993).

Andrew Morris graduated from Brown University in 1991 and is currently a graduate student in history at the University of Virginia. This article grew out of an undergraduate history seminar at Brown led by James Patterson, whom the author would like to thank for his encouragement and criticism. He also wishes to express his appreciation for the support of Naomi Lamoreaux, Oliver Zunz, and Brian Balogh, and especially for the assistance of Providence city archivist Carole Pace and the staff of the Rhode Island Historical Society Library.

they had become impoverished already, by sending them back to their legal place of residence. Substantial public funds were spent on the “removal of paupers” throughout the country; such a category would remain a line item in Providence’s accounts of expenses until the 1890s.⁵ The key question was always whether a poor person had “settlement”—i.e., residency—in a town, a condition that entitled him to relief. Rhode Island had a particularly stringent residency law, one whose main provision granted residency only after five successive years of paying taxes on \$200 worth of property, a formidable requirement for many throughout the nineteenth century. Thus the state found itself with large numbers of nonresident poor, and deciding questions of settlement constituted a major part of poor-law administration. As Creech notes, neither concern for the individual nor thoughts of rehabilitation influenced such policy, which was instead driven by “an interest in removing all persons without settlement who were or might become destitute, no matter how long they might have lived in a given town.”⁶



The poor farm in Cumberland, 1903. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8892).

The Bristol poor farm, 1903. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8990).



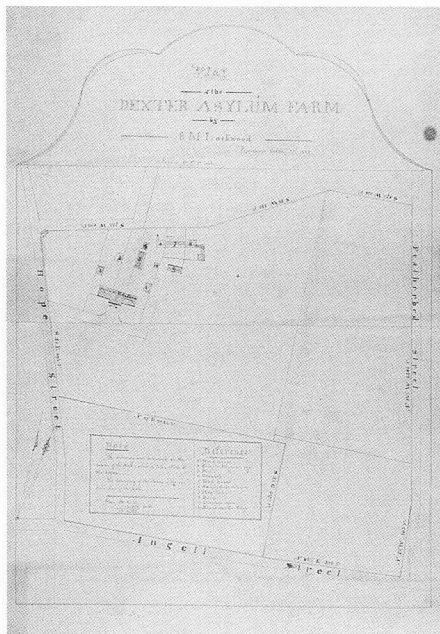
Rhode Island also shared with the nation various ways of dealing with the “indoor poor,” those whom a town chose to commit to institutional care. Some of these people were mentally unstable, but most were merely poor. A survey in 1850 revealed that fifteen Rhode Island towns spent an annual average of \$51.50 on each poor person maintained in a town poor-house, where those who needed long-term public support were sent until they could lift themselves out of destitution. The sixteen other towns in the state chose one of two methods of dealing with the indoor poor: they either contracted with a private individual for care of the poor as a group, or they “vendued” the poor, auctioning off the responsibility of caring for an individual to the lowest bidder, a slightly cheaper alternative at \$45.60 per capita.⁷ It was a system rife with abuses; contemporary reports related horrific examples, particularly of the latter practice, and called for humanitarian reforms

by eliminating the practice of venduing and decreasing the state's dependence on the poorhouse system.

The shape of poor relief in postbellum Providence mirrored many of these developments. Prior to the war Providence's poorhouse, the Dexter Asylum, had represented the focus of systematic relief in the city. Established by the will of Ebenezer Knight Dexter in 1824, the asylum was supported by income from the massive donation of real estate that was put into trust "to ameliorate the conditions of the poor, and to contribute to their comfort and relief."⁸ Providence moved its local destitute from its workhouse to the asylum in 1828 and ordered that residents of the city who subsequently fell into poverty would, "with as little delay as possible," be "removed from the various places where they now or hereafter may live . . . and placed in said Asylum." Life at the asylum centered on hard work, with severe rules for the punishment of those who tried to avoid their duties. Such rigorous living conditions were intended to discourage any who would too readily seek food and shelter at the city's expense.⁹

Dexter Asylum was Providence's official poorhouse through the early twentieth century. Because of Dexter's bequest, support of the resident poor actually cost the city nearly nothing. But Dexter's generosity was limited to those who qualified as Providence residents; it did not extend to those who had not gained residence in the city. In 1909 Mary Conyngton, a progressive reformer, noted that the asylum "is [Providence's] only institution for public indoor relief, and paradoxically enough, it is not maintained by the city, and owing to the limitations on admission, can hardly be public."¹⁰ For the nonresident poor, the alternative to the asylum was either removal to their town of origin or committal to the state workhouse. Like the Dexter Asylum—whose inmates Conyngton described as "the feeble-minded, the mildly insane, the aged and respectable poor, consumptives, men and women worn out by intemperance or vice, cripples, invalids and victims of temporary misfortune"¹¹—the state workhouse served a relatively undifferentiated population of the poor. Both the asylum and the workhouse faced the problem of trying to distinguish the truly helpless from those who could perform some labor to help support themselves.

The city was able to make some very rough distinctions in its poor population. Of the insane poor for whom the city provided indoor relief during the postbellum years, those considered curable were sent to Butler Hospital in Providence; those considered incurable were sent (through 1870) to the insane asylum in Brattleboro, Vermont. Though both were private institutions, they performed an indispensable function in the care of



"Plat of the Dexter Asylum Farm." Pencil on tracing paper, 1842. RIHS Collection (RH X3 8986).

Date of Admission	Name of Person Admitted	Age	Trade or Occupation	Where Sent	Employment	Discharge	Number of Days	Remarks
						Discharge		
						Discharge		
1852								
Jan 20	Allen Knight	25	Servant	Home	on the house	Jan 25	10	Admitted from Butler Hospital, Vermont. Discharged
"	Amelia Williams	30	"	"	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged
"	Peter Williams	41	"	"	at school	Feb 22	33	Discharged
" 26	Eugene Dexter	40	"	"	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged
" 29	Daniel Devereux	30	Solvent	Home	on the farm	Jan 25	10	Discharged
Jan 31	Augusta Salbery	32	"	Home	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged
" 3	William Richardson	70	Mariner	"	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged
"	Henry Hattell	75	Mariner	"	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged
" 7	James Wright	33	Mariner	"	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged
" 8	David Salbery	27	Jeweler	"	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged
" 9	Mary Bell	22	Servant	"	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged
"	Daniel Patten	23	Mariner	"	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged
" 10	Amasa Rogers	45	Mariner	"	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged
" 11	Margaret Todd	23	Servant	"	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged
"	Smith Robinson	32	Mariner	"	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged
" 14	Elizabeth Dolan	3	"	"	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged
"	Margaret Early	25	Servant	"	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged
"	Bridget Early	3	"	"	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged
" 18	Lydia Patten	3	"	"	"	Jan 25	10	Discharged

A page from Dexter Asylum's register of inmates, 1852. RIHS Collection (RH X3 8995).

the "public" poor. The records of Butler Hospital reflect the significant presence of the impoverished there. Responding to a popular belief that the hospital was immoderately wealthy, its trustees claimed that that was a perception "so clearly wrong as it can be showed to be, if we stop to consider what a large proportion of its patients are unable to reimburse the institution for what has been expended in their care."¹² Butler Hospital attempted to be selective in its admissions policy for the poor, accepting those who "were likely to be materially benefitted by treatment" and those whose "previous condition of life has been such that they would inevitably suffer from the associations inevitable at an institution supported at public charge"; that is, it wished to admit poor people who were potentially curable and respectable.¹³ Typically, however, the hospital received a heterogenous selection of the poor.

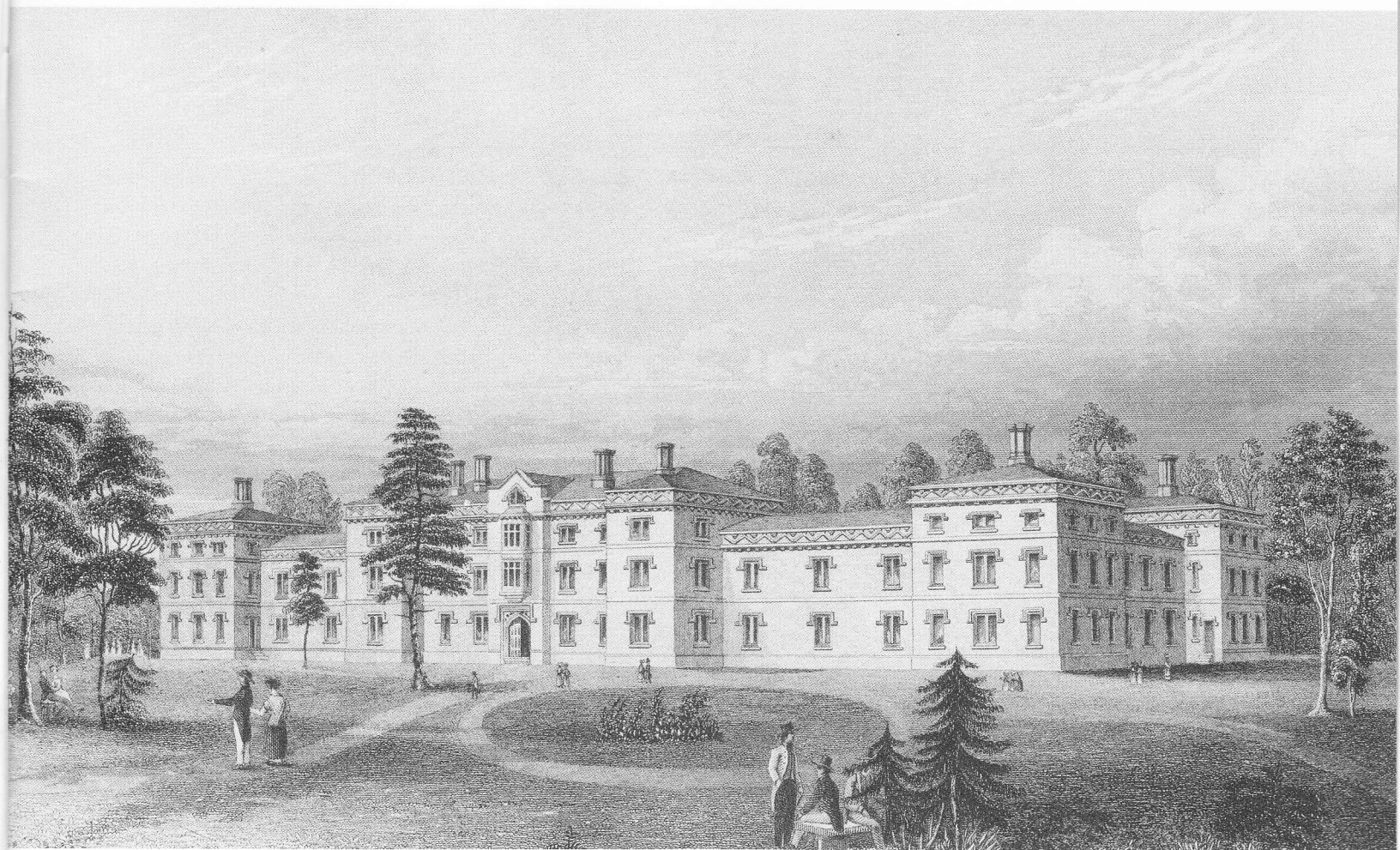
The number of inmates remained relatively steady at each institution. Dexter Asylum averaged 103 inmates a year between 1872 and 1899; Butler Hospital had an average population of 12 city inmates a year between 1864 and 1884; the number of insane poor from Providence averaged 17 at the Brattleboro asylum between 1864 and 1870 and 21 at the newly opened state asylum in Cranston between 1871 and 1884, with the number increasing over time, especially at the state asylum, an increase probably due more to the city's population increase than to any financial decision to accommodate more such inmates.¹⁴ The significance of financial considerations in determining the city's attitude toward indoor relief is difficult to assess. The comparison of costs at the institutions is complicated, since state and local monies, as well as private funds, were spent in varying proportions to defray those costs.¹⁵ The picture of indoor care is clouded even more by a continuing failure to define the function even of these specialized institutions; at the state level, reported the newly formed Board of State Charities and Corrections in 1870, "our Insane Asylum is wholly for paupers, and a considerable number of those sent to the workhouse are more properly paupers than convicts."¹⁶ As Katz notes, the nation's indoor poor were in fact commonly cared for at a variety of institutions, many not specifically credited to support the poor but essentially carrying out that function nonetheless.¹⁷

The decreasing significance of the indoor poor as a public policy question for the city of Providence was hastened by the state government. Following the trend of many state governments toward centralizing the facilities under their charge, in 1874 Rhode Island established an almshouse at which the nonresident poor would be kept at the state's expense.¹⁸ In 1884 the state also assumed all costs of the insane poor of the towns, thus further decreasing the line-item costs of indoor support significantly, though undoubtedly it passed these costs on to the towns through other means.¹⁹ Through the state and the Dexter Donation, by 1884 Providence was totally relieved of the cost of supporting the indoor poor.

The distinctions between public and private relief were often hazy,²⁰ as they were at Butler Hospital, and an examination of Providence's public efforts must take private relief into account as well. In Providence, as elsewhere, religious organizations accounted for a sizable portion of relief, both institutional and "outdoor," through direct grants of food, fuel, money, and other goods. The St. Vincent de Paul Society, a Catholic relief organization, was one of Providence's four major citywide charities during the late nineteenth century, along with the Women's City Missionary Society, which originated in the Protestant churches of the city, the Charitable Fuel Society, and the Irrepressible Society, another women's group, which later merged with the Junior League.²¹ George Wightman, who supervised Providence's public efforts for two decades after the Civil War, saw a natural affinity between private and public aid. Reporting on a public Charity Building established in 1878, he noted that one of its functions was to provide

space for meeting with agents of private charity; "In this way, through consultations from time to time, charity has been systematized and efforts made unitary."²²

Neither indoor relief nor private charity solved the problems of poverty in Providence. Reformers, as well as municipal and state authorities across the country, began to realize the inefficacy of the poorhouse and other indoor relief as a general solution to poverty.²³ One response was the increased specialization of institutional care, as evidenced by the segregation of the insane poor into Butler Hospital and the state asylum. But the most significant challenge came from the poor who sought aid through the limited outlets of



Butler Hospital for the Insane. Engraving, 1850.
RIHS Collection (RHi X3 98).

"outdoor" relief, the direct financial assistance provided by cities and towns. Though private charities often tried to shift expectations for such aid away from the public sector, the city was the source to which many of the poor turned first and most often for relief. Even despite the later efforts of the private Providence Society for Organizing Charity, formed in 1892 to systematize relief efforts and shift responsibility for poor relief to the private sector, the public coffers continued to supply most of the money for relief of the poor.²⁴

In postbellum Providence, as throughout the nation, debate over poverty spending focused on outdoor relief. As it became increasingly apparent that almshouses could not support the numbers of people in need of short-term assistance, outdoor relief became the overseer of the poor's primary expense.²⁵ This trend was nationwide. "Poorhouses

never could find useful work for their inmates or offer the sick, old, and helpless, not to mention the able-bodied unemployed, much more than a roof and an escape from starvation," Katz notes. "Nor did they reduce pauperism or cut the cost of poor relief. In fact, despite the diffusion of poorhouses, the volume of outdoor relief continued to grow."²⁶ With the sharp surge in outdoor relief that followed the depression of the mid-1870s, the problem demanded action. In Providence the combination of monetary aid and the provision of goods and services such as firewood, clothing, and doctor's visits, all considered outdoor relief, had cost \$7,515 in 1870; by 1875 it had jumped to \$14,024, and in 1877 it reached \$19,247, with the sharpest rise coming in direct financial support.²⁷ As administrators and reformers in Providence confronted these figures, they sought different methods for distributing relief, methods that would allow aid to be granted only to the deserving and that would avoid the specter of producing a dependent class of relief recipients.

The structure and administration of relief in Providence were colored by a fear of creating a pauper class. As Mayor Thomas Doyle wondered in his address to the city on the eve of reform of outdoor relief in 1878, "To what degree, and for how long a period, shall relief be afforded to a person or family outside of the institution supported by the town or state as a pauper asylum? Shall hereditary pauperism be encouraged and promoted either by private or public aid, and shall paupers be pensioned from the public treasury?"²⁸ By giving the city's aldermen the right to determine the "mode and extent" in which relief would be provided, the state legislature had earlier granted Providence a degree of latitude in wrestling with this question.²⁹ In 1854 the aldermen determined the levels of relief that would remain in effect until the early 1870s: resident poor were to be allowed no more than ten dollars of goods per person or per family a year, with an extra ten dollars available upon the mayor's approval; transient poor could be relieved with a one-time order for goods of up to a dollar, extendable to five dollars on order of the mayor. Direct cash relief had to be approved by the aldermen, and the city treasurer would pay cash orders only for specific articles.³⁰

In the 1860s most orders for relief were issued by the aldermen and mayor. However, as overseer of the poor, Wightman had the job of taking the administration duties of poor relief off their hands, and he gradually gained responsibility for most of the city's poor-relief appropriation and exercised practical control over its distribution. With political officials having less time to evaluate the worthiness or need of applicants in the growing city, in 1872 they modified the 1854 "Ordinance Prescribing the Mode of Temporary Relief to Poor Persons" to shift the day-to-day responsibility of granting aid from the mayor and aldermen to the overseer of the poor, while also liberalizing the amount of money at his disposal. At the same time, authority to select the overseer, formerly chosen by popular election, was given to the city council, a change that shielded Wightman from direct popular accountability.³¹

Wightman evidently struck an acceptable balance between the council's fiscal concerns and his own somewhat more generous impulses, for he served as overseer for thirty-two years (a mark that would be surpassed by the thirty-four-year tenure of his successor, Matthew Cummings).³² Available biographical sketches suggest that Wightman was a committed public servant. Born in Warwick in 1821, the son of a long-established Rhode Island family, he moved to Providence in 1842, where a brother was a jewelry manufacturer. After trying his hand in the trades (the *Providence Directory* listed him as a printer in 1847), by 1850 he found his vocation in public service, working first as an "engineer" in the state prison and then as a member of the Old Watch, Providence's first organized police force.³³ Wightman's experience as a policeman may well have given him an increased appreciation of the struggles of the honest poor. The overlap between

police work and poverty work—in both their punitive and sympathetic aspects—was underscored not only by the practice of lodging transients in the police station but also by the location of Wightman's office there through the 1870s.³⁴

In his annual reports during the 1860s, Wightman lobbied forcefully for an increase in the amount of aid that he could grant to the poor. An allocation of one dollar per person for the nonresident poor, he argued, was unreasonable; "The citizens of Providence are known for their liberality, ever ready to contribute to every good work, and the Overseer should be vested with authority somewhat in proportion to the liberality of the people," he declared in his 1864 report.³⁵ Four years later, frustrated by the aldermen's inactivity on this issue, he asserted that "the ordinance in relation to the relief of the out-door poor needs an entire revision. . . . This provision was formed for a state of things far different from that now existing."³⁶ The aldermen finally granted an increase in 1872, allowing up to ten dollars a month for the resident poor and ten dollars a year for transients.³⁷ Wightman was satisfied with this change, and he now turned his attention to the way poor relief was distributed.

Wightman was one of many across the country who were dealing with such issues, and some did so with far more strident rhetoric and forceful agendas. Upper-class activists in many urban areas brought about significant changes in outdoor relief, sometimes even abolishing it altogether. In Brooklyn, reformer Seth Low led an attack on outdoor relief through that city's Board of Supervisors, which controlled the distribution of money to the commissioners of the poor. The reformers, mostly wealthy Republicans, contended that the city's outdoor relief had led Brooklyn to be dubbed a "pauper's paradise," although in reality poor families there were allowed at most a dollar's worth of food or fuel for a week, substantially less than indigent families in Providence could receive after 1872.³⁸ The Brooklyn activists used their political clout and their citation of relief statistics (which Katz claims were inaccurate) to effect a phasing out of direct aid between 1876 and 1877. The funds to the commissioners of the poor were eliminated, and the responsibility for any direct assistance to the poor was left to private philanthropies, whose conditions for aid were usually more stringent and intrusive.³⁹ The radical action taken in Brooklyn was aimed at two problems that haunted outdoor relief everywhere: the system's potential for abuse by the "unworthy"—the lazy and able-bodied—and its potential for creating dependency in those who had a genuine need of aid. Other cities and towns across the nation acted on similar impulses. In Rhode Island, by 1892 outdoor relief was no longer provided by South Kingstown, Scituate, Tiverton, Cranston, or, most notably, Newport, which in 1873 had supplied 267 people with \$9,064.⁴⁰

The harsh extreme of abolishing outdoor relief was avoided in Providence. Wightman himself had a commitment to some form of direct aid to the needy; "The door of our city treasury should be of easy access to our worthy and virtuous poor," he declared in 1864, but wary of potential abuse, he added that "it is this class we desire to reach, not the vagrants who infest all our large cities, going about from door to door with their stereotyped tales of destitution."⁴¹ The distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor was reflected when the city established a "Relief Administration" in 1862 to aid the families of soldiers enlisted or drafted into the Union army, as well as families of veterans and casualties. The \$100,000 fund was administered separately from the city's general relief fund, and it was extended after the war.⁴² But even with poor veterans provided for to some degree, Wightman still found the system straining under the claims of the deserving:

During this past winter I have assisted seventy-eight families, who, from various causes, could not be assisted by the Relief Administration, and who had no legal claim upon this office, and yet they were here among us, and had it not been for the war, the most of them would have taken

care of themselves. While I aim to judiciously and economically manage the affairs of this office, still I cannot withhold aid from this class, and only regret that my authority is so limited.⁴³

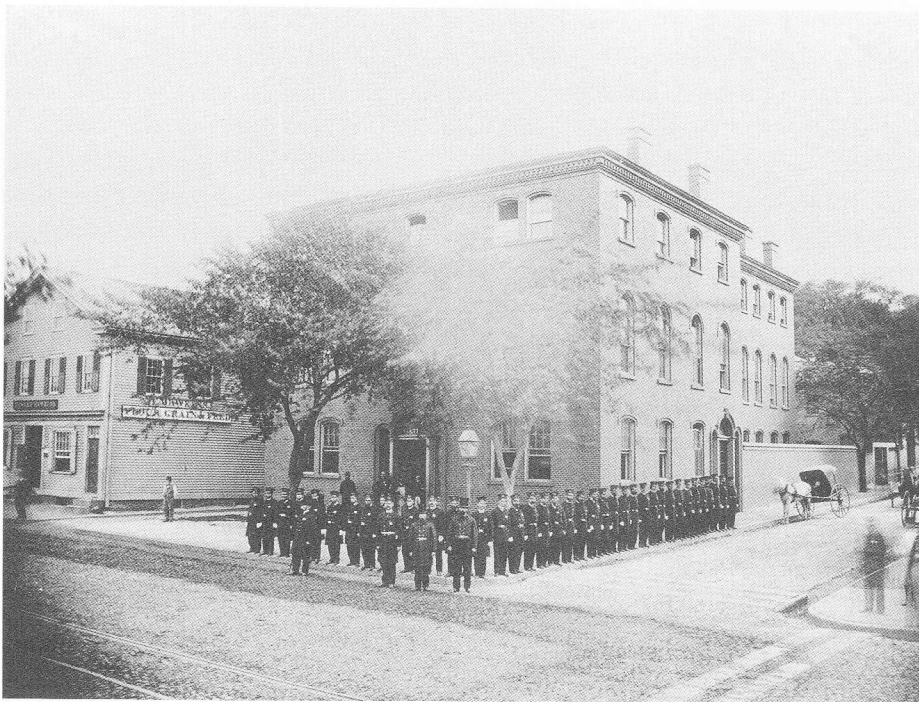
Wightman acknowledged the advantage, for the deserving poor, of outdoor relief over commitment to a poorhouse: "No frugal and industrious widow, with a family of children, should be compelled to go to an Alms House when the small sum of one or two dollars per week, a little fuel, and a little assistance from friends, will carry them safe through a winter."⁴⁴ Wightman and other welfare administrators realized, as Katz puts it, that "outdoor relief's great virtue was simple: it prevented starvation," but they also realized that there was a need for discrimination in distributing relief: "The means [welfare administrators] advocated, aside from their own knowledge of who in the community truly deserved help, was the work test."⁴⁵

The imposition of a work test for outdoor relief in Providence was broached in Wightman's report for 1877. The report opened with gloomy news regarding the economy and his department: "The continued depression of business has caused a large expenditure for the year, and the indications are that business is not speedily to revive."⁴⁶ The news had been the same since 1873, when the depression had struck Providence, but the persistence of the depression, and the city's burgeoning relief expenditures, convinced Wightman of the need to reevaluate the situation. According to his calculations, the city's expenditures for outdoor relief for the year were \$26,452 for 5,535 people, or \$4.77

per capita; with other forms of relief added in, the figure was roughly \$5.07 per capita. This was slightly less than the amount in 1873, but relief was being provided to twice as many people. The number of transients seeking temporary lodging in the Central Police Station had climbed to 11,022 during 1877, up from 4,383 in 1870.⁴⁷ The city had been so overwhelmed by out-of-work laborers that in 1876 and 1877 the city council had authorized thousands of dollars to employ workers for street-grading projects, with the eligibility for this work determined by Wightman.⁴⁸ In Wightman's eyes, things were at a crisis point.

Wightman's report for 1877 filled ten pages of small type, rather than the relatively terse three or four pages of preceding years. In it Wightman made a variety of suggestions for reform. These included

a proposal that his office be moved to a building where he could better handle the number of cases coming before him: "All the business has to be done at one small window, and as there is great diversity in the applications, covering a variety of subjects, confusion necessarily ensues." In response to the growing number of women seeking lodging at the police station, he recommended that "a bureau of aid to destitute and friendless women should be established in connection with this office." Citing the example of Boston in establishing a home for such needy women, he claimed that through the creation of a similar facility in Providence "a pressing necessity would be met and a door opened for a work of good."⁴⁹



Central Police Station, Providence, circa 1865. RIHS Collection (RH X3 906).

Wightman next turned his attention to the "Difficulties of the Pauper Question." Rather than holding the poor solely responsible for their condition, he suggested that "there is a wrong somewhere, an element of weakness in our social economy, which we should study to reach and correct." But a paragraph later he presented a contradictory explanation: "The majority of dependents, however, . . . become so through evil habits, either shiftlessness or intemperance, primarily; and secondarily, through hereditary influences or the miasm of pauper surroundings in childhood." While acknowledging the larger economic factors at work, Wightman ultimately assigned the responsibility for poverty to the poor themselves. Such contradictory attitudes were shared by many reformers. It was slowly becoming obvious that industrial capitalism had certain inherent flaws that created a class of needy people, even if the composition of that class changed rapidly. All overseers of the poor could point to examples of men destitute through no fault of their own, particularly after the depression of 1873, yet they knew from firsthand impressions that public relief could trap people in a cycle of dependence which further aid seemed to perpetuate. "Public aid becomes a heir-loom or legacy," said Wightman, "the tide of pauperism swelling with each succeeding generation."⁵⁰

In order to break that cycle, Wightman sought a middle ground between liberal "alms-giving" and the total elimination of outdoor relief. He quoted Benjamin Potter, of the Board of Overseers of Boston: "Labor seems to be the test to be applied, at prices less than commonly paid, that applicants may not be discouraged from seeking work elsewhere, safeguards necessary to prevent calling the idle class from other places."⁵¹ Though Wightman himself did not specifically call for a labor requirement, he tapped into a current of thought that administrators in Providence had espoused for years. "Let a just discrimination always be made in dispensing public charity, between those who are idle from choice and their own bad habits, and those who cannot obtain the labor they would gladly perform," Mayor Doyle had declared a year earlier.⁵²

The ideology of the work ethic fueled much of the urgency that such efforts to reform the relief system took on in Providence and other localities in the nation during this period. The glorification of work as an end in itself was entangled with the harsh attitudes that had brought forth the Elizabethan poor laws. "He that will not work according to his faculty, let him perish according to his necessity," wrote Thomas Carlyle in the 1840s; "there is no law juster than that."⁵³ Support for this view could be found in the Bible itself: "This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). While such precepts were rarely carried out to the letter, they were a powerful justification for keeping relief minimal and unattractive.

In Providence, as in other places, the recipients of public aid represented a threat to the principles of industriousness that permeated the moral atmosphere of the time. The transients who slept in the police station at night were an especially powerful symbol, as Daniel Rodgers observes in his study of the work ethic in America: "The tramp cut through the tangled issue of poverty to its heart. He was the quintessence of economic failure, a man who hated work—a product not of social forces (save misguided generosity) but of compulsive laziness."⁵⁴ Continued support of the transient population and of others who sought outdoor relief disturbed those who feared the development of a permanent group of public charges. As Rodgers notes, "The work ethic turned into a horror of chronic dependency."⁵⁵ Responding to this widespread fear, and the evidence from their own police station, the politicians and welfare officer of Providence moved to forestall the development of a "pauper class" with work relief. The idea of providing public relief in exchange for labor was morally acceptable to the taxpayers of Providence, for it was considered an arrangement that would both support and deter the needy. In 1878, a year after the Charity Woodyard opened, Wightman claimed that

through that facility "employment will be continued to the necessitous, thus in a measure rendering out-door relief unnecessary."⁵⁶

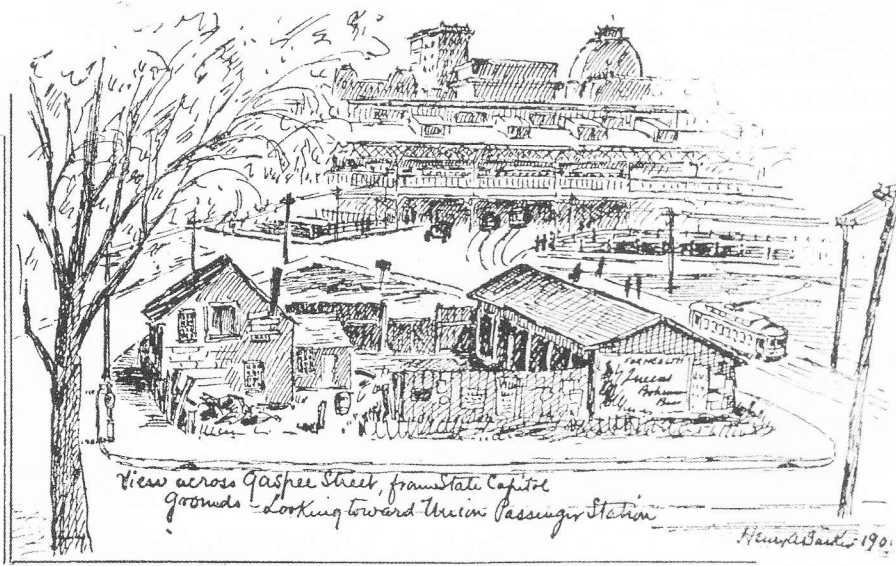
The Providence Charity Woodyard was a response to the twin forces of growing relief expenditures and reform thinking. Established on Francis Street in 1877, later moved to the Cove Lands in front of the present State House, the woodyard was intended as a solution to the dual problem of providing work relief for the able-bodied and deterring transients in search of lodging. Able-bodied residents seeking relief were to be employed at the yard for a wage of fifty cents a day. "The compensation, it is true, is small," Wightman reported to the aldermen eight months after the yard's opening, "but the principle has been not to pay such wages as would tend to make the situation permanent, but to cause the laborer to be on the look out for more remunerative employment elsewhere."⁵⁷ Traceable to the Elizabethan poor laws, this principle of "less eligibility"—the idea that relief should be the least attractive option available to the poor—was basic to Mayor Doyle's and Wightman's conceptions of work relief. Both men also saw the deterrence of tramps as another major benefit of the woodyard. Anyone seeking shelter at the police station would be marched to the woodyard the next morning to work for an hour and a half; an extra hour of work would obtain a hot meal.⁵⁸ The increase in both tramps and the able-bodied poor spurred reformers nationwide to institute similar measures.

In addition to its service to the city, the Charity Woodyard was also thought to confer benefits, even beyond monetary compensation, on those who worked there. As a counter to the "deep, black, seething river of pauperism," work relief offered a "healthy influence, developed to largely aid in the repression and mitigation of pauperism. A man on wages is far different from one on alms."⁵⁹ The opportunity to work in the woodyard enshrined the dignity of labor, giving a man "aid in such a way as will tide him over his emergency, and at the same time leave him his pride and manhood."⁶⁰

No more than 8 percent of the total number of people receiving relief in Providence were employed at the woodyard during any year from 1879 through 1895, and for most of that period the proportion in fact hovered around 3 percent. In 1879, when statistics were first available, the facility employed 204 people; this figure dropped to an average of about 81 people per year for the next fifteen years and then rose sharply in 1894 to 205 in the aftermath of another depression.⁶¹ But it was never the actual numbers employed that mattered most to city officials and administrators; as long as the woodyard stood against the notion of getting something for nothing, and seemed to be having the desired deterrent effect, they were satisfied.

Between 1877 and 1879 the amount of money granted for outdoor relief fell by at least 50 percent, and the number of overnight lodgers at the Central Police Station dropped to 4,882 in 1878 and to 1,377 in 1879.⁶² Wightman happily reported in 1878 that "many who have heretofore received aid have never shown themselves in this office since the yard has been in operation. They have either taken care of themselves or left the city for other places."⁶³ A year later he noted that "the imposition of labor has had a marked effect, lodgers having sensibly decreased and street begging being nearly extirpated."⁶⁴ The gradual recovery from the 1873 depression undoubtedly helped reduce the numbers of people seeking relief, but city officials were so taken with their innovation that they ascribed the reduction principally to the woodyard. "Nine years has wrought a decided change," Wightman observed in 1886. "It is true that the change in the times has had some effect, but I am satisfied it is not due to that wholly, but in a large measure to the system inaugurated in that year [1877] of furnishing labor to the unemployed having

families.”⁶⁵ Mayor Doyle was pleased enough with the early success of the yard that he proposed that the city establish a stone-breaking operation as well, a suggestion that was never implemented.⁶⁶ But the idea of providing public aid in return for labor was firmly set in the framework of Providence’s relief policy, and the woodyard would continue operating through the turn of the century and beyond.



The Providence Charity Woodyard. Sketch from Providence Magazine 28 (August 1916): 515. RIHS Collection (RH1 X3 8970).

In its day-to-day operations, the Charity Woodyard had varying degrees of effectiveness. The reports of the overseer generally contained a request for civic-minded people to patronize the woodyard by buying the wood chopped there: “While it is not the ambition of the city of Providence . . . to compete with its citizens in any line of business whatsoever, it is our desire to reduce to the minimum all expenses incurred by this department. This yard should be made self-supporting.”⁶⁷ The facility was most active during the fall and winter months, when many laborers were laid off and in need of temporary support. From 1878 to the 1890s the numbers employed dropped slowly, with occasional jumps, such as that fol-

lowing the panic of 1893, but the amount of wages per worker tended to rise, indicating either more generous remuneration or increased numbers of days worked.⁶⁸ First and foremost, the woodyard remained an institution for temporary relief, and it does seem to have served as a deterrent for potential lodgers, persuading many to seek less stringent aid in other communities. The changes that the woodyard brought about were not, of course, pleasing to all concerned, and several attempts were made to burn the yard down in the late 1890s.

Relief as a Percentage of Total Expenditures in Providence, 1865-1900

	% OF TOTAL EXPENDITURES
1865-1870	1.430
1871-1880	.517
1881-1890	.382
1891-1900	.331

SOURCE: City auditor’s reports for the years cited.

The increase in relief spending in the 1870s, it should be noted, was more attributable to Providence’s rapid gain in population and area, and to the economic downturn, than to the overgenerosity of relief feared by city officials. While the population of Providence rose from 68,904 in 1870 to 116,753 in 1880, expenditures in support of the poor fell from \$.302 to \$.138 per city resident during that time (though they stood at \$.346 in 1877). This trend was consistent from 1850 to 1900, with per capita expenditures declining from \$.392 to \$.136.⁶⁹ Moreover, relief represented only a tiny and decreasing fraction of the city’s total spending, as the accompanying table shows.

The city’s decision to reduce spending on the undeserving poor hastened a process that had already been in effect for nearly thirty years. These policies now placed Providence at the low end of relief spending among eastern cities.⁷⁰ Although Wightman himself noted, the year before he proposed his reforms, that the “increasing territory and population [of the city] has increased the dependent population nearly 100% within a few years,”⁷¹ relief administrators in Providence generally focused narrowly on their spending relative to each preceding year without taking into account the natural growth of the rolls of the needy resulting from the city’s expansion.

Among the towns and cities of Rhode Island, Providence granted one of the lowest levels of relief to its poor. Surveys conducted by the Board of State Charities and Corrections

in 1870, 1873, and 1892 placed Providence among the two or three lowest in the average amount of aid it supplied to each recipient of outdoor relief.⁷² Compared to the earlier surveys, the 1892 survey showed a narrower range of differences in relief spending throughout the state, but Providence still remained at the low end of the spectrum. It was the sheer numbers of the poor, rather than misguided generosity, that fueled the growth of Providence's relief budget.

Moreover, Wightman's fears of a hereditary class of dependent paupers were probably unwarranted. Katz's analysis of outdoor relief in Pennsylvania in 1875 showed very few indications of such a class there: nearly half of the recipients were women with families left destitute by "death, absence, or desertion of husband or father," and many recipients were recent immigrants seeking support as they attempted to locate employment (Wightman in fact noted in 1880 that such immigrants made up a large part of those employed at the woodyard).⁷³ As Katz argues, the nature of poverty at the time did not match the assumptions of many relief administrators and reformers. A study in New York in 1875 "gives a picture of poverty rooted in the conditions of working-class life. Seasonal work, fluctuating demands for labor, and periodic depressions often produced destitution."⁷⁴ If poverty was not caused by laziness, then work relief had little justification other than as a punitive measure for mere misfortune.

In addition, the nature of the work done at the woodyard also casts doubt on its efficacy as a moral uplifter. At times when an excess of wood had been chopped, other tasks had to be created. One contemporary observer watched "a party of men carrying wood from one corner of the yard to another and piling it there; when it was all removed it was brought back again and piled in the same place." Mayor Doyle explicitly sanctioned such a farce: "As far as practicable, [relief] should be in return for work done, even though it was merely removing earth or materials from one place to another."⁷⁵ Although the men working at the yard were only a small proportion of the people on relief, the woodyard—and through it, the philosophy of work relief—still received credit in 1909 for reducing Providence's expenditures, as well as for lifting the spirits of those required to work for the assistance they received.⁷⁶

Compared with the city's preoccupation with the woodyard and the issue of work relief, little attention was given to a concurrent relief effort, the Charity Building, a facility that provided short-term housing for women and children. Between 1878 and 1899 the Charity Building housed an average of about 220 women and children a year, only a small percentage of the total numbers relieved.⁷⁷ Though initially intended as a place of recovery for fallen women, it evolved instead into a temporary shelter primarily serving immigrant women on their way to join their families or find employment outside the city. It was a mission that provoked little controversy. In 1890, in his first report as Wightman's successor, Matthew J. Cummings spoke glowingly of women and children as the proper recipients of public aid: "The majority of people who receive assistance are the mothers of families. . . . These people are truly objects of charity, well deserving the recognition of philanthropic people. Their descendants, through maternal influence especially, become loyal members of the state and fit members of society."⁷⁸

Although accommodations at the Charity Building were definitely short-term, stays were growing longer as the century drew to a close, as indicated by the number of meals the facility provided to the women and children there; this figure rose from 6.2 meals per lodger in 1878 to 18.3 meals in 1899.⁷⁹ That aid to transient women was becoming somewhat less temporary may be reflected, too, in Cummings's proposal for the establishment of a laundry service that would employ women in the same way that the woodyard employed men.⁸⁰ This proposal remained unimplemented by the turn of the century,

perhaps because officials were reluctant to subject female relief recipients to the same harsh standards that were applied to men.

During the 1880s Wightman was generally satisfied that the work requirement had pared down the relief rolls to exclude the undeserving. At times he would attribute some of the misery that he witnessed to the structure of capitalism, but he always ended such observations with an optimistic conclusion about society's ability to correct what needed correcting in the economic system: "If [society] finds itself at fault, apply the proper remedies, when dependency will be materially lessened, and a way opened to finally extirpate pauperism."⁸¹ His solution, however, continued to be work relief; and as it was applied in Providence, that solution remained more punitive than beneficial to its recipients.

Unlike Wightman, his successor, Matthew Cummings, did not speak optimistically about the elimination of poverty. Instead, his vocabulary was that of "scientific charity," the science of finding the best methods to coordinate and minimize relief, to distinguish the deserving poor, and, as much as possible, to provide not relief but education and self-help. Cummings's approach to his new post mirrored that of the activists in the charity-organization societies that were being formed nationwide to implement these goals, and he worked closely with the city's own Society for Organizing Charity.⁸² Cummings was a self-made businessman, a first-generation Irish American who ran a successful printing business in Providence. In 1890 he was appointed to Providence's Democratic city committee and elected both to the city's school committee and to the office of overseer of the poor.⁸³ Cummings took up the cry of many of his contemporaries for a more systematized and "scientific" approach to distributing relief. In his report of 1892, on the eve of major industrial disarray, he outlined what the new science of "charity work" entailed:

Charity work requires a . . . thorough diagnosis of social conditions. It requires the dissemination among the people of the clear, exhaustive and systematic knowledge which constitutes the science of charity. This work of charity demands of its disbursers, both public and private, constant and careful study, lest the greater injury is done the community in the spreading of mendicancy rather than checking it. . . . The aim of the practical charity worker should be less financial charity and more education.⁸⁴

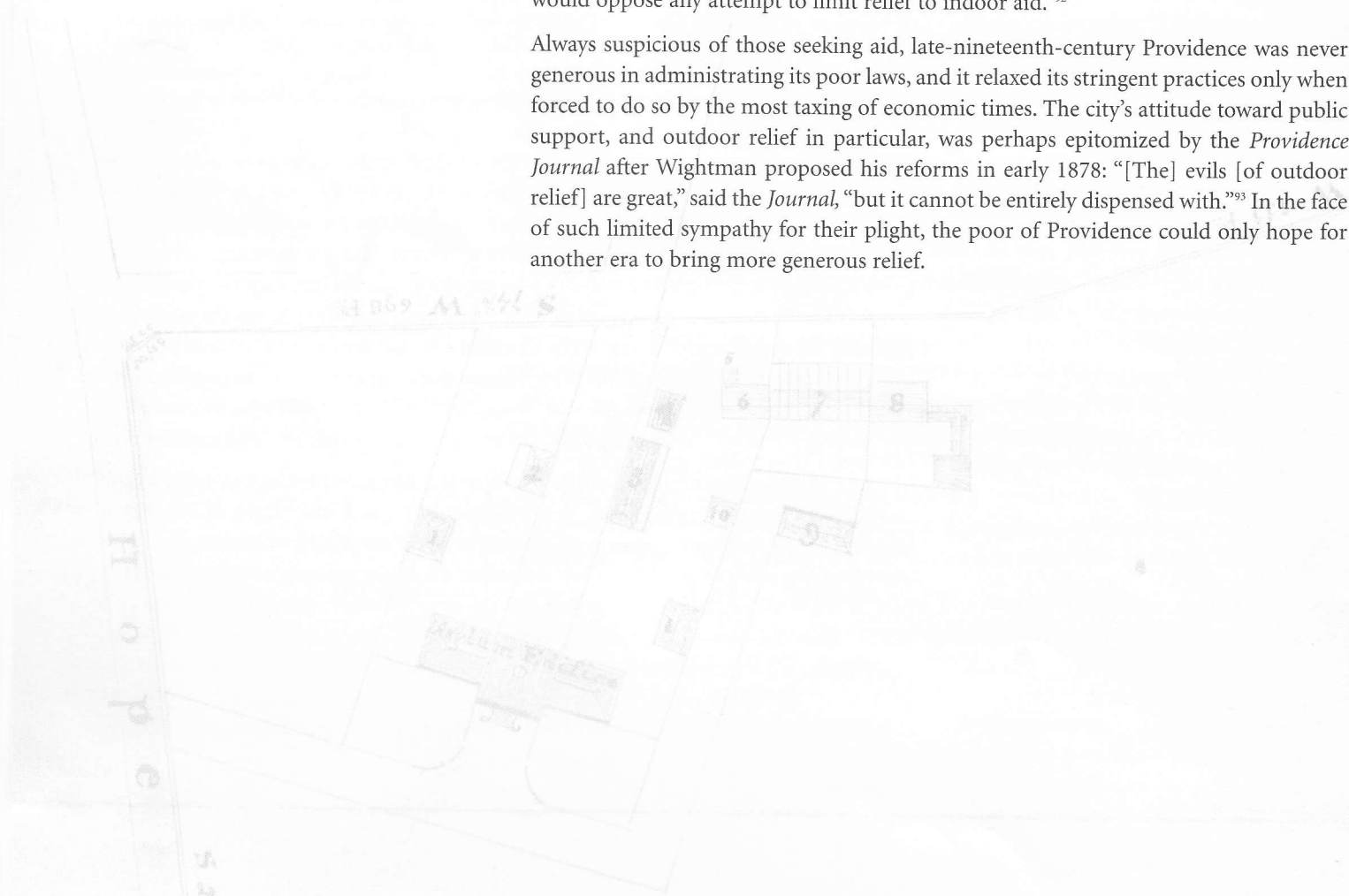
The practices of scientific charity naturally aroused some resentment among relief recipients. "People not understanding the circumstances are too quick to condemn the administrator of this office . . . and think him uncharitable for refusing to assist really worthy applicants," said Cummings in 1890.⁸⁵ Appropriating a technique of private charity groups, he instituted a system of home visitations by "friendly visitors," which allowed him to both personalize relief efforts and ascertain the true situation of those applying for assistance.⁸⁶ "Home research should be the watch-word of every charity giver, whether public or private, for the tendency of the age is to get something for nothing," he declared.⁸⁷ In Cummings's eyes, the system worked; all that was necessary was fine-tuning it and educating the people about its scientific principles and methods.

The severe depression that began in 1893 revealed the defects of Providence's relief system and philosophy of administration. Relief rolls soared, for as the "blasts of November wind blew its unwelcome gusts into the homes of the unemployed workmen, and when want took the place of plenty, the city was called upon" for assistance.⁸⁸ The total numbers of those aided, the total expenditures for outdoor relief, the numbers of people employed in the woodyard, and the numbers given overnight shelter all rose dramatically. Under these conditions the resources of the woodyard proved inadequate. "This branch of the department was utilized to its full tension during the past year," Cummings reported in 1894. "The large number applying for assistance made it impossible to give them all employment in the yard."⁸⁹

The limitations of work relief meant either that people were denied assistance or that the regulations were stretched to meet the extraordinary circumstances. Seeking to convince the aldermen that special measures were necessary "in times of great distress," Cummings called for an emergency program of municipal public works such as they had provided in the 1870s to supply employment for the city's unemployed.⁹⁰ His call went unheeded. The strain put on scientific charity by the massive demand is acknowledged in Cummings's report of 1897: "The work of distributing out-door relief during such a crisis," the report conceded, "is a very difficult task to perform without lowering the social condition of the applicants, and thereby doing more harm than good."⁹¹ Though fearing that the unworthy poor might be taking advantage of any expansion of relief, Cummings nonetheless was forced to respond as best he could to the urgent demands of those who were suffering because of the weakened economy.

As Providence moved toward the Progressive Era, the experience of relief administration in the late nineteenth century provided few definitive lessons for the next generation of reformers. Indoor relief had metamorphosed into specialized care, increasingly in state institutions, for specific groups of the poor—children, the sick, and the insane. The Dexter Asylum and Butler Hospital continued their ill-defined efforts toward relief of the needy, their more limited role in solving the problems of poverty now acknowledged. The limited reforms to outdoor relief represented by the Charity Building and the Charity Woodyard had sufficiently muted criticism to the extent that in 1909 an observer could claim that "the majority of the charitable workers of the city . . . look upon [outdoor relief] as an essential part of the philanthropies of Providence, and would oppose any attempt to limit relief to indoor aid."⁹²

Always suspicious of those seeking aid, late-nineteenth-century Providence was never generous in administering its poor laws, and it relaxed its stringent practices only when forced to do so by the most taxing of economic times. The city's attitude toward public support, and outdoor relief in particular, was perhaps epitomized by the *Providence Journal* after Wightman proposed his reforms in early 1878: "[The] evils [of outdoor relief] are great," said the *Journal*, "but it cannot be entirely dispensed with."⁹³ In the face of such limited sympathy for their plight, the poor of Providence could only hope for another era to bring more generous relief.



Notes

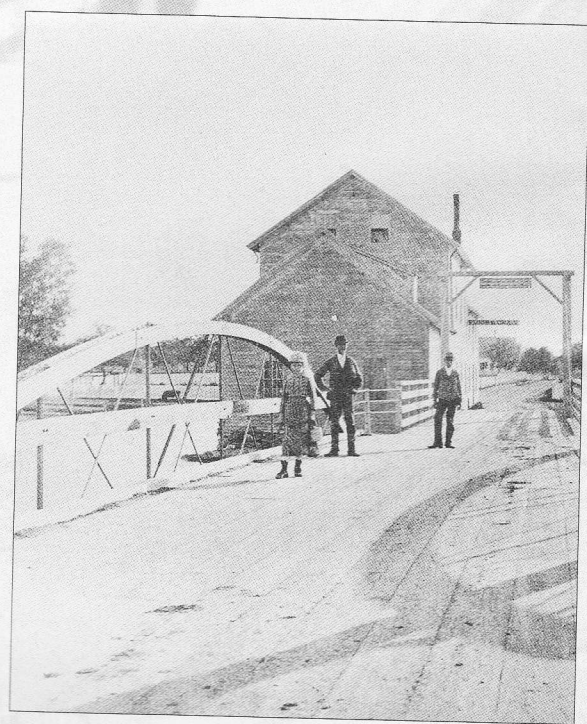
1. *Providence City Documents, 1859* (Providence, 1860), no. 1, p. 9.
2. Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), xi.
3. Margaret Creech, *Three Centuries of Poor Law Administration: A Study of Legislation in Rhode Island* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), 115.
4. *Ibid.*, 117.
5. Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 21; *Annual Report of the City Auditor, Providence, R.I., 1892* (Providence, 1893), 68. The annual auditor's reports, which used standard categories for reporting expenditures from the 1850s through 1900, are included in the successive volumes of *Providence City Documents*.
6. Creech, *Poor Law Administration*, 163.
7. Thomas R. Hazard, *Report on the Poor and Insane in Rhode Island, Made to the General Assembly at Its January Session, 1851* (Providence, 1851); Creech, *Poor Law Administration*, 197, 202. Though it predates the period of this study, Hazard's report represents the most complete statewide survey conducted during the mid-nineteenth century.
8. *Proceedings of the Town of Providence Relative to the Dexter Donation and the Dexter Asylum, Sept. 1879* (Providence, 1879), 8-9.
9. *Rules and Regulations for the Government of the Dexter Asylum, Established at a Town Meeting of the Freemen of the Town of Providence on the 26th Day of July, 1828* (Providence, 1828), 11.
10. Mary Conyngton, "Philanthropy," in *A Modern City: Providence, Rhode Island, and its Activities*, ed. William Kirk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1909), 291.
11. *Ibid.*, 292.
12. *Reports of the Trustees and Superintendent of the Butler Hospital for the Insane, 1894* (Providence, 1895), 27.
13. *Reports. . . Butler Hospital for the Insane, 1887* (Providence, 1888), 18.
14. Statistics derived from *Report of the Overseer of the Poor, 1864-1899*. The overseer's reports are included in the *Providence City Documents* compilations. The city reported Dexter's population for nearly the entire period, and the populations at Butler, Brattleboro, and the state asylum until the state assumed primary responsibility for the care of the insane poor. State statistics after that period do not break down the figures for the different classes of people from Providence at the state institutions.
15. Costs per capita were higher at Butler than at Dexter or at Brattleboro or the state asylum, reflecting the more specialized care that Butler provided. Dexter, Brattleboro, and the state asylum had roughly equivalent per capita costs, but at each institution the city was responsible for different percentages of these costs at different times. Generally the city paid half the costs of the poor at Butler, while the hospital supplied the remainder; at Dexter the city did not have to provide anything except an occasional capital expense out of its operating budget, since the institution was supported by the income from its trust; at Brattleboro the city paid only a relatively small portion of the costs, while the state picked up the difference, but at the state asylum the city was charged much more per capita than it had paid at Brattleboro. *Report of the Overseer, 1864-1884*.
16. *Second Report of the Board of State Charities and Corrections in Rhode Island, 1870* (Providence, 1871), 32.
17. Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 45.
18. George W. Wightman, Superintendent of State Charities and Corrections, to local overseers of the poor, July 1874, form letter in "Overseer of the Poor, Misc." folder, Rhode Island Historical Society.
19. *Report of the Overseer, 1885*, p. 5.
20. Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, x. In New York State, private charity supplied the money for roughly half of the official poor relief (which did not include public spending on prisons and mental institutions). *Ibid.*, 45.
21. *Ibid.*, 46; Conyngton, "Philanthropy," 290-94. See also Daniel T. McColgan, *A Century of Charity: The First One Hundred Years of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States*, vol. 2 (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1951), 234-43.
22. George W. Wightman, *Report Relative to the Operations of the Charity Building and Wood-Yard, April 12, 1880* (Providence, 1880), 5.
23. Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 35; Creech, *Poor Law Administration*, 217.
24. Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 44; Conyngton, "Philanthropy," 290, 295-96.
25. Creech, *Poor Law Administration*, 217.
26. Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 35.
27. Direct financial relief generally took the form of cash orders for groceries or other goods. *Report of the City Auditor, 1855-1900; Report of the Overseer, 1860-1900*.
28. Thomas Doyle, "Mayor's Address," *Providence City Manual, 1878* (Providence, 1878), 23-25.
29. *Rhode Island Acts and Resolves*, June 1854, 14-15.
30. "An Ordinance Prescribing the Mode of Temporary Relief to Poor Persons," *Charters*

Notes continued

- and *Ordinances of the City of Providence, 1854* (Providence, 1854), 237.
31. *Charters and Ordinances*, 235-40; "An Ordinance in Relation to the Poor," *Providence City Manual, 1873-74* (Providence, 1874); Resolution 606, 23 May 1872, *Resolutions of the City Council of the City of Providence, with Reports, June 1871 to June 1872* (Providence, 1872), 230; Creech, *Poor Law Administration*, 237-38. Immediately prior to the modification of the 1854 ordinance, the aldermen and mayor had provided two-thirds of the orders for supplies and cash for outdoor relief. See *Resolutions, 1871-1872*, p. 102. This pattern of devolving responsibility from political officials to administrators and standing committees continued across a range of city services during the late nineteenth century. See John Gilkeson, Jr., *Middle-Class Providence, 1820-1940* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 184.
 32. Conyngton, "Philanthropy," 285-86.
 33. *Representative Men and Old Families of Rhode Island* (Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1908), 2:1234-36; *Providence Directory, 1847-1859* (Providence: H. H. Brown, 1847-59).
 34. See Eric Monkkonen, "Nineteenth Century Institutions: Dealing with the Urban 'Underclass,'" in *The "Underclass" Debate: Views from History*, ed. Michael B. Katz (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 351-53.
 35. *Report of the Overseer*, 12 Dec. 1864, pp. 3-4.
 36. *Report of the Overseer*, 1 June 1868, p. 5.
 37. *Providence City Manual, 1872* (Providence, 1872), 121.
 38. Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 47.
 39. *Ibid.*, 50.
 40. Board of State Charities and Corrections of Rhode Island, *Fifth Annual Report, 1873* (Providence, 1874), 59; idem, *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report, 1892* (Howard, R.I., 1893), 156.
 41. *Report of the Overseer*, 12 Dec. 1864, p. 3.
 42. "City of Providence—Relief Committee," 1862, Providence City Archives.
 43. *Report of the Overseer*, 5 June 1865, p. 73.
 44. Board of State Charities and Corrections, *Fifth Annual Report*, 61. Wightman made this statement as superintendent of the Board of State Charities and Corrections, an additional responsibility he undertook from his deep interest in relief administration. A eulogy for Wightman by the board notes that "he became an authority in everything relating to the settlement, the disposal, and the care of the dependent classes." Idem, *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report*, 159.
 45. Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 53, 56.
 46. *Report of the Overseer*, 1877, p. 163.
 47. *Ibid.*; *Report of the City Auditor, 1873-1877*. Lodging statistics through 1876 are found in "Annual Report of the Chief of Police," *City Documents, 1876* (Providence, 1876), no. 23, p. 38; after that year they are given in *Report of the Overseer*.
 48. The city appropriated funds for these projects from January to March 1876, rejected another appropriation in May 1876, then resumed funding from March to June 1877. Board of Aldermen Minutes 9:87, 25 May 1876, Providence City Archives; *Resolutions of the City Council of the City of Providence, with Reports, January, 1875 to January, 1876* (Providence, 1876), 326; *Resolutions . . . January, 1876, to January, 1877* (Providence, 1877), 21-22, 32-33, 51, 75; *Resolutions . . . Jan. 1877, to Jan. 1878* (Providence, 1878), 64-65, 102, 166.
 49. *Report of the Overseer*, 1877, pp. 165-66.
 50. *Ibid.*, 166-68.
 51. *Ibid.*, 171.
 52. Thomas Doyle, "Mayor's Address," *Providence City Manual, 1876* (Providence, 1876), 32.
 53. Daniel Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 224.
 54. *Ibid.*, 227-28.
 55. *Ibid.*, 226.
 56. *Report of the Overseer*, 1878, p. 4. Given the state's history of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic agitation (which had surfaced in the Dorr War in the 1840s and in the success of the Know-Nothing party in the 1850s) and the overrepresentation of immigrants on the welfare rolls, it is more than likely that the city fathers' decision to impose a more stringent policy on outdoor relief was also influenced by nativism. By 1874 more than half the residents of Providence were of foreign stock, with first- and second-generation Irish constituting 37 percent of the population. William G. McLoughlin, *Rhode Island: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1986), 140-41; Gilkeson, *Middle-Class Providence*, 91 n. 64. According to Wightman's figures, "foreigners" accounted for 76 percent of the people he aided in 1876. However, except for one instance in 1858, Wightman never singled out immigrants in his official reports as a particular cause of worry, and at times he seemed sympathetic to them. In 1880 he noted that "for the most part" many of the men he aided "were well-disposed lads and young men in quest of honest employment. Quite a number of them had been but a short time in the country, and were seeking friends." While his vision of a pauper class may have had many Irish faces in it, Wightman stressed pauperism more than he stressed its immigrant nature. *Report of the Overseer*, 1858, p. 8; 1880, p. 7.
 57. Wightman, *Charity Building and Wood-Yard*, 5.
 58. *Report of the Overseer*, 1880, p. 5.
 59. *Report of the Overseer*, 1878, pp. 7, 9.
 60. *Report of the Overseer*, 1884, p. 8.
 61. *Report of the Overseer*, 1878-1895.
 62. *Report of the City Auditor, 1877-1879; Report of the Overseer, 1877-1879*.
 63. Wightman, *Charity Building and Wood-Yard*, 5.
 64. *Report of the Overseer*, 1879, p. 7.
 65. *Report of the Overseer*, 1886, p. 4.
 66. Thomas Doyle, "Mayor's Address," *Providence City Manual, 1879* (Providence, 1879), 25.
 67. *Report of the Overseer*, 1891, p. 13.
 68. *Report of the Overseer*, 1878-1895. After the late 1870s the overseer's reports do not include figures for the wages paid at the woodyard. However, given the aldermen's early reluctance to increase allotments to families, and an approving reference by Cummings to the low rate of compensation (*Report of the Overseer*, 1890, p. 11), it is plausible to infer that the increase per worker resulted from an increase in the number of days worked rather than an increase in the wage rate.
 69. *Report of the City Auditor, 1850-1900; Census of the City of Providence, 1895* (Providence, 1896); Conyngton, "Philanthropy," 287.
 70. Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 42-43.
 71. *Report of the Overseer*, 1877, p. 174.
 72. Board of State Charities and Corrections, *Second Annual Report, 1870* (Providence, 1871), 60; idem, *Fifth Annual Report*, 59; idem, *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report*, 156.
 73. Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 41; *Report of the Overseer*, 1880, p. 7.
 74. Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 89.
 75. *Ibid.*, 31-32; Doyle, "Mayor's Address," *Providence City Manual, 1878*, p. 25.
 76. Conyngton, "Philanthropy," 287.
 77. *Report of the Overseer*, 1906, p. 9.
 78. *Report of the Overseer*, 1890, p. 19.
 79. *Report of the Overseer*, 1890, 8; 1906, p. 9.
 80. *Report of the Overseer*, 1893, p. 18.
 81. *Report of the Overseer*, 1887, p. 8.
 82. See Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880-1930* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), chap. 1.

83. *Providence Journal*, 24 Sept. 1929.
84. *Report of the Overseer*, 1892, pp. 17-19.
85. *Report of the Overseer*, 1890, p. 22.
86. Rodgers, *Work Ethic in Industrial America*, 225.
87. *Report of the Overseer*, 1895, p. 7.
88. *Report of the Overseer*, 1893, p. 3.
89. *Report of the Overseer*, 1894, p. 11.
90. *Report of the Overseer*, 1894, pp. 4-5.
91. *Report of the Overseer*, 1897, p. 3.
92. Conyngton, "Philanthropy," 290-91.
93. *Providence Daily Journal*, 8 Jan. 1878.





Tidemills of Rhode Island

WALTER E. MINCHINTON

*A*s generation upon generation must have watched the clouds scudding by and pondered how the power of the wind could be harnessed, so our ancestors must have wondered time and again how the power of the sea, the relentless ebb and flow of the tide, could be used by man. Although Forest de Bélidor, a Frenchman writing in the early eighteenth century, claimed that the first tidemill had been invented by a master carpenter of Dunkirk in the previous century,¹ it is now known that he was in error. As with windmills, until recently our earliest information on the employment of the tide for practical purposes came from the Arab world. The great Muslim geographer al-Maḡdisī, Shams al-Dīn, who died about A.D. 1000, wrote that “the tide is a marvel and blessing for the people of Basra. The water visits them twice each day and it enters the rivers and irrigates the orchards and carries the ships to the villages. And when the tide ebbs it is also useful for the working of the mills because they are all situated at the mouth of the river and its tributaries. So when the water goes out to sea it turns them round.”²

This statement suggests that tidemills were in operation at Basra by the tenth century. No more has so far come to light about the use of tidemills in the Arab world. Whether such knowledge was brought to Europe is also not known. As with wind power and other aspects of water power, it may well be that the two traditions are separate. Now an Irish archaeologist has claimed that he has found the remains of two tidemills, one with a vertical wheel, the other with a horizontal wheel, near Cork.³ He has dated these mills at about A.D. 630, but how they came to be built is unknown.

There is no information about other tidemills for the next four centuries. Although there are claims that there were tidemills in the lagoons of Venice in the eleventh century, the mills established there seem to have been ship mills whose wheels were turned by the surge of water.⁴ Apart from these, the earliest documented European tidemill appears to be that at Dover, England, in the entrance of the harbor. According to Domesday Book, it was a mill “which wrecks almost all ships, through its great disturbance of the sea; it does very great harm to the King and his men; it was not there before 1066.”⁵ This suggests that the Dover mill was built sometime between 1066 and the completion of the Domesday survey in 1086.

Tidemills were subsequently established at many points along the coasts of the British Isles as population growth and economic development over the centuries brought a demand for additional sources of power.⁶ From the thirteenth century onward, tidemills were also built along the Atlantic seaboard of western Europe. There were about a hundred tidemills in Spain, about fifty in Portugal, about a hundred in France, about sixty in Belgium and the Netherlands, and several near Hamburg, in the White Sea, and in Iceland. Altogether there were over five hundred tidemills in Europe. They were principally employed for grinding grain, but they were also put to other uses, such as pumping water and sawing timber.

This Barrington tidemill, owned and operated by John Kelley, was used for grinding grain. The mill was powered by the tides of the Warren River. Photo circa 1880. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 2151).

The late Walter Minchinton was a professor of economic history and the head of the Department of Economic History at the University of Exeter in England. He gathered some of the material for this article during his tenure as a visiting fellow at the John Carter Brown Library in Providence.

Tidemill construction usually involved building a dam across a creek or inlet that had a gate as well as a suitable location for the mill. In Europe the gate or gates were normally hung vertically; in America they were hinged at the top and appear to have been hung horizontally, as illustrated in the plan of the Van Wyck-Lefferts Mill near Huntington, Long Island, built sometime between 1793 and 1797.⁷ The millpond formed by the damming was filled by the flowing tide, which pushed the gate open. When the tide began to ebb, it forced the gate shut, and the impounded water then flowed through a sluice to drive the undershot/breastshot wheel of the mill, much as in a conventional stream-driven water mill.

In one way the tide was a better source of power than a river or stream, for it did not run dry in summer or freeze in winter. But it had a major limitation as well: if only the ebbing tide was used, as it usually was, then tidemills could operate during only two periods of about five hours in the twenty-four-hour day. Moreover, no working day was the same as the one preceding, since the time of high tide moved back about an hour a day. The working life of the tidemiller was thus like that of the seaman, ruled by the time of the tide. There were a few attempts to enable tidemills to operate on the flowing as well as the ebbing tide, but these required extra capital investment for either a second wheel and an elaborate arrangement of canals, or additional gearing. Since the intensity of demand for such a capacity was commonly limited, examples of tidemills that would work on both states of the tide were rare.

As far as is known, the aboriginal Indians of North America did not harness waterpower, but when Europeans came to settle the seaboard of eastern North America, they brought the techniques of waterpower use with them. The first North American water mill is believed to have been set up by the French at Port Royal in Nova Scotia in 1607, but whether the power of the tide was harnessed there is not known. English and Dutch settlers, who would have known about tidemills in their homelands, both built tidemills in 1635. The first English tidemill was established at Salem, Massachusetts, and was followed by others in New England during the following decades; for example, tidemills were built at Boston and nearby Hingham in 1643 and at Manchester, Massachusetts, the following year. At Boston a dam was constructed across a cove of the Charles River, and several tidemills were set up there. Now filled in, Boston's Back Bay was formerly the tidal pool. The first Dutch tidemill was built by a man named Geritsen at Midout, now the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. A number of other tidemills were then established in the neighborhood of New Amsterdam, now New York.

With its indented coast and inlets and a tidal range of about five feet at Providence, it is not surprising that tidemills were soon established in Rhode Island. A list of former American tidemills, compiled by Stephen Straight, includes three in Rhode Island: one in North Kingstown, one in Apponaug, Warwick, and one in Barrington.⁸ In addition to these, our researches have discovered five more tidemills that operated in the state, making a total of eight. Three were to the west of Narragansett Bay: one north of Wickford, North Kingstown; one at Apponaug; and one on Mill Cove near River View, Warwick. To the east of the bay were a tidemill at Barrington, one on the Kickamuit River in Warren, two in Bristol, west of the town, and one at Newport. We know that three of the mills were built in the seventeenth century, one was built in the eighteenth century, and one was built in the nineteenth century. The dates of the other three mills are unknown.

The earliest of the tidemills known to have been built in Rhode Island appears to have been the one erected in the 1650s on Mill Cove in Warwick. Town records suggest that "John Greene's house was near the Bridge (which must be the bridge over the brook

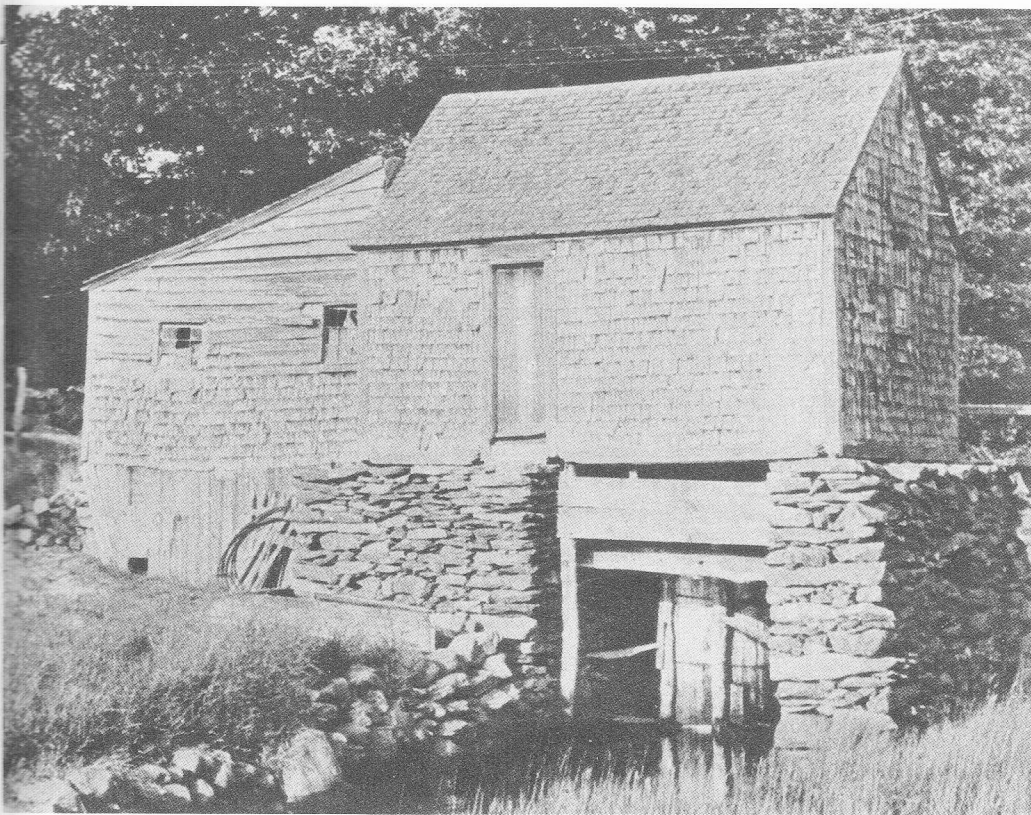
running to the Tide Mill).⁹ This tidemill was reputedly destroyed during the Indian war of 1675-76, but it seems to have been subsequently rebuilt. A record of 1696 notes that this was a good mill able to operate on every tide.¹⁰ The millpond is shown on a plat of 1835, when the tidemill was purchased by Amos Greene, a descendant of John Greene (1585-1659), one of the small band of followers of Samuel Gorton, a religious dissenter who had migrated from England to Boston in 1637. John Greene had acquired title to land on the north shore of Mill Cove by 1655. On the death of Amos in 1857, his property, including the mill, passed to his son Moses, but by the time of the latter's death in 1892, the mill was no longer standing.¹¹ The remains of the millpond can still be seen.

A second Rhode Island tidemill was built north of Wickford in North Kingstown.¹² Later it was called the Tourgee Mill. There is some doubt whether this was strictly a tide-mill, although it was probably tide-assisted. Its millpond was created by a dam, along which Camp Avenue now runs. Water was supplied by the stream running into Mill Creek. At high tide the water in the creek backed up to the mill tailrace and blocked the wheel, so that the mill could be operated only when the tide had fallen sufficiently to restore the head, the normal situation with a tidemill. The millpond was not unique; a number of other mills on the tideline also had ponds filled by both the incoming tide and a stream.

The date of the founding of Tourgee Mill is not known, but local tradition claims that it was erected in the late seventeenth century, at the same time as the adjacent dwelling house built by John Tennant, who acquired the property soon after he came from England. Following a subse-

quent succession of owners named James, Allen, Tarbox, Pierce, and Smith, the mill was purchased by George Washington Tourgee, a descendant of John Tennant, in 1843. The mill consisted of a single-story frame building about fifteen feet long and ten feet wide, with a lean-to shed at the western end almost as long as the main building. The shed contained a carpenter's workshop, whose lathe and other machinery were powered by the mill wheel. A cast-iron horizontal wheel replaced the original large wooden vertical bucket wheel in 1863.

The mill could grind about forty bushels of grain a day and was operated on a toll basis: two quarts of every bushel ground went to the miller. The business thrived in the second half of the nineteenth century, but it began to decline about 1900. In 1911 the mill was described as the "last of the old Johnny Cake mills" for its production of stone-ground flour,¹³ but after 1915 business fell off rapidly. George A. Tourgee, George Washington Tourgee's son, continued to run the mill when there was any demand into the 1920s. In the 1930s Henry Ford showed an interest in buying the mill for reassembly at his collection in Sudbury, Massachusetts, but nothing came of this plan. William G. Anthony of Providence acquired the property in 1935 and restored the gristmill cottage the following year, but before the mill could be restored, it was destroyed by the Hurricane of



The Tourgee Mill in North Kingstown. Half-tone, 1920. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8991).

1938. The site has been somewhat altered since then. The pond was filled in by the U.S. Navy in the 1940s, and little of it can now be seen.

A third tidemill built in Rhode Island in the seventeenth century was at Windmill Point in Bristol, on the eastern side of Poppasquash Neck. In the course of its history this mill was known as Proprietors Mill and Reynold's Mill.¹⁴ It was erected on Poppasquash Pond as part of the original settlement of the town from 1679 and was in existence by early 1683, when John Saffin complained that its construction had cut off access by water to meadowland he owned and that no roads had yet been built to serve the area. Captain (later Major) John Walley had employed Captain Benjamin Church to build the mill and dam at a cost of about £260. The mill was run by George Beard.

On 21 May 1684 the town meeting agreed to allow Captain Walley a rebate of £10 on his rates provided that he built "a Good and Substantial Cart Bridge" over the creek to lead to Poppasquash and the mill, and that he maintained it as long as the mill operated. But the mill proved unprofitable because the low tidal range limited its hours of operation, and it appears that the bridge was not fully completed. By 1696 the mill and the bridge, both of which were out of use and in disrepair, were featured in a dispute between the original proprietors of the Mount Hope Lands and some of the other inhabitants in regard to the allocation of the lands granted. It was alleged that Major Walley had refused offers to take over and operate the mill and had stopped up the road leading to it. It was claimed that the cost of carrying grain to mills in the neighboring towns was as great as the price of the grain itself, and that the lack of a mill cost the town about £150 a year.

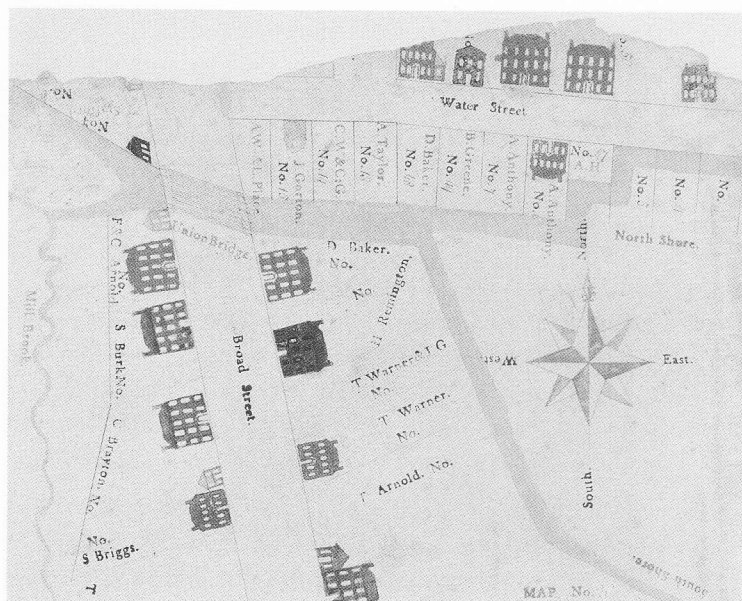
By 1707 the property had apparently come into the hands of Colonel Nathaniel Byfield. To solve the problem of a mill for the town, in March of that year the town meeting agreed that if Colonel Byfield built a new mill on the site, it would be forever free of rates or taxes. Byfield accordingly built "two tidemills for grinding corn"—that is, two pairs of millstones driven by the tidal-powered wheel. On 10 March 1710 it was reported to the town meeting that these "do very well, but the tides are so small that they fall short of supplying the Town with Meal." Colonel Byfield had therefore begun building a windmill adjacent to the tidemill to supplement the power available. To encourage him, the town meeting extended his exemption from rates and taxes to cover any gristmills that he might build on this site.¹⁵

It is not known how long this tidemill continued in use. The site on Windmill Point (named for Byfield's windmill) has been somewhat altered by modern developments, but the remains of the millpond and the causeway between the pond and the sea can still be seen to the east of Poppasquash Road.

Another tidemill was built in Bristol on the western side of Poppasquash Neck at Mill Gut. A plan recording the ownership of land in Bristol shows the tidemill dam, but it is not shown on a map of the area in 1777 nor on a navigational chart of about 1878. The present stone bridge carrying Colt Drive near Mill Gut was built in the early 1900s when Colonel Samuel Pomeroy Colt acquired the land in the area as a residential and farming estate.

The date of construction of the tidemill in Warren is not known. This mill was powered by a pool created by a dam across the Kickamuit River near the lower bridge. During the Revolution, on 25 May 1778, the mill and two adjacent dwelling houses were burned down by Hessian soldiers, and the miller was reputedly taken prisoner. At that time the mill was owned by Smith Bowen and Samuel Pearse. According to an account of losses sustained during the Hessian raid, the mill was valued at £88 12s., and Smith Bowen

claimed to have lost clothing and household goods worth £50 10d. from his house.¹⁶ A dam built by the Bristol Water Company has greatly altered the site where this mill once stood.



A tidemill adjacent to the Union Bridge appears as a single-story structure, owned by T. Stafford, in the upper left corner of this detail from "A Plat of the Village of Apponogue, 1805," by Sabin Lewis. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8994).

The second tidemill to be built in Warwick was on Apponaug Creek. In February 1796 the residents of Warwick petitioned the General Assembly to allow John Stafford to erect a tidemill for grinding corn and other grain at or near the Apponaug Bridge. Permission from the General Assembly was required, since all rivers had to be kept open to permit fish to spawn. The necessary permission was granted in June 1796, "provided that the mill dam be made and erected with suitable waste-gates for venting the superfluous water, and in such manner as not to back the water or otherwise injure the mills of Mr Caleb Greene; and also provided, that the said John Stafford, shall make, and leave open at all proper times, a suitable passage, not less than sixteen feet wide, in the said dam, for the passage of rafts and boats up and down said river."¹⁷ The mill was included on "A Plat of the Village of Apponogue, 1805," by Sabin Lewis, when it was owned by T. Stafford. Although little is known of its subsequent history, the position of the

millpond can still be seen, and the building now on the site, much altered over the years and recently converted into offices, contains timbers that may have formed part of the mill structure.

The tidemill in Barrington was known as Kelley's Mill. It was used for grinding grain. Located at Kelley's Bridge, it was owned and run by John Kelley, who served as Barrington's town treasurer from 1831 to 1837. It is not known when this mill was built, but it operated until 1870.¹⁸ No trace of it now remains.



A view of John Kelley's mill and toll bridge, circa 1880. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 2152).

According to tradition, there was a tidemill in Newport, built in the nineteenth century and using a pool behind Long Wharf. It was said that this mill, like many of the tide-mills in Maine, was used to run a gang of saws for sawing planks and boards.¹⁹ The recent discovery of a letter in the Newport Historical Society has confirmed this tradi-

tion. The letter was written about 1844 by Henry Williams, who was born in Newport in 1801 and had moved with his family to New York in 1813. Writing to his sister Catherine, Williams described the visit he had recently paid to Newport after an absence of many years. He and his brother Samuel had traveled from New York by boat and had landed at Long Wharf, where Williams renewed his acquaintance with childhood haunts: "I said, here Uncle [James] Hadwin had a tide mill, and called to mind that father said the tide rose about 4 feet."²⁰ Between 1890 and 1910 the pool was filled in for dockside storage space. The site was later cleared and used for the construction of a Marriott Hotel, a bus station, and a visitors' center.

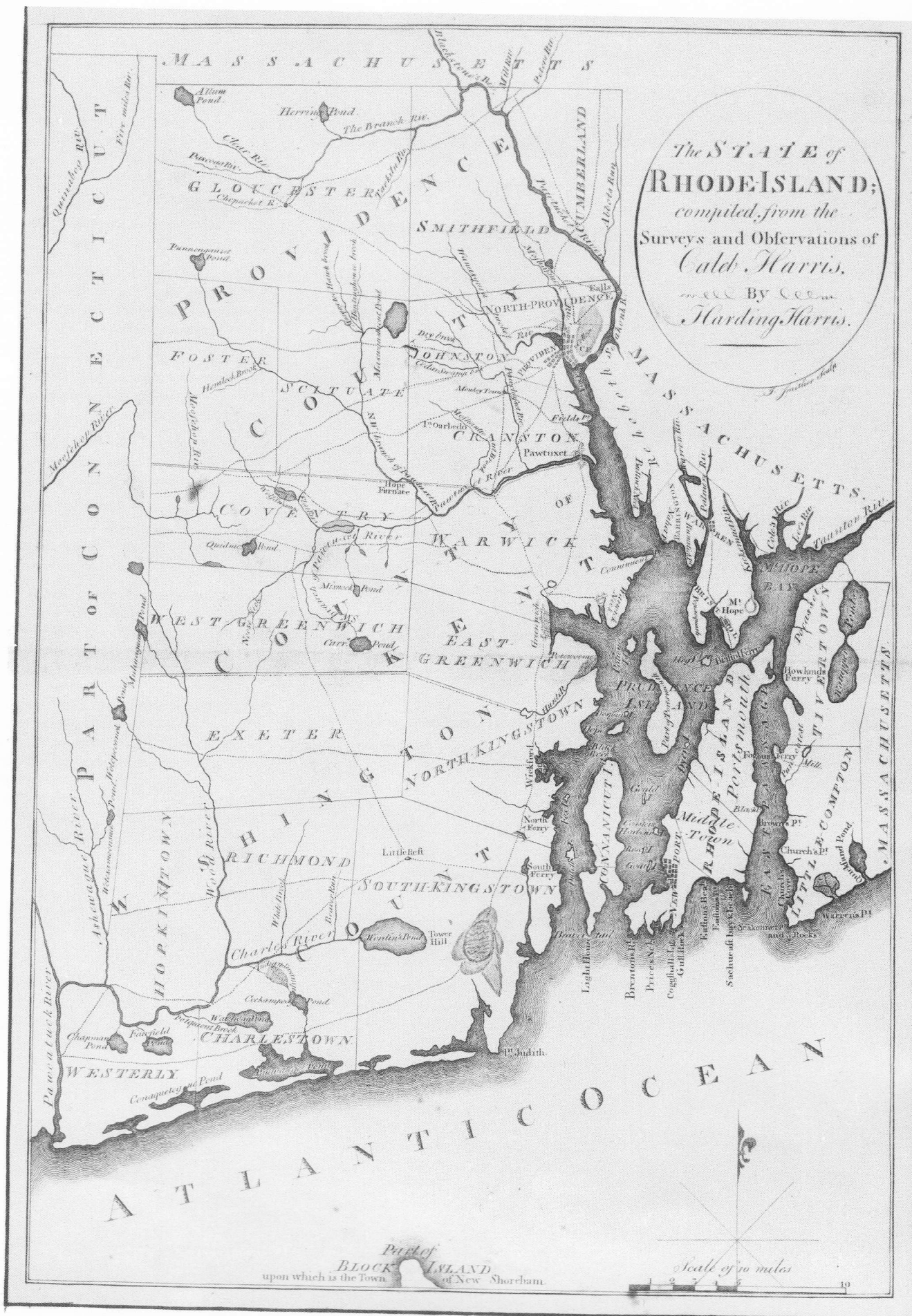
A claim that there was a tidemill at East Greenwich, Rhode Island, in the early eighteenth century must be rejected. Somehow the description of a tidemill erected on the south bank of the Thames at East Greenwich, London, in the early nineteenth century became the basis of a later reference that mistakenly placed the mill in Rhode Island and moved its origin back a century.²¹

Of the eight known tidemill sites in Rhode Island, the only one where a building survives is the site at Apponaug, and that structure has been much altered. Remains of millponds can be seen at Mill Cove in Warwick and at the two sites in Bristol. The sites of the tidemills in North Kingstown, Warren, and Barrington have been substantially altered, and that of the Newport tidemill has been completely cleared and built over.



Notes

1. Bernard Forest de Bélidor, *Architecture hydraulique ou l'art de conduire, d'élever et de ménager les eaux pour les différents besoins de la vie*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1737-53), vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 304-7.
2. Mark J. Goeje, ed., *Ahsan al-Taqāsīm fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalīm* (Leiden, 1906), 124-25.
3. Colin Rynne, "Milling in the Seventh Century—Europe's Earliest Tide Mills," *Archaeology Ireland* 6, no. 2 (1992): 22-24. These mills were on Little Island, County Cork.
4. Lynn T. White, Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 85. In correspondence, the late Dr. White accepted my view on this matter.
5. John Morris, ed., *Domesday Book: I, Kent*, ed. Philip Morgan (Chichester: Phillimore, 1983), sec. D 10.
6. See Walter Minchinton, "Tidemills of England and Wales," in *Transactions of the Fourth Symposium of the International Molinological Society*, ed. Kenneth Major et al. (London: Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, 1979), 339-53.
7. T. Allan Comp and Kathleen S. Hoeft, eds., *Long Island Wind and Tide Mills: An Interim Report* (Washington, D.C.: Historic American Engineering Record, 1976).
8. See *Old Mill News* 17, no. 3 (Summer 1989): 3-4.
9. "Notes of General George S. Greene," in Louise B. Clarke, ed., *The Greenes of Rhode Island, with Historical Records of English Ancestry, 1534-1902* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1903), 775.
10. Commonwealth of Massachusetts Archives Division, Massachusetts Archives, vol. 40, Judicial 1688-1724, p. 407.
11. Report on Greene House, typescript in the files of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Providence.
12. The following account of Tourgee Mill is largely derived from Mary Kenyon Huling, "The Tourgee Tide Mill," in Pettaquamscutt Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, *Facts and Fancies concerning North Kingstown, Rhode Island* (North Kingstown, 1941), 107-10.
13. "Last of the Old Johnny Cake Mills," *Providence Sunday Journal*, 10 Sept. 1911, sec. 4. There are photographs of the mill in the *Providence Sunday Journal*, 19 Sept. 1920, Artgravure section, and the *Providence Evening Bulletin*, 29 July 1937.
14. For the following information on this mill through the seventeenth century, see Massachusetts Archives, vol. 40, pp. 385, 392, 406-8.
15. Wilfred B. Munro, *The History of Bristol, R.I.: The Story of the Mount Hope Lands from the Visit of the Northmen to the Present Time* (Providence, 1880), 122-24.
16. Virginia Baker, *The History of Warren, Rhode Island, in the War of the Revolution, 1776-1783* (Warren, 1901), 15, 56-57.
17. *Rhode Island Acts and Resolves*, 1796; Oliver Payson Fuller, *The History of Warwick, Rhode Island, from Its Settlement in 1642 to the Present Time* (Providence, 1875), 151.
18. Thomas W. Bicknell, *History of Barrington, Rhode Island* (Providence, 1898), 559, 429. Bicknell states that this mill was the only water-power ever used in the town.
19. Charles P. Coggeshall, "Some Old Rhode Island Grist Mills," *Bulletin of the Newport Historical Society*, no. 39 (January 1922): 21.
20. Ronald M. Potvin, ed., "In His Own Words: Henry Williams Returns to Newport," *Bulletin of the Newport Historical Society* 65, no. 222 (1993): 38.
21. The tidemill at East Greenwich, London, was originally described in John Nicholson, *The Operative Mechanic and British Machinist: Being a Practical Display of the Manufactories and Mechanical Arts of the United Kingdom*, 2nd ed. (London, 1825), 96-99, and then in Geoffrey Gerard, *Hydro-electric Engineering* (London: Pitman, 1949), 168. Lev B. Bernshtein, *Tidal Energy for Electric Power* (Jerusalem: Israel Program for Scientific Translation, 1965), 29, citing Gerard, places this tidemill in East Greenwich, Rhode Island. Possibly a translator's mistake, this error has been repeated subsequently.



The STATE of
RHODE ISLAND;
compiled from the
Surveys and Observations of
Caleb Harris.
By
Harding Harris.
A further draft

Part of
BLOCK ISLAND
upon which is the Town
of New Shoreham.

Scale of 10 miles

RHODE ISLAND MISCELLANY

The State of Rhode Island

TRAUGOTT BROMME

*Translation from the German
by Richard Bland*

In the early 1800s many of the Europeans emigrating to North America arrived without jobs or job prospects and unable to speak English. Among these people were a substantial number of Germans. Helping to fill their need for information about what they might find in America was a guidebook entitled Traugott Bromme's Hand- und Reisebuch für Auswanderer nach den Vereinigten Staaten von Nord-Amerika, Texas, Ober- und Unter-Canada, Neu-Braunschweig, Neu-Schottland, Santo Thomas in Guatemala und den Mosquitoküsten (Hand- and travel-book for emigrants to the United States of North America, Texas, Upper and Lower Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Saint Thomas in Guatemala, and the Mosquito Coast). This book, which went through several editions, is quite thorough, with over 550 pages divided into two main parts: the first describes the various places an emigrant might be likely to travel to; the second offers recommendations about who should and who should not emigrate, with discussions of about a hundred occupations. The paragraphs below are Bromme's description of Rhode Island on pages 138 to 140 of the book's fifth edition, published in Bayreuth by Verlag der Buchner'schen Buchhandlung in 1848. Spellings of proper names have generally been left as they appear in the original.

The smallest state of the Union, and consisting of three larger and several smaller islands in and before Narraganset Bay, and a small stretch of coast on both of the latter, lies between 41° 22' and 42° 3' north latitude and between 5° and 5° 50' east longitude [the author separates east and west longitude with a prime meridian at 77° west, apparently because that longitude runs through Washington, D.C., the nation's capital—TRANS.], is bounded on the north and east by Massachusetts, on the south by the Atlantic Ocean, and on the west by Connecticut, is 48 miles in extent from north to south, 42 miles from east to west, and embraces 1580 □miles, or 1,011,200 acres.—The northwestern part of the land is hilly and rocky; the remaining part is mostly flat; rocky terrain appears everywhere, serving as bedrock for the ground surface, which on the islands 2 to 3 feet deep is composed of fertile clayey soil. The interior of the land serves best for raising hay, and contains much meager and rough ground, superior on the Connecticut, where fine-grained granite is frequently quarried today; the area around Narraganset Bay is uncommonly fertile.—The Providence River, which is formed through the confluence of the Pawtuket and Patuxet, and the Taunton cut through the state, and empty together into Narraganset Bay, which extends about 30 miles inland and ends in the three bays of Providence, Bristol, and Mount Hope. In the main bay lie several notable islands: Rhode Island, from which the state gets its name; 3 miles from this one, Connonicut, and to the north, Prudence Island. Block Island, which likewise belongs to this state, lies in the open sea, and is 10 miles long and 4 wide. Five harbors lie in Narraganset Bay: Newport, Providence, Patuxet, Bristol, and Waaren.—Rhode Island has the most moderate climate among the Atlantic states; both in summer and

*Map by Harding Harris, 1796. RIHS Collection
(RHi X3 811).*

Richard Bland is a National Park Service anthropologist in Alaska.



winter the temperature is moderated by the sea winds; on the mainland, more inland, the climate however is as in Massachusetts.—Agriculture is carried out as in Massachusetts, and produces corn, rye, barley, oats, and some wheat; livestock breeding is splendid; there are beautiful herds of cattle and already substantial sheep breeding; the state produces fruit in quantity. The forest contains pine, oak, birch, maple, cypress, elm, poplar, linden, etc. Among the minerals are iron and some copper; lime is quarried around Providence; marble and graphite are likewise available, and in the north of the state a respectable coal deposit was discovered. Expertise in crafts has already made substantial steps forward; cotton and wool mills are present in quantity; cotton-spinning mills number about 209 in the state, with 518,817 spindles; already over 5000 looms in operation. Woolen mills are in Warwick and Portsmouth; hat factories, paper mills, linen mills, iron smelters, brandy and rum distilleries, spermaceti and tallow plants, sawmills, and sail cloth factories are present in quantity. The trade of the state is significant and is supported by 62 banks; the principal export articles comprise lumber, cattle, horses, butter, cheese, fish, rum, and cotton and linen wares.—Public investments which should be mentioned are: the Blackstone Canal, which connects Providence with Worcester, Mass.; the Providence-Boston Railroad, and the 47-mile-long Providence-Stonington Railroad, both of which are connected with New York by steamboat.—The inhabitants come originally from Massachusetts, joined by arrivals from other states of the Union, but only a few European immigrants; their number amounts at present to about 113,907, among whom are 4243 free Coloreds; they have a lively spirit of enterprise, and belong, by religion, primarily to the Baptist. The Baptists have 20 congregations, 18 ministers, and 9 others under various names; the Congregationalists, 16 congregations, with the same number of



ministers; the Episcopalians, 16 congregations and 18 ministers, and the Methodists, 10 preachers; all other sects have only a single church. Schools are well supported: in Brown's University in Providence, and in a high school, which has acquired the character of a college, are 324 students, in 52 academies 3664 students, and in 434 elementary schools 17,355 students. Rhode Island is the only state in the Union which, during the Revolution, created no new constitution, but rather kept its letter of freedom of 1663. The legislative power rests in the hands of the General Assembly, which consists of a council of 10 members, which is newly selected every year, and a House of Representatives, which numbers 72 members and must be renewed semiannually. The executive power lies in the hands of the governor and lieutenant governor, who, like the judge and other judicial persons, remain in their post only a year.

Rhode Island, which formerly was divided into Rhode Island proper and the Providence Plantations, at present can be broken down into five counties: Bristol, Kent, Newport, Providence, and Washington. The most significant cities are: Providence, at $41^{\circ} 5'$ north latitude on Narragansett Bay, 30 miles from the sea, with 26,527 inhabitants; it consists of two parts, which are separated by the Narragansett, but united again by a fine bridge; possesses over 1500 houses, 21 churches, 1 courthouse, several academies, and a higher institution of learning, Brown's University, whose buildings are located on a hill in the upper end of the city; the city contains many factories, distilleries and sugar refineries.—Newport, at $41^{\circ} 29'$ north latitude on Rhode Island proper, capital of the state, with about 1100 houses and approximately 9638 inhabitants, 1 statehouse, 10 churches, and substantial shipping business and trade, which, however, earlier, when the slave trade was still permitted, was more sizable.—Warwick, on the bay of the same name, with 6726 inhabitants;—Bristol, on Bristol Bay, with a harbor,



respectable shipping business, and 4409 inhabitants;—South Kingston, at the entrance of Narragansett Bay, where, alternating with Providence, every other year the General Assembly holds its session, with 3717 inhabitants;—Charlestown, on both sides of the Charles, with 1304 white and 923 Indian inhabitants, who live in the southern part of the city and have 1 Baptist church and 1 school.—

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PERIODICALS
POSTAGE PAID AT
PROVIDENCE, RI

Cover

*John Kelley's tidemill, Barrington, circa 1880. RIHS
Collection (RH: X3 2150).*