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Developing an *Esprit de Corps:* Efforts to Reform the Teaching Profession in Rhode Island, 1870-1900

DAVID A. FARBMAN

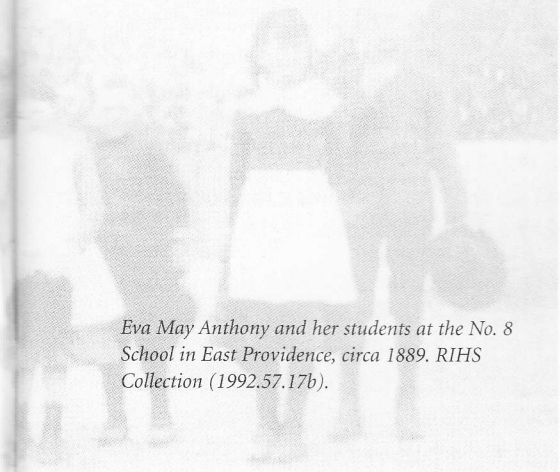
Observation and experience both show that those schools are best where the teachers are persons who make, and intend to make, the business of teaching their vocation.

A. R. GREENE, superintendent of schools, Warwick, *Annual Report of the [Rhode Island] State Board of Education,* 1899

In 1870 the superintendent of the Providence public schools, the Reverend Daniel Leach, was disturbed by what he observed in his schools, and he blamed the teachers. "So many enter upon the profession, not from a love of it, but from necessity, or rather from the inability to succeed in anything else. They have very low views of their profession and always regard their labor as a drudgery to be endured solely for its compensation. . . . Their highest ambition seems to be to retain their places till something better shall offer." Leach then concluded that the schools suffered as a result; school was boring to the students, and they, in turn, lacked "energy."[1] Yet three decades later Leach's successor, Horace Tarbell, wrote of promising developments in the city's schools. "The ennui of the schoolroom . . . ," Tarbell asserted in 1898, "is much less than it was when those who are now adults were pupils in school. . . . The old traditional contest between pupils and teacher is largely a thing of the past. Children feel the difference."[2] Tarbell believed that this shift in the mood of the classroom was no accident. He judged that teaching had undergone a change because the attitude of individuals in charge of the classroom had changed.

Whereas most teachers before the Civil War (a majority of whom were young men) considered their jobs to be no more than a temporary expedient in their lives, many of the newer teachers in the later nineteenth century (most of them women) remained in teaching for many years. And whereas for much of the 1800s a majority of teachers had little more than a high school education, by the final decades of the century an ever-increasing number had attended special teacher-training schools. These so-called normal schools provided aspiring teachers with an intense subject-based education, courses in pedagogical method, and, eventually, first-hand experience in the classroom. They also strengthened the belief of many officials and taxpayers that better-trained teachers made better educators. Teachers who had attended normal school frequently expressed great satisfaction in their work, and many sought ways to advance their education even further. For these teachers, teaching had, in short, become a career.

Surveying the enormous change in outlook that developed among teachers during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, modern historians of education have often portrayed that change as an act of will by female teachers who acquired skills, stamina, and self-confidence in spite of male administrators who recruited them to their expanding schools chiefly to gain cheaper, more compliant employees.[3] As the case of Rhode Island suggests, however, the transition from teaching as last resort to teaching as a career revolved around a mostly cooperative relationship between administrators and

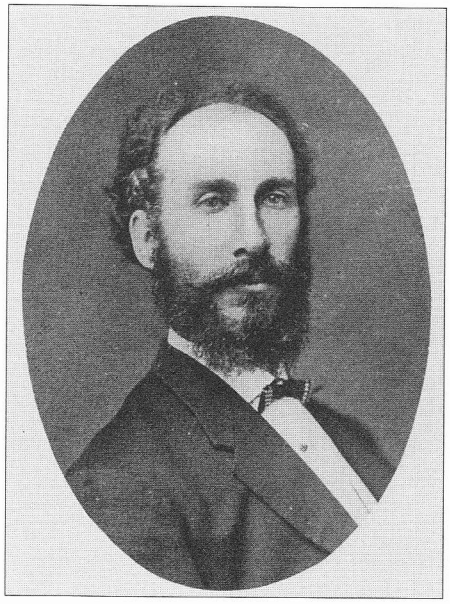


Eva May Anthony and her students at the No. 8 School in East Providence, circa 1889. RIHS Collection (1992.57.17b).

David Farbman earned his doctorate in history at Brown University in 1998. *He would like to thank Professors Mari Jo Buhle and James Patterson for their assistance in the writing of this article. He also wishes to thank Marlene Lopes of Rhode Island College's Special Collections Library for her research assistance.*

faculty, who together strove toward the goal of creating a corps of competent and dedicated teachers.[4] On the one hand, local and state administrators implemented systematic programs to educate, compensate, and organize current and future jobholders so that they might develop both expertise and loyalty. In turn, many young women, eager to secure financial independence and a rewarding role outside the home, utilized these programs to gain a teaching job and grow within their chosen profession. By century's end, in Rhode Island and elsewhere, the efforts of both teachers and administrators had succeeded in producing a body of teachers who were better educated, more optimistic, and more committed to the work of teaching than their predecessors a few decades earlier had been.

In 1871 Rhode Island took its first and most momentous step on the path towards improving the quality of its teachers by establishing the Rhode Island State Normal School. In Rhode Island and elsewhere, it was undoubtedly the institution of the normal school that played *the* central role in advancing the status of the teaching profession. In attempting to raise the level of knowledge and pedagogical skill among teachers, normal schools set clear standards of eligibility for the occupation and fixed the value of specialized training as the most significant factor in the creation of effective educators. In turn, the very presence of normal schools prompted many to consider the courses they offered as necessary preparation for truly successful teaching. Normal schools thus institutionalized both the training and the definition of the competent teacher.



Thomas W. Bicknell was Rhode Island's commissioner of public schools from 1869 to 1875. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9036).

The process of establishing a normal school in Rhode Island began in 1869, when Governor Seth Padleford appointed Thomas Bicknell as the state's school commissioner. A young and active administrator, Bicknell appreciated the desperate need for better-educated teachers in a state where the number of schools and schoolchildren was growing nearly every year.[5] In one of his first acts as commissioner, he convened a statewide teacher institute in order to bring educational training to current teachers in a conference setting. Thousands of teachers and administrators from Rhode Island and other states attended the institute; in fact, it was the largest ever held in New England.[6] Encouraged by this enormous interest, eleven Rhode Island towns joined with Commissioner Bicknell in calling for the creation of a state-sponsored normal school.[7] Impressed by such a strong display of public support, the General Assembly quickly agreed, and on 15 March 1871 it appropriated $10,000 to establish the first fully state-funded normal school in the nation. Housed in an old church building in Providence, the Rhode Island State Normal School opened its doors in September 1871.[8]

Though it was the first to pay full tuition for its students, the new school was hardly unique; well over a hundred normal schools had been set up across the Northeast and the Midwest in the latter half of the century.[9] The first such school had been founded over thirty years earlier in Lexington, Massachusetts, under the leadership of educational pioneer Horace Mann. Like Bicknell, Mann believed that education was simply the most effective and efficient means available for acculturating the nation's large immigrant population, as well as for educating the future labor force of the nation. As one of Mann's first students put it, "As our commerce increased, and the tide of emigration flowed more rapidly, the people found it necessary to do something for the support of the government, and knowing that it must depend upon the rising generations, they formed their attention to the subject of Education."[10]

For education to live up to this ideal, however, well-trained and dedicated teachers were needed, teachers who would be able to carry out the projected mission. The normal school thus became the instrument through which the aspirations of a highly energetic

The first fully state-funded normal school in the nation, the Rhode Island State Normal School occupied this building at 265 High Street, Providence. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9037).

and morally upright educational system would be realized. Thomas Stockwell, Bicknell's immediate successor, captured the zeal of the reformers when he wrote, "We shall develop an *esprit de corps* in the body of our teachers that will wonderfully inspire the work of the schools and give them a life and vigor hitherto unknown."[11] The first principal of the Rhode Island State Normal School, James Greenough, expressed much the same sentiment, albeit in a somewhat exaggerated form: "The teacher strengthens the family, builds the State and helps to establish in the world the Kingdom of God."[12] In the eyes of many education reformers across the country, the institution of the normal school was the cornerstone of a better America.

Despite its idealism, the normal-school movement essentially grew out of practical needs, specifically the need for teachers educated beyond the eighth grade. With high schools still a relative rarity in most parts of the nation through the 1880s, many would-be teachers had no access to secondary education. If reformers hoped to fill teaching positions in their respective states with individuals educated beyond the basics of elementary school, they would have to find ways to augment the education of those who wanted to teach. To that end, Rhode Island's Normal School devoted the first two years of its three-year program to an accelerated course of study in such fundamentals as geography, history, mathematics, and languages. The school continually revised and added to this part of its program in order to meet the changing demands of the curricula of local school districts. Indeed, the requirements of this portion of the training grew increasingly demanding as time went on, eventually including such subjects as astronomy, geology, and art. Students could bypass this part of the school's program only if they had a high school diploma or passed an equivalency exam.[13]

Yet education reformers of the latter half of the nineteenth century also believed that expert teachers should know not only what to teach but also *how* to teach.[14] Consequently the core of the Rhode Island State Normal School's curriculum was a one-year course entitled "The Science and Art of Teaching." With lessons in psychology, moral science, arithmetic instruction, and general pedagogy, the Normal School attempted to provide local schools with teachers who understood how to implement the latest methods of effective teaching. This portion of the training program also underwent significant revision through the years, always with the objective of including ever more sophisticated teaching techniques.[15] In this regard, the Normal School's program drew a good deal of praise from local school administrators. Typical was the appreciation expressed by D. S. Baker, superintendent of North Kingstown schools, in 1881: "While it is true that teachers, like poets, are born, not made, the moulding influence of the Normal School, and the methods and discipline there taught, preeminently fit one for the profession of a teacher."[16] Moreover, many teachers in Rhode Island believed that the specialized training provided by the Normal School raised the status of their profession, for the school's program undoubtedly signaled that teaching was an increasingly complex occupation that required thorough preparation of its practitioners. According

to Thomas Bicknell, "The only regret ever expressed by our public school teachers is th by them the good fortune of attendance at such a school had never been enjoyed."[17]

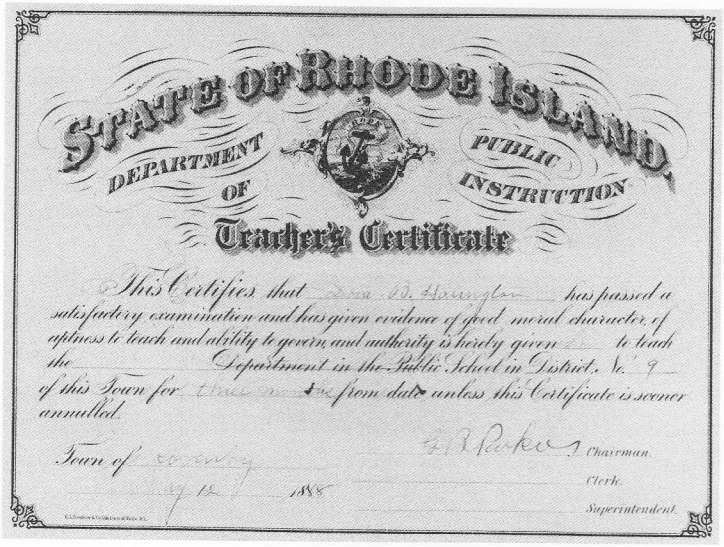
Still, the Normal School's administrators soon realized that truly effective teacher trainir required more than books and lectures; students also needed to see firsthand how teac ers actually operated in the classroom. To that end, in 1881 the school arranged for i seniors (i.e., third-year students) to observe certain classrooms at a nearby Providen primary school. But while such observation was surely a useful addition to the studen training, school officials across the state still hoped that normal-school graduates cou arrive at their first jobs with teaching experience of their own.[18] That was made possib when William E. Wilson, the Normal School's new principal, struck an agreement 1893 with Providence school superintendent Horace Tarbell and state school commi sioner Thomas Stockwell to allow one of Providence's primary schools to function as training annex of the Normal School. Normal School seniors would be responsible f teaching all classes, with "critic teachers" (mentors) present to ensure control. Th trustees of the Normal School found the results beneficial, noting that the experien "has seemed to bring the actual work of teaching so much nearer the pupils [and] h

The state Normal School offered its students practical teaching experience in its kindergarten training course. Photo circa 1900. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9042).

made the object of their studies so much more real that it has quite transformed t [Normal] school."[19] When the trustees extended the training course to two years in 189 they required juniors to observe these senior-taught classes.

The expansion of the training course seems to have been a turning point in the school's history. In 1893 the General Assembly began funding the construction of a new building for the school, and in 1898 the new Normal School opened its doors as the most expensive public school in Rhode Island.[20] To many educators at the time, the honor was well deserved, for the school stood as the epicenter of the Rhode Island's educational establishment. To an increasing degree, administrators across the state had begun to equate quality teachers, and teaching, with training at the Normal School. "The teachers [in Foster] are nearly all normal students or graduates," the Foster School Committee reported in 1897. "There is no question but that teachers with the qualifications of a higher education and training in the modern methods of teaching are more capable of inspiring the schools."[21] As they sought to improve their teaching staffs, many school districts came to consider a diploma from the Normal School as a necessary prerequisite for new teachers.

To formalize this preference for hiring Normal School graduates, local and state administrators began pushing for a standardized system of teacher certification. The system they envisioned would apply throughout the state, for as Commissioner Stockwell explained, "[It is] impossible for one town to raise its standard of qualifications when its neighbors are content to let theirs remain."[22] A call for certification had in fact come as early as the 1850s from Rhode Island's first school commissioner, famed education reformer Henry Barnard.[23] Serious consideration did not begin, however, until Normal School graduates began proving through their work that specialized teacher training was a significant determinant in teaching success.


STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
Teacher's Certificate

This Certifies that Dora B. Harrington has passed a satisfactory examination and has given evidence of good moral character, of aptness to teach and ability to govern, and authority is hereby given her to teach the Department in the Public School in District No. 9 of this Town for three months from date unless this Certificate is sooner annulled.

Town of Coventry, May 12, 1888

E. P. Parker, Chairman
Clerk
Superintendent

Dora B. Harrington received this certificate, authorizing her to teach school in Coventry, in May 1888. It was not until 1898 that the General Assembly enacted a law prohibiting any town from hiring a teacher without a state teaching license. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9031).

The first prominent appeal for a certification law in Rhode Island came in Stockwell's annual report of 1886. Stockwell recognized that towns would still do the hiring, but he argued that requiring certification of all teachers would assure a certain level of teaching competence and might inspire teachers to increased commitment in their work. Gaining no response from the legislature, Stockwell began to sharpen his plea. "[Teaching] is a matter of some consequence to those who enter it," he declared. "[Certification] will make the teachers' calling in a true sense a profession with its fixed standards and criteria."[24] Normal School principal William Wilson supported the appeal: "A law fixing a reasonable minimum of qualification to be required of all who are appointed to teach is pressingly needed. There can be no doubt of the effect of such a law upon the number who would embrace the opportunity to acquire preparation for teaching." Wilson emphasized that a statewide certification law would not conflict with current ideas about teacher training but would merely define the standards for skilled teachers.[25] Following the lead of Stockwell and Wilson, many local superintendents joined in the call for a teacher certification law.

The General Assembly did not act on this demand for a certification law until 1897, when it appointed a commission to study how to "further supplement the resources and efforts of the towns [to reach] uniformly . . . the highest attainable standard" in their schools. The commission offered several recommendations to bring about greater uniformity, including eliminating ungraded schools (still operating in some of the rural towns), ensuring every student in the state access to a high school, and establishing teacher certification standards.[26] The following year the Assembly passed a statewide certification law that prohibited any town from hiring a teacher who had not obtained

a state teaching license. The law divided the licensing program into four distinct level with the gradations based mainly upon the amount of formal training the applicant ha received. To obtain a license of one of the top two grades, applicants had to pass a stan dardized examination or present a college or normal-school diploma. Licenses of th lower two grades were intended for those who had not acquired special training.[27]

Rhode Island's certification system, like those of other states, evolved as the result of good deal of experimentation in the 1880s and 1890s. While some states required a applicants for certification to take subject-based examinations, many normal-schoo graduates objected to this requirement on the grounds that their teaching competenc was sufficiently demonstrated by the diploma they had earned. Administrators, too often found fault with these examinations, for rather than measuring teaching abilit the examinations mainly verified a knowledge of facts. In view of these objections, man states adopted a certification system similar to Rhode Island's, which recognized bot the training of normal-school graduates and the necessity of keeping as many teacher in the growing system as possible.[28] With most Rhode Island teachers applying fo licenses, the state issued a total of 1,163 certificates (including all four grades) the firs year the law was in effect. A year later the State Board of Education voted to make th second-grade certificate, issued to those with a normal-school diploma, a permaner one to acknowledge the importance of a normal-school education, as well as "to giv [teaching] more truly the reality of a profession—a dignity which it has heretofore seldom reached." By 1900 the board had issued 300 of these permanent teaching certificates.[29]

Most current teachers—especially normal-school graduates—strongly supported th new certification program. As one official put it, "The attitude towards it of the grea body of teachers still remains one of unswerving loyalty and hearty acquiescence."[30] B formally recognizing the efforts of those who had specifically trained for the work o teaching, the certification law signaled that those who obtained such specialized educatio were a more valued educational resource than those who had not. Normal-school graduate might thus feel pride in their past efforts and pride in the work they were then doing Expressing a feeling common among administrators and teachers, Central Falls schoo superintendent W. A. Mowry found that "the effect of the new [certification] law i already perceptible. The tone of the teaching profession in the state is raised."[31] Man teachers across the state, particularly those with normal-school diplomas, recognize that their social status could also be raised by the new law, and they welcomed this change

There is little doubt that the Rhode Island State Normal School was founded in an effor to encourage women to become teachers. Women were generally believed to have a spe cial aptitude for creating effective learning environments.[32] Commonly seen by the pre vailing culture as guardians of the nurturing home, they were thought of as naturally f to be custodians of the nurturing classroom as well. As education scholar Geraldin Jonçich Clifford observed, the "ideology of 'woman's sphere' . . . was broadened t include school-keeping as an extension of the domestic role." [33] School officials value female teachers for their "womanly" qualities, such as empathy, compassion, and ten derness—qualities considered crucial to good education. To be sure, administrator would not have sought women as teachers if such employment undermined the rigi gender system. Indeed, most female teachers were not working outside their homes a part of a conscious effort to throw off socially imposed gender limitations; they wer participating in, not resisting, a practice dictated by paternalistic values.[34]

Yet the recruitment of women to teaching extended much beyond the conceptual rea sons. In addition to their "natural" abilities, women were appealing employees for thre

practical reasons: compliance, cost savings, and availability. Though American society sanctioned the entrance of women into the public sphere as teachers, they were still considered the weaker sex. The "cult of domesticity," so pervasive in the nineteenth-century social structure, allowed women to be admired for their innate talents, but it necessitated that "stronger" men guide them in the public sphere. According to Madeline Grumet, "The ideal teacher was one who could control the children and be controlled by her superiors."[35] Many male administrators welcomed women into teaching because women were found to be more amenable to policy changes and easier to hire and fire than men were.

Women were also cheaper to employ. Because the "cult of domesticity" dictated that their primary role was as the custodians of the home, women did not need an occupation outside their homes to fulfill their prescribed social duties. From this it followed that if a woman did work, she could and should be paid less than a man, both to emphasize that her job was secondary to her domestic obligations and to mark her lesser position in the public sphere. Thus administrators could claim financial wisdom in hiring female rather than male teachers.

Moreover, in Rhode Island and elsewhere, men were themselves turning away from teaching. Whereas men had traditionally taken teaching jobs as a stopgap measure until something better offered, they were now bypassing such jobs for other white-collar work that paid more. This relative decline in the appeal of teaching for professionally oriented men came at a time when there was an increasing need for teachers; and when women flocked to fill these comparatively low-paying positions, teaching quickly became feminized.[36] The statistics of this feminization show that the national teaching force was two-thirds female by 1870 and three-quarters female by 1900. In the urban North, where education reforms were implemented more rapidly, the figure was even higher; 85 percent of the schoolteachers there were female by 1900.[37] In Rhode Island women made up a still higher percentage (see table 1).

Table 1

Gender of Teachers in Public (Day) Schools of Rhode Island, 1870-1900

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	% FEMALE
1870[a]	178	533	75.0
1875	195	861	81.5
1880	226	891	79.8
1885	182	1,055	85.3
1890	174	1,204	87.4
1895	172	1,448	89.4
1900	180	1,707	90.5

SOURCE: *R.I. Schools Annual Reports* for the years cited.

[a] Winter term.

The feminization of teaching is of interest not only as a confirmation of gender norms but also as a reflection of the shifting priorities of schools and school administrators. Just as business executives experimented with new methods of organization during this period, administrators sought to meet the growing demands placed upon their schools by finding more effective ways to educate the children. John Rury, who found that female teachers generally presided over smaller classes than men, argues that feminization was, in fact, a means to attain this goal.[38] To assure that teachers could give more attention to individual students, local governments planned their new schools around smaller classes. But smaller classes, together with an increasing student population, meant that districts had to hire more and more teachers every year. Administrators filled these additional teaching positions with women, who not only were considered more naturally fit as teachers but would also work for less money than their male counterparts.

The increasing popularity of the Rhode Island State Normal School suggests, however, that the momentum of feminization was not dictated by male administrators alone. In effect working in tandem with administrators, women sought jobs in teaching as a means to gain both financial independence and personal satisfaction. These women were active and willing participants in the shift of teaching to a primarily female occupation. Many hailed teaching as a noble profession, and one to which they were especially suited; they did not believe, as many of their male predecessors had, that the job was only a temporary expedient until they could find something better. As a Rhode Island Normal School graduate wrote in 1892 in a senior essay entitled "Woman's Sphere," "It is the high privilege of woman to rule by influence, and therefore, she must

have the rights by which she may be elevated to the highest point in culture," i.e., a p tion as a teacher.[39] Teaching and, in particular, the normal school gave women opportunity to take advantage of the limited public role that they were allowed in so Moreover, as teachers they might derive considerable satisfaction from the aware that their work had a positive influence on children and, in turn, on the nation's fu

Aside from the more abstract reasons why women found teaching appealing, mon compensation was an important factor. A job in teaching was a way for a woma escape, to some degree, from the economic limitations of the home. Studies show most late-nineteenth-century teachers came from middle-class—especially lower-mi class—backgrounds. A steady job, and a relatively well-paying one for women, probably quite appealing to this segment of the population.[40] Rhode Island No School records through 1885 show that most of the school's students did in fact c from families in the middle or lower middle classes (see table 2).

Table 2

Occupation of Parents of Students at the Rhode Island State Normal School, 1871-1885

OCCUPATION[a]	NUMBER	% OF TOTAL
Farmers	262	26.8
Artisans	219	22.4
Miscellaneous	112	11.5
Specialists	103	10.6
Sales/Clerks	83	8.5
Laborers	82	8.4
Shopkeepers	53	5.4
Professionals	49	5.1
Teachers	13	1.3

SOURCE: *Catalogue and Circular of the Rhode Island State Normal School, 1885,* 27-28.

[a] The occupations listed in the catalog vary a great deal, and thus the occupational categories listed here are somewhat arbitrary and are intended only to show the essential composition of the school in terms of class background. Full economic data for these families, other than occupation, is not available. After 1885 the Normal School did not record the familial origins of its students.

Financial self-sufficiency increased a woman's social options, because with a sal woman would not have to depend either on her parents or on a husband for sur Many women sought teaching positions as a means of gaining economic independ before marriage. While it was still considered taboo for a woman to teach after marria a married woman's primary responsibility, after all, was to her home and family—a s women could bide her time before settling down. With the age of first marriages r steadily throughout the nineteenth century, women teachers felt more comfortable ing in their jobs longer, and it did not seem improper for them to work for several before marrying.[41]

The inclination of women to seek an occupation before marriage grew as more more girls had the opportunity—with more and more high schools being built attend school beyond the eighth grade. While boys might quit school to begin app ticeships, girls, without such an option, tended to stay in school longer, and r looked for ways to put their education to use. Since female teachers were among th models of working women that schoolgirls ordinarily came in contact with, it was r ral that teenage girls might want to become teachers themselves.[42] The teaching pr sion had lower status than most male professions, but it did offer a pathway for s women to feel empowered.[43] The few men who entered teaching with a career in r usually anticipated promotions to administrative positions, which were still la closed to women. For most of these men, teaching was to be the first rung on the der of a career in education.[44] For women, on the other hand, teaching was neither resort nor a springboard to a more prestigious job, but a rewarding opportunit greater social and financial independence.

In significant ways, school administrators, especially at the local level, came to un stand that teaching for many women was becoming a career. Finding that these mitted teachers were generally the best trained and most competent, administr sought them out to teach at their schools. But the recruitment process was not sir for while school officials were primarily concerned with effective education, local p cians were frequently more concerned with holding down the costs of runnin schools; and it was these politicians who had control over budget decision, includin hiring and firing of teachers.

The most basic conflict was over teachers' salaries. As more and more normal-sc graduates entered the work force, and the demand for good teachers grew, fair pensation became an increasingly important issue. Regarding themselves as tra professionals, qualified applicants expected salaries commensurate with their st

School officials well understood the value of hiring these teachers, but elected town officials were not always quick to comply. Often school administrators watched with frustration as those in power failed to take advantage of opportunities to raise the quality of the town's teaching staff.[45] "Frequently, teachers were removed because complaints are made against paying them too high wages," South Kingstown school superintendent E. C. Tefft observed in his 1886 annual report. "Let the complaints be made against hiring poor teachers for low pay, and remedy the evil by employing such teachers as are qualified for their work, by paying such wages as will command their services."[46] The school superintendent of Westerly pinpointed the direct connection between the quality of teachers and the salaries paid:

> To retain good teachers, and to induce good teachers to make teaching a business for life, a solid profession, generous wages must be paid. No school district or officers can afford to lose a good teacher by having someone for less money who in all probability cannot do as good work. A poor teacher is a very poor article to have around in the great and important work of the moral and intellectual training of our children.[47]

To partially remedy the situation, many school officials recommended that their town committees set up a payment schedule whereby teachers would be rewarded for both specialized training and teaching experience. In this way salaries would reflect the qualifications that school officials believed made for better teachers. The new system would replace the old method of linking wages to grade level taught, with teachers of the higher grades paid better salaries than teachers of the primary grades. The result of this wage hierarchy, of course, was that most of the grammar schools were filled with less experienced, less well-trained teachers, a situation that school officials wanted to correct. Several municipalities, including Woonsocket and Providence, instituted new salary guidelines in accord with the recommended changes by the 1890s.[48]

Still, teachers' salaries, both nationally and in Rhode Island, remained no better than those in other occupations requiring less training. Male teachers in Rhode Island earned approximately $1,000 (for a nine-month position) in 1900. These wages were comparable on the national level to those of clerical workers and postal workers, who earned average annual wages of $1,011 and $925 respectively in occupations that did not require as much schooling as teaching did. On the other hand, between 1890 and 1899 salaries for male teachers rose 37 percent nationally, while those of clerical workers and postal workers fell 4 percent and 13 percent respectively.[49] Male teachers were still struggling to earn the respect of other white-collar professionals, especially as teaching became an increasingly feminized profession;[50] but although their pay lagged far behind that of other professionals, it was at least beginning to reach the levels earned in other white-collar occupations.

Table 3

Monthly Wages of Male and Female Teachers at Rhode Island Public Schools, 1875-1900

	Male Teachers		*Female Teachers*		
YEAR	WAGES	% CHANGE[a]	WAGES	% CHANGE[a]	% OF MALE WAGES
1875	$ 85.18	——	$46.17	——	54.2
1880	70.24	-21.3	42.99	- 6.9	61.2
1885	80.21	+14.2	43.71	+ 7.2	54.5
1890	89.48	+11.6	45.40	+ 5.2	50.7
1895	101.83	+13.8	50.06	+10.3	49.2
1900	110.69	+ 8.7	51.46	+ 2.8	46.5
Overall[b]		+29.9		+11.5	

SOURCE: *R.I. Schools Annual Reports* for the years cited.

[a] As compared to previous salary listed.

[b] Overall change from 1875 to 1900.

Yet these improvements were enjoyed only by the men—a small fraction of the teaching force (see table 3). Female teachers continued to suffer from the effects of the nineteenth-century ideology of separate spheres: however much they were believed to have innate qualities that made them superior teachers, they were still paid far less than men, since they were not seen as family breadwinners. Thus, while most administrators sought higher wages for their teachers, they did not propose equal pay for men and women. R. Murray, Jr., the school superintendent in Cumberland, was a rare exception. "It seems hardly fair or just," he wrote, "that such an undue discrimination in the matter of salary should be made against [women] on account of sex. 'The laborer is not less worthy of' *her* than of '*his* hire.'"[51] But such

The curriculum of the state Normal School included instruction in domestic science. Photo circa 1900. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9039).

insight was very unusual. The preva view was that lower pay for women matter how competent they wer teachers—was not wrong.[52]

It should be noted, however, that d the nineteenth century the salary issu not one that usually pitted men ag women. Simply put, female teachers erally found their pay reasonabl teacher in the Boston school system, had begun teaching in 1889, remin about her first job: "Of course the pa small. . . . But at the time it seemed t ridiculously large: thirty eight doll week was the handsome beginning was not until the next century, women had begun to gain a gr foothold in the public sphere, that sig cant numbers of female teachers beg question the inequity in pay scale males and females. Only then did fight for equal pay become linked t struggle for women's rights.[54]

A second issue that divided school officials and economy-minded town officials wa establishment of retirement pension funds for teachers. School officials urged the tion of such funds on the grounds that teaching, like other professions, should pr enough financial security to last a lifetime. Less contentious than the salary issue, sion funds were supported as a way for towns to recognize the services of their long teachers. In Rhode Island, a pension fund for teachers was first proposed in Provi in 1881, and by the turn of the twentieth century such funds existed in a few o state's towns. The establishment of these funds reflected a trend across much o northern part of the country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centu Chicago, for example, set up a pension fund for its teachers in 1895. The first state sion fund for teachers was established in New York in 1895, the second in New Jer year later. By 1916 thirty-three states had some kind of fund providing for their t ers' retirement.[55]

The details of Newport's retirement fund, begun in 1898, illustrate the basic oper principles of this innovation. Basically the fund functioned as a voluntary form of s security, with those teachers who wished to receive retirement benefits contributi it a small portion of their salary. Fifty-three teachers in Newport elected to do this town then sought to supplement the fund from other sources to bring it up to a level of $20,000, enough to maintain annuities for current retirees and a sufficien ance for future payments.[56] In general, town officials appeared less resistant to reform than to paying teachers higher salaries, probably because pension funds di require large contributions from the town coffers. The payment of pensions to tea would earn enough public acceptance by 1907 for the General Assembly to deci establish a state retirement fund, one that would pay benefits to any teacher ove sixty who had taught in the state's public schools for thirty-five years or more.[57]

Since the teaching force in Rhode Island, as elsewhere, was overwhelmingly femal provision of pensions to teachers constituted a measure of quiet recognition that fe

teachers—despite their comparatively low salaries—were deserving of the same kind of economic benefits enjoyed by many male white-collar workers in other fields. When hiring teachers, school administrators risked losing out on those seeking a long-term career if they could not offer these applicants suitable financial compensation. Being able to offer a pension allowed administrators to signal their recognition not only of the worth of extended tenures in teaching but also of the value of individual teachers. The chairman of the Newport School Committee, C. F. Barker, explained that the town needed to establish a pension fund because "It sometimes happens that efficient and faithful teachers grow old in their work without having been able to save from their yearly earnings an amount sufficient to support them when no longer able to work. [We hope] to assist this class of teachers, who have spent the whole of the active portion of their lives working for others, constantly giving more than they have received."[58]

Perhaps the most intense disagreements between school administrators and town officials arose over the issue of hiring and firing teachers, and of which body—the town council or school committee—should control teacher employment. A good part of the tension emerged as a raw power struggle between the two groups: those without the power—the school committees and, by extension, the superintendents—complained bitterly that those with the power were misusing their legal right to hire and fire teachers. School committee members often accused town officials of engaging in improper and unscrupulous practices when hiring teachers. According to the educators, teachers were frequently removed from their positions in order to install others, sometimes less experienced, as favors to political constituents. These accusations may not always have been totally justified, but statistics do lend them some weight. During the early 1880s, for instance, nearly a third of Rhode Island's teachers taught for only a semester or two before leaving their positions.[59] Although it is impossible to determine which left voluntarily and which were removed, it seems probable, given the prevalence of the educators' complaints, that political appointments did account for a significant portion of the changes.

In denouncing politically motivated dismissals, educators strongly argued the advantages of stable teaching staffs. As Charlestown school superintendent A. A. Saunders put it, "The fact remains that the best schools in the town, in the broadest sense, are those that have been subjected to the fewest changes in teachers for a long period of time."[60] He and many others emphasized that teachers who felt loyal to their job and reasonably secure in it were likely to want to excel at their work, while those who knew that their employers might fire them unjustly at any time might well be reluctant to give their job their full efforts. Women, whose position in the public sphere was still tenuous, seemed especially vulnerable under the prevailing system.

If schools were to be improved, educators declared, arbitrary practices in hiring and firing would have to be eliminated. "The hope of any school is the teacher," explained Cumberland school superintendent Alvin D. Shepard, "and if she is chosen through personal interest or sympathy, or because of political or sectarian preference, our schools must inevitably suffer and the standard be lowered. We should choose our teachers because of their qualifications and competency, and not for any of the above-named reasons."[61] Such admonitions appeared in nearly every annual report of superintendents and school committees across the state during the 1870s and 1880s. School officials assured town politicians and citizens alike that the only way to ensure that a school would have a competent body of teachers was to work toward staff stability. Such stability, in turn, would promote increased dedication among teachers, which would, so they argued, produce better teaching.

As the century progressed, the pressure exerted by school committees and superintendents had a clear effect. Gradually their warnings about the dangers of frequent teacher

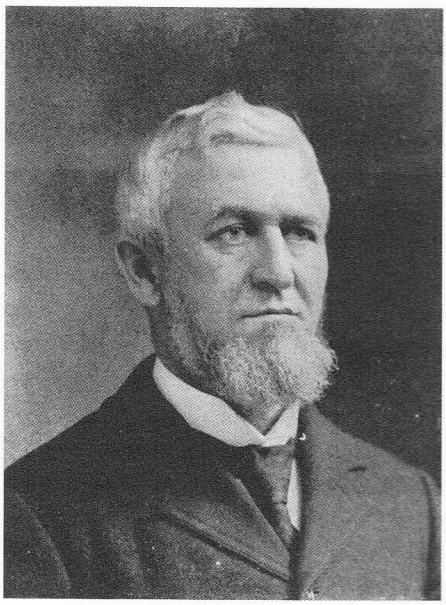
changes gave way to information about the large percentages of teachers who contin in their positions throughout the school year, or for several years. "This year just pa shows very few changes in the corps of teachers," reported Burrillville school supe tendent. A. P. Keith in 1900. "By thus retaining the services of such a large proportio them we have been enabled to attain a much higher standard than is possible whe many changes occur." His appended list showed that of the town's twenty-four teac twenty-one had taught in Burrillville for at least two years, and a full third had ta there for more than five years.[62] In 1896 Providence school superintendent H. S. Ta noted that teachers in the capital city remained in their positions six times longer they had a generation earlier.[63] Such statistics became increasingly commonplace b turn of the century. Superintendents generally credited both the town officials, for c ing their practice of hiring and firing teachers for political reasons, and the teacher committing themselves to longer service in their positions.[64]

To further promote stable, knowledgeable teaching staffs, many local administra organized teacher associations, designed both to provide teachers with continuing cation and to allow them to develop greater connections with each other and with work.[65] These associations often became lively forums for the exchange of pedago ideas and methods that teachers could put to the test in their own classrooms. school commissioner Thomas Stockwell hailed the development of teachers' ass tions across Rhode Island in 1893:

> There is no more significant sign of the times than the growing tendency among our best tea thus to meet together for the purpose of study and development. . . . Moreover, it is very enc aging to find our teachers entering upon these courses of experimentation and investigatio Whatever their conclusions may be, the benefits derived from the labor expended in carryi the work will amply repay them, and their schools will reap their rewards in the true profess spirit which such teachers will carry into the schoolroom.[66]

Burrillville school superintendent Alvin Shepard expressed his enthusiasm fo town's association and its beneficial effects in a 1894 report: "The interest that has shown in the teachers' meetings held during the past two terms, the enthusiasm played by the teachers in their everyday schoolwork, and the desire for self-imp ment, all foretell the raising of the standard of our schools, and this result is practi assured with a corps of teachers, the majority of whom are as earnest in their wo those now employed [anywhere in Rhode Island]."[67] Ella M. Pratt, principal of a pri school in Central Falls and one of the few women in an administrative position, in 1900 that "the teachers in the primary grades have manifested a great interest i meetings held once a month for the purpose of discussing the best methods and benefit is anticipated therefrom in the work of the future."[68]

Ironically, the teachers' associations would later come to haunt administrators, for early twentieth century, under the initial inspiration of Chicago teacher Margaret H the associations were transformed into teacher-controlled councils that fough repressive rules and policies imposed by school administrators. "The essential th said Haley at a National Education Association convention in 1904, "is that the pu school teachers recognize the fact that their struggle to maintain the efficiency schools thru better conditions for themselves is a part of the same great struggle the manual workers . . . have been making for humanity thru their efforts to secur ter living conditions for themselves and their children."[69] Beyond issues of fina security, teachers in the twentieth century sought a greater voice in the desig implementation of the curriculum, for they believed that their work should be r nized beyond their individual classrooms.[70]



Thomas B. Stockwell served as commissioner of the state's public schools for thirty-one years, from 1875 to 1906. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9038).

By the end of the nineteenth century the attempt to strengthen Rhode Island's corps of teachers had produced fundamentally positive, if incomplete, results. Unfortunately, in the absence of accounts by the teachers themselves, such success can be gauged only from the reports of school officials. These officials may, it is true, have had a vested interest in projecting an optimistic view of the teachers they oversaw; yet it is nonetheless significant that their optimism grew as the years progressed. The concerns of Providence school superintendent Daniel Leach in 1870, quoted at the beginning of this article, were common among administrators in the years before the opening of the Rhode Island State Normal School. They were frustrated by the lack of commitment they perceived among many of their teachers.

In 1875, however, after the Normal School had been in operation for a mere four years, Commissioner Stockwell was able to offer a much more promising assessment of the state's teachers. "Today," he wrote, "the aspect of teaching is changed. . . . [There is among teachers] a spirit of loyalty to the work, [and] responsibility to the demands of the profession."[71] In 1880 he went even further:

> The general tone of school life has been elevated and a stronger moral sentiment has been awakened. This is due, I think, to the increased sense of responsibility for the character of their pupils which our teachers are now coming to feel. This movement will undoubtedly continue until it shall have made a very general conquest of the profession, when we may look, with a good degree of expectation, for that development of a sound moral character, which we all feel to be of pressing importance, but which, as yet, has failed of being secured.[72]

The commissioner was hesitant to declare victory because it was clear that a permanent teaching force was not yet in place across the state. Nearly a third of all teachers had not remained in the same position that they had held the previous year. Nationally this figure reached 40 percent, with the average teacher staying only three years in the same school.[73] By 1900, however, longer tenures had become far more common in Rhode Island and throughout the nation.

One indication of this trend is the information supplied in the Normal School's *Catalogue and Circular.* Every five years the school printed a complete listing of its graduates and what they were doing with their lives. While the 1900 listing showed that the majority had left teaching, usually to get married, a substantial number had remained teachers (see table 4). Dozens of graduates from the early years of the school were still teaching in 1900. Though it is likely that a significant proportion of the school's graduates were predisposed to consider teaching a lifelong career, the fact that many graduates did in fact remain in the profession indicates that conditions were sufficiently supportive of such a career goal. Of the school's first ten graduating classes (from 1872 to 1877), 40 of the 168 graduates (24 percent) were still teaching in 1895, and only seven of those 40 had left teaching five years later.[74]

Table 4

Life Choices of Graduates of the Rhode Island State Normal School, 1872-1899, as Recorded in 1900

CLASS[a]	TOTAL NUMBER IN CLASS	NUMBER TEACHING	NUMBER MARRIED	OTHER
1st (1872)	23	6	9	8
5th (1874)	15	5	9	1
10th (1877)	8	1	3	4
15th (1879)	15	4	7	3
20th (1882)	14	5	7	2
25th (1884)	11	6	2	3
30th (1887)	12	8	2	2
35th (1889)	8	2	3	3
40th (1892)	15	12	2	1
45th (1894)	19	15	3	1
50th (1899)	40	31	2	7
Total[b]	726	343 (47.2%)	251 (34.6%)	132 (18.2%)

SOURCE: *Catalogue and Circular of the Rhode Island State Normal School, 1900,* 49-70.

[a] The Normal School graduated two classes a year through 1894 and one class a year beginning in 1895.

[b] Numbers reflect total of all graduates (not only in classes shown) from 1872 to 1899.

In addition to the greater numbers of long-term teachers, Rhode Island schools also saw a remarkable increase in the number and proportion of teachers with normal-school diplomas during the last twenty years of the century (see table 5). By 1900 such teachers had overtaken untrained ones as the majority of the state's teaching force. This trend matched the situation in many other states, where by the first decades of the twentieth century a normal-school education—and, soon

Table 5

Highest Educational Achievement of Teachers in the Rhode Island Public Schools, 1882-1900

	College		*Normal School*[a]		*High School*		*Common School*[b]	
YEAR	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%
1882	50	4.5	264	23.7	643	57.6	158	14.2
1885	61	4.9	318	25.7	689	55.7	169	13.7
1890	78	5.6	413	30.0	752	54.6	135	9.8
1895	124	7.6	638	39.4	782	48.3	76	4.7
1900	205	10.9	952	50.5	684	36.2	46	2.4

SOURCE: *R. I. Schools Annual Reports* for the years cited. Statistics are not available prior to 1882.

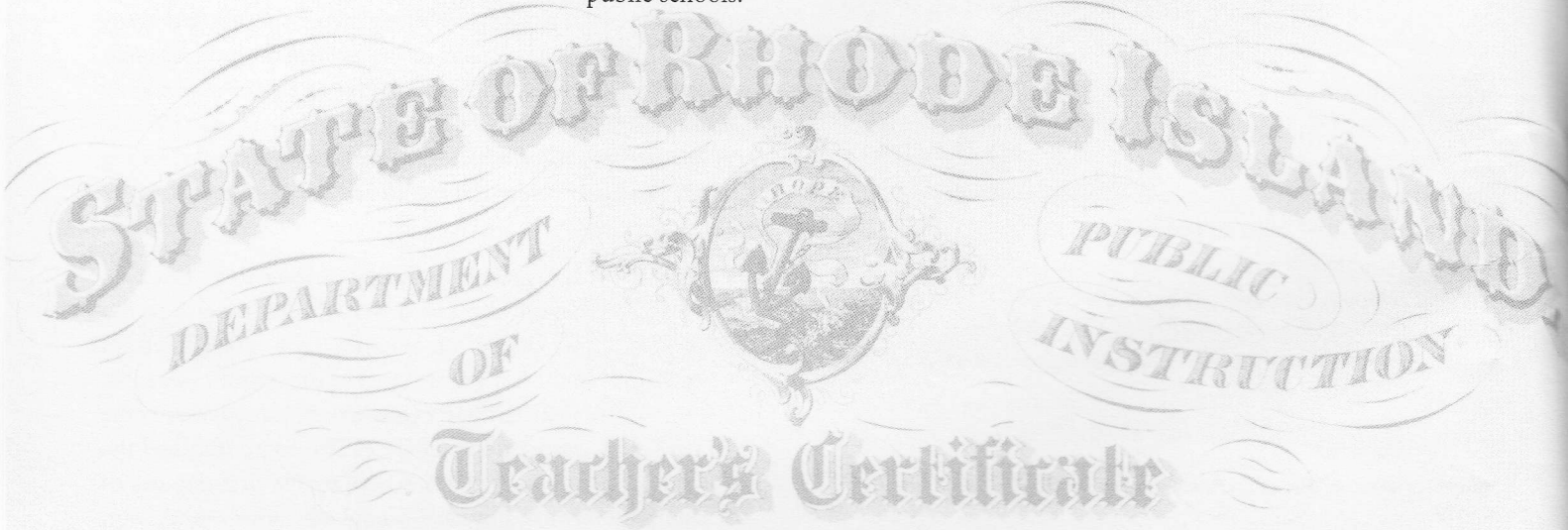
[a] After 1894 includes "special training."

[b] Through grade 8.

after, a college degree—were considered prerequisites for obtaining a teaching position.

Administrators did not hide their pleasure in seeing their hopes for a more career-oriented corps of teachers come to fruition. "Credit is due the [town] committee for carefulness in the selection of teachers,—preference always being given to those professionally trained, and insisting upon an educational qualification," wrote Cranston school superintendent W. Almy in 1896. "By strict adherence to these rules our teaching force has been put upon a higher intellectual plane and continued observance of them will still further dignify the profession."[75] Two years later the Newport Committee on Teachers noted how the improvement among teachers had impacted the schools: "That our corps of instructors is moved by the right spirit is shown by a growing interest in their work; and this interest, always contagious, is affecting the pupils more and more. That this is true is proved, in turn, by the great regularity of attendance, and by the fact that the matter of discipline requires less and less attention."[76] By the end of the nineteenth century, many superintendents and committees were echoing these sentiments, reporting that schools had been improved as a direct consequence of their better-trained and more devoted teachers.

By 1900 it was clear that the level of training and commitment among the state's teachers had indeed risen. Of course this change came about primarily through the efforts of the teachers themselves, specifically those individuals, predominantly women, who chose to pursue a career in teaching. Yet such a choice would have been much less an option had not state officials brought about the founding of the Rhode Island State Normal School. Not only did the school create expanded opportunities for teaching careers; it also established a standard of what might be expected of teachers across the state. Local school officials, too, helped raise the standards of the teaching profession through their support of a number of reforms: the implementation of a system of pay based on training and years of experience; the provision of additional economic benefits such as pensions; the depoliticizing of the hiring practices of town committees; and the creation of a community of learning and sharing among teachers. Ultimately these state and school officials understood and supported the needs of aspiring teachers, and they enabled them to devote their full efforts to the education of children in the state's public schools.



Notes

1. *Semi-Annual Report of the Providence Superintendent, 1870* (Providence, 1870), 6-7, 16.

2. *Report of the Superintendent of Providence, 1898* (Providence, 1898), 49-50.

3. Because most teachers were women, the subject of their development has received a good deal of attention from feminist scholars. Many—like historians Nancy Hoffman in *Woman's "True" Profession* (Old Westbury, N.Y., 1981), Alison Prentice and Marjorie R. Theobald, eds., in *Women Who Taught* (Toronto, 1991), and curriculum theorist Madeline R. Grumet in *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* (Amherst, Mass., 1988)—tend to argue that efforts by women to improve their status as teachers were limited by male administrators, who preferred women only because they could be paid less and held less public power than men. Nancy Hoffman, for instance, claims that "the school reformers had no intention of granting teachers a voice" (*Woman's "True" Profession,* 212). These studies often portray the transition in the nature of teaching in these years as a struggle between men in power and women without it; if women did achieve social and personal growth through teaching, it is argued, it came in opposition to the actions of school administrators. This is also a dominate theme of an essay collection, Donald Warren, ed., *American Teachers: Histories of a Profession at Work* (New York, 1989). For broader surveys of educational history of this period, see Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980* (New York, 1988), and David B. Tyack, *The One Best System* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974). Paul Mattingly, *The Classless Profession* (New York, 1975), views the changes in the teaching profession over the course of the nineteenth century from the perspective of male educational administrators and teachers.

4. On the Rhode Island school system and the state Normal School, see Hector R. Carbone's noninterpretive institutional history of the Normal School, "The History of the Rhode Island Institute of Instruction and the Rhode Island Normal School as Agencies and Institutions of Teacher Education, 1845-1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1971). In addition, see Thomas W. Bicknell, *History of the Rhode Island Normal School, 1871-1900* (Providence, 1911), a largely self-congratulatory history by the state education commissioner responsible for the school's founding. Finally, a study of Rhode Island education in the nineteenth century, Charles Carroll's *Public Education in Rhode Island* (Providence, 1918), provides many details of administrative policy. The best source of understanding the issues facing the Rhode Island school system is the annual reports of the State Board of Education, which include statements from the state education commissioner and every local superintendent and school committee in the state. Copies of all these reports, hereafter cited as *R.I. Schools Annual Report* followed by the year, are located in the Special Collections Library of Rhode Island College, the twentieth-century descendant of the Rhode Island State Normal School.

5. In the three decades before the turn of the century, the number of children registered in the public schools in Rhode Island nearly doubled, partly as the result of the wave of immigrants flooding the state and partly because the state began requiring attendance on a more regular basis.

   Number of Children Registered in the Public Schools of Rhode Island, 1870-1900

YEAR	NUMBER
1870	28,364
1875	38,554
1880	40,604
1885	47,990
1890	52,774
1895	50,424
1900	57,856

   SOURCE: *R.I. Schools Annual Reports* for the years cited.

6. Carbone, "History," 263.

7. In 1854 the state legislature had established a Rhode Island State Normal School to train primary-grade teachers. Basing the school's structure and purpose on the model created by Horace Mann in Massachusetts in 1839, the legislature expected the school to bring more teachers, most of whom would be women, into the growing school system. At its founding, the state partially funded the school and required supplementary tuition by the students. Attendance was low, however, and the school closed within seven years. Soon after, two private normal schools sprang up, and with financial support from the state they tried to fill the growing need for trained teachers; but their programs, too, were unsuccessful, and both failed within a few years. See Carroll, *Public Education,* 163-65; Jurgen Herbst, "Teacher Preparation in the Nineteenth Century: Institutions and Purposes," in Warren, *Teachers,* 219-23.

8. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1870,* p. 41; Carbone, "History," 5, 250-66.

9. At the time of its founding, 114 other normal schools existed, but no other states paid full tuition. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1871,* p. 60.

10. Excerpted from the diary of Mary Swift, first class in Lexington Normal School, 1839; reprinted in Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession,* 65. In 1884, after a new antitruancy law was passed, the Rhode Island State Board of Education declared a similar, albeit more blunt, mandate for the schools: "The heterogeneous masses must be made homogeneous. Those who inherit the traditions of other and hostile nations; those who are bred under diverse influences and hold foreign ideas; those who are supported by national inspirations not American must be inducted into the life and spirit of the New World and must be assimilated and Americanized. The chief agency to this end has been the public school and popular education" (Carroll, *Public Education,* 204).

11. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1892,* p. 137. See also Merle Borrowman, ed., *Teacher Education in America* (New York, 1965), 19-24. As Borrowman puts it, reformers hoped "that the students of the normal school could be given a sense of mission and dedication to service through teaching. . . . No desire was closer to the hearts of the normal school people, who waxed romantic about teaching as a 'profession'" (*Teacher Education,* 12).

12. Bicknell, *Normal School,* 110. According to the Providence School Committee, teachers were of preeminent importance because "a mistake made in [children's] primary education, either in management or instruction, is fraught with momentous consequences . . . and no one should assume the responsibility of a child-educator, whose whole heart is not consecrated to the work, or who engages in it mainly, if not wholly, from mercenary motives" (*Report of the Providence School Committee, 1875,* p. 40). "Prospective teachers," wrote the Reverend Cyrus Peirce, the principal of an early Massachusetts normal school, "must give over their minds, hearts, and time to the Business—they must make school the great object of their attention and of their affection. It must be uppermost in their souls. If they are not willing to do this, they have not yet counted the cost" (Mattingly, *Classless Profession,* 142).

13. Carbone, "History," 269. Also see the annual editions of the *Catalogue and Circular of the Rhode Island State Normal School.* As school districts continued to organize and expand and the number of high schools in the state subsequently rose, the high school course became less relevant to the primary function of the school: teacher training. In 1897 the Normal School's board of trustees expressed the hope that in the future the high school component of the school's program could be phased out. At that time eighteen high schools operated across the state, and over 60 percent of the Normal School's students entered with a high school education; by the next year this proportion rose to almost 75 percent. But until all students had access to a high school, the state was required to provide this education in the Normal School. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1896,* p. 37; *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1897,* p. 46.

Notes continued

14. As one school official explained, "Formerly we asked, what do the teachers know about arithmetic, grammar, geography, etc.; but now we ask in addition, what do the teachers know about children, for knowledge of the child as well as the lesson is needed to reach the best results" (*R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1896,* p. 142).

15. *Catalogue and Circular,* 1871-1900.

16. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1881,* p. 110.

17. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1871,* p. 68.

18. Carbone, "History," 282-84.

19. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1893,* p. 37.

20. Carbone, "History," 339-43. Despite the physical growth of the Normal School, by the last years of the century it seemed unable to fill the ever-growing demand for trained teachers, and towns had to develop their own programs to supplement its work. Pawtucket, Providence, Cranston, and Central Falls, for example, established training schools for their own high school graduates who wished to become teachers in the local school systems. See Carbone, "History," 328-29; Carroll, *Public Education,* 228-29.

21. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1897,* p. 121.

22. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1886,* pp. 159-60.

23. Carroll, *Public Education,* 136-39.

24. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1888,* p. 132. Stockwell also claimed that the public would support statewide certification: "I think it is safe to say that there has never been a time when the whole people were more ready to unite in measures looking to the advance of our schools" (ibid., 117).

25. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1895,* pp. 45-46.

26. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1897,* pp. 28-33.

27. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1898,* pp. 11-14. The first-grade license, valid for three years, was issued to those presenting a diploma from an accredited college or university. The second-grade license required a normal-school diploma or a high school diploma together with a diploma from a training school (training schools, which were locally run, offered teacher-preparation programs with standards usually lower than those of the state Normal School). The second-grade license was good for two years, as was the third-grade license, which required passing a statewide examination on basic school subjects. The fourth-grade license, valid for one year, was issued to those passing a statewide exam slightly less demanding than the one given to applicants for the third-grade license. Ibid., 12-13.

28. Michael W. Sedlak, "'Let Us Go and Buy a School Master': Historical Perspectives on the Hiring of Teachers in the United States, 1750-1980," in Warren, *Teachers,* 263-66. By 1894, four years before Rhode Island's certification system was adopted, only three states had statewide certification programs. By 1911 fifteen states had such programs. Ibid., 266.

29. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1900,* pp. 12-13. Eventually more and more of the nation's normal-school graduates chose to attend college after graduating from normal school and before teaching. By the first years of the twentieth century this trend acted to displace normal schools as the primary institutions for training teachers. (See Herbst, "Teacher Preparation," 231, and Borrowman, *Teacher Education,* 27-45.) Yet as the Rhode Island model shows, although a college education did become more common among normal-school graduates, the normal schools were the original and, therefore, the chief agency for encouraging individuals to enter teaching.

30. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1900,* p. 11.

31. Ibid., 137. A few school administrators raised some minor (and temporary) objections to the new law. For instance, G. C. Gross of Charlestown argued that statewide certification took power away from local school boards, some of which, while they did not do the actual hiring, had been empowered to determine the qualifications of applicants for teaching positions. "This power is now taken from them for, as they did not grant the certificate, they cannot annul it" (*R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1899,* p. 173).

32. In its 1875 report the Providence School Committee listed the qualifications required of teachers: "high intelligence, wisdom, prudence, self control and quick discernment, mingled with maternal instincts" (*Report of the Providence School Committee, 1875,* p. 40).

33. Geraldine Jonçich Clifford, "'Daughters into Teachers': Educational and Demographic Influences on the Transformation of Teaching into 'Women's Work' in America," in Prentice and Theobald, *Women Who Taught,* 121. Also see Grumet, *Bitter Milk,* 43.

34. One scholar puts such a dynamic like this: "The democratic predilections that predisposed Americans to accept the feminization of education would have been insufficient for the purpose if feminization had implied feminism. . . . Teaching gradually came to be regarded as womanly, in terms of the female role traditionally defined" (Redding Sugg, Jr., *Motherteacher: The Feminization of American Education* [Charlottesville, Va, 1978], 8).

35. Grumet, *Bitter Milk,* 43. See also Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place* (New York, 1978), 26.

36. For an impressive study of why and how teaching transferred from men to women, see Sugg, *Motherteacher.*

37. John L. Rury, "Who Became Teachers?: The Social Characteristics of Teachers in American History," in Warren, *Teachers,* 25.

38. Ibid., 19. Another clear indication that the schools were simultaneously expanding and becoming more organized was the rapid increase in the number of schools coinciding with a decrease, both in numbers and percentages, of those that were ungraded (i.e., less modernized).

Number of Schools and Ungraded Schools in Rhode Island, 1870-1900

YEAR	TOTAL NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	NUMBER UNGRADED	% UNGRADED
1870	635	NA	—
1875	737	301	40.8
1880	824	294	35.7
1885	882	291	33.0
1890	1,051	266	25.3
1895	1,252	263	21.0
1900	1,465	238	16.2

SOURCE: *R.I. Schools Annual Reports* for the years cited.

39. Carrie E. Sampson, "Woman's Sphere," 7 Dec. 1892, box 0.0/9, Rhode Island State Normal School Senior B Essays, Special Collections Library, Rhode Island College.

40. Rury, "Who Became Teachers?" 9-26. In addition to recruiting women to teaching, the legislature also hoped to draw students from rural areas. The expectation was that they would then return to their hometowns with improved educational techniques and curricula and push those towns to move more quickly to modernize their schools. Nine days after the legislature passed the bill establishing the school, it passed a supplementary bill providing a traveling stipend to those students who lived outside a five-mile radius of Providence, where the school was located. This provision proved rather significant, since over a quarter of the students would come from farms (see table 2). A study of a Massachusetts normal school for 1859 showed a similar pattern, leading the author to conclude that teaching was increasingly seen by young women as a means to move from the confinement of rural towns and leave behind the "family-centered culture." Ibid., 22.

41. See Clifford, "'Daughters into Teachers,'" 127-28.

42. Ibid., 124-25.

43. In Nancy Hoffman's words, "The profession of teaching now moved into a position that it would hold for the rest of the century and on into modern times: less equal in status to male professions *and* a source of satisfaction and

power for women" (*Woman's "True" Profession,* 15-16).

44. Of the 72 men who graduated from the Normal School from 1872 to 1895, those few who stayed in education (most left teaching for other professions) included two superintendents and the director of a new vocational program. *Catalogue and Circular, 1885,* pp. 27-28; *Catalogue and Circular, 1895,* pp. 17-27.

45. The School Committee of Coventry, for example, explained to town officials that the committee's task was no different from that of the town council. "We see nothing in the employment of a teacher which should be differently managed from other corresponding transactions in business. . . . Let teachers be encouraged to expect as much pay as their services are worth" (*R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1893,* p. 139).

46. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1886,* p. 113.

47. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1886,* p. 117.

48. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1890,* p. 125. A state law requiring minimum salaries was not enacted until 1906. Carroll, *Public Education,* 250.

49. Paul H. Douglas, *Real Wages in the United States, 1890-1926* (Boston, 1930), 361, 378, 398.

50. See Mattingly, *Classless Profession,* 153-60.

51. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1886,* p. 105.

52. Geraldine Jonçich Clifford, "Man/Woman/Teacher: Gender, Family, and Career in American Educational History," in Warren, *Teachers,* 307-8, 293-99; Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession,* 9-10. Also see Rothman, *Proper Place,* 47-60.

53. Excerpted from Marian Dogherty, *'Scusa Me Teacher* (Francestown, N.H., 1943), reprinted in Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession,* 257.

54. James W. Fraser, "Agents of Democracy: Urban Elementary School Teachers and the Conditions of Teaching," in Warren, *Teachers,* 131.

55. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1881,* p. 113; Fraser, "Agents," 130-31.

56. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1898,* pp. 134-35. The Newport Retirement Fund Committee, responsible for establishing the fund, consulted with H. S. Tarbell, Providence school superintendent and overseer of the first retirement fund in the state.

57. Carroll, *Public Education,* 249; Fraser, "Agents," 131.

58. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1898,* p. 134.

59. In 1870 over one-third of the state's teachers did not teach in the same classroom as they had the previous year. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1899,* p 184. By the turn of the century the percentage had been halved.

Number of Teachers and Teacher Changes in Rhode Island Schools, 1881-1900

YEAR	TOTAL NUMBER OF TEACHERS	NUMBER OF CHANGES	% OF TOTAL
1881	1,100	338	30.7
1885	1,237	381	30.8
1890	1,378	369	26.8
1895	1,620	357	22.0
1900	1,887	305	16.2

SOURCE: *R.I. Schools Annual Reports* for the years cited.
Statistics are not available prior to 1881.

60. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1894,* p. 145. Meanwhile the school committee of North Smithfield, in apparent frustration, proposed a simple solution to alleviate the continual disputes between it and the town committee: "We believe the difficulty can be overcome by giving the school committee authority in the hiring of teachers. . . . The best qualified applicants would be elected, good teachers would be retained, and changes would be less frequent" (*R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1890,* p. 115).

61. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1895,* p. 137. By this time it had become common practice to use the female pronoun in referring to teachers.

62. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1900,* p. 136.

63. *Report of the Providence School Committee, 1896,* p. 7.

64. This hiring system was soon replaced by one under which hiring and firing were totally controlled by school administrators. Many found the latter system equally distasteful, though it arguably served the interests of better education. See Fraser, "Agents," 123-24.

65. The Normal School, too, set up such community learning environments, though on a much larger scale; for instance, it ran an annual lecture series that was attended by teachers from all over the state. In 1900 its series "The Education of Mankind and of the Child in the Light of Evolution" was so successful that school officials in Pawtucket chose not to hold their usual local lectures that year. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1900,* p. 35.

66. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1893,* p. 215.

67. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1894,* p. 144.

68. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1900,* p. 88. In addition to providing the opportunity to learn together, these teachers' associations helped teachers to organize for their interests. For example, the association in Newport was formed to facilitate the establishment of the teachers' retirement fund. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1898,* p. 134.

69. Margaret Haley, "Why Teachers Should Organize," in *National Education Association Addresses and Proceedings* (St. Louis, 1904); reprinted in Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession,* 294.

70. Fraser, "Agents," 142. See also Tyack, *One Best System,* 267-68.

71. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1875,* p. 106.

72. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1880,* p. 112.

73. Ibid., 91; Edgar B. Wesley, *NEA, The First Hundred Years: The Building of the Teaching Profession* (New York, 1957), 342.

74. *Catalogue and Circular, 1895,* pp. 17-20; *Catalogue and Circular, 1900,* pp. 49-54.

75. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1896,* p. 141.

76. *R.I. Schools Annual Report, 1898,* p. 135.

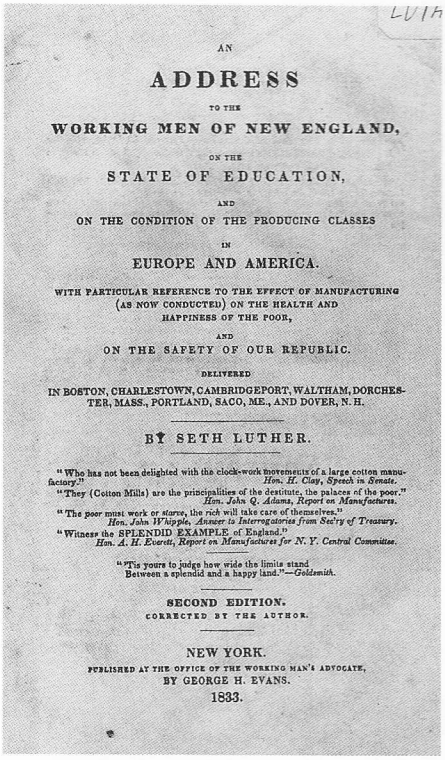
To the Honorable General Assembly next to be holden at South Kingstown on the last Monday of October AD 1823.

Humbly petitioneth Seth Luther of Providence in the County of Providence housewright that by reason of various losses & unavoidable misfortune he has become insolvent and is now confined in gaol. That although his insolvency is proved to the satisfaction of a judicial tribunal, & he has been admitted to take the poor prisoners oath his creditor avails himself of the provision of laws for keeping him in prison by leaving money for his support, & he has therefore no hope of release but from the merciful interposition of the Assembly. The particulars of his situation are disclosed more fully in the Statement hereto annexed, by which it appears that great part of his misfortune have arisen from sickness & personal calamity - and although if he were at large he might hope to earn something more than a mere support & provide for a gradual reduction of his debts he can have no such hope while continued in Confinement. He therefore prays that the benefit of the Act entitled "an act for the relief of Insolvent Debtors" may be extended to him and that he may be liberated from gaol until the trial of this petition, and all proceedings against him for Debt be stayed, & he as in duty bound will ever pray

Seth Luther

Young Luther in Debt

CARL GERSUNY



AN

ADDRESS

TO THE

WORKING MEN OF NEW ENGLAND,

ON THE

STATE OF EDUCATION,

AND

ON THE CONDITION OF THE PRODUCING CLASSES

IN

EUROPE AND AMERICA.

WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE EFFECT OF MANUFACTURING (AS NOW CONDUCTED) ON THE HEALTH AND HAPPINESS OF THE POOR,

AND

ON THE SAFETY OF OUR REPUBLIC.

DELIVERED

IN BOSTON, CHARLESTOWN, CAMBRIDGEPORT, WALTHAM, DORCHESTER, MASS., PORTLAND, SACO, ME., AND DOVER, N. H.

BY SETH LUTHER.

"Who has not been delighted with the clock-work movements of a large cotton manufactory." *Hon. H. Clay, Speech in Senate.*

"They (Cotton Mills) are the principalities of the destitute, the palaces of the poor." *Hon. John Q. Adams, Report on Manufactures.*

"The poor must work or starve, the rich will take care of themselves." *Hon. John Whipple, Answer to Interrogatories from Sec'ry of Treasury.*

"Witness the SPLENDID EXAMPLE of England!" *Hon. A. H. Everett, Report on Manufactures for N. Y. Central Committee.*

"'Tis yours to judge how wide the limits stand
Between a splendid and a happy land."—*Goldsmith.*

SECOND EDITION.
CORRECTED BY THE AUTHOR.

NEW YORK.
PUBLISHED AT THE OFFICE OF THE WORKING MAN'S ADVOCATE,
BY GEORGE H. EVANS.
1833.

An articulate exponent of the workers' cause, Luther published this Address to the Working Men of New England *in 1833. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9040).*

Left: *In 1823 the Rhode Island General Assembly received sixty-nine petitions from insolvent debtors seeking release from jail. One of the petitioners was Seth Luther. C#00165, Petitions to the General Assembly, 1824, vol. 52, p. 88, Rhode Island State Archives.*

Carl Gersuny is a professor emeritus of sociology and an associate of the Labor Research Center at the University of Rhode Island.

One of four sons of Revolutionary War veteran Thomas Luther and his wife Rebecca, Seth Luther was born in Providence in 1795. He had six years of formal schooling and then served an apprenticeship as a house carpenter. In 1815 he was one of the militiamen mobilized to keep order in the aftermath of the Great September Gale. During that year he was also received into Providence's First Baptist Church, to which his mother had belonged since the year he was born. He would remain in that church until 1824, when he would be expelled for "disorderly walking"—most likely a reference to his heterodox interpretations of Scripture, which, as a street preacher, he used as a blunt instrument against the privileged classes.

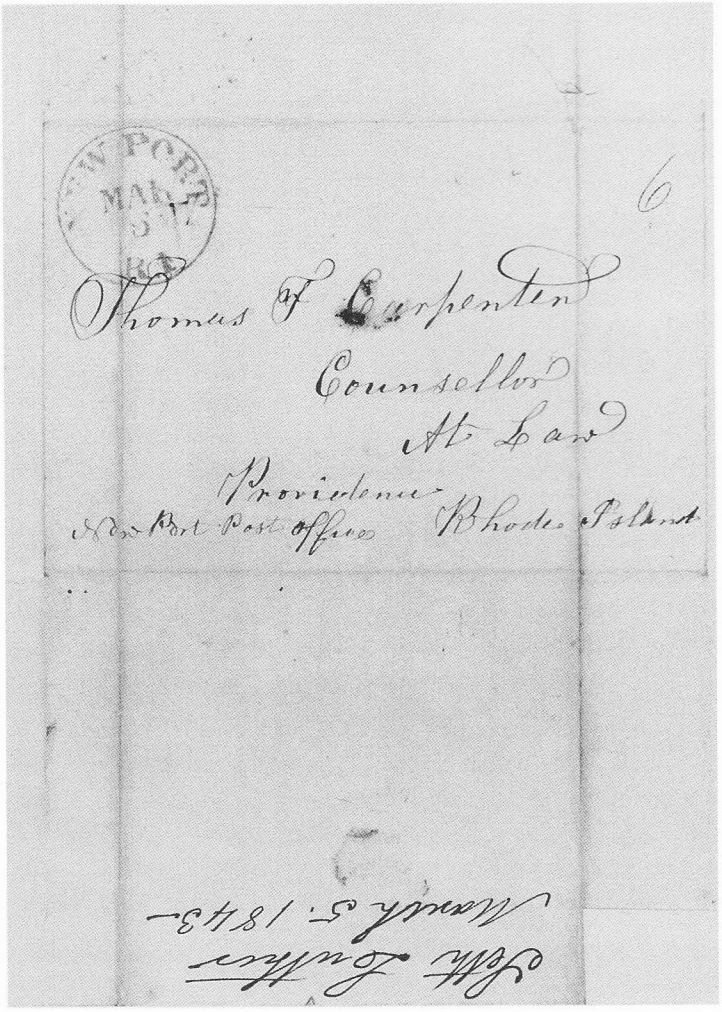
Becoming active in the labor movement of the Jacksonian era, Luther proved to be an articulate exponent of the workers' cause, with even his enemies acknowledging his great talent as a speaker and writer. Four of his speeches were published in pamphlet form. In 1832 he was a member of a delegation that lobbied the governor of Rhode Island in behalf of a ten-hour workday. In 1834 he helped found the Trades Union of Boston and Vicinity, and he became a leader of the short-lived National Trades Union as well. In 1836 he gave a rousing Fourth of July oration at a labor observance in Brooklyn.

In 1841 Luther was engaged as a lecturer by the Rhode Island free suffrage movement, which was seeking the repeal of property qualifications for voting in the state. After forming a People's party and holding its own popular elections, the movement attempted to replace the existing state government with one under "People's Governor" Thomas Wilson Dorr in an abortive effort remembered today as the Dorr War.

Luther was imprisoned for his part in that war. After his release in 1843 he traveled to Illinois to recover from his ordeal. In the summer of 1844 he made speeches at rallies for Polk's presidential campaign in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, exhorting his listeners to support the release of Thomas Dorr from prison. In March 1846 he appeared in Manchester, New Hampshire, at a gathering seeking to promote a ten-hour workday. When the United States declared war against Mexico, he offered his services as a clerk in the army or navy, but he never served in that capacity.

In June 1846 Luther was arrested after he tried to rob a bank on State Street in Boston at sword point, demanding one thousand dollars "in the name of President Polk." He spent the remaining seventeen years of his life in various asylums, including ten years at Butler Hospital in Providence. In 1858 he was transferred, for reasons of economy, to Vermont Asylum in Brattleboro, where he died on 29 April 1863.[1]

There are many blank pages in the story of Luther's life, but recent research by Jama Lazerow and Mark S. Schantz has contributed greatly to the store of available knowledge.[2] This research has focused attention on the place of religion in Luther's thinking, particularly with regard to his unconventional interpretation of Scripture. Schantz examines the class divisions between street preachers like Luther and establishment fig-



Imprisoned for his part in the Dorr War, in March 1843 Luther dispatched an appeal for help to attorney Thomas F. Carpenter from the state jail in Newport. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9030).

ures like Francis Wayland, who dominated the First Baptist Church. "Despite rejecting the order and discipline of the bourgeois congregations," Schantz finds, "the street preachers nonetheless wished to possess a measure of spiritual authority. Of all the plebeian speakers who resided in Providence, Seth Luther commanded singular attention . . . and attracted a substantial following."[3]

In the course of his research, Schantz discovered Luther's 1823 petition for release from imprisonment for debt.[4] This highly revealing document can be read as Luther's earliest piece of autobiographical writing.

Imprisonment of insolvent debtors was an ancient practice, designed to act as a deterrent to unwise borrowing and assumption of imprudent risk, as a means to ferret out hidden assets, and as an inducement to third parties to ransom prisoners by paying their debts. Such imprisonment was not without its drawbacks for creditors, for they had to pay for the upkeep of their confined debtors, whose earning capacity, of course, was seriously impaired by their confinement. Many recorded instances of long-term incarceration in Rhode Island suggest that some creditors may have valued retribution over recovery of the amounts at issue. Before Rhode Island's courts were empowered to adjudicate cases of bankruptcy, petitions for relief by insolvent debtors were submitted to and voted on by the legislature. In 1823 the General Assembly received sixty-nine of these petitions, of which forty, including Seth Luther's, were approved.[5] Luther petitioned thus:

> To the Honorable General Assembly next to be holden at South Kingstown on the last Monday of October AD 1823
>
> Humbly petitioning thus Seth Luther of Providence in the County of Providence, housewright—that by reason of various losses and unavoidable misfortunes he has become insolvent and is now confined in gaol. That although his insolvency is proved to the satisfaction of a judicial tribunal & he has been admitted to take the poor prisoner's oath, his creditor avails himself of the provision of law for keeping him in prison by leaving money for his support, & he has therefore no hope of release but for the merciful interposition of the Assembly. The particulars of his situation are disclosed more fully in the statements hereto annexed, by which it appears that a great part of his misfortunes have arisen from sickness and personal calamity, and although if he were at large he might hope to earn something more than mere support & provide for the gradual reduction of his debt, he can have no such hope while he continues in confinement. He therefore prays that the benefit of the Act entitled "An Act for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors," may be extended to him and that he may be liberated from gaol. . . .
>
> Seth Luther

The statements attached to the petition provide a window through which some of the particulars of the twenty-eight-year-old Luther's life may be viewed. With their listing of his creditors and the amounts owed and their inventory of his meager possessions, these statements reveal new details about Luther and the reasons for some of his losses. To gauge the magnitude of his financial plight, we have to put Luther's indebtedness—which he calculated at $968.44½—into a 1990s frame of reference. While it may be true, as economist Walter Haines tells us, that "a statistician is a person who states an uncertainty with precision," we can nonetheless cobble together a number from consumer

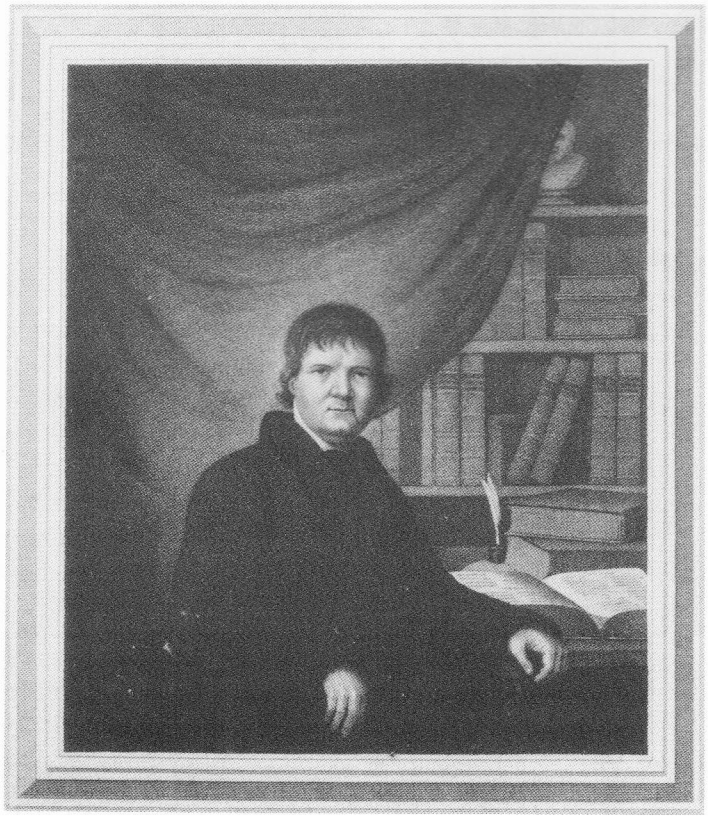
price indices that will allow us to roughly convert 1820s dollars into their 1990s equivalent.[6] Multiplying Luther's figures by 12½ will give us an approximation of his debt.

Included with Luther's petition was a list of his losses, given under oath:

	$ Cts
Loss by engaging as Agent for Joseph Teal of the City of Boston in the business of Bookselling during the term of one year and eleven months	500.00
Loss of Cash by bad debts, to wit Cash delivered to John Warner, Minor	10.25
Note against Uriah Cogwell now in the hands of an Attorney in Connecticut	34.99
Cost of Collection Attempt	3.00
Loss by Sickness During the Summer of 1822 2 months loss	75.00
In fall and winter of 1822-3 Surgical operation by Drs Mackie and Peck in consequence of a rupture of a Bloodvessel lost time 4 months loss	156.00
Drs bill for all sickness mentioned	38.50
Loss on getting a Portrait of Rev S. Gano engraved and attempting to sell same	100.00
Total	$917.74

This list provides glimpses into parts of Luther's life that have long eluded labor historians. Although Luther undoubtedly traveled widely, the references to his illness and his surgical operation by two Providence doctors indicate that he spent more time in Rhode Island during this period than has been inferred from the evidence of his later published writings.

By far the largest item on the list was the $500 loss that Luther somehow incurred as an agent for Joseph Teal, a Boston bookseller. It is not clear how the agent rather than the principal incurred the loss; perhaps the situation was analogous to one in which a franchisee loses heavily while a franchiser prospers. Luther worked for Teal for nearly two years, a long period in which to persist in a losing proposition.



Luther's attempt to sell copies of this portrait of the Reverend Stephen Gano ended badly. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9033).

Luther's losses because of ill health shed light not only on his income potential as a house carpenter but also on the high cost of medical care. In the summer of 1822 he missed two months of work because of illness, to which he attributes $75 in lost wages. In the winter of 1822-23 he lost four months' pay, $156, because of a ruptured blood vessel. His medical care was rendered by Dr. William Peck of 119 North Main Street and Dr. John Mackie of 42 Westminster Street for $20.50 and $18.00 respectively (see appendix to this article). Extrapolating from his account of lost wages, we can estimate his earning potential at between $400 and $500 per year, minus some allowance for seasonality in the building trades.

The last of Luther's claimed losses resulted from his bizarre scheme of selling portraits of Stephen Gano, the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Providence from 1782 to 1828. This loss of $100 (of which $95 was owed to the engraver) was incurred because Luther—a street preacher who offended the church's respectable congregation, and who would be expelled from that church in 1824—was probably the last person from whom the church's pewholders would buy such an item, and Gano was probably the last person whose portrait Luther's plebeian street congregation would buy even if they had the money to spare.

Scrutiny of the list of creditors appended to Luther's petition (see appendix) reveals the wide range of his social contacts at the time. It also reveals that the bulk of his indebtedness was held by a small number of creditors; of the forty-four persons on the list, the four men at the top were owed 59 percent of the total. The major creditor by far was Luther's brother Thomas Luther, Jr., who was owed $378, or 39 percent of the total.

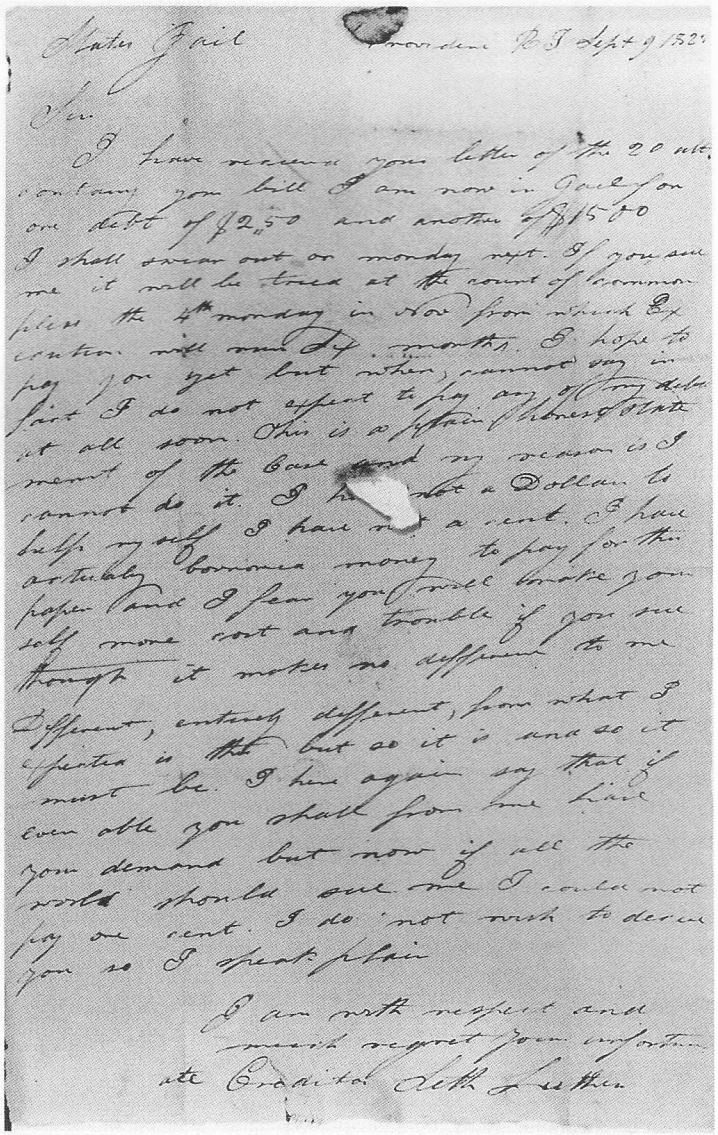
In all, the list is a veritable Who's Who in Providence, with Nicholas Brown, Esq., on it for $18.08 and William Goddard, Esq., for $1.00. Of the forty-four creditors, thirty-six were Providence residents, all but two of whom can be identified in the 1824 *Providence Directory.* Two of the out-of-town creditors can also be identified. With three exceptions, however, the nature of the transactions that produced the debts cannot be identified with any confidence, since it cannot be ascertained whether a debt to a merchant tailor or to the proprietor of a hardware store was for goods purchased on credit or a loan.

The most famous of the creditors from out of town was Asher B. Durand (1796-1886) of New York City. Durand was one of the luminaries in the graphic arts in the United States during much of the nineteenth century. Trained as an engraver, he made the engraving of John Trumbull's famous painting *The Signing of the Declaration of Independence,* and as a painter he became a leading figure among the landscape painters of the Hudson River school. Early in his career he engraved numerous portraits of clergymen; and it was with Durand that Luther contracted for the engraved portrait of the Reverend Stephen Gano. Luther wrote to Durand from debtors' prison:

> State Jail Providence R.I. Sept 9 1823
>
> Sir
>
> I have received your letter of the 20 ult containing your bill I am now in jail on one debt of $2.50 and another of $15.00 I shall swear out on monday next. If you sue me it will be tried in the court of Common pleas the 4th monday in Nov from which Execution will run Six months. I hope to pay you yet but when, cannot say in fact I do not expect to pay any of my debts at all soon. This is a plain honest statement of the Case and my reason is I cannot do it. I have not a Dollar to help myself I have not a cent. I have actually borrowed money to pay for this paper and I fear you will make yourself more cost and trouble if you sue though it makes no difference to me Different, certainly different, from what I expected is this but so it is and so it must be. I here again say that if ever able you shall from me have your demand but now if all the world should sue me I could not pay one cent. I do not wish to deceive you so I speak plain
>
> I am with respect and much regret your unfortunate Creditor [*sic*]
>
> Seth Luther[7]

From Caleb Earle (1771-1851) Luther received much more than the $54 in credit that appears on the list. Earle—a carpenter, lumberyard proprietor, and shipowner—had been the master under whose direction Luther had served his apprenticeship as a house carpenter. In addition, he was lieutenant governor of Rhode Island from 1821 to 1824, in which capacity he participated in the October 1823 legislative session that considered Luther's petition for relief under the Insolvent Debtors Act. The relationship of Earle and Luther was thus a multifaceted one, but we have no information as to how Luther incurred the $54 debt. In fact, only two claims besides Asher Durand's can be attributed to obvious causes—Dr. Mackie's and Dr. Peck's, for medical services rendered. It may also be surmised that the $13.21 owed to jailer Stephen Wilmarth was for costs incidental to Luther's incarceration.

The list of creditors includes two mariners, two lumber merchants, three shoemakers, a boardinghouse keeper and an innkeeper, two bookstore proprietors, two tailors, and an accountant. A somewhat mysterious creditor is Arouet Richmond, a "hydraulion" of 44 Broad Street.[8] The Providence fire department had a new pumper called the Hydraulion, but



The incarcerated Luther explained his plight to Asher B. Durand in this letter of 9 September 1823. Asher B. Durand Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library; Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

the firefighters were volunteers; to be owed $23 by Luther, this creditor (apparently named after Voltaire) must have had a sufficient source of income not connected with extinguishing fires.

Finally, in view of Luther's activities as a Baptist street preacher and his acceptance and later rejection by the First Baptist Church, it may be noted that five members of that church's congregation were among the creditors. Two of these served as superintendents of the church's Sunday school: James D. Knowles ($13.50) from 1820 to 1821 and Hugh Brown ($8.00) from 1821 to 1827.[9]

Under penalty of perjury, the June 1820 Act for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors required that a petitioner furnish a "just and true inventory of all his property and estate, of every kind and nature . . . (except wearing apparel not exceeding in value one hundred dollars)." On 26 September 1823, under oath before Justice of the Peace Benjamin Peck, Luther itemized his meager belongings:

	$ Cts
One odd Vol Rumford Essays	1.00
2 shares in Benedicts Hist Baptists	2.00
One trunk covered with leather	1.00
one pair Iron Shovel and Tongs	0.75
2 Copies Gospel St. John in French @ .25	0.50
1 old Chest	0.25
1 Copy "Advice to a Younger Brother"	0.25
1 Copy French Fables	0.25
	$5.80 [*sic*]

Three items in this inventory shed light on Luther's life and mission. The first of these is his volume of Rumford essays. Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford (1753-1814), was an important figure in the field of physics, to which he made significant contributions relating to the theory and application of heat. He was also a picaresque character in the drama of his times. Born in Woburn, Massachusetts, he sided with the British during the Revolutionary War and fled to England in 1776. Later he fought on the British side in South Carolina and on Long Island. In 1783 he was in Europe with an introduction to the elector of Bavaria, who made him a major general, head of the war department, and police minister. In 1791 he became a count of the Holy Roman Empire.

That the writings of such a person should engage the interest of Seth Luther stems from the fact that in carrying out his police function, Rumford set out to rid the streets of Munich of beggars and vagabonds. Toward that end he provided for centralized distribution of poor-relief funds, established a work program, and promoted the provision of nutritious meals for the indigent. To discourage drunkenness, he encouraged coffee drinking (and also invented the percolator). Luther could discount Rumford's motives—which were those of a policeman in charge of social control—because many of the measures taken had an appeal for reformers, much as in a later age Bismarck would adumbrate the welfare state. "The care of the poor," wrote Rumford, ". . . I must consider a matter of very serious importance. It appears to me to be one of the most

sacred duties imposed upon men in a state of civil society, one of those duties imposed immediately by the hand of God himself, and of which the neglect never goes unpunished."[10]

The second item deserving of comment is Luther's two shares in Benedict's *General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World,* a massive two-volume tome published in Boston in 1813, two years before Luther's baptism at the First Baptist Church in Providence. Publication of this work was funded by subscription, and the names of the subscribers appear in an appendix to volume two after over nine hundred pages of dense text. Among some five hundred names of Rhode Island shareholders appear those of Seth Luther and one of his creditors, Nicholas Brown, Esq. Luther's investment of $2.00 in this enterprise more than two years before his baptism reflects the early influence of Rebecca Luther, his mother, whose own baptism had taken place in 1785. David Benedict, the author of the work, was the minister of a church in Pawtucket and the son-in-law of Stephen Gano, the engraving of whose portrait had helped send Luther to debtors' prison. Although Gano's displeasure with Luther culminated in Luther's expulsion from the church after his release from debtors' prison, it did nothing to abate Luther's use of religious imagery, as witness his published writings of the 1830s.

The third item of interest is "1 Copy 'Advice to a Younger Brother.'" It is hardly surprising that a debtor whose biggest obligation is to his oldest brother might have been given such a compendium of sound advice. If Thomas Luther, Jr., had any hope of recovering the $377.97 owed him, or any substantial portion of it, he was deluding himself; and if he had bought this book for his unfortunate sibling, he was throwing good money after bad. Nonetheless, the book's remarks on judicious money management do seem reasonable:

> Every man has it in his power to confine his expenditure to his means; and so long as he does that, he may preserve his independence. But when once we go beyond the boundary which prudence prescribes, we take a most dangerous step which we cannot recall, and from the effects of which we can rarely recover. . . . But he who spends with regularity and economy, who considers his resources, and takes good care not to exceed them, preserves most securely his independence and honour. . . . Here let me particularly recommend to you an undeviating habit of punctual payment. Pay as you go and refuse to receive credit.[11]

Like most advice, however, this was no doubt easier to give than to follow. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine a world without credit. Nevertheless, we can imagine how an exasperated brother might have pressed such a book on Seth Luther. Its place in the inventory may well shed light on Luther's relationship with members of his family. Half a lifetime later Luther would spend ten years at Butler Hospital, and nobody would come to visit him there.

At the General Assembly session at South Kingstown on 27 October 1823, the House of Representatives voted that

> On the petition of Seth Luther of Providence praying for the benefit of the Act entitled "An Act for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors" . . . Resolved that the prayer of said petition be granted and the benefit of said act be extended to the said Seth Luther accordingly.[12]

The Senate followed suit, and we again lose track of Luther until the early 1830s.

Appendix

Alphabetical Register of Seth Luther's Creditors

	AMOUNT OWED	AVAILABLE INFORMATION[a]
Aborn, James, Esq.	$ 6.00	Lumber merchant, Union St.
Ames, Robert A.	4.50	Providence
Angell, Job	5.00	(Two persons of that name in *Providence Directory*)
Barnard, Eunice	2.00	Nantucket
Bartlett, I. H.	13.34	New Bedford
Brown, Capt. George L.	8.00	Mariner, over 154 South Main St.
Brown, Hugh	8.00	Editor of *Providence Gazette,* 3 South Main St.; First Baptist
Brown, Nicholas, Esq.	18.08	Merchant, 36 South Main St.; 189 Benefit St.
Clapp, Waterman	18.50	Shoemaker, 4 Market Sq.
Clarke, George G.	24.00	Jeweler, 27 Cheapside (lower North Main St.); 22 Broad St.
Durand, Asher B.	95.00	Engraver, New York City
Earle, Caleb	54.00	Lumberyard proprietor, 40 South Water St.
Fenner, Thomas, Jr.	2.50	Harness maker, 97 North Main St.; 111 Westminster St.; First Baptist
Field, Warren	23.00	
Fox, George W.	21.70	Grocer, 10 & 211 South Main St.; First Baptist
Garrish, Andrew	1.50	New Bedford
Goddard, William, Esq.	1.00	Editor of *Rhode Island American,* 111 Benefit St.
Kendall, Oliver	7.50	Bookseller, 2 Market Sq.; Eddy St.
Knowles, James D.	13.50	Baptist seminary, Washington, D.C.; First Baptist
Luther, Stephen	7.47	Weaver, 453 North Main St.; First Baptist
Luther, Thomas, Jr.	377.97	Shoemaker, 453 North Main St.
Luther, Thomas, Sr.	40.00	Tanner, 453 North Main St.
Maccomber, Miss Hannah	5.50	Boardinghouse keeper, 60 Weybosset St.
Mackie, Dr. John	18.00	Physician & surgeon, 42 Westminster St.
Manchester, Isaac	2.75	New Bedford
Miller, John, Esq.	1.00	Publisher of *Manufacturers' & Farmers' Journal,* 4 Marker Sq.
Mumford, Col. Harry G.	2.50	Bowen St.
Nelson, Col. Nathaniel	15.00	New Bedford
Olney Dyer & Company	6.50	Hardware dealers, 26 Weybosset St.
Oman, William	3.10	Newport
Peck, Dr. William	20.50	Physician, 119 North Main St.
Potter, Capt. William, Jr.	15.00	Mariner, 120 South Main St.
Prentis, John	10.00	Merchant tailor, 19 Westminster St.; 6 Washington St.
Richmond, Arouet	23.00	Hydraulion, 44 Broad St.
Sherman, Peleg	3.50	Shoemaker, 35 & 107 Broad St.
Shumway & Reed	18.93	Dry goods sellers, 7 Market Sq.
Smart, Mrs. Sarah	1.50	100 Westminster St.
Smith, Christopher	19.50	Merchant tailor, 13 Market Sq.; 44 Broad St.
Smith, Noah, Jr.	1.00	Accountant, 222 North Main St.
Teal, Joseph	17.00	Bookseller, Boston
Wheeler, Samuel G.	4.50	Hat seller, 13 Market Sq.; 81 Pawtucket St.
Wilder, John	5.70	Innkeeper, 18 Market Sq.
Wilmarth, Stephen, Esq.	13.21	Jailer, 113 North Main St.
Wolcott, G. W.	1.72½	

SOURCES: Petitions to the Rhode Island General Assembly, 52:88 (October 1823); *Providence Directory,* 1824 (Providence: Brown & Danforth, 1824).

[a] All street addresses are in Providence; where two addresses appear, the first is the business address, the second the home address. *First Baptist* indicates a member of the First Baptist Church in America, Providence.

Notes

1. Louis Hartz, "Seth Luther: The Story of a Working-Class Rebel," *New England Quarterly* 13 (1940): 401-18; Carl Gersuny, "A Biographical Note on Seth Luther," *Labor History* 18 (1977): 239-48.
2. Jama Lazerow, *Religion and the Working Class in Antebellum America* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); Mark Saunders Schantz, "Piety in Providence: The Class Dimensions of Religious Experience in Providence, Rhode Island, 1790-1860" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1991), forthcoming from Cornell University Press.
3. Schantz, "Piety in Providence," 320.
4. Ibid., 322.
5. Peter J. Coleman, *Debtors and Creditors: Insolvency, Imprisonment for Debt, and Bankruptcy, 1607-1900* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1974), 96; Petitions to the Rhode Island General Assembly, 52:88 (October 1823), in Rhode Island State Archives.
6. Walter W. Haines, "The Myth of Continuous Inflation: United States Experience, 1700-1980," in *Inflation through the Ages: Economic, Psychological, and Historical Aspects,* ed. Nathan Schmukler and Edward Marcus (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1983), 184; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C., 1975), E135-66; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1996* (Washington, D.C., 1996), 483.
7. Asher B. Durand Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.
8. *Providence Directory,* 1824 (Providence: Brown & Danforth, 1924).
9. Henry Melville King, *Historical Catalogue of Members of the First Baptist Church in America* (Providence: Townsend, 1908).
10. *Collected Works of Count Rumford,* ed. Sanborn C. Brown, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 118-19.
11. William Hussey, *Letter from an Elder to a Younger Brother on the Conduct to Be Pursued in Life* (Boston: E. Penniman, 1810), 41.
12. Rhode Island General Assembly, Acts, Resolves and Reports, vol. 28, October 1823 session, 80.

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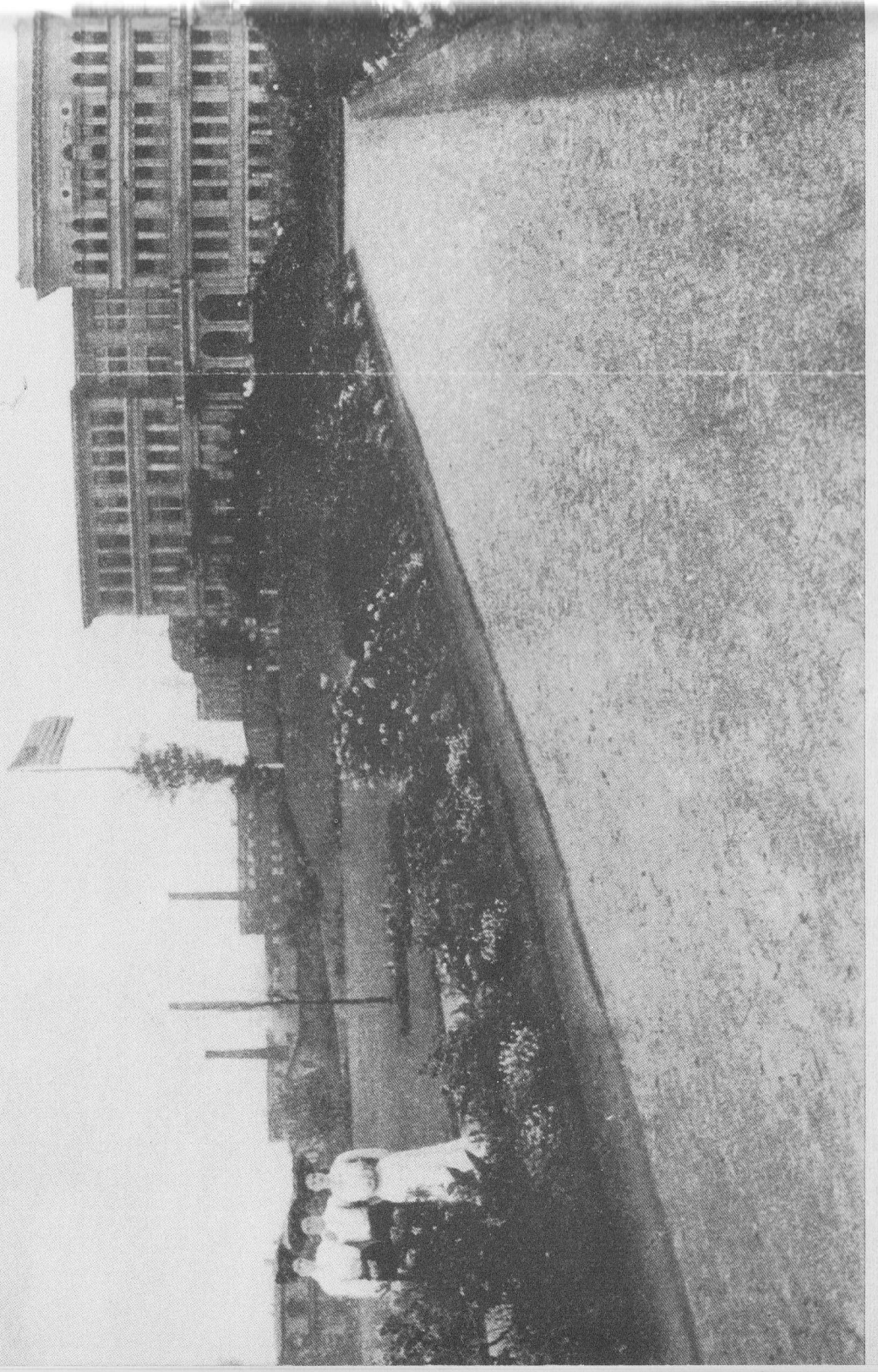

PERIODICALS
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Cover

The Rhode Island State Normal School moved into its new building in 1898. The Rhode Island State House, also newly constructed, is at the right in this 1900 photo. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 1187).