

R H O D E
I S L A N D
H I S T O R Y

WINTER 1971

AN
INTERVIEW
BETWEEN



The Rev. Ray Potter,
AND THE DEVIL!

R H O D E I S L A N D H I S T O R Y

Published by

THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
52 POWER STREET, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

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Issued Quarterly at Providence, Rhode Island, February, May, August, and November. Second class postage paid at Providence, Rhode Island.

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Director's Newsletter

VOLUME 30, NUMBER 1 FEBRUARY 1971

The scandal that ended Ray Potter's effectiveness as an antislavery agent in Rhode Island inspired an anonymous author to write the dialogue of this title.

Title page of an 8-page pamphlet (n.p., n.d.), gift of Mr. Fred Arnold to The Rhode Island Historical Society.



Frederick Douglass was one of several leading abolitionist speakers who came into the state in 1842 to hold rallies against the proposed constitution which excluded Negroes from the franchise.

Portrait of Frederick Douglass ca. 1842 by an unknown artist, gift to the Society in memory of Alphonso Richards Jones.

Re-enfranchisement of Rhode Island Negroes

by J. Stanley Lemons and Michael A. McKenna*

The Negro in Rhode Island regained the right to vote in the political turmoil resulting from a movement to expand the suffrage for whites and from the Dorr War. What discrimination took away in 1822, the black community won back in 1841-1842 by having established itself as a body with which to be reckoned and by helping the winning side in the struggle between competing white forces.

In the decade after the War of 1812 many states, including New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, went through a period of suffrage reform. Generally they democratized the franchise. Rhode Island resisted this trend, but she shared another impulse which aimed at disenfranchising black voters. Connecticut eliminated Negro suffrage in 1817, and New York raised discriminatory property qualifications in 1821. Rhode Island altered its franchise law in 1822 so that only *white* male adults were eligible to be "freemen." In part this action was possible because Rhode Island Negroes were few in number, disorganized, and economically and politically impotent. The development of a community spirit and black institutions in the next twenty years was to be an important factor when a new chance for enfranchisement came in 1841-1842. By the time of the Dorr Rebellion, Negroes constituted a self-conscious body which forced rival political groups to take notice.¹

Afro-Americans were only a small part of Rhode Island's population, hence self-respect and articulation were all the more important if the dominant white community was to listen. The United States Census counted 3,238 blacks in a total population of 108,837

in Rhode Island in 1840. While Newport, Cranston, Bristol, South Kingstown, and Warwick contained significant numbers of Negroes, Providence had the largest concentration, nearly 50 percent of the total. The City Census of 1835 numbered 18,054 whites and 1,223 blacks; the 1845 City Census found 30,266 whites and 1,481 Negroes. Furthermore, since only males could vote, the potential number of voters in the Afro-American community was relatively low. The United States Census recorded 668 "colored men" over the age of twenty-four in 1840 and 830 between the ages of twenty and fifty years old in 1850.² As one consequence of this small number of potential voters, black demands tended to be met with expedient action by whites. Nevertheless, the creation of a vocal, self-conscious black community forced the various white factions in the suffrage controversy and in the Dorrite turmoil to deal with the issue of votes for Negroes.

Rhode Island Negroes were disorganized until the 1820s, but by the late 1830s they had developed a vital community life in Providence, complete with churches, schools, fraternal societies, businesses, and reform organizations. The opening of Providence's first all-black church, the African Union Meeting House, in 1820 began the period of significant development.³ The Negro church was one of the earliest examples of black consciousness and has nurtured Negro protest from the time of Bishop Richard Allen of Philadelphia in the late eighteenth century to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Reverend Jesse Jackson in the present. By 1840 Providence had four all-black churches, and among the ministers was Alexander Crummell, a recent

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1 Julian Rammelkamp, "The Providence Negro Community, 1820-1842," *Rhode Island History*, v. 7, no. 1, [January 1948], 20-33. Irving Bartlett, *From Slave to Citizen: The Story of the Negro in Rhode Island* (Providence: Urban League of Greater Providence, 1954),

35-42. James T. Adams, "Disfranchisement of Negroes in New England," *American Historical Review*, XXX (April 1924), 545-546.

2 J. D. B. DeBow, *Statistical View of the United States* (Washington: Beverly, Tuck, 1854), 63. Edwin M. Snow, *Census of the City of Providence, Taken in July, 1855* (Providence: Knowles, Anthony & Co., 1856), Appendix, 9-11. "Table of Population," broadside, 1842, RIHS Library.

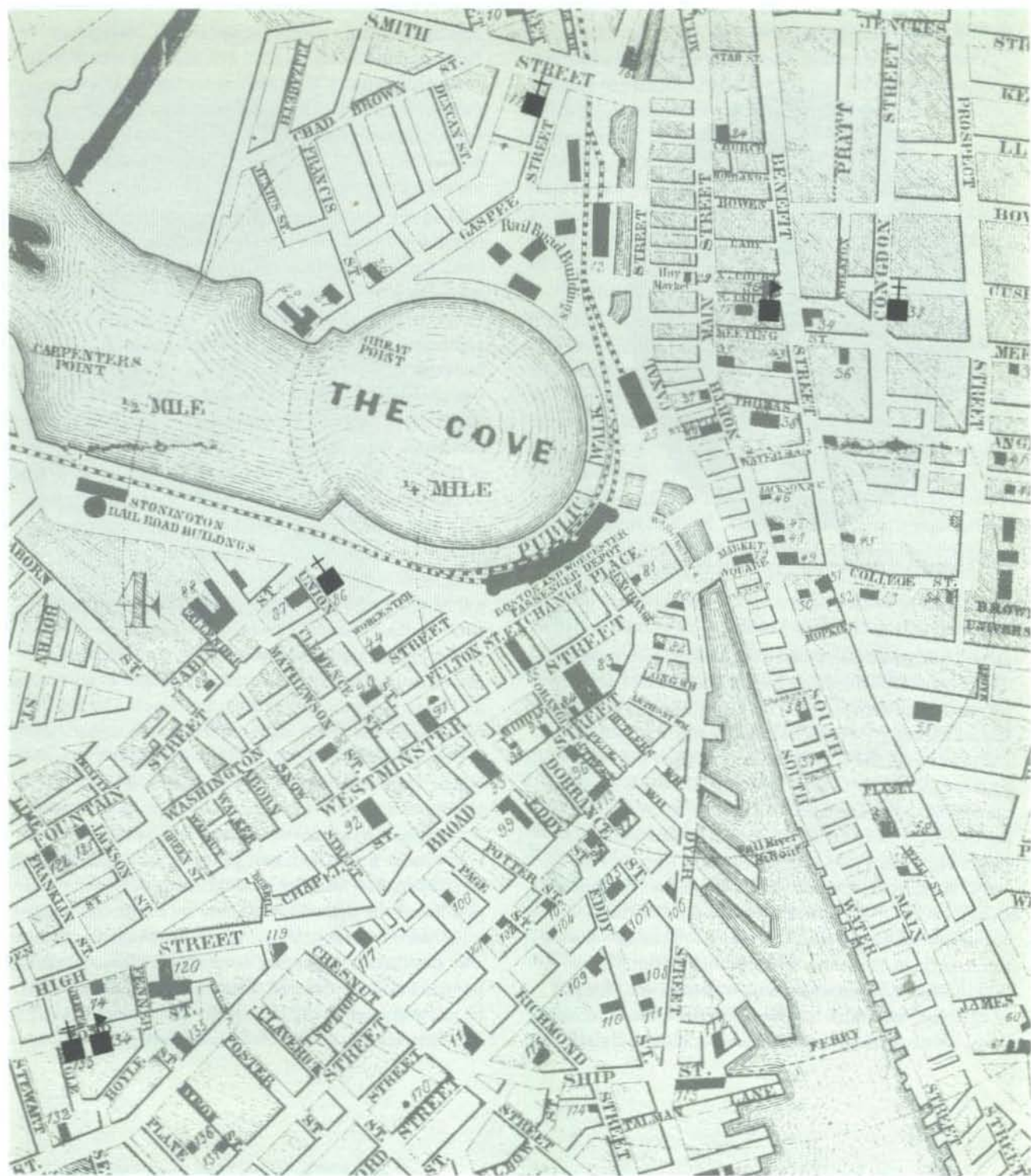
3 Rammelkamp, 20.



Detail from Map of the Town of Providence from actual survey by Daniel Anthony, 1823.

Providence's first all-black church, opened in 1820, began the period of significant development of the Negro community. This portion of an 1823 map of Providence shows the location of the African Union Meeting House (16). Among today's landmarks located on this section of the map are the First Baptist Church (4),

the First Congregational Church which is today's First Unitarian Church (5), the Episcopal Church (7), the Court House (3) and the Market House (1).



Detail from Map of the City of Providence from actual survey by Cushing and Walling, 1849.

"By 1840 Providence had four all-black churches." On this portion of a map of 1849 there are also indicated two public schools for Negro children. The churches are Zions (11), Meeting Street (31), Christ Church (86), and Second Freewill (133). The schools are (33) on Meeting Street and (134) on Pond Street.

Richard Allen, founder and first Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.



From Dictionary of American Portraits (Dover Publications, Inc., 1967).

arrival from the New York struggles for equal suffrage. The church took a leading role in educational developments in Providence. From its beginning the African Union Meeting House sporadically ran a school. In 1836 the Reverend J. W. Lewis established the New England Union Academy. Another school for Negroes opened on Pond Street in 1837, and the City of Providence voted in 1838 to support two schools for Negro children. From almost universal illiteracy in 1820, the illiteracy rate among Providence Negroes fell to half by 1840.⁴ Fraternal societies and reform groups appeared, indicating that the black community shared the American enthusiasm for joining voluntary organizations. The second oldest chapter for Negroes of the Masonic Lodge was begun in Providence in 1826. The 1820s saw the appearance of the Mutual Relief

Society and the Young Men's Union Funds Society. The temperance crusade produced the Providence Temperance Society in 1832 at a meeting where forty "took the pledge." Negroes were active in the anti-slavery crusade and received stimulation and encouragement from William Lloyd Garrison in nearby Boston after 1829. Altogether Negroes had seven societies by the early 1840s.⁵

Working against great obstacles and without aid, Negroes slowly built up modest business and financial holdings. By 1841 these included groceries, candy stores, shoe repair shops, and secondhand clothing stores. In 1822 the total worth of black property was approximately \$10,000. By 1839 the estimate ranged between \$35,000 and \$50,000. John Hazard, a clothier, was worth \$2,700; Edward Barnes, a grocer, was worth \$2,900; and Elleanor Eldridge, a whitewasher, owned real estate valued at \$4,000. Most amazing, two-thirds of the Negroes in Providence lived in their own homes.⁶

The economic and social advances produced men who protested against discrimination and pressed for greater rights. Men like the ministers Alexander Crummell and Jeremiah Asher, William J. Brown, a shoemaker, Ransom Parker, a teacher, and James Hazard, the clothier, forcefully advanced the position of blacks and made the white community consider their arguments. When Providence sought to levy taxes on Negro property, the community reacted by arguing that taxation without representation was unfair. A protest meeting at the African Union Meeting House elected George C. Willis, a laborer, as its chairman and Alfred Niger, a barber, to be secretary. Both were active collaborators of William Lloyd Garrison in the anti-slavery movement. Willis, Niger, Edward Barnes, and George McCarthy, a trader, petitioned the General Assembly for either the vote or relief from taxation. A few representatives were favorably disposed, recognizing the justice of the argument; however, others objected strenuously, "Shall a Nigger be allowed to go to the polls and tie my vote? No, Mr. Speaker, it can't be."⁷ The legislature voted to

4 Rammelkamp, 26-27. William J. Brown, *The Life of William J. Brown of Providence, R.I.* (Providence: Angell & Co., 1883), 83-84.

5 Rammelkamp, 21, 29-31. Brown, 129-131.

6 Rammelkamp, 23. Brown, 40-41. Elleanor Eldridge, *Memoirs of Elleanor Eldridge* (Providence: B. T. Albro, 1842), 70-71.

7 Brown, 86. Bartlett, 38.

8 United States Congress, House, Select Committee, *Report No. 546, "Rhode Island — Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of,"* 28th Cong., 1st Sess., June 7, 1844, pp. 2, 11. Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage: From Property to Democracy, 1760-1860* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 245. *Providence Journal*, May 3, 1841.

Eleanor Eldridge, a whitewasher, owned real estate valued at \$4,000 in 1839.



From *Memoirs of Eleanor Eldridge* (Providence, 1838).

exempt them. This episode on the eve of the suffrage struggle of 1841 revealed the black community to be ready to take advantage of any divisions among the whites.

Great division existed in Rhode Island, being traced along social, economic, religious, and ethnic lines. Rhode Island was the only state by 1840 which still confined the franchise to freeholders. The frame of government was the colonial charter granted in 1663, and the freeholders tenaciously resisted efforts to expand the suffrage. As Rhode Island became more industrialized after the War of 1812, a growing propertyless population agitated for the vote. Even

worse from the standpoint of many of the old stock was the fact that the industrial population was increasingly foreign-born and Roman Catholic. The effect of the freehold qualification in Providence was to reduce the proportion of freemen in the city from 50 percent in 1790 to 33 percent in 1832. The *Providence Journal* said the number of freemen in the state in 1840 was 11,239 out of 26,000 males. Furthermore, because of malapportionment of the legislature, about one-third of the eligible voters elected a majority of the representatives.⁸

Almost continuous agitation for the vote extended from the late 1820s.⁹ Workingmen such as Seth Luther, a housewright, and William Tillinghast, a barber, led workingmen's efforts; and they were joined by sympathetic freeholders, the most famous of whom was Thomas Dorr. Although Dorr actively supported the anti-slavery movement and worked for Negro rights, he could not overcome the "whites only" attitude of most in the suffrage movement. Indeed, when the Rhode Island Suffrage Association became a regularly constituted organization in March 1840, it decided to accept as members only "native born white male citizens of the United States," and adopted as its object "a liberal extension of suffrage to the native white male citizens of the United States, resident in Rhode Island."¹⁰ However, by autumn a reorganized Association broadened its objectives. The *New Age and Constitutional Advocate*, the organ of the Suffrage Association, declared in December that it wanted "universal suffrage" and that no one should be excluded.¹¹ In 1841 the Suffrage Party held a series of mass meetings and called an extralegal convention to write a constitution for the state. They held an election in July for delegates to the Suffrage or People's Convention, and declared the voting to be open to all male citizens regardless of nativity or race.¹² In fact, few blacks were permitted to vote.¹³

Negro leaders tried to unite with the suffrage movement and to get it to act on their behalf, but anti-Negro prejudice was too strong within the

9 Marvin E. Gettleman and Noel P. Conlon, eds., "Responses to the Rhode Island Workingmen's Reform Agitation of 1833," *Rhode Island History*, v. 28, no. 3 (August 1969), 75-94, Williamson, 242-250. Arthur May Mowry, *The Dorr War: or, The Constitutional Struggle in Rhode Island* (Providence: Preston & Rounds, 1901), 34-44. Jacob Frieze, *Concise History of the Efforts to Obtain an Extension of Suffrage in Rhode Island: From the Years 1811 to 1842* (Providence: Moore, 1842), 22-37.

10 Frieze, 30.

11 *New Age and Constitutional Advocate*, December 4, 1840. U. S. Congress, *Report No. 546*, 108-109. Mowry, 50-51.

12 Elisha R. Potter, *Considerations of the Questions of the Adoption of a Constitution and Extension of Suffrage in Rhode Island* (Boston: Webb, 1842), 17.

13 *Providence Journal*, September 15 and 18, 1841. Peter J. Coleman, *The Transformation of Rhode Island, 1790-1860* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1963), 274.

Suffrage Party and in the People's Convention. At a meeting of the Suffrage Party in September 1841, the executive committee presented nominations for treasurer. A majority report supported Alfred Niger, and a minority report favored Thomas Green. When someone objected saying that Niger was a Negro, the meeting was thrown into confusion and the majority report rejected. The very person responsible for nominating Niger turned out to be a well-known opponent of Negro suffrage, and he explained that he had done this to force the Party to decide finally upon the issue of Negro suffrage. His intention was simply to "smoke out" pro-Negro sentiment in the Party.¹⁴

The People's Convention convened in early October, and on the crucial question of suffrage it proposed to liberalize the franchise for all white males, including the foreign-born, but excluded the Negro. Before the provision was voted upon, Alexander Crummell led a committee of Negro spokesmen to present a remonstrance to the Convention, urging them not to ignore the black community. The petition was signed by James Hazard, Ransom Parker, Ichabod Northup, a laborer, Samuel Rodman, a laborer, and George J. Smith, a coachman.¹⁵ They protested that exclusion on account of color was unwarranted, anti-republican, and destructive in effect. They declared, "We have long, and with but little aid, been working our way up to respectability and competence." Despite discrimination and disenfranchisement, "we have, nevertheless, been enabled to possess ourselves of the means and advantages of religion, intelligence, and property . . . we unhesitatingly assert that we will not suffer by a comparison with our more privileged fellow-citizens of the same rank, in either religion, virtue, or industry." The petition argued that the United States had been founded on the principle that all men were created free and equal and that exclusion would violate that principle. Finally, they said that disenfranchisement begat a sense of inferiority and lessened the sense of individual worth. "Surely, it must sicken the soul, and

The Reverend Alexander Crummell.



Engraving from Harper's Weekly, April 14, 1866.

eat out the heart of any people." They warned that discrimination on the basis of color might be the warrant for future exclusions on equally irrelevant distinctions. "[T]he annals of nations clearly teach that there is always danger in departing from clearly defined and universal truths, and resorting to unjustifiable and invidious partialities."¹⁶

14 The entire episode is reported in the *Providence Journal*, September 27, 1841.

15 Rammelkamp, 30. U.S. Congress, Report No. 546, 113.

16 U.S. Congress, Report No. 546, 111-113.

17 *New Age and Constitutional Advocate*, Oct. 22, 1841.

18 Williamson, 252-253.

The petition had little effect. After limited debate the Convention voted 46-18 to retain the "white" in the suffrage clause. A few delegates felt that a grave error had been made. Benjamin Arnold of Portsmouth said, "If only white citizens were allowed to vote, the word *White* would become a dagger in the bosom of our cause." Opponents argued that Negro suffrage would jeopardize the whole project and that it was a matter of getting 15,000 disenfranchised whites the vote against a few hundred blacks.¹⁷ The People's Convention adjourned until November 15 to permit public consideration of the proposed constitution. When they reconvened, they attempted to mollify Negro and abolitionist opposition by including near the end in Article XIV, paragraph 22, a stipulation that the question of whether to retain the word "white" would be put to a referendum after the constitution was ratified. Then the Convention approved the constitution and set the date for the vote for December 27-29, 1841.

Negroes objected to the exclusion. "Negroes, who considered themselves more American than the naturalized foreign-born, protested vigorously to Dorr and to the Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Society."¹⁸ The abolitionists felt betrayed because they had actively worked in the suffrage movement. The November meeting of the Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Society denounced the People's Convention decision as "cowardly and hypocritical." The Society protested directly to the Convention when it reconvened in November and went before it to argue against Negro exclusion, but to little avail. Consequently, the Anti-Slavery Society's executive committee issued a circular calling on all abolitionists to work vigorously against the proposed constitution. Frederick Douglass and five other leading abolitionist speakers came into the state to hold rallies against the constitution. Labor groups and the *New Age* denounced them as outside agitators, and mobs opposed to "nigger voting" broke up meetings in Woonsocket and North Scituate. The

speakers persisted and at enthusiastic rallies they raised \$1,000 to oppose the constitution. The December meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society appointed Douglass to a committee to carry the protest against the "white" clause before the Suffrage Convention when it reconvened in January 1842, to count the votes.¹⁹

Evidently the abolitionist effort had little positive effect because the vote count in January showed the People's Constitution receiving a smashing approval of 13,944 to 52, the largest vote ever cast in any Rhode Island election to that time. Douglass later observed, "The majority of the people were evidently with the new constitution, even the word *white* in it chimed well with the popular prejudice against the colored race, and at first helped to make the movement popular."²⁰ The ties between the Suffragists and the Negroes were completely cut, but some tenuous connections had developed between the conservative freeholders and the blacks. In their opposition to the Suffrage Constitution, the freeholders had welcomed the abolitionist speakers in late 1841 and contributed money to their campaign.²¹

In point of fact, Rhode Island's Negroes got little support from the conservatives for the franchise. Various articles appeared in the anti-suffrage *Providence Journal* in September and October chiding the Suffrage Party for their hypocrisy on the issue of votes for Negroes.²² In November 1841, a Legal (freeholders) Convention was convened to write a state constitution; and like the People's Constitution the draft proposal excluded Negro suffrage. The most crucial difference was the high restrictions on the admission of foreign-born voters in the Legal Constitution. The overwhelming approval given the People's Constitution only heightened the alarm in the minds of the freeholders. The Legal Convention reconvened in February 1842, to complete the drafting of its constitution. They revised their suffrage requirement to permit all native-born white males to vote while retaining a high barrier against the foreign-born. It still excluded

19 Benjamin Quarles, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 21-22. Philip S. Foner, *Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass: Early Years, 1817-1849* (New York: International Publishers, 1950), I, 48. Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Hartford: Park Publishing Co., 1882), 250-252. U.S. Congress, *Report No. 546*, 114-116.

20 Douglass, 252.

21 Quarles, 22.

22 *Providence Journal*, September 15, 17, 18, 27; October 1, 14, 25, 1841.

the Negro but left the matter of Negro suffrage to the discretion of the legislature.

The exposed nerve in the freeholders' political body was the prospect of being overwhelmed by lower-class, foreign-born, Catholic voters. French Canadian and Irish immigrants began coming to New England in substantial numbers in the 1830s; and their presence caused growing concern among the old-stock, Protestant population of all classes. The United States Census, recording nativity for the first time in 1850, revealed that 16.2 percent of Rhode Island's population was foreign-born and almost 70 percent of them from Ireland. Providence City Census in 1835 counted 1,005 foreigners, and found 5,965 in 1845. In the early 1840s immigrant families already constituted as much as a third of the people in some Cumberland mill towns.²³

The freeholders campaigned vigorously to win approval of the Legal Constitution in a vote held March 21-23, 1842. They feared that its rejection might lead somehow to the adoption of the People's Constitution. They openly appealed to nativist fears.²⁴ One election broadside declared that foreigners had no direct claim on any state to be admitted to the vote. "By the People's Constitution; should it go into operation, a large body of foreigners already in the State, would be brought immediately to the polls." More would be encouraged to come and augment the number. "Thereby our native mechanics and working-men would suffer by the competition, for labor; and the balance of political and civil power would inevitably be placed in the hands of emigrants from foreign countries, who would, either directly or indirectly control the State. Let native American citizens pause and reflect, and honestly decide, if they are or are not willing to become subject to such control; and then act accordingly."²⁵ More extreme was a broadside with the dramatic heading: "Native American Citizens! Read and Take Warning!" It called

upon all "Christians" to vote for the Legal Constitution on March 21-23, warning that it will protect against a Catholic takeover:

Would you be justified in rejecting it, and in adopting another which will place your government, your civil and political institutions, your public schools, and perhaps your religious privileges, under the control of the Pope of Rome, through the medium of thousands of naturalized foreign Catholics? . . . Rhode-Islanders . . . Are you prepared to see a Catholic Bishop, at the head of a posse of Catholic Priests, and a band of their servile dependents, take the field to subvert your institutions, under the sanction of a State constitution. If not, vote for the Constitution now presented to you, which is well calculated to protect you from such abuses.

Ironically the name signed at the end was "Roger Williams."²⁶

The campaign was waged by the conservative freeholders on their best issue, and they nearly carried the day for their constitution. The constitution lost by 676 votes out of 16,702 cast. However, the defeat left the contending forces at an impasse with the Suffrage Party holding an extralegal constitution overwhelmingly approved by the voters and the freeholders hanging on to the legal government. The Suffragists declared their constitution to be in force and scheduled general elections under it for April 1842. Before this election the legal government responded with the Algerine Law which levied heavy penalties on anyone accepting office or exercising power under the People's Constitution. In addition it got a promise from President John Tyler of Federal support in the event of disorders. The effect of these efforts showed up in the light vote in the People's election. Only 6,359 voted and elected Dorr to be Governor. Still, the legal government did not move against the People's government. Dorr brought the crisis to a head in May when he led an attempt to seize the Providence Arsenal. The attack

23 Coleman, 229-230, 242-246. Snow, 8, 10. Kurt B. Mayer, *Economic Development and Population Growth in Rhode Island* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1953), 41. Larry Anthony Rand, "The Know-Nothing Party in Rhode Island," *Rhode Island History*, v. 23, no. 4 (October 1964), 102-116. Caroline F. Ware, *Early New England Cotton Manufacture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931), ch. 8.

24 Williamson, 254-255. Chilton Williamson, "Rhode Island Suffrage Since the Dorr War," *New England Quarterly*, XXVIII (March 1955), 34. Rand, 106-107. Coleman, 273-274.

25 "Comparison," broadside, 1842, RIHS Library.

26 "Native American Citizens! Read and Take Warning!" broadside, 1842; also see "Citizens of Rhode-Island! Read! Mark! Learn!" broadside, 1842, RIHS Library.

27 Brown, 159.

28 Douglass, 252.

Consecrated in 1838, the Church of SS. Peter and Paul was evidence of the growing Roman Catholic population in Providence. This building occupied a portion of the land where the Cathedral stands now.

fizzled and the Dorrites scattered. Most of the members of the "People's Legislature" and the executive officers resigned, and Dorr fled from the state.

The freeholders, now calling themselves the Law and Order Party, moved to calm the situation. In early June the legislature called a new constitutional convention to be assembled in September. They scheduled the election of delegates for August and threw open the voting to *all native* male citizens who could meet a three-year residence requirement. The black community, which had gravitated toward the conservative freeholders after being rejected by the Suffragists, gladly grasped the opportunity, and they voted in spite

of threats from the Dorrites.²⁷ Frederick Douglass later said, "We cared nothing for the Dorr Party on the one hand, nor the 'law and order' party on the other. What we wanted, and what we labored to obtain, was a constitution free from the narrow, selfish, and senseless limitation of the word *white*."²⁸ Forced to expand the franchise, the conservative freeholders sought allies against the dreaded tide of the foreign-born. Indeed, this concern caused them to extend suffrage to all native American males. The freeholders were more prejudiced against the foreign-born than they were against Negroes. For their part, the blacks resented the Suffrage Party's concern for the foreign-born voter



while excluding native Americans only on the basis of color. Negro leaders like Brown, Hazard, and Parker offered the black community as a reliable ally to the freeholders. The first proof of the alliance was the right to vote for delegates to the new constitutional convention. The next test came when Dorr returned to the state in late June to head an armed force in an attempt to seize the government.

Negro suffrage got a better hearing in the Law and Order constitutional convention in September because the party had a debt to pay Negroes. The legislature in June had only barely called for a new convention when Dorr appeared in Chepachet with an armed force. Rumors reaching Governor Samuel Ward King told of a rebel force numbering upwards to 1,100 men and cannon, ready to march on Providence and bombard the city if it did not surrender. King called out the militia and declared martial law. Providence's black community offered to raise two companies and nearly 200 men volunteered for them. These men became part of the Providence Home Guard and helped to patrol the streets. In one incident, Nehemiah Knight, a blacksmith, was arrested for threatening a Law and Order man and was "marched through the streets of Providence, to the armory, by a gang of white men and negroes armed, (mainly negroes,) and was guarded by negroes."²⁹

As a result of Negro support in the Dorrite disruptions, the Law and Order Party incurred an obligation to the black community which was repaid with the franchise. In return Negroes accepted an obligation to support the Law and Order Party and program in subsequent elections. The delegates at the convention in September were well aware of the touchy issue of Negro suffrage. It came up repeatedly and not until the

end of the convention was the word "white" finally stricken. The convention voted 45-15 to drop "white" from the suffrage clause.³⁰ This constitution was approved in November 1842, by a vote of 7,024-51, and Negroes voted almost unanimously for it.³¹

Gaining the vote as they did in an atmosphere charged with rebellion and nativism, the black community suffered the bitterness of the former Suffrage Party people. A large broadside put out by the Dorrites after the final defeat in June had a series of cartoons ridiculing the opposition. One entitled "The Providence City Guards celebrating the Victory over the Dorrites" had ugly stereotyped Negroes shown in drunken gluttony, eating with dogs at their elbows. The black faces had big mouths with sharp, cannibal-like teeth.³² Some Suffrage people held the Negroes responsible for Dorr's defeat, and threatened to mob any Negro who dared to vote on the Law and Order constitution.³³ William Brown recalled an unpleasant encounter with a Dorrite. The man asked Brown if he had voted. "Do you suppose you are ever going to vote again? . . . Your wool will grow closer to your skull than it does now before you vote again."³⁴

The Suffrage proponent William Goodell reflected this bitterness when he charged:

Up to May last, as we know, the suffrage party were hooted at, for wishing to admit 'the low Irish and the niggers' to the polls . . . But the tune has turned now. When the contest came lately, to the sword, the city aristocracy were willing to have the help of the colored people, the most of whom were their dependents, their laborers, their coachmen and their domestics. They enrolled them as firemen, and admitted some of them into the military . . . the admission of the dependent colored people to vote, as well as to fight, and the

29 U.S. Congress, *Report No. 546*, 79, 318-319.

30 Rhode Island, House of Representatives, *Journal of the Convention Assembled to Frame a Constitution for the State of Rhode Island, at Newport, Sept. 12, 1842* (Providence: Knowles, Anthony & Co., 1859), 22, 36-37, 45, 48, 51, 57.

31 Brown, 172.

32 "Governor King's Extra: Dedicated to His Excellency without Permission," broadside, 1842, RIHS Library.

33 Brown, 159, 162.

34 Brown, 172-173.

35 William Goodell, *The Rights and Wrongs of Rhode Island* (Whitesboro, N.Y.: Oneida Institute, 1842), 6.

36 Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 170-175.

This brick building at 24 Meeting Street once housed the first public school for Negro children in Providence.

boast of their support, *answers their selfish purposes and is impudently trumpeted to their praise.*³⁵

However true this charge might have been, it ignored the fact that the black community had tried to side with the Suffrage Party and had been turned away and that they willingly cast their lot with the party which promised the greatest gain. Nor did it explain the action of independent black men like William Brown, James Hazard, and Ransom Parker who supported the Law and Order forces.

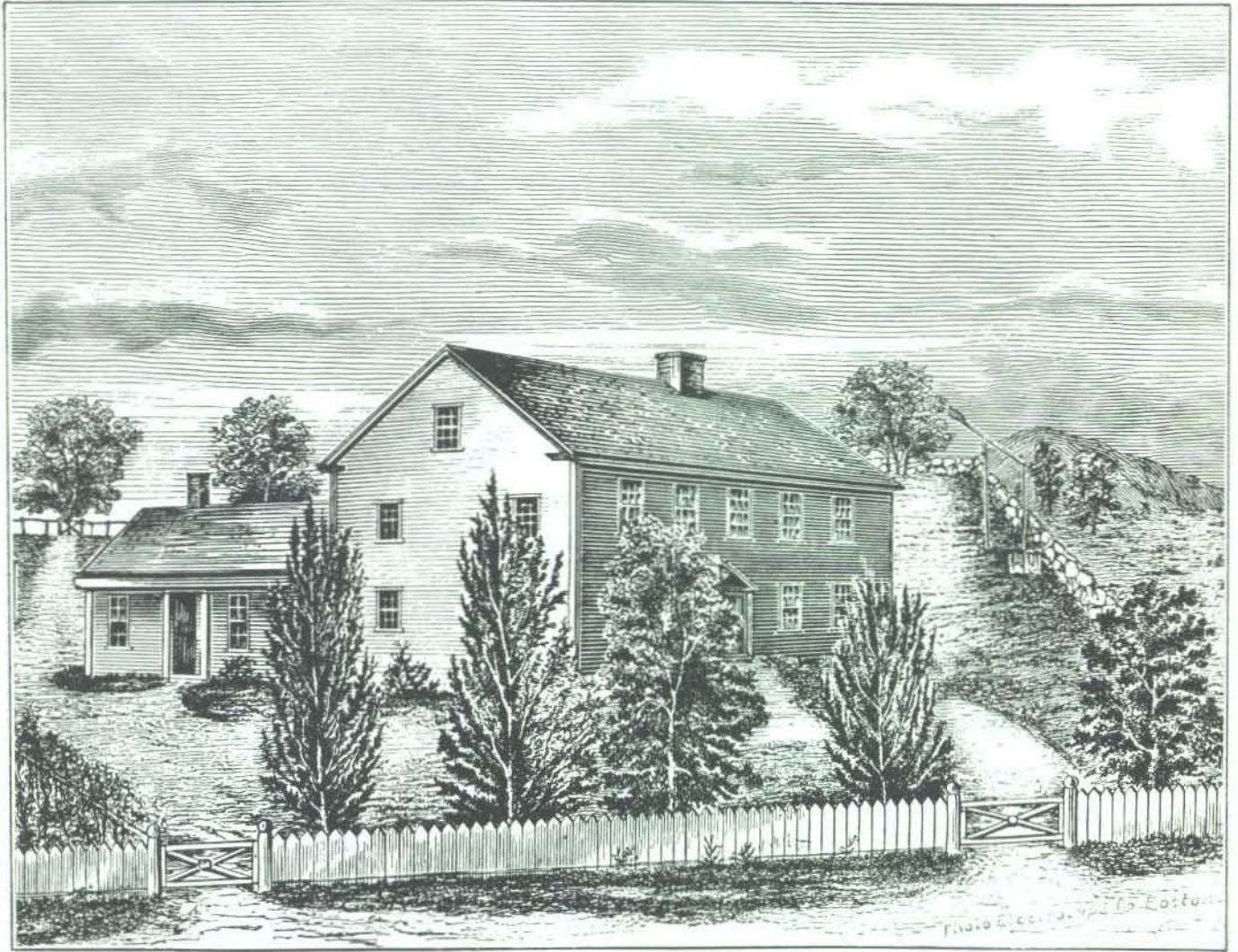
The fact that Negroes gained the vote in Rhode Island in 1842 was actually rather remarkable when contrasted with the trends elsewhere. In New York

repeated efforts to overcome discriminatory voting requirements failed from 1837 to 1860. Attempts to win the vote in New Jersey and Connecticut were completely without success in that period. Worse, Pennsylvania adopted a new constitution in October 1838, which disenfranchised black voters.³⁶ The particular situation in Rhode Island was unlike that in any other state. Here the real struggle was over the question of universal *white* manhood suffrage, an issue essentially settled elsewhere. The re-enfranchisement of blacks was a by-product, but it would not have occurred without an active, alert effort by Negroes themselves.

Sketch by Whitman Bailey from the Providence Magazine, The Board of Trade Journal, April 1915.



Horace Mann's birthplace in Franklin, Massachusetts.



*Detail of a sketch from A History of the Town of Franklin, Mass. . . .
by Mortimer Blake (Franklin, Mass., 1879).*

Oratory and Learning: Horace Mann at Brown

by Kathleen Edgerton Kendall
and Jonathan C. Messerli*

Brown University in 1816 had an enrollment of about one hundred students and many of them, like Horace Mann of Franklin, Massachusetts, came from little farm towns near Providence. These young scholars faced a strenuous, broad, classical curriculum. The Laws of the College for 1823, for example, show that the freshman class reviewed "a part of Virgil, Cicero, and the Greek Testament," and then studied "Graeca Minora, Xenophon's Cyropoedia, Sallust, Cicero de Amicitia and de Senectute, Horace, Roman Antiquities, Sheridan's Lectures, Arithmetic and English Grammar."¹ The students found a serious weakness in this curriculum, despite its breadth and depth. As they took part in rote recitations, memorizing and reproducing the textbook contents and the professors' lectures, they chafed at the lack of opportunity for original thinking.² Only in English composition and in undergraduate debating societies could they learn to express their own ideas. The oral and written expression of ideas were to play a vital role in Horace Mann's career as a lawyer, legislator and secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education (1837-1848), and many of his classmates also pursued careers demanding much speaking and writing. What then was the nature of their rhetorical preparation for this work at Brown University, 1816-1819?

Brown University took its name from Nicholas Brown, whose donation of \$5,000 endowed a Professorship of Oratory and Belles Lettres. Tristram Burges held this professorship when Mann was at Brown. The

required course of study gave a major emphasis to rhetorical theory, providing that the students must read Cicero's *Select Orations* and *De Oratore*, Thomas Sheridan's *Lectures on Elocution*, Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, and George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric*.³ All classical works had to be read in the original Greek or Latin, but that posed no problem for Mann. His roommate said he had never heard "a student translate the Greek and Roman classics with greater facility, accuracy, and elegance,"⁴ and Mann remained at Brown for two years after graduation as a tutor of Greek and Latin.

Mann rejoiced that he studied oratory when the jargon, rules and precepts of an earlier period were on the wane. He noted that orators were no longer "manufactured . . . wholly on the principles of mechanism and handy-craft."⁵ He read Sheridan's advice on speech delivery, which stressed naturalness rather than the categorized gestures taught in earlier works. Campbell advocated carefully reasoned arguments, and the students worked diligently on their logic. But Tristram Burges drilled his students in rhetorical style above all, both written and oral. His students' orations seemed to aim especially for the Ciceronian "grand" style, best suited to "deal with men's minds," to implant "new opinions in men," and to eradicate other opinions "which have been long established."⁶ Mann, the best student in his class and valedictorian his senior year, thought oratory the supreme art: ". . . the power of the orator verges

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1 Walter C. Bronson, *History of Brown University* (Providence, 1914), p. 167.

2 Alvah Hovey, *Barnas Sears* (New York, 1902), pp. 13-14.

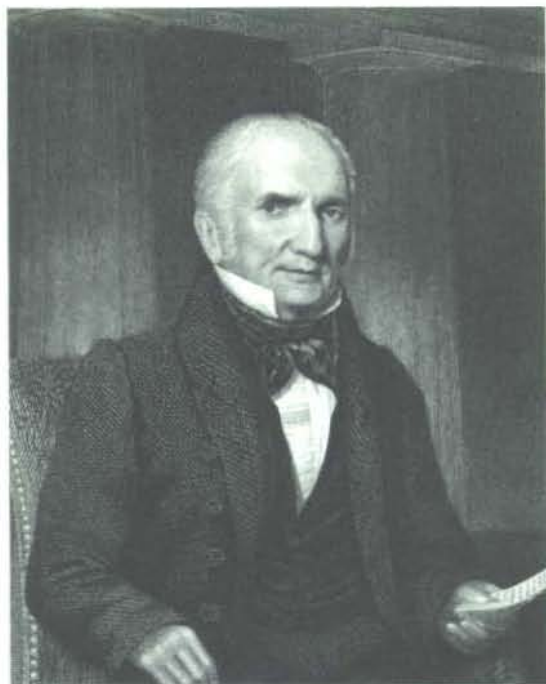
3 Bronson.

4 Judge Barton, in a letter to Mary Peabody Mann, quoted in *Life of Horace Mann*, by Mary Peabody Mann, centennial edition (Washington, D. C., 1937), pp. 26-27.

5 Horace Mann, "Lecture Delivered before the United Brothers Society," March 10, 1819, Horace Mann Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston [hereafter referred to as MHS].

6 Cicero's *Orator*, from *Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, translated by C. D. Younge, IV (London, 1852), pp. 409-410.

Tristram Burges, Professor of Oratory and Belles Lettres.



Engraving by W. T. Fry from a painting by G. Harvey.

towards the attribute of Omnipotence. The spirit of man is in his hands and he leadeth him whithersoever he will."⁷

Mann learned to write by writing and to speak by speaking. But in each case he concentrated upon the logic and the literary style of his arguments, rather than on research to support them. Thus, he could write over thirty short (under one thousand words) English essays, each on a different topic, and receive plus marks from his instructor, with little or no reference to statistics or specific examples.⁸ Later, during his eleven years as secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education,

he learned to use statistics most persuasively. He compiled statistical abstracts of school conditions in each town and published "graduated tables" showing the comparative ranking of each town, a project so successful in inducing local school reform that he called it "the only stroke of genius that characterized the administration of his office."⁹ He did not learn this inventive approach at Brown. There, he wrote with assumed authority on subjects such as the establishment of a national university, the separation of church and state, and immigration, with scarcely a reference to real evidence. The fact that both his peers and professors singled him out for special honors in oratory indicates that Mann represented an exemplary product of Brown's rhetorical training. Apparently no one challenged his sweeping generalizations or lack of pertinent evidence.

Tristram Burges encouraged his students to give declamations in the college chapel, criticizing their delivery as well as their logic and style. Mann's chapel address on "The American Navy" contained numerous flowery expressions and a mood of chest-thumping chauvinism, with the lack of historical accuracy more than compensated for by an abundance of star-spangled prose. His friends reminisced most fondly about his chapel address on "The Authors of the Declaration of Independence," when he defied a college ruling against holding a Fourth of July celebration and led a procession of students from the college yard into the chapel, to deliver the oration "amidst great applause." For this breach of rules, the college charged him "a trifling fine," but "he lost no credit with either the students or the government."¹⁰ His classmates invited him to speak at the senior class dinner, where he advised them that "One's Education is Never Completed." For the valedictory address he spoke sanguinely of "The Gradual Advancement of the Human Species in Dignity and Happiness."

The students' best opportunity to develop ideas of their own came in the discussions of current, controversial topics by the extracurricular debating societies,

7 Mann, "Lecture . . ."

8 Mann's college compositions, 1816-1819, MHS.

9 Mary Peabody Mann, "Appendix" to *Life and Works of Horace Mann*, II (Boston, 1891), p. 563.

10 Judge Barton.

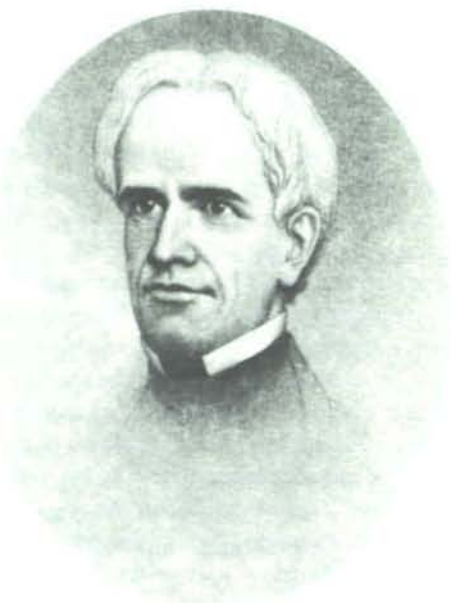
Judge Ira Moore Barton, who was Mann's roommate during their Junior and Senior years at Brown University, has described episodes of Mann's student days.



Engraving by A. H. Richie, from *Historical Collections by Holmes Ammidown*, in two volumes, v. 1. (New York, 1874).

the Philermenians and the United Brothers Society. Political rivals, the Philermenians favored the Federalists, and the United Brothers supported the Jeffersonians. The groups met twice a month on Saturday afternoons, although at times they had problems finding places to meet, since the administration gave them no support. They conducted meetings according to parliamentary procedure, fined their members for absence or noise, and gained electioneering experience competing for the many society offices. An elected committee selected the debate topics, and members drew the topics and the sides they would debate alphabetically. Each person debated an equal number of affirmative and negative positions annually. After each debate the members could comment upon

Horace Mann



Engraving by J. Sartain from *Genealogy of the Descendants of Richard Man . . .* by George S. Mann (Boston, 1884).

the arguments presented, and then the group decided on the winner.¹¹ Such procedures served to counterbalance the curricular emphasis on rote memorization.

The debates also helped arouse student interest in national politics. Mann, a member of the United Brothers Society, argued successfully at one meeting that it was politic for the republic of the United States to establish military schools; at another, he won arguing the negative side of the question, "Can a republic make war more effectively than a monarchy?"¹² The debate society libraries provided another benefit of membership, for they contained large collections of current material. In 1821 the United Brothers Society Library had fourteen hundred volumes¹³ and the Philermenians had almost sixteen hundred volumes,¹⁴

11 Records of the United Brothers Society, Brown University Archives.

12 Mann's college speeches, 1816-1819, MHS.

13 *Catalogue of the Books in the Library of the United Brothers Society. Together with the Names of its Members* (Providence: Brown University, 1821), Brown University Archives.

14 Bronson, p. 180.

their total holdings almost equalling the number of books in the college library.

Although the debate societies gave the students confidence in speaking before groups and exposure to contemporary issues, they reflected in many ways the weaknesses of the curricular training in rhetoric. Sophistry and euphony pre-empted careful research and analysis as the means of settling issues. Mann won his debate on the value of military schools, for example, but his essay on the same topic shows a painful unawareness of the topic's complexity. In their enthusiasm over the chance for free expression, the debaters overlooked the necessity for careful examination of data. Faculty members gave no aid, and peer criticism though shrewd, could also be shallow on the wide variety of national issues debated each year.

The highest honor the United Brothers Society could confer upon a member was to choose him as their official lecturer. They chose Mann for this position at the end of his junior year, giving him six months to prepare for his important address to the group. The speech he gave might serve as a prototype of student speeches in 1819.¹⁵ He selected a clear thesis, that eloquence is necessary to defend freedom against despotism, a subject well-suited to his audience of college debaters. He developed his idea through carefully organized steps, first showing the enormous power of oratory, then arguing that oratory was one of two ways to exercise control over society (the other way was coercion), and finally leading to the idea that "eloquence is the soul of liberty." The ornate style of the speech reflected contemporary tastes. The best orator in the United Brothers Society produced passages like the following:

To raise ourselves from the earth on which we seem destined to move, and traverse the regions of ether; to manage the bark on billowy wastes, when driven by careening tempests that deform the face of ocean and wake the "blue monsters of the deep" from their

Stormy seas provided an apt metaphor for Brown students of 1819. Just four years before, the Great Gale had brought this scene to the foot of College Hill.



Detail of A Representation of the Great Storm at Providence, Sept. 23rd, 1815, engraved by J. Kidder.

fancied security; and to take the red bolts of vengeance from the hand of Deity, are achievements of surprising magnitude.

Mann proved his arguments more with hypothetical cases, overstatements, rhetorical questions, and name-calling, than with specific examples. Tyrants were all cruel, feudal lords, or "vile worms," and oratory was a subject which "concentrates all the advantages of the useful, and is adorned with all the graces of the elegant." He exaggerated the power of the orator who used emotional proof, saying that if he "describes the

15 All quotations in following discussion of Mann's speech are from "Lecture . . ."

16 James S. Holmes to Horace Mann, April 7, 1821, MHS.

17 Mann, "Lecture . . ."

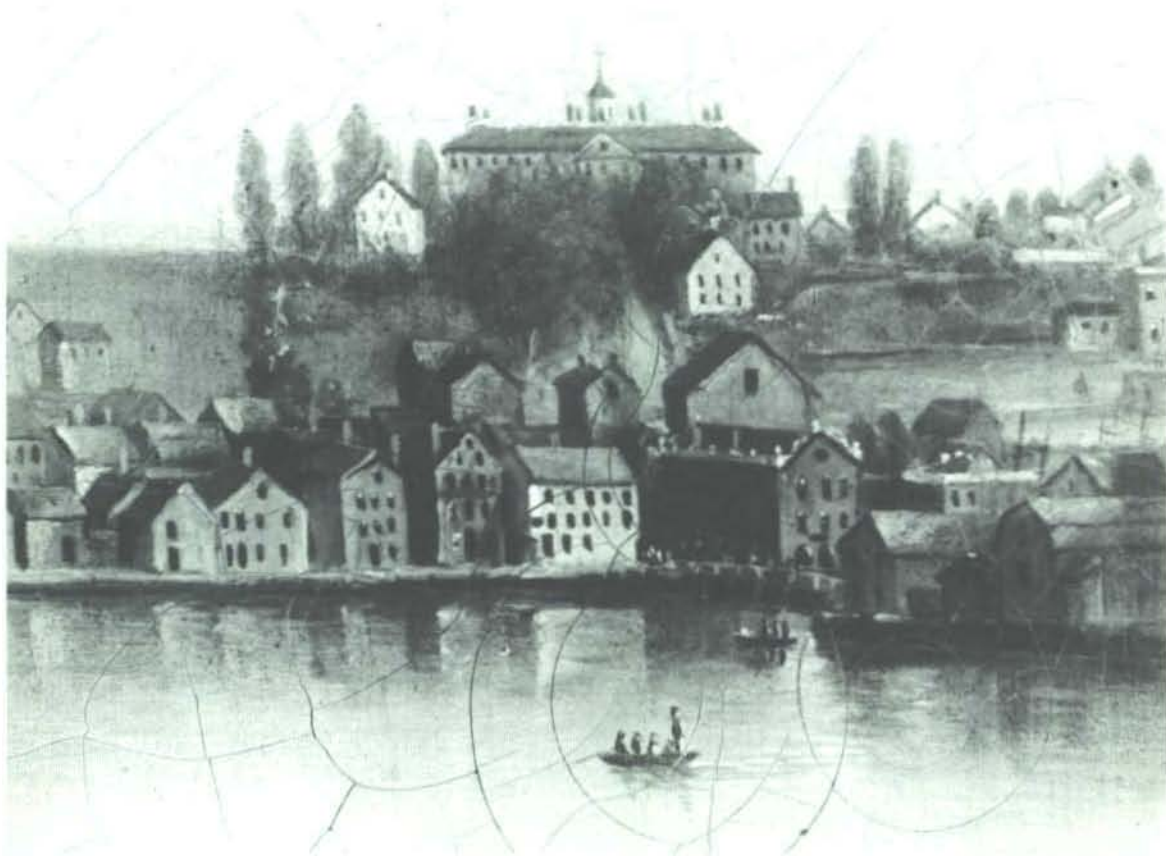
University Hall, when Horace Mann was a student at Brown, dominated the hill. This view is a detail from Alvan Fisher's painting of the Providence Cove in 1818. The original hangs in John Brown House at 52 Power Street.

sufferings of injured innocence, our lips cannot refrain from imprecating vengeance on the perpetrator of the shameful deed." Briefly surveying the power of rhetoric from Greece to America, he did stop for one specific, vivid example: the case of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's speeches against Warren Hastings. And his concluding example of Patrick Henry's speaking had special significance for this 1819 audience, who had heard first-hand accounts of the American Revolution.

Mann's trust in the "omnipotence" of skillful oratory met its test eighteen years after his graduation from Brown, in 1837. As secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, he relied heavily on eloquence to reach the public, for many years giving annual speeches in every county in the state. These speeches, unlike the debate society orations of his college days, contained a firm grounding in fact, for he spent eleven years visiting and studying the schools and knew his subject thoroughly. They contained some of the same stylistic excesses found in his college speeches, but his practical experience with education gave him a good sense of

reality missing in those collegiate exercises. He also complemented his oral persuasion with annual reports of school conditions and a journal for teachers.

The students at Brown in the early nineteenth century realized that the college curriculum alone simply did not meet their needs. James Holmes complained about this problem to his classmate Mann: "The fact is, . . . I have never had a conception of my own; no, nor so far as I can ascertain, I have never had so much as a peep at the genitals of originality, and cannot tell therefore with what instruments *ideas* are begotten withall."¹⁶ The debate societies and English compositions gave Horace Mann and his cohorts this "peep at the genitals of originality." Debating one another and writing themes on dozens of issues, they strengthened their tools of organization, logic, and style. At the same time, however, no one trained them to do careful research into the facts behind an issue before reaching a decision. And no one disabused them of their naive belief that through speech alone, the orator could lead men "whithersoever he will."¹⁷



boys in Utica, N. Y. and the girls in Providence, R. I. and in some other places, have formed themselves into Anti-Slavery Societies, and have done something for the slaves. In Providence, the girls worked with their needles, and made watch-guards, bead bags, and many other pretty and useful articles. They put some little sentences about the slaves into the things they made, so that those who bought them might be often put in mind of those who are held in bondage.

One sentence used by them was this: "May the use of our needles prick the consciences of slave-holders." I once saw a pretty watch-guard made by them, in which they had worked the sentence,

"O sons of freedom, equalize your laws;
Be all consistent, plead the negro's cause."

When they had sold the things they had made, they had thirty dollars to send to the treasurer of the American Anti-Slavery Society. This is enough to pay for 3600 copies of the paper called Human Rights, or 4600 copies of the Slave's Friend. I think it will be so used as to "prick the consciences" of many slave-holders. If you will turn to page 12, you will see that the American Society rejoices in the formation of Juvenile Anti-Slavery Societies, and earnestly desires that they may be formed in all parts of the country. When the Almanac is printed for next year, I hope I shall be able to tell of many societies of children, who are showing their thankfulness for the blessings they enjoy, by doing something for the wretched slave children.

WHERE IS THY BROTHER?

"What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord God of hosts." ISAIAH.

What mean ye that ye bruise and bind
My people, saith the Lord,
And starve your craving brother's mind,
That asks to hear my word?

What mean ye that ye make them toil
Through long and dreary years,
And shed like rain upon your soil
Their blood and bitter tears?

What mean ye that ye dare to rend
The tender mother's heart;
Brothers from sisters, friend from friend,
How dare you bid them part?

What mean ye, when God's bounteous hand
To you so much has given,
That from the slave who tills your land
You keep both earth and heaven?

When at the judgment God shall call,
WHERE IS THY BROTHER? say,
What mean ye to the Judge of all
To answer on that day?

E. L. F.

☞ All articles designed for insertion in the Almanac for 1837, must be sent to us before the last day of May 1836.

Antislavery Agents in Rhode Island, 1835-1837 *by John L. Myers**

Between the appearance of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* in 1831 and October 1833, only a few antislavery societies were founded in the nation. Almost from the beginning, abolition leaders perceived the necessity of employing paid lecturing agents to spread the gospel of their doctrine. Rhode Island had received some of this agency attention by the summer of 1835. It had two particularly zealous auxiliary societies in Pawtucket and Providence, its people apathetic to or in sympathy with the institution of slavery had been forced to listen to the antislavery affirmations, and many of its citizens had become convinced that complicity with the institution was sinful for the individual and barbarous and incendiary for the nation. Yet while six others had organized at the state level, Rhode Island had not yet received the effort of lecturing that would establish an active state antislavery society and create auxiliary units to manage the sustained development of the cause.

The Providence Anti-Slavery Society leaders had sought the aid of the American Anti-Slavery Society during the early months of 1835 to obtain a lecturing agent, but the demands upon the national society's embryonic organization and frequently timorous leadership had left the appeal unanswered. The Providence society then had employed Samuel L. Gould for a month; he had delivered more antislavery addresses over the state than any other man had done. The national society also encouraged abolition leaders to stop in Rhode Island communities en route to and

from humanitarian and reform convention meetings in other states. This continued during the summer. In late June 1835 the Rev. Charles Simmons of Attleboro, a local agent, lectured twice in Pawtucket, while on July 4 antislavery addresses in the state were delivered by the English visitor, George Thompson, in the afternoon at the High Street meeting house and by Henry B. Stanton in the evening at the Richmond Street meeting house in Providence, by Stanton in the morning at the Baptist church and by the Rev. J. O. Choules of New Bedford in the afternoon in Pawtucket, and by the Rev. John Blain in Washington. Thompson spoke again on July 5 and Stanton on July 5 in the Baptist meeting house in Woonsocket and on July 6 in Pawtucket. In addition, the executive committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society at its July 10, 1835 meeting appointed Blain and another Providence clergyman to local agencies. Blain accepted, but the other did not answer. Until the assignment of Stanton to the state, however, the real force behind the Rhode Island antislavery growth was the Providence society, and that was not enough.¹

Stanton undoubtedly went east in the spring of 1835 with the knowledge that he would be appointed to an agency. In June the executive committee received his acceptance of a commission and, in answer to a request from William M. Chace of the Providence Anti-Slavery Society for his services, assigned Stanton to Rhode Island. The new representative of the American Anti-Slavery Society was born in Griswold, Connecticut,

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The American Anti-Slavery Almanac of 1836 boasted of the activities of Providence's Juvenile Female Anti-Slavery Society. On another page of the same issue Sarah Miller was listed as president and Almira Bolles as secretary. Membership numbered 35.

¹ *Second Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society* (New York, 1835), 47. American Anti-Slavery Society Executive Committee Minutes, July 10, 1835 meeting [Boston Public Library]. American Anti-Slavery Society Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of February 24, March 15, April 5, 1835 [Boston Public Library]. *Report and Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Providence Anti-Slavery Society* (Providence, 1833), *passim*. *Emancipator*, June 2, 1835; April 1836. *Liberator*, July 4 and 18, 1835. *Providence Journal*, July 1, 1835. *Pawtucket Chronicle*, June 26, July 10, 1835. *Rhode Island Country Journal*, July 3, 1835. *Woonsocket Patriot*, July 3, 1835.

Henry B. Stanton.



From *Random Reflections* by Henry B. Stanton (New York, 1887).

June 27, 1805. Converted to Charles Grandison Finney's brand of Calvinism in the evangelist's New York revivals, Stanton worked for Thurlow Weed's *Monroe Telegraph* and then enrolled at Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, which developed into a breeder of antislavery leaders. Caught up in the Lane Seminary debates about the sinfulness of slavery and the efficacy of colonization, Stanton withdrew from the institution during the ensuing controversy over academic freedom and the rights of the students to establish an antislavery society and to work with the blacks of the city. He represented his fellow students at the annual convention of the American Anti-Slavery Society in May 1834

and was selected as a manager of the national organization. Although he lectured in the East a month thereafter, he did not speak in Rhode Island. In the spring of 1835 he became a founder of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society and one of its delegates to the 1835 national meetings. His wife's description of him as "the most eloquent and impassioned orator on the antislavery platform" was not as inaccurate as the source might lead one to expect. John Prentice of Providence claimed he had "few superiors" as a speaker. Stanton rose to become "second to none but [Theodore] Weld, in this country, for eloquence and power as a lecturer." His campaign in Rhode Island was soon to be cited as the model for other agents to follow. By 1837 he had become one of the corresponding secretaries of the national organization and one of those who specified antislavery direction.²

Unfortunately for history, many of the lecturing agents followed the example of their leader Weld or the appeal of their own modesty and seldom communicated with the national society's offices. In those instances in which their initial inclinations were favorable to reports, the printing of their letters in antislavery publications so irritated many of them that future communications were limited. This was true of Stanton in his early endeavors. Therefore, all too little record exists by his account of his attainments in Rhode Island. To complicate the study further, Rhode Island editors were far more skillful than those in most states who opposed the principles of abolition. With the exception of the *Pawtucket Chronicle* in the early 1830s, newspapers seldom reported abolition activities. They either followed the policy of the *Providence Journal* in printing notices of antislavery meetings in the advertisement section of the paper and omitted subsequent news reports of local abolition events or simply ignored antislavery activities entirely. The editor of the *Journal*, who had apparently been criticized for printing the notice of the call for the organizational meeting of the Rhode Island Anti-

² Executive Committee Minutes, June 5, 1835 meeting. *First Annual Report American Anti-Slavery Society* (New York, 1834), 31-32, 35. Thurlow W. Barnes, *Life of Thurlow Weed* (Boston, 1884), I, 159. *General Catalog Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Chicago, Lane Seminary Affiliated* (Chicago, 1939), 37. *Liberator*, May 12, 1837, quoting from *Lynn Record*. *New York Evangelist*, March 22, 1834; January 10, 1835. Henry B. Stanton, *Random Reflections*, 3d ed. (New York, 1887), 49. *Proceedings Ohio Anti-Slavery Convention* (Cincinnati,

1835), 2-10. *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York, 1888-1889), V, 649-650. John Prentice to Weaver, September 22, 1835, Silas Weaver Papers (RIHS Library).

³ William Lloyd Garrison to Phelps, December 16, 1835, Amos A. Phelps Papers (Boston Public Library). *Providence Journal*, October 31, 1835; February 4, 1836; et passim 1833-1836. John L. Myers, "Beginnings of Anti-Slavery Agencies in Vermont, 1832-1836," *Vermont History*, XXXVI (Summer 1968), 136-140.

Slavery Society, claimed he followed this policy because he regarded antislavery objectives as impractical but did not intend to make martyrs of the leaders of the movement. He asserted this had been partly responsible for the slow growth of the movement in the city. He may have been right, but this policy certainly leaves the historian without necessary information about major events transpiring in the state.

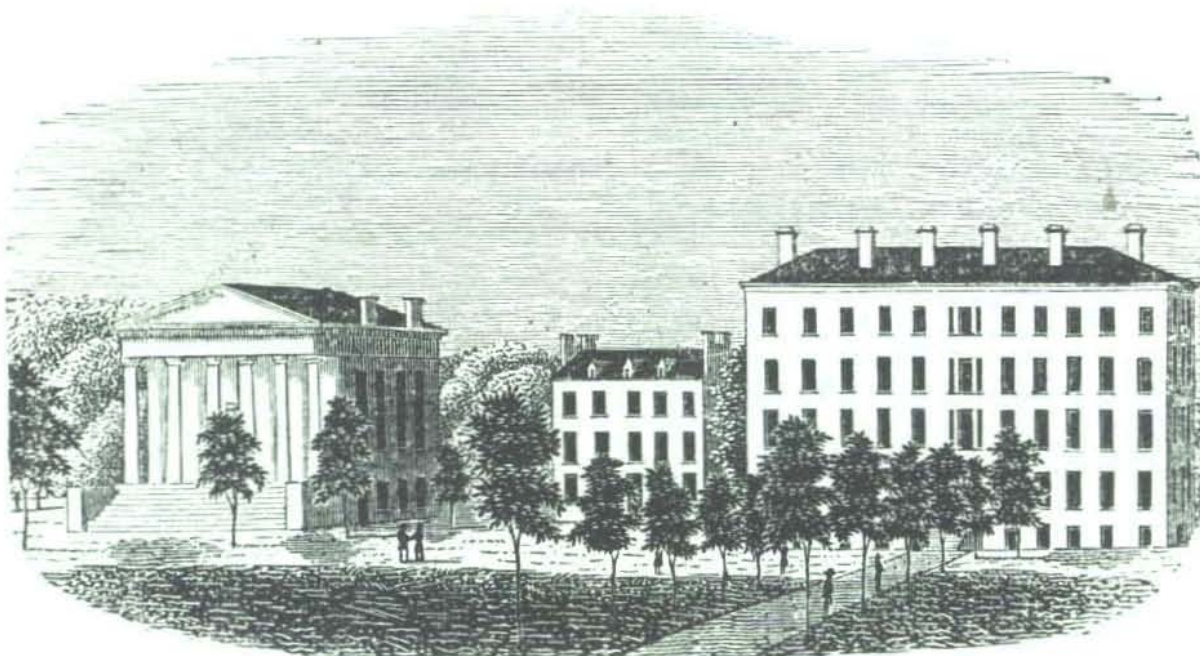
Knowing that Stanton was chronicled to have accomplished so much, I wondered at the beginning of this study if the lack of evidence concerning his activities meant that this credit to him was no more than an effective propaganda device of the abolitionists. Soon, however, the occasional references to his attainments in antislavery letters and newspapers began to be supported by enough political and neutral sources to confirm his success. The stillness about his services is especially remarkable when one remembers that the summer and autumn of 1835 was perhaps the most difficult time for the fledgling antislavery movement. George Thompson was virtually driven out of the country and even mild speakers like Samuel J. May or the poet John Greenleaf Whittier were subjected to personal violence in Vermont and Massachusetts, states in which the antislavery message had been proclaimed for four years. From mid-June 1835 to February

1836 Stanton labored, generally alone, to convert the people of Rhode Island to abolition principles and to create a state antislavery society. Antislavery letters and newspapers mark Rhode Island and New York as the major objects of the year's exertions. Employing the same tactics which Theodore Weld was utilizing in the West, Stanton began "at the outskirts" and worked "his way as quietly as possible to the centre." In doing that, he avoided Providence and Newport.³

Stanton's initial appearances were with James G. Birney, former Alabama slaveholder and subsequently Liberty Party candidate for the presidency; William Goodell, temperance and antislavery editor and lecturing agent; and Theodore S. Wright, Negro clergyman of New York City, in Providence on May 21 and in Pawtucket on May 22. He also lectured in the Phenix meeting house in Warwick. He spoke on June 30 and July 4 in Pawtucket, the latter a morning address in the Baptist church. In the evening he lectured at the Richmond Street meeting house in Providence, and on the 5th in the Baptist meeting house in Woonsocket. By somewhat over a month later he had organized five new societies, a men's, a ladies', and a young men's in Natick, and community groups of 220 members in North Scituate and of seventy members in Valley Falls. He aroused so much turmoil in Woonsocket that a

Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, "a breeder of anti-slavery leaders."

From Historical Collections of Ohio . . . by Henry Howe (Cincinnati, 1869).



public meeting on August 22 passed resolutions opposing immediate emancipation, opposing activities by clergy "in the political arena," expressing sympathy with the South, and suggesting abolition lecturers go South to speak.⁴

Stanton was lecturing in Slatersville as early as the first week of September. The editor of the *Woonsocket Patriot*, who had expressed himself as opposed to slavery but convinced that Northerners should be silent about it, was sufficiently impressed to style Stanton as "a young man of considerable talents." By October a new antislavery society of 200 members, identified as the Smithfield and Vicinity Society, was established. Another in Cumberland, where he had spoken five times, was soon to be found. In late September the agent was served a warrant by a constable at his lodgings with Judge Brown in East Greenwich. He was charged with being a vagrant without visible means of support and was ordered out of town. A public meeting was called on September 24 to devise means for suppressing Stanton's activities. Given bail by the Judge, he held his meeting, and at its conclusion acquired the constable's signature as one of the first additions to the antislavery roll.⁵

By the end of October the editor of the *Providence Journal* was concerned. Noting that *The Emancipator*, weekly publication of the American Anti-Slavery Society, had made its first public announcement about Stanton's activities in the state, the Providence editor printed a letter, signed "Union," conceding that Stanton was making progress and that abolitionists in the city were predicting that the aristocracy of the state would be astonished at the change of sentiment towards slavery in the country towns. The writer urged those who were anti-abolition to awaken and save the nation and called for attendance at an anti-abolition meeting the next week.⁶

The *Anti-Slavery Almanac* reported an attempt to disperse a ladies' society meeting on November 26,

1835; Stanton probably was present. A week later on December 4 Stanton was joined by Goodell, J. M. Blakesly, and Blain at a session of the Providence Juvenile Society. He later recorded that he had been "outrageously treated while attempting to speak in a Methodist church in Providence," but the leader of that mob was by 1836 the chief marshal at another meeting in the city and led the cheering for him. Stanton accompanied C. C. Burleigh from Providence to Newport on December 8 and apparently worked there with Blakesly for a time. He served from July to February 2, the date of the state convention. In each community he usually delivered at least five or six lectures, more if necessary, engaged in numerous personal conversations, and distributed publications. Goodell reported Stanton's lecture sites as Providence, North Providence, Cumberland, Burrillville, Smithfield, Scituate, Warwick, Coventry, East Greenwich, South Kingstown, Charlestown, Richmond, Hopkinton, Westerly, Barrington, Portsmouth, Middletown, Tiverton, and Little Compton with other work in Foster, Glocester, Johnston, North Kingstown, and Newport. He estimated that Stanton delivered between 150 and 160 addresses, usually five or six a week. Unable to ascertain the number of societies established, Goodell mentioned only a female society in Little Compton and an auxiliary of 400 members in parts of Warwick and Coventry. He pointed out that the object was not to create new organizations but to propagate the abolitionist doctrine. In addition, in a constituency so small, emphasis was placed upon a strong state society which would make the local units less important.⁷

The J. M. Blakesly mentioned above aided Stanton considerably. James Manning Blakesly of York, New York, was a student at Brown University from 1834 to 1837. He addressed the Providence Juvenile Anti-Slavery Society, December 4, accompanied Stanton to Newport in December 1835, and attended

4 John W. Alvord, William T. Allan, L. H. Parker, and Theodore Weld to Marius Robinson, November 1835 (Oberlin College Library). Barnes and Dumond, eds., *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld, and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844*, 2v. (New York, 1934), I, 232-233, 242, 255-256. Dumond, ed., *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857*, 2v. (New York, 1938), I, 289-290. Executive Committee Minutes, meetings of July 31 and November 3, 1835. *Human Rights*, I (September 1835), 3. *Emancipator*, June 2, 1835. *Liberator*, July 4 and 18, 1835. *Pawtucket Chronicle*, May 22 and 29, June 26, 1835. *Providence Journal*, July 1, 1835.

Rhode Island Country Journal, July 18, 1835. *Woonsocket Patriot*, July 3, August 22 and 29, 1835.

5 Stanton, p. 50. *Emancipator*, October 20, 1835. *Woonsocket Patriot*, August 29, September 5, 1835. Copy of a notice in Silas Weaver Papers, John Prentice to Weaver, September 22, 1835, Silas Weaver Papers.

6 *Providence Journal*, October 31, 1835.

7 *American Anti-Slavery Almanac*, I (1837), 26. Stanton, pp. 51-52. *Liberator*, December 26, 1835. *Emancipator*, April 1836. C. C. Burleigh to Garrison, December 29, 1835, William Lloyd Garrison Papers (Boston Public Library).

Charles Calistus Burleigh.



From William Lloyd Garrison... v. 3 (N.Y., 1889).

the state convention. Goodell reported that Blakesly served as a temporary assistant for three or four weeks sometime prior to the state convention.⁸

By December Stanton was attempting to collect 750 signatures for a formal call of a state convention. He wrote Amos Phelps, holding out the hope that the "state may stagger slavery by its action," if the correct efforts could yet be made. Consequently, he urged Phelps to join him for a month prior to the convention for, in Stanton's opinion, only a Congregational clergyman could convince many of that denomination's ministers in the state. Phelps had been the most effective of the early agents of the antislavery crusade, but he had seldom spoken in Rhode Island. Born in

Farmington, Connecticut, on November 11, 1804, he had attended Yale as an undergraduate and the Andover and Yale Theological Seminaries. After service at Hopkinton, Massachusetts, he was pastor of the Pine Street Church in Boston, 1832-1834, when he, a former supporter of the American Colonization Society to send free blacks to Africa and a member of what Americans today would call "the establishment," associated himself in a dramatic step with the New England Anti-Slavery Society. Accepting an agency from the American Anti-Slavery Society in April 1834, he helped lay the foundations for the development of state abolition auxiliaries in Maine, New Hampshire, and New York.⁹

Phelps was caring for his ill wife during most of November and December 1835. Nevertheless, he answered Stanton's call and assisted him for between four and five weeks. His reported activities included speeches with Stanton on January 13 in Providence, on January 15 about twelve miles from Providence, and on January 16 again in Providence. He then served in the southern part of the state, including at least some time in East Greenwich, before returning to the capital on January 28. Stanton, in a letter of introduction, informed an antislavery acquaintance that Phelps "visits... for the purpose of being heard on the subject of freedom of speech & the liberty of the press & the inalienable rights of man." Phelps left for Connecticut following the convention.¹⁰

Some additional last-minute lecturing assistance was also rendered by Charles C. Burleigh. Born in Plainfield, Connecticut, November 10, 1810, to a family of marked mental gifts, Burleigh studied law, was admitted to the bar, but became involved in the antislavery movement through his concern about anti-Negro attacks against Prudence Crandall's admission of colored girls to her Connecticut school. Samuel J. May selected him to edit his Brooklyn, Connecticut *Unionist*. Burleigh quickly moved into the

Alvord et al. to Marius Robinson, November 1835. Barnes and Dumond, I, 232-233, 255-256. Executive Committee Minutes, November 3, 1835 meeting. *Providence Journal*, January 9, 1836.

8 *Emancipator*, April 1836. *Liberator*, December 26, 1835. C. C. Burleigh to Garrison, December 29, 1835, Garrison Papers. *Proceedings of Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Convention* [Providence, 1836], 4. *Historical Catalogue of Brown University 1764-1904* [Providence, 1905], 610.

9 *Liberator*, May 12, 1837, quoting from *Lynn Record*. *New York Evangelist*, October 16, 1830. George W. Campbell to Phelps, April 6, 1829; committee of the

Pine Street Church to Phelps, August 18, 1832; and Stanton to Phelps, December 18, 1835, Phelps Papers. *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* [New York, 1895-1955], II, 327. *General Catalogue of the Theological Seminary, Andover, Mass., 1880* [Andover, 1883], 79.

10 Phelps to Tappan, March 5, 1835, Lewis Tappan Papers [Library of Congress]. *Proceedings Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Convention*, 4. Stanton to Weaver, January 9, 1836, Weaver Papers. Phelps to his wife, January 16 and 29, 1836 and Garrison to Phelps, December 16, 1835, Phelps Papers. *Providence Journal*, January 9, 1836. *Emancipator*, April 1836.

Garrisonian faction of the abolition crusade. He was employed as an agent by the Middlesex County, Massachusetts, and American Anti-Slavery societies. Described frequently as an eloquent speaker, with great ability to extemporize, conscientious, self-sacrificing, and logical in mind, his manner of address and ammunition of facts had to overcome a careless and indifferent appearance in body and dress. He was a tall man, of obvious physical endurance, but who wore long hair in ringlets and possessed a famous beard. Stanton recorded, "He dressed like a tramp." Yet an editor asserted that "he can hold an audience in breathless silence for several hours; . . . he is instructive, persuasive, and an argumentative debater."¹¹

Burleigh had been working in Boston in the anti-slavery offices, occasionally emerging for speeches. He left Massachusetts at the entreaty of Stanton on December 7, lecturing at Foxboro en route. He conferred for a day December 8 with Stanton in Providence and the two then proceeded to Newport. Burleigh continued to Block Island. Addressing groups as large as he could collect in private homes, since the meeting house was not heated in winter, he spoke usually about slavery, but twice for temperance. Weather delayed his departure until December 23; he returned to his Connecticut home on the mainland by way of New London.¹²

Stanton had remarkable success mobilizing a noteworthy list of 850 citizens, about thirty of whom were ministers, who were willing to issue the call for the state convention. With the exception of two, every town in the state contributed signatures. Among them were an ex-Governor and five ex-Chief Justices. Over 400 delegates, approximately 350 from Rhode Island, participated in the Providence organizational meeting of the new society, February 2, 3, and 4, 1836. Stanton had prepared well. S. S. Jocelyn of Hartford, Phelps, and Stanton represented the parent unit; May, Garrison, Burleigh, and Charles Stuart also attended from out of state. Letters were received from abolitionists all over

the North. The meeting raised \$2,000 for the new year's operations and established an office in Providence for the distribution of abolition pamphlets.¹³

Following the convention, the state society's executive committee requested that Stanton continue his efforts and apparently also asked for Phelps' services. Phelps argued that Stanton should now join him in Connecticut. Since the agency committee of the national society had employed William Goodell for three months on February 10, 1836, to devote part of his time to writing and part to lecturing, Stanton recommended that Goodell be assigned to Rhode Island and that control over him be relinquished to the state society. Goodell, however, accepted the editorship of the projected newspaper of the New York State Anti-Slavery Society, the *Friend of Man*. The Rhode Island abolitionists requested in March that some other man be designated, but the agency committee postponed a decision by referring the matter to the executive committee. Subsequently at its April 5 meeting, the agency committee directed Burleigh to shift his field of operations for three months from Connecticut to Rhode Island, but he would not undertake the assignment until after the national convention in May and then he declined entirely. This failure to obtain the services of Goodell, Stanton, or Burleigh seemed to thwart further development. All the record shows is an appearance by Stanton and Orson Murray of Vermont in Pawtucket on May 20 and another by Stanton before the Providence Ladies Anti-Slavery Society later in the summer. Rhode Island was not being as neglected as it might appear; the demands upon the national society were too great for its meager financial resources and personnel available to it. Rhode Island had its state organization and twenty auxiliaries, a large number for a state with five counties. Thereafter, its abolitionists would have to be primarily responsible for the program.¹⁴

Until the autumn of 1836 the only significant contribution of any of the employees of the national

11 Seth Hunt, "Charles C. Burleigh," *History of Florence, Massachusetts*, ed. by Charles A. Sheffield (Florence, 1895), 211-214. *Emancipator*, March 9, 1837, quoting from *Hartford Chronicle*. Parker Pillsbury, *Acts of Anti-Slavery Apostles* (Concord, N.H., 1883), 479-480. *Appleton's Cyclopaedia*, I, 455. Stanton, p. 71. *Liberator*, May 12, 1837, quoting from *Lynn Record*. Samuel J. May, *Some Recollections of Our Anti-Slavery Conflict* (Boston, 1869), 61-66. Thomas W. Higginson, *Contemporaries* (Boston, 1896), 331.

12 Burleigh to Garrison, December 29, 1835, Garrison Papers. *Emancipator*, April 1836.

13 *New York Evangelist*, January 23, 1836. *Emancipator*, February and April 1836. *Proceedings Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Convention*, 4-6. *Rhode Island Country Journal*, January 29, February 19, 1836. *Providence Journal*, January 13, 1836.

14 Elizur Wright, Jr., to Phelps, March 3, 1836 and Stanton to Phelps, February 24 and March 5, 1836. Phelps Papers. Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of February 10 and 24, March 15, April 5, June 5, and July 6, 1836. *Pawtucket Chronicle*, May 20, 1836. *Emancipator*, December 1, 1836.

organization was the preparation of the abolitionist case for presentation before a committee of the state legislature. A set of resolutions from an anti-abolitionist meeting in September 1835, combined with others passed and forwarded by Southern legislatures, which denounced antislavery leaders, were referred by the legislature to a committee for study. The committee drafted a bill, but party leaders deferred consideration until the next session. When the abolitionists presented memorials asking to be heard, the committee set Wednesday, June 22, in Newport to hear the arguments, then subsequently, by a 3-2 vote, decided that the interested parties should first furnish their arguments, remarks, and evidences in writing. Ray Potter, a state abolition leader, hastened to Troy, New York, to plead for assistance from Theodore Weld, the American Anti-Slavery Society's most successful lecturer, but Weld was then battling mobs to establish the right of freedom of speech in that community and could not be convinced that his services were needed more in Rhode Island. The agency committee delegated Stanton and Phelps to prepare the case. When Stanton became ill and had to remain under treatment in Providence, C. C. Burleigh and David L. Child aided Phelps. After seeing the material which the petitioners proposed to present, the Assembly preferred to postpone the investigation indefinitely. When the disappointed abolitionists asked for permission to use a room in the State House to present their position to the public, the Assembly by a 36-28 vote laid the request on the table. Unable to obtain a hearing in Newport, the Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Society called a meeting in Providence, listened to addresses by Burleigh, Phelps, and Child, and issued an official statement which it sent to the assemblymen, accompanied by the latest annual report of the American Anti-Slavery Society.¹⁵

The attempts to procure agents for the state continued virtually unsuccessfully. The agency committee on June 5, 1836, recommissioned Burleigh and in July appointed Blain, but both men declined.

They did agree to address meetings on July 4, Burleigh in Pawtucket, Blain at the Baptist Pine Street meeting house in Providence. The state society was no more successful in its efforts to employ Orange Scott, a Methodist clergyman from Massachusetts. As a result, lecturing during the summer was limited to several addresses delivered by George Benson, Garrison's brother-in-law, and William Chace.¹⁶

Probably somewhat embarrassed by the absence of effort in Rhode Island since the previous winter, the agency committee on September 20 deputed William H. Burleigh, Henry C. Wright, Gould, Henry Beldon, and Stanton to assist Potter until the November state anniversary meeting. The national society had now entered the year of "The Seventy," a time during which it attempted to employ seventy agents, following the Biblical example, in a massive campaign to convert the North to anti-slavery principles. In Pennsylvania the effort spawned a state society; in populous New York, Massachusetts, and Ohio a host of lecturing agents established new auxiliaries and garnered hundreds of new anti-slavery members, but Rhode Island seems never to have become a significant part of this best-organized agency campaign. Although Burleigh and Beldon were both appointed to agencies in August, no record has been discovered to imply that they performed service anywhere before the agents' training convention in November and December of 1836 in New York City. Since the reports of the state meeting indicate they did not attend, they evidently did not begin their employment until late November.¹⁷

Henry C. Wright was born in 1797, supported himself as a hatter, and attended Andover Theological Seminary for two years. Although he was licensed to preach, he was employed almost exclusively in agencies for the benevolent and reform movements of the day. Wright was a later addition to the abolition crusade; his first appearance at antislavery conclaves was in May 1835. By September he was delivering one of the main addresses at the quarterly meetings of the Massachu-

15 *Herald of Freedom*, July 9, 1836. *Liberator*, July 2, 1836. *Emancipator*, June 30, July 21, 1836. *Rhode Island Country Journal*, June 17, 1836. Garrison to Samuel J. May, June 17, 1836, Garrison Papers. Barnes and Dumond, I, 308-310. Agency Committee Minutes, June 5, 1836 meeting. William Goodell, *Rights and Wrongs of Rhode Island* (Whitesboro, N.Y., 1842), 16, 35.

16 *Friend of Man*, July 14, 1836. *Providence Journal*, July 4, 1836. *Pawtucket Chronicle*, July 1 and 8, 1836. Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of June 5, July 6, and August 2, 1836. Garrison to George Benson,

August 18, 1836, Garrison Papers. Lucius C. Matlack, *History of American Slavery and Methodism 1780-1849* (New York, 1849), 119.

17 Barnes and Dumond, I, 333. *Emancipator*, November 24, 1836. *Herald of Freedom*, November 19, 1836. *Providence Journal*, November 14, 1836. *Pawtucket Chronicle*, October 14, 1836. John L. Myers, "Organization of 'The Seventy': To Arouse the North Against Slavery," *Mid-America*, XLVIII (January 1966), 29-46. Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of August 2 and 17, September 20, October 5, 1836.

sets Anti-Slavery Society. Thereafter, while employed by other organizations, he frequently played an important role at abolition gatherings. In June 1836 the agency committee commissioned him for one year at a salary of \$600 plus expenses as its agent for western Massachusetts, but at its July 6 meeting it took note of his declination. Wright instead accepted an agency with the American Peace Society, but was soon in disagreement with its directors and was replaced. The agency committee then renewed its offer, assigning him to Maine, but directing him to serve in Rhode Island for three weeks until that state's anniversary.¹⁸

Wright arrived in the state on October 18 and presented his first address in Bristol on October 20, followed by others on October 21 and 23. He had been apprehensive about what might occur in a town so closely associated in the past with slavery. His lectures brought almost no attendance. In spite of his lack of progress, some anti-abolitionist posted a handbill in different parts of the town endeavoring to arouse the people to protest against his scheduled meeting on October 24. A group of prominent citizens, determined to prevent violence, attended his lecture, listened politely, and safely escorted Wright to his lodgings at the conclusion. An abolition editor reported now only Warren and Newport had not heard antislavery lecturers. Wright proceeded to Warren on October 25 and spoke twice. One church was closed to him, but he was able to obtain use of the Methodist meeting house. After his third address on October 31, that hall was also denied for his use, limiting his activities during the succeeding week to the distribution of antislavery papers.¹⁹

Gould was in Crawford County in western Pennsylvania on September 23. If one takes into account the time to cross the mountains and organize his operations in a new location, he could not have served more than a few weeks at most before the state meeting. Stanton returned from northern New England for an address in Potter's church in Pawtucket on

Henry Clarke Wright.



Sunday, September 4, but he immediately withdrew again. Since his activities are unaccounted for between September 27 and October 7, he might have been in Rhode Island. In addition, after the state anniversaries in Maine and Vermont, he might have returned again by approximately November 1. He did attend the anniversary on November 9.²⁰

In addition to those already mentioned, Nathaniel Southard, another member of the band of Seventy and a close associate of Garrison, crossed the border from his assigned field in Massachusetts to Chepachet on Monday evening, October 17, in order to schedule a lecture in the town's only meeting house. The only

18 Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of June 5, July 6, October 5, 1836. Barnes and Dumond, I, 419n. *General Catalogue . . . Andover, Mass. 1880*, 42. Garrison to Henry E. Benson, December 5, 1835, Garrison Papers. *Liberator*, May 30, 1835. Merle E. Curti, "Non-Resistance in New England," *New England Quarterly*, II (January

1929, 35. *Permanent Temperance Documents of the American Temperance Society* (Boston, 1835), I, 527-528. William F. Galpin, *Pioneering for Peace, a Study of American Peace Efforts to 1846* (Syracuse, 1933), 107.

19 *Liberator*, October 29, 1836. *Emancipator*, November 10, December 1, 1836. *Friend of Man*, November 3, 1836.

abolitionist in the community, a merchant and president of the bank, was in charge of the house and readily opened it to Southard. The agent departed for Burrillville to schedule meetings there, returning to Chepachet for a single address to about fifty people on October 19.²¹

Ray Potter, the only member of the Seventy permanently assigned to Rhode Island, between the date of his appointment to a six-months agency in late September of 1836, and October 26, lectured in fifteen communities, trying to arouse interest in the state meeting, collect subscription payments, and circulate petitions. He assisted Wright in Bristol. After participating in the state anniversary from November 9 to 11, Potter proceeded to New York City for the agents' training convention. He withdrew from the meeting early, however, and resigned his commission shortly thereafter. According to newspapers, he confessed in a letter to his congregation that he had engaged in illicit intercourse with a church sister who would soon bear his child. This naturally ended Potter's effectiveness in antislavery circles. Nevertheless, the committee did appoint him to a local agency and authorized \$13.25 for his October lecturing expenses.²²

The Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Society's first anniversary convened in the Richmond Street meeting house in Providence from November 9 to 11. Over 130 delegates from twenty towns listened to addresses by Stanton, Wright, Gould, C. C. Burleigh, Blain, James T. Woodbury, Lewis Tappan, George Benson, and R. G. Williams. Potter, Southard, and William Chace were also present. Differences between the officers of the national society and the abolitionists of the state were open. The former emphasized its obligations to support the activities nation-wide and the resources which it had expended in Rhode Island in the past; the latter accentuated the drain by the American Anti-Slavery Society upon local financial resources and the national society's present lack of support with personnel. Tappan chided the state abolitionists for having

accomplished so little since the formation of their society the previous winter. While 3,500 abolitionists lived within the state's borders, they had forwarded less than half of the \$1,000 they had subscribed to the national organization. Stanton, with Potter agreeing, explained that no agent had been employed because neither the state nor national societies could obtain one. Yet at the same time he defended the national officers by asserting that "Rhode Island has been better supplied with agents than any State in the Union. Eight agents have been sent here to labor for a season." During the previous fifteen months, the American Anti-Slavery Society had spent nearly \$2,500 upon agents and publications for the state. Obviously, this was primarily prior to the organization of the state society. What concerned Rhode Island abolitionists, however, was not the past; sixty national agents were then in the field, but Rhode Island had virtually none.²³

Authorization for the creation of a committee to hire and direct an agent for the state was one of the principal actions of the anniversary meeting. Voting to appoint an agent was easy; finding one and financing his operations was not. The state executive committee even advertised in antislavery newspapers, an uncommon procedure. The American Anti-Slavery Society, forced to accept Potter's resignation, assigned C. C. Burleigh in December 1836 to Rhode Island as soon as he completed his labors in Pennsylvania, but the committee in February reversed itself even before Burleigh's other work was complete. Instead, it instructed Stanton and Amos Dresser to transfer to Rhode Island. Stanton may have complied temporarily, for reports of his activities during February were sketchy, but he was speaking in Massachusetts by the first week in March. Amos Dresser was widely known in the nation. While on a trip to visit a relative in Mississippi, Dresser had been seized in Nashville and found guilty by a kangaroo court of being a member of an abolition society and of selling anti-slavery literature. He had been tarred and feathered and ousted from

20 *Emancipator*, October 6 and 13, November 3, 10, 17 and 24, 1836.

21 *Emancipator*, November 10, 1836.

22 *Emancipator*, November 10, 1836. *Friend of Man*, October 13, 1836. *Liberator*, November 25, 1837. *Pawtucket Chronicle*, September 30, 1836; February 3,

1837. Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of November 17, December 6 and 20, 1836.

23 *Providence Journal*, November 14, 1836. *Emancipator*, November 17 and 24, 1836. *Herald of Freedom*, November 19, 1836. *Rhode Island Country Journal*, November 4, 1836. Oliver Johnson to Tappan, March 22, 1837, Lewis Tappan Papers.

the city. Appointed to an agency in December 1836, he served the next five months primarily in Massachusetts, often with Stanton. Nevertheless, reports do exist to indicate appearances in Little Compton in early April, at the meeting of the Providence Anti-Slavery Society at the Richmond Street Church April 21 and at the First Baptist meeting house in Pawtucket on April 28.²⁴

Antislavery in Rhode Island also benefited from the short employment of an agent by the state society. Oliver Johnson was a native of Peacham, Vermont, who left his farm home in 1825 to begin work as a writer and printer for a number of publications. While editor of the *Boston Christian Soldier* in 1831, he heard Garrison speak and soon became one of the strongest supporters of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. During the 1820s he several times relinquished his publishing activities to serve as lecturing agent of state or the national antislavery societies. In the winter of 1836-1837 he had been working in Pennsylvania to help organize a state society. The agency committee initially reassigned Johnson to Vermont. Perhaps he did not approve of the transfer or perhaps the pressure from Rhode Island demanded a response. In any case, Johnson resigned his national commission to accept a financial agency for the Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Society, certainly with directions to obtain unfulfilled pledges of money made to the national organization. He may have been employed at the same time by the American Anti-Slavery Society, for the agency committee paid his expenses of \$41.89 to September 20, 1837.²⁵

After a short digression to Boston to visit his wife, Johnson turned to Rhode Island for addresses before the ladies' society and two public meetings in the Union Hall in Providence, beginning March 4. In addition, he delivered three lectures in each of the villages of Chepachet, Harmony, and Greenville. He found

Oliver Johnson, lecturer, writer and editor.



From William Lloyd Garrison . . . v. 1 (N. Y., 1885).

audiences were small, prejudice was deep. In the latter two communities he also addressed the children in school. He characterized the abolitionists of the state as cold and inactive. By the third week of March he felt free to return to Massachusetts, reporting that differences between the American and Rhode Island Anti-Slavery societies were sufficiently placated. He spent the remainder of the year in Massachusetts until his return as general agent of the state society in the winter.²⁶

William L. Chaplin may also have served in Rhode Island when he finally was able to enter the employ of

24 *Emancipator*, January 12, April 27, 1837. *Providence Journal*, November 14, 1836. *Pawtucket Chronicle*, April 28, 1836. *Rhode Island Country Journal*, April 21, 1837. *Liberator*, March 24 and 31, April 7 and 28, May 5, June 9, 1837. Amasa Walker, *Memoir of Rev. Amos Dresser* (no title page), 103. Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of December 6, 1836, February 8 and May 17, 1837.

25 Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of February 8 and 14, November 2, 1837. Oliver Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times* (Boston, 1880), 252 *et passim*. Johnson to Tappan, March 22, 1837, Lewis Tappan Papers. Ernest L. Bogart, *Peacham, the Story of a Vermont Hill Town* (Montpelier, 1948), 219. John L. Myers, "Early Antislavery Agency System in Pennsylvania, 1833-1837," *Pennsylvania History*, XXI (January 1964), 81-82.

the American Anti-Slavery Society. In June 1836 Chaplin was first appointed agent and directed to eastern Pennsylvania. Illness must have kept him from his assignment. By March 14, 1837, according to the minutes of the agency committee, he was ready to begin. His expenses of \$32.77 were paid from February 10 to the close of his agency, probably about June 30. Antislavery sources seldom mentioned any activities. William Chace wrote that only Chaplin and Stanton aided their meetings during the last week of June and that Chaplin, because of illness, had not achieved much. *The Liberator* reported that Chaplin was one of two speakers at the meetings of the state society in South Kingstown and East Greenwich on June 20 and 21, respectively. Chaplin forwarded \$30 to the national society's treasury.²⁷

The crest of antislavery agency activity was reached in Rhode Island a year earlier than in many states. Because of its small size and population, the state had offered an unusual opportunity to demonstrate what a concentrated campaign of one man — in this case Henry B. Stanton — could accomplish in engendering antislavery sentiment. Using the techniques already familiar from other humanitarian and reform movements, already refined by 1835 for antislavery applicability, and building upon the foundations established by earlier lecturers from the summer of 1832 until he began and the existence of inceptive societies in Pawtucket and Providence, Stanton, accompanied in the final drive by a number of other antislavery agents, had kindled such thought and enthusiasm that public sentiment was changed and a state antislavery organization formed in February 1836. Thereafter, the need of the resources of the American Anti-Slavery Society elsewhere and the confidence of its leaders that Rhode Islanders themselves could continue the crusade caused Rhode Island to fall behind other states in its anti-slavery progress. The

number of auxiliaries in the nation almost doubled from 527 to 1,006 between May 1836 and May 1837. National membership was estimated at over 100,000. Yet if the promise of early 1836 was not totally fulfilled, Rhode Island had made its initial movement into the support of the immediate abolition cause. By late 1836 an antislavery society had even been founded in Newport. On August 1, 1837, the state organization sponsored meetings commemorating the freeing of slaves in the British Empire with gatherings at Providence, Bristol, and Newport. Few would have predicted two years before that the August state meeting could be held at the State House in Newport as it was on August 21 and 22, 1837. Following the example in Vermont and Massachusetts, local abolitionists began to quiz candidates for political office concerning their thoughts about slavery in the District of Columbia, the right of petition, and the admission of slave-holding Texas to the American union. As the *American Anti-Slavery Society's Annual Report* declared in 1837, "Where last year abolitionism was branded as treason, this year it has been openly avowed. Men who last year hoped to rise to power by abusing Abolitionists, are this year humbly asking abolition votes." James G. Birney, corresponding secretary of the national organization, reported in 1838 in a state-by-state analysis of the strength of antislavery sentiment that Rhode Island was the only state into which abolition had been fully introduced and in which a mob had never gained an upper hand. Antislavery lecturing activity was not ended in the state. Nevertheless, the financial stringencies produced by the Panic of 1837 and dissension within the antislavery movement itself shifted the methods and direction of abolition labors after 1837. What is important is that the agents by that date had generated antislavery sentiment throughout the state and organized it so that growth could continue and public policy be effected.²⁸

26 Johnson to Tappan, March 22, 1837, Lewis Tappan Papers. *Providence Journal*, March 4, 1837. *Emancipator*, April 27, 1837. *Liberator*, November 3, 1837. William Birney, James G. Birney and His Times (New York, 1890), 296.

27 *Emancipator*, June 29, 1837. *Liberator*, June 30, 1837. *Friend of Man*, July 19, 1837. Dumond, I, 404. William Chace to Phelps, July 22, 1837, Phelps Papers. Myers, *Pennsylvania History*, XXI, 76-77. Agency Committee

Minutes, meetings of June 5, July 6, 1836; February 22, March 14, May 17, July 8, 1837.

28 *Fourth Annual Report American Anti-Slavery Society* (New York, 1837), 31, 43. William M. Chace to Thomas W. Dorr, July 18, 1837, Rider Collection (John Hay Library, Brown University). *Herald of Freedom*, November 26, 1836. *Rhode Island Country Journal*, July 21, August 18, 1837. *Liberator*, August 4, 1837.

(C) Account of work done on Mr. John J. Clark's House.

126 1/2 Squares of the 3 Floors Sides & Ends	2 5/8	37. 19.	
25 3/4 ditto Panel Floor 2 7/8 12 Joins 2 1/2		10. 4. 3	
31 ditto Kibb's d' Wood	7/8	10. 11.	
28 3/4 ditto Boarding Roof	6/8	8. 12. 6	
200 Feet full plank	1/2	3. 6. 8	
58 1/2 Sq ^{rs} Boarding Sides Feather Edg'd	5/8	14. 2. 6	
206 Feet Dental & Modillions full	5/8	51. 10.	
19000 Shingles lay'd	1/6	6. 3. 6	
108 Feet High's & Gutter	6	4. 19.	147. 11. 5
22 1/2 Sq ^{rs} Garret Floor	9/8	10. 2. 6	
38 Windows put up w th Venetian d: 2/8		2. -	
280 Feet Chichitave put on Windows	1/2	9. -	
108 Feet full to the Dormants, Dental & Modillions	3/8	18. 18.	
4 3/4 Sq ^{rs} Planking Dormants	3/8	- 11. 3	
1 1/2 d ^o Boarding Roof on d ^o	6/8	- 9.	
140 Clapboards lay'd on d ^o	15/8	1. 1. 7	
112 Feet full plank	1/2	- 18. 8	
3 1/2 Sq ^{rs} Feather Edg'd Boarding sides d ^o	5/8	- 16. 3	
8 Sq ^{rs} Framing d ^o	6/8	2. 8.	
16 Feet Cornice Boards d ^o	1	- 5. 4	16. 8. 3
44 d ^o Quels on Windows d ^o	2	- 7. 4	
112 d ^o Putting Clapboards d ^o	1	- 9. 4	
4 Dormant Window Frames put up	9	- 3.	
The whole of the Flatt on the Roof including Sudd	3	- 6.	
162 Feet Water Table round the House	8	5. 8.	
36.4 d ^o Belt round d ^o	8	12. 2. 8	
407 Square Feet Rustic of the Corners	1	22. 7.	
3175 Clapboards lay'd	12/8	19. 1.	
750 Feet Putting & Shading	7/8	1. 11. 3	
27 Window & Door Casings	2/6	3. 7. 0	68. 8. 5
82 Feet outside Door Case, dble Architrave w th 2 1/2 3 1/2		2. 16. 5	
54 1/2 Feet inside Casing for the same (Sash 2 1/2)	2 1/2	- 11. 4	
24 Timbers for the Chimneys, (with the wooden Brick)	1	- 11.	
The whole of the Woods put in the Chimney & Cellar partition		1. 16.	
Leading the Dormants & Chimneys		- 12.	
38 Window Frames w th 13/8 1 d ^o w th 5/8		25. 16.	
256 Sq ^{rs} Sash w th 6 1/2 Sq ^{rs} d ^o w th 2 1/2		11. 7. 1	
1 Venetian Window Frame		7.	
31 Sq ^{rs} Sash 7. 6 Sq ^{rs} Compas d ^o w th 2/8		1. 13. 1	55. 16. 2
			£ 318. 7. 3

Director's Newsletter

In April of this year we shall enter our one hundred and fiftieth year of activity as a Society. In the lives of historical agencies in this country it represents a milestone of no small proportions; only a handful of our sister institutions have celebrated a sesquicentennial anniversary. In the life of our own organization it provides a convenient time to assess accomplishments over a century and a half and a chance to consider what remains to be done to fulfill the hopes of our founders.

The Rhode Island Historical Society was formed because of a very real concern about the gradual destruction and dissipation of the records and relics of the colonial past. Tradition tells us that John Howland, a veteran of the Revolution and holder of dozens of civic offices, once rescued a packet of Roger Williams letters from the cobblestones of a Providence street where they had been tossed on a heap of rubbish.

Over the years the varied interest and enthusiasm of the members, the officers, and the Society's curators has led to the development of a great historical collection of books, documents, and museum objects comprised of several individually great collections. While the emphasis has shifted from time to time the general goal has remained unchanged: to collect, to preserve, and to interpret the materials of our State's history.

In the remaining decades of this century it would seem that our original purpose can be best pursued by continuing to collect for the John Brown House and Museum and by ever enriching the holdings of our Library; by completing as well as is physically and financially possible the work of restoring John Brown House; and by expanding our capacity to interpret this heritage through our lectures and our magazine, but most importantly through the facility of a lecture hall which can also serve to exhibit Rhode Island objects and through the medium of a new state history which will translate Rhode Island's experience to new generations of Rhode Islanders.

The officers and staff have already been at work sorting out priorities and making plans and preparations. To a large extent the availability of funds will determine our speed though not our direction. As in the past, the membership will receive appeals for both particular and general projects. We hope they will respond with the same generosity and determination as our founders; the concern is every bit as urgent today as it was in 1822. This Society has not only survived a century and a half, it has prevailed — due in large part to generous bequests by individuals who honored not only their forefathers and the past, but themselves and the future as well.

The recent acquisition of four hundred and fifty letters and documents pertaining to John Innes Clark and his family provides an important insight to a major personality among the great merchant princes of John Brown's day. Heretofore almost totally obscured, Clark emerges as a commercial equal of John Brown. This inventory of carpentry work for the exterior of his great house, located at Benefit and John Streets, appeared in the papers. The house, shown in this drawing, was destroyed by fire in 1849.

*Designed by Malcolm Gear Designers, Inc. 1969
Type set by Typesetting Service Co.
Printed by Foremost Lithograph Co.*