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RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

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PLANTATIONS, Philip W. Noel, Governor.

From the State House dome Independent Man imprints his silhouette on the horizon — symbolizing an insistence on individuality that continues to intrigue students of Rhode Island's past, present and future (page 23).

Photograph by Richard O. Benjamin, courtesy Providence Journal.

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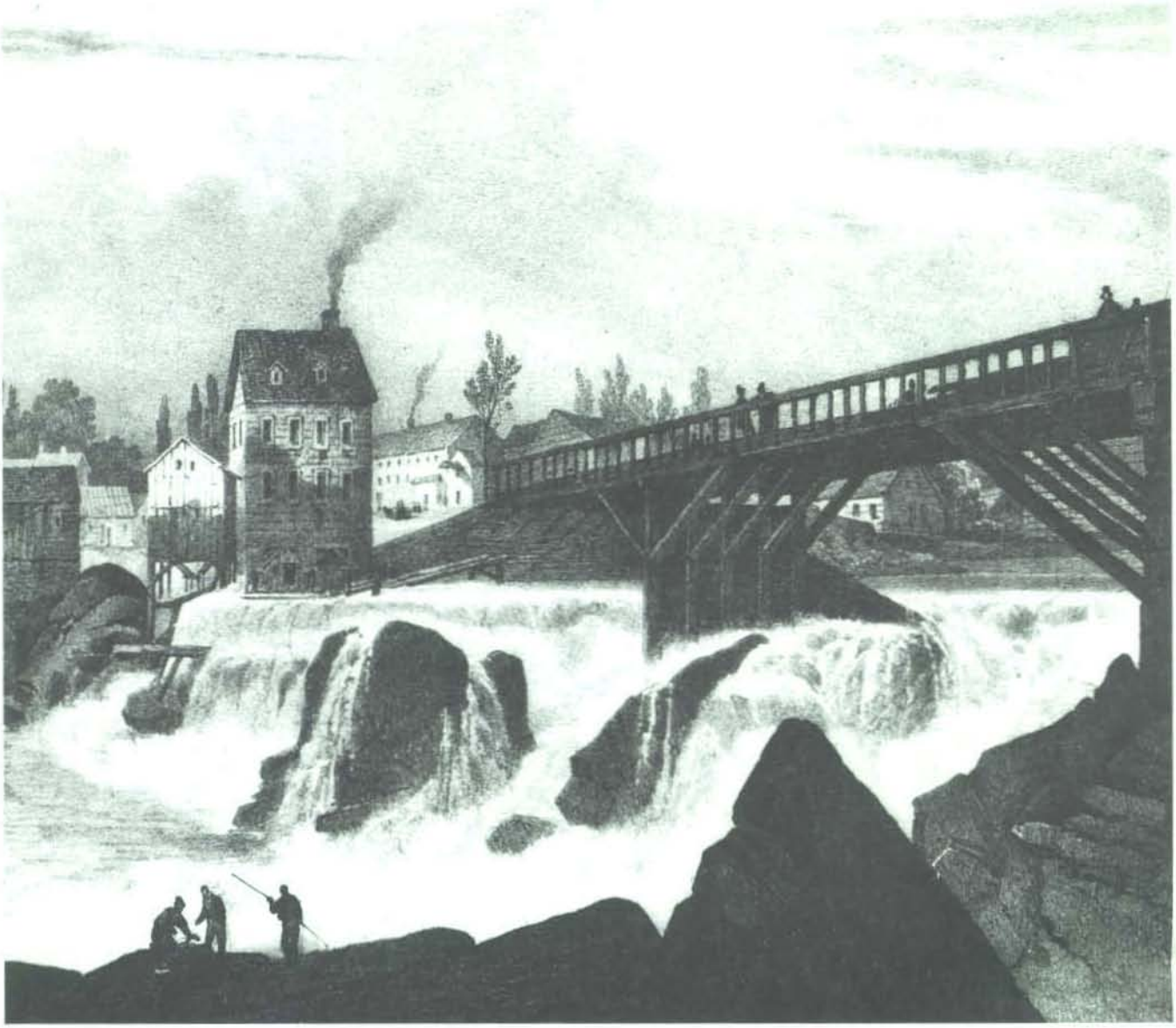

Detail, lithograph from original by Jacques Gérard Milbert, Graphics Collection, RIHS.

These falls drew Pawtucket's founder, iron worker Joseph Jenks, to the site in 1671 and led to early establishment of the town as an iron center.

Pawtucket Village Mechanics — Iron, Ingenuity, and the Cotton Revolution

*by Brendan F. Gilbane**

Joseph Jenks founded Pawtucket in 1671 at the falls of the Blackstone River where he set up his forge and iron works. For more than a century the Jenks tradition in iron was carried on by his successors. After the American Revolution, Oziel Wilkinson, a Smithfield blacksmith, moved his family to the little hamlet to continue their own work in iron. By 1790 the village reputation as an iron center was firmly established.

In that year Samuel Slater came to Pawtucket to translate Arkwright water-frame patents into operational machinery to spin cotton yarn by water power. The experience and ingenuity of the village iron workers became vital factors in Slater's success. But the new machinery which began the nation's industrial revolution soon transformed the primary occupational activity of Pawtucket from iron to cotton. The iron business did not disappear, rather it became geared to the new industry as the cotton craze spread through village, state, and region.

For generations after Pawtucket's founder set up his forge among the rocks beneath the falls, the Jenks name was synonymous with iron. During the Revolution, Stephen Jenks manufactured muskets for the Rhode Island militia, and his son Stephen Jenks Jr. carried on the business after his father's death in 1800.[1] Other members of the family remained in possession of water privileges and the estate near the site of the old forge but devoted themselves to other pursuits. Pardon and Jabez Jenks lost their snuff and clothier's shops in the great flood of 1807; the following summer they opened a wool carding and clothing business at the same site. Pardon Jenks for years operated the grist mill built by his father Moses near the old coal yard in the shadow of the old forge. Although he left no written memoirs, "Uncle" Pardon — who died in 1860 at 86 — became an important source of much information on early Pawtucket, since his remembrances have been woven into many of David Benedict's papers.[2] Although the Jenks heritage was not lost to Pawtucket during the early years of the new nation, its activities and interests broadened into other fields.

Another name became associated with the Pawtucket iron industry. The Wilkinson family brought its collective genius to the village where it remained for nearly a century following the Revolution. For some reason local accounts have been far more muted on the Wilkinson fame than on that of Jenks or Slater. The contributions of the father and sons ranged from iron making, machine manufacturing, road construction, to public service and banking. David Wilkinson alone ranks with the most renowned names of inventive talent which the Federal period produced. The whole story of Pawtucket's early growth is liberally studded with the name Wilkinson, yet the family fame has been allowed to languish. The small Pawtucket village has limited space in the pantheon of heroes, but one more niche is deserving.

Oziel Wilkinson came to Pawtucket from Smithfield, Rhode Island, around 1783. He had wanted to move in 1775 or 1776 from his father's blacksmith shop on Mussey's Brook, a tributary of the Blackstone between the present villages of Manville and Albion. But with the Revolution and the threat of

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1 Robert Grieve, *Illustrated History of Pawtucket, Central Falls and Vicinity* (Pawtucket, 1897) 52. Massena Goodrich, "Centennial Address," *Report Centennial at Pawtucket of Incorporation of North Providence* (Providence, 1865) 26. *United States Chronicle* (Providence) Nov. 28, 1800.

2 David Benedict, "Reminiscences," *Pawtucket Gazette and Chronicle* Feb. 11, 18, 1853; Mar. 9, Apr. 22, 1860; Aug. 23, 1878. *Providence Gazette* Aug. 15, 1807. Grieve, 64, 89-90, 108.

British marauding parties moving up Narragansett Bay, he was advised to delay until after the war. Born in 1744 in Smithfield, Oziel had six children when the Revolution began; he and his wife Lydia Smith, also of Smithfield, later added four more to the family. A member of the Society of Friends, he was not likely to join the fighting, so he stayed on his father's farm working in the blacksmith shop during the war. But since his iron ore and many of his customers were located around Providence, and since Pawtucket Falls offered him a more forceful source of power to lift his heavy trip-hammers, he moved as soon as peace had settled. At the Smithfield works Oziel had begun to exhibit the inventiveness which in time became a family mark, and he had begun to train his young sons in the blacksmith skills.[3]

At Pawtucket by 1786 Oziel had constructed what came to be called the upper anchor shop on Sargent's Trench above and behind the old Jenks forge. Here he made anchors for ships in construction at Pawtucket, Providence, Newport, New Bedford, or Boston. In 1786 Oziel purchased a machine for cutting the big iron screws used in screw presses for the oil works, paper mills, and clothier shops of the day. In 1790 he successfully experimented with making steel from iron. A Providence advertisement announced the products then available at his Pawtucket shop —

The Subscriber has lately erected, at Pawtucket Falls, a STEEL MANUFACTORY; where he has for Sale for Cash or Bar-Iron, Steel in the Blister or drawn into Bars. He also makes Paper-Mill, Clothiers and Printers' Screws, Machines for cutting cold Nails by Water or Hand, Irons for Carding-Machines and Spinning-Jennies, Mill-Irons, Anchors, &c. Oziel Wilkinson.[4]

Business was improving in Oziel's shop when Moses Brown brought young Samuel Slater to Pawtucket in 1790. The Providence Quaker asked Oziel if the young man could board with his large family. Oziel agreed, not knowing of course that Slater would soon revolutionize his family's future. Oziel at the time was still a blacksmith who was planning expansion. Sometime about 1794 he began building a rolling and slitting mill. The following year the public was notified that "The new ROLLING and SLITTING MILL at Pawtucket, in North-Providence, is completed, and now running, Where may be had, Nail Rods, from the Size of Tenpenny Nails, to Spikes four to the Pound. Also, cold Nail-Plates, from 3d. to 8d., Shovels rolled, &c."[5] Many years later Oziel's grandson Edward S. Wilkinson described the operations of this mill —

In 1806, my father, Daniel Wilkinson, was foreman of the works. Iron rods were slit out for the purpose of making all sizes of wrought nails and spikes; also shapes for ox and horse shoes. Hoops were rolled for hooping hogsheads, and large quantities were sold to go to New Bedford and Nantucket, for oil casks. Nail-plates were rolled for all sizes cut nails. The nails were manufactured, by cutting the nail-plates with shears into narrow strips, according to the size of the nail required, and were then put singly into a heading tool, which was opened by a spring and closed by a motion of the foot. The head was then made with a hand hammer. I remember going to Boston in 1812, with Oziel Wilkinson, when he sold a lot of nails, to Daniel May, in State street. The price was sixteen cents per pound. The nails were manufactured principally from Archangel iron, costing $140 per ton.[6]

Before the century ended, the Wilkinsons turned to the manufacture of cannon. In an advertisement over Abraham Wilkinson's name, the "Pawtucket Cannon Foundery" offered cannon of any size from three to twelve pounds "bored from solid Iron, neatly finished, and well proved."[7] Referring to this novel manufacture of cannon, Edward Wilkinson recalled "They were cast solid, and bored out by water power. It was then talked, that to Pawtucket belonged the credit of the first cannon cast solid in this country. They were bored by making the drill or borer stationary, and having the cannon revolve and press up against the drill."[8]

Even before Slater arrived from England to begin the cotton spinning industry with the Arkwright-model water frame, the Wilkinsons were gaining valuable technical experience from various experiments at producing yarn then being tried around New England. Sometime in the mid-1780s, David

3 "David Wilkinson's Reminiscences," *Transactions R. I. Society for Encouragement of Domestic Industry 1861*, 100-101.

4 *U. S. Chronicle* Feb. 18, 1790.

5 *U. S. Chronicle* Sept. 24, 1795.

6 Edward S. Wilkinson to Elisha Dyer, Dec. 16, 1861, *Transactions . . . 1861*, 87-90.

7 *Providence Gazette* Nov. 10, 1798.

8 In the letter to Dyer cited above, Edward Wilkinson erroneously dated this cannon foundry 1805-1808.

Wilkinson recalled, an attempt was made in East Greenwich to make cotton yarn on a jenny, "for which I forged and ground spindles. I made a small machine to grind with, which had a roller of wood to roll on the stone, which turned the spindle against the stone, and so ground the steel spindles perfectly." He also remembered that his father Oziel had been asked by a Providence group to make the iron work for one of the first crude carding machines. He himself had assisted in completing an early spinning machine based on a Bridgewater, Massachusetts model of Arkwright's water frame, which Americans were furiously trying to imitate.[9]

Although these early machines were all failures, the significant thing is that the Wilkinsons, particularly Oziel and his son David, were preparing themselves unknowingly for the technical demands of Samuel Slater's attempt to reconstruct Richard Arkwright's water frame, which would revolutionize the spinning of cotton yarn in America as it had done in England. With their background in iron, their innate ingenuity, and their fascination for new ideas and techniques, the Wilkinsons made that revolution almost instantaneous with Slater's arrival in Pawtucket. Slater knew nothing of iron; the speed with which his plans could be transformed into moving machinery depended on the preparation of the Yankee "versatiles." The Wilkinsons were prepared.

Before the turn of the century, this family of blacksmiths further displayed their ingenuity. They brought out the Pawtucket flour mill of another Providence Quaker, Thomas Arnold, which had been built in 1793 as one of Rhode Island's earliest flour mills. Around the turn of the century they also turned to the manufacture of linseed oil in one of their shops, subsequently lost in the great flood. Only a boy at the time, Edward Wilkinson remembered many years after how on the Sunday morning of the disaster, "I noticed that my father's shoes were covered with flaxseed, he having been at work removing flaxseed from Abraham, Isaac and David's oil mill on Sargent's Trench to Abraham Wilkinson's house on Pleasant street."[10] Of course, by the time of the flood in 1807, the Wilkinsons had also become converts to the cotton industry. Cotton spinning was altering not only the structure of the village community, but was coming to dominate the Wilkinson family. Each of Oziel's children, with the exception of one who died young, either became a manufacturer or was married to one connected with the cotton industry.

Yet the Wilkinson fame lay in metals. In an age of invention, the Wilkinson expertise in iron gave the family its share of firsts. David recalled somewhat modestly that about 1794 a man named Baldwin came from Boston to Pawtucket, "after machinery for a canal he was going to make, north from Boston. We made the patterns and cast his wheels, racks, &c., and he took them to Charlestown and finished the locks. I was there and saw the operation. It being the first canal in the country, a good deal of curiosity was excited among the people." Later David related how "we cast at Pawtucket, the iron for the draw for the Cambridge bridge. A Mr. Mills, who built the South Boston bridge, came to me for the machinery for the bridge. I fixed the patterns, and went to Raynham, got the castings, and carried them to Boston, for the first new bridge."[11] In later years Pawtucket claimed more firsts than she probably deserved, but the Wilkinsons, especially Oziel and David, were associated with so many innovations that for them the experience became commonplace.

Dictionary of American Portraits (*New York: Dover, 1967*).

This ingenious Yankee recognized the ingenuity of the Wilkinsons — Colonel Loammi Baldwin, Revolutionary patriot and civil engineer sought Wilkinson machinery in building the "first canal in the country," the Middlesex.

9 "David Wilkinson's Reminiscences," 101-102.

10 *Pawtucket Gazette and Chronicle* Feb. 10, 1871; Jan. 31, 1873.

11 "David Wilkinson's Reminiscences," 106.

Oziel would have been a progressive and a reformer in any age.[12] He was a prime mover and director of the Norfolk and Bristol Turnpike Corporation which cut the road from Pawtucket bridge to Boston. That highway — its first thirteen miles Oziel's responsibility — became one of New England's foremost. Wilkinson's own Pawtucket shops provided shovels and tools for construction of the road. For several years Oziel's name appeared in the membership of the Providence Society for Abolishing the Slave-Trade, a title soon changed to Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. In 1790 and 1791 Oziel was elected a member of its standing committee, while fellow Quaker Moses Brown was elected treasurer.[13]

Records of North Providence also demonstrate Oziel's public service to his town. At various times he was elected to the Town Council and town positions carrying a wide range of responsibilities, including surveyor of highways, fence viewer, and pound keeper. In fact, he had built Pawtucket's pound in 1796 on land he had leased to the town for a nominal sum.[14] In 1803 he was elected one of the directors of the Providence Mutual Fire Insurance Company.[15] When he died in 1815, he showed his gratitude for Slater's role in his prosperity by leaving $1000 to each of Slater's six young children. Certainly the children didn't need the gifts because Slater was well on his way to a fortune, but the gratitude was characteristic.[16] Oziel was a remarkable man who sired a remarkable family whose careers spanned the iron, machinery, and cotton industries in New England. As the Wilkinson genealogist noted —

It is somewhat surprising, when we consider the labors of this man, and the various establishments he erected, and the kinds of work he turned off, that his name has so humble a place in history. However, his works speak for him, and the time is coming when his unostentation will heighten, rather than obscure public regard.[17]

Unfortunately, Oziel Wilkinson still remains largely a forgotten man, even in the Pawtucket to which he brought so much early renown.

The success of the Wilkinson family — initiated in their iron works during the 1780s and 90s — was assured by their later ability to move where economic opportunities took them. During the first two decades of the nineteenth century the Rhode Island iron industry reached a plateau despite earlier signs of long term growth. The reasons for this leveling off were found in changes in international relations and in the related decline in shipbuilding.[18] The Wilkinsons, blacksmiths by tradition, did not give up their production of presses, nails, shovels, farm implements, or metal wares. Oziel's twin oldest sons, Abraham and Isaac, who had come to Pawtucket to help build and run the anchor shop, formed a partnership of their own in 1790 which lasted until the collapse of 1829. The A. & I. Wilkinson Company became an extensive operation, with machine castings and furnaces in Pawtucket, Providence, and Fall River.[19] David and Daniel, their younger brothers, formed the Pawtucket Nail Manufacturing Company, which advertised nails, brads, hoop iron, bar iron, nail rods, stoves, kettles, and articles of cast and wrought iron. Edward S. Wilkinson, son of Daniel, was for a while agent of the company. In 1824 David and Daniel also became partners in George S. Wardwell & Company in Providence which retailed the products of the Pawtucket Nail Company.[20]

But while they kept their fingers in the iron business, the Wilkinsons began to orient themselves quickly to the new cotton industry, capitalizing on their metal skills and their contacts with the cotton pioneers. Abraham and Isaac began to move into production of various kinds of cotton machinery, and eventually built and operated cotton mills at Pawtucket as well as at Valley Falls and Albion. Abraham, who had to forego heavy labor because of an injury received in the anchor shop, took over the management of the firm's extensive financial affairs, while Isaac, who combined extraordinary physical powers with his mechanical skills, became overseer of the anchor shop, machine shops, and furnaces. In 1812 Isaac Wilkinson built the Valley Falls turnpike

12 Brief biographical sketches of Oziel are in *Biographical Cyclopedia of Representative Men of Rhode Island* (Providence, 1881) 58-60 and Israel Wilkinson, *Memoirs of Wilkinson Family in America* (Jacksonville, Illinois 1869) 468-476.

13 *Providence Gazette* Feb. 20, 1790; Feb. 18, 1792; Feb. 16, 1793. *U. S. Chronicle* Nov. 25, 1790; Feb. 24, 1791.

14 North Providence Town Meeting Records 1765-1808, Pawtucket City Hall.

15 *U. S. Chronicle* Jan. 6, 1803.

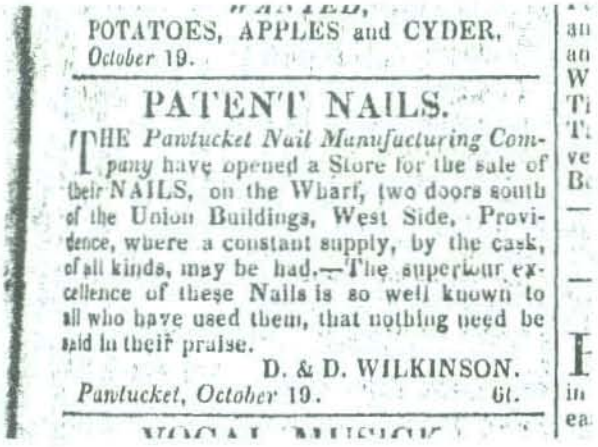
16 *Petitions to General Assembly 1816*, p. 27, Rhode Island State Archives.

17 Israel Wilkinson, *Memoirs*, 470.

18 Peter J. Coleman, *Transformation of Rhode Island 1790-1860* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1963) 33-34.

19 *Rhode Island American* (Providence) June 6, 1815.

In the Rhode Island American *of October 19, 1819, readers were advised of the superior excellence of the Pawtucket Nail Manufacturing Company's wares.*



POTATOES, APPLES and CYDER,
October 19.

PATENT NAILS.

THE *Pawtucket Nail Manufacturing Company* have opened a Store for the sale of their NAILS, on the Wharf, two doors south of the Union Buildings, West Side, Providence, where a constant supply, by the cask, of all kinds, may be had.—The superiour excellence of these Nails is so well known to all who have used them, that nothing need be said in their praise.

D. & D. WILKINSON.
Pawtucket, October 19. 6t.

extending from Pawtucket village to the later site of the famous Catholic oak, close by William Blackstone's grave, thus facilitating the expansion of their operations in Smithfield.[21] In 1823 they became partners in the Fox-Point Union Company in Providence, a lumber and carpentering business in conjunction with a Providence iron foundry.[22] The A. & I. Wilkinson operations had become so extensive by 1829 that when management and credit shortcomings caught up with them, their collapse marked the beginning of the panic of 1829 in Pawtucket.

The real genius of the Wilkinson family, however, was David, who assumed direction of his father's iron enterprises when Oziel turned to the cotton industry at the end of the eighteenth century. David carved out a career which in some ways surpassed his father's. His fascination with mechanics almost from infancy was phenomenal. From a precocious beginning of sitting astride a log making cold iron nails, David tackled the bigger challenges of molding screw presses. Screws were huge, heavy objects which required great skill to make, and it was difficult to get them molded at the various furnaces in Massachusetts. David related that

My father had once seen old Israel Wilkinson mould one screw, and, after he had bought those old tools of young Israel, as he was called, and at a time when he wanted some moulding done, he took me — then about fifteen years old — into his chaise and carried me to Hope furnace, about fourteen miles from Providence, in Scituate, to mould a paper mill screw, as they had no moulder at their furnace who would undertake to mould one. I had never seen a furnace in operation, or seen a thing moulded, in my life. I moulded three or four screws before I left for home. I stayed there about a month. The screws weighed about five hundred pounds each — were five inch top, with cross holes seven inches diameter, through a lantern head for a lever seven inches diameter. They were cast in dried-clay moulds, hooped and strapped with iron bands. I took the screws home to Pawtucket and cut and finished them there.

David's talents brought him close to capturing fame as inventor of the steamboat years before Fulton unveiled his successful creation. On a visit to the Cranston iron ore beds — source of the Wilkinson iron before they started importing it — he chanced to meet Elijah Ormsbee repairing a steam engine used to raise water from the bottom of ore pits. Ormsbee told Wilkinson of a Philadelphia boat being operated by steam, and offered, "if I would go home with him and build the engine, he would build a steamboat. I went home and made my patterns, cast and bored the cylinder, and made the wrought iron work." Ormsbee in the meantime hired a boat from John Brown, Providence merchant, to carry the engine. "I told him," related David, "of two plans of paddles, one I called the flutter wheel and the other, the goose foot paddle. We made the goose foot, to open and shut with hinges, as the driving power could be much cheaper applied than the paddle wheel." Of their success, Wilkinson merely noted that "after having the steamboat in operation, we exhibited it near Providence . . . . After our frolic was over, being short of funds, we hauled the boat up and gave it over." This amazing adventure has not gone

20 *R. I. American* Oct. 19, 1819. *Manufacturers' and Farmers' Journal* (Providence) Jan. 3, 1820; May 20, 1822; Sept. 16, 1824.

21 Israel Wilkinson, *Memoirs*, 223-24. Grieve, 88, 170.

22 *Mfrs. & Farm. Journal* May 8, 1823.

unnoticed in the history of development of the steamboat. It is possible, as David Wilkinson charged, that Robert Fulton got ideas directly from someone who had studied, among others, the Wilkinson-Ormsbee invention.[23] According to a later account, the boat had been sailed to Providence from Winsor's Cove, then to Pawtucket for a day or two, and finally returned to Providence. Thus Pawtucket and Providence saw their first steamboat about 1794 built by a twenty-two-year-old Pawtucket mechanic long before Fulton bucked the Hudson with the *Clermont*.[24]

About the same time David made his most noted contribution to the machine industry in America — invention of the slide lathe. One machine historian has put the case strongly:

It has been said with exact truth that in the history of invention too great importance cannot be given to the slide lathe — that is to say, speaking technically, the slide rest and its combination with the lead screw, operated by change gears — because this combination is used in some form in almost every machine-tool. Machine-tools are the machines to make machines, without which machine building on a large scale would have been impossible. It is not too much to say that the machine age became possible only with the perfecting of the slide lathe. Heretofore the earliest development of this important machine has been credited to Henry Maudslay, a celebrated English engineer. Recent research, however, seems to indicate that the claim of priority in this fundamental invention may be made for David Wilkinson, of Pawtucket, Rhode Island.[25]

Wilkinson himself modestly but tersely related how this invention came into existence. At Pawtucket "we made many screws of wrought iron for clothiers' presses, and oil mills; but they were imperfect, and I told my father I wanted to make a machine to cut screws on centers, which would make them more perfect. He told me I might commence one." Many anecdotal lines later we are told that "about 1794, my father built a rolling and slitting mill, at Pawtucket. On the gudgeon of the wheel of which, I put my new screw machine in operation, which was on the principle of the gauge or sliding lathe now in every workshop almost throughout the world . . . . I cut screws of all dimensions by this machine, and did them perfectly."[26] Wilkinson originally received only ten dollars for this invention but in 1848, after investigating the matter, Congress granted him $10,000.[27]

It was only natural for David Wilkinson in time to direct his skill toward making machines for the new cotton and textile industry while continuing regular iron production. The change was gradual, as his biographer noted. "The machine business developed gradually within the anchor shop. It was, at first, just an additional activity of a large blacksmith shop . . . . The machine business, however, grew rapidly, and in time work at the forge became subordinated to work at the lathe; the number of machine-tools employed was increased; and finally, the forge was retained only as an adjunct to a machine-shop."[28] Another historian of manufactures, however, dates the beginning of manufacturing of mill machinery more precisely about 1810, "when David Wilkinson opened a shop for this purpose at Pawtucket and Alfred Jenks started similar works at Holmesburg, near Philadelphia." Jenks, of course, had already learned his trade in Pawtucket.[29]

In partnership with Samuel Greene, the firm of David Wilkinson & Company began in 1817, and their advertisements indicate the changing order of priority of their goods. The announcement specified that the company was formed "for the purpose of manufacturing Machinery generally. Power Looms, together with all the apparatus for weaving on the most improved plans; Cotton and Woolen Machinery of all kinds, and Screws of every descrip-

23 "David Wilkinson's Reminiscences," 103-105. Joseph W. Roe, *English and American Tool Builders* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1926) 119. John Krout and Dixon Fox, *Completion of Independence* (New York: Macmillan, 1944) 230.

24 Israel Wilkinson, *Memoirs*, 510. Seymour Dunbar, *History of Travel in America* (New York: Tudor, 1937) 347-351, 404-05.

25 Jonathan Lincoln, "Beginnings of the Machine Age in New England: David Wilkinson of Pawtucket," *New England Quarterly* 6:4 (December 1933) 722-23. See Roe, 120, for earlier view on Maudslay.

26 "David Wilkinson's Reminiscences," 104, 106.

27 Report, Senate Committee on Military Affairs, reprinted *Transactions . . . 1861*, 111-113.

28 Lincoln, 725.

29 Victor S. Clark, *History of Manufactures in U. S. 1607-1860* (Washington, D. C., 1916) 1:519. Roe, 123.

30 *R. I. American* Dec. 12, 1817. *Mfrs. & Farm. Journal* Jan. 3, 1820.

31 Although Jonathan Lincoln is by far the best on David Wilkinson, see also Israel Wilkinson, *Memoirs*, 505-520, and relevant articles in *Transactions . . . 1861*, 113-118.

32 Goodrich, "Centennial Address," 41.

33 Page 174. See Edward S. Wilkinson, "Reminiscences," *Pawtucket Gazette and Chronicle* Oct. 21, 1870, for brief summary of Brown's career with no mention of slide lathe.

tion, made and repaired." The firm continued to concentrate on manufacture of machinery while maintaining its iron and screw products.[30] By 1820 Wilkinson had also trained young machinists who were carrying their skills far beyond the confines of Sargent's Trench.[31]

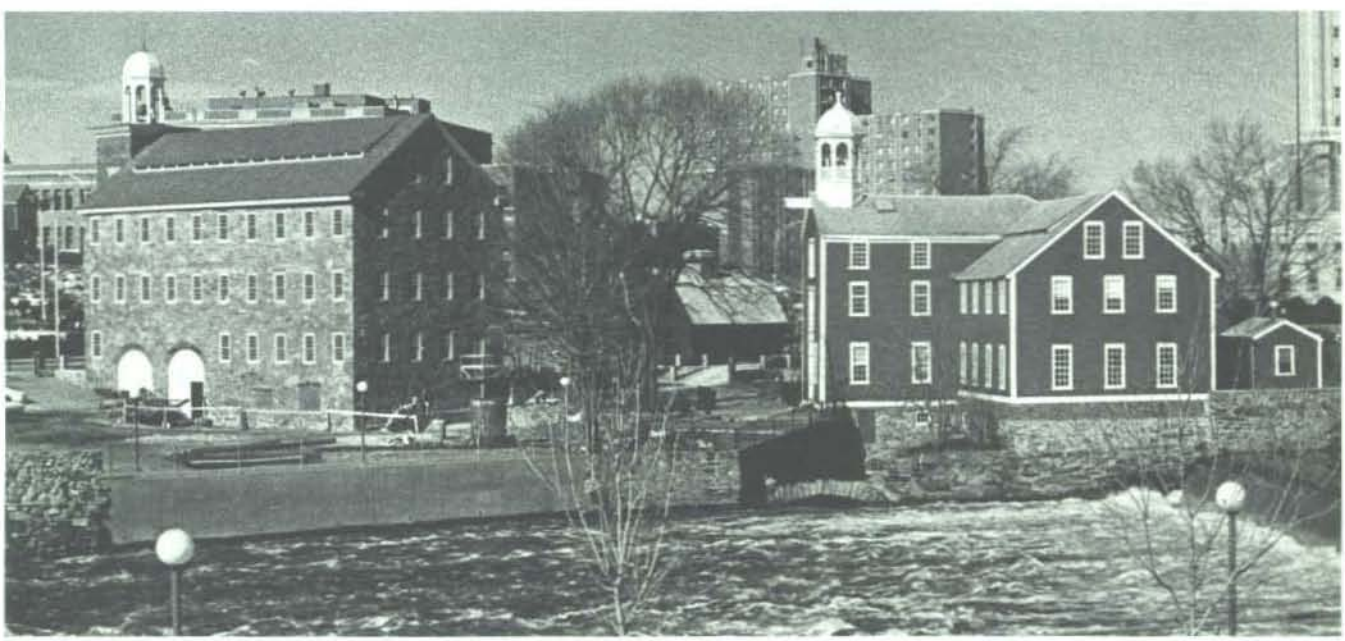
The inventiveness of Pawtucket mechanics during these early days of machinery was by no means limited to Wilkinsons. Massena Goodrich in 1865 noted that "a lawyer, of large experience in patent cases, lately remarked, that it is truly surprising, in investigating the history of valuable inventions, to see how many of them you can trace back to Pawtucket."[32] In an era of experimentation, there is a high probability that many inventions were never recorded or patented, and that a great deal of duplication, pooling of knowledge, and independent exploring was going on. Thus it is not always easy to properly identify the rightful originator of a machine or mechanism. Such confusion surrounds David Wilkinson's slide lathe. The doubt not only is related to simultaneous work being done by Henry Maudslay in England, but also to a claim made for one of Wilkinson's neighbors, Sylvanus Brown.

Another Pawtucket mechanic with impressive credentials, Brown was born in Cumberland in 1747 to a family whose iron manufactory stood on a tributary of the Blackstone River a short distance from Pawtucket falls. After his father's death when Sylvanus was ten, the boy learned the trade of millwright from a great-uncle. At twenty-one he began his own business continuing until 1775 when he enlisted in the colonial navy. He served as master-at-arms on the *Alfred*, flagship of Commodore Esek Hopkins, returning to Providence later to work in a state arms shop. Soon after the Revolutionary War he was commissioned by the governor of the eastern British provinces to build several mills in Brunswick and Nova Scotia. With fifty men from Rhode Island, he built seven sawmills and two gristmills over a two-year period. After a brief visit to Europe, he returned to Pawtucket. In Sylvanus Brown's house young Samuel Slater supposedly spent his first night in Pawtucket. At this point in general accounts Slater too is suddenly given credit for inventing the slide lathe.

The Biographical Cyclopedia of Representative Men of Rhode Island noted that "Mr. Brown possessed an ingenious mind, and in 1792 invented and used the first slide lathes for turning rolls, whereby they were made straight and of uniform size. He also built a machine for fluting rolls . . . ."[33] A generation later, Joseph W. Roe, speaking of David Wilkinson and the slide lathe, stated that Wilkinson "seems to have been working on it in America at the same time as Maudslay in London. Sylvanus Brown, who

David and Oziel Wilkinson's mill of 1810 (left) was conveniently near the Slater mill at right. Today both are handsome reminders of Pawtucket iron, ingenuity, and the cotton revolution.

Courtesy Slater Mill Historic Site, Pawtucket, R. I.



helped Slater build the first Arkwright cotton machinery at Pawtucket, is also said to have invented the slide lathe still earlier (in 1791) and to have also used it for cutting wrought-iron screws for sperm-oil presses."[34] Using both sources, Frank A. Taylor more recently wrote confidently that Sylvanus Brown "constructed and used a slide-crest lathe for turning straight rolls of uniform size some three years prior to the invention of the slide-rest by Maudslay who is generally credited with this achievement."[35] This historiographical puzzle is essentially resolved by Congress's appropriation of $10,000 to Wilkinson and Jonathan Lincoln's later research, plus the fact that the authority usually cited for Sylvanus Brown information is Massena Goodrich, a highly unreliable source for so technical a matter.[36] Nevertheless the issue does indicate the pioneering efforts of Brown, and although Goodrich in sketches and articles on Pawtucket history rarely bothers verifying information, it is still possible that Sylvanus Brown in some way contributed to the Wilkinson slide lathe.

Larned Pitcher — another Pawtucket mechanic — opened a machine shop in the village on the Rhode Island side of the river in 1813 and soon took as partners P. Hovey and Asa (also Aza) Arnold. They moved across the river to the stone mill and later into the yellow mill, both just south of the bridge on the Massachusetts side. In 1819 Ira Gay became a partner and the firm changed to Pitcher & Gay, one of the largest manufacturers of cotton machinery. Gay — while a member of the firm — invented a dresser and a speeder.[37] Asa Arnold — before he left Pitcher and Hovey in 1819 for New Hampshire — invented a machine for separating wool in carding into slivers so that the wool could be spun from the cards, which had already straightened out the fibers.

It was a form of "endless" roving, roving previously having been in short rolls which had to be pieced together. Whether the device was patented is not known, but on Jan. 21, 1823, Arnold obtained a patent for a roving machine for spinning cotton in which he introduced a differential motion applied to the speeder. The result was a valuable improvement in cotton-roving machines, increasing both quantity and quality of product. It was introduced into England in 1825 and was characterized as being one of the most important machines for spinning cotton. While some American manufacturers acknowledged this invention and paid Arnold royalties, others, especially those outside of Rhode Island, refused to do so, and, in the course of the infringement suits which Arnold brought, the whole code of patent laws was repealed and the new code of 1836 was passed, but Arnold received no redress for the infringements.[38]

This signature of machinist-inventor Aza Arnold appears on an indenture of July 7, 1817, leasing to two men half a room in a stone factory for the sum of seventy-five dollars per year.

Manuscript, Aza Arnold Collection, RIHS.

In 1824 James S. Brown — son of Sylvanus — succeeded Gay in the firm Pitcher & Brown. J. Leander Bishop, also giving the father credit for inventing the slide lathe, wrote that his son James "is even more distinguished than the father as a machinist and an inventor." While still a boy in 1817, James Brown went to work for David Wilkinson making cotton machinery; in 1819 he moved to Pitcher & Gay on the Massachusetts side of the river, becoming a partner in 1824. When Larned Pitcher retired in 1842, Brown became sole owner and developed the business into an extensive operation. While Brown later became a prolific inventor, two of his major contributions appeared before 1830. The first — created while he was working for Pitcher & Gay in 1820 — was the slide rest, by which the height of the tool can

34 Roe, 120, See Grieve, 86, for his hypothesis on the issue.

35 *DAB* 3:157.

36 Goodrich, *Historical Sketch of the Town of Pawtucket* (Pawtucket, 1876) 48-50.

37 Roe, 124, Grieve, 89. John W. Haley, *Lower Blackstone River Valley* (Pawtucket: E. L. Freeman Co., 1936) 54-55. Goodrich, *Historical Sketch*, 65-66.

38 Carl W. Mitman, "Aza Arnold," *DAB* 1:361. Grieve, 89. Goodrich, *Historical Sketch*, 64-65.

be adjusted while the lathe is in motion. Ten years later he developed the gear cutter for cutting bevel gears. This machine required no change of the headstock to make the proper taper in going once round the wheel. Thus another Pawtucket father-and-son team, Sylvanus and James Brown, earned renown in the machine industry.[39]

Still another invention to which Pawtucket machinist-inventors laid part claim was power weaving. In 1814 John Thorpe invented a power loom which stood upright and worked by perpendicular action. After he left Pawtucket he so enhanced his reputation as a skilled machinist and inventor that he is quietly memorialized on a little-seen tablet in the Old Slater Mill in Pawtucket.[40] In 1817 a more acceptable power loom was invented by a Scotchman, William Gilmore. When Samuel Slater rejected it, Gilmore took the design to Judge Daniel Lyman in the western part of North Providence who employed Gilmore to experiment with it. With the aid of the ubiquitous David Wilkinson, Gilmore finished the invention — the Scotch loom — thus connecting Pawtucket to another vital machine. According to Bishop, a power loom operating simultaneously at Waltham had cost about $300 to make; the Scotch loom cost $70. "This engine, which was considered superior to the Waltham loom, was constructed in about sixty days, at Pawtucket, by David Wilkinson, who added some improvements of his own, and commenced making them for sale." Bishop concludes that "Its comparative cheapness enabled the small as well as large manufacturers to dispense with the hand looms, which were soon after superseded entirely for factory use, with a consequent increase of the cotton business, which without its aid would probably have been abandoned."[41] It is undoubtedly not coincidental that an advertisement appeared notifying manufacturers that Benjamin Robert "has removed from Waltham to Pawtucket, where he will manufacture brass, steel, and cane Reeds for manufacturing Cotton and Woolen Goods."[42] It was unfortunate that Pawtucket cotton manufacturers, especially Slater, were so slow in adjusting to power looms when they had makers of the machines thriving in their own village. Their caution, among other factors, cost Rhode Island the leadership of the cotton industry.

Another ingenious Pawtucket mechanic, Jeremiah Arnold, scanning his long life in the village could recall,

I came to Pawtucket when I was twenty years old, and worked for David Wilkinson. In 1817 I helped make a machine for making Scotch plaid. In 1818 I helped build a steam engine . . . to run a steamboat in Providence. In 1819 I built the first bed-tick loom. I saw the first loom run by water power. It was made to stand upright.

The latter was probably Thorpe's loom. Arnold continued to list presses and machines he had helped build up to midcentury.[43]

The iron and later the machine industries in Pawtucket often get overlooked in the more historically dramatic cotton revolution. The reason is easy to understand — the machinists of the village were skilled mechanics who set up no factories, employed no gangs of mill workers, worked no children or women. They labored for the most part over forges or lathes themselves in their own shops assisted by their own sons, close relatives, or apprentices. Yet with their technically complicated innovations, they quietly laid the groundwork for the textile revolution. Without Sylvanus Brown, David Wilkinson, Larned Pitcher, Asa Arnold, John Thorpe, and nameless mechanics whose contributions may not have matched their mentors', Pawtucket village would not have gained the distinction it commanded in the first third of the nineteenth century. The Jenks and Wilkinson iron reputations were buttressed by Pawtucket's versatility and ingenuity; unfortunately those reputations would receive cloudy recognition in time. Samuel Slater would leave a more lasting mark, not only in the village society of his own time, but in the small mill which symbolized Pawtucket's contribution to the industrial revolution.

39 J. Leander Bishop, *History of American Manufactures* (Philadelphia, 1864) 2:729. Grieve, 146-7, 258-60. Roe, 124.

40 Goodrich, *Historical Sketch*, 64-66. Mitman, "John Thorpe," *DAB* 18:508. *Pawtucket Past and Present* (Pawtucket: Slater Trust Co., 1917) 37.

41 Bishop, 213.

42 *R. I. American* March 20, 1818.

43 Goodrich, *Historical Sketch*, 76.

As late as March 2, 1913, the Sunday Tribune *of Providence made this reference to past agrarian domination of state politics.*

Detail, cartoon by Howard E. Branch.

Agrarian Politics in Rhode Island, 1800 - 1860

*by James L. Marsis**

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Rhode Island politics was continually dominated by the agrarian sector of the state. Since this group had historically been committed to Jeffersonian notions of government, the state's politics had always had a decidely liberal tone. Yet two political trends developed, seemingly inconsistent with what one might have expected, for each of them embodied viewpoints clearly conservative.

The first trend concerned itself with the nature of party affiliation during this period. In view of its long established reputation for democratic individualism, the state could be expected to have lent its support to the parties led by Jefferson and Jackson. Generally speaking this was the case, but true only within certain limits, for Rhode Islanders had a general tendency to split their vote between local and national candidates. It was a common experience for state government to be dominated by Jeffersonian Republicans and in turn by Jacksonian Democrats, when at the same time its people were casting their ballots for Federalist and Whig presidents.[1] The situation is rather perplexing and consequently quite interesting. It takes on an added degree of interest because at all times politics was being controlled by the state's agricultural interests, from which one would expect consistent voting patterns. Why would such a group — committed as it was to principles of nineteenth-century liberal politics — consistently vote for the conservative party in national elections? The question is certainly worth raising and perhaps answering in some measure. But first some mention why the agrarian sector was able to exert political control.

Given the fact that Rhode Island was essentially a commercial state in the eighteenth century, and a manufacturing one in the century following, one would quite naturally expect leaders of these interests to dominate political affairs. And yet they did not. Out of deference they were elected to major political offices but never permitted to dictate policy. They were forced either to yield to agrarian interests or face removal from office.[2] The whole state of affairs ran counter to what one would expect to be the natural flow of power. Yet the situation — unusual as it seems — can be readily understood by examining the structure of the basic charter of government.

Unlike her sister states, Rhode Island did not change her instrument of government after the Revolution. She continued to be governed by the royal charter granted in 1663, but this did not alter the fact that her laws clearly reflected the general spirit of the revolutionary age. The charter granted virtual omnipotence to the General Assembly, and thereby gave that body leeway to set the freehold qualification for voting at one hundred and thirty-four dollars, a level which allowed the franchise to be extended to nearly three-quarters of her white adult male population. Nevertheless the charter did provide that the assembly be apportioned in such a way as to eventually cause highly inequitable representation. This proved to be the case because the charter provided that the number of representatives from each town be permanently fixed. Newport was allotted six delegates, and Providence, Portsmouth, and Warwick were each given four. The remaining towns — all rural — were each given two representatives. This arrangement had been intended to give due consideration to the preeminent position of the commercial towns, but it had the potential to become politically explosive because no provision was ever made to allow towns to be reapportioned in accordance with their future growth. Consequently, rural regions were assured

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1 Edward Field, ed., *State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations at the End of the Century: A History*, 3v. (Boston and Syracuse: Mason, 1902) 1: 285-299. Samuel H. Allen, "Federal Ascendency of 1812," *Narragansett Historical Register* 7: 4 (October 1889) 381-389.

2 For a study of earlier deferential politics see Joel A. Cohen, "Rhode Island and the American Revolution: A Selective Socio-Political Analysis," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1967. For a good illustration of agrarian political power during the confederation period, see Irwin H. Polishook, *Rhode Island and the Union, 1774-1795* (Evanston, Ill. : Northwestern University Press, 1969).

For almost two centuries apportionment in Rhode Island's General Assembly was governed by the royal charter of 1663.

State House. Photograph by Leo P. Reardon.

continued control of the legislature because the collective number of their representatives greatly exceeded those of the major commercial areas.[3]

Throughout the early federal period, the issue of reapportionment simmered just beneath the surface of politics, for in 1796 the agricultural regions had used their power to shift the burden of taxation to Providence.[4] But it wasn't until the 1820s that this question literally burst into the open, when growth of manufacturing in Providence swelled population to the point where the previously determined formula for representation became ludicrously unjust. Once released, the reform issue proved to be impossible to contain. Reform groups — organized throughout the city — grew increasingly vehement when it was realized that Providence's newly found population was essentially propertyless and consequently unable to meet the statutory requirement for voting. This new grievance compounded the injustice of the constitutional situation. Yet nothing could be done. For as the nineteenth century wore on, the agricultural sector grew more and more reactionary. It refused to consider any possibility for reform, and by 1842 it had become so obstinate that the state was plunged into an ill-fated civil war. The entire episode represented a tragic commentary on political development, for it had been brought on by a group heretofore renowned for its commitment to democratic principles.[5]

Transformation of the farm group from eighteenth-century libertarians to nineteenth-century reactionaries represents the second political trend of this period. In itself it represents a rather fertile field for investigation, because the forces which motivated the farmers' behavior have never been systematically explored. But in addition one might inquire whether the rather bizarre voting pattern which this group displayed was in any way prompted by the same factors which had led to their general opposition to constitutional reform. Studies conducted thus far have not concerned themselves with this question, but they have served to clarify the history of these events. Consequently it is now possible to attempt an explanation of exactly why the farmers behaved as they did.[6]

If any one factor could help explain why political events flowed as they did during this period, it would be the commitment which farmers had to democratic

3 For a masterful study of constitutional problems see Patrick T. Conley, "Rhode Island Constitutional Development, 1636-1841: Prologue to the Dorr Rebellion," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Notre Dame University, 1970.

4 Conley, 132-137.

5 Conley, passim.

6 Major monographs are Peter J. Coleman, *Transformation of Rhode Island 1790-1860* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1963). Conley, see above. Edward F. Sweet, "Origins of the Democratic Party in Rhode Island, 1824-1836," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Fordham University, 1971.

ideals, for this commitment motivated their inconsistency in voting and their reactionary behavior. But these ideals — although similar in many respects to those adhered to today — can still be easily misunderstood. In many respects, they bridged the ideas of the modern secular state with those of the earlier, theologically based state.

The political philosophy of the farmers paralleled contemporary democratic ideals inasmuch as it stressed the concept of the basic nobility of the individual, and recognized the inalienable rights which flowed from this nobility. But their philosophy had none of the overtones of more advanced libertarian thought. Individual rights were not viewed as an end in themselves, but only as a means of insuring human dignity. Consequently, if a particular mode of behavior proved to be degrading to the individual, and thus detracted from his innate nobility, the farmers considered it to be clear grounds for governmental restriction. The agrarian mind at this time made a clear distinction between the concept of freedom and that of license. And in part, this helps to explain why the farmers later developed many of their reactionary attitudes. For as Providence became more urbanized, it ushered in a way of life which they viewed as a threat to human decency — and as will be pointed out later — as a threat to the survival of the republic itself.[7] But the scope of the farmers' views did not rest here. They were also committed to ideas on the nature of the community which, first, further alienated them from the town since they felt it catered to rank individualism; and second, produced a pragmatic brand of politics which helps account for their tendency repeatedly to change party affiliation in national elections.

In the minds of the farmers, the state did not exist entirely for the purpose of serving the individual. For although they believed in the *sanctity* of the individual, and clearly held it to be the responsibility of the state to uphold this sanctity, they distinguished this view from the more modern one, which makes *primacy* of the individual its overriding concern. This mode of thought produced a philosophy which put a premium on the well-being of both individual and community, with neither being sacrificed for the good of the other. In short they sought a system which could harmonize the two basically antagonistic concepts of "the individual" and "the community," and thus prevent the excessive movement of the state towards favoring either of the two.[8]

As it has been described, it appears that the social system preferred by the farmers would have required a juggling act to keep it in equilibrium. But in fact the reverse was true. Democracy was to provide for the safeguard of individual liberties by promoting acceptance of a bill of rights, while the community itself was to flourish by committing itself to a Jeffersonian way of life and to be protected from the larger political unit by exercising a locally oriented brand of politics. This course of action represented the states' rights philosophy taken to lowest level of government, and in the agrarian sector it became the accepted maxim of political life. The farmers kept a constant check on legislation which affected the day-to-day life of the community with such vigilance that the selfishness they so abhorred on an individual level became the outstanding characteristic of the community. They forced all state elections to be held annually, and no important legislation on the state level was able to pass until freemen of each town held a meeting which determined the course of action they desired their delegates to follow.[9] If these policies encumbered normal operations of government, such action was deemed necessary. In the agrarian mind, the local community was the lifeblood of the individual, and consequently farmers felt that democracy's chief function was to protect it from the larger — and potentially more powerful — political units of government. This commitment to the primacy of the community led farmers to vote for both parties in so consistent and casual a manner. While nineteenth-century liberalism catered to their political views, economic programs advanced by more conservative elements served the needs of their community in this sector. Consequently on the national level they voted for the party which advanced mercantilist policies in order to secure their economic ends, while on the state level they voted for the party which advocated

7 Views illustrated quite clearly in the 1820s and 30s when farmers initiated a campaign to stamp out the vice which they felt was rampant in Providence.

8 This general view — common to nearly all agrarian groups of New England and New York — found expression in nearly all agricultural periodicals of the time. For extensive treatment of this subject see Sidney Jackson, *America's Struggle for Free Schools: Social Tensions and Education in New England and New York, 1827-1842* (Washington, D. C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1941).

9 Town Records. Polishook, passim.

political decentralization in order to insure local control of politics. Within this framework, which stressed primacy of the community, logical consistency can be seen in what otherwise would appear to be an erratic pattern of behavior.

Despite their local orientation, agricultural towns of Rhode Island did not all lead an isolated existence. Those inland usually did, but those along the coast, especially in the southern half, did not. Inhabitants of the latter area had expanded their horizons by engaging in general commercial activities of the state. Geographic location had led them naturally into commerce, and they pursued it throughout the eighteenth century and during the first quarter of the nineteenth. Occcasionally they raised a salable grain crop such as corn, but usually their exports consisted of meat products such as pork and beef or of dairy products such as butter and cheese, either sold to large mercantile houses of Providence and Newport or exported directly by the farmers themselves, in vessels acquired by pooling of resources. More often than not they sold to larger merchants for, in spite of their commercial interests, they remained essentially committed to the yeoman philosophy and consequently did not care to become fulltime businessmen.[10] Nevertheless their commercial interests proved to be quite significant, and a section of the rural population — large enough to be the pivotal factor in any election — possessed the same political interests as those of larger port towns.[11] This is why the state usually split its vote. Farmers' interest in commerce led Rhode Island to support the Jay Treaty, to give President Adams a hero's welcome during a state visit in 1797 and to vote for him in 1800; while their commitment to democratic individualism caused the state government to be controlled continually by Jeffersonian Republicans. Most of the state's inhabitants even supported the Alien and Sedition Acts, thus casting general suspicion on the sincerity of the farm community's beliefs.[12] But these

Rhode Island applauded Federalist John Adams and voted for him in the presidential election of 1800 . . .

Print, Graphics Collection, RIHS.

actions did not signify any real insincerity — farmers were merely revealing the level of their interest in export agriculture, as well as their rather self-interested views about the meaning of democracy.

From a political point of view, agrarian policies during this period proved to be quite advantageous to the state at large, for they served to mitigate some of the divisive issues which otherwise would have seriously split "town" and "country."[13] But political cooperation which trade inspired never really led farmers to approve of city life and city points of view. Commerce simply cemented a relationship which otherwise had no reason to exist. Consequently, when in the 1820s Providence slowly turned her interests from trade to manufacturing, the political

10 Maritime Papers 1776-1787, Outward and Inward Entries; Registers of Vessels 1776-1783, 3v., R. I. State Archives. Providence Customhouse Papers, RIHS Library.

11 Major port towns or those which produced for export were Bristol, Charlestown, Coventry, East Greenwich, Exeter, Hopkinton, Jamestown, Little Compton, Middletown, Newport, North Kingstown, Portsmouth, Providence, Richmond, South Kingstown, Tiverton, Warren, Warwick, Westerly, and West Greenwich. Their combined votes easily exceeded the number required for a majority in General Assembly.

12 Field, 285-293.

13 Only source of real tension at this time was the strongly contested state tax assessment. Conley, 47-49, 132-137.

. . . but put Arthur Fenner of the opposite party into office as governor in 1803.

State House. Photograph by Leo P. Reardon.

consensus which existed between these two groups began to break down and within a decade it would be replaced by mutual hostility. But before this happened, the state enjoyed twenty years more of political cooperation.

As Rhode Island moved into the first decade of the nineteenth century, her inhabitants began to experience for the first time the economic hardships which were to flow from the last phase of the Napoleonic Wars. As the decade progressed, England's orders in council, Napoleon's decrees, and Jefferson's embargo all but closed the lucrative West Indies trade. To commercial areas of the state the situation threatened economic ruin, so their political response was quite predictable. With the aid of the farmers, Pinckney won the state over Madison in 1808, and Federalists took control of the General Assembly. The only important office Republicans were able to hold was the governorship, and this they lost in 1811.[14] Except for Madison's loosening of the embargo's provisions, political pressure — even from the entire New England area — proved to be of no avail. Rhode Island's inhabitants were saved from bankruptcy only by the resourcefulness of Providence merchants.

During the most troubled years, Providence had sought to offset the closing of British and French West Indies by finding alternative ports in Latin America. Initially, efforts had met only with partial success, because Portugal had long maintained an exclusive monopoly over the commerce of Brazil.[15] But in 1808 King John VI of Portugal issued a decree which opened ports of Brazil on a regular basis. With this act, a virtual outpouring of the state's agricultural products now ensued. Bahia, Pernambuco, and Rio de Janiero began to receive more Rhode Island goods than all non-combatant nations of Europe combined.[16] The trade proved to be an economic godsend and served to reenforce commercial links between town and country, for only the mercantile houses of Providence could handle such long distance trade. Unfortunately for the farmers this trade provided only a brief interlude to impending disaster for, by 1817, Brazil wanted American flour, since its previous sources of supply were no longer able to meet growing needs. With such alluring prospects, Providence merchants moved quickly to restructure their trade and soon devoted their energies in this area almost exclusively to exportation of flour. As profits of mercantile houses soared, those of commercial farmers declined, since wheat could not be grown profitably in this state. The general prosperity of the agricultural regions began to wither and soon was even further affected when Providence began to change the structure of its coastal trade. Instead of concentrating on export of agricultural products,

14 Allen, 381-389. Field, 293.

15 Earl C. Tanner, "Trade between the Port of Providence and Latin America 1800-1830," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1951, 97-116.

16 Customhouse Papers (unbound), Edward Carrington Papers, and Merchant's Notebook (MS.) 167-179, RIHS Library.

that city now began to export the manufactured goods of its burgeoning industry.[17] This additional difficulty was received with bitterness, and was to eventually prove one of the turning points in the state's political history. Even though many farmers continued to prosper, these changing conditions represented the end of an old commercial partnership. With its termination, common political interests which had for so long served to bridge ideological differences between commercial farm regions and the town were brought to an end. The degree of cooperation between the two now began to decline, as farmers came to fear the growing power of Providence. From this point on the farmers came to devote themselves increasingly to obstructing constitutional reforms so desperately needed, since such reform would have given urban areas political control of the state.

Had geographic conditions been different, the political breakdown which began in the 1820s might well have been avoided. Providence's expanding population could have provided a suitable replacement for the farmers' dwindling exports. But the demand of the large urban market was simply too great for the farmers to meet and — given the state's small size — further expansion of agriculture was impossible. Contraction in farming was threatened at this time because soil exhaustion was beginning to cut into the productivity of older settled areas.[18]

Providence, of course, was fully aware of these facts and — in a move which further alienated the farmers — began to look westward for new sources of supply. But this was really only part of the problem. At the bottom of it all lay the fact that agricultural interests were not completely willing to become part of the new emerging order. The Providence market was economically unappealing because it was unstable, subject to fluctuations of the business cycle. Even beyond this, if farmers were to take full advantage of their new situation, they would have had to devote themselves exclusively to cultivation of cash crops, and this was something they simply were not willing to do. They objected to the fact that they would have to become fulltime businessmen and even went so far as to resist adopting new ideas and techniques now beginning to emerge in agriculture. The farmers were not only trying to adjust to a new economic situation, but were also trying to fend off the disappearance of a way of life. Urban growth was threatening their established pattern of existence and, because of this, they were becoming completely inflexible on the issue of reform.[19]

As the challenges of urban life became more and more apparent, farmers began to turn much of their attention to the philosophical roots of their heritage. They now frequently expressed the view that their way of life stood above all others. But their interest in the yeoman philosophy was not solely limited to pondering the nobility of their own life-style. They also became preoccupied with the social evils they felt were inherent in city life. More and more, they began to turn their attention to vices which they saw rising in Providence. As this interest became more acute, the farmers came to focus on the most highly visible of all vices — drunkenness.

During the 1820s, agitation for temperance legislation began to build steadily and, as its ground swell grew in intensity, farmers turned in droves to the Baptist Church, long in the forefront of reform in this area.[20] Prior to this time, numerical growth of Baptists in the state had been almost nil. But with the agrarian sector's new social concerns, their member-

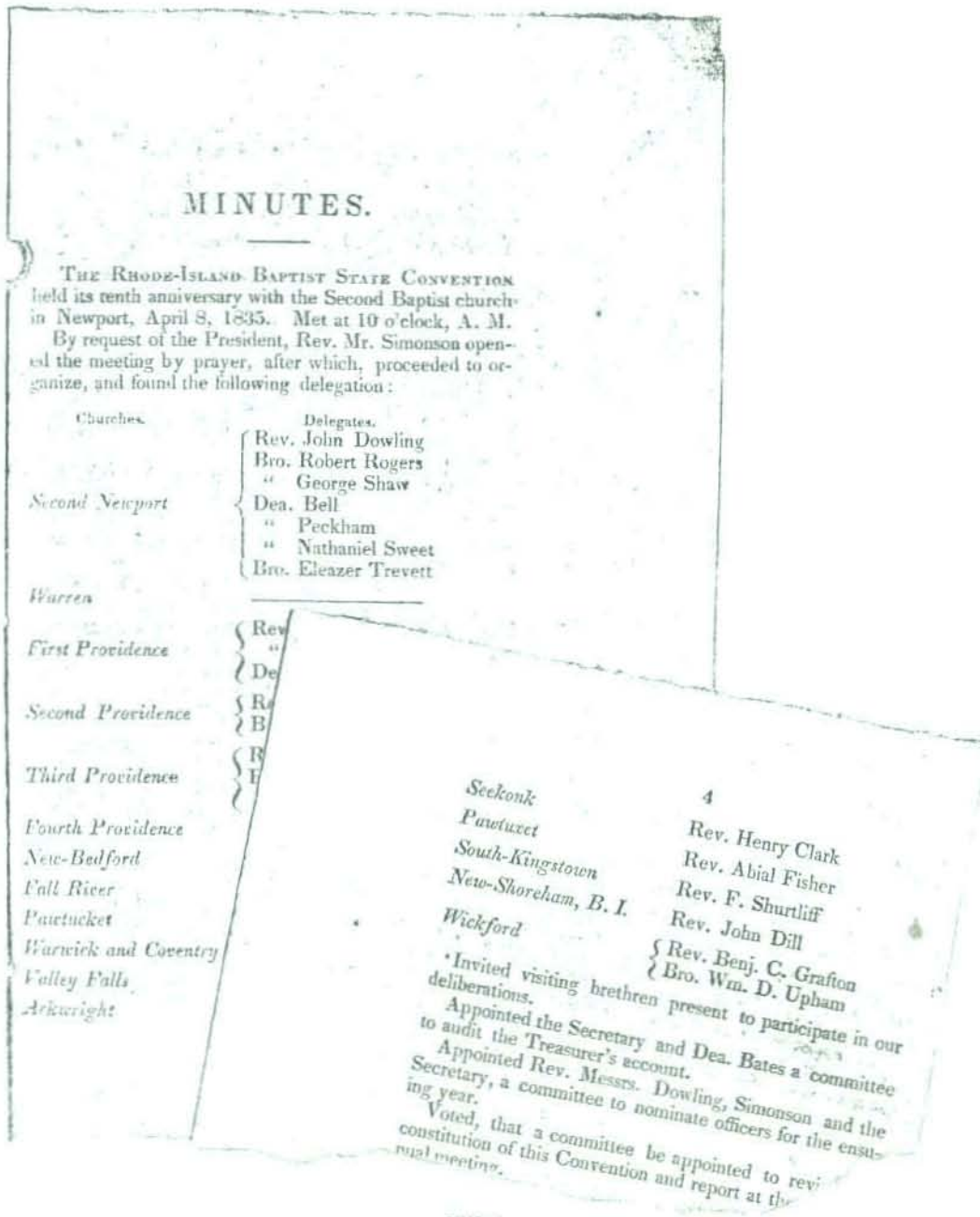
17 Providence merchants obtained wheat from New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Richmond. Customhouse and Carrington Papers.

18 For problems of land limitation and soil exhaustion see Edwin M. Snow, *Report upon Census of R. I., 1865* (Providence, 1867). Kurt B. Mayer, *Economic Development and Population Growth in R. I.* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1953).
Providence's problem with food supply is revealed in petitions sent to General Assembly. See *Granted Charters 1823-1825*, VIII, 11-12. Percy Wells Bidwell and John I. Falconer, *History of Agriculture in Northern U. S., 1620-1860* (New York: Peter Smith, 1941) 142-144. Clarence Danhof, *Change in Agriculture: Northern U. S., 1820-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969) 13-20.

19 Asher Robbins castigated the farmers for their general disgruntlement and reluctance to take advantage of new techniques becoming available to them. Robbins, *Address to Rhode-Island Society for Encouragement of Domestic Industry* (Providence, 1822) RIHS Library.

20 See Petitions to General Assembly; *Annual Reports and Minutes Baptist Yearly Meeting Conference*, 1812-1850; *Minutes Warren Baptist Association*, 1771-1870; RIHS Library and Brown University; and individual church histories.

ship virtually exploded. Between 1820 and 1850, the number of Baptist churches in the southern region of the state almost quadrupled. The farming area counted more of these congregations than all other denominations combined. And unlike their churches which had existed previously, these did not choose to function autonomously. New congregations kept in close contact with one another and clearly defined the purpose for which they had been formed. Their members devoted themselves to missionary work among the state's inhabitants and pushed for legislation which could contain the evil ways of the city.[21]



MINUTES.

THE RHODE-ISLAND BAPTIST STATE CONVENTION held its tenth anniversary with the Second Baptist church in Newport, April 8, 1835. Met at 10 o'clock, A. M. By request of the President, Rev. Mr. Simonson opened the meeting by prayer, after which, proceeded to organize, and found the following delegation:

Churches.	Delegates.
Second Newport	Rev. John Dowling Bro. Robert Rogers " George Shaw Dea. Bell " Peckham " Nathaniel Sweet Bro. Eleazer Trevett
Warren	
First Providence	Rev " De
Second Providence	R B
Third Providence	R F
Fourth Providence	
New-Bedford	
Fall River	
Pawtucket	
Warwick and Coventry	
Valley Falls	
Arkwright	
Seekonk	4
Pawtuxet	Rev. Henry Clark
South-Kingstown	Rev. Abial Fisher
New-Shoreham, B. I.	Rev. F. Shurtliff
Wickford	Rev. John Dill
	Rev. Benj. C. Grafton Bro. Wm. D. Upham

*Invited visiting brethren present to participate in our deliberations.

Appointed the Secretary and Dea. Bates a committee to audit the Treasurer's account.

Appointed Rev. Messrs. Dowling, Simonson and the Secretary, a committee to nominate officers for the ensuing year.

Voted, that a committee be appointed to revi constitution of this Convention and report at th nual meeting.

RIHS Library.

Minutes of the Baptist state convention in 1835 give some indication that the denomination was growing in rural areas.

21 Work Projects Administration, *Inventory Church Archives of R. I., Baptist* (Providence: Historical Records Survey, 1941) 224-231. C. Allyn Russell, "Rhode Island Baptists 1825-1931," *Rhode Island History* 28:2 (May 1969) 35-40.

Baptist Church, Bristol.

Picturesque Rhode Island *by Wilfred H. Munro (Providence, 1881).*

This whole "reform" impulse had all the trappings of an effort to impose social control over those who did not conform to the morality of the politically dominant group. Because of this, their crusade is all but impossible to admire. But it did serve to demonstrate the inner turmoil with which the farmers were living. The world familiar to them was being slowly upended not only in the economic realm but in the

social one as well. In such circumstances it is no surprise that their opposition to constitutional reform was stiffening. Under such conditions, any response other than political reaction would in itself have represented aberrant behavior on their part.

Conservatism blossoming among Rhode Island's farmers at this time did not reflect, at least to any great extent, a turning away from their earlier political heritage. For despite outward appearances, they continued to cling to the democratic philosophy which had so strongly claimed their allegiance in an earlier day. All that was really changing was the focus of their view. Given the stress of the times, they now concentrated on that portion of their political philosophy which emphasized conditions necessary for proper maintenance and survival of democratic government. As former Jeffersonians, they had always been familiar with the notion that republican principles could flourish only in a virtuous society. Now — as Baptists — it is to be expected that they were continuously reminded of this, for such a view was part and parcel of the philosophy this group endorsed. This fact has been clearly pointed out in the monumental study of New England Baptists —

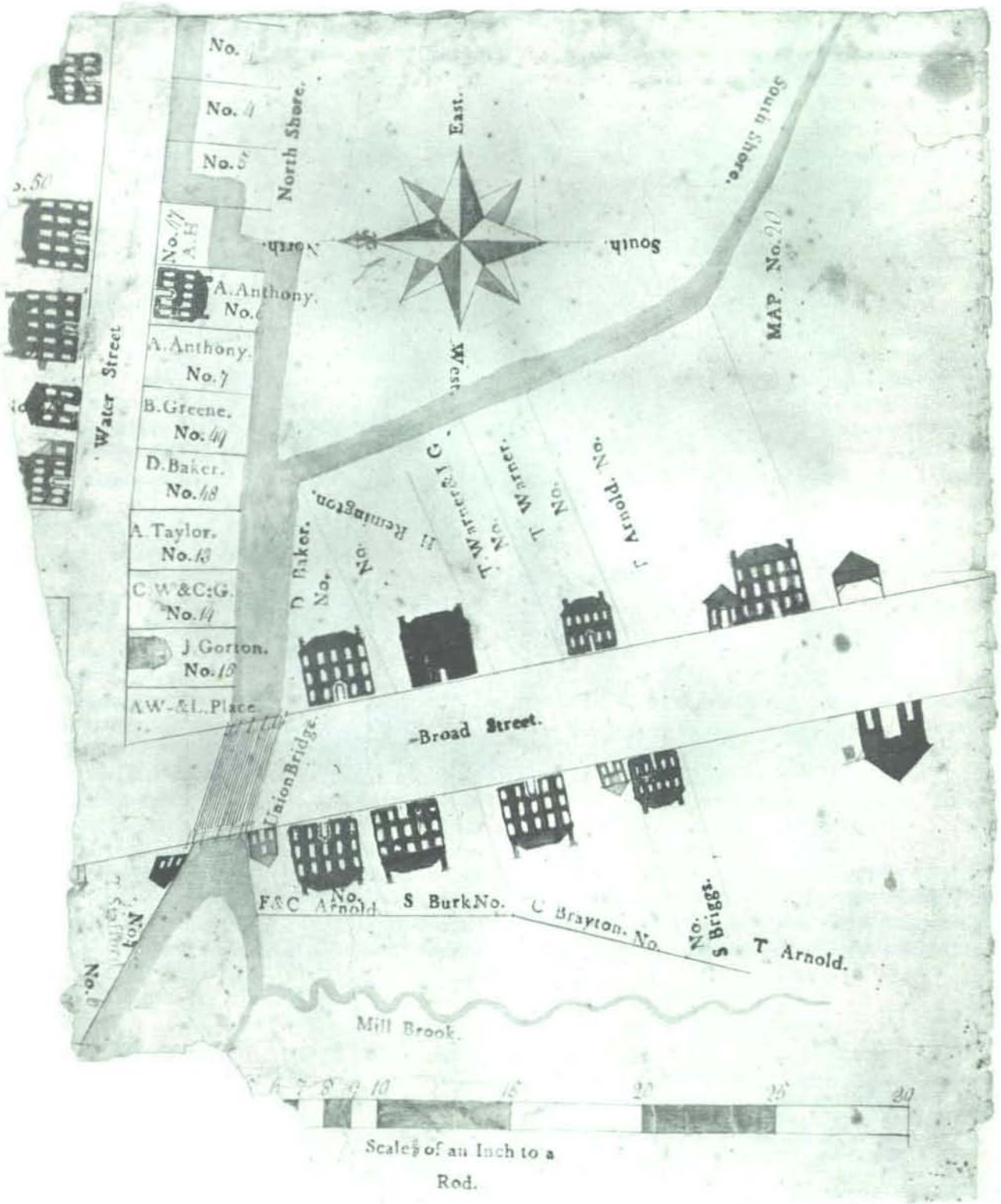
After 1800 the Baptists found themselves politically aligned with the Jeffersonian party, but it is clear that they did not see it as a Revolutionary party so much as the fulfillment of certain premises of Christian liberty inherent in their new reformation. Rigid adherence to the virtues of the Protestant ethic guided their moral code; a steady devotion to good order and a Christian nation pervaded their political outlook . . . . They held firmly to the Lockean conception of natural rights and government by the consent of the governed, but believed also that men were innately too sinful to be trusted entirely with freedom. Although they thought men were fundamentally rational creatures — as opposed to animals — they also believed that reason was God-given and that man in his fallen state had lost so much of his rational wisdom that only through the grace of God could he hope to govern himself wisely.[22]

If it is indeed true that Rhode Island's farmers adhered to those sentiments, then exact reasons for their refusal to yield on the reform issue are readily understandable. They feared not only emergence of a new life-style but also the very survival of their system of government. Given the chaotic life of the city, one can reasonably assume that they did view it as in direct opposition to conditions which they felt were necessary if republicanism were to flourish.

The general path of reaction on which the farmers had embarked reached its culmination in the 1840s. All of the social circumstances to which they had been objecting now reached intolerable proportions. Hardship in Ireland led to a large influx of Irish Catholics, and the Irish brought with them both a habit for drinking and a religion anything but endearing to the rural community. This situation raised tensions to the breaking point, while at the same time it made compromise all but impossible. The result was the Dorr rebellion of 1842. From a military standpoint, the event proved to be an absolute fiasco, but it did accelerate the realignment which had already begun to occur among the state's political parties. During these years the urban base of the Democratic party had fallen under the control of the reformers. This of course produced a situation intolerable to the agrarian sector. Consequently the farmers migrated from this party and, in coalition with the Whigs, moved first into the Law and Order party, and then into the Know-Nothings. Later they moved quite naturally into the Republican party, for by the late 1850s Baptists were showing considerable concern over the issue of slavery. By the time of the Civil War, Rhode Island farmers had moved full circle — from the party which had stood for their local brand of democracy to one which advocated rule by the larger majority. Basically, the replacement of commerce by manufacturing had released the forces which made this ending almost inevitable. But it is ironic that this group came to rest within the Republican party because they pursued a policy which had rested on the precept of minority rule.

22 William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent 1630-1833*, 2v. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971) 2: 751-52. For an excellent survey of the literature dealing with the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American belief in the relationship between virtue and republican ideals, see Robert E. Shalhope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis: Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly* 29: 1 (January 1972).

Unlike other New England settlements developing around a square of common centered by the meeting house, Rhode Island towns grew in linear fashion along waterfront or post road, as this plat of the "Village of Apponogue 1805" indicates.



Portion of map by Sabin Lewis, Graphics Collection, RIHS.

Toward a Rhode Island History

*by Albert T. Klyberg**

Paradox and Particularism

To see in the study of local history an opportunity to scrutinize American society in microcosm is commonplace among many current historians. Investigation of a particular locality becomes as it were a laboratory in which causation and historical themes can be measured and analyzed in detail and from which well considered truths about the total American experience can be derived and transmitted. Hundreds of university theses and scholarly monographs using this approach have illuminated the history of communities and regions and periods all across this country. The verdict on this methodology has not yet been rendered; wide-ranging techniques and approaches have made comparisons and generalizations difficult. Whatever the final verdict on this approach, the returns are clear for Rhode Island. Its history of nearly three and a half centuries, if not unique, is strewn with enough idiosyncracies, paradoxes, and local particularisms as to make comparisons risky if not ridiculous.

The record of Rhode Island's past is one of nature's aberration and human inconsistency, of precocity and senility, of innovation and parochial persistence. It is a history of religious freedom and religious intolerance, of civil liberties and civil tyranny, of business genius and industrial genocide, of global initiative and neighborhood paralysis, of soaring yet profound artistic expression as well as profane celebration of mediocrity.

If students of Rhode Island history are agreed on anything, it is that not much of the state's history is as simple and uncomplicated as it would first appear; a few examples will suffice to draw the point. Most students have distorted the true nature of the colony's early attitudes on religious toleration. While it is true that Rhode Island offered refuge to many seventeenth-century persons "troubled of conscience," Roger Williams' own "toleration" derived as much from his theological individualism and his instincts to preserve freedom for his own beliefs as from genuine tolerance.

True that a series of documents did establish separation of church and state, beginning with the words "only in civill things" of the Providence compact of 1649 and culminating in the great charter of 1663 which granted the right to "hold forth a livlie experiment that a most flourishing Civill State may stand and best bee maintained . . . with full liberties in religious concernment." That separated Rhode Island philosophically as well as politically from theocratic neighbors. The colony did become a refuge for nonconformists, but while Jews and Catholics were protected from harassment by edict, they were not permitted to participate in political affairs until the end of the eighteenth century. Other examples of intolerance in the "land of tolerance" include nativist "Know-Nothing" excesses against Catholics in the 1850s, social and geographical segregation of mill-hands or discrimination of Irish Catholics against Italian and French Catholics at the end of the nineteenth century, and the work of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s.

That Rhode Island was particular and idiosyncratic can be seen in the reluctance to give up its colonial charter until 1842. Although the other states had revised their constitutions in the Revolutionary era, Rhode Island clung to its once liberal but long since archaic document until the so-called Dorr War threatened to overthrow it by force. Thus, in the vaunted age of the common man and Jacksonian democracy, while the rest of the nation experienced the largest turnouts and greatest percentage of voter

*Director of this Society since 1970, Mr. Klyberg is also vice-chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission. His essay was written to provide historical background for that Commission's forthcoming revision of its "Historic Preservation Plan."

participation in the presidential election of 1840, in Rhode Island sixty percent of free adult white males were kept from going to the polls by a stringent real property qualification. Similarly, during the 1830s agitation of Anti-Masonry, while in every other state the Anti-Masonic party allied itself with the Whigs, in Rhode Island the alliance was with the Democrats.

The state has had more than its share of brilliance and innovation. Among notable examples chronologically are the exceptional relations between Roger Williams and the Indians, the aplomb and acumen of merchant princes conducting a global maritime activity of great complexity, the golden era of Newport's colonial intellectual elite, the leadership of merchants like Judah Touro and the Browns in the field of public philanthropy, the ushering in of cotton manufacture in America, the technological genius of men like George Corliss, the humanitarian and reform instincts of such men as Moses Brown, Thomas Wilson Dorr and Philip Allen, and the state's leadership in such reforms as abolition of capital punishment. But such creativity must stand alongside the state's impotence for constitutional reform, the stultification and decay of its major industry, textiles, and the total political domination of the nation's most intensively urbanized society by rural voters for a century and a half.

These then are some of the dilemmas and contradictions one must deal with in considering Rhode Island's history. That very little basic research has been accomplished on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries makes the task more difficult and this is largely responsible, one suspects, for misinterpretation of trends which burst forth in bright promise in the colonial period only to be diverted or subverted in later eras. Thus this current essay is but a prospectus toward a Rhode Island history, an attempt which cannot be fulfilled until the great surveying effort, of which this is a part, amasses and analyzes the myriad particles of this state's past.

The Land: Bounties and Boundaries

Measuring only forty-eight miles north to south and thirty-seven east to west and split nearly in two by Narragansett Bay, the smallest state was the beneficiary of a parsimonious natural agricultural endowment. For a brief period in the seventeenth century the Bay islands provided a luxurious agriculture — protected from natural predators, herds of cattle and flocks of fat sheep furnished the islanders with their first export. Indeed the surplus of agricultural bounty may have initiated trading activities. The northern part of the state was a rock-studded upland; only the southern coastal plain offered substantial agricultural possibilities and became noted for plantation-size farms. From the first, as early as 1640, there was a lime extraction industry in Smithfield, later the town of Lincoln. The eighteenth century saw a temporarily active iron industry at Hope Furnace in Scituate. Coal was mined indifferently in Portsmouth from 1760 into the early nineteenth century, and the granite quarries of Westerly have been yielding since the 1840s.

Although the notable Narragansett plantations and their famous "Pacers" persisted until the nineteenth century and the east side of the Bay originated a hearty species of chicken — the Rhode Island Red — agriculture has not been a sustaining industry. Rather, water was the state's life blood, first in Narragansett Bay with its fishing opportunities and great natural harbor which became home for an incredible series of profitable mercantile companies in Newport and after in Providence. Later the water of the state's small but swift streams — the Blackstone, Pawtuxet, Moshassuck, Woonasquatucket, Branch, Pawcatuck and Wood rivers — provided water power and mill sites for the precocious cotton and woolen textile industry of the 1790s and early 1800s.

Rhode Island's boundaries were in a state of flux from 1636 when Roger Williams orally acquired land

from the Narragansett Indians until the final dispute with Massachusetts was settled in 1862. The colony of 1659 included Providence, Warwick, Newport, Portsmouth, eight other islands in the Bay, and the Narragansett country also claimed by Connecticut. An English board of arbiters in 1663 stated that the line between Connecticut and Rhode Island was to be the Pawcatuck River to the point at which it met the Ashaway River. The boundary from there was a straight line to the southwest corner of Warwick and then due north to the southern Massachusetts line. The eastern border with Massachusetts, determined by England in 1746, established Cumberland, Tiverton, Little Compton, Warren and Bristol as part of Rhode Island. Final resolution of this border in 1862 ceded the town of Fall River — carved from Tiverton in 1856 — to Massachusetts. Rhode Island received the western part of Seekonk, now East Providence, and the western section of Pawtucket, whose border was extended to the Ten Mile River.

Narragansetts, Nomads and Nonconformists

The principal Indian tribe of Rhode Island was the Narragansetts of the Algonquin nation. To a lesser degree on fringes and borders of the territory were Wampanoags of Massachusetts and Nipmucks, Niantics and Pequots from nearby Connecticut. The Narragansetts played an important part in the founding of the colony; their diplomacy with Roger Williams is a model for Indian-white relations since. Unfortunately, the relationship was too fragile to survive the great conflict of King Philip's War 1675-76 which engulfed nearly all New England and rolled over Rhode Island destroying nearly every structure outside the island of Aquidneck, culminating in defeat of the Indians at the Great Swamp massacre and the death of Philip at Mount Hope. Their power broken, the Narragansetts became part of the South County community, eventually giving up their reservation in Charlestown in 1880. Now they are revitalizing proud traditions in a day when their imprint on the land is borne largely by hundreds of place names, dozens of significant archaeological sites, and miles of perfectly executed stone walls, a craft long associated with this people.

Rhode Island shared with other coastal regions the common experience of being touched by some of those intrepid seafarers and rovers set loose during the expansion of Europe in the sixteenth century in that great reconnaissance which charted our globe. Miguel Corte Real in 1502, Giovanni Verrazano in 1524, and Adrian Block in 1614 reached our shore and learned of the great Narragansett Bay. But their impact was lightly felt; rather, religious nonconformists designed our first community patterns.

William Blackstone, founder of Boston, was probably the first European to settle within what is now Rhode Island. Beginning a steady flow of persons "troubled of conscience," Blackstone established a retreat at a place he called "Study Hill" in Cumberland, overlooking the river which was to bear his name. Being something of a recluse he shunned formal society, content with the association of his fertile orchards and substantial private library.

Roger Williams arrived in 1636, a refugee from the Puritan divines' conception of Zion. Under his leadership a community at Providence was founded. He was followed shortly by Anne Hutchinson, John Clarke, and William Coddington who settled on Aquidneck, forming quickly the communities of Portsmouth (1638) and Newport (1639). Another religious seeker, Samuel Gorton, came to Providence but left shortly to begin his own community at Shawomet or Warwick (1642). Within a very brief time all these leaders and others like William Harris were quarreling with one another, mostly over religious doctrines and insight, occasionally over land or civil jurisdiction. To some degree their seemingly in-

cessant cantankerousness and contrary-mindedness was an index to liberty and individuality not found or permitted in other colonies. Nor was their bickering always of a petty nature but often rather profound and cosmic.

In retrospect it is amazing that the colony survived bitter and protracted internal squabbles while fending off external threats from Plymouth, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. These neighbors jealously sought control of the rich Narragansett region while despising the heterodoxy which flourished in Rhode Island. In addition the colony was scorched by Indian warfare and periodically though ineffectively reprimanded by displeased rulers and councils in England. It survived, however. The island agriculture which provided the first exports encouraged the growth of the seaport of Newport. "Other-worldly" Quaker merchants capitalizing upon their acquaintance with co-religionists in New York and Philadelphia saw their fortunes double and redouble. Sephardic Jews in Curacao were attracted to this open and prosperous Newport as early as the 1680s.

The absence of established religion had many ramifications affecting even the physical arrangement of the townscapes. Unlike settlements in other New England areas where conformity in religion was the pattern, Rhode Island towns did not develop around town squares or commons whose prominent feature was the meeting house, but grew in a linear fashion, either along a waterfront or a post road.

Since the royal charter of 1663 granted religious freedom and large amounts of home rule, Rhode Island towns were the principal focus of government. Counties never became more than units of judicial administration and today have the merest significance. The governor was chiefly a ceremonial figure until 1935, the real power residing with the legislature whose two houses sitting in a grand committee appointed nearly all office holders until the third decade of the twentieth century, when the source of their appointive power — the Brayton Act — was repealed.

From the outset the wide variety of religious practice, the political contentiousness and competition among the towns, and the absence of a strong centralizing force in the form of a powerful governor fragmented and diffused a society which otherwise would have lent itself to easy control and direction by being geographically so compact. Add to this mix a charter which allowed considerable local initiative and a maritime economy whose base was worldwide commerce and you have the ingredients for a kind of atomistic anarchy (that much vaunted "independence") which has been a strong strain — though not always a dominant one — through Rhode Island's history.

Merchants, Molasses, Dilettantes and Juntos

The wide latitude of local self rule guaranteed by the charter and the corresponding absence of meddling, regulating royal governors, along with a fierce independent spirit of enterprise and a wonderful harbor poised between Boston and New York, combined to provide some of the ingredients for a successful coastal trade. As did their brethren in Philadelphia, Quaker merchants of Newport gave equal attention to countinghouse and meeting house with a resultant prosperity. In the early to mid-eighteenth century this trade expanded to the West Indies, Europe, and finally Africa. Often out of step with the military policies of the other New England colonies, Narragansett Bay shipping took advantage of the colonial wars and their attendant embargoes to trade with all sides. A reputation for sharp trading, privateering, profiteering and piracy developed.

Governor Samuel Cranston's thirty-year administration (1697-1727) was an era of transition and consolidation. During this time the English government threats to seize the liberal charter were deflected, the threat by Indians receded, some of the external boundary quarrels with Massachusetts and Connecticut were resolved, and internal squabbling was kept at a manageable level. Not only were foundations laid for a strong shipping economy, but the Narragansett plantations owned by many Newport merchants also flourished. To the north the less

prosperous Providence County grew at a slower pace, but growth did take place, witnessed by the political subdivision and creation of new towns in 1731.

Following the economic flowering of Newport came a cultural burgeoning enhanced by the arrival of George Berkeley, then Dean of Derry. Around him gathered a coterie of artists, architects and literary personalities — John Smibert, John Callender, and Peter Pelham. Within a decade Newport began its long career as a summer resort, attracting wealthy merchants and planters from such places as Charleston, South Carolina, and the West Indian islands. The issuing of paper money dominated politics; importation of molasses was the center of economic attention.

The great wealth pouring into Rhode Island as a result of an independent trade policy during wartime and an expansionist monetary policy could not all be contained at the mouth of the Bay. With the attendant, if somewhat slower, rise of the northern towns emulation and then competition occurred. In due course as Newport boasted of its Trinity Church, Colony House, Redwood Library, Touro Synagogue, and Brick Market, Providence built its College, Colony House, Market House, First Baptist Meeting House, and Athenaeum. Competition for control of the colony's affairs erupted in the 1760s between the rival juntos of Ward and Hopkins. Scholars claim there was more to the rivalry than just patronage; resentment against Quaker oligarchs of Newport — dating back to their abandonment of mainland towns to the ravages of King Philip's raiders — possibly underlay part of the feeling.

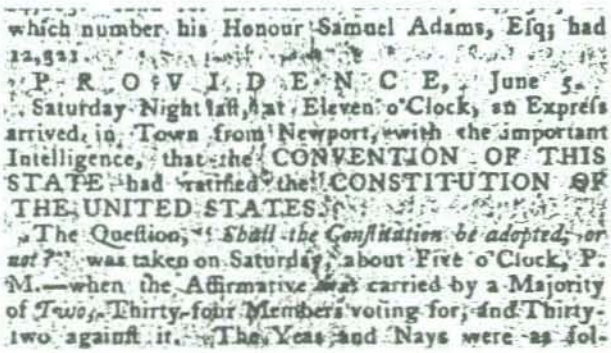
The precocious party struggles of Hopkins and Ward were put aside in the 1770s, however, as threats from George III and Parliament interfered with shipping and menaced the charter. Acts of rebellion like destruction of the *Liberty* and *Gaspee* brought forth Admiralty commissions and stiff patrols throughout the Bay compelling the usually independent and "otherwise minded" Rhode Islanders to seek mutual assistance and cooperation from their neighboring colonies.

The outbreak of the Revolution found Rhode Island in the vanguard; the colony declared its independence from the king on May 4, 1776. Significant contributions to the war were made by such men as Nathanael and Christopher Greene, Stephen and Esek Hopkins, William Ellery, James Mitchell Varnum, Stephen Olney, Israel Angell, and William Barton. Newport was occupied first by the British, then by the French. The Battle of Rhode Island in 1778 was probably the largest engagement which took place in New England.

The conclusion of the war found Newport's maritime commerce and most of this once great colonial city in a shambles. Providence, unscathed, emerged as the state's principal center and its principal merchants, enjoying great trading opportunities, extended their interests to South America and then across the Pacific to China.

Pre-war political competition revived — now the areas of contention were the state's issue of paper money, the Federal impost, and ratification of the Federal Constitution. With the precipitate decline of the island towns and the steady growth of the northern ones, the imbalance of representation in the legislature fixed by the old charter began to be noticed. By 1790 political lines were drawn between Federalist merchants and their adherents — mostly clustered in the urban seaports — and their opponents who formed a rural or country party. Labels would change, issues and personalities come and go, but for the next century and a half an urban economic elite with a rural base would dominate Rhode Island politics, with only a few interruptions in their hegemony.

Rhode Island's reluctance to join the Union stemmed from the same impulse which propelled it into the Revolution — fear of centralized power outside the state controlling activities within the state. After flirting with the idea of an independent sovereign state, Rhode Island reluctantly ratified the Constitution. A new era was about to begin.


which number his Honour Samuel Adams, Esq; had 12,932.

PROVIDENCE, June 5.

Saturday Night last, at Eleven o'Clock, an Express arrived in Town from Newport, with the important Intelligence, that the CONVENTION OF THIS STATE had ratified the CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES.

The Question, *Shall the Constitution be adopted, or not?* was taken on Saturday, about Five o'Clock, P. M.—when the Affirmative was carried by a Majority of *Two*, Thirty-four Members voting for, and Thirty-two against it. The Yeas and Nays were as fol-

The Providence Gazette *of June 5, 1790, carried this fateful news.*

Cotton Manufacturing and Constitutional Reform

For Rhode Island the nineteenth century began in 1790 and the eighteenth century didn't end until 1843. While the state pioneered in transforming its economy from maritime activity to textile manufacturing, it continued to operate under an outdated colonial charter whose absurdities nearly dissolved the state into anarchy after several sincere efforts at reform came to naught.

Simultaneously with joining the Union at a time when its maritime trade was at a new peak for four years — nearly ninety percent of all slaves imported to South Carolina were carried in Rhode Island vessels — successful attempts to mass-produce cloth caused major segments of Rhode Island investment capital to be transferred from maritime commerce to textile manufacturing. The firm of Almy & Brown, under Samuel Slater's leadership and with adaptable artisans of local forges and cabinet shops, produced good durable machines which made reasonably satisfactory and inexpensive cloth in quantity. Within two decades investors who had previously owned fleets of seagoing carriers commanded fleets of mills instead. Up the Blackstone Valley and west along the Pawtuxet sprang the mills. Prior urban patterns of seaport towns and post road villages were joined by the phenomenon of the mill village — self-contained, dominated by factory owners, its workers disenfranchised either by being renters or foreign-born immigrants, or both.

Some capital stayed with the sea. The decade of the 1820s was the heyday of the China trade. The first five American consuls in Canton were either Providence merchants or their relatives. Cotton spawned the secondary industry of machine tools — manufacture of machines to make textiles. Woolen manufacturing developed as a junior partner to cotton — junior in terms of number of factories and employees but not in the dollar value of its product. Growth of factories and increase in profits boomed throughout the local economy, giving impetus to expansion of already existing financial institutions such as banks and insurance companies.

Other forms of industry during this period included a precious metal industry — manufacture of silver products — and a coarse metal industry of forges and foundries, both with important antecedents in the eighteenth century. Nehemiah Dodge and his apprentice Jabez Gorham were active in Providence while Samuel Vernon worked in Newport and Samuel Casey in Kingston. Jenckeses and Wilkinsons were the most prominent forge masters. Growth of the economy was reflected in expansion of transportation links — the Blackstone Canal, Providence & Worcester Railroad, Providence and Stonington Line, and nearly a score of turnpikes radiating out from Providence.

Economic growth and the rise of Providence — which became a city in 1832 — were unable to alter the apportionment of 1663 entombed in the charter. Even the demise of the Federalist Party in 1819 and the advent of a decade of political homogeneity failed to generate the good will needed to break the death grip of malapportionment. As mill towns burgeoned in the next fifteen years, teeming with renters and workers under control of mill owners, the probability and possibility of reapportionment and extension of suffrage became even more remote. Rural Democrats knew that reapportionment and free suffrage would end their control of the legislature. The suffrage agitation of the 30s accelerated into the contrapuntal constitutional conclaves of the 1840s, the hapless Dorr rebellion of 1842, and the nativistic constitution of 1843 which widened the franchise only slightly.

The general intellectual and social progress shared by other states was reflected in Rhode Island too. Private philanthropy aided the community's poor, sick, and mentally deficient. In addition to the suffrage movement, both antislavery and penal reform had adherents. Many Congregational churches went through the upheaval of Unitarianism; Anglican churches grew in number, gradually to replace Baptists and Quakers as the dominant Protestant sect. Public school innovations developed by Connecticut import Henry Barnard (1845-48) and abolition of capital punishment in 1852 were important state

accomplishments. Anti-Catholic and other nativist sentiments detracted from the more progressive accomplishments of the time.

Industrialization, Immigration, Urban Growth

Two forms of energy in Rhode Island's history were harnessed in 1857. The first was emergence of the Republican Party out of the wreckage of the law and order wing of the Democratic Party, the Know-Nothings, the free soilers, the temperance party, and the Whigs. For the next seventy-five years under the successive and successful leadership of Henry B. Anthony of the *Providence Journal*, a Civil War general named Charles Brayton, and United States Senator Nelson W. Aldrich, a powerful political machine ran the state almost without opposition. Based on the malapportioned senate, where a few hundred votes in a small town were equal to fifty thousand votes in Providence, and a shifting alliance of special interest groups in the cities, a parade of one-term, figurehead governors marched to the orders of General Brayton, the "blind boss" who lost sight of nothing. In succeeding decades the machine's hegemony was threatened only when one of the component elements broke ranks — when Mugwump Republicans or suffragists deserted briefly in the 1880s — prohibitionists in the 1880s and 1890s — *Providence Journal* faction in the 1900s — and Italians and French Canadians in the 1920s. Few of these desertions were lasting, and fewer resulted in Democrats coming to power.

The other source of energy widespread in Rhode Island around 1857 — steam power for running machines and factories — had been pioneered for textile manufacturing by Samuel Slater in 1828 in his Providence mill. Production of boilers, steam engines and locomotives became a substantial industry in Providence. Use of steam power to turn belts, pulleys, and spindles meant that textile mills no longer had to be located at mill dams and falls where energized water conducted through power canals turned wheels and turbines. Instead, mills could be located in port cities with easy access to coal barges or rail transport. Within a decade the skylines of Providence, Warren, Bristol, East Greenwich, Wickford and Newport were pierced by smokestacks and a second era of manufacturing had begun. Eighteenth-century port towns with their pedestrian scale gained a nineteenth-century industrial overlay, garnished with a new industrial population of non-Yankees, new problems of traffic congestion, housing, health and education, not to mention a thick layer of industrial soot.

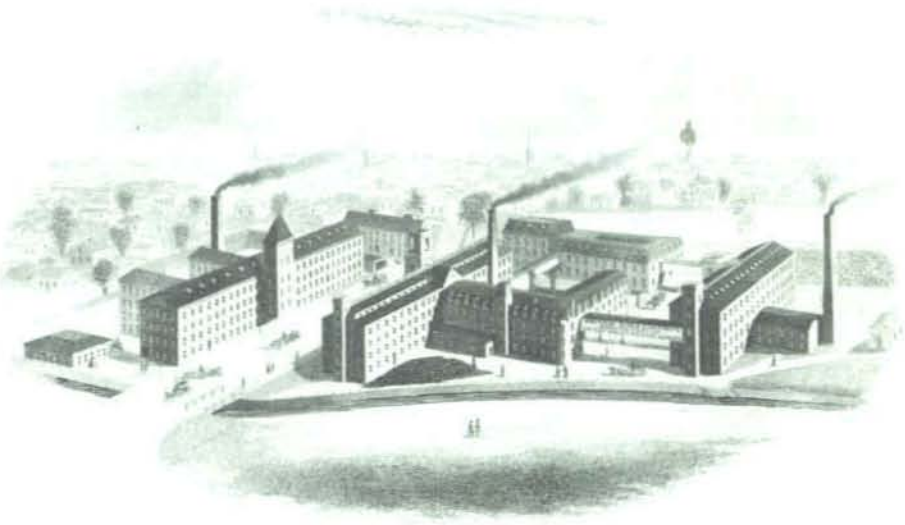
Newport expanded in other ways. The summer capital of Rhode Island began its second great era as an Atlantic coast resort. Bellevue Avenue opened, the first of the great mansions appeared. A new coterie of artists and writers set up camp beyond the

Two forms of energy . . .

Republican Party leadership — exemplified by Henry B. Anthony, governor and senator.

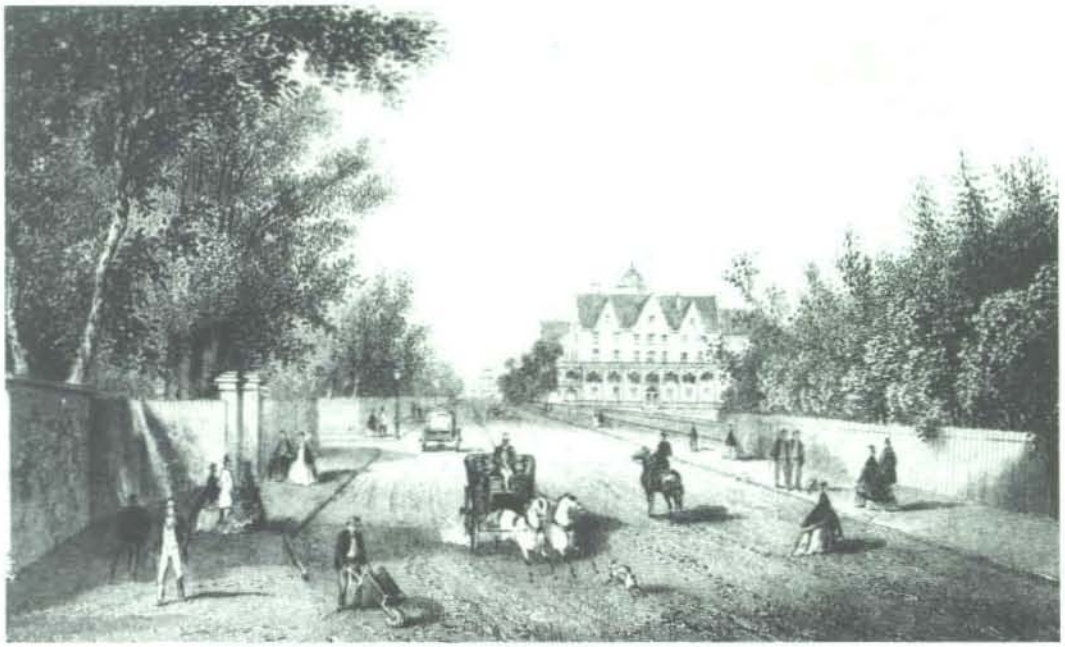
Providence Plantations for 250 Years by *Welcome Arnold Greene* (Providence, 1886).

Steam power — applied to such manufacturing interests as the expanding American Screw Company.



Print, RIHS Graphics Collection.

Newport's Bellevue Avenue about 1860.



View of Newport, *Thomas Nelson and Sons (London, Edinburgh, and New York). Graphics Collection, RIHS.*

Avenue within the shadow of the Redwood Library. The United States Navy — long a familiar feature in the town — expanded its ties by enlarging Fort Adams and building the Naval War College. During the Civil War the "city by the sea" also served as the site of the Naval Academy.

Providence continued to grow by filling in low areas along the Providence River, making a profusion of fingerlike wharves and docks. The great salt cove grew smaller and smaller as railroad, horsecars and utility systems began to interlace far-flung neighborhoods into an urban whole. City engineers, police and fire personnel began to replace viewers of fences and volunteers of watch and ward societies. Sixteen-term Mayor Thomas A. Doyle — one of the nation's earliest urban renewal leaders — reigned during the 60s, 70s and 80s.

New population to swell industrial centers like Providence, Pawtucket, and Woonsocket came first from nearby country towns and farms. Then in the 1830s this Yankee stock began to be replaced by Irish immigrants. In the 1860s French Canadians were brought in to work in the textile mills, and Italian immigration began in the 1880s. In the 1890s and first decade of the twentieth century came Portuguese, Poles, Ukrainians, Armenians, Jews from eastern

Europe, Lithuanians, Lebanese; and recently have come Latin Americans.

As the cities continued to grow and as sons of these immigrants and naturalized citizens reached voting age, the political balance threatened to shift against the towns within which these compactly settled but unincorporated areas lay. Legislative managers performed a kind of municipal mitosis or political cell division — Woonsocket was split off from Cumberland, Pawtucket from North Providence and, eventually, Central Falls from Lincoln. Each time the more rural counterpart was left safely in Republican hands while the new city was likely to have a Democratic mayor but a Republican city council since — even under the expanded suffrage of the 1888 Bourn amendment to the state's constitution — only property tax payers could elect councilmen. Under the impetus of the Brayton act of 1901 the rural-controlled senate gained power to appoint key city officials.

Decline of Textiles and Immigrant Ascendancy

Despite occasional reverberations of national economic downturns the period from 1860 to 1900 was one of general business expansion in Rhode Island. Even the panic of 1873 was more of an opportunity for the Brown financial empire to eliminate its chief rival, the Spragues, than any lasting setback for the state's business community. Both woolen and cotton textiles and related industries of bleaching, printing, and special fabrics enjoyed boom times. By the time of the first World War, however, the industry began to show signs of age — equipment and factories were wearing out, labor was not content to live under total factory domination. Some companies shifted certain processes to the South to be closer to the source of supply and to have a less expensive work force in new factories. After the war came a series of crippling strikes and a period of little growth followed by the Depression of the 1930s. The second World War revived the industry briefly, but from 1946 through the 1950s mill after mill closed or was sold to larger corporate combinations.

Politically, things came apart too. One of the chief effects of strikes in the 1920s and the attendant calling out of militia to subdue workers was the growing disenchantment of French Canadians and Italians with the Republican Party. The Ku Klux Klan which disparaged the loyalty and integrity of non-Anglo-Saxon Protestants was a force for driving immigrants with a common Catholic heritage together for the first time; and the candidacy of Alfred E. Smith in 1928 reinforced that tendency. Growth of Democratic ranks in the 1920s projected Theodore Francis Green into the governor's chair in 1933, and in 1935 control of the two houses of legislature was wrested from the Republicans. In fourteen furious minutes of legislative frenzy five major bills were passed and signed into law completely reorganizing the entire government of the state. Small town domination — in effect for nearly a century and a half — was swept away in the "bloodless revolution" of 1935. The ascendancy of an ethnic-based Democratic coalition has carried down to the present.

The impact of economic disaster resulting from death of the state's primary industry was partly ameliorated by development of major military installations at Newport, Quonset and Davisville from 1939 to 1945. Following the war "for sale" signs appeared on mills throughout the state and Rhode Island began a long slow effort to develop new businesses and jobs. Private and public agencies like the Weekapaug Group, Rhode Island Development Council, and Industrial Building Authority have struggled for nearly thirty years to overcome a sluggish economy. The solid — though not always obvious — accomplishment of these efforts was never better demonstrated than during the recent

staggering closings and curtailing of substantial military installations at Quonset, Davisville and Newport. Even though the Navy represented the largest single employer in Rhode Island, the effect of the closings has been overcome.

More spectacular than gradual growth of industry since World War 2 has been the suburbanization of Providence and Kent counties. The emergence of Cranston and Warwick as cities, and substantial population jumps in Johnston, Cumberland, Lincoln, and Smithfield reflected national trends as older cities of Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, and Woonsocket lost population and then stabilized their sizes. Another area of significant growth has been institutional services — higher education, hospitals, community services and, most of all, state government.

Students of modern government often erroneously assume that Rhode Island most closely reflects the political science model of a "city-state" — a homogenous, largely urban center with supporting and complementary suburbs where public business is conducted without interference from overlapping or contradictory jurisdictions of town and county governments. Indeed the true picture is at considerable variance to this ideal. "Home rule rights" and a persistent identification with local pride and even with neighborhood and village identities has produced a kind of garrulous guerilla warfare in town meetings and constitutional conventions.

Lurking behind the obvious challenges of a slothful regional economy and the issue of financing state government through a personal income tax which vexed and dominated state politics of the 50s and 60s, a potentially greater issue of consolidating principal public policies in state government at the expense of cities and towns was and continues to be a struggle with both economic and political ramifications. Beginning with the administrations of Theodore Francis Green in 1933 and enhanced by the modern management and centralizing concepts introduced by Dennis Roberts, state government has grown and taken charge of planning and development for business and industry as well as for transportation, recreation, and conservation of natural resources. Decisions on the future of Narragansett Bay, for example, have been and will be more and more a state decision and less and less subject to local town councils. The trend is likely to continue as more and more town functions are tied into programs of the Department of Community Affairs and local development controlled by regulations such as the Wetlands Act. Archaic and unrepresentative instruments like financial town meetings are currently under assault. Regional approaches to educational and safety services are being put forth. The struggle is as old as Rhode Island itself, differing only in the absence or near absence of religious controversy from the battles of Roger Williams with his independent and otherwise-minded brethren. It is a theme played with variations over three centuries and orchestrated by a variety of maestros, composers, and just plain posers. It is central to that greatest of all humanizing endeavors, the history of a people — in this case the history of the fascinating if frequently frustrating, unpredictable, highly individualistic, now ethnically varied, incomparable people of Rhode Island.

Photograph by Laurence E. Tilley.

The Providence home of the Aldrich family at 110 Benevolent Street will become a center for the enjoyment and study of Rhode Island history through use of its rooms as galleries for exhibits of key community artifacts and adaptation of the ballroom to serve as lecture hall. Given to the Society in the hundredth anniversary year of Senator Nelson W. Aldrich's election to membership, it is received with gratitude and appreciation for Rhode Islanders yet to come.