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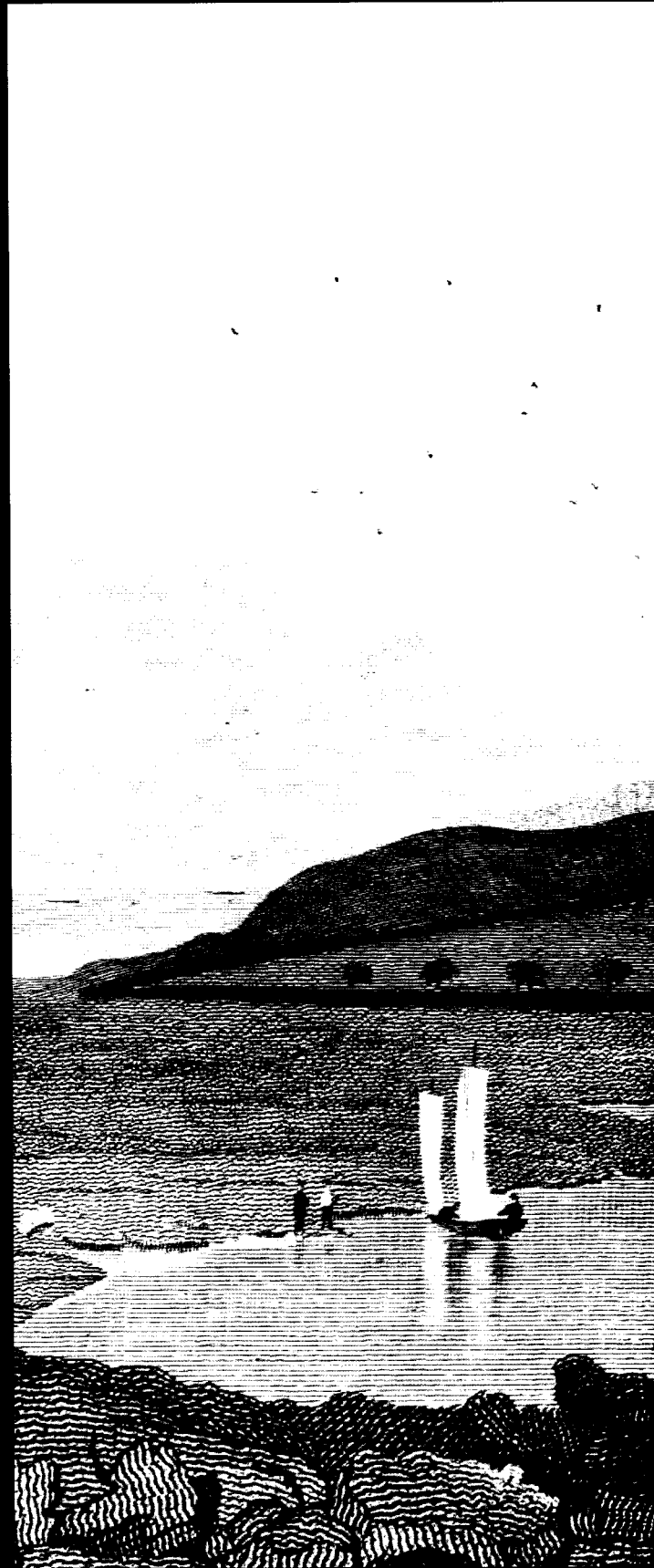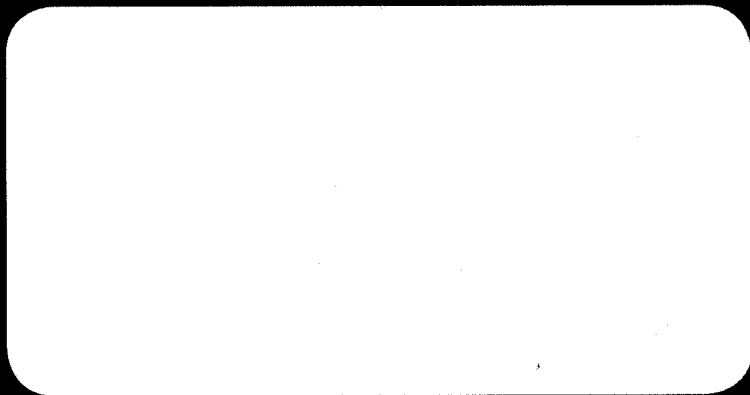
Cover

Erected in 1819, the Newport Asylum housed the poor on the town's isolated Coasters Harbor Island. Engraving, 1834, courtesy of the Naval War College Museum.

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This 1870 map shows the location of the Newport Asylum on Coasters Harbor Island. Accessible only by boat for over three decades after its founding, the asylum remained well isolated from the rest of Newport even after a bridge to the island was constructed in the 1850s. RIHS Collection (RHi X5 338).

Economy and Isolation in Rhode Island Poorhouses, 1820-1850

On the morning of Friday, 25 June 1819, a crowd milled about in downtown Newport, Rhode Island. Many of Newport's most prominent citizens were present, including members of the clergy, the United States and Rhode Island legislatures, the Newport Town Council, the U.S. Army and Navy, and two different Masonic lodges. At ten o'clock the crowd formed a procession, with one Masonic lodge at the head, another at the tail, and the clerical, political, and military elites of the town arrayed in between. They marched north along the waterfront, then embarked in boats that were waiting to ferry them across a small harbor to a deserted island called Coasters Harbor Island. Precisely at twelve noon the assembled crowd witnessed the laying of the cornerstone of an important new town building. The grand master of the St. John's Masonic Lodge assisted the grand master of the Grand Masonic Lodge of Rhode Island in placing a medal underneath the cornerstone. One side of the medal read "This Corner Stone Laid June 25 in the 43d year of American Independence." The other side read "Newport Asylum, Erected 1819."[1]

Newport's elite had turned out, with pomp and circumstance, to mark the construction of a new poorhouse that would accommodate any and every Newporter in need. Although not located downtown with other town buildings and public places, this new asylum for the poor was as expensive and carefully constructed as any public building of its time. When the Newport Asylum Commissioners arranged shaves, haircuts, and transportation for thirty-

eight inmates from the old almshouse to the new asylum in July 1820, it marked the beginning of a new era in the lives of the needy of Rhode Island: the era of poorhouses.[2]

Thirty years later, in 1850, "Shepherd Tom" Hazard (1797-1886), a retired factory owner and sheep farmer, made a personal visit to the asylum in Newport, and to every other Rhode Island town but one. Hazard's goal in traipsing all over the state was to visit the "poor" and "insane" of each town and to discover how well the towns were meeting their responsibilities to provide food, shelter, clothing, and medical care for those townspeople who could not provide for themselves. His focus was on all paupers, people who received some form of assistance from their town governments, whether it was housing, firewood, food, health care, or money. In a report to the Rhode Island

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Gabriel Loiacono is a Ph.D. candidate at Brandeis University. His dissertation is entitled "Paupers in Nineteenth-Century Rhode Island: The Reality and Rhetoric of Poverty." The author would like to thank Andrew Smith of the Rhode Island Supreme Court Records Center, as well as the staff of the Scituate, Rhode Island, Town Clerk's Office, for pointing him to valuable sources for this essay.

Thomas R. Hazard and his family. This photograph was taken at about the time that Hazard presented his Report on the Poor and Insane in Rhode Island to the General Assembly. RIHS Collection RHi X3 5426.

General Assembly, Hazard found Rhode Island's towns to be caring for their needy at markedly different levels.

In general, Hazard approved of towns that had an "asylum," or poorhouse, a house or farm that was owned by the town and run exclusively for care of the poor. For example, he happily noted that the town of Scituate had an asylum, "pleasantly and conveniently situated on the road . . . well arranged for the accommodation of the poor, and appear[ing] to be well conducted."[3] Towns that did not have a poorhouse, such as Coventry, failed Hazard's examination. Visiting Coventry the same day he had visited Scituate, Hazard found Coventry's poor "in the most deplorable condition imaginable." Without a poorhouse in 1850, the town fathers of Coventry had most likely arranged with a local family to house, feed, and clothe the paupers for a lump-sum payment. "The house in which they were huddled," Hazard wrote, "was old and dilapidated—and the furniture was absolutely unfit for the use of the most degraded of savages." He was also shocked by the dinner served there, which he found to be only a dish of watery, unripe potatoes, with not even enough of them to quench the inmates' hunger.[4] In short, Hazard found that the care of the poor in Rhode Island ranged from very bad to very good, and that the bad conditions were usually attributable to one or both of two causes: the mixing of insane paupers with sane paupers, and the absence of poorhouses, or asylums, in which many of a town's poor could be kept comfortably and efficiently.

Between the opening of the Newport Asylum in 1820 and Hazard's tour in 1850, thirteen of Rhode Island's thirty-one towns built poorhouses.[5] Hazard lived to see a total of twenty-eight town poorhouses established in the state, in part because of his prodding. Although "Shepherd Tom" was not an unqualified supporter of poorhouses, his efforts to promote them paralleled similar reform movements in other states, which together formed a national movement to institutionalize

poor relief. Between 1820 and 1870, reformers like Hazard insistently called for more poorhouses, and state and town governments, at least throughout the northeastern United States, heeded that call.

Historians of social welfare have paid close attention to the advent of poorhouses in the United States. Usually they have advanced the argument that reformers intended these poorhouses either as a means of social control or as part of an emerging culture of benevolence.[6] This essay will note where poorhouses fit into these interpretations, but it will emphasize two other themes in the history of poorhouses in nineteenth-century Rhode Island: economy and isolation. The paramount goal of poorhouse proponents was economy—spending less on poor relief. The most significant result of the poorhouse movement was the increased isolation of paupers from their communities.

In the records of reformers and town officials who spearheaded the construction of poorhouses between 1820 and 1870, economy is the most frequently recurring theme. Simply put, poorhouse proponents thought that cutting the costs of poor relief, and thus cutting taxes to support the poor, was the most important and persuasive argument in favor of building poorhouses. It is true that there were other considerations as well. Reformers sometimes complained that the public was being taken advantage of by "sturdy beggars" who should have been working for their food; in this way the reformers suggested that they were seeking to exercise social control over the needy. At other times reformers documented and deplored the poor treatment of paupers, thereby framing the construction of poorhouses as part of the construction of a more benevolent society. But the most distressing part of poor relief, according to most reformers and town officials, was that its expenses seemed to be far too great. They often hoped that poorhouses would provide humane and disciplined relief to those in need, but above all they wanted that relief to be economically efficient.

In the long term, poorhouses were usually not as successful in keeping poor relief costs down as reformers and town officials had hoped. These institutions did, however, effect a sea change in the lives of the needy: poorhouses markedly increased the geographic and social isolation of paupers from the social communities of their towns. Usually located on farms, away from the towns' population centers, poorhouses concentrated the needy in one spot and cut them off from their friends and neighbors. Prior to the poorhouse movement, paupers were integrated into their communities; if they did not live in their own houses, they lived in the houses of relatives or neighbors, or of townspeople who took them in as a way to earn money.

Poorhouses completely changed paupers' lives. With their geographic isolation and strict rules regulating their residents' comings, goings, and visitors, poorhouses reduced the everyday interactions between the poorest members of a community and the community's other members. In ways that historians have not closely examined, poorhouses helped to form an even greater social cleavage than had previously existed between the people at large and the poor.[7]

During a period when, at least formally, distinctions between the propertied and the unpropertied were falling away, legal distinctions between paupers and the rest of society were actually increasing. At the same time that many working-class Rhode Islanders won the right to vote, formed their own civic associations, and increasingly asserted their rights as republican citizens, the poorhouse, and a series of new poor laws, defined and pushed paupers out of Rhode Island's political and social communities. This essay will show how the poorhouse changed the ability of paupers to be part of a larger social community, and how this social exclusion affected the everyday lives of paupers.

Rhode Island had only two poorhouses (or almshouses) in 1810.[8] Newport had built one in 1723, and Providence had built one in 1756. These early poorhouses were places of last resort, not intended to house all of a town's needy.[9] Towns provided some residents in need with direct monetary assistance, which was termed "outdoor relief." The almshouse, or "indoor relief," was intended primarily for transients, the insane poor, and individuals without families or neighbors who could assist them. To help with their own support, eighteenth-century inmates of the Newport almshouse were authorized to beg on the streets of Newport before they returned to the almshouse at night. After 1750 the town required paupers to wear badges on their clothing, marking them as dependents of the town.[10] Both the authorized begging and the badges were an attempt to reduce taxpayers' expenses on behalf of the needy, either by supplementing paupers' incomes or by ensuring that only those willing to accept the social stigma of dependence would actually ask for town money. Overseers of the poor made use of the almshouse but generally spent far more on paupers who remained in their own homes or in the homes of friends or family.

The poorhouse that was so celebrated by Newport's elite in 1819 was probably the second built in Rhode Island since the mid-eighteenth century.[11] In proposing this poorhouse, elite Newporters addressed two issues: taxes and benevolence. In arguments that would resound in other towns for decades after, the proponents of the new poorhouse promised that it would relieve the tax burden of the town's care for its needy and would provide better, more humane care for the needy than was previously provided. The Newport "Asylum," as the poorhouse was called, would also prefigure one of the most significant effects of poorhouses on the lives of the poor: it would effectively isolate its inmates from the rest of the town. Indeed, the site of the Newport Asylum, on a small island,

which for years did not even have a bridge to the large island on which Newport itself is situated, was emblematic of the effects of the new poorhouses on the poor of Rhode Island.

Newport taxpayers' chief motivation for approving a new poorhouse was that it promised to reduce taxes levied to support the poor. As in most Rhode Island towns, Newport's town government included an overseer of the poor, whose job it was to warn out needy outsiders and to ensure that needy Newporters were provided for. With the approval of the town council, the overseer of the poor allocated food, firewood, clothing, and money to those Newport natives who were in need. At the end of the year the town treasurer assessed the taxpayers for the cost of this relief, along with other town expenses, proportioned according to the amount of real and personal property each taxpayer owned. Thus taxpayers paid a different amount each year, depending on how much money the town had spent that year. In the early nineteenth century, spending on poor relief was often the single largest item in the budget, and it was often the cause of increases in the local town tax.[12]

Tax increases were, to say the least, unpopular. Continuous or sharp rises in taxes were frequently met with complaints and with demands that the town somehow provide for the poor more economically. Newport's poor tax increased steadily from 1810 until it reached a total of $6,300, to be divided amongst Newport taxpayers, in 1819.[13] When proposing that the town build the expensive new asylum, proponents emphasized that it would both provide "decent accommodation of the Poor" and save money. A committee of poorhouse proponents told a town meeting that "The Committee are of Opinion that the advantages to the Town in placing the establishment on Coasters Harbour Island will result in a saving to the Town of at least Two Thousand Dollars annually and they have no doubt that on an improved Plan for cultivating the Island by all such Paupers as are able to work That in a few years, the Revenue will more than pay

the expence of the Institution."[14] For Newport taxpayers, the asylum was an investment that promised to pay off in future tax bills.

Taxpayers also worried that recipients of town money sometimes abused the system of relief. Edward Lawton, an enthusiastic proponent of a new poorhouse for Newport, complained that "a variety of abuses had crept into this system" of outdoor relief, "from the want of proper checks upon the conduct of the officers and overseers, most of which abuses" were a result of "the concerns of an enormous *out-door pension list.*" "The existence of these evils," Lawton wrote, "had determined some of the most active and enterprising citizens, to attempt a radical reform of the whole system."[15] This radical reform was the complete cessation of any outdoor poor relief, and the construction of a new poorhouse that would cost Newport $6,940.39, a bit more than the cost of maintaining the poor for a year.[16] Recipients of outdoor relief were presented with the choice of moving out of their friends' or neighbors' homes and into the new poorhouse or losing their access to poor relief.

The site chosen for the town's new asylum would literally change the place of the poor in Newport. Whereas the old almshouse had been located at the edge of the town center, the new poorhouse was decidedly secluded.[17] Two miles north of the center of town and separated from Newport by nine hundred feet of water, Coasters Harbor Island was nearly uninhabited; its chief functions hitherto had in fact all been related to its seclusion.[18] In the eighteenth century the island had been a quarantine station for foreign ships and had been the site of a smallpox hospital. During the Revolution the British navy used the island to house sick British sailors and soldiers, identifying it on maps as "Pest Island" or "small pox island."

Recognizing that the inmates of the asylum would be neighbors of people with infectious diseases, the Newport Board of Health issued new quarantine regulations just before the institution opened. These regulations

provided "That the President [of the Board of Health] shall determine at what distance from the Asylum on Coaster's Harbour Island, the Quarantine Vessels shall be placed, so that the health of the Poor, that may be lodged in the Asylum, may not, at any time, be, in the remotest degree, endangered by such vessel."[19] In addition to using Coasters Harbor Island to quarantine vessels, town officials placed hospitals for contagious diseases on other parts of the island well into the late nineteenth century.[20] Although these officials clearly were not careless about the health of the asylum inmates in this regard, it is also clear that they reserved the isolated island for only two communities in Newport: paupers and those with contagious diseases. Officials did not intend either of these groups to be part of the larger social community of the town.

Newport's elites were evidently not eager to rub elbows with the town's neediest. Lawton, the poorhouse proponent, expressed his criticisms of the very poor to New York's secretary of state in 1823: "It ought to be mentioned," he wrote of those who received town assistance in the years before the new poorhouse was built, "that notwithstanding the great expense of supporting the poor in this place, their appearance was far from respectable as a class, and they were in habits of gross drunkenness and idleness, and withal most sturdy street beggars."[21] Evidently Lawton did not like to meet the poor on the streets of Newport.[22]

He was much less likely to meet any paupers in Newport once the town had its new asylum. Except in cases of illness, visitors were allowed at the institution only on Wednesdays. Inmates could leave only with a permit from the asylum keeper, and they had to return by sundown.[23] To ensure the paupers' isolation from the rest of the community, the asylum's commissioners warned Newporters to stay away from the island once the new institution was opened on 10 July1820. A notice ran in the Newport Mercury for several weeks that summer under the headline "Newport

ASYLUM": "No Visitors will be admitted on the Island of Coasters Harbour, from and after Monday next, the 10th inst. except by special Permit from one of the Commissioners."[24] Officials evidently wanted to seal the island off from the town, but not because of the quarantine vessels; nowhere in the Board of Health's thirteen quarantine regulations were Newporters forbidden from visiting Coasters Harbor Island. The prohibition on "Visitors" was issued specifically in regard to the asylum, with officials working to ensure that the paupers there would be effectively isolated from their fellow townspeople. Indeed, in spite of frequent requests by the asylum commissioners, it was not until the 1850s that a bridge was built between the island and Newport, and even then the town did not put up money to build the bridge.[25] For town officials, the island that housed Newport's paupers was better left separated from the town itself.
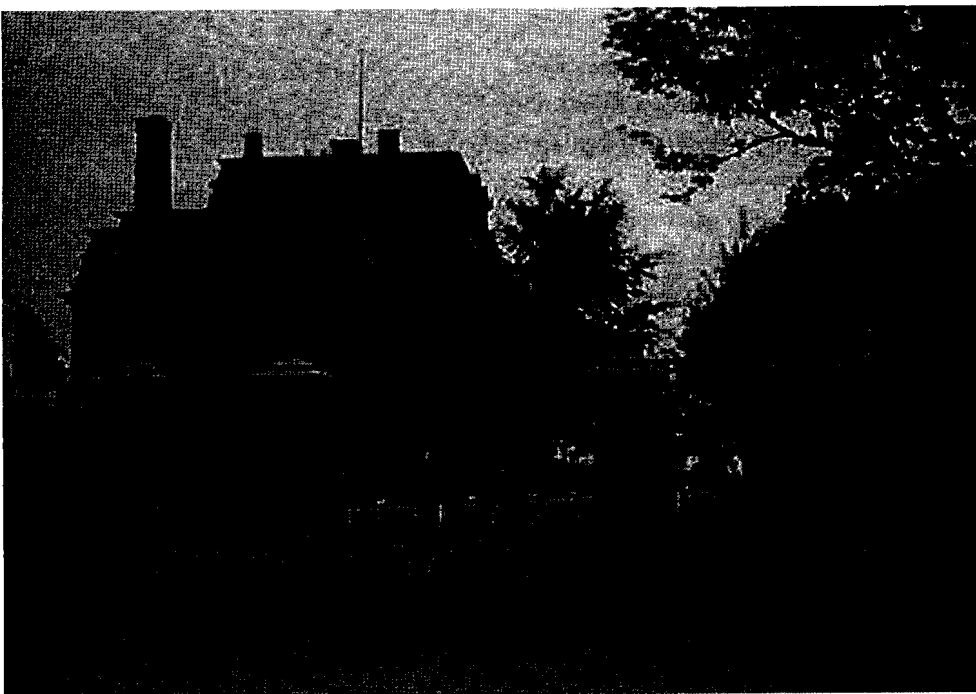
As Newport taxpayers had hoped, the new poorhouse did reduce the cost of caring for the needy, at least during the first few years of its operation. After the initial outlay for construction, public expenses on behalf of Newport's poor were two-fifths of their 1819 level. No doubt the dramatic purging of the outdoor relief rolls contributed to this saving. Foreshadowing future problems, however, within a few months the asylum's commissioners began making exceptions to the town's ban on outdoor relief. They decided, for example, that if one Mrs. Weaver was not well enough to be moved across the harbor to the asylum, she would be provided for where she was.[26] Thus Mrs. Weaver and some other paupers were allowed money even if they remained outside the poorhouse. In general, though, it looked to observers throughout the United States as if poorhouses like Newport's were the solution to the spiraling costs of supporting the poor.

After 1820, communities throughout the Northeast turned to poorhouses out of concerns similar to those in Newport. The consensus among officials seems to have been complete: poorhouses were the cheapest, most moral, and most effective method of providing for the poor. In 1821 Josiah Quincy spoke for Massachusetts's Committee on the Pauper Laws of This Commonwealth in recommending poorhouses to every town in the state. In 1824 John Van Ness Yates, New York's secretary of state, made the same recommendation for every county in New York. In 1827 a report of the

Completed in 1830, a decade after the Newport Asylum, Providence's Dexter Asylum was equally imposing, and although it was not on an island, its immense walls and gates, finished in 1840, could effectively isolate inmates from the spreading city of Providence. Photograph from the Rhode Island Collection, Providence Public Library.

Philadelphia Board of Guardians of the Poor bemoaned the city's tardiness in building a proper poorhouse.[27] In Rhode Island the popularity of poorhouses proceeded apace, spreading from the populous coastal towns to the more rural towns inland. Coastal Bristol built a poorhouse in 1820; Providence, benefiting from the legacy of a former town official, Ebenezer Knight Dexter, opened an impressive new poorhouse in 1830; and the coastal towns of Tiverton, Portsmouth, and Warwick set up their own poorhouses in the 1830s.

In 1844 Scituate became probably the first rural, interior town in the state to establish

a poorhouse.[28] Prior to 1796 the Scituate overseers of the poor usually provided for the needy by placing them with families whose households had room for one or two additional people. In return for providing food, shelter, and clothing to these needy persons, families would receive money from the town treasury, and perhaps would also benefit from the labor of those committed to their care; if able, these paupers would be expected to work on their host's farm or in his household. This practice was sometimes called "auctioning (or venduing) the poor," for at times overseers of the poor did in fact hold auctions and award the care of needy persons to families that promised to charge the least amount of money to the town.

Eventually Scituate's taxpayers grew unhappy with this procedure. They noted that in 1796 the bill for maintaining the poor was $470, while all other town expenses amounted to only $215. In an attempt to contain the increasing expense, voters at a 1796 town meeting decided to consolidate their expenditures on behalf of the poor by approving a contract with one householder, John Aldrich, to take all of the paupers at once.[29] When Aldrich would no longer do this after 1804, town overseers tried to find someone to take his place; they moved all of the paupers, en masse, first to one house and then to another, but almost no one would accept the town's poor for more than one year at a time. Finally, in 1818, the overseers of the poor relented and returned to the old system of contracting out the poor one by one. For the next twenty-six years, it appears that the overseers of the poor sent each pauper to live with a family somewhere in or near the town.

The Scituate Town Council began to look for a site for a poorhouse in 1836, but it could not agree on a place or a price until eight years later.[30] Throughout the long search the constant hope was that a poorhouse would save the town money; in the words of the town council, the search committee was charged to "advise some way to support the poor in order to save expenses either by hiring or buying a farm."[31] With the cost of providing for Scituate's needy

an issue in town politics for at least forty years, in 1844 the town finally bought a farm that would serve as its poorhouse, and it sent many of the town's paupers to live there. When Thomas Hazard came through Scituate on his 1850 inspection of the poor in Rhode Island, he found the poorhouse to be pleasant, and he judged the inmates' breakfast to be plentiful, good, and wholesome.[32]

Although Hazard was usually pleased with towns that had provided poorhouses for the needy, he did not go as far as earlier public reformers had in asserting that poorhouses should replace all other forms of poor relief. Neither was he as concerned with economy as most reformers and town officials were; his 1851 *Report on the Poor and Insane in Rhode Island* was most of all a plea for humane treatment of the poor and insane. Hazard's chief concern was not economy but benevolence. In fact, Hazard explicitly rejected Edward Lawton's condemnation of outdoor relief.

Whereas Lawton had proudly proclaimed in 1823 that Newport would stop all cash relief to Newport residents, Hazard countered that this plan would be harmful to the poor. Instead, Hazard advocated a "mixed" program of relief for towns in the state: he wanted every town to build a poorhouse, but also to provide cash to those who were in need and could be supported in their own homes. "It is cruel when the few grains of sand are running low in life's glass," he wrote, "to rend an old man from the *discomforts*, (if you please) of a home, around which are entwined the cherished remembrances of his childhood's days, and send him away to die."[33] To arguments like that of Edward Lawton, that recipients of outdoor relief would take advantage of the town's generosity, Hazard urged that paupers be given consideration equal to that accorded other town residents. "It is urged by some, against this plan [of mixed poor relief], that, by adopting it, the public is liable to be subjected to an imposition," he wrote. "To meet this it might be said, that other plans subject the *poor* to impositions, which they are quite as unable

The location of another isolated poorhouse, labeled "Town Farm," appears on this undated map of Scituate. Courtesy of Scituate Town Clerk's Office.

to bear as the public." A devout Quaker, Hazard believed that the Rhode Island General Assembly should be motivated more by Christian love than by economic efficiency. "No individual or community," he asserted, "was ever yet made poor by the practice of a liberal, discriminating charity—carried out in good faith—void of any selfish motives lurking at heart, and founded solely on love to God and his creatures."[34]

Although he did not see poorhouses as a solution to fiscal concerns, as so many town governments did, Hazard did see poorhouses as a remedy for other mid-nineteenth-century problems in poor relief. For Hazard, the chief vice of the old system of auctioning the poor to the lowest bidder was not a lack of economic efficiency but a lack of government oversight. Citing examples of neglect and physical abuse, especially of insane paupers, Hazard argued that outdoor relief aside, only state-supervised poorhouses could be depended upon to provide sufficient food, clothing, cleanliness, and care to paupers. "The cruelty

and injustice" of auctioning the poor, Hazard wrote, "is so obvious, that it seems almost insulting to the understanding, to attempt to prove it wrong."[35] For Hazard, it was obvious that when a homeowner made a low bid for the upkeep of a pauper, the pauper's interest in being well clothed and well fed was pitted against the homeowner's interest in minimizing his expenditures for the pauper's care. "It is high time," said Hazard, "that this miserable system of venduing the poor, revolting alike to common humanity and to every precept of the christian religion, was abolished in our land . . . Through it, numberless open as well as secret and unheard of cruelties have been inflicted on poor, feeble, helpless, down-trodden, broken-spirited fellow mortals—placed by their afflictions and misfortunes beyond the pale of our civil, legal, social, and religious institutions; delivered over to be tormented, by the most cruel of their species, with no friend on earth to appeal to—with none to complain to, save the righteous God in Heaven."[36]

The very fact of being a pauper, Hazard said, removed one from protection by civil, legal, social, and religious institutions. After issuing his 1851 report, Hazard even compared the experiences of paupers in Rhode Island to the experiences of enslaved southerners. Referring to Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1853 index of nonfictional cruelty to slaves, Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin, Hazard wrote that he could "collect an authentic narrative of outrages,—wrongs and cruelties equally numerous and atrocious in character as those detailed by Miss Beecher, out of the abuses that have occurred within the last thirty years in the asylums and poor houses of the little State of Rhode Island alone."[37] For this reason, paupers needed special protection: oversight by the government and by the community at large.

Believing that a town's social community was responsible for the care of its paupers, Hazard hoped that townspeople would help prevent abuses by visiting their local poorhouse so that no abuse would go unnoticed. "In building an Asylum," Hazard wrote, "I would

recommend that it should be placed on a public road . . . this operates as a safeguard in some measure for the good treatment of the poor." "Every citizen of the town should take an interest in their Asylum and occasionally visit it," Hazard admonished, "which they will not be liable to do so often if it be located in a place difficult of access, as they would if situated on a road that they necessarily pass in attending to their daily concerns."[38] Hazard believed that such visits would help poorhouse inmates remain part of the social community. His sentiments were apparently the result of his own experiences. Having gained a fortune in textile manufacturing and sheep farming and retired from business at the age of forty-one, he had devoted himself in retirement to a number of reforms, especially that of care for the poor and insane, and his report seems to have grown out of the neighborly visits he made to his town's poorhouse.[39]

Shepherd Tom Hazard's hopes for integrating poorhouses into the community, however, were not realized. Most of these institutions were very isolated. This was true even of the one in Scituate, of which Hazard so heartily approved. Maps of that town in the mid to late nineteenth century show the poorhouse to be one of Scituate's most isolated farms. Located in the town's southwest corner, it shared a lengthy road with only one other residence,[40] and although Hazard found the poorhouse "pleasantly and conveniently situated on the road," it does not appear to have been a road where many of the town's citizens might pass by.

The experiences of paupers prior to the advent of poorhouses varied considerably. It is safe to generalize, however, that these persons usually participated more fully in the social communities of their neighborhoods and towns than paupers who were confined in poorhouses. While participation in social communities is impossible to measure on a large scale, it can be examined in individual cases. One such case is that of Lydia Bates, a

young Scituate woman, who is unusual among nineteenth-century paupers in that she left behind descriptive records of her experiences as a pauper.

Lydia Bates was probably born in Scituate around 1800.[41] In 1818, when the town council reverted to its former method of housing the poor by auctioning them off to local householders, Lydia Bates was one of those auctioned off. By July 1819 she was living at the home of William and Lydia Phillips, who were modest property holders and therefore good candidates to take on one of the town's poor.

Records show that overseers of the poor paid for Lydia Bates's stay in at least six households in Scituate between 1819 and 1822.[42] From this fact alone it is evident that the young woman came in daily contact with each of these families and, most likely, their friends and neighbors. Her stay with the Phillipses, however, left the most records, and from these it is clear that she had a full social life, and that she socialized not only with the family that took her in but also with friends, acquaintances, and neighbors. Simply put, while an auctioned-off pauper at the home of William and Lydia Phillips, Lydia Bates was well integrated into the social community of her Scituate neighborhood.

While living with the Phillipses, Lydia Bates learned that she was expecting a baby. This brought her to the attention not only of the overseers of the poor but also of the justices of the peace and, eventually, of the Rhode

Lydia Bates's "X" signature can be seen on this transcript of an examination of Bates by local justices of the peace. Courtesy of the Rhode Island Supreme Court Judicial Records Center.
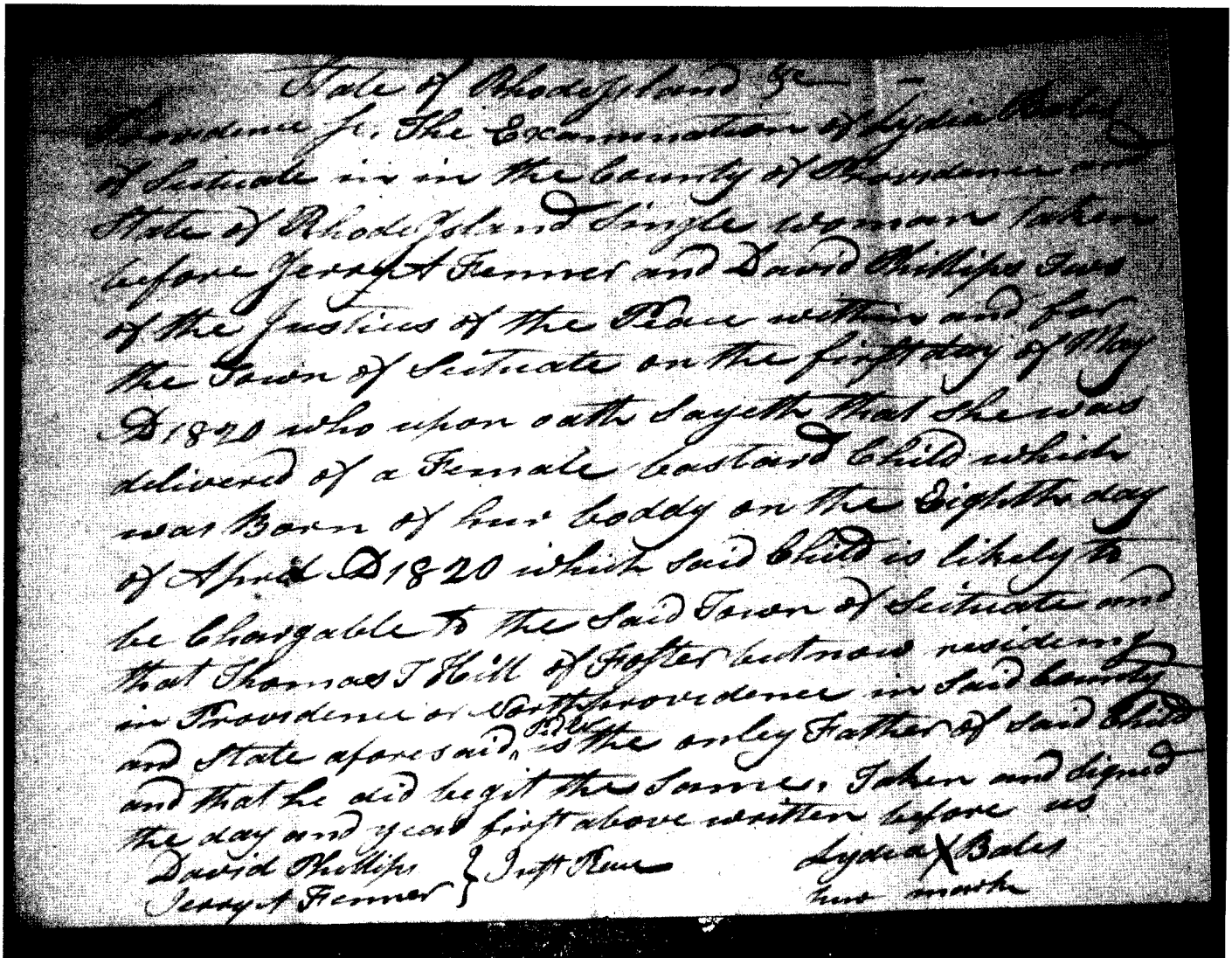
Island Supreme Judicial Court. Each of these government authorities was interested in identifying the father of her baby.

The overseer of the poor never questioned Bates's right to be supported by the town. Presumably her father had a settlement in the town of Scituate, which entitled all of his children to the town's care if they should fall on hard times. But these town rights went through the father, not the mother. Under existing law the financial responsibility for Bates's baby would fall either to the baby's father or to his hometown, but if the father could not be found, it would be the town of Scituate that would bear that responsibility. While it was the overseer's job to ensure that Scituate townspeople were cared for, it was also his job to ensure that Scituate did not spend money caring for people who, in the language of the poor laws, "belonged" to any other town in Rhode Island, or indeed to any other place in the world, but Scituate.

And so the overseer, along with a justice of the peace, set out to find the father. Before, during, and after her baby's birth, Lydia Bates maintained that the father of her baby was Thomas T. Hill, a native of nearby Foster who now lived in Providence. Thomas Hill was a peddler, a traveling salesman who sold earthenware jugs, among other items, from the back of his cart.

Scituate's town sergeant tracked Hill down, arrested him, and brought him before the justices of the peace in Scituate. Hill maintained that he was not the father and should not be responsible for Bates's baby, but with Bates steadfast in her testimony, the justices of the peace ruled that Hill was indeed the father of her baby and ordered him to pay $23.46 immediately and 50¢ a week as long as the child was supported by the town of Scituate.[43] It was at this point that Thomas Hill opted to take the case to the Supreme Judicial Court.

In preparation for his appeal, Hill hired a lawyer and conducted several interviews with acquaintances and neighbors of Lydia Bates. These interviews were aimed at impugning her character—at showing her to be a young woman of loose morals, one who could have conceived a child with any number of men. Aside from Thomas Hill's hostile characterizations of Bates, his interviews provide an unusual insight into the life of an auctioned-off pauper.

These interviews show that despite her status as a pauper and a ward of the town, Bates was able to have a robust social life, both as part of the family she lived with and as part of the social community around her. Witness after witness testified that she had many acquaintances in the neighborhood, that she was free to visit a tavern, and that she even entertained visitors in the Phillipses' home. Lydia Phillips and William Phillips, who had contracted to care for Bates in July 1819, casually recalled her social calls, making it clear that it was not out of the ordinary for this pauper in their home to make and receive visits. Lydia Phillips recalled that Bates was often present when visitors came to the Phillips household and was free to converse with those visitors. When traveling salesman Thomas Hill passed by the Phillips home, it was Bates who went out to meet him, and she came back with an earthen jar. William Phillips even recalled a time when two men came calling for Bates after he had gone to bed, and he did not send them away from his house; "they Came there and I expect that she Let them in," Phillips testified, "and I Got up and we set up all Knight."[44]

It may seem surprising that William Phillips, a householder, should get up to sit with Bates—his dependent pauper boarder—and her two guests for the whole night, but in fact the system of auctioning the poor *allowed* for that sort of intimacy between paupers and the townspeople around them. Merely by their physical presence, scattered as they were around the town, paupers who had been auctioned off were frequently very much integrated into the town community. It should be noted, though, that Phillips did not seem to approve of this particular late night visit, and his implied disapproval may have been one of the pieces of evidence that undermined the Supreme Judicial Court's faith in Bates's word.

Hill won his court case: he was judged by the Rhode Island Supreme Judicial Court not to be the father of Lydia Bates's baby. But whatever the truth or falsehood of the accusations that he made against Bates, those accusations should not taint our understanding of her life as an auctioned-off pauper. Bates had a great deal of personal freedom: she was able to socialize with the householders who took her in, with their neighbors, and with passersby; she came and went from the Phillipses' house as she pleased; she formed a large acquaintance with the men and women around her; in short, she lived a life markedly different from the isolated lives of most paupers confined in poorhouses. Auctioned-off paupers could be vulnerable to serious abuse, but they could also be part of their town's community.

There is no evidence that Bates or her daughter ever had to experience the new form of poor relief that came to Scituate in 1844. After 1827 there is no known mention in town records of either Bates or her daughter. Up until then the town continued to pay local householders, and Lydia Bates herself, for the support of her daughter, whom the town clerk persisted in referring to as "the Child she had by T. T. Hill" for years after the Supreme Judicial Court had declared otherwise.[45]

By 1850 Lydia Bates's hometown of Scituate was one of fifteen towns in Rhode Island that had established poorhouses. When Thomas Hazard made his tour that year, he found a total of 412 inmates in Rhode Island's poorhouses.[46] Another 140 paupers were "sold"—either auctioned off en masse to one householder or contracted out singly or in small groups, as Lydia Bates and her daughter had been. There was no official count of paupers who lived in their own homes, or in the homes of friends or relatives, and who were called "pensioners" or recipients of "outdoor relief."[47] Although the number of poorhouse inmates was small—one-third of 1 percent of the total population of the state in 1850–their numbers had grown

since 1820, and they would continue to grow after 1850. While civic officials and reformers continued to uniformly praise the institution of the poorhouse, poorhouse inmates who left records of their thoughts and feelings were not often pleased with it, largely because of the social isolation that the poorhouse inflicted on them.

Among the few paupers who left behind accounts of their time in a poorhouse was William R. Fales, a native of Portsmouth who became a minor celebrity, known as the "Portsmouth Cripple," while living in that town's poorhouse, the Portsmouth Asylum. Fales was frequently visited by Thomas Hazard, and he even befriended a group of visitors

to the poorhouse from Philadelphia, one of whom later published Fales's memoir and letters from the poorhouse in book form. From this book we can glean a picture of what life in the Portsmouth Asylum was like. The picture that emerges is one of loneliness, hard living, and isolation, a far cry from the social world of Lydia Bates.

A generation younger than Bates, William Fales was born in 1820, the year that Bates

The site of the Portsmouth Asylum, where Thomas Hazard visited William Fales in the late 1840s. Photograph, 1932, from the Rhode Island Collection, Providence Public Library.

gave birth to her baby girl. At the age of six Fales was diagnosed with "inflammatory rheumatism," which meant that his limbs tended to swell and become painful. He battled the disease throughout his childhood, but by the age of sixteen he could not stand, and by the age of twenty he could not sit upright in a chair. At the age of twenty-five he was brought to the Portsmouth poorhouse, because neither he nor his mother could provide for him any longer. When Hazard met him, Fales could barely move by himself, and he was afflicted with an almost continuous pain in his limbs.[48]

It was not his physical condition, however, that attracted Hazard and others to William Fales; rather it was his devout religious faith. From the age of sixteen he had been a devoted

Christian, and he eventually came to see his physical suffering as a means to become closer to God. Indeed, much of his memoirs reads like a prayer for the alleviation of his physical and mental suffering and for his spiritual improvement. Every once in a while, though, Fales described what life in the poorhouse was like for himself and for other inmates. His experiences were no doubt exceptional on two counts—his very painful physical ailment and his popularity with several well-to-do, religious-minded people from as far away as Philadelphia—but that exceptionality does not detract from the insight into the conditions of poorhouse life that his descriptions and observations afford.[49]

Despite his popularity, Fales found life in the poorhouse very lonely. In 1849, for example,

Pages from William Fales's memoirs, published in 1851. Thomas Hazard and other visitors supplied Fales with writing materials. RIHS Collection (RHi X17 130).

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On this occasion he writes to his friends in the following manner:

TO MY PHILADELPHIA FRIENDS.

THE POOR CRIPPLE'S GRATITUDE FOR BENEVOLENT ACTS.

Afflictions protracted and severe have brought me to be acquainted with God, and to feel grateful to him for all the blessings bestowed upon me. Help in time of need, and deliverance from temporal troubles, not only excites my gratitude to the Lord for his goodness, but also to the instruments of his mercies. Of late I have been brought under renewed obligations to my great Creator and Benefactor, for disposing your hearts to contribute to the wants of his very unworthy but poor afflicted creature. And now permit me, my dear friends, in addressing you, to address directly all who have so kindly and generously contributed to my support and comfort, and to return to you all my most sincere and grateful thanks. I believe it will be gratifying to your sympathizing minds to know that you have afforded effectual relief to a poor, tried, and weary suf-

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ferer. I appreciate your kindness. The favour which you have conferred on me was just such as I inexpressibly needed. Oh, that my gratitude may be equal to my blessings both to the great Author thereof, and to those individuals through whom they have been received. I somehow feel so lowly and dependent, that it seems to me I have no right to the enjoyment of these added comforts and privileges, and I can reconcile it in no other way than by the consideration and belief that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof," and therefore it is his right to dispose of his blessings unto whom and in whatever manner He pleases, and that it is indeed through a favourable turn in his providence that this good home has been provided for me in the time of my extremity; yes, it is to the Lord I trace the boon of this pleasant home with its attendant comforts. That the Lord bless and reward you an hundred-fold in this world, and with everlasting happiness hereafter, is the desire of your deeply indebted friend,

W. R. FALES.

he wrote, "I often think if I had a friend near at hand to whom I might unburden my troubled mind, it would alleviate my sorrows. But, alas! I have no such an one here (except it is the Lord)." Noting a month later that Hazard had come to visit, bringing a minister with him, and that two others had visited not long before, Fales was thankful: "you see how good the Lord is to send servants to visit this lonely spot," he wrote to a friend.[50]

Indeed, by many accounts poorhouses were often very lonely places. Hazard recognized this in his report on the poor of Rhode Island. In recommending that poorhouses be built close to public roads, he hoped that this proximity to passersby would bring poorhouse inmates into the community more. Besides other advantages, he said, "the passing and little incidents that occur on the road tend not a little to dissipate the tediousness that often connects itself with the monotonous life the old and decrepid are forced to lead." Having visited William Fales many times, Hazard knew well that life in a poorhouse could be extremely tedious and monotonous. The Portsmouth poorhouse, he noted disapprovingly in his report, was "pleasantly, but inconveniently situated, being quite a distance from an open road."[51]

As perceptive as he was, however, Hazard does not seem to have recognized that the older practice of auctioning the poor allowed paupers to be involved in the wider community in ways that the poorhouse made virtually impossible. He wanted to make it easier for nonpaupers like himself to visit paupers in the poorhouse, but the fact that those paupers were strongly discouraged from making visits of their own to friends and family outside of the poorhouse did not concern him as other disadvantages of pauperism did. Hazard in fact endorsed rules that made it difficult for inmates to leave their poorhouse, recommending that other towns follow the "Laws, Rules &c. for the Warwick Asylum for the Poor." In addition to ensuring good attendance at religious services and good food, the Warwick rules required that "No one shall leave the farm without a ticket of permission

from the Master, or in his absence, from the Matron, specifying the time of such absence; and shall return at the time specified and deliver his or her ticket to the Master or Matron, and for neglect of so doing, shall be denied the priviledge of absence thereafter, unless satisfactory excuse be offered to the Master."[52]

William Fales, of course, could not have left the poorhouse on his own anyway; his severe rheumatism precluded that. With the help of his friends in Philadelphia and Thomas Hazard, however, it was eventually arranged for him to have room and board with a family in nearby Middletown, in a house that abutted one of Shepherd Tom's meadows. To judge by his letters, Fales was delighted with the change; he constantly contrasted the good company and care he had at his new home, occupied by a widow, her daughter, and an aunt, with the trying company of insane inmates and the insufficient care he had endured at the Portsmouth Asylum. His daily interactions with his host's daughter were especially pleasing to him. He was still receiving visitors when he came down with an unnamed disease and died, a few months short of his thirtieth birthday.[53]

Although Fales's case was exceptional, both in the seriousness of his physical ailment and in the celebrity he achieved while in the poorhouse, his observations about the loneliness and dreariness of poorhouse life are telling. The rules that confined inmates to the poorhouse, taken together with the physical ailments of many poorhouse inmates and the remoteness of many poorhouses, made for a very different social situation for paupers in the poorhouse era than their predecessors, like Lydia Bates, had experienced. The stories of Lydia Bates and William Fales are microhistories of the lives of paupers before and after the construction of poorhouses. The change from one era to the next involved a major transformation: in Bates's time, paupers had a separate legal status but were part of the wider social community; in Fales's time, paupers were distant from that community.

The physical and social segregation of paupers had a tremendous potential to shape the way Rhode Islanders—and, in fact, all Americans—came to view poverty and the very poor. Throughout the nineteenth century, Americans grappled with the question of how to organize a society that had rejected many of the status distinctions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British society. Attempts to reenvision legal status can be complex and can lead to problematical resolutions; historians such as Edmund Morgan have shown, for instance, how the enslaved status of African Americans developed simultaneously with the abolition of legal status distinctions between "white" men in the seventeenth century. Similarly, the nineteenth century saw more challenges to old hierarchies, accompanied by the reification of other distinctions. Specifically, white men continued to challenge old inequalities in political life between elites and commoners, while women and African Americans began to challenge legal inequalities on the basis of sex and race. At the same time, however, Americans of every description accepted, and even hardened, distinctions between paupers and everyone else.

Distinctions of legal status, rather than social class, shaped the lives of the very poor in nineteenth-century Rhode Island. Paupers had a legal status different from that of everyone else in society. Town officials had extensive authority over any person they deemed a "pauper," who could be ordered out of town or sent to a poorhouse, there to be strictly controlled. And while white men and, to a lesser extent, white women succeeded in achieving greater formal equality for themselves, states and towns actually created more legal disabilities against paupers over the course of the century, including the first explicit exclusions of paupers from suffrage, the circumscription of the rights of the poor on boats and trains, and the increasing confinement of paupers to poorhouses.[54] Paupers in mid-nineteenth-century Rhode Island were one group that everyone could agree was of a

separate status, even if Rhode Islanders disagreed over the legal status of wage earners, immigrants, African Americans, and women.

While aimed at saving towns money, the rise of poorhouses in Rhode Island also resulted in a widening and stiffening of the legal and social distance between paupers and others. While other Rhode Islanders were renegotiating their legal and social statuses, the status of paupers remained constant. Physical and social isolation compounded the legal inequalities between paupers and everyone else by taking these inequalities so far out of public view as to be almost invisible. When paupers were shut away in remote poorhouses on quiet rural roads, it was less likely that townspeople would notice the increasingly strict regulations and coercive power with which these paupers were governed. Whether intended or not, paupers in the poorhouse era could not socialize the way paupers in the preceding era could, and as their distance from the wider social community increased, they remained just as far from an expanding political community as ever.

Indeed, the Rhode Island Constitution technically prohibited paupers from voting until 1973.[55] Long before this, however, town officials would quietly roll back the efforts of the poorhouse proponents. Rhode Island towns continued to build poorhouses until twenty-eight of thirty-two towns in the state administered poorhouses in the peak year of 1873. After that year, though, town officials provided increasing amounts of outdoor relief, and towns gradually began to discontinue the use of poorhouses. Still, Americans' hopes for economic efficiency in poor relief, the sort of efficiency promised by poorhouses in the 1820s, has never abated.

Notes

1. Records of the Committee appointed by the Town of Newport to contract for, and superintend the erecting of a building on Coasters Harbour Island, to be called The Newport Asylum, 25 June 1819 entry, Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island.

2. Records of the Commissioners of the Newport Asylum Commenced March 21st 1820, 13 July 1820 entry, Newport Historical Society.

3. Thomas R. Hazard, *Report on the Poor and Insane in Rhode Island* (1851; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1973), 39.

4. Hazard, *Report*, 49-50.

5. Newport, Providence, and Middletown already had poorhouses, and Newport and Providence built new poorhouses in this era. Altogether, the Rhode Island towns with poorhouses by 1850 were Middletown (1813), Newport (second poorhouse built 1819), Bristol (ca. 1820), Providence (second poorhouse built 1828), Tiverton (1831-32), Portsmouth (1832), Little Compton (1832), Smithfield (1834), Warwick (ca. 1838), Cranston (1840), Scituate (1844), East Greenwich (1848), Warren (date not determined), North Providence (date not determined), and Cumberland (date not determined). Hazard's *Report on the Poor and Insane* notes which towns had a poorhouse by 1850, and it sometimes notes when those poorhouses were built. On Middletown, see Samuel G. Arnold, *An Historical Sketch of Middletown, R.I.* (Newport: John P. Sanborn & Co., 1876), 36-37. On Newport, see Hazard, *Report*, 10; Margaret Creech, *Three Centuries of Poor Law Administration: A Study of Legislation in Rhode Island* (1936; reprint, College Park, Md.: McGrath Publishing Co., 1969), 174; Anthony S. Nicolosi, "The Newport Asylum for the Poor: A Successful Nineteenth-Century Institutional Response to Social Dependency," *Rhode Island History* 47 (1989): 3-21; and *Newport Mercury*, 10 June 1820. On Bristol, see Hazard, *Report*, 21. On Providence, see Hazard, *Report*, 25-29. On Tiverton, see Creech, *Poor Law Administration*, 255. On Portsmouth, see Creech, *Poor Law Administration*, 255, and Raytheon Employees Wildlife Habitat Committee, "Portsmouth Asylum," http://www.rewhc.org/townfarmintro.shtml (accessed 20 Mar. 2006). On Little Compton, see Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, *Historical and Architectural Resources of Little Compton, Rhode Island* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1990), 17. On Smithfield, see Mary Soulsby, Bruce Coulette, and Kevin McBride, *Report: Phase II Intensive Survey Site RI 1870 (Smithfield Town Asylum)* (Storrs, Conn.: Public Archaeology Survey Team, 1991), 6. On Warwick, see Hazard, *Report*, 46. On Cranston, see "Agreement to Purchase Asylum" in Records of Cranston, Rhode Island, MSS 193, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence. On Scituate, see Creech, *Poor Law Administration*, 171, and Cyrus Walker, "The History of Scituate, R.I., from the Acquisition of the Territory in 1659 to the Close of the Nineteenth Century," manuscript in Scituate Town Clerk's Office, 17-20. On East Greenwich, see Hazard, *Report*, 49, and Martha R. McPartland, *The History of East Greenwich, Rhode Island, 1677-1960* (East Greenwich: East Greenwich Free Library Association, 1960), 169-71.

6. The present study bears out the common assumption among historians of nineteenth-century social welfare that there was a significant change in the lives of paupers during that period. However, perhaps because of the lack of readily accessible sources documenting

the paupers' experiences, most of these historians have focused more on those who provided poor relief or were involved in public discussions of it than on those who were its recipients. This focus has resulted in an overemphasis on the change in American ideas about poor relief while leaving largely unexplored how the lives of the paupers themselves were affected. The present study attempts to demonstrate a change in paupers' experiences that other studies have assumed; but it does not corroborate the contention of many historians that there were fundamental changes in the thinking of local administrators and the public about poor relief and the needy, nor does it necessarily show that the rise of poorhouses in the antebellum period was primarily an effort to exercise social control over the poor, as has sometimes been claimed. The evidence presented here suggests that poorhouses were established primarily to save taxpayers money, and while they increased the social isolation of the poor, it is not always clear that that was their intent. (In Newport, as we shall see, such social isolation does seem to have been intended by some town officials.)

7. Historians have sometimes alluded to the effect of the poorhouse on the social lives of paupers, but they have not often investigated exactly how paupers in the years before the poorhouse era were able to socialize differently from paupers in the years that followed. Michael Katz's national study *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, for example, says that keeping paupers in poorhouses amounted to "shutting up the old and sick away from their friends and relatives to deter the working class from seeking poor-relief," but it provides no evidence to support this idea, and no examples of contemporary concern about such isolation. Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America*, tenth anniversary edition (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 25.

8. The terms "poorhouse," "almshouse," "asylum," "poor farm," and "town farm" were used synonymously in Rhode Island records of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

9. Some towns had "town houses" that served multiple functions, housing town meetings, town council meetings, some poor inhabitants or transients, and sometimes even public taverns. These town houses were not a chief resource of poor relief; they seem to have been used mainly for those poor who were in transition from one town or home to another. See, for example, Roswell B. Burrhard, *The Town of Little Compton: An Historical Address* (Providence: Providence Press, Snow & Farmham Co., 1906), 24-25.

10. On authorized begging, see Creech, *Poor Law Administration*, 37. On badges, see Nicolosi, "Newport Asylum," 5-6.

11. Middletown had built one in 1813.

12. On the expenses of Scituate, for example, see Creech, *Poor Law Administration*, 171-72.

13. Ibid., 172.

14. Newport Town Meetings, 1 Mar. 1819, Newport Historical Society.

15. Edward W. Lawton, Esq., a commissioner of the New-Port Asylum, to J. V. N. Yates, secretary of state of New York, excerpted in J. V. N. Yates, *Report of the Secretary of State in 1824 on the Relief and Settlement of the Poor*, reprinted in *The Almshouse Experience: Collected Reports* (New York: Arno Press & New York Times, 1971), 1081.

16. Creech, *Poor Law Administration*, 173.

17. The only map I have seen that includes the old almshouse is "A Plan of the Town of Newport in Rhode Island," surveyed by Charles Blaskowitz (1777), in Antoinette F. Downing and Vincent J. Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, 2nd ed. (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1967), 97, and in Nicolosi, "Newport Asylum," 4. This map was drawn forty-two years before the old almshouse was largely emptied of its inmates, so it is possible that by 1819 the old almshouse was surrounded by houses. Situated near the intersection of Thames and Farewell Streets, in 1777 it abutted the town graveyard and ropewalk on one side and streets that were probably residential on the other.

18. One tenant, a Mrs. Austin, leased part of Coasters Harbor Island before the town built a poorhouse there. In preparing for construction, the town adjusted her lease in order to take possession of the whole island before the lease's term ended, so the island was completely uninhabited when construction on the asylum began. See

Records of the Committee ... to contract for ... The Newport Asylum, 9 and 23 Mar. 1819, Newport Historical Society.

19. *Newport Mercury*, 24 June 1820.

20. Nicolosi, "Newport Asylum," 7-8.

21. Lawton to Yates, 1081-82.

22. There is no direct evidence that Coasters Harbor Island was chosen specifically for its remoteness. When the town freemen decided to build a new asylum, they decided in a separate vote that it should be in that location, but there is no record of arguments for or against the site or why—apart from the money to be saved— the committee to pick a site considered it the "most eligible place." Coasters Harbor Island was one of a number of town-owned lands. See Committee ... to contract for ... The Newport Asylum, 2 Mar. 1819, and Newport Town Meetings, 1 Mar. 1819. Two days after paupers moved into the new asylum, the asylum commissioners looked into the possibility of building a bridge from the island to the mainland, but they decided that it would be too costly. See Records of the Commissioners of the Newport Asylum, 13 July and 1 Aug.1820, Newport Historical Society.

23. Creech, *Poor Law Administration*, 178; Commissioners of the Newport Asylum, 7 Aug. and 5 Oct. 1820.

24. *Newport Mercury*, 8 July-5 Aug. 1820.

25. Nicolosi, "Newport Asylum," 7-8.

26. Commissioners of the Newport Asylum, 16 Nov. 1820.

27. For these three important reports in Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania, see *Report of the Massachusetts General Court's Committee on Pauper Laws* (1821), *Report of the New York Secretary of State on the Relief and Settlement of the Poor* (1824), and *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Board of Guardians of the Poor of the City and Districts of Philadelphia to Visit the Cities of Baltimore, New York, Providence, Boston, and Salem* (1827), all of which are reprinted in *The Almshouse Experience*.

28. Future research on Cumberland's history may show otherwise.

29. Creech, *Poor Law Administration*, 165-66. Town bills were added up at the end of the year and divided among the property holders, who would thus know
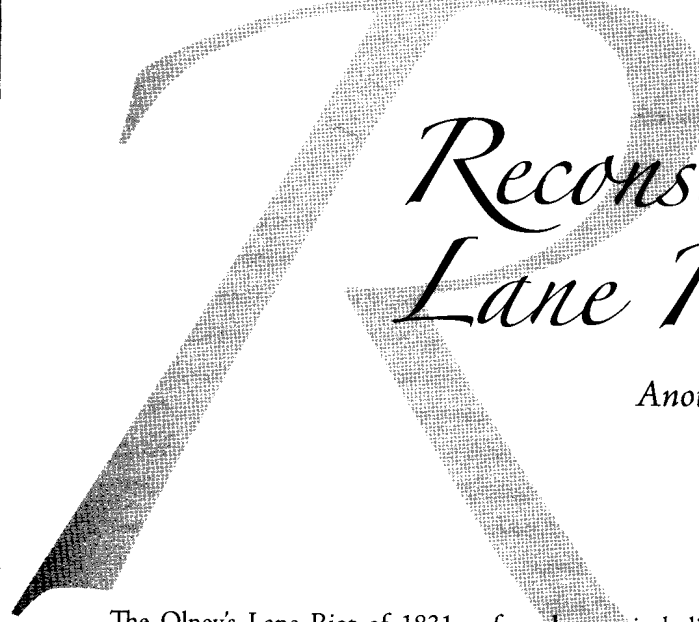
In September 1831 the ship Lion (part of whose bill of lading in shown here) arrived in Providence from Sweden. A short time later a contingent of its sailors attacked a brothel on Providence's Olney's Lane. RIHS Collection (RHi X17 160).

Reconstructing the Olney's Lane Riot:

Another Look at Race and Class in Jacksonian Rhode Island

The Olney's Lane Riot of 1831, a four-day episode of violence in which five men were killed, was a watershed event in the world of working-class Providence, Rhode Island. It was a sailor's brawl that developed into an anti-brothel riot with fatal consequences. Sometimes cited as the nation's first incident of domestic militia action during peacetime, the color of some of the participants and the fact that men of color were both victims and transgressors eventually caused this episode to be characterized as a "race riot," along with many other urban disturbances of the period. An inspection of primary sources suggests, however, that while racial differences were meaningful to participants and observers alike—to members of the working class as well as the ruling class—the riot's central animus was not racial.

Race riots, in which mobs of one race turn upon members of another, usually with attendant atrocities, and often without coherent provocation, have been common enough in American history. In the New York draft riots of 1862, African Americans—indeed, anyone of color, including an exceedingly unlucky Mohawk man—were hunted down and lynched. In Rosewood, Florida, in 1923, Tulsa in 1921, and Detroit in 1943, entire communities suffered brutal retaliation for supposed transgressions of blacks against whites, transgressions which, in the end, could not even be verified.[1]

In contrast, the riots that began with an assault upon a Providence bordello on the evening of 19 September 1831 and ended with state authorities firing on citizens four nights later stemmed from several sources, including shore-leave truculence endemic to the sailor culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the more modern tensions of life in a rapidly growing urban center. While racial differences undoubtedly contributed to the tensions that gave rise to this violent confrontation, this was neither a white-on-black nor a black-on-white riot. Exactly how race figured into the event is open to interpretation; how it became the central causative factor in historical treatments of the episode has more to do with the evolving politics of writing history than it does with the event itself.

Providence in 1831 was an eighteenth-century seaport in the throes of an industrial revolution. Sailors, dockworkers, ship carpenters, caulkers, and other sea-related workers predominated over unskilled manufacturing operatives. With the passage of the state's 1784 gradual emancipation act, growing number of former slaves and their families saw residence in Providence as an opportunity for a fresh start. Initially, Africans and Indians, whether enslaved or free, typically worked as coachmen, cooks, or other domestics and were domiciled with their masters/employers. However, a growing "middle class" of free skilled workers of color could claim ownership of as much as eighteen thousand dollars in real estate. By 1830 one-half of Providence's African Americans and Narragansetts owned their own homes. But as larger numbers of newly freed or otherwise unencumbered people of

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color entered the city, they were constrained to reside in its geographical extremities: on Olney's Lane (present-day Olney Street), in the North End; in Hard Scrabble, a collection of shanties along the west bank of the Moshassuck River between modern-day Orms Street and Chalkstone Avenue; or in Snowtown, another area of rundown dwellings that sprawled along the canal basin where the Moshassuck flowed into the Great Salt Cove, about a half mile from Hard Scrabble. These cheap quarters also attracted poor native whites hopeful of finding their fortunes in the big city, and even more immigrants, most of whom were Irish. Many men from all of these groups earned their living as sailors.[2]

Going to sea has been depicted by Richard Henry Dana and Herman Melville as a romantic rite of passage, and perhaps it was, at least for men who had other prospects. But for most among unskilled seaport youth, it was one of a limited number of options for making a living. Sailoring was no different, in its most important respects, from laboring in a factory. A sailor's hours were long, the work was often alternately dangerous and tedious, the discipline was harsh, and the compensation was low. Indeed, like many factory employees, sailors became caught in a trap of debt peonage, in which wages never exceeded the expenses of being a sailor. This was especially true in the case of whaling expeditions, the longest and most arduous of maritime voyages. Because of the peculiar way a seaman's "lay," or share, might be computed, many a whaling sailor returned after two years at sea having earned nothing and owing the shipping master for his keep during that period.[3]

Sailors who managed to break away from the sea might become entrepreneurs in the food, entertainment, and lodging business for other sailors. Richard Johnson, a black Providence sailor originally from Pennsylvania, opened a "cooky stand," or diner, in the basement of a brothel on Olney's Lane. Johnson's establishment featured cooked meals, rum, fiddling, dancing, and considerable lewdness,

and rows and fistfights there caused the town council to revoke his business license.[4] Similar "victualling cellars," conducted by unskilled workers catering to a decidedly working-class clientele, were commonplace in Providence and other seaport towns.

James "Uncle Jimmie" Axom, another black Providence sailor, retired from the sea in 1820 and opened a sailors' boardinghouse on Transit Street in Fox Point. With his Narragansett wife, Hannah, Uncle Jimmie oversaw the affairs of his boarders, holding their money for "safekeeping," furnishing them with grog, and otherwise providing prostitutes and other entertainments, for which he deducted a large fee. Many a salt, awakening from a drunken stupor, found himself substantially indebted to Uncle Jimmie, who then thoughtfully arranged for payment by signing up his hapless guest aboard the next ship out of town.[5]

According to a contemporary witness, William J. Brown, boardinghouse masters like Jimmie Axom regularly steered their guests to the centers of Providence's "red-light" entertainment.[6] One of these centers was the neighborhood of Olney's Lane, a mixed community of native whites and prosperous Afro-Narragansetts. Noah Brown, the father of black shoemaker-turned-politician William J. Brown, owned property on Olney's Lane; William Caesar, a revered Afro-Narragansett veteran of the Revolution, had an ancient gambrel-roofed cottage on nearby Stevens Street, on the edge of Hard Scrabble. But the area was also the center of the red-light district, some of whose disreputable establishments were owned by such reputable citizens as James Thurber, a woolen mill magnate, and members of the Staples family, one of whom, William Read Staples, a state Supreme Court associate justice, owned several residences housing notoriously dissolute persons. Nicholas Brown, perhaps Rhode Island's most prominent millionaire, petitioned the Providence Town Council for a liquor license for Elizabeth Grainger's tavern, despite its reputation as a brothel. Ezekiel Burr, another respectable citizen, belonged to a family

whose real estate interests included brothels, unlicensed saloons, and other disorderly establishments. Ezekiel Burr's father, Joshua, had in fact purchased Providence's old jail in late 1777 and rented it out as a boardinghouse to Margaret Bowler, a Narragansett Indian woman, who in turn rented rooms to women providing sex for soldiers and sailors during the Revolutionary War.[7] Margaret Bowler's "Old Jail" continued in business until a mob destroyed it in the summer of 1782.

Indeed, though popular with the working class, New England brothels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were the focus of a peculiar ambiguity. Whether animated by some imagined wrong or drunken irascibility, from time to time the sailors and landsmen who frequented them would themselves riot and tear down these centers of entertainment in what Timothy J. Gilfoyle has described as a "spectator sport." "Public women" were considered fair game for the amusement of violence-prone laborers, mischievous boys, and carousing sailors. Portland, Maine, had its great Whorehouse Riot of 1825, carried out by sailors and other patrons. Boston's notorious "Beehive" was taken apart by some of its drones that same year. Though people of color were involved either as clients, prostitutes, or perhaps even as rioters, these episodes fall within the definition of "brothel riots" rather than race riots.[8]

Racial bias was a more important factor in some of these events than in others. It clearly was significant in the Providence riot of October 1824, when a mob of about two hundred white men assaulted the "dance hall" of Henry Wheeler in Hard Scrabble. Since early June of that year black and white laborers had been engaging each other in various challenges involving the occupation of sidewalks and the "Shingle Bridge" that crossed the Moshassuck River at Smith Street. After losing one of these contests, a white gang, led by a local boy of limited mental capacity named Nathaniel Metcalf, tore down several homes, including some owned by decent residents. One such resident,

Christopher Hill, an African American, spent the next winter living in the remains of his house while bitterly refusing any offer of aid, then emigrated to Liberia the following spring. Providence's literate class showed what it thought of the injustice by enjoying a sardonic screed entitled *Hard Scrabble, or Miss Phillis's Bobalition*, a burlesque commemoration of the riot that depicted the community's African American inhabitants as pretentious buffoons, with images of "Pomp and Phillis treading the minuet de la court." No one was punished for the Hard Scrabble Riot in spite of a spirited prosecution by Attorney General Dutee J. Pearce, who insisted that justice be done for the orderly population regardless of color. Nathaniel Metcalf was eventually rewarded for his public-spirited participation in the riot by being appointed town crier.[9]

Such historians as Howard P. Chudacoff and Theodore C. Hirt have identified racial unrest as one of many factors in the social context of the Hard Scrabble Riot. Jim Crow was indeed on the march in early-nineteenth-century Providence. An 1806 curfew ordinance restricted only "persons of color" from engaging in outside activities after 10 P.M. In 1822 the Providence Town Council ordered a special census of "colored persons," which included the identity of the homes where they resided and the owners of those homes, and the General Assembly arbitrarily disenfranchised black voters that same year. Even the city directory became segregated, with African American and Narragansett citizens finding their entries removed to the back of the volume under "Colored Persons" in 1832. But Chudacoff and Hirt also make it clear that the city's first concern in the wake of the Hard Scrabble Riot was the suppression of "rioters and disorderly persons," not people of color per se. Although Providence's ruling class apparently felt that blacks were overly represented among rioters and disorderly persons, the chief worry was not race but crime. Providence's *Literary Cadet and Saturday Evening Bulletin* was in fact relatively egalitarian in characterizing Hard Scrabble as

a locus of "outlawed negroes and abandoned whites," with a further comparison of the spot with London's notorious St. Giles.[10]

Though publicly frowned upon, and provided no fines were imposed, anti-brothel rioting was tacitly encouraged by the artisan and merchant classes, in part because the demolition of buildings in the poor districts targeted not only sailors' dives and other waterfront dens of iniquity but also the homes of black and Native American residents, helping to eliminate the presence of these minorities in the community. In other words, racial bias was a factor, but not the dominant factor, in these riots.

Ezekiel Burr, a respectable citizen of Providence, lived in this house near the Olney's Lane brothel he owned. Photograph by Joseph Sullivan.

The Olney's Lane, or Snowtown, Riot of 1831 began on the evening of 19 September 1831. The proximate cause of the riot was an altercation at Richard Johnson's "cooky stand" in the basement of the "Red House," a two-story brothel owned by Ezekiel Burr on the south side of Olney's Lane.

The Red House was a busy place. Mahala Halsey, the wife of Samuel Greene, lived there with her other "husband," sailor William Jordan. When Jordan was away at sea, Halsey became the "wife" of whoever occupied the room in Jordan's absence. Her close friend, Elizabeth Richmond, had a similar arrangement in another room with Providence laborer Cato Coggeshall and sailor Augustus Williams. Jordan, Coggeshall, and Williams were black. On the evening of the nineteenth, Nancy Bradford and Fanny Lippitt who also lived in the Red House, were entertaining two white sailors, John Stafford and a seventeen-year-old Englishman named Reese. Both the interracial

nature of the clientele and the frequency of violence at the establishment were made clear in Johnson's post-riot deposition: "the upper part of the house was occupied by black and white prostitutes ... and sailors used to resort there. There were frequent fights and riots in the house it would frequently end in the street where they would be dispersed by the Watch."[11]

How one of these fights developed into the Olney's Lane Riot of 1831 depends upon who related the events. According to Johnson, his cooky stand had been closed by the town council the previous week because of the frequent noisy altercations there. Johnson and a white man named Vose were packing up the furniture on the evening of 19 September when a mob appeared out of nowhere and began throwing stones at the house. When Johnson emerged from the basement, he saw Augustus Williams, William Jordan, and Cato Coggeshall, all three of them armed, battling with "six or seven men." After carrying his sea chest to Ezekiel Burr's house for safekeeping, Johnson returned to the Red House in time to witness Jordan and Williams firing guns at a growing throng. According to Johnson, Williams not only fired his own weapon but grabbed Coggeshall's and fired that as well. After being hit by a rock, Johnson ran up Olney's Lane to his parents' house and hid there until an approaching gang prompted him to leave the house and flee to New York City the following week. Johnson denied having or firing any weapon, and he denied any physical involvement in the fighting. His deposition made it clear that William Jordan kept guns in the flat he shared with Mahala Halsey.[12]

Upon returning to Providence, Johnson was imprisoned with Jordan, Coggeshall, Williams, John Gardner, and seven white men who had been apprehended by the militia during the riots. Six of the white rioters were eventually released on bail. Jordan was found to have smallpox and was removed to the city pesthouse, where he died two weeks later. Johnson, Williams, and Gardner were indicted by the Providence County grand jury for manslaughter in the death of Swedish sailor George Erickson.[13]

Details of grudges between Red House inhabitants and customers were revealed at the trial. James G. Armington, a white soda-shop owner and occasional sailor, had recently been ejected from Johnson's cooky stand for unruly behavior. On Olney's Lane a week before the riot, he had met Cato Coggeshall, who had just changed paper money into coins, and slapped the coins from Coggeshall's hand. Armington's schoolboy antics continued on the evening of the riot. After carousing at Johnson's for several hours, Armington refused to pay the fiddler, a white female, to whose music he had been dancing. After being ejected and beaten by John Gardner, Armington staggered down Olney's Lane, where he encountered a party of seamen. Attracted by the prospect of a brawl, the seamen attacked the Red House with rocks. With help from William Jordan, sailor John Gardner, and the white sailors Stafford and Reese, Johnson and Williams drove off the mob with shotguns and pistols. When a second contingent of sailors, recently arrived on the ship *Lion* from Gothenburg, Sweden, also attacked the house, one of them, George Erickson, was killed by a load of buckshot fired from Williams's gun. Sailors William Hull (from the ship *Ann and Hope*), William Henry, Jack Smith, and John Phillips were wounded. The black sailors, Williams, Johnson, Jordan, and Gardner, were seized by constables and jailed, but Stafford and Reese made their getaway.[14]

Such sailors' brawls were common in seaports all over the world, and Olney's Lane had already seen its share. Indeed, the town council had cited Richard Johnson the previous July for allowing disorderly persons to assemble at his cooky stand, and then, according to Johnson's testimony, it had closed the establishment because of the rowdiness there. But this time a white sailor had been killed and the killer had been black, a situation that electrified the city's artisans and changed the event, at least for posterity, from a sailors' brawl to a race riot.

William Hull was fifteen years old when he received seamen's protection certificate 1696, recorded in this customhouse register, in 1827. He was one of the sailors injured in the 1831 fracas at the Red House. RIHS Collection (RHi X17 159).

Over the next three evenings, mobs of a thousand or so enraged carpenters, shoemakers, storekeepers, and other largely skilled workers demolished a dozen houses popularly considered to be brothels and unlicensed grog shops. Rosanna Jones's brothel on Hewes Street was attacked, and mobs broke the windows in Elizabeth Grainger's house at 1 Smith Street. Houses in Snowtown, including the one rented by John Gardner's mother and sister, were leveled. Several Olney's Lane houses, including the Red House, were gutted. The violence lasted until the evening of 23 September, when the militia was forced to fire into an unruly crowd, killing four and wounding six others—all white.[15]

The black Olney's Lane defendants were to be tried individually. It took a year for Augustus Williams to be brought to trial, where he was convicted of voluntary manslaughter for shooting George Erickson and was sentenced to nine months in prison and a two-hundred-dollar fine. Attorney General Albert C. Greene then declined to proceed against Richard Johnson and John Gardner, and they were released. Gardner was later rearrested on James Armington's complaint and convicted of assault, for which he received a three-month sentence and a fine of fifty dollars.[16]

By far Rhode Island's worst disturbance since the Revolution, the Olney's Lane Riot was described in contemporary newspaper accounts, as well as in Providence's own published investigation, as a conflict between lower classes

of people, without reference to color. The chief cause of the disturbance, according to the town fathers, was the presence of disreputable resorts such as the Red House, which attracted "noisy, idle and dissolute persons."[17]

The racialized view of the Olney's Lane Riot seems to have begun sixty years later, in a climate of increasing animosity toward people of color in the United States. Henry Mann's popular 1889 history of the Providence police force describes Olney's Lane (which the author fails to distinguish from Snowtown) as "inhabited chiefly by idle blacks of the lowest stamp. Some of the houses were occupied by an indiscriminate mixture of whites and blacks." However, Mann reveals the existence of many "decent residents" of the neighborhood whose complaints to authorities about the dissolute lifestyles of their neighbors were ignored. Richard Bayles's 1891 *History of Providence County* asserts that the rioting was caused by "sailors bent on having a row with negroes." Some seventy years later, in the midst of the Civil Rights movement, Peter Coleman's *Transformation of Rhode Island* (1963) furthered this conception of the Olney's Lane affair by describing it as one of drunken sailors invading "the Providence Negro district."[18] In fact, neither Snowtown nor Olney's Lane was exclusively black; they were, however, almost exclusively humble, and the venue of most of Providence's "disorderly houses."

Members of any growing population that is marginalized and limited to a shrinking pool of obsolescent pursuits will be forced to consider economic opportunities afforded by providing illicit and unsavory services. A perusal of the "colored pages" of the Providence city directories from 1832 to 1848 does not reveal a single person of color employed in the city's burgeoning textile, iron, glass, or jewelry factories. Even the declining shipbuilding industry employed just one black rigger; other skilled shipyard trades were occupied only by whites. The economic marginalization of much of Providence's black community undoubtedly

helped to steer many—though by no means most—toward dead-end employment as dealers in stolen goods, prostitutes, or bawdy-house proprietors. An attack on vice can therefore be seen as an attack on any racial or ethnic group thus represented.

For this reason the racial aspect of the Olney's Lane Riot has overshadowed other more significant factors. True, the sailors who attacked Richard Johnson's cooky stand were white, and though arrested and confined with Johnson and the other Red House defenders, they were never indicted, while Johnson, Williams, and Gardner were indicted for manslaughter. This reflects a judicial bias in favor of whites. That the attackers singled out Johnson and his fellow sailors as men of color was evident in the trial testimony. At least one witness recalled the attacking mob exclaiming, "Let's get the negroes!" Augustus Williams (who put the blame for Erickson's death on Johnson) recalled Johnson asking, "Is this how we negroes are supposed to live? To be obliged to defend themselves from stones?"[19]

But Reese and Stafford, who fought to defend the bordello alongside Johnson, Williams, Jordan, and Gardner, were white. That the Olney's Lane Riot was yet another episode in the prevailing seaport brawls between seamen—perhaps a precursor to the urban gang warfare that sprang up in New York and other cities in the next decade—is revealed by William Jordan's preparation as the attack on the Red House began. Though he was already dressed, Jordan donned his sailor's garb—straw hat, "monkey jacket," and white duck pants—before joining his black and white comrades in the street. One could speculate that he thought it important to establish his credentials as a sailor in the eyes of other sailors, suggesting, perhaps, that he saw the affray as a battle between rival sailors rather than between races.[20]

Neither the state nor the community at large pursued retributive justice against any of the defendants. Three black men were indicted, but only Augustus Williams was convicted, and
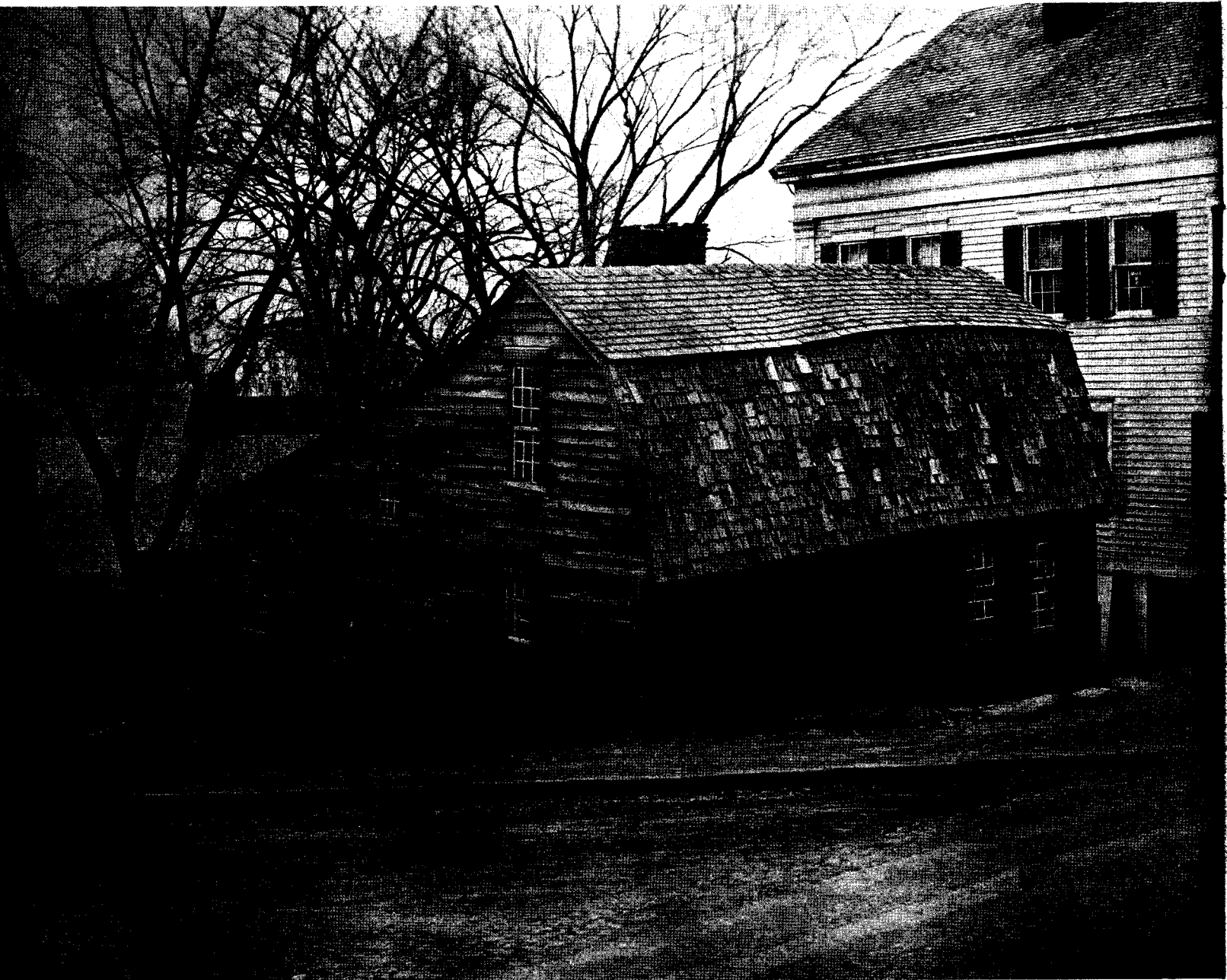
*Much property damage was inflicted in
the 1831 rioting, but the home of the Afro-
Narragansett William Caesar, in the vicinity
of Providence's red-light district, remained
unscathed. RIHS Collection (RHi X17 158).*

the charge against him was not capital murder, as might have been expected in an atmosphere of race hatred, but voluntary manslaughter. During his trial the defense suggested that since Williams, Johnson, and Gardner were tenants at the Red House, they had a degree of proprietorship that mitigated their conduct in trying to protect it; and the fact that the prosecution was content to indict the three men on the lesser charge suggests that the state's white citizens agreed to this course of action. The anger and vengeance that the public displayed during the rioting faded quickly. There was no vigilante attack on the Providence jail when Attorney General Greene declined to prosecute Gardner and Johnson, and both were released without incident. Augustus Williams continued to reside in Providence for many years as a laborer after serving his sentence.[21]

Moreover, respectable black people in the vicinity were never threatened, nor were they molested in other parts of Providence. William J. Brown, who chronicled the riot, apparently felt no personal fear of attack. As in brothel riots in other ports, the destruction of property was strictly limited to "red-light" areas, in this case Olney's Lane, Hewes Street, and the vicinity of Snowtown.[22] Also noteworthy is the class of the white townspeople involved in the subsequent attacks on bordellos. Of the four men killed by the militia, only one was a sailor; the others were a paperhanger, a bookbinder, and a blacksmith's apprentice, all skilled workers. The wounded were also part of the skilled artisan class: these included Josias Luther, whose family ran a prosperous leather business;[23] Daniel Branch, a housewright from Mill Street, on the edge of Hard Scrabble, who was a leader in the rioting and was wounded by a saber when he attempted to grab a musket from a militiaman; and Reuben Pearson, a skilled machinist, who was one of the few rioters arrested. What can account for the absence among the rioters of the Irish and Yankee factory workers, and such other unskilled or semiskilled drudges as woodcutters, teamsters, and laborers,

who made up so much of Providence's white workforce? It appears that class dynamics paid a much more salient role in this riot than did racial animosity.[24]

The construction of the Olney's Lane Riot as solely a racial incident can be accomplished only at the expense of certain historical realities. First, while the manifold expressions of racism in Jacksonian Rhode Island cannot be denied, it is clear that the fracas that ignited the subsequent rioting was precipitated by no more than the kind of well-documented rowdy masculine horseplay that informed much of the culture of sailors around the world. The attack on the Red House cannot be seen merely as white-on-black violence in light of trial testimony that revealed the presence of two white sailors, Reese and Stafford, who joined in the brothel's defense.

Second, the preponderance of people of color on the economic margin of the Providence economy, the victims of deliberate occupational segregation, placed many African Americans and Native Indians in undesirable neighborhoods and therefore provided the occasion for their association with places of vice. William J. Brown bemoaned this reality and blamed the "class of bad men and women" of color for besmirching the reputations of the virtuous people of color who were forced to live among them. The rioters of 1831 were able to tell the difference: only structures notorious as bawdy houses were attacked.[25]

Finally, the riots' suppression and their aftermath suggest that Providence's black community was treated relatively fairly. Only Williams was prosecuted for shooting Erickson, and for the lightest charge possible in a homicide. The other defendants were released without trial. The authorities blamed the lower classes for the disturbances, without distinction as to color. The Providence town government responded by obtaining a city charter and increasing the size of its watch, but there were no lynchings and no further legal disabilities applied to persons of color.

The history of racial conflict in America is appallingly extensive, yet race is not the only, or even the deciding, factor in every episode that might involve a conflict between two or more persons of different races, nationalities, or ethnic identities. A late-nineteenth-century attack on Lager Bier saloons in New York City's German neighborhood by radical temperance activists, for instance, was a riot against German immigrants only in a very narrow sense; the event cannot be fully understood without considering the history of temperance advocacy and the propensity toward social violence in America, and calling it an anti-German riot may miss the point. Given the preponderance of people of color residing in Providence's brothel district, a classic seaport brothel riot could not have occurred anywhere in the city without involving persons of color. That circumstance makes the racism of Olney's Lane an incidental rather than a determining factor.

Notes

1. For Rosewood, Detroit, and Tulsa, see Michael D'Orso, "*Like Judgment Day": The Ruin and Redemption of a Town Called Rosewood* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1996); Robert Shogan and Tom Craig, *The Detroit Race Riot: A Study in Violence* (Phildadelphia: Chilton Books, 1964); Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

2. Several works deal with race and the urbanization of Rhode Island: Peter J. Coleman, *The Transformation of Rhode Island, 1790-1860* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1969); Ruth Wallis Herndon, *Unwelcome Americans: Living on the Margin in Early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998). For an appraisal of black property ownership, see Julian Rammelkamp, "The Providence Negro Community, 1820-1842." *Rhode Island History* 7 (1948): 20-33.

3. Jeffrey Bolster, *Blackjacks: African-American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), and Frederick L. McKissack and Patricia C. McKissack, *Black Hands, White Sails: The Story of African-American Whalers* (New York: Scholastic Press, 1999), survey the experiences of black sailors during this period.

4. Deposition of Richard Johnson, *State vs. Richard Johnson and Augustus Williams,* Albert C. Greene Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society.

5. *The Life of William J. Brown, of Providence, R.I.* (1883; reprint, Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries, 1971), 72.

The universality of this practice is suggested in Judith Fingard, *Jack in Port: Sailortowns of Eastern Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 1982).

6. *Life of William J. Brown,* 77.

7. Fifth Decennial Census of the United States (1830); Herndon, *Unwelcome Americans,* 18; *Providence Journal,* 24 Sept. 1831.

8. Timothy J. Guilfoyle, "Strumpets and Misogynists: Brothel Riots and the Transformation of Prostitution in Antebellum New York City," in *The Making of Urban America.* edited by R. A. Mohl (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1997), 13.

9. *Providence Patriot,* 29 Oct. 1824; *Hardscrabble Calendar* (Providence, 1824).

10. Howard P. Chudacoff and Theodore C. Hirt, "Social Turmoil and Governmental Reform in Providence, 1820-1832 *Rhode Island History* 31 (1972): 21-31; Providence Town Papers, 1806, 1822, Rhode Island Historical Society; Providence city directories, 1830 and 1832.

11. Depositions of Richard Johnson and John Gardner, *State vs. Johnson and Williams,* Greene Papers.

12. Deposition of Richard Johnson.

13. *State vs. Johnson and Williams.*

14. Ibid.; *Providence Journal,* 25 Sept. 1831.

15. Ibid.

16. *State vs. Johnson and Williams; State vs. John Gardner,* 1832, Rhode Island Supreme Court Judicial Records Center, Pawtucket.

17. *State vs. Johnson and Williams.*

18. Henry Mann, *Our Police* (Providence, 1889), 44; Richard Bayles, *History of*

Providence County in Three Volumes
(Providence, 1891), 2:107; Coleman,
Transformation, 129.

19. *State vs. Johnson and Williams.*

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid. Providence City Directory, 1844.

22. *Providence Journal*, 24 Sept. 1831.

23. Josias was the brother of Seth Luther, a
leader and organizer of Rhode Island's
budding labor movement. Seth was quick
to place a notice in the *Providence Journal*,
25 Sept.1831, informing the public
that his brother had been an innocent
passerby.

24. *Providence Journal*, 24 Sept. 1831. An
expansive portrait of antiracist working-
class solidarity is Peter Linebaugh and
Marcus Rediker, *The Many Headed
Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and
the Hidden History of the Revolutionary
Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).
The presence of middle-class artisans
in Jacksonian riots is explored by
Leonard Richards, *Gentlemen of Property
and Standing: Anti-Abolition Riots in
Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford
University Press, 1970).

25. *Life of William J. Brown*, 39.