



Rhode Island History

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Engraved from a Daguertype Miniature by A. J. Dick

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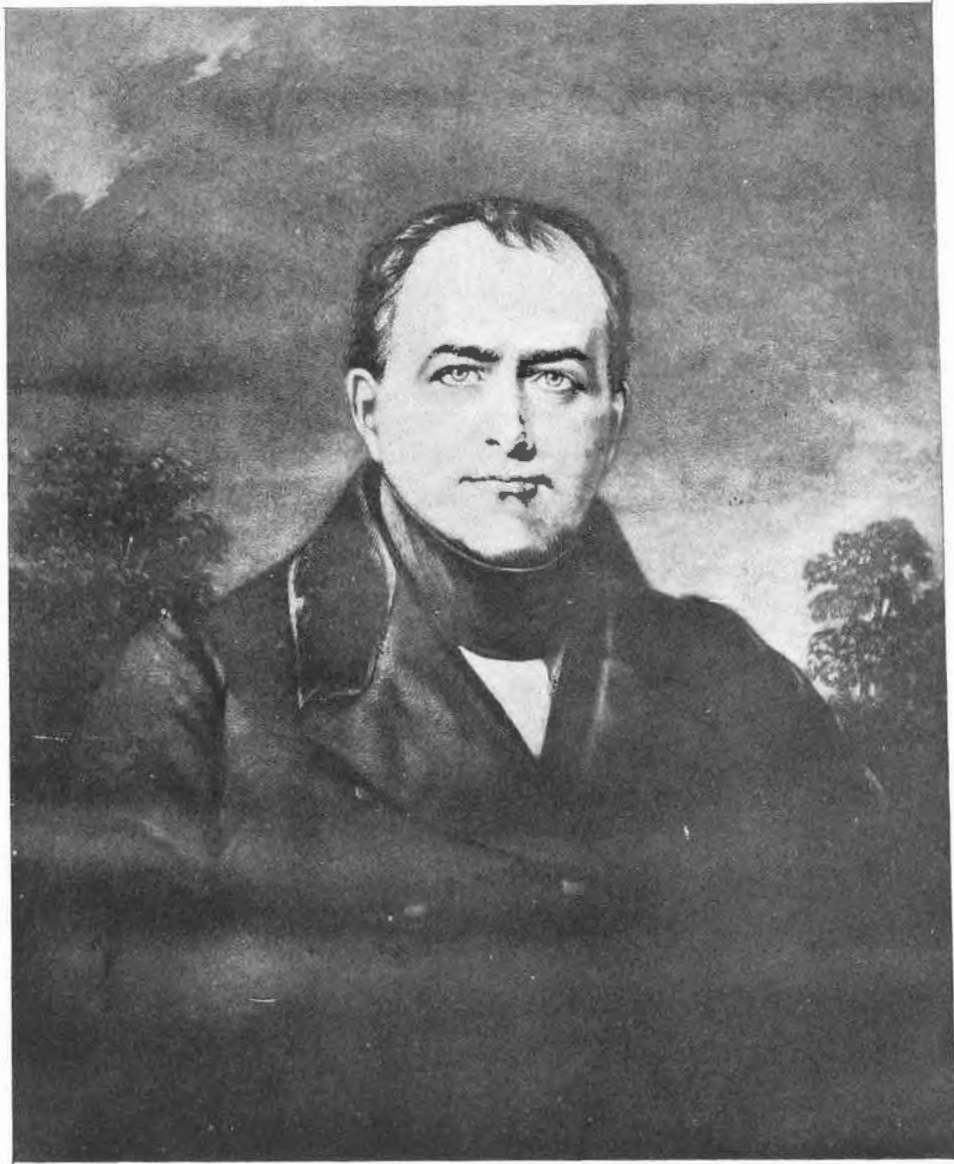
To Our Readers:

As many of you know, because of Rhode Island's serious financial difficulties the state has cut \$150,000 from its support of the Rhode Island Historical Society. We are therefore looking throughout the organization for ways to save money, and *Rhode Island History* must be scrutinized as well.

In an effort to cut costs without sacrificing quality, beginning with the next volume the Rhode Island Historical Society will publish *Rhode Island History* twice rather than three times a year, thus providing considerable savings on postage. At the same time, the number of pages in each individual issue will increase substantially, not only enabling us to continue providing our readers with the same amount of high-quality scholarship as before but perhaps even allowing us to introduce more variety into the publication.

We sincerely hope that you, our readers, will understand the change, and we thank you for your continuing support.

Luther Spochr, Ph.D.
Chairman
RIHS Publications Committee



Elected People's governor in April 1842, Thomas Wilson Dorr sought to solidify his insurgent government by seizing the state arsenal in Providence the following month. Daguerrotype, 1842, Rhode Island State Archives.



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A Call to Arms: Thomas Wilson Dorr's Forceful Effort to Implement the People's Constitution

In the spring of 1842 Rhode Island was torn between competing legal systems, rival governors, and separate legislative assemblies. The People's government was led by Thomas Wilson Dorr. Dorr and his followers founded their government on the ideal of popular sovereignty, with a constitution that was ratified by an unauthorized popular referendum the previous winter. The Charter government was led by Governor Samuel Ward King. King's government received its authority from Rhode Island's original royal charter of 1663, which the state had failed to replace with a modern constitution after severing its ties with England. The Charter government justified its authority not by popular consent but by the legitimacy that came with nearly two hundred years of relatively stable and prosperous governance.

Both governments claimed to be the legitimate authority of the state, and the supporters of each side, including armed militias, swore to defend their respective governments. The rival groups worked hard to win allies within the federal government and neighboring states. The federal government reluctantly supported the Charter side and promised to send federal troops to Rhode Island should the conflict turn violent. Leading authorities in neighboring states, including armed militias in New York, were outraged by this apparent federal meddling and pledged support for the People's government. This essay tells the story of the military confrontation that unfolded when Thomas Dorr and his supporters attempted to forcefully implement the People's Constitution in the spring of 1842.

promise of military assistance from supporters in New York, Thomas Wilson Dorr returned to Rhode Island to settle unfinished business. The People's governor departed the Empire State by ferry on Saturday evening, May 14, 1842, and traveling up Long Island Sound, he passed Fishers Island and arrived at the small seaside town of Stonington, Connecticut, early Sunday morning.¹ By 2:00 P.M. word had reached Providence that Dorr was in Stonington, and by day's end a group of two hundred supporters, many carrying small arms, had come to Stonington by special train to greet their leader. Early the next morning Governor Dorr and his armed entourage boarded the Stonington Line and traveled by rail to the Providence depot on Allens Avenue, arriving there at 10:00 A.M.²

With about three thousand supporters turning out to greet him, Dorr was treated to a hero's welcome upon his arrival in Providence. An impromptu parade of twelve hundred followers, a quarter of whom were armed, formed a procession that snaked through the city's streets for more than two hours.³ The line of mechanics, roughnecks, and other working-class citizens included a hundred members of organized militias, seventy-five men on horseback, and a boisterous marching band. At the head of the line was Governor Dorr, carrying a sword and riding in an open-air barouche pulled by a team of four white horses.

From alleys and windows those on the Charter side watched the scene in disgust and horror. The Charter regime's sheriff of Providence, Roger Potter, held an arrest warrant for Dorr, but he dared not execute it; along with other

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Having failed to win the support of President John Tyler in Washington, but granted the

Charter officials, he viewed the procession from a safe distance.⁴ Armed men were now defiantly parading through the city's streets, and the state's established authorities appeared powerless to stop them. "When I saw Dorr himself surveying with cool atrocity, streets through which he had determined to spread dismay and death—when I saw all this and no hand to prevent it, I confess that my faith in Rhode Island courage and love of liberty nearly failed me," said one Charter supporter. "My blood boiled with indignation."⁵

Dorr's parade ended at the home of Burrington Anthony, a former federal marshal who had been elected as the People's sheriff of Providence. Anthony's home, which Dorr's men made their headquarters, was located on Atwells Avenue on Federal Hill, a short distance west of the town center. The home enjoyed both the tactical advantage that comes with height and the additional advantage of being just outside the heart of town, a safe distance from where the Charter government met. It was also close to the state arsenal on Cranston Street, a half mile to the southwest. Should the Charterites attempt to obtain the arms at the arsenal, they would have to pass near Dorr's men; and should Dorr decide to take the arsenal, his forces would have unimpeded access to it.

After hours of travel and covered in dust, Dorr stood in his raised carriage outside Anthony's home and delivered an impassioned forty-five-minute speech. One Charter supporter recalled that while Dorr spoke, he was "one of the most fierce looking men I ever saw."⁶ No transcript of the speech has survived, but most accounts relate that Dorr reiterated his now common themes of popular sovereignty and expanded suffrage. His supporters had read the arguments in *The Nine Lawyers' Opinion*, of which Dorr was one of the authors, and in dozens of articles in the *New Age and Constitutional Advocate*, a Providence suffragist newspaper. They had heard Dorr and others make similar speeches at mass rallies, at the People's Constitutional Convention the previous fall, and at the People's inauguration on May 3. They had directly supported the ideas in two statewide

elections, one in favor of the People's Constitution and another in favor of the People's government, and they had indirectly supported the ideas in a third statewide election, one in which a majority of the state's voters rejected the Charterite-drafted Landholders' Constitution.

Dorr restated the case that legitimate governmental authority is derived from the consent of the governed and that the majority of the state's population had chosen to replace the Charter government with the democratically elected People's government. He recounted the ills suffered under the old regime, including malapportionment of the General Assembly and limited suffrage. He condemned the Assembly for enacting the so-called Algerine Law, which directed harsh penalties against those who participated in elections, or claimed office, under the People's Constitution, and he denounced the Charter authorities for resisting the will of the people with the threat of federal troops. He asserted that there were numerous supporters of expanded suffrage throughout the nation, and that in places like New York and Pennsylvania, they were preparing to assist the Rhode Island reformers. He explicitly stated that he had been promised five thousand men from New York. Should the hired forces of the federal government enter the fray, he promised, "the contest will then become national and our State the battleground of American freedom."⁷

Dorr had good reason to mention the support from surrounding states, as he had been given a hero's welcome by the leading figures of Tammany Hall in New York.⁸ His excursion there had ended with a parade in which an estimated five hundred supporters, accompanied by a band and a company of volunteer firemen, encouraged him to continue Rhode Island's constitutional struggle, and he was presented with a letter, co-authored by two New York military leaders, Col. Alexander Ming and Lt. Col. Abraham Crasto, that offered him the service of "several military companies."⁹ Levi D. Slamm, the editor of the *New Era*, a New York newspaper that strongly backed the suffragist cause, informed Dorr that he had chartered a steamboat to carry a thou-





sand armed supporters to Rhode Island should fighting erupt.¹⁰ These pledges were added to commitments that Dorr had already received from Allan Sniffen, a supporter who promised him that New Yorkers by the hundreds stood ready to back his cause; from Louis Lapham, an abolitionist from Massachusetts who pledged the backing of three hundred armed men; and from still other supporters in Pennsylvania.¹¹

The likelihood that the federal government would enter the conflict and that the Dorrites would require outside assistance was quite real. A month earlier, on April 11, 1842, President John Tyler shocked the suffragists by granting Governor King the ultimate instrument of

intimidation, a letter pledging federal support. "Should the time arrive (and my fervent prayer is that it may never come) when an insurrection shall exist against the government of Rhode Island, and a requisition shall be made upon the Executive of the United States to furnish that protection which is guaranteed to each State by the Constitution and laws, I shall not be found to shrink from the performance of a duty," Tyler wrote.¹² Thus President Tyler had taken sides in the dispute, a fact that was reprinted in the press and was widely known throughout the state.¹³

Beyond his letter, Tyler's actions suggested that he was prepared to make good on his threat. On April 25, 1842, Col. A. C. W. Fanning, in

Dorr made his headquarters at Burrington Anthony's house on Federal Hill. Rhode Island State Archives.

command of U.S. troops at Fort Monroe, Virginia, was ordered to fill two companies and to report to New York harbor, within striking distance of the quickly escalating Rhode Island conflict. One day later the War Department ordered Col. James Bankhead, the commanding officer of U.S. forces at Fort Columbus, New York, to fill two additional companies and to prepare for "detached service."¹⁴ Colonel Bankhead and the two artillery companies arrived at Fort Adams in Newport, Rhode Island, on May 2, 1842.

The federal government kept abreast of the latest developments in the crisis through the use of espionage. A letter from army headquarters in Washington, signed by the assistant adjunct general (ironically named Freeman), authorized Maj. Matthew M. Payne, commanding officer of the federal troops at Fort Adams, to "[e]mploy any means in your power to obtain accurate information as to the probability of a conflict between the two political parties now understood to be ready to resort to arms for the possession of the government of Rhode Island." Well aware of the controversy that might erupt should the use of federal spies be made public, officials at army headquarters quickly followed this letter with a second letter by Freeman: "In reference to my letter to you of yesterday, I am instructed by Major General Scott to desire you to hesitate much about sending an officer for the purpose of obtaining intelligence in Providence, and not to do so if you can obtain the services of any other discreet, intelligent citizen; because the purpose of the detached officer, whether in uniform or not, would be liable to be suspected—which might do much harm in the present excited state of public feeling in Rhode Island."¹⁵

The congressional report of the 1844 investigation into the federal government's role in suppressing the People's government summarized the situation this way: "He [President Tyler] sent a military officer as requested, to Rhode Island, who was to act in concert with the Charter authorities. He had delivered two companies of artillery, with a full compliment of effective men, ready for active and 'detached' service, to enter the territory of Rhode Island. He

also placed two companies more, equally effective, and prepared for active service, within ten hours' sail, and in striking distance of the state; and had established a military espionage over the people of the state."¹⁶ It was in this climate, with the reality of federal involvement materializing and the hope of outside support growing, that Thomas Dorr addressed his supporters.

What distinguished the speech from others that he had delivered was that Dorr's usually thoughtful manner had been replaced by raw passion. At one point Dorr raised a sword in the air, a sword that had been given to him by supporters in New York, and announced that it had been "dipped in blood once, and rather than yield the rights of the people of Rhode Island, it should be buried in gore to its hilt." A witness to the speech recalled Dorr saying that "he was willing to die with that sword in his hand, if need be, to sustain the Constitution of the State." The *Providence Express*, a pro-Dorr publication, reported Dorr declaring "his readiness to die in the cause in which he had sacrificed everything but his life" and vowing that the sword's "ensanguined blade should be again imbued with blood, should the people's cause require it."¹⁷

Dorr's emotions ran hot, and his heated rhetoric would soon demand corresponding actions. The People's governor was preparing the crowd, and perhaps himself, for the battle to come, with the speech serving as the bridge from words to deeds. Peaceful means for resolving this irreconcilable conflict had been exhausted. For those who lacked the desire or will for armed struggle, the time had come to depart the cause; for those willing to fight for political rights, it was now time to take up arms.

Tuesday, May 17, 1842, early afternoon. At 1 p.m. on May 17, the day after Dorr's arrival in Providence, his followers fired their signal guns, calling his supporters to assemble at Dorr's headquarters on Federal Hill.¹⁸ Dorr gave the order for militia companies from Woonsocket, Pawtucket, and Gloucester to report to Providence for military duty,¹⁹ and as he waited for

the arrival of reinforcements from the north, his supporters in Providence sprang into action.

Around eighty of Dorr's men marched to the heart of Providence and seized two cannons from the basement of the headquarters of the United Train of Artillery, one of the city's militia groups that were somewhat sympathetic to the Dorrite cause. The men were led by Josiah Reed, the captain of the United Independent Company of Volunteers, a band of Dorr supporters, and included men from another such group, the Fourth Ward Volunteers. The weapons were in a building directly across a small alley from the Cadet Armory on Benefit Street, where men from the Marine Corps of Artillery and Cadets Companies, both militia companies loyal to the Charter side, were stationed. Despite the presence of this rival force, Reed and his men took possession of the two bronze cannons without resistance.²⁰ The weapons were rushed down College Street's steep hill, past a small crowd of pro-Charter supporters at the intersection of College and South Main, and safely delivered to Dorr's headquarters by early afternoon.

These were no ordinary cannons, though it is highly unlikely that the Dorrites were aware of their storied past. The guns were a gift to the United Train of Artillery from George Washington, who had borrowed and lost similar cannons from that unit during the Revolutionary War. The cannons that Dorr's men seized had been captured by Washington's troops during the 1777 Battle of Saratoga, an American victory that many consider the turning point in the nation's struggle for independence. Having played a role in the Revolutionary War, the cannons would now take center stage in the state's revolutionary crisis.²¹

By the spring of 1842 the cannons were antiques, relics of a bygone era. Cast in the 1760s in Strasbourg, France, at the renowned foundry of John François Beringer, they possessed all the attention to detail that one would expect from a Beringer cannon—decorative scrolls and dolphin-shaped handles, as well as inscriptions bearing the names *Tantae* and *Pallas*, the latter most likely referring to *Pallas Athena*, the Greek

goddess of wisdom and warfare.²² But the decorative cannons were old and their working condition was unknown. Moreover, being relatively small, and therefore mobile, they were capable of firing only modest six-pound balls, and thus they were relatively weak weapons.

The bronze artillery pieces were not the only cannons at Governor Dorr's disposal; at least four additional cannons were stationed outside his headquarters in a defensive position.²³ These, however, were less reliable iron guns, far heavier than their bronze cousins and more prone to misfiring, which could cause them to explode like bombs. The weight of the iron guns and their inherent danger made them useful primarily for defensive purposes, but not for launching an assault.

Before the bronze guns had been delivered to Dorr's headquarters, word about them was on its way to Governor King, who at the time was only a few miles away from Dorr and his men. Fearing that Dorr would use the cannons to attack the state arsenal, which was then guarded by only twenty hired laborers, King gave the order to reinforce it with two military companies. The Charter official in charge of the arsenal was Quartermaster General Samuel Ames, who was not only the highest-ranking official at the site and a future chief justice of the state's Supreme Court; he was also Thomas Dorr's brother-in-law.²⁴

Before the confrontation would run its course, other members of Dorr's immediate family would also answer the call to defend the Charter authority, including his younger brother Sullivan Dorr Jr., his father, Sullivan Dorr Sr., and his uncles Zachariah Allen and Crawford Allen. Dorr's family were not unaware of Thomas Dorr's involvement when they were drawn to the battlefield; on the contrary, one of their primary motivations for joining the Charter side was the knowledge that the People's governor would lead the attack. Dorr's relatives were defending their family name as much as they were defending the existing authority.²⁵

Zachariah Allen later recalled that when he arrived at the arsenal in the early afternoon,



The Dorr family home, on Benefit and Bowen Streets in Providence, was built by Thomas Wilson Dorr's father, prominent merchant and businessman Sullivan Dorr Sr., in 1809. Rhode Island State Archives.

he found "not a single volunteer loyal citizen was there"; moreover, there was no "supply of water for extinguishing fire in case combustibles were thrown in or upon the building."²⁶ Had the Dorrites moved their newly acquired cannons directly to the arsenal and launched an attack that afternoon, the only defenders they would have faced were Zachariah Allen, Samuel Ames, and a small group of hired men. Greatly outnumbered, the Charter force would have had little hope of defending its position, and the sizable stock of weapons that it guarded would have been lost to the insurgents. Instead

of being used for an immediate attack, however, the cannons were positioned in front of Dorr's headquarters at Burrington Anthony's house, and Dorr and his advisors assembled to determine their strategy.

At contentious discussions throughout the day and into the evening, several attempts were made to dissuade Dorr from his current aggressive course.²⁷ Many of his closest friends, including strong supporters of the suffrage cause and members of the People's legislature, strongly opposed a direct confrontation with the Charter side and argued against the use of

force. Moderates like Dutee Pearce, a former congressman, supported the People's government and the process that had created it, but they did not support the use of force.²⁸ Given President Tyler's pledge to back the Charter government, the moderates believed that a confrontation at that late hour could lead only to disaster. They also recalled the lessons of Fries's Rebellion, the Whiskey Rebellion, and Shays's Rebellion, each of which had ended poorly for insurgents. Although aggressive action might lead to a temporary victory, the taking of the arsenal, the moderates were convinced that the use of force would ultimately be suppressed by federal troops. Should surrounding states enter the fray and a full-fledged regional conflict ensue, Rhode Island would be the theater for a bloody confrontation, and its towns might be destroyed; but the final result was certain: the federal troops would prevail.

For Dorr, however, the time had come for decisive action, as he believed that any further delay would only strengthen his enemies. He had yielded to the moderates in the past and had delayed taking possession of state property after his inauguration, and he was certain that he and the People's government were worse off for the delay. Even now time was being lost to the moderates. Dorr recalled the lessons of the American and French Revolutions; when in history had one government voluntarily ceded power to another without the use of force? If the tree of liberty required periodic nourishment from the blood of patriots, as Thomas Jefferson had once suggested, Thomas Dorr would be the first to offer his blood. In the end, Dorr sided with the more extreme element among his supporters, people like the radical labor reformer Seth Luther, who had long advocated the use of force in pursuit of the insurgents' cause.

One by one the moderates left Dorr's side, leaving him surrounded by a less-refined lot. Those who remained in his camp tended to be working-class people, those who would directly benefit from the expansion of suffrage, rather than elected members of the People's government and other suffragists whose support of

voting rights was based entirely on principle. In the end, Dorr put his faith in the people he hoped to benefit.

Together with his working-class followers, Dorr hatched a simple plan: they would attack the arsenal that evening and then establish a military base on the campus of Brown University, in the heart of Providence. The arms from the arsenal and fortified buildings of the college would provide the insurgents ample protection from the Charter forces. Dorr's men would then take possession of the state's nearby public buildings, which they believed rightfully belonged under the control of the People's government. Should the federal government intervene on the Charter side, the Dorrites would have sufficient strength to withstand the initial attack, and soon reinforcements would arrive from New York and elsewhere.²⁹

As Dorr and his men began to move forward with their bold plan, Governor King's forces quickly but quietly prepared for the impending conflict. The warrant that had been issued for Dorr's arrest had proved useless, as the Charter officials dared not confront Dorr while he was defended by his armed supporters.³⁰ By choice or by necessity, the Charterites now found themselves in the preferred military and political position. If conflict was inevitable, as it now seemed to be, let the insurgents play the role of aggressor; it would be far easier to defend the arsenal than to attack it, and politically easier to justify the defense of state property than its commandeering.

Early evening. By early evening Governor King and his war council had what they believed was reliable information that Dorr planned to attack the arsenal.³¹ A man named Able Oaks, who had been a Dorrite up to that point, revealed to his employer, Almond Hodges, a Charter supporter, that Dorr planned to strike the arsenal that very evening. Oaks's story was corroborated by Charter spies, who made regular visits to Dorr's headquarters.³²

Dorr's camp, where volunteers came and left as they pleased, proved highly susceptible

to espionage. Since the outcome of the pending conflict was far from clear in early May 1842, it is likely that at least some of Dorr's supporters hedged their bets by feeding information to pro-Charter officials. These were men like Edward J. Mallet, the postmaster of Providence, who was described as someone who "was sometime on one side, and sometimes on the other—evidently wishing to be on both sides if he could, and to keep on the strongest in all events."³³ Should the Charter government survive the conflict, a little provided information might keep a Dorrite from prison; should Dorr's side triumph, the fence-sitters would be none the worse for their actions.

Upon learning that the attack was imminent, Charterites printed a broadside that urged Charter supporters in the city to prepare for the defense of the arsenal.³⁴ Word was spread that three tolls from the city's church bells would signal that Dorr's men had begun their attack. Governor King ordered that messengers be sent to call on the militia companies in the pro-Charter towns of Newport, Warren, and Bristol to prepare for action, and a steamship was dispatched to those towns to transport the militias

to Providence. Elisha Dyer, the adjutant general of the Charter forces, was instructed to travel via the Stonington Line (the same line that had carried Dorr to Providence just a day before) south to East Greenwich, where he was to order Col. George T. Allen of the Kentish Guards to rally his militia and proceed to Providence for immediate service.³⁵

The Charter government's plans to bring supporters to Providence began to unravel almost immediately. When Elisha Dyer arrived at the rail station in Providence, he found it deserted. Dyer recalled that "there was not a light to be seen or a sound to be heard in or around the station; even the watchman could not be found."³⁶ It seemed that the situation could not have been worse for Dyer and the Charter side. Even if Dyer was able to acquire a fast horse and travel by road to East Greenwich, as he eventually did, valuable time would be lost in the process. The road to East Greenwich would be dangerous, Allen and his men would be in bed by the time Dyer arrived, and the Kentish Guards would have to travel to Providence by horse in total darkness. The situation virtually guaranteed that the East Greenwich reinforcements would not arrive in time to defend the arsenal from that night's attack. Moreover, there was no chance that the steamship that had left for Newport, Warren, and Bristol would return to Providence in time for the confrontation. The Charter forces in Providence could expect no reinforcements.

As the sun set, there was confusion and disagreement among the Charter men at the arsenal. Edward Carrington and John H. Clarke, members of Governor King's war council, arrived there with the intention of loading its roughly two thousand stands of arms, artillery pieces, and ammunition onto two large wagons and moving them to a safer location. Carrington and Clarke feared that the arsenal could not be defended, but Zachariah Allen and others there disagreed, arguing that the weapons were far safer behind the building's stone walls than they would be on the city's unprotected streets. Then a scout arrived, reporting that Dorr's men were

Having learned of the impending attack on the arsenal, Governor King had this broadside distributed around Providence. R.I.H.S. Collection (RH1 X3 669).

**TO THE CITIZENS
OF PROVIDENCE!!!**
**You are requested FORTHWITH
to repair to the**
**State Arsenal
and TAKE ARMS.**
SAMUEL W. KING,
Governor of the State of Rhode Island.
Providence, May 17, 1842, 6 o'clock P. M.

now patrolling the streets and disarming Charter supporters. With removal of the weapons no longer an option, Carrington and Clarke left the arsenal in search of reinforcements.³⁷

Meanwhile, at Dorr's camp efforts to dissuade the People's governor from attacking the arsenal continued well into the evening. There is evidence to suggest that Sullivan Dorr Sr. visited the headquarters to argue against the use of force.³⁸ While no record of a conversation there between Dorr and his father exists, one can imagine the intensity that such a discussion would have had. In the end, no one could convince Thomas Dorr to call off the attack. Later that night Sullivan Dorr Sr. took his place among the Charter supporters, joining the First Light Infantry on reserve at the armory in downtown Providence.³⁹ The conflict that divided a state and captured the attention of the nation also split the Dorr family to its core.

Late Evening. By 10:00 P.M., with the promised Charterite reinforcements yet to arrive at the arsenal, the situation seemed bleak to the twenty or so men in the building. The call to defend the arsenal had been issued, and there certainly had been enough time for gathering the troops. Did the Charter government lack sufficient support to withstand the insurgents? Worse yet, had Governor King made a strategic decision to allow the rebels to take the arsenal? Such a move would have provided time for the Charter militias to arrive from the south, and it would also have provided Governor King the evidence he needed to bring President Tyler into the conflict. "The troops were promised to be sent here before dark, and it is now late in the night, and they are not come," exclaimed Col. Leonard Blodget of the arsenal's Charter force in a near panic. "Can it be possible we are left here to be sacrificed?"⁴⁰

Fearing the worst, the defenders of the arsenal spent their time loading and priming hundreds of muskets. They fastened the lower doors and windows with the building's iron shutters, leaving the upper shutters slightly open to provide room for firing. Sentinels and scouts were sent into the dark to gather information,

but they returned with no new intelligence. All that was now left to do was to wait and hope that reinforcements arrived before Dorr's cannons did. "If I fall here," Zachariah Allen later recalled a frightened defender saying, "they [the man's family] have no one to look to. I shall now feel calmed to do my duty if you will promise to have them cared for." To this plea, Allen responded, "Provided that I survive."⁴¹

The Charter forces were not the only ones waiting for reinforcements and thinking about the possibility of dying in battle. Remembering the thousands of people who had voted in favor of the People's Constitution, Dorr hoped for the arrival of far more men than the few hundred who waited for orders outside his headquarters. With a thousand men his force would be overwhelming, but with only a few hundred the outcome was uncertain. What Dorr did not know was that had he attacked the arsenal without further delay, his troops would have outnumbered the defenders by nearly ten to one. As time passed, more men arrived at Dorr's headquarters and others returned to their homes, having lost their nerve for combat.⁴² With the overall numbers remaining fairly constant, the envisioned overwhelming force failed to materialize.

Dorr meanwhile prepared himself for the worst. Recognizing that he might be killed in battle, he summoned Walter S. Burges, a longtime friend and well-respected member of the General Assembly, who had supported the reformers in their effort to enact change through established channels, and he entrusted him with his legal and private papers.⁴³ With these now in safe hands, Dorr was prepared to take to the field, but he remained certain that more men would arrive than those currently at the headquarters. Not wanting to attack before the arrival of these reinforcements, he waited a while longer.

At 11:00 P.M. Charterite sentinels reported seeing armed men moving along Cranston Street toward the arsenal. The defenders, including one of Dorr's younger brothers, Sullivan Dorr Jr., took their posts in preparation for the approaching attack. Men removed their coats and cocked their weapons. Samuel Ames, Dorr's



Most of the Charterite defenders prepared to meet the attack from the arsenal's upper floor. Sketch by E. L. Peckham, RIHS Collection

the chance of a successful ambush. Maneuvering the cannons through Federal Hill's best streets was a difficult enough task, but attempting to bring them through the area's narrow alleys in pitch darkness would have been far more difficult. Moreover, the circuitous route provided Dorr's men with an additional fifteen minutes to prepare themselves mentally for the coming encounter after a long night of anxious waiting.

It now seemed inevitable that the outcome of the state's governmental crisis would be de-

ecided not by ballots but by bullets, and that the determination would take place under a heavy fog. One Charterite recalled the tension, surely experienced on both sides: "Many a coward, in the light of day, amid the serried ranks of a disciplined host, encouraged by the stirring strains of martial music, and animated by the action and the din of the conflict has rushed upon the cannon's mouth—but how much more awfully sublime the scene, when men leave their homes in the darkness of night, and go forth, with none



of the pomp and circumstance of war, in a silence to be *felt*, to meet black hearted conspirators, they know not how numerous, through they know not what snares!"⁵⁹

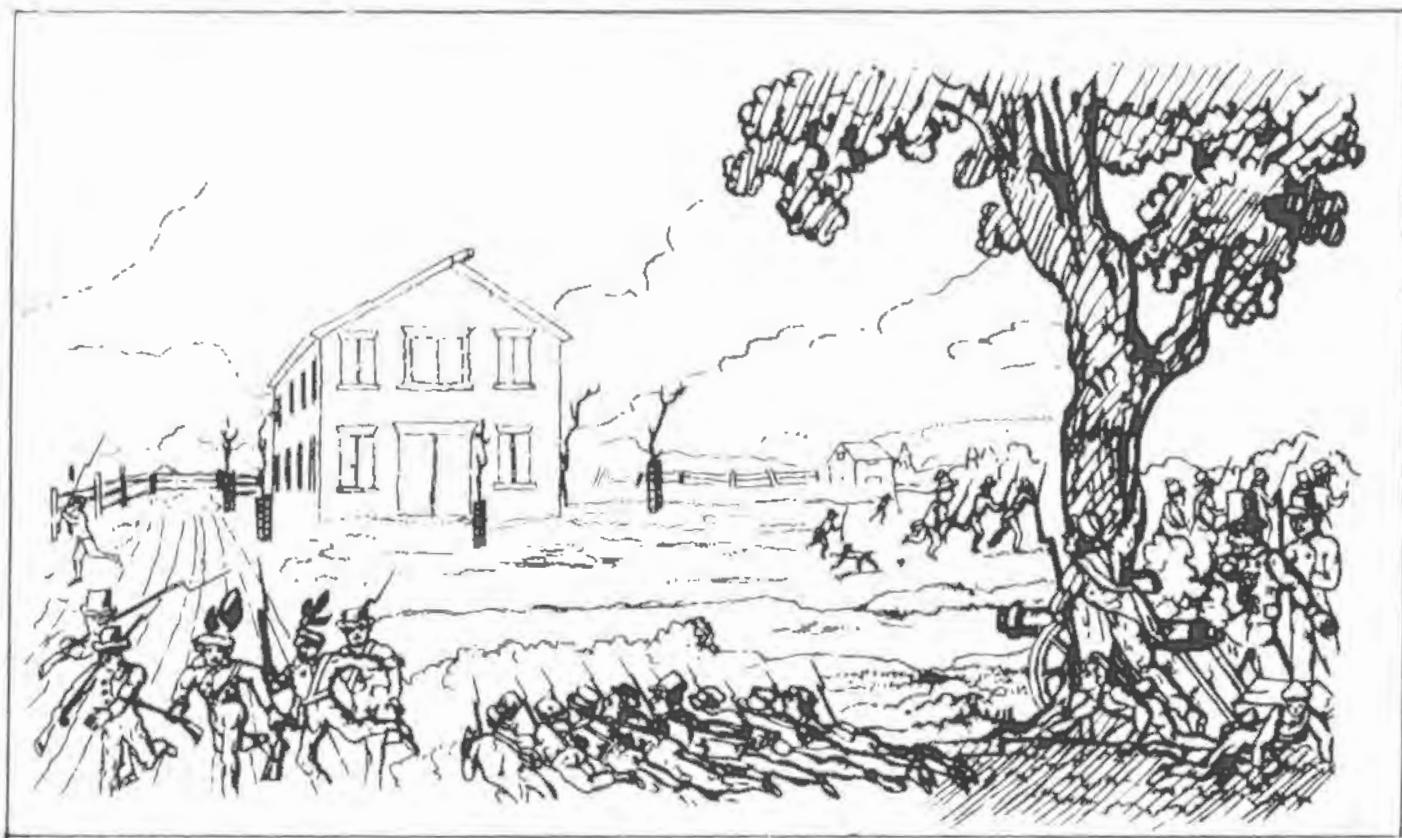
To the insurgents, the pervading fog seemed a blessing, as it provided cover for their attack on a battlefield that afforded few natural protections. According to one Dorrite, "The night was not chosen because it was dark; the fog came up late; it seemed like an interposition of Divine Providence."⁶⁰ Divine Providence or not, the

fog also provided a cloak for the timid, behind which they could hide their natural fears and through which they could anonymously retreat should things go badly.

The Charter men assumed their defensive position in the arsenal. Most of the defenders, including Colonel Blodget, stationed themselves near the windows on the arsenal's second level. This elevated position had two advantages: it gave the defenders an unobstructed line of fire, and since Dorr's cannons would most certainly be aimed at the iron doors on the lower level, through which the attackers would then attempt to rush, the men on the second story would be away from the insurgents' cannon fire and initial charge. The more vulnerable lower level was manned by Quartermaster General Samuel Ames and the arsenal's regular guards.⁶¹

The order was given inside the arsenal to "wait until you hear the sound of cannon on the outside before you open fire."⁶² This order would not be easy to follow for many of the anxious Charterites, especially those on the ground floor. One of the men in command of the arsenal's cannons, Bill Cameron, found it particularly difficult to hold his fire. Described as "an old privateersman, who had served on a vessel in the War of 1812, and had rather fight than saw wood," Cameron "had been grossly insulted by some of the Dorrites and was burning for revenge."⁶³ Bill Cameron had fired cannons before and was anxious for another opportunity.

Having arrived at the arsenal, Dorr initially positioned his cannons about two hundred yards away, surrounded by a small stand of trees.⁶⁴ True to form, he announced the presence of his troops not by cannon fire but by a formal declaration. Col. Charles Carter, an officer in Dorr's force and a member of the Fourth Ward Volunteers, a militia group that had assisted in seizing the cannons the day before, was ordered to approach the arsenal under a white flag of truce. With a white handkerchief attached to his sword, Carter moved to the arsenal, knocked on its iron door, and delivered a message from Col. Jonathan M. Wheeler, the commanding officer of Dorr's force, demand-



The attempt on the arsenal. RIHS Collection

ing that the Charterites surrender the arsenal to Governor Dorr. Colonel Blodget responded that he "was not aware of a Col. Wheeler or a Governor Dorr and refused to surrender the arsenal." When Carter warned that the arsenal was surrounded by a large number of men who intended to take it by force if it was not surrendered, Blodget defiantly challenged Carter to "come and take it."⁶⁵

Dorr's men now had to choose between two unpleasant alternatives: fight or flight. The belief, widely held among Dorr's supporters, that the Charterites would peacefully cede power when confronted by armed insurgents had proved false. Rebuffed at the arsenal, the insurgents could either retreat in disgrace or they could attack.

Colonel Wheeler, together with a majority of the men he commanded, and Col. John S. Dispeau, with his Pawtucket company, chose to retreat. Colonel Carter was one of the officers who remained. "On my return [from demanding the surrender of the arsenal]," Carter recalled, "I found Colonel Wheeler, who asked in an under-

tone, 'what did he say?' I replied, 'why, what the devil do you think he said? He said he should defend it.' I turned around, and when I looked back again, Colonel Wheeler was gone. . . . I saw no more of Colonel Wheeler that night. He had gone off into the fog." Further, "I saw Colonel Dispeau marching off his Company. I said, 'Dispeau, what the devil are you doing?' He replied, 'there is danger here.' I asked him how the devil he expected to go into war without getting into danger."⁶⁶

Dorr chose to defy the odds and attack. Taking control of the remaining troops and reestablishing order, he replaced the now absent Wheeler with Colonel Carter as the force's commander. The insurgents were now reduced to less than fifty men, but Dorr and Carter recklessly moved forward with their plan.

Peering through the fog from within the arsenal, Colonel Blodget was barely able to see the insurgents' cannons, which had now been moved closer, just northeast of the building. With Dorr's men in position, the two cannons were leveled directly at the stone structure. A

torch was raised, the order was given to fire the first cannon, and the cannon flashed—but it failed to discharge. The order was given to fire the second cannon, and it too flashed, but it failed to fire as well. “I am betrayed,” exclaimed Dorr; and he and his men, now fully exposed to the Charter force, had no choice but to retreat from the field.⁶⁷

The insurgents scattered, some retreating to Dorr’s headquarters while the majority simply returned to their homes. Tired and hungry, most had lost their desire to fight. The confrontation had ended without a single shot being fired, and no one lay dead or dying. The Charter forces had retained control of the arsenal, and reinforcements from the southern part of the state would soon arrive.

Had the insurgents’ cannons fired, Dorr and his remaining men would almost certainly have been killed. Without sufficient numbers to successfully attack after the initial cannon fire, they would have been fully exposed to the return fire of the arsenal’s defenders, who now outnumbered them by more than five to one. The fog, which only moments earlier had provided the insurgents with strategic cover for their attack and perhaps prevented their guns from firing, now mercifully provided them with a means of escape.

No one knows with certainty why the cannons failed. One theory suggests that a Judas figure, Hiram Chappell, caused the misfires by betraying Dorr and plugging the cannons. A day after he had served as an escort to Dorr during Dorr’s return to Providence on May 16, Chappell was instructed to purchase four or five kegs of powder with twenty-five dollars worth of gold quarter-eagles that Dorr had given to him. When questioned by Charter commissioners following the failed attack, Chappell claimed that he had plugged the bronze cannons; later, while being harassed in prison by Dorr’s supporters, he recanted and denied plugging the guns.⁶⁸ Two years after the failed attack, no longer fearing further imprisonment by the Charter authorities or threats from Dorr’s supporters,

Chappell reiterated his original claim in sworn testimony at Dorr’s trial for treason: “I stated before the Commissioners that I plugged the cannon on the night of the 17th of May. I did plug the two brass pieces, with pine plugs, about one inch in length. It was done about eleven o’clock at night. I did not communicate it to any one at the time; I should have been foolish to have done so. I went out to the arsenal plain and remained under the shed till morning. I might have said to some of the prisoners whom I was with in jail in 1842, that I did not plug the canuon, but I did it only to put them off.”⁶⁹

All that is known for certain is that at some point Hiram Chappell lied, either to Charter officials and in court testimony or to fellow prisoners during his incarceration. There is reason to believe that Chappell was not, in fact, the culprit, for he never offered a reason for his claimed plugging of the cannons, nor did Charter authorities apparently believe his story, since he was imprisoned for his role in the attack. Moreover, Chappell stayed loyal to the suffragist cause after the episode at the arsenal, joining Dorr’s men on Federal Hill the next morning and rejoining Dorr in June at Chepachet, where Dorr attempted to reconvene the People’s legislature.⁷⁰ More than his words, Chappell’s actions suggest that Hiram Chappell did not plug the insurgents’ cannons.

Many others had the opportunity to sabotage the cannons on the night of the attack. It would have been relatively easy to douse the gunpowder with water, leaving the guns inoperable; this could have been done by a Charterite spy who had infiltrated the insurgents or by a Dorr supporter who was leaving the cause in disgust as things turned potentially violent. Natural forces could also have been responsible for the misfire that night. By late evening the fog was so thick that people standing within arms’ length could not recognize each other. The fog covered the city and everything it touched with a sheet of moisture. If the powder was left exposed, either through neglect or through sabotage, it would turn to a useless paste.

Colonel Carter, the officer who most likely attempted to fire the cannons, insisted that they

were not sabotaged: "I marched them [the cannons] on the ground, unlimbered them, primed and touched the right piece; it flashed. The left one was then primed and touched; it flashed also. I tried the priming wire; it would not go down. The powder was very poor and very fine. It was wet and became hard like cement. The pieces were not plugged, other than the plugging of the atmosphere by the Almighty." Joshua Hathaway, a Dorr supporter who claimed to have bored out the cannons upon their return from the arsenal, reported that "there were no plugs in the vent. The powder had become very hard from being wet."⁷¹

Ultimately it mattered little why the cannons failed, for in reality the fight was already lost prior to the order to fire. Profoundly disappointed with the night's events, Dorr later remembered that "the people were called, and they did not come," and that those few who did heed the call did not stay long. "The people as a body, let it be said, were unwilling, or unable; they were deterred by the threats of the President, or debarred by the mailed hand of a military despotism. Be it as it may, they did not come." For a man who drew his strength from the support of the masses, the abandonment was almost more than he could endure. "It was our friends, and not our enemies, who conquered us," he concluded in despair.⁷²

One Dorrite who was on the battlefield that night placed the blame not on "the people" but on the movement's leaders: "Nearly all who had been elected to office under the People's Constitution; all who had spouted in public meetings, and all who had resolved on war to the knife, like cowards as they were, dared not show their faces at that momentous time! Do not blame the people; let the disgrace go where it ought, on those who set the ball in motion. I know the effect of such baseness at the time we were on the ground before the Arsenal, when it began to be whispered about from one to another, that such and such persons were not there, to share the dangers of the fight. Our men, one after another, soon began to leave the ground, and with reason,

too. Men began to doubt the truth of their cause, and the right we had to take life, in support of our cause. . . . [T]he whole moral force of the Revolution was broken at that time."⁷³

Whatever the cause of the failure—weak leadership, sabotage, fog, the threat of federal troops, arrests, delay, poor planning—the aborted attack proved to be a decisive blow to the insurgents. Eleven members of the People's legislature resigned their positions on the morning after the debacle, and seven additional resignations followed in the following days.⁷⁴ Not only did these men resign their offices; many of them condemned Dorr's attack as deplorable and destructive.⁷⁵ And just as the People's cause was unraveling, Charter forces were being reinforced by their allies from the south. The steamship that had departed the previous day returned to Providence, filled with Charter loyalists who awaited their orders from Governor King.

The suffragists' much-anticipated outside assistance was nowhere to be found. The failure of the military effort at the arsenal virtually guaranteed that outside support, specifically from New York, would not materialize. Dorr's supporters in New York had in fact been preparing to move aggressively in his behalf; just hours before news of the arsenal fiasco arrived there, Levi Stamm's *New Era* printed a declaration signed by those who, "appealing to Divine Providence for the purity of our motives, do pledge our 'sacred honor' to hold ourselves in readiness, to be organized into companies of 'Patriotic Volunteers,' under such officers as shall by ourselves be elected, and upon the requisition of Governor Dorr, to march at the shortest notice to the aid of our Republican brethren of Rhode Island, in the event that any *armed interference* be made by the Federal Government to the jeopardy of their *inalienable and indefeasible rights*."⁷⁶

But when news of the failed attack reached New York, support for Dorr's effort, which only hours before had reached its pinnacle, melted in an instant. "The flag which had been flying for several days at Lanman Hall, in honor of Dorr and his proceedings, was struck, and all looked

as sad as though 'melancholy had marked them for her own,'" one paper reported.⁷⁷ If the Rhode Island suffragists lacked the will to defeat the state's Charter forces, as it now appeared, support from New York seemed futile. Just as New Yorkers would not tolerate the federal government imposing its will on Rhode Island, neither would they impose their own views on their reluctant neighbors to the north.⁷⁸

After their failure at the arsenal, Dorr and his remaining followers retreated to the insurgent stronghold in the northern village of Woonsocket. Later that summer they would attempt to reconvene the People's legislature in the village of Chepachet in friendly Glocester, only to have that effort put down by the emboldened Charter government, which declared martial law throughout Rhode Island. In time Dorr would return to Providence, where he would be tried, convicted of treason against the state, and imprisoned. For all concerned, it appeared that Dorr's revolutionary movement had failed.

The annals of history are strewn with tales of men who were willing to kill and die in the heat of passion. Far fewer are the tales of men willing to kill and die in the cool pursuit of a just cause, and fewer yet of those willing to risk their lives for a cause promising no personal gain. But the rarest of all, perhaps for good reason, are accounts of those willing to lead such an effort when opposed by the full force of established authority, respected friends, and close relatives. Such was the case of Thomas Wilson Dorr, making him, depending on one's perspective, either a fool or a hero.

The competing camps faced distinct challenges, and both sides made critical mistakes. The suffragist leaders, increasingly isolated and marginalized, remained confident in the justice of their cause and the inevitability of their success. The reformers would learn firsthand that the macro-level narrative of democracy, which often makes the spread of democracy appear inevitable, is far different from the micro-level narrative, which reveals an unpredictable

struggle carried out by each generation. The reformers also underestimated the strength of the Charter resistance, ignoring one of the few truisms in politics—that there is nothing more dangerous and unpredictable than a clique of gray-haired men with titles, fighting for their political survival.

Dorr's greatest error in judgment was in overestimating the willingness of the suffragists to use force. Dorr never fully understood why his support grew weaker as the crisis reached its pinnacle. Many moderate reformers rejected the use of force, believing that success meant incremental improvement on the suffrage issue, something that they believed was within their grasp by the spring of 1842. It was not that they necessarily adhered to lesser principles or held weaker convictions, as Dorr lamented. If the price of a total victory—victory without compromise—was the shedding of blood, many of the moderates were content to settle for a less definitive outcome. For them, the threatening rhetoric of their campaign was just that, words to be used as a catalyst for change; and if change was to come slowly and incrementally but peacefully, so be it. They were confident that the momentum of history was moving in their direction, making patience not a weakness but a virtue.

The Charterites made mistakes of their own. They were clearly emboldened by the promise of federal support and the strength of their military position, but they underestimated the reform movement, believing it to be another fleeting locofoco cause that might burn bright for a moment but would soon return to a controllable smolder. Finding themselves on the wrong side of history, they undertook a strategy of delay, deception, and intimidation. Their rigidity incited the radical element of the reform movement and threatened the social order that the conservatives held dear.

In June 1842 the Charter government easily put down Dorr's second and final attempt at exercising political power, a desperate attempt to assemble supporters in the village of Chepachet. Like the failed arsenal attack, the Chepachet episode ended without a battle, as Dorr wisely dismissed

his disappointingly small band of armed supporters when faced with overwhelming military strength. The Charterites continued their show of force by declaring martial law, arresting suspected Dorr supporters, and causing Dorr to flee the state. When he eventually returned to Providence, he was arrested, tried on a charge of high treason against the state, and, in June 1844, sentenced to life at hard labor in solitary confinement.

The Charter government eventually learned that its military campaign, while successful in the short run, could not stop the state's democratic reform movement. Despite its military prowess, the conservatives ultimately lost the political battle in Rhode Island, as they had in other states. In 1843 conservatives replaced the state's flawed royal charter with a flawed constitution, and although it would take many decades, the state eventually corrected the malapportionment of the legislature and removed the last of the voting restrictions.⁷⁹ Rhode Island's constitutional struggle reveals another political truism: the river of democracy grows wider and stronger as it flows toward its source, the sovereign people, eventually eroding all barriers.

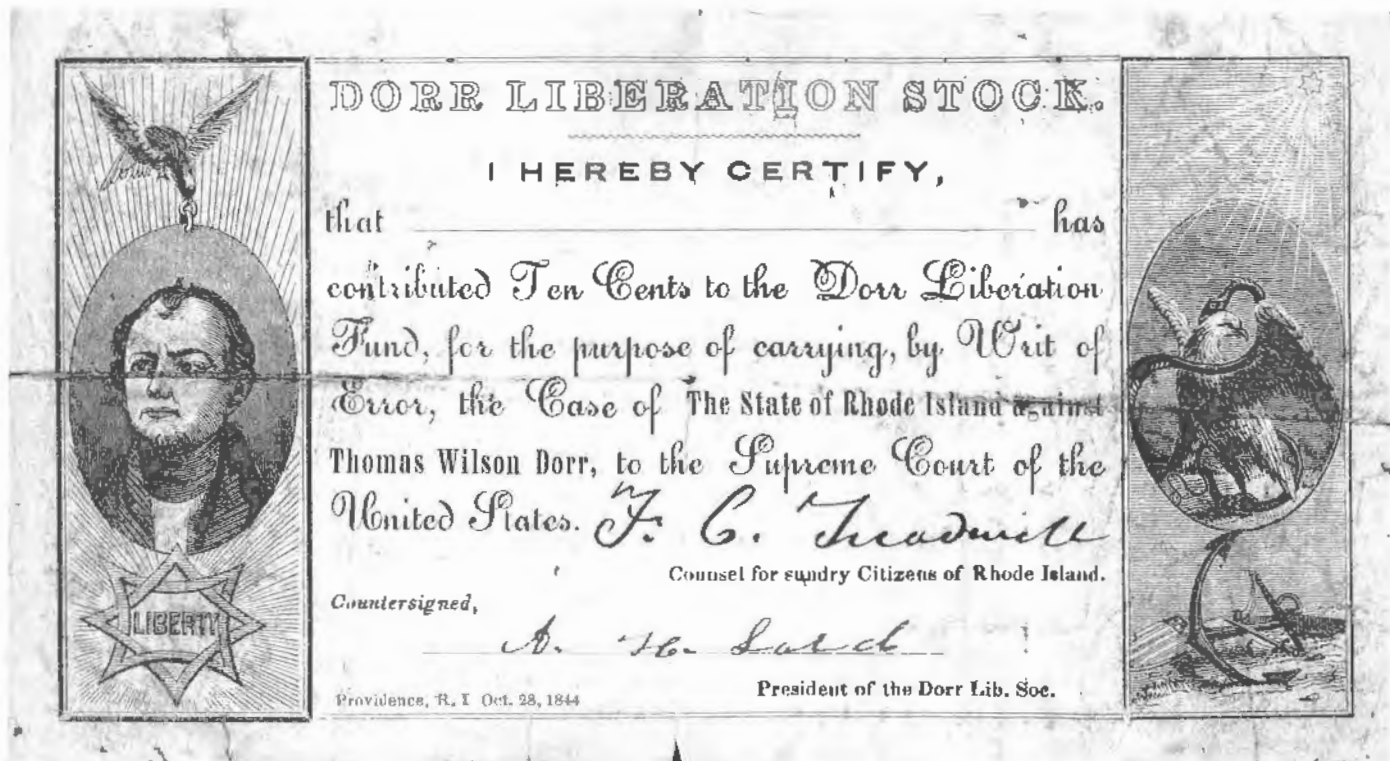
Dorr proved far more powerful as an imprisoned martyr than he had as a military commander. A Dorr Liberation Society was quickly formed to agitate for his release, and with his

liberation becoming a potent political issue, candidates for office were forced to either pledge their support for freeing Dorr or be held accountable by the electorate. Fearing the political fallout from the growing liberation movement, the General Assembly agreed to free Dorr if he pledged allegiance to the state; but having risked everything for principle, Dorr refused anything but an unconditional release. He was granted that release by the Assembly in June 1845 after spending twenty months in prison. In 1851 the Assembly, now controlled by pro-Dorr Democrats, voted to restore Dorr's political rights, and it later annulled his treason conviction.⁸⁰

When Dorr died in 1854, the state was governed by a constitution, suffrage had been expanded, the problem of the legislature's malapportionment had been meaningfully addressed, and Dorr himself had been cleared of all wrongdoing. The People's governor died at the age of forty-nine, physically broken from his time in prison but with his principles intact. His small disturbance had successfully shaken the state out of its political slumber and moved the country one small step forward in its journey toward democratic governance.

For more information and educational materials on this subject, go to www.rihs.org.





Above
 The Dorr Liberation Society established a fund for the legal defense of the imprisoned People's governor. Rhode Island State Archives.

Thomas Wilson Dorr is buried at Swan Point Cemetery, Providence. Photograph by the author, 2005.

Notes

1. Jacob Frieze, *Concise History of the Efforts to Obtain an Extension of Suffrage in Rhode Island* (Providence, 1842), 83.
2. For the most detailed account of Dorr's arrival, see Arthur May Mowry, *The Dorr War, or the Constitutional Struggle in Rhode Island* (Providence: Preston & Rounds Co., 1901; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968), 175-76. Other accounts include Dan King, *The Life and Times of Thomas Wilson Dorr* (Boston: published by the author, 1859; reprint, Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Library Press, 1969), 125-26; Charles Coffin Jewett, *The Close of the Late Rebellion in Rhode Island* (Providence: B. Cranston & Co., 1842), 3; Frances H. McDougall, *Might and Right* (Providence: A. H. Stillwell, 1844), 239-40; and Frieze, *Extension of Suffrage*, 83-84.
3. There are numerous conflicting reports regarding the size and nature of Dorr's welcoming party in Providence. The actual number of supporters was somewhere between 1,200 and 3,000, while the number of men under arms remains less clear. The numbers cited in my text are from what is likely the most accurate source here, Mowry's *The Dorr War*, 175-76.
4. Testimonies of Edward H. Hazard and Roger Williams Potter, in Joseph S. Pitman, *Report on the Trial of Thomas Wilson Dorr for Treason* (Boston: Tappan & Dennet, 1844), 28, 25.
5. Jewett, *Late Rebellion*, 4.
6. Testimony of Edward H. Hazard, in Pitman, *Trial*, 28.
7. For this and other quotations from Dorr's speech, see U.S. Congress, House, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 28th Cong., 1st sess., 1844, Report no. 546, 679-80 (hereafter cited as Burke's Report); George M. Dennison, *The Dorr War: Republicanism on Trial, 1831-1861* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976), 84; and Almon Danforth Hodges, *Almon Danforth Hodges and His Neighbors: An Autobiographical Sketch of a Typical Old New Englander* (Boston: privately printed, 1909), 183. There is an excellent analysis of various interpretations of the speech in Mowry, *The Dorr War*, 176-77.
8. Mowry, *The Dorr War*, 171-73.
9. Arthur May Mowry, "Tammany Hall and the Dorr Rebellion," *American Historical Review* 3, no. 2 (1898): 296.
10. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1946), 411-13.
11. Smiffen to Dorr, Apr. 20, 1842; Lapham to Dorr, Apr. 16, 1842; in Dennison, *The Dorr War*, 75, 74, 81.
12. Tyler to King, Apr. 11, 1842, *Burke's Report*, 659.
13. The letter was reprinted in the *Providence Daily Journal* on Apr. 15, 1842.
14. *Burke's Report*, 55.
15. W. G. Freeman to M. M. Payne, Apr. 25 and 26, 1842, *Burke's Report*, 701.
16. *Burke's Report*, 55. For the congressional investigation, see Mowry, *The Dorr War*, 274-80.
17. Testimony of William P. Blodget, in Pitman, *Trial*, 27; testimony of Edward H. Hazard, in *Burke's Report*, 878; *Providence Express*, May 17, 1842; Mowry, *The Dorr War*, 176-77.
18. Jewett, *Late Rebellion*, 4-5.
19. Dennison, *The Dorr War*, 84.
20. Elisha Dyer, *Reminiscences of Rhode Island in 1842: As Connected with the Dorr Rebellion* (Providence: published by the author, 1888), 17; testimony of Josiah Reed, in Pitman, *Trial*, 74-75; Jewett, *Late Rebellion*, 5; Zachariah Allen, "The Dorr War: Mr. Zachariah Allen Relates the Events of May 17 and 18, 1842," *Providence Press*, May 7, 1881, supplement;

- and Frieze, *Extension of Suffrage*, 87. Frieze describes the cannons as six-pounders. Almon Hodges's later account, which borrows heavily though selectively from Frieze's, claims they were nine-pounders (Hodges, *Almon Danforth Hodges*, 184). Several accounts describe the guns as brass, though they were in fact bronze.
21. Mowry, *The Dorr War*, 181 n. The strange life of these cannons did not end with the Dorr Rebellion. After that episode they were given to the Warren Artillery Militia as a reward for its loyal service to the Charter side. This, of course, angered the United Train of Artillery, which rightfully owned the guns but had been less supportive of the Charter government during the conflict. When the Warren Artillery disbanded in the early twentieth century, the cannons were given to the town of Warren and used as decoration at its town hall. In 1979 they were removed and placed in storage until they could be refurbished; but in 1981 they disappeared from their storage space and were missing for thirteen years. When state police officers retrieved them from the bottom of Pleasure Lake in Providence's Roger Williams Park in 1994, the cannons were found to have been cut in pieces and to have had their ornamental designs removed. Today the historic guns are stored in a carriage house off Daker Street in Providence, and a campaign is under way to raise funds for their restoration. For more on the cannons, see Gerald M. Carbone, "A Tough Fight to Save Cannon," *Providence Journal*, May 29, 2005, sec. B.
 22. Carbone, "Tough Fight."
 23. Frieze, *Extension of Suffrage*, 85.
 24. Ibid., 87; Marvin F. Gettleman, *The Dorr Rebellion: A Study in American Radicalism, 1833-1849* (New York: Random House, 1973; reprint, New York: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., 1980), 121.
 25. Gettleman, *The Dorr Rebellion*, 121-22; Jewett, *Late Rebellion*, 7; Patrick T. Conley, *Democracy in Decline: Rhode Island's Constitutional Period, 1776-1841* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1977), 340; Hodges, *Almon Danforth Hodges*, 189.
 26. Allen, "The Dorr War."
 27. Frieze, *Extension of Suffrage*, 88-89.
 28. Testimony of Dutee J. Pearce, in Pitman, *Trial*, 25-26.
 29. Mowry, *The Dorr War*, 182; Hodges, *Almon Danforth Hodges*, 185.
 30. Mowry, *The Dorr War*, 175.
 31. At least one source claims that Dorr's intent to attack the arsenal was known to Governor King as early as the morning of May 17: Frieze, *Extension of Suffrage*, 86. This seems highly unlikely, however, given Governor King's actions at the time; it was not until after the bronze cannons were taken later in the day that King took decisive measures that suggest he believed an attack was imminent.
 32. Some of the Charterite men making regular reports from Dorr's headquarters include a Mr. Baker, Colonel Pitman, and Henry S. Hazard. See Hodges, *Almon Danforth Hodges*, 185, and testimony of Leonard Blodget, in Pitman, *Trial*, 38.
 33. Testimony of Aaron White Jr., in *Burke's Report*, 281.
 34. Jewett, *Late Rebellion*, 5; Mowry, *The Dorr War*, 183.
 35. Dyer, *Rhode Island in 1842*, 22.
 36. Ibid., 23.
 37. McDougall, *Might and Right*, 243; Allen, "The Dorr War."
 38. Dorr's father is placed at Anthony's house in one secondhand account: testimony of Hiram Chappell, in *Burke's Report*, 881. Another account mentions the presence of only Dorr's immediate relatives: Mowry, *The Dorr War*, 182. See also Hodges, *Almon Danforth Hodges*, 186.
 39. Hodges, *Almon Danforth Hodges*, 189.
 40. Allen, "The Dorr War."
 41. Ibid.
 42. McDougall, *Might and Right*, 243.
 43. Testimony of Walter S. Butges, in *Burke's Report*, 916.
 44. Allen, "The Dorr War."
 45. Ibid.
 46. Testimony of Edward H. Hazard, in Pitman, *Trial*, 29.
 47. Allen, "The Dorr War"; Frieze, *Extension of Suffrage*, 88; Hodges, *Almon Danforth Hodges*, 189.
 48. At least three men brought reports from Dorr's camp to Colonel Blodget in the arsenal. See testimony of Leonard Blodget, 38.
 49. Testimony of Charles W. Carter, in *Burke's Report*, 907.
 50. Hodges, *Almon Danforth Hodges*, 182.
 51. For a description of the arsenal, see Winfield Townley Scott, *Sword on the Table: Thomas Dorr's Rebellion* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1942), and Dyer, *Rhode Island in 1842*, 28-29.
 52. Testimony of Leonard Blodget, 39. The size of the cannons is unclear. One account claims that they were large guns, ranging in size from twelve- to forty-eight-pounders: Hodges, *Almon Danforth Hodges*, 182. Colonel Blodget testified that they were far smaller, of six-pound caliber.
 53. Allen, "The Dorr War."
 54. Frieze, *Extension of Suffrage*, 88.
 55. Ibid., 89; testimony of Horace M. Pearce, in Pitman, *Trial*, 45.
 56. Governor Dorr's Address to the People of Rhode Island (August 1843), in *Burke's Report*, 754.
 57. Accounts of the size of Dorr's force vary: see Mowry, *The Dorr War*, 184; McDougall, *Might and Right*, 244; and testimony of Charles W. Carter, in Pitman,

- Trial*, 68. Though smaller than Dorr desired, his force was still considerably larger than the Charter force in the arsenal at the time. Edward H. Hazard, who was in the arsenal, reported that the defenders numbered roughly 70 men from the Cadet Company militia, 70 from the Marine Artillery militia, and 20 others, or about 160 men altogether. Testimony of Edward H. Hazard, in Pitman, *Trial*, 29.
58. See testimony of Hiram Chappell, in Pitman, *Trial*, 35. Love Lane's current name is Knight Street.
59. Jewett, *Late Rebellion*, 9.
60. Testimony of Charles W. Carter, in *Burke's Report*, 907.
61. Allen, "The Dorr War"; Mowry, *The Dorr War*, 184.
62. Allen, "The Dorr War."
63. Hodges, *Almon Danforth Hodges*, 189.
64. *Ibid.*, 187.
65. Mowry, *The Dorr War*, 184; testimony of Leonard Blodget, 38.
66. Testimony of Charles W. Carter, in Pitman, *Trial*, 69. For a nearly identical account of the events, see Report of the Trial of Thomas Wilson Dorr, in *Burke's Report*, 906-7.
67. Testimony of Leonard Blodget, 38; McDougall, *Might and Right*, 244.
68. Testimony of Hiram Chappell, in Pitman, *Trial*, 34; testimony of John S. Dispeau, in Pitman, *Trial*, 48, and in *Burke's Report*, 893.
69. Testimony of Hiram Chappell, in Pitman, *Trial*, 37. (The difference between bronze and brass was not always clear in the nineteenth century; the guns were actually bronze.) For another account of Chappell's testimony, see Report of the Trial of Thomas Wilson Dorr, in *Burke's Report*, 882.
70. Testimony of Hiram Chappell, in Pitman, *Trial*, 35.
71. Testimonies of Charles W. Carter and Joshua Hathaway, in Pitman, *Trial*, 69, 75.
72. Governor Dorr's Address to the People of Rhode Island (August 1843), 757-58.
73. Anonymous letter, in McDougall, *Might and Right*, 246-47.
74. Mowry, *The Dorr War*, 190.
75. Handbill, reprinted in McDougall, *Might and Right*, 247.
76. Mowry, *The Dorr War*, 194.
77. *New York Commercial Advertiser*, copied in *National Intelligencer*, May 24, 1842, in Mowry, 194-95 n.
78. Not all the New Yorkers abandoned Dorr and his cause. One supporter in particular, Mike Walsh, known as the "Captain of the Spartan Band," joined Dorr's men at Chepachet. Some reports suggest Walsh brought as many as twenty-five men with him to Rhode Island, but the thousands who had been promised to Dorr from New York never arrived.
79. Patrick T. Conley, "The Constitution of 1843: A Sesquicentennial Obituary," in *Rhode Island in Rhetoric and Reflection: Public Addresses and Essays by Patrick T. Conley* (East Providence: Rhode Island Publications Society, 2002), 171-81.
80. Mowry, *The Dorr War*, 255-59.

Book Notes

Rhode Island Book Notes: A Selection of Recent Titles

Gerald M. Carbone, *Nathanael Greene* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). A popular biography of the Rhode Island Revolutionary War general that draws substantially on *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, the 13-volume series sponsored by the Rhode Island Historical Society.

Eric G. Grundset, ed., *Forgotten Patriots: African American and American Indian Service in the Revolutionary War* (Washington, D.C.: National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, 2008). This extensive reference work (872 pages)—a greatly expanded second edition of a volume that originally appeared in 2001—contains a 64-page chapter on Rhode Island.

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