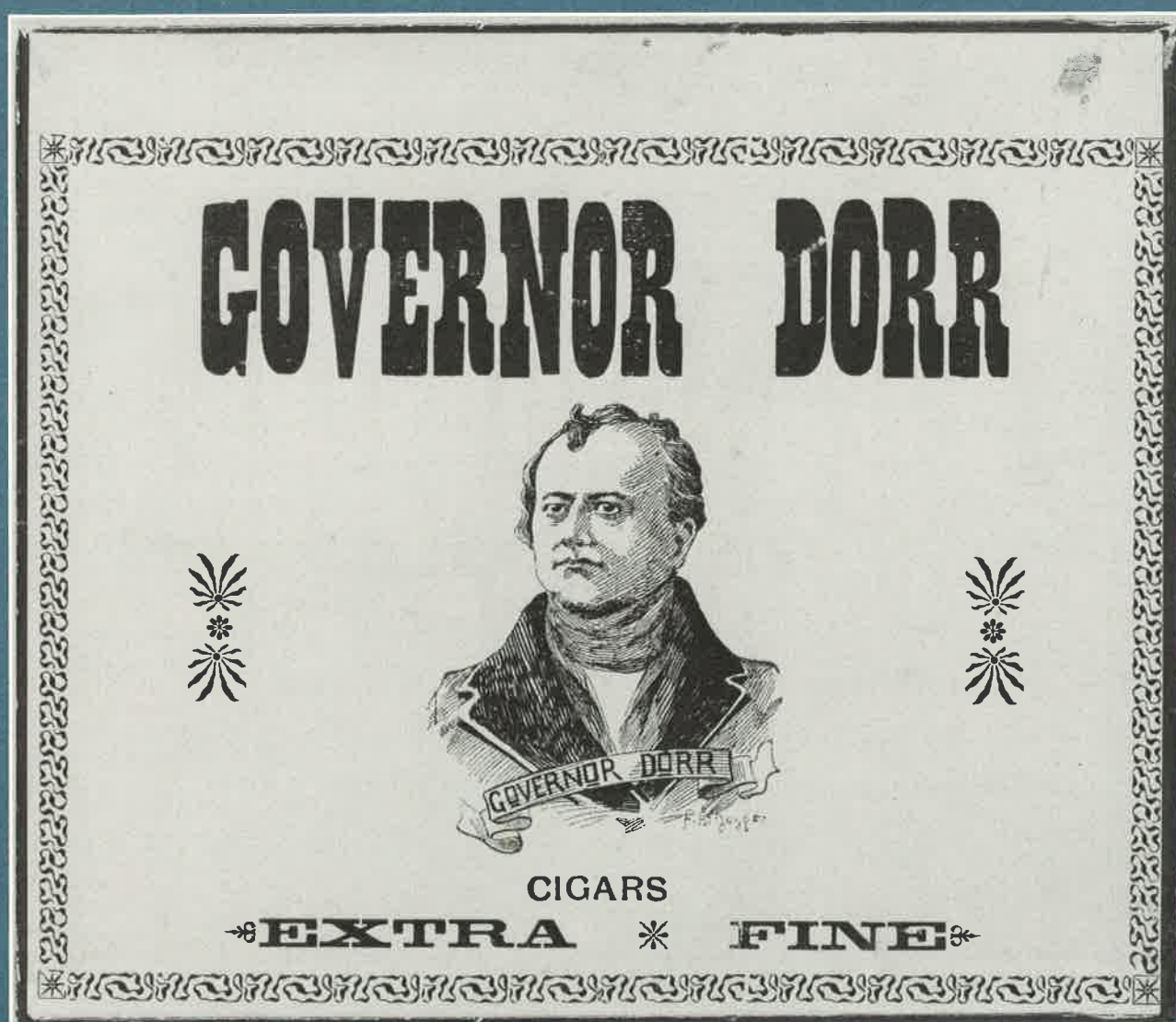


# Rhode Island History

SUMMER/FALL 2012

VOLUME 70, NUMBER 2



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1776.  1841.

*Adoption of the Constitution of Rhode Island.*

**PEOPLE'S TICKET.**

I am an American citizen, of the age of twenty-one years, and have my permanent residence or home in this State.

I am qualified to vote under the existing laws of this State.

I vote for the CONSTITUTION formed by the Convention of the People, assembled at Providence, and which was proposed to the People by said Convention on the 18th day of November, 1841.

"People's Ticket." A ballot used in the statewide referendum on the "People's Constitution" in December, 1841. The constitution was overwhelmingly approved by those who voted. Dorr Rebellion Digital Collection, Phillips Library, Providence College, R.I. (<http://www.providence.edu/library/dps/Pages/Projects.aspx>, accessed 24 May 2012).

## The Dorr Rebellion and the Social Contract of Political Equality

JONATHAN HILES

*Others there are, landholders to the bone;  
They keep the land of others as their own....*

*These are the men who love to rule the state  
And have their laws decide the poor man's fate....*

*But this can never be. Spirits have risen,  
Fired by the memory of their sires in heaven;  
They ask their rights, 'tis all the boon they crave,  
Determined not to be the rich man's slave.<sup>1</sup>*

From the most basic historical perspective, the Dorr Rebellion was a struggle over who should make Rhode Island's laws. In 1841, an economic elite held political sway, as a real estate requirement barred most white men—and all women and blacks—from voting. For eleven years, Rhode Island had been the only state in the nation that made voting rights dependent on property ownership.<sup>2</sup> In order to petition the state's Whig government to liberalize franchise laws, which were dictated by the 1663 Rhode Island Charter, laborers and freeholders formed the Rhode Island Suffrage Association.<sup>3</sup> Facing staunch resistance from "Charterites"—supporters of the government's position that the Charter's voting restrictions should be maintained—the Suffrage Association adopted an ultimatum and a philosophy: "Give Us Our Rights or We Will Take Them!"<sup>4</sup> Still unable to gain concessions from Governor Samuel Ward King and the Rhode Island General Assembly, in October 1841 the Suffrage Association, led by Thomas Wilson Dorr and newly named the "People's Party," sought to take their rights by drafting a "People's Constitution" to replace the old Charter. The creation and content of this Constitution, which granted suffrage rights

to all white males and redrew districts according to population,<sup>5</sup> rested on the theory of Popular Constituent Sovereignty, which holds that the "people"—the "majority, and not ... any portion or class"—are sovereign and possess an inherent right to alter constitutions by their chosen methods.<sup>6</sup>

The state government refused to authorize a referendum on the People's Constitution. Nonetheless, the constitution was overwhelmingly approved by a vote of 13,597 to 52 in the People's Party referendum held in December 1841.<sup>7</sup> Its remarkable popularity notwithstanding, the People's Party encountered effective resistance from establishment forces. The General Assembly refused to recognize the referendum and, in February 1842, convened its own constitutional convention from which emerged the conservative "Landholders' Constitution." Beyond failing to reapportion districts according to population, the Landholders' Constitution continued to withhold suffrage rights not only from blacks—as the People's Constitution had done—but also from non-propertied citizens who were foreign-born. Dorr condemned this largely false show of compromise and, along with supporters, engineered the defeat of the Landholders' Constitution by a vote of 8,689 to 8,013 in March 1842.<sup>8</sup> As before, the seeming downfall of Charterites only helped to bring Rhode Island's constitutional crisis to a head. In April, both Dorr and Samuel Ward King were elected governor in separate elections carried out according to different rules. Dorr claimed victory, as he had been elected according to the voting laws of the People's Constitution, while Charterites refused to yield their power because, they argued, King had won on the basis of the old Charter's legitimate voting restrictions.

After all peaceful means had been exhausted, “Dorrites” (named for their allegiance to Dorr) applied the full meaning of the doctrine of Popular Constituent Sovereignty by resorting to force. After King and his supporters refused to abandon government or allow elected members of the People’s Party to enter its chambers, Dorr and followers took up arms in order to impose the people’s supremacy. Their efforts ultimately ended with a whimper, as Charterites maintained control of state government without bloodshed and drafted a new constitution that replaced the old Charter in 1843.<sup>9</sup> However, the People’s Party left an enduring mark on political theory and the course of Rhode Island politics. The principle that a majority possessed the irrevocable legal and moral right to forcefully depose its government radically empowered ordinary citizens and challenged established authority.

Although Popular Constituent Sovereignty stands for political rights, its radicalism transcends the suffrage issue because it addresses not only how but also for whom laws should be made. The People’s Constitution is the most tangible link between political equality—at the ballot box—and consequential progressive policies, as it altered legal procedures, corporate regulations, and public education in order to ensure greater social fairness. In a demonstration of their equalizing impacts, provisions in the People’s Constitution corresponded to the proposals and goals of radical workingmen’s movements throughout the country. Additionally, radical leaders from Ohio to New York lauded the doctrine of Popular Constituent Sovereignty, since they anticipated that the political mobilization of working-class citizens would inevitably result in pro-labor reforms. The writings of People’s Party leaders, and Dorr in particular, also reveal that the suffrage movement pursued a more broadly equitable society. Believing that government as then constituted privileged the

wealthy and persecuted the poor, Dorr strove to stamp out laws that fostered class inequality. The People’s Constitution pursued this aim through measures intended to counteract abuses of the poor in courts and protections of the rich in corporate charters. The political equality envisioned by the People’s Party, therefore, encompassed a prohibition against government favoritism of the well-off at the expense of the downtrodden.

Striking down unequal laws would represent significant progress but did not, on its own, meet suffragists’ standards of political equality. They believed that a truly republican state required more than the elimination of economically regressive laws because equal laws could treat different classes unequally. As a result, the People’s Constitution not only eliminated laws undermining equality but also implemented provisions that actively advanced it. The pledge to promote free schools exemplifies this dimension, as it assigned to Rhode Island government an affirmative obligation to create a more level playing field. The People’s Constitution was to be not only a bulwark against oppression but also a vehicle for the collective elevation of all the state’s inhabitants. Believing that laws should “be made [not] for the good of the few, but of the many,” the People’s Party promoted political equality in elections in order to advance policies that would produce greater overall social equality.<sup>10</sup>

ALTHOUGH THE PEOPLE’S PARTY enjoyed broad popular support, significant differences existed within its membership. Dorr embodied this diversity of perspective, as he advocated several policies more sweeping than those incorporated in the People’s Constitution.

He challenged establishment forces on behalf of workers despite being born into an upper-class and highly respected Rhode Island family. In 1775, his grandfather, Ebenezer Dorr, galloped from Boston to warn Massachusetts residents of the

approach of the British army and was reputed to have accompanied Paul Revere on his “midnight ride.” Dorr’s father, Sullivan Dorr, accrued great wealth through trade with China. On his mother’s side, Dorr was directly descended from William Harris who had immigrated to Rhode Island with Roger Williams in 1636. An exceptional student at Phillips Exeter Academy and Harvard, Dorr worked as a lawyer in New York and could have continued a lucrative practice when he settled down in Providence in 1832. He decided instead to campaign for universal manhood suffrage and other social causes. In 1834, he won election to the Rhode Island House of Representatives where he pursued education reform and corporate regulation.<sup>11</sup> By 1841, Dorr was by far the most important figure in the People’s Party, as its supporters embraced the label “Dorrite” and elected Dorr governor in an election open to all white males. Additionally, he was the most influential theorist of the People’s Party and the chief architect of its constitution.<sup>12</sup> Dorr’s substantive and symbolic importance heightens the significance of his zealous reformism because his views likely reflected those of a large portion of the People’s Party.

Seth Luther, a labor leader and organizational secretary of the People’s Party, represents a far less significant but still noteworthy faction of the suffragist movement.<sup>13</sup> Born of humble origins and trained as a carpenter, he campaigned for a ten-hour work day and minimum wage and rallied large audiences of working men and women to take on the monied interests who oppressed them. He was considerably less prominent than Dorr within the People’s Party, but he expounded a crucial radical viewpoint that spurred political activism amongst laborers and aroused opposition from moderate suffragists. It is important to note that Luther played no role in drafting the People’s Constitution and that the reforms it contained fell short of those that he sought on behalf of laborers. As a result of



*T. Dorr.*

Inaugurated Governor of Rhode Island.

May 31 1842

A popular portrait of Governor Thomas Dorr executed around the time of his inauguration, January, 1842. Dorr’s supporters may have hoped that his election would gain legitimacy from his assured appearance in print. RIHS Collection (Engraving, RIHS X3 5225).

his political failure, as well as his later confinement for insanity, Luther has been unduly marginalized in histories of the Dorr Rebellion.<sup>14</sup> His views deserve study even where they diverged from those of most Dorrites because they speak to the interests and beliefs of many laborers, whose activism fueled the suffrage cause. Additionally, analysis of Luther’s uniquely radical political ideology shows the ways in which particular reforms advocated by the People’s Party were relatively restrained.



On the opposite extreme from Luther, the People's Party featured comparatively moderate elements. Their views are largely reflected in the People's Constitution, whose provisions reflected the moderation of consensus opinion. More radical and controversial opinions, in contrast, have remained unexamined and deserve greater scrutiny because they show that a large portion of Dorrites held more radical beliefs than those reflected in the platform of the People's Party.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the policies and core values of the more reformist suffragists best illustrate the overarching belief, shared by a broad cross-section of those in the People's Party, that economic benefits as well as political rights should be more equitably enjoyed. For this reason, it is useful both to consider the People's Party en bloc, chiefly through examination of its Constitution, and to distinguish between elements within it by analyzing the manuscripts, letters, and pamphlets of Dorr and, to a lesser degree, Luther.

In examining the links between Dorrites' struggle for suffrage rights and more concrete forms of equality, this essay reviews the public discourse surrounding the Dorr rebellion, the doctrine of Popular Constituent Sovereignty and its implications, and the concrete policy reforms contained in the People's Constitution. Presented in order of ascending importance, these three levels of analysis respectively suggest, imply, and confirm Dorrites' concern with social justice. The rhetoric surrounding the Dorr Rebellion illustrates the importance of appealing to workers in political debates and offers clues that, according to its opponents, the People's Party sought redistributive policies. However, since public appeals were often propagandist and occasionally contradictory, it is necessary to search beyond potentially superficial oratory and to scrutinize the theory of Popular Constituent Sovereignty advanced by the People's Party. In application, this doctrine necessarily empowered the common man and safeguarded against tyranny

by an elite. Accordingly, it garnered enthusiastic support from radicals and virulent opposition from conservatives. Yet, because Popular Constituent Sovereignty deals directly with political processes but not with policies, more tangible evidence is required to establish its link to a broader doctrine of social equality. As a result, prior studies of the Dorr Rebellion have ignored the centrality of social justice issues. Marvin Gettleman's seminal study, *The Dorr Rebellion: A Study in American Radicalism, 1833-1849*, concludes that the People's Party sought "political victory by exclusively political means" and therefore neglected the "social and economic grievances that rankled among the plebeians."<sup>16</sup> An analysis of the People's Constitution shows, in contrast to this historical interpretation, suffragists favored legal, regulatory, and educational policies that were designed to improve the condition of the working classes by increasing the courtroom rights of non-elites, curbing the power and autonomy of wealthy corporations, and providing a more equal footing for all citizens through public education.

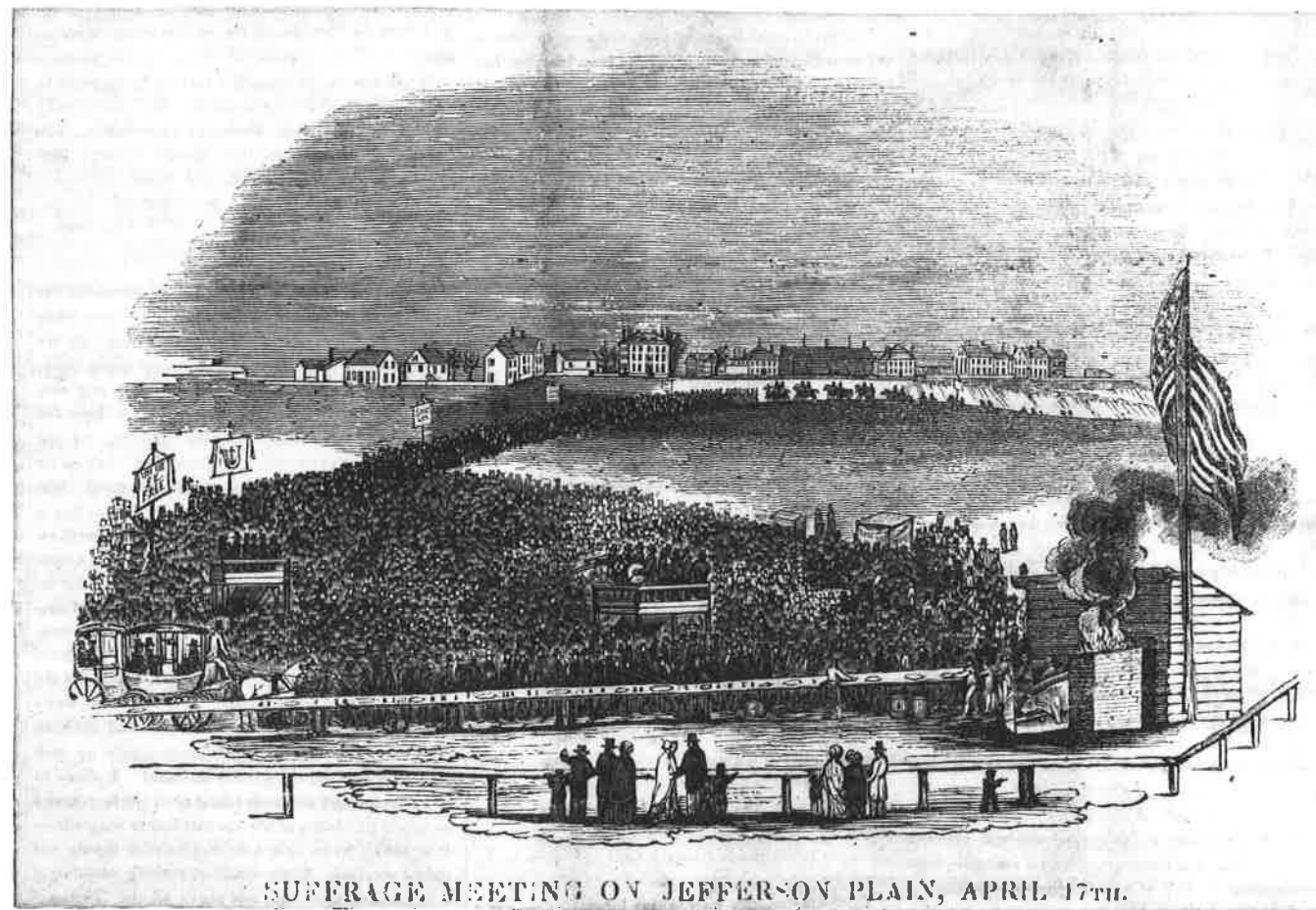
IN ORDER TO EVALUATE the importance of economic issues in the Dorr Rebellion, it is necessary to first review the suffrage restrictions, social divisions, and public discourse that shaped it. Immediately prior to the conflict, Rhode Island's voting laws ensured a lopsided distribution of political power without precedent. State property-holding requirements had limited voting rights since 1723, but such qualifications became particularly burdensome during the first half of the nineteenth century. Whereas restrictions on suffrage had gradually eased during the colonial era, permitting seventy-five percent of white males to vote by the American Revolution, statutory, economic, and demographic changes steadily decreased the proportion of citizens eligible to vote in the fifty years prior to the Dorr Rebellion. In 1798, the General Assembly had increased landholding requirements, limiting the

franchise to those who owned \$134 in property or accrued at least seven dollars annually in rent.<sup>17</sup> An influx of Irish immigrants—who caused Rhode Island's population to more than double during the first half of the nineteenth century—and the transition to an industrial economy made this threshold especially restrictive, as an emergent wage-earning class possessed insufficient property wealth to vote.<sup>18</sup> As a result, by 1841, only forty-two percent<sup>19</sup> of white male Rhode Islanders enjoyed the franchise, including as little as six percent of those living in Providence.<sup>20</sup> Unequal apportionment of representatives further diminished the political influence of working-class manufacturing centers, as the old State Charter allocated representation according to geographic rather than population distribution, thereby granting rural areas—which contained only one-third of the State's population—control over the General Assembly. The disparity in per capita political power between Providence and Portsmouth typified this trend: Providence had nearly fifteen times as many inhabitants but nonetheless received the same number of representatives.<sup>21</sup> After studying the combined effect of voting restrictions and unequal apportionment of representatives, a U.S. Congressional committee calculated that the people of Rhode Island "were ruled ... by one-ninth part of the adult [white] male population."<sup>22</sup>

Rhode Islanders, frustrated by their exclusion from the political process, engaged in diverse and independent struggles for electoral reform. In 1824, agitation for an extension of the franchise culminated in Rhode Island's first constitutional convention, which adopted only minor reforms and failed to win support in a statewide referendum open only to those already able to vote.<sup>23</sup> Around the same time, grassroots organizations began to petition the General Assembly for electoral reform. Petitioning reflected large-scale dissatisfaction with the status quo as well as political and social divisions that would perpetually plague the suffrage cause.

Presaging racial divisions that would reappear in the Dorr Rebellion, several petitions in the 1820s and 1830s requested black enfranchisement, even as many others asked only that the Assembly lower suffrage barriers for white males.<sup>24</sup> For example, an 1833 petition signed by over thirty citizens from the Town of Warren demanded that "[t]he right of suffrage ... be extended to all white male citizens, who pay taxes, perform military duty, and have attained the age of twenty-one years."<sup>25</sup> More conservative supporters of electoral reform, many of whom were of the middle and upper classes, favored even more modest measures, proposing an extension of suffrage only to native-born taxpayers. Still others ignored the franchise issue altogether, neglecting the imbalance of political power according to class and instead insisting only that representation in the General Assembly be allocated in proportion to population. Therefore, in spite of powerful stirrings for change, social conflict and ideological disagreement produced conflicting proposals for increasing political equality.

Despite differences among supporters of electoral reform, one systematic suffragist campaign, led by labor activists, presaged the Dorr Rebellion. As a result of its rapidly industrializing economy, Rhode Island was an early site for labor agitation and Providence hosted perhaps the first region-wide meeting of workers' delegates in 1825. During the early 1830s, wage earners organized a workingmen's movement, which demanded greater political and economic rights. Seth Luther, the most prominent member of Rhode Island's workingmen's movement during the 1830s,<sup>26</sup> helped to spearhead a broad reform agenda to remedy the abuses of "a monied aristocracy." Advocating workers' protections, stringent bank regulations, and universal education in addition to universal white manhood suffrage, the workingmen's movement struggled for social justice through the pursuit of voting rights.<sup>27</sup> Even as the workingmen's movement previewed the economic



This engraving depicts a large gathering of the Rhode Island Suffrage Association, April 17, 1841, held on Jefferson Plain, now the site of the Rhode Island Statehouse. The Suffrage Association and the "People's Party" that emerged from it won spontaneous and widespread support from many working-class Rhode Islanders. RIHS Collection (Wood engraving, RIHS X3 2173).

progressivism of the People's Party, its compromises demonstrated the multifaceted relationship between political equality and economic justice. Despite initial calls for radical economic reforms, the workingmen's movement decided, in 1834, to confine its short-term proposals to suffrage issues in order to join freeholders in the newly-formed Constitution Party, which campaigned for the expansion of voting rights.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, conservative reactions to the Constitution Party indicate that economic motivations remained central, as members of Rhode Island's Charterite government alleged that the Constitution Party embodied a "spirit of

leveling" that could lead to worker insurrections.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, although the 1834 suffrage struggle ended differently than the Dorr Rebellion—the General Assembly mollified reformers by holding a fruitless 'do-nothing' constitutional convention—similarities regarding political rhetoric and the strong influence of working-class interests reveal the centrality of economic grievances to the suffragist cause.

In a testament to their distinctively vital interest in political equality, workers again organized a campaign for constitutional reform in the spring of 1840, founding the Rhode Island Suffrage Association, which grew out of meetings of

mechanics.<sup>30</sup> Once more, a considerable number of freeholders—a large portion of whom were urban artisans or professionals—allied with wage earners and expressly condemned the electoral system for fostering a concentration of political power and wealth.<sup>31</sup> Speaking at the People's Party convention, one suffragist, who used the pseudonym "Thræseus Paetus," alleged that landholders had made the government a representative "not of the people, but of a class," by "securing to the rich [the power to control government]."<sup>32</sup> Dorr shared "Paetus's" concern with the political supremacy of wealthy interests, charging that the government was controlled by an "aristocracy" that encouraged an "increase in wealth and luxury" and the "growth of monopoly."<sup>33</sup> In the view of suffragists, an exclusive franchise created an intolerable nexus between political and economic power.

Like their Dorrite opponents, Charterites perceived an economic motivation in the movement to expand suffrage rights. Most of their leaders came from the upper classes, which "tilted heavily" towards the Charterite cause.<sup>34</sup> They accused the People's Party of plotting to equalize wealth in addition to political power. As part of a campaign to link the suffrage cause to recognized radicals, federal judge and leading Charterite John Pitman branded the People's Party a "'Revolutionary movement'" gotten up by outside agitator "'Augustus O. Brownson,'" a radical Democrat who was notorious among property holders for advocating the outright abolition of inheritance rights.<sup>35</sup> Charterites also alleged that suffragists posed a threat to communal stability and private property. In one such warning, the *Providence Journal* cautioned that "property would melt away in taxes" if the suffragists prevailed.<sup>36</sup> National opponents of the Dorrite cause also charged it with economic radicalism, deriding its members as "agrarians"—supporters of an equitable distribution of land—who would not only "plunder the banks," but also eliminate

"private property... [protections]."<sup>37</sup> Ubiquitous alarmism about wealth redistribution, like Dorrite condemnations of wealthy interests, suggests that the ultimate agenda of the People's Party extended beyond electoral reform.

Although a review of public discourse indicates that the People's Party adherents favored direct measures to bridge the gap between rich and poor, discourse alone does not provide conclusive evidence of their political vision. Since Charterite accusations of "agrarianism" and property-seizing represent political propaganda, they should be treated with skepticism. Further obscuring the understanding of widely-circulated political commentaries, Charterites often made the same assertions about suffragists as suffragists made about them. For example, one Charterist broadside warned that there would be "no more democracy or equality" if the People's Constitution prevailed, while another branded Dorrites, the "Providence Aristocracy."<sup>38</sup>

Corresponding to their inversions of suffragist critiques, Charterites made explicit appeals to wage earners. One bulletin solicited the support of mechanics by raising the prospect that the People's Party would slash their salaries.<sup>39</sup> Another sought to separate political and economic equality, railing against the People's Constitution before proceeding to praise tariffs and regulations that "save ... working men."<sup>40</sup> The difficulty of assessing and reconciling such seemingly incompatible proclamations demonstrates that it is possible to understand the importance of economic justice in the suffrage cause only by looking beyond popular portrayals. Nevertheless, the public pronouncements of both Dorrites and Charterites offer convincing evidence that the franchise debate was part of a broader contest over government treatment of property, wealth, and workers.

Beyond indicating the importance of economic issues, partisan disputes reveal the crucial political influence of social divisions. Charterites exploited

nativist prejudices and racial divisions, with one characteristic broadside warning that suffragists would pit immigrants against blacks in order to make Rhode Islanders “slaves of Roman Catholic tyranny.”<sup>41</sup> Ironically, it was the Law and Order Party, comprised of former Charterites, which benefitted from and fueled racial and ethnic antagonisms. The rhetoric and policies of its leaders largely reflected those supported by native-born Protestant farmers, many of whom harbored anti-Catholic prejudices. Although the People’s Constitution had received strong support overall in the non-state sanctioned referendum of December 1841, the vote revealed geographic divisions rooted in ethnic tensions. In industrial centers, turnout was sixty-four percent; in agricultural districts, turnout was only forty-two percent. Urban workers, many of them Catholic, had more to gain from the People’s Constitution, as it extended voting rights to property-less wage earners and equalized representation. Farmers feared not only the loss of political influence but also the prospect that urban Catholics would seize political power under more inclusive voting laws. The anti-Catholic propaganda disseminated by Charterites, and their proposed restrictions on immigrant voting, intentionally appealed to this sentiment.

By weakening working-class support for the People’s Party, appeals to racial biases stymied efforts to create a unified suffragist front, which was necessary to topple a conservative government bent on keeping power. Since most rank-and-file Dorrites were non-freeholders, their defections weakened the core base of the People’s Party. Moreover, suffragists of the middle and professional classes were, on the whole, unwilling to take up arms against the state because they tended to be more moderate than working-class suffragists and comfortably situated under the status quo. As a result of these conditions, the Law and Order Party was able to debilitate the Dorr Rebellion through coercive

tactics.<sup>42</sup> A law that passed in April 1842 compelled defections by authorizing severe penalties for those who participated in the “people’s” election that elected Dorr governor. It also set life imprisonment as a penalty for those who tried to assume office under the People’s Constitution. Dorrites called this new policy the “Algerine Law” because, they claimed, it enslaved innocents like the pirates of Algeria.<sup>43</sup> The force of arms prevailed even more decisively when, as a last resort, Dorr and followers launched an abortive attack on the Providence arsenal in the early morning of May 18, 1842. This defeat effectively ended the Dorr Rebellion. Yet, after fleeing the state, Dorr publicized plans to reconvene the “People’s Legislature” on July 4 in Chepachet, Rhode Island. Several hundred supporters eagerly awaited his arrival, and some even performed military drills in order to prepare for anticipated combat. However, after Dorr turned up on June 25, no People’s legislators appeared.<sup>44</sup> Foreseeing the futility of further violence, Dorrites could only disband, conceding defeat in fact but not surrendering their principles.

Even though the People’s Party had essentially expired by this point and the Landholders’ Constitution had peeled off moderate nativists, the Law and Order Party had not exploited prejudices enough to eliminate potential political threats. A regrettable compromise by the People’s Party, which resulted in its decision to deny black voting rights, created an opening on this front. During the convention of the People’s Party, Dorr had presented a motion that would have given blacks the right to vote, but it failed by a vote of 46 to 18. Although delegates agreed to include the issue in a popular referendum scheduled for the following year, the compromise rightfully left potential black voters dissatisfied and even impelled Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison to campaign against the People’s Constitution in Rhode Island.<sup>45</sup> The People’s Party did not support black voting

rights; its constituency of working-class whites, many of whom were Catholic immigrants, resented economic competition from blacks and embraced racial stereotypes. Seizing on this opening, the subsequent “Law and Order Constitution,” drafted during the fall of 1842, removed landholding requirements for all native-born citizens, black as well as white, even as it maintained them for immigrants. Citing this use of a racial wedge, Patrick Conley has argued that the Law and Order Constitution contained the “most nativistic suffrage clause in the nation.”<sup>46</sup>

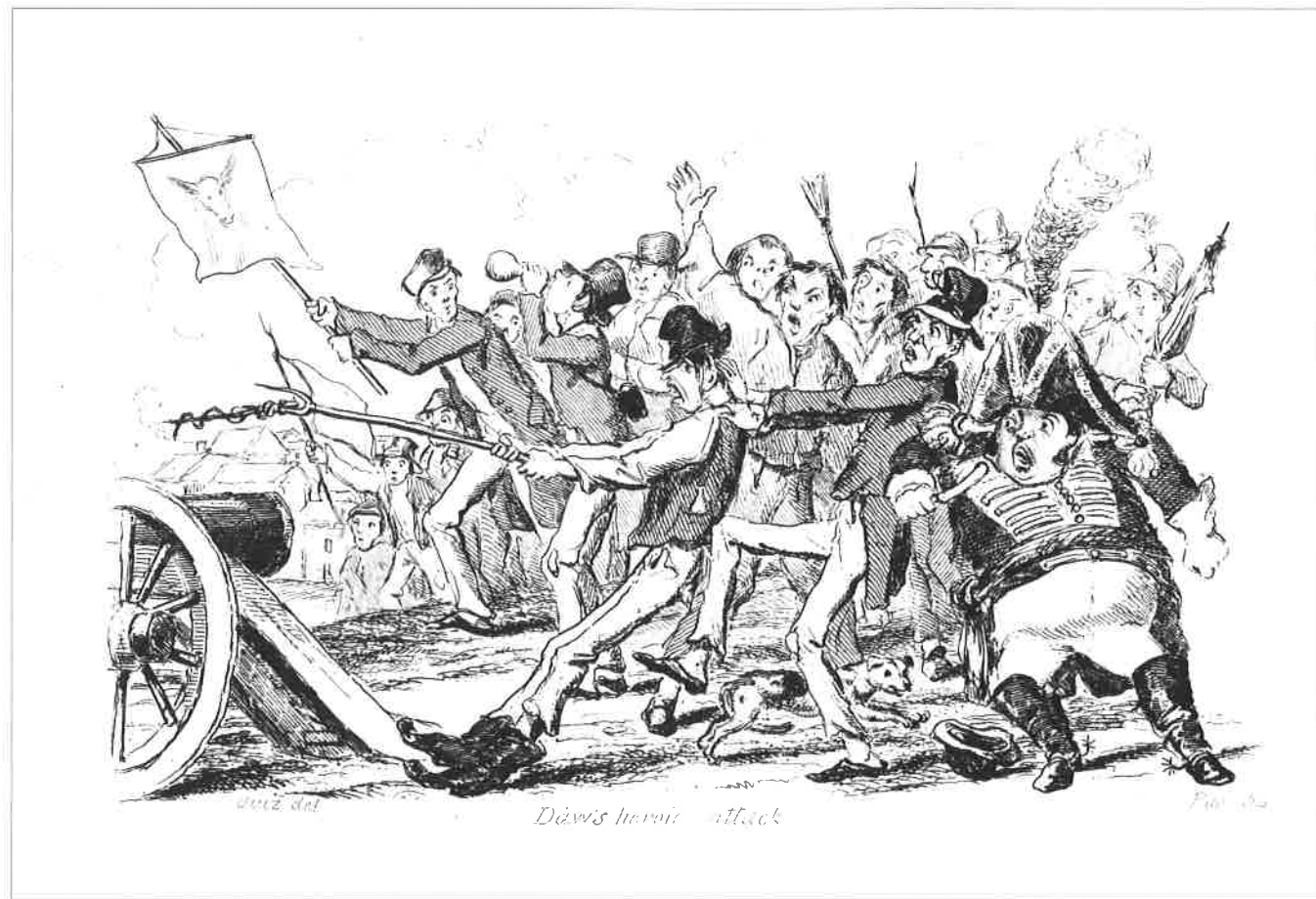
This cynical tactic worked as planned, as the new constitution was ratified overwhelmingly in November 1842, by a vote of 7,024 to 51.<sup>47</sup> The vote, in which Dorrites abstained from voting, revealed that racial and religious antagonisms had increased support for the existing government.<sup>48</sup> Conceptions of ethnic identity as well as economic interest thus shaped popular opinions of political equality. Whereas support for social justice and more liberal political rights gave rise to the People’s Party, social enmities helped to undermine it by obscuring economic concerns that knew no ethnic bounds.

ALTHOUGH THE IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVES and ultimate downfall of the People’s Party were confined to Rhode Island, its principles ignited debate throughout the nation. In no area was this truer than in regard to the doctrine of Popular Constituent Sovereignty. Most forcefully explicated in *The Nine Lawyers’ Opinion*, written by Dorr and his allies in 1842, the doctrine holds that the “supreme and ultimate power, which prescribes the form of government for the people of the State ... resides in the *People themselves*.”<sup>49</sup> This supremacy endows the people with unchecked authority to alter constitutions any time “their safety or happiness requires.” Furthermore, *The Nine Lawyers’ Opinion* asserted that the “mode of [constitutional change] is... immaterial” because the

people should be “the judges of this.” The contest between the People’s Party and defenders of the old State Charter centered on the question of whether popular sovereignty should exist in practice or merely in “theory or form.” Dorrites believed that governments should be only temporary holders of the people’s trust and that no law or constitutional agreement should prevail against the people as a result.<sup>50</sup> By giving popular majorities the right to achieve their goals by any means necessary, their theory of Popular Constituent Sovereignty amounted to a right to armed rebellion.

More than an expedient justification for the overthrow of the Charterite government, the right to rebellion represented a fundamental principle with implications extending far beyond Rhode Island politics. All sides agreed on this point, with John Pitman, a Law and Order Party leader, warning that the “central question is not suffrage extension or any other reform proposal, but the manner in which political change and constitutional revision should take place.”<sup>51</sup> Reflecting its genuine ideological attachment to Popular Constituent Sovereignty, the People’s Party codified the principle in their constitution, ordaining that “[t]he people have ... an unlimited capacity to alter, reform, or totally change [their government].” The People’s Constitution also took more tangible steps to facilitate constitutional change. Whereas the Law and Order Constitution imposed procedural restrictions that made constitutional amendments difficult to achieve—and that practically prohibited those that would threaten entrenched economic and political interests<sup>52</sup>—the People’s Constitution encouraged them, stipulating that alterations to the constitution would have to earn only simple majorities in town meetings and consecutive General Assemblies.<sup>53</sup> As an unchecked right to revolution in theory and a feasible means for transforming government in practice, Popular





Supporters of the old Charter mocked Dorrites after an abortive attack on the Providence Armory, which included a failed attempt to fire a cannon. Charterites here portrayed Dorrites as disorderly and inept. Cartoon, from "Daw's Doings," Boston, 1842, RIHS Collection (RIHS X3 1061).

Constituent Sovereignty aimed to maximize the political influence of ordinary citizens.

Even though the right to rebellion represented a radical and transformative political doctrine, the People's Party found justification for it in history and law. The authors of *The Nine Lawyers' Opinion* frequently invoked the Founding Fathers, reminding readers "that the Constitution of the United States was not made by virtue of any call ... from the ... Government, but by the voluntary unauthorized act of the several States." Exemplifying their inclination to show that the American Revolution validated Popular Constituent Sovereignty, the

second half of *The Nine Lawyers' Opinion* is comprised solely of quotes from the Founders that promote the prerogatives of political majorities.<sup>54</sup> While the words of the Founders substantiated Popular Constituent Sovereignty on philosophical and nationalistic grounds, Dorrites claimed that the U.S. Constitution provided its more concrete legal basis. They equated Popular Constituent Sovereignty with an American conception of "republican" in arguing that Article Four of the Constitution mandates a right to rebellion because it dictates that "the United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form

of Government." *The Nine Lawyers' Opinion* rested its case not only on legal doctrine but also on an optimistic view of common people, whose prudence ensured that "Sovereign power" would be "from its nature ... rarely exercised."<sup>55</sup> Advocates of the right to rebellion insisted that the American Revolution was grounded in the inherent truth that, collectively, ordinary people could best advance justice.

This traditionalist portrayal notwithstanding, conservative reactions belie the contention that Popular Constituent Sovereignty was anything but radical. Establishment figures did not find similar justification in history, and they certainly did not trust the people to exercise sovereignty wisely. Accordingly, courts uniformly asserted that Popular Constituent Sovereignty represented "one theory" rather than a fundamental right. In concluding that the People's Constitution was not "a binding force," Rhode Island's Supreme Court ruled that Popular Constituent Sovereignty had "no basis in law."<sup>56</sup> The U.S. Supreme Court took a similar stance, holding in *Luther v. Borden* (1849) that the judiciary lacked the authority to mandate enforcement of the People's Constitution and Dorr's victory as governor. In sidestepping the constitutional question, the Court not only refused to endorse Popular Constituent Sovereignty but also implicitly rejected it, deeming Dorr's behavior "unlawful"<sup>57</sup> according to valid state laws. Regardless of its philosophical and moral merits, Popular Constituent Sovereignty had no legal standing.

Charterites shared the Court's view, arguing that the Dorr Rebellion amounted to an assault on tradition and stability, which they deemed the chief safeguards of freedom. Expressing this outlook, John Pitman alleged that "liberty has most to fear, not from the reign of law and order, but from the unrestrained licentiousness of the people." Charterites believed that popular sovereignty,

# HURRAH

FOR THE

## OLD CHARTER.

### THE OLD CHARTER IS SAFE!

All who voted for the new Constitution prefer law and order under the Charter to an unquiet government under the Constitution! **One thousand men who voted against the Constitution did so because they preferred the Charter. It can now be maintained! Suffrage men have cheated themselves, and the Charter is triumphant!!**

**Friends of the Charter, to the polls! Vote against the Constitution and the extension of suffrage, and secure the old Government!!**

This broadside urged voters to oppose the People's Constitution. Charterites argued that they would preserve law and order; a Dorrite victory would elevate 'rabble' to govern ordinary citizens. Digital Collection, Phillips Library, Providence College, R.I. (<http://www.providence.edu/library/dps/Pages/Projects.aspx>, accessed 24 May 2012).

correctly construed, entailed rule by a majority of interests rather than of numbers. This view reflected the belief that the working classes represented only one interest because they would always think and vote en bloc—and do so rashly—whereas those of the higher classes would apply prudential principles. This Charterite outlook relied on the assumption that those unable to vote had, by their own devices, "reduced themselves to their [mean]



condition.”<sup>58</sup> According to this logic, the supposed depravity and homogeneity of the lower classes rightfully precluded them from voting and rendered Popular Constituent Sovereignty an especially great menace. Conservative leaders in Rhode Island argued that majority rule, no matter its context, would threaten social hierarchy, and used this argument in order to convince President John Tyler and Southern congressmen that the application of Popular Constituent Sovereignty would permit slave revolts. Opponents of the doctrine in both the North and the South recognized that greater political equality would allow common people—whether black or white, slave or wage earner—to secure their interests to the detriment of those who hoarded political and economic power.<sup>59</sup>

During the Dorr Rebellion, most national politicians agreed fully with Charterites because they, too, feared that an unchecked populace would instigate social upheaval. Henry Clay called the People’s Constitution a “wanton defiance of established authority,” and Daniel Webster warned against “the sudden impulses of mere majorities.”<sup>60</sup> Additionally, Southern Democrats worried that popular sovereignty would allow blacks to form a constitution or initiate a popular uprising,<sup>61</sup> so ominous a prospect that John Calhoun threatened to leave the Democratic Party if it adopted a symbolic resolution that praised the People’s Party.<sup>62</sup> Beyond receiving unequivocal condemnation from the three most prominent members of Congress, the People’s Party faced unified opposition from conservative Democrats and Whigs. This coalition supported entrenched institutional powers, including banks, creditors, and slaveholders. Verdicts on Popular Constituent Sovereignty cut across deep-seated ideological as well as party divides. Even such antislavery luminaries as Horace Greeley, former President John Quincy Adams, and New York Governor William Henry Seward condemned the popular

uprising in Rhode Island.<sup>63</sup> These men found rare common ground with the South’s “slave power” because Popular Constituent Sovereignty empowered common people and inherently threatened establishment powers.

Noting this unfavorable reaction, Democratic Senator Silas Wright of Massachusetts warned Dorr in a confidential letter that Democratic members of Congress “did not look favorably upon Popular Constituent Sovereignty,” and would not direct “any department of ... government” to defend it.<sup>64</sup> By this Wright meant that Congress would refuse not only to endorse the People’s Party but also to deter the Federal government from violently crushing it. His predictions proved correct, as a resolution in support of the People’s Party floundered in the Senate and failed to attract a sponsor in the House. The executive branch was even more hostile to the suffrage cause. President Tyler refused to provide assistance to Dorr when the two met briefly on May 10, 1842, and he provided arms as well as men to reinforce garrisons at Providence and Newport during that spring and summer.<sup>65</sup>

In contrast to their conservative counterparts, national politicians who challenged class inequality and the power of corporations, especially banks, expressed partial support for Popular Constituent Sovereignty. Endorsing the majoritarian principles underlying the Dorr Rebellion, former president Andrew Jackson wrote in the spring of 1842 that the people constitute a “sovereign power” possessing “a right to alter and amend their system of government when a majority wills it.” Similarly, Senator Levi Woodbury of New Hampshire, a fierce enemy of a paper currency seen to favor the rich, commended the suffragist cause in a letter to Dorr, arguing that it is the people who have the right to dictate “when, where, how” to change their constitution. Another Senator who objected to paper currency, William Allen of Ohio, demonstrated particularly impassioned support for majority

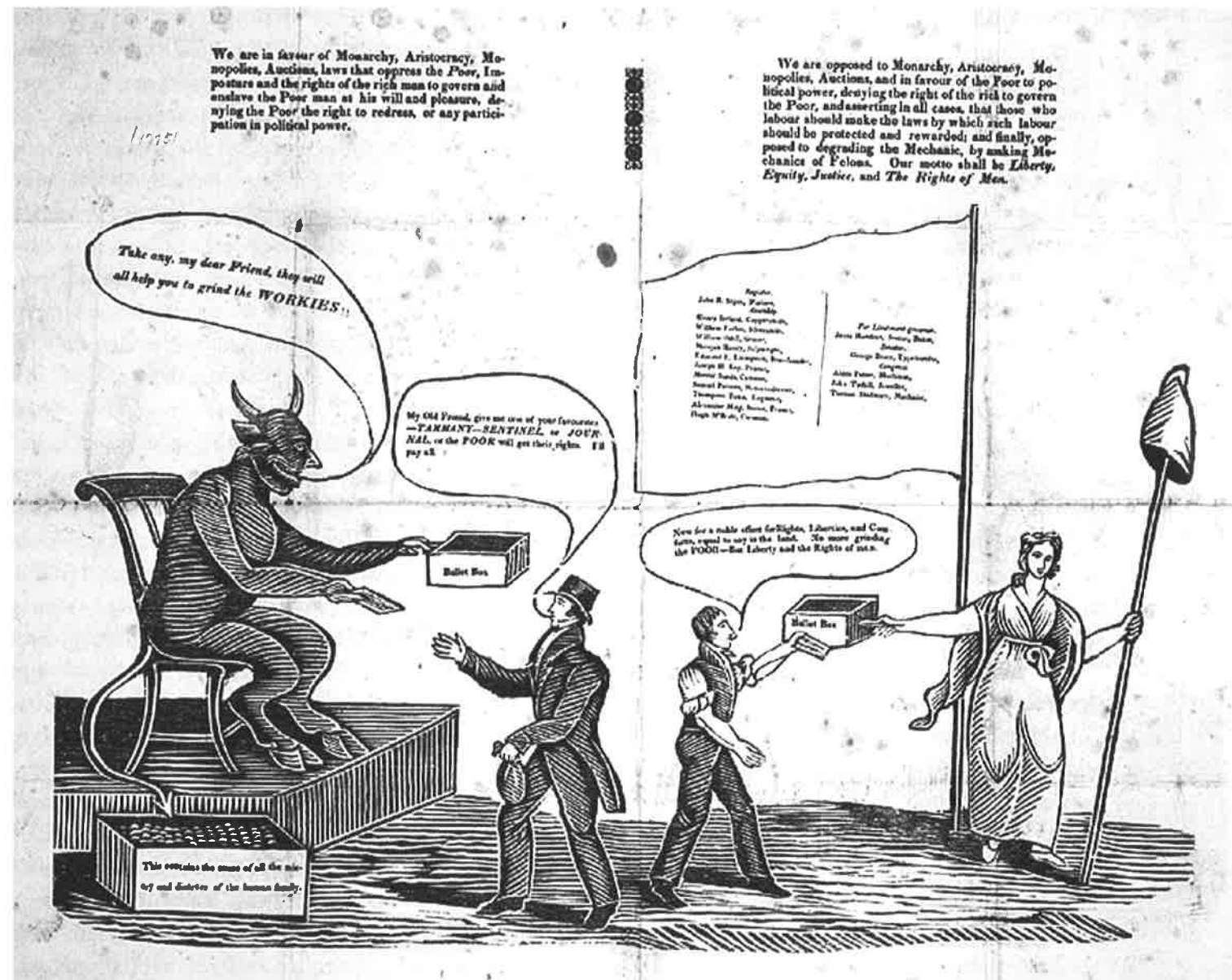
rights, labeling the Charterite government, “a sheer, a downright, a blasphemous usurpation.”<sup>66</sup>

Although such mainstream proponents of greater economic equality supported Popular Constituent Sovereignty in theory, few of them argued that it should be carried through to its logical conclusions. Having expressed his support for Dorr, Levi Woodbury counseled, “shun violence—insubordination—civil war—but ... instead [stick] steadily and faithfully to your just...objects in constitutional methods.”<sup>67</sup> Likewise, even as the authors of the “Burke Report,” a Congressional investigation of the Dorr Rebellion, sympathized with the goals of the People’s Party in declaring that the people can “alter, reform, or abolish existing forms of government,” it stopped short of endorsing Dorr’s attempts to unseat the Charterite government through violent means.<sup>68</sup> Thus, even advocates of greater economic fairness refused to support the full meaning of Popular Constituent Sovereignty. Stripped of a right to rebellion, the doctrine offered no mechanism by which the people could impose their will.

In contrast to more cautious and establishment reformers, who tended to counsel against violence, radicals representing working-class interests supported an absolute version of Popular Constituent Sovereignty. Recognizing that the political mobilization of laborers was necessary for securing their interests, workingmen’s advocates reasoned that majorities should seize political rights if governments would not grant them. Seth Luther expressed this outlook, frequently advising labor activists, “We ought first, to adopt passive resistance,” but, “if need be ... to resist tyranny ... sword in hand.”<sup>69</sup> Sharing this view, radicals outside Rhode Island lent verbal and material support to the People’s Party. Dorr encountered strong support amongst economically progressive Tammany Hall politicians, who gave him a hero’s welcome when he visited New York City briefly

in May 1842.<sup>70</sup> One of Dorr’s most ardent allies there, labor organizer Mike Walsh, denounced “wage slavery” and declared each man’s “equal right to the share of the means which nature has provided.” Judging the Dorr Rebellion to be a “plebian uprising,” Walsh led a contingent of more than a dozen men to assist with Dorr’s assault on the Providence arsenal. Additionally, he lent twenty more supporters to help lead a subsequent rebellion at Chepachet because he believed, mistakenly, that Dorr planned to continue fighting rather than to merely convene the People’s Legislature.<sup>71</sup> Walsh’s fellow radical, New York labor organizer and mayoral candidate Alexander Ming, also supported a popular right to rebellion. In a letter written in May 1842, Ming told Dorr that it was “an honor to apprise” him of the news that “friends from New York” would soon lend a hand to his uprising.<sup>72</sup> Judging that they could bring about a ten-hour work day, restrictions on banking, and the elimination of paper currency only through pure social democracy, Walsh and Ming associated Popular Constituent Sovereignty with the welfare of workers.<sup>73</sup>

The most visible and controversial advocate of the right to rebellion was Massachusetts Democrat Orestes Brownson. Perhaps the nation’s most well-known and reviled radical, Brownson wrote a widely-circulated essay, entitled the “The Laboring Classes” (1840), which asserted a deterministic, class-based historical narrative. Observing that the “only enemy of the laborer is [his] employer,”<sup>74</sup> Brownson argued that a violent “struggle between ... wealth and labor” was necessary because “[t]he system of wages must be supplanted by some other system, or else one-half of the human race must forever be virtual slaves of the other.” Beyond deploring capitalist economic relations, Brownson proposed that government should abolish property inheritance and allocate estates according to public need.<sup>75</sup> Although the degree of Brownson’s



This New York Workingmen's Party cartoon was signed by Alexander Ming, who, like fellow party leader Mike Walsh, corresponded with Dorr and offered him support. The well-heeled man on the left tells Satan he supports "Monarchy, Aristocracy, Monopolies, Auctions, laws that oppress the Poor" and any "denying the poor . . . participation in political power." The devil then hands the man votes from the ballot box, saying, "Take any, my dear Friend, they will all

help you to grind the WORKIES." On the right, Lady Liberty holds a ballot box and stands by a flag that implores readers to "register." A worker, in casting his ballot, declares, "No more grinding the POOR—But Liberty and the Rights of Man." (Edwin Kilroe Ephemera Collection, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York).

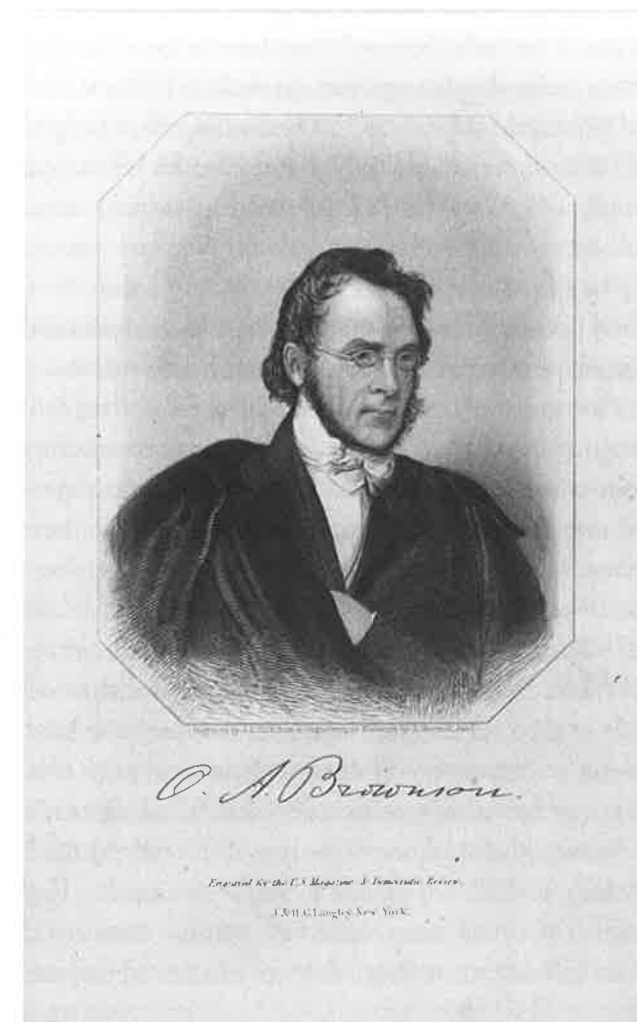
radicalism set him apart, he, like other radicals, subscribed to the belief that wealth distribution would occur inevitably if majorities "have the ultimate power to act as they shall judge best."<sup>76</sup> Accordingly, unlike moderately progressive anti-bank

Democrats in Congress, Brownson supported the right to revolution as implied by an uncompromising interpretation of Popular Constituent Sovereignty. Affirming this position in a letter to Dorr, he wrote, "The right of the people of Rhode Island to change

their form of government by means of Revolution I acknowledge."<sup>77</sup> Brownson's adamant political and economic radicalism typified the intersection between support for the right to revolution and advocacy of broad-based social equality.

YET, EVEN AS HIS SUPPORT for Dorr illustrates economic radicals' affinity for Popular Constituent Sovereignty, in later writings Brownson emphasized the distinction between government by the people

Orestes Brownson, pictured in 1839, wrote that a "violent struggle" between upper and lower classes was necessary to abolish inheritance rights. By 1843, Brownson's faith in democracy had diminished. (O.A. Brownson, engraved by A.L. Dick, from a daguerreotype miniature by A. Morand, Jun'r, Library of Congress, reproduction number, LC-USZ62-8877, LC-USZ62-125936).



and government for the people. In "Democracy and Liberty," an 1843 essay that lamented the stagnation of workers' movements, he declared, "We have been too ready to conclude that if we only once succeed in establishing democracy . . . the end will follow as a matter of course." Differentiating between political equality and economic equality, he suggested that democracy should not be understood as a goal in itself because the "end we are to aim at, is the progress of all men, especially the poorest classes."<sup>78</sup> By this standard, Brownson insinuated, the People's Party had failed to address the plight of the poor. Obliquely referencing the Dorr Rebellion he declared, "We have not erred in laboring to extend popular suffrage . . . but in relying on it as alone sufficient."<sup>79</sup> In fact, Brownson suggested that popular sovereignty was often detrimental to popular interests and branded as "blasphemous" the axiom, "Vox Populi est vox dei"—the voice of the people is the voice of God. Rather than initiating anarchical revolutions, he explained, the people should pursue practical change through institutions. Otherwise, liberties would be changeable and thus at all times vulnerable. Brownson's criticisms of majority rule reflected a lesser faith in common people than Dorr had long espoused. Moreover, they struck at the core of the suffrage struggle by suggesting that the People's Party had failed to adequately promote the interests of the people.<sup>80</sup>

Brownson's refusal to equate Popular Constituent Sovereignty with the inevitable well-being of laborers resembles Marvin Gettleman's claim that the People's Party ignored social inequalities unrelated to voting rights. These arguments do not undermine the correlation between economic and political radicalism, but they do clarify and heighten the importance of establishing a more concrete connection between the objectives of the People's Party and the interests of Rhode Island's working classes. The People's Constitution proves

this connection because it included tangible reforms that were designed to aid the working classes and that coincided with the proposals of radicals throughout the nation.

CONSISTENT WITH THE DORRITE TENET that the people are their best defenders, the People's Party aimed to increase democratic control over the legal system as well as the electoral process. In 1841, elites had almost exclusive control over courts in Rhode Island and most other states. In Rhode Island, non-freeholders could not serve on juries or bring suits unless freeholders endorsed their writs.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, juries gradually lost power throughout the 1820s and 1830s, while judges gained near absolute dominion over courts.<sup>82</sup> Whereas juries had once had the power to decide both law and fact, an 1827 court reform act directed judges "to instruct the grand juries in the law," and to give regular juries their "opinion on the law" before deliberations commenced.<sup>83</sup> In order to rectify this imbalance and make judges more beholden to the people, a sizeable minority of People's Convention delegates proposed that judges be elected by direct popular vote. Weighing their preference for popular control against their interest in guaranteeing an independent and politically disinterested judiciary, Dorr and other delegates secured passage of a proposal dictating that the General Assembly elect judges annually. Though this compromise was less sweeping than more reformist delegates would have liked, it illustrated Dorrites' conviction that grassroots control was essential to political equality. The safeguard of democratic influence was to prevent elite judges from harming the common man.<sup>84</sup>

In line with measures to make judges more accountable, the People's Constitution set forth procedural reforms that empowered juries. Whereas the Charterite Constitution held that the "judges of the Supreme Court shall ... instruct the jury in the law,"<sup>85</sup> the People's Constitution

sought to bolster the authority of juries by making them judges "both of the law and of the facts."<sup>86</sup> Dorr's view of the justice system reflects a general perception that juries functioned to defend the downtrodden. Asserting that jurors should "decide according to law and evidence," he remarked that it was "the great object of juries to stand in defense of the innocent" because if judges predominated, the "innocent would find no protection." Consequently, Dorr and his followers believed that an increase in jury power would serve to "shield the oppressed."<sup>87</sup>

National movements for economic justice promoted similar alterations to the judge-jury relationship and protections for working-class defendants. Their adherents generally considered judges to be "aristocratic" members of government whose near-absolute power symbolized "social ... and political inequality."<sup>88</sup> Concluding that judges not only signified inequality but also exacerbated it, radicals pushed for judicial elections, term limits, and more viable mechanisms for impeachment. Although the People's Constitution did not incorporate each of these proposals, its curtailment of judicial power embodied their collective tenor.

The role of juries dictated by the People's Constitution also aligned with the goals of leading progressives. In many states, criminal defendants did not receive the benefit of juries unless they agreed to cover a portion of their costs, a policy that disadvantaged indigent and even middle-class defendants. Seeking to rectify such inequality, reformers campaigned to guarantee juries in criminal trials and to secure their right to interpret the law. Efforts to remove jury fees represented only one aspect of broad opposition to what workingmen's advocate and prison reformer William Mullen labeled a "fee-for-justice" legal system.<sup>89</sup> The People's Constitution reflected similar concerns, as it aimed to reduce the correlation between justice and wealth by providing both witnesses and

evidence at the "public expense, when necessary." Even more significantly, the People's Constitution altered existing practice by requiring that juries sit in all criminal trials.<sup>90</sup> Prior laws had afforded all defendants the theoretical legal right to juries, evidence, and witnesses. However, poor defendants could not afford to access these rights. The People's Constitution replaced a theoretical right with an actual one because its framers believed that government possessed an affirmative duty to make *de jure* rights equally accessible.

Although the People's Party constructed a more equitable judicial system, its position on debt imprisonment illustrates that some of its reforms fell short of those proposed by its more progressive members. As a central feature of working-class political movements nationwide,<sup>91</sup> the abolition of debt imprisonment received strong support from leading radicals, including Orestes Brownson,<sup>92</sup> Seth Luther,<sup>93</sup> Mike Walsh, and Alexander Ming.<sup>94</sup> The cause gradually gained traction in the nineteenth century, with Pennsylvania eradicating the practice in 1842 and Massachusetts following suit in 1857. However, in 1841 the movement to end debt imprisonment remained close to the political fringe. In Rhode Island, the issue was particularly pertinent and controversial, as an influx of immigrant wage earners markedly increased the population vulnerable to debt imprisonment. Advocates for common laborers such as Rhode Island's *Farmers and Manufacturers Journal* bemoaned the State's merciless treatment of helpless debtors.<sup>95</sup> The Charterite Constitution had implicitly endorsed debt imprisonment, prescribing that "the person of a debtor ... ought not to be continued in prison after he shall have delivered up his property."<sup>96</sup> At the People's Convention, Dorr lobbied to reverse this policy, proposing a clause that stated plainly, "No man ought to be imprisoned for debt." Several delegates immediately attacked Dorr's recommendation, predicting that its implementation

would limit both borrowers' accountability and capital flows. Unable to arrive at a resolution, the Convention adopted a compromise, agreeing to neither sanction nor abolish imprisonment for debt.<sup>97</sup> Like other features of the People's Constitution, this resolution was progressive for its era but less sweeping than more reform-minded members of the People's Party would have liked.

The debate over the issue of debt imprisonment demonstrates that passage of the People's Constitution required concessions tailored to the cautious instincts of more moderate reformers. Dorr's advocacy of deep-seated changes to the criminal justice system, beyond the elimination of debt imprisonment, indicates that a more radical constituency existed within the People's Party. Embracing a cause that even egalitarian reformers overlooked, Dorr advocated prison reform, "resolving that the nature and the object of the Prison Discipline Society," which educated and rehabilitated inmates,<sup>98</sup> entitled it "to the respect and confidence of the community."<sup>99</sup> Prison reform did not become a broader, more publicized working-class concern until the mid-nineteenth century (taking root first in New York, Philadelphia, and Massachusetts), so Dorr's early promotion of the cause testifies to his penchant for supporting visionary policies that assisted those suffering from the most severe forms of oppression.<sup>100</sup> It is difficult to know the exact degree or substance of Dorr's proposed legal reforms, but there can be no doubt that he desired fundamental transformations, including in a list of goals "the erection of a State Prison, the revision, amendment and consolidation of our criminal law, both statute and common, and our civil law, either the whole or a part."<sup>101</sup> Not content with piecemeal change, Dorr sought to revolutionize the legal system in order to elevate those less well off.<sup>102</sup>

RHODE ISLAND'S EXISTING LEGAL SYSTEM and statutory laws drew criticism for not only

persecuting the poor but also enriching the wealthy. As a market economy emerged in the early 1800s, judges throughout the nation construed common law to benefit corporations. Courts especially increased inequality between workers and employers by sanctifying the role of contracts, as they ruled that employees could not obtain damages for workplace injuries unless a prior agreement stipulated that such compensation was due. Judges ruled that, as far as the law was concerned, employer-employee contracts were binding and agreed to upon equal and free terms, a view that emerged from a "market ideology." In adopting this interpretation, judges cruelly mocked as "legal paternalism" any notion of non-contractual obligations, even as the decline of benign employer paternalism made courts a crucial refuge for laborers.<sup>103</sup> An absolute insistence on the inviolability of contracts also applied to corporate charters, which the Supreme Court made inalterable in *Dartmouth College Case* (1819).<sup>104</sup> In rendering contracts absolutely authoritative, Federal and State courts ensured that corporate stockholders would enjoy exclusive economic and legal privileges.<sup>105</sup>

Rhode Island partook in a nationwide transformation in laws governing corporate charters that also benefitted corporations. Until 1790, corporate charters, which grant to businesses privileges and liabilities separate from those of their owners, could be conferred only on non-profit organizations through meticulous and rarely used legislative processes. After ratification of the U.S. Constitution, standards became more lenient and state legislatures gradually began to grant charters to private corporations that served a public interest in order to procure private capital for public infrastructure projects. However, in extending the rights of persons to private enterprises, states increasingly supported initiatives for private profit that possessed tenuous and uncertain relationships with public welfare. The chartering of banks presents the foremost example, as states allowed

banks to circulate currency and set interest rates with almost no accountability. In Rhode Island, a so-called "bank process" permitted banks to make first claims upon debtors, to the exclusion of individual creditors. Like most other states, Rhode Island also distributed numerous monopolistic grants without requiring payment in return.<sup>106</sup> Compounding this legalized favoritism, widespread bribery increased corporations' privileges. All of these policies vastly enriched a select cohort of bankers, entrepreneurs, and stockholders, while rendering the position of individual debtors and creditors ever more precarious.<sup>107</sup>

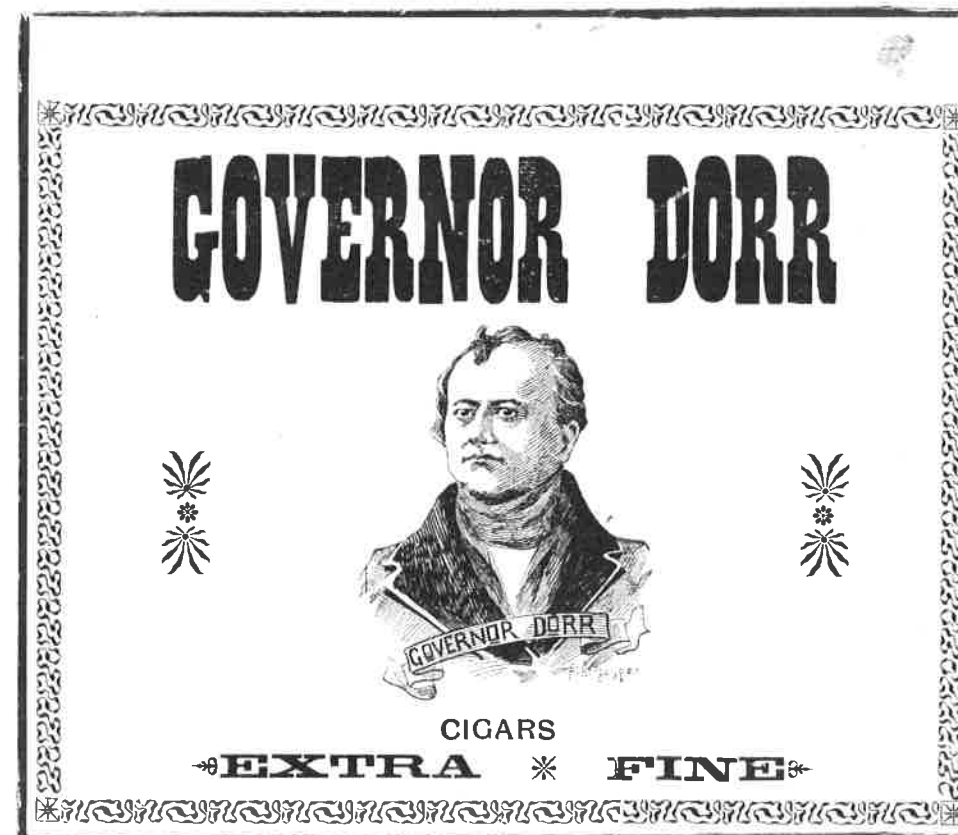
It is no wonder, then, that Dorr was convinced reforms were "especially" needed in the realm of policies "which [regulate] commercial affairs."<sup>108</sup> Bemoaning outright corruption as well as the morally equivalent coziness between corporate leaders and politicians, Dorr condemned "fishy politicians"<sup>109</sup> who acted to enrich friends and family as well as themselves.<sup>110</sup> Reacting to his concerns about favoritism—both illegal and codified—prior to the Dorr Rebellion, Dorr had led passage of Rhode Island's Bank Act as a member of the General Assembly in 1836. The Bank Act, which Dorr proudly deemed the nation's strictest bank regulation, placed a six percent cap on interest rates, increased oversight of banks, and required them to recover debts in the same manner as individual creditors. These provisions reflected Dorr's conviction that banks exploited ordinary citizens and that government could best control the flow of capital for the public good.<sup>111</sup> Dorr supported government management of currency because he believed that government should intervene when it could serve popular interests.

The People's Constitution demonstrated Rhode Islanders' displeasure with corporate power and the dominance of banks in particular, in instituting significant reforms to corporate chartering and regulation. Toughening lax procedures that

permitted banks to acquire legal privileges, it stipulated that "any bill creating, continuing, altering or renewing any banking corporation" would have to pass both Houses of the General Assembly with a two-thirds majority rather than the simple majority needed to pass most bills. In a further restriction on future bank charters, all new banks laws would have to prevail in popular referenda. In granting to the people direct power over the economy, this new regulatory mechanism typified Dorrites' recognition that democratic processes and economic policies were interconnected as well as their belief that popular control could most effectively combat economic exploitation.

New restrictions on banks were uniquely stringent, but the People's Constitution gave the

A cigar box lid [ca. 1841?] paid homage to Thomas Dorr, the nineteenth-century champion of working-class rights. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 566).



General Assembly expansive powers to regulate all types of corporations chartered in Rhode Island. Defying existing state laws and practices as well as the Supreme Court's holding in the *Dartmouth College Case*, one of its provisions permitted the General Assembly to repeal any future or existing corporate charter.<sup>112</sup> Additionally, increased oversight would apply to private enterprises that maintained old or obtained new charters, as the General Assembly received "visitatorial power over corporations,"<sup>113</sup> which would allow its members and other government officials to visit and inspect chartered enterprises in order to ensure that they abided by state laws and the specific conditions contained in their charters.<sup>114</sup> Revealing the extensiveness of these new restrictions on corporate power, an advocate of the People's Constitution proudly declared, "It is true that, by the provisions of [the People's] Constitution, corporations are not suffered to remain in that *omnipotent* position that they had heretofore occupied."<sup>115</sup> The government, in this view, should actively resist the consolidation of wealth.

As with other features of the People's Constitution, its corporate regulations corresponded to the goals of workingmen's movements but were less sweeping than the proposals of radical labor activists. Jacksonian Democrats pursued similar reforms, campaigning to strengthen regulations, permit repeal of bank charters, and increase corporate liability for debts and employee



injuries.<sup>116</sup> A smaller Democratic Party faction, which enjoyed the backing of labor advocates, supported more drastic measures, including the wholesale elimination of banking, paper currency, and corporate charters. Indeed, Mike Walsh's political organization, the Spartan Association, made the abolition of corporate charters a primary goal.<sup>117</sup> The People's Constitution may appear relatively conservative compared to these far-reaching proposals, but it sought to further the same objectives by preventing government favoritism of the well-off.

The concerns with social inequality manifested in the People's Constitution appealed to economic reformers outside Rhode Island. Recognizing the hostility of the People's Party to the excesses of private enterprises, radical Ohio Democrat and newspaper editor Samuel Medary suspected that Dorr would object to "upholders of corporate privileges and paper currency." In a letter on the issue, Medary explained that his political association, Democracy of Ohio, "opposed ... all paper currency" and "all chartered and special privileges," because they were "destructive to equality."<sup>118</sup> It is not clear whether Dorr sought to abolish paper currency outright or affect the same outcomes by allowing only government to distribute it, but he undoubtedly agreed with Medary's basic argument that the prevailing economic order mistreated workers.<sup>119</sup> "One of the most important problems of the day," Dorr said, "is how to [give to] labor a fair share of its own production." He lamented that, under current circumstances, "Capital ... refuses to make equitable division of the proceeds of its toil," leaving a laborer "little more than enough to supply his absolute daily wants."<sup>120</sup> In seeking to rein in the controllers of capital, Dorr and fellow members of the People's Party strove to elevate the condition of individual borrowers and dependent workers.

In criticizing the covetousness of capitalists, Dorr was making a broader case against a culture

of greed. Asserting that "the common welfare" was "in danger of being lost sight of in the pursuit of gain, through the increase of prosperity" and "inroads of luxury," Dorr found culprits in "the bankers, manufacturers, monopolists, and the money power generally."<sup>121</sup> Seth Luther went even further in claiming that the influence of a "money power" had caused "avarice" to corrupt all ranks of society. In a stark parallel to later theories of cultural hegemony, Luther asserted that wealthy interests had shaped all levels of American culture and political discourse, thereby preventing the common man from realizing his own interests. Luther's stance on this issue, as on most others, was more radical than that of other Dorrites. Yet, his condemnation of a self-seeking and acquisitive worldview reflected the complaints of many workers whose support spurred the Dorr Rebellion. Rousing audiences of laboring men and women, Luther alleged:

We have been lulled into a false security: we have been told that we must celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July ... but we find the next day ... we have been required to bow our necks ... with the fruits of our labor .... Celebrations are in vain so long as we worship [money]; so long as we are the victims of deception and fraud.<sup>122</sup>

In suggesting that workers were oppressed not only by elites but also by themselves, Luther supported Dorr's belief that a morally bankrupt social ethic had wrought inequality. A cultural ideology emanating from the wealthy caused workers to venerate wealth and overlook its transgressions.

In the society that Dorr and Luther envisioned, individuals would not strive to become exploiters themselves but would instead organize to end economic exploitation. Luther refused to assign avarice to human nature and instead argued that it had been learned and could be unlearned. "A child," he bemoaned, "is taught to believe ... that

money is the most valuable thing on earth." Trusting that children could be taught differently, Luther identified "[t]he early education of a child" as the remedy for greed. Dorr also argued that universal education provided the linchpin for civic equality, observing that unequal educational opportunities "[make] the rich too proud and the poor too humble," even though, in truth, "[scholarly] labor" rather than social status determines the course of intellectual development.<sup>123</sup> For this reason, greater equality in social and economic affairs depended on the creation of an education system that would open new doors to the children of all classes.

Even before his rise to political prominence, Dorr had worked zealously to improve and expand public schooling. The first resolution he proposed after his 1834 election to the Rhode Island House of Representatives would have raised the salaries of Providence teachers by fifteen percent. The following year, Dorr offered a bill to establish a low-cost public high school in Providence (public schools were not completely free during this era), which gained passage one year later as a result of his vigorous lobbying efforts. As Dorr's campaign in support of public education was gaining momentum, Rhode Island received an influx of revenue from the 1836 Federal Deposit Act, which created a deposit fund that paid to each state a portion of the national government's new surplus. Dorr immediately proposed another successful and progressive education bill, which dictated that all interest on revenues from the Bank Act be directed to schools. These new funds transformed Rhode Island's education system, precipitating an increase in the statewide school budget from \$10,000 in 1828 to \$25,000 in 1839. More than a policy objective, education reform was a personal calling that Dorr undertook with particular zeal. He served on a three-man committee to design the curriculum for the Providence high school he helped establish, which opened in 1843, and was

the de facto president of the Providence School Committee as early as 1838, and its official leader from 1841 to the demise of the People's Party. A progressive social vision inspired his steadfast commitment to equal educational opportunity, as Dorr explained in 1837:

Establish a thorough system of education ... and the children of the poor will not longer be sufferers for want of advantages; those of us more favored in circumstances will be as well taught at less cost than at present; and those of the rich will have an opportunity to partake in instruction provided for all at the public expense.<sup>124</sup>

In this vision, public education would be the catalyst of a broad social transformation. It would elevate the masses and at the same time encourage intermingling among youth of different classes. A more equitable education system would benefit all persons by removing the shackles of economic injustice, which bred social disunity detrimental to the interests and values of rich and poor alike.

Dorr's appeal for publicly-funded schools corresponded to the objectives of national movements for social justice. The creation of a universally accessible public education system was popular among those who sought to combat social stratification.<sup>125</sup> Workers' movements and radicals such as Frances Wright, Robert Dale Owen, and Dorothea Dix lobbied for free public schools as part of their larger struggles to build a more egalitarian society.<sup>126</sup> Several radical reformers sought to create manual labor schools, multidisciplinary institutions in which students would undertake both academic learning and physical labor.<sup>127</sup> Like the new school system proposed by Dorr, manual labor schools would be "[o]pen alike to the rich and the poor, for the benefit of all, at the expense of all," and they were promoted with the explicit goal of alleviating material inequality and class prejudices. Luther predicted that, by making "labor respectable," and appealing to all classes,

they would help ensure that all people were treated as “equals” in dignity and “civil ... rights.”<sup>128</sup> In the same vein, Orestes Brownson asserted that, whereas manual labor was unjustly denigrated as a result of its association with “the poor, the uncultivated ... the enslaved,” it could be made “honorable” if all persons learned to “love it.”<sup>129</sup> For the same reason, Theodore Weld, the principal founder of manual labor schools, argued that they would remove “absurd distinctions in society,” abolishing class inequalities by “bringing education within the reach of the poor.”<sup>130</sup>

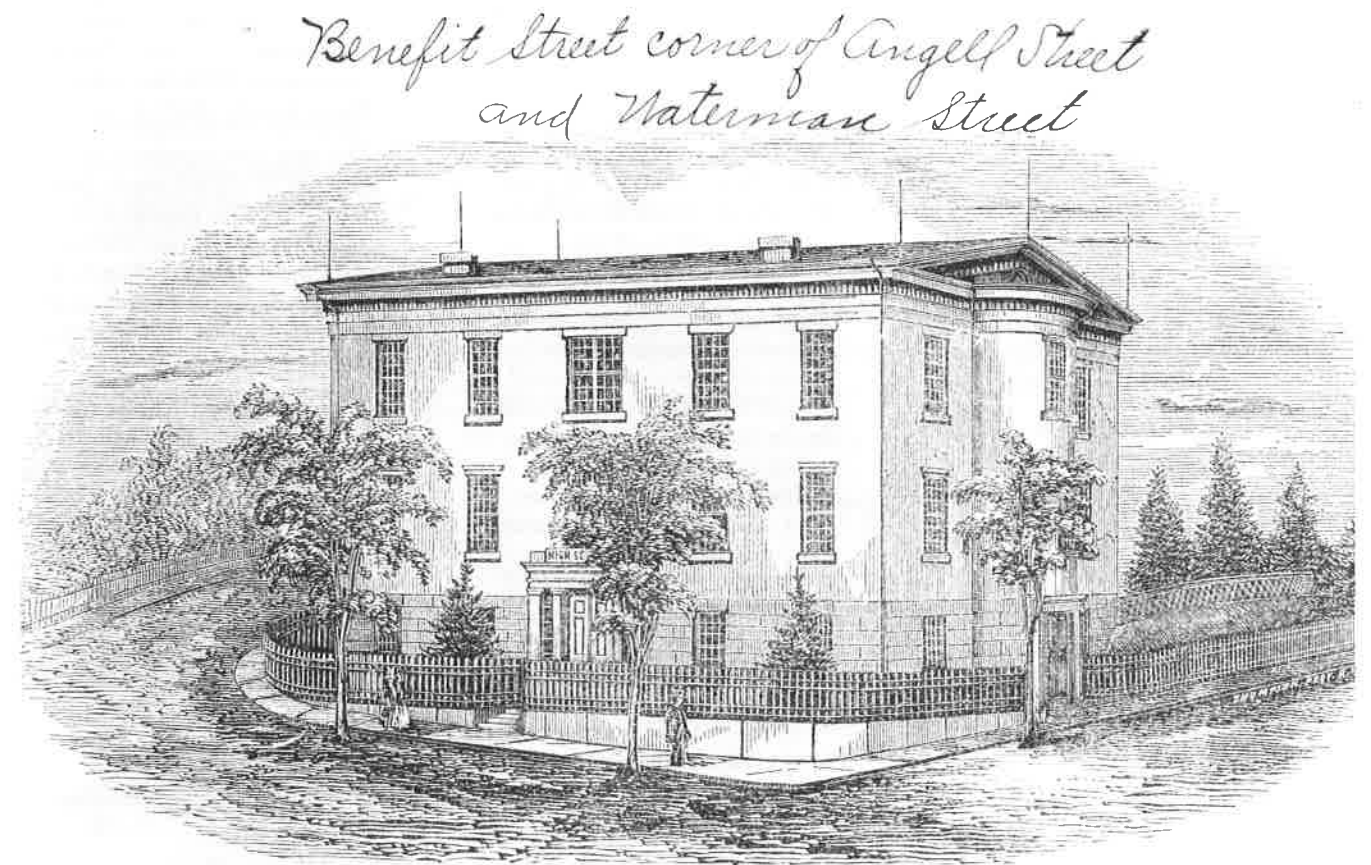
As it did with most other issues, the People’s Party adopted a stance on education that was more in line with the policies of Dorr than those of Luther or Brownson. Though the People’s Constitution did not provide for manual labor schools, its provisions aimed to secure the same goals. The General Assembly would “promote the establishment of free schools,” which would amend concrete social realities and the ideological forces underpinning them. The Landholders’ Constitution, in contrast, directed the establishment only of “public schools,” which required tuition fees. This stipulation largely represented a continuation of the status quo, whereas the People’s Party pursued reforms that would further social progress.

With regard to education policy, as with its doctrine of Popular Constituent Sovereignty, the People’s Constitution provided a practical mechanism for realizing a guarantee made in principle. Whereas the Charterite Constitution safeguarded only Rhode Island’s “permanent school fund,” which amounted to \$25,000, the People’s Constitution dictated that schools receive an additional \$10,000 in revenues from lotteries and auction duties as well as the entirety of Rhode Island’s income from the United States deposit fund, which had been used for non-educational purposes several times since 1836.<sup>131</sup> In another characteristic contrast, the Landholders’ Constitution declined to specify a method for

allocating educational expenditures, whereas the People’s Constitution commanded that funds be paid over to “towns and cities ... in equitable proportions.”<sup>132</sup> This emphasis on greater equality in education—across both classes and geographic boundaries—reflected Dorrites’ ideal of a socially just and cohesive education system “for the benefit of all, at the expense of all.”<sup>133</sup>

The proposal for free schools was rooted in the principle that the government should proactively protect the interests of its citizens. By providing students of all classes with the opportunity to fulfill their potentials, free schools would facilitate greater equality of opportunity, a central goal of the People’s Constitution. The most basic right of each citizen was freedom from state oppression, exemplified by laws giving judges and corporations carte blanche. But government owed citizens more than the removal of its own fetters. Citizens needed practical tools in order to benefit from abstract notions of equality. State-financed schools would make the opportunity for economic advancement a real right. Moreover, they would cement the principle of inherent human equality and discourage class prejudice. By advancing equality as a principle and a practice, free schools embodied the core purpose of the Dorr Rebellion.

In a testament to its central importance in the suffrage struggle, the free schools clause of the People’s Constitution commenced, “[t]he diffusion of useful knowledge...being of the upmost importance in a republican state....” The Dorr Rebellion was ultimately fought over the true meaning of “republican.” Dorrites believed that when government served the few, not the many, institutions built on custom and contract, rather than popular rights and principles of justice, should give way. They thus took a radical line in the recurring conflict between conviction and convention, revolution and stability. The central question in the Dorr Rebellion was whether and



Providence High School on Benefit Street, which opened in 1843, was the first free secondary school in Rhode Island. As school committee president, Thomas Dorr helped draft the 1838 education bill authorizing the school's construction. Rhode Island Historical Society (RHi X3 2270).

when overturning the status quo is justified.<sup>134</sup> Charterites cast themselves as safeguards of stability. They argued that rule by a select and “prudent ... corporate people” fulfilled the precepts of republicanism.<sup>135</sup> The People’s Party, in contrast, believed that republicanism demanded greater political equality and grassroots participation in government. Universal education permitted the realization of this goal by equipping citizens with the knowledge not only to determine the outcome of elections but also to oversee trials, bank charters, and even revolutions. An unjust status quo, beyond undermining the collective power of the people, had prevented ordinary citizens from exercising

control on an individual or collective level. The legal system disciplined those already deprived, and the owners of capital dominated their exploited workers. The People’s Party strove to eliminate inequality imposed by circumstances of chance, but freedom from oppression did not satisfy the rigors of true republican liberty. Real liberty existed only if citizens of all classes possessed the actual right to decide their own fates. It required that the people unseat an illegitimate government and institute one that assumed the positive duty to secure basic protections and opportunities for all citizens. This guarantee of essential fairness was at the heart of the Dorrite struggle for political rights.

## Notes

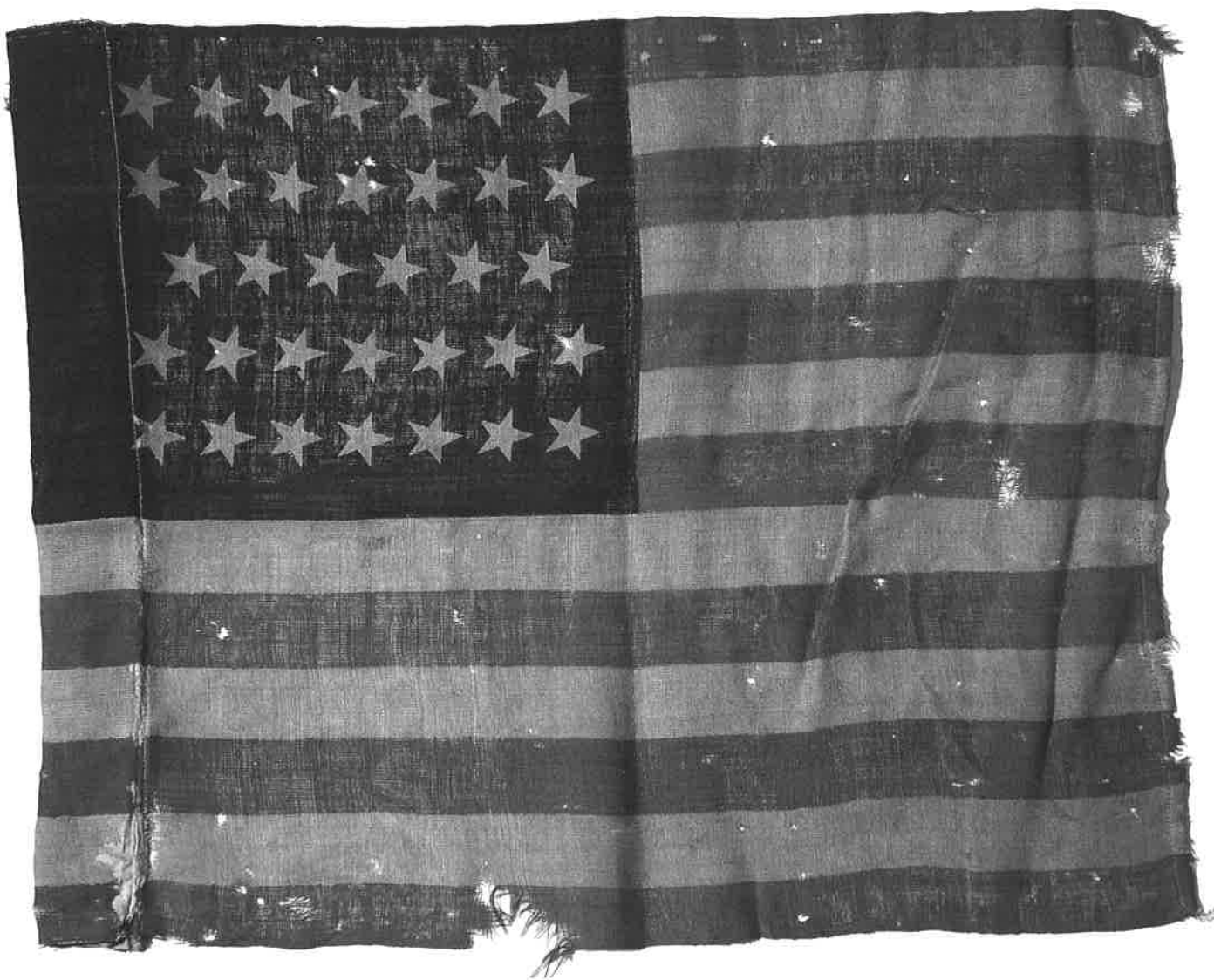
1. "Landholders' Victory," 1842, RB 133, Hay Rider BroadSides, John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, R. I.
2. Patrick T. Conley, *Democracy in Decline: Rhode Island's Constitutional Development, 1776-1841* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1997), 184-85.
3. A sizeable minority of Dorrites supported black suffrage. In the "People's Convention," which consisted of about one hundred delegates, Dorr proposed to strike the condition of 'white' from a provision extending suffrage. He argued that a restriction on black suffrage would undermine the Convention's "dedication to Founding principles and political equality." His arguments notwithstanding, only eighteen delegates voted to grant suffrage to blacks. (See U. S. Congress House Select Committee on Rhode Island, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island* [Washington: Blair & Rives, 1844], 110.)
4. "A Call to the People of Rhode Island to Assemble in Convention," 24 July 1841, RB 224, Hay Harris BroadSides, Hay Library.
5. This paper uses the term "all white males" liberally, according to the conventions of antebellum Rhode Island. However, it is important to note that the "People's Constitution" prevented some white men from voting, including former felons and "paupers and persons under guardianship"; furthermore, the pro-suffrage constitution permitted property taxes of up to fifty cents and prevented anyone "not taxed ... or possessed of one hundred and fifty dollars" from running for "mayor, alderman, or common councilman." (See *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 188, 194.)
6. Thomas Dorr, *The Right of the People of Rhode Island to Form a Constitution, The Nine Lawyers' Opinion*, [c. 1842] (Providence, Rhode Island, 1880), 67-68.
7. This vote total represented a majority of eligible voters, even according to the standards of the Old State Charter. Marvin E. Gettleman, *The Dorr Rebellion: A Study in American Radicalism, 1833-1849* (New York: Random House, 1973), 54.
8. Patrick T. Conley, "No Tempest in a Teapot: The Dorr Rebellion in National Perspective," *Rhode Island History* 50 (1992): 72-74.
9. Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 325-40.
10. U.S. Congress, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 194.
11. Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 249-52.
12. Conley, "No Tempest in a Teapot," 69.
13. Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: From Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2005), 541.
14. Carl Gersuny, "Seth Luther—The Road From Chepachet," *Rhode Island History* 33 (1974): 46-55.
15. There is some evidence that divides within the People's Party broke down partially according to class. Botelho argues that Dorr's supporters were divided between "working-class suffragists" and "middle-class reformers," who were "militant" and "moderate," respectively. Joyce M. Botelho, *Right and Might: The Dorr Rebellion and the Struggle for Equal Rights* (Providence, R.I.: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1992), 58. Gettleman contends that "middle-class Dorrites feared working-class insurrection almost as much as conservatives." (*Dorr Rebellion*, 68). It is beyond the scope of this essay to speculate on such claims, but they are central to the issue of class in the Dorr Rebellion and deserve further study.
16. Gettleman, *Dorr Rebellion*, 73.
17. U. S. Congress, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 9-10.
18. Joseph Brennan, *Social Conditions in Industrial Rhode Island* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Porcupine Press, 1978), 129.
19. Botelho, *Right and Might*, 30.
20. William Wiecek, "Popular Sovereignty in the Dorr War—Conservative Counterblast," *Rhode Island History* 32 (1973): 37.
21. Orestes Brownson, *The Rhode Island Question* (New York, 1842), 9.
22. U. S. Congress, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 9-10.
23. Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 184-87.
24. Gettleman, *Dorr Rebellion*, 16-18.
25. "Town of Warren Petition to Rhode Island General Assembly," 1833, C1179, Rhode Island General Assembly Petitions Failed/Withdrawn, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, R.I.
26. Brennan, *Industrial Rhode Island*, 54.
27. Seth Luther, *An Address on the Rights of Free Suffrage* (Providence, Rhode Island: S.R. Weeden, 1833).
28. Gettleman, *Dorr Rebellion*, 18.
29. "Debates in the General Assembly," *Farmers and Manufacturers Journal*, 1 Sept. 1834, Thomas Wilson Dorr Papers, John Hay Library, Brown University.
30. Ronald P. Formisano, *For the People: American Populist Movements from the Revolution to the 1850s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 249.
31. Gettleman, *Dorr Rebellion*, 34.
32. "Suffrage Convention," *Manufacturers and Farmers Journal*, 14 Nov. 1841, Thomas Wilson Dorr Papers, Hay Library.
33. U. S. Congress, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 745.
34. Formisano, *For the People*, 171.
35. Gettleman, *Dorr Rebellion*, 57.
36. "Circular," *Providence Journal*, 18 May 1842, 1-Size RB 247 1842.5, Hay Harris BroadSides, Hay Library.
37. U. S. Congress, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 107.
38. Botelho, *Right and Might*, 36, 79.
39. Russell J. DeSimone and Daniel Schofield, *BroadSides of the Dorr Rebellion* (Providence: The Rhode Island Supreme Court Historical Society, 1992), 73.
40. *An Appeal to Honest Suffrage and Laboring Men*, 1844, 1-Size RB 317 1844.3, Hay Harris BroadSides, Hay Library.
41. DeSimone and Schofield, *BroadSides of the Dorr Rebellion*, 77.
42. Conley, "No Tempest in a Teapot," 67.
43. Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 324.
44. Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 344-48.
45. Formisano, *For the People*, 165.
46. Patrick T. Conley, "The Constitution of 1843: A Sesquicentennial Obituary," *Rhode Island in Rhetoric and Reflection*, ed. Patrick T. Conley (East Providence: Rhode Island Publications Society, 2002), 174-77.
47. Conley, "No Tempest in a Teapot," 91.
48. Gettleman, *Dorr Rebellion*, 79.
49. Dorr, *Nine Lawyers' Opinion*, 68.
50. Christian G. Fritz, *American Sovereigns: The People and America's Constitutional Tradition Before the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 248-50.
51. Gettleman, *Dorr Rebellion*, 57.
52. Conley, "Constitution of 1843," in *Rhode Island in Rhetoric and Reflection*, 179-80.
53. U. S. Congress, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 199.
54. Dorr, *Nine Lawyers' Opinion*, 78, 80-91.
55. Dorr, *Nine Lawyers' Opinion*, 71.
56. Gettleman, *Dorr Rebellion*, 57.
57. Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 214.
58. Fritz, *American Sovereigns*, 249.
59. Wiecek, "Popular Sovereignty in the Dorr War," 43-48.
60. John Ashworth, *Agrarians and Aristocrats* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1983), 226-27.
61. Patrick T. Conley, "Popular Sovereignty or Public Anarchy? America Debates the Dorr Rebellion," *Rhode Island History* 60 (Summer 2002): 73.
62. Seth Luther to Thomas Dorr, 20 September, 1845, Box 9, Folder 14, Ms. 2-FD-D73c, Dorr Correspondence, Sidney S. Rider Collection, Hay Library.
63. Conley, "Popular Sovereignty or Public Anarchy?" 75-76.
64. Silas Wright to Thomas Dorr, 16 April, 1842, Box 4, Folder 6, Ms. 2-FD-D73, Dorr Correspondence, Rider Collection, Hay Library.
65. Conley, "No Tempest in a Teapot," 76.

66. Ashworth, *Agrarians and Aristocrats*, 226-29.
67. Levi Woodbury to Thomas Dorr, 15 April, 1842, Box 4, Folder 6, Ms. 2-FD-D73, Dorr Correspondence, Rider Collection, Hay Library.
68. U.S. Congress, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 26.
69. Seth Luther, *An Address on the Origin and Progress of Avarice and Its Deleterious Effects on Human Happiness* (Boston: The Author, 1834), 14, 16.
70. Conley, "Popular Sovereignty or Public Anarchy," 76.
71. Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 347-49.
72. Alexander Ming to Thomas Dorr, 13 May, 1842, Box 4, Folder 11, Ms. 2-FD-D73, Thomas Wilson Dorr Papers, Hay Library.
73. Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 330-33.
74. Orestes Brownson, *The Laboring Classes* (1840; repr., Delmar, N.Y.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1978), 8-9.
75. Brownson, *Laboring Classes*, 13-14.
76. Brownson, *Rhode Island Question*, 72.
77. Orestes Brownson to Thomas Dorr, 14 May 1842, Box 4, Folder 11, Ms. 2-FD-D73, Dorr Correspondence, Rider Collection, Hay Library.
78. Orestes Brownson, "Democracy and Liberty," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 12 (1843): 786.
79. Brownson, "Democracy and Liberty," 375.
80. Conley, "Popular Sovereignty or Public Anarchy," 82-84.
81. U.S. Congress, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 13.
82. Gettleman, *Dorr Rebellion*, 177.
83. Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 217-18.
84. "Suffrage Convention," *Manufacturers and Farmers Journal*, 11 Oct. 1841.
85. U.S. Congress, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 145.
86. U.S. Congress, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 187.
87. Thomas Dorr, "It is the Great Object of Juries" (handwritten manuscript), September, 1846, Box 3, Folder 5, A1207, Thomas Wilson Dorr Papers, Hay Library.
88. Ashworth, *Agrarians and Aristocrats*, 36.
89. David Montgomery, *Citizen Worker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 62-65.
90. U.S. Congress, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 187.
91. Seth Rockman, *Welfare Reform in the Early Republic* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 26.
92. Brownson, *Laboring Classes*, 11-12.
93. Luther, *Address on the Origin and Progress of Avarice*, 23.
94. Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 355.
95. Brennan, *Industrial Rhode Island*, 145.
96. U.S. Congress, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 136.
97. "Suffrage Convention," *Manufacturers and Farmers Journal*, 14 Nov. 1841.
98. The Prison Discipline Society, *Reports of the Prison Discipline Society, Boston: 1836-1845* (Boston, Mass.: Press of T.R. Marvin, 1855), 58-59.
99. Thomas Dorr, "Resolutions on Prison Discipline Society" (handwritten manuscript), 18 June 1834, Box 2, Folder 15, A859, Thomas Wilson Dorr Papers, Hay Library.
100. Montgomery, *Citizen Worker*, 62-65.
101. Thomas Dorr, "Resolutions for Political Reform" (handwritten manuscript), December, 1833, Box 2, Folder 15, A866, Thomas Wilson Dorr Papers, Hay Library.
102. Many national reformers sought to simplify the legal code in order to prevent judges from construing common law to benefit privileged interests. Dorr's interest in a wholesale revision of the law may indicate that he, too, advocated less malleable legal standards.
103. Morton Horowitz, *The Transformation of American Law: 1780-1860* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), 208.
104. Horowitz, *Transformation of American Law*, 112.
105. Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 97-100.
106. Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 279, 282.
107. Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 44-47.
108. Thomas Dorr, "Resolutions for Political Reform" (handwritten manuscript), December 1833, Box 2, Folder 15, Thomas Wilson Dorr Papers, Hay Library.
109. Thomas Dorr, "Deliver Us From Fishy Politicians" (handwritten manuscript), n.d., Box 2, Folder 8, A1204, Thomas Wilson Dorr Papers, Hay Library.

110. Thomas Dorr, "Nepotism" (handwritten manuscript), 1847, Box 3, Folder 6, A1209, Thomas Wilson Dorr Papers, Hay Library.
111. Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 278-79.
112. Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 313.
113. U.S. Congress, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 194-95.
114. Samuel Ames and Joseph Kinnicut Angell, *Treatise on the Law of Private Corporations Aggregate* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1855), 683-84.
115. U.S. Congress, *Interference of the Executive in the Affairs of Rhode Island*, 107-108.
116. Ashworth, *Agrarians and Aristocrats*, 232-34.
117. Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 541.
118. Samuel Medary to Thomas Dorr, 29 January 1846, Box 10, Folder 5, Ms. 2-FD-D73, Dorr Correspondence, Rider Collection, Hay Library.
119. Moreover, a Dorrite contingency, represented by Seth Luther, supported the elimination of paper currency. Displaying his flair for sensational oratory, Luther declared that "paper money ... has ... in all countries, and all ages, carried destruction and desolation to the poor man's door." Luther suggested that, as a result of paper currency, "those who labor, and produce all the wealth of the country, are doomed to a life of ceaseless toil." (Seth Luther, *Origin and Progress of Avarice*, 19).
120. Thomas Dorr, "One of the Most Important Problems" (handwritten manuscript), 1845, Box 3, Folder 4, A1207, Thomas Wilson Dorr Papers, Hay Library.
121. "Correspondence with Governor Dorr," *The New York Weekly News*, 2 Aug. 1845, Thomas Wilson Dorr Papers, Hay Library.
122. Luther, *Origin and Progress of Avarice*, 14.
123. Thomas Dorr, "Is Educational Superiority More Dependent on Nature than Education?" (handwritten manuscript), 1833, Box 2, Folder 15, A859, Thomas Wilson Dorr Papers, Hay Library.
124. Patrick T. Conley, "Thomas Wilson Dorr: Neglected Educational Reformer," *Rhode Island in Rhetoric and Reflection*, 120-26.
125. Paul Goodman, "The Manual Labor Movement and the Origins of Abolitionism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 13 (1993): 371.
126. Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 353.
127. Rockman, *Welfare Reform in the Early Republic*, 26-27.
128. Rockman, *Welfare Reform in the Early Republic*, 26-33.
129. J. A. Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 272.
130. Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor*, 79, 115.
131. Conley, "Thomas Wilson Dorr," 125.
132. C. Carroll, *Public Education in Rhode Island* (Providence, R.I.: E.L. Freeman, 1918), 124.
133. Luther, *An Address on the Rights of Free Suffrage*, 11.
134. Fritz, *American Sovereigns*, 268-76.
135. Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 318.



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Flag of the Fourteenth Rhode Island Heavy Artillery, an African-American unit. This flag was brought back to Rhode Island by Joseph Carey Whiting, Jr., First Lieutenant, Company B. RIHS Museum Collection 1962.21.1, RHi X17 551.

## Souvenirs of War

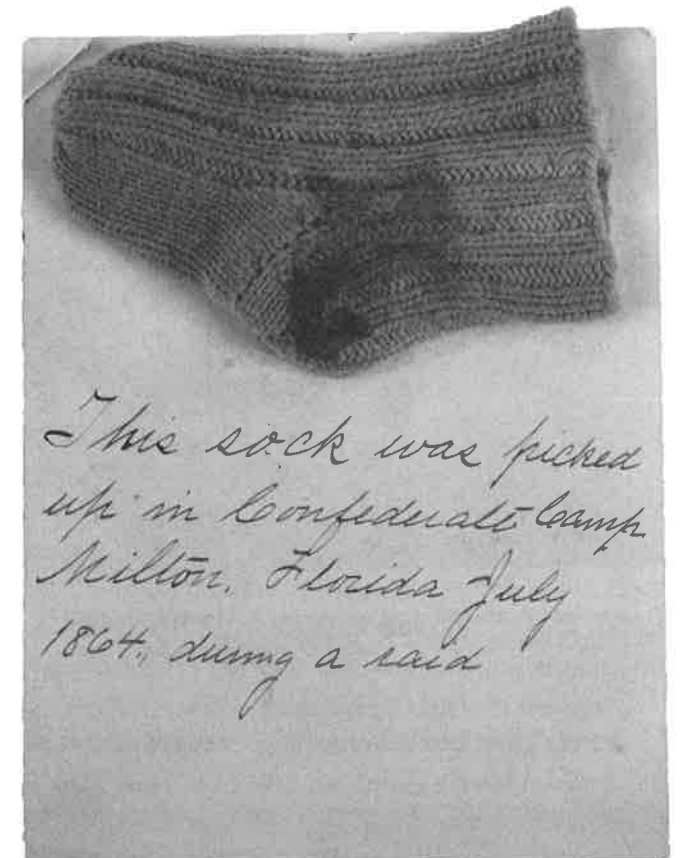
KIRSTEN HAMMERSTROM

At the Rhode Island Historical Society, we collect the evidence of the past: chairs, paintings, and shoes; diaries, maps, and letters. All of these things—these objects and documents—are all we have, along with the stories the donors tell and the myths we create. Objects become shrines to the stories that are told until they become something that is not *chair*, *sock*, *diary*.

The objects are nothing without the stories they come with, although sometimes an object asks more questions than the story that came with it can answer. The flag of the Fourteenth Rhode Island Heavy Artillery, Rhode Island's "colored" unit in the Civil War, is stained and torn and we don't know who carried it, or how, or if it went into battle in Plaquemines, Louisiana. The donor didn't say forty years ago, and while a flag this size could have been a guidon, we will never truly know.

Other objects are more confounding. There's a baby sock glued to a card, with an inscription indicating that it was picked up during the Third Rhode Island Heavy Artillery's raid on a Confederate camp in Florida during the Civil War.

A baby sock is a peculiar war souvenir. It was collected by George M. "Pop" Turner a sergeant in Company A of the Third Rhode Island Regiment of Heavy Artillery (Third RIHA). Turner, who lived with his mother and father on Point Street in Providence, was seventeen when he enlisted as a private with the Third Rhode Island Regiment for a term of three years. When he enlisted on August 20, 1861, the regiment was "nominally a regiment of infantry but the name was changed officially on December 19 to that of Third Regiment of Rhode Island Heavy Artillery."<sup>1</sup> He mustered out



Infant's yellow sock affixed to card by George M. Turner, collected by Turner during a raid on a Confederate camp in Florida, July, 1864. RIHS Museum Collection 1930.12.12, RHi X17 1213.

as a sergeant, honorably discharged on August 31, 1864. After the war, Sergeant Turner transcribed the letters he had sent home from the South. He also wrote labels for the relics he collected, some his own, some from other soldiers. Copies of his letters, a scrapbook, an account book, and his collection of "war souvenirs" were given to the Rhode Island Historical Society in 1930. He left us, in effect, a curated collection of his war experiences.



Fragment of palmetto collected by George M. Turner in 1862. RIHS Museum Collection 1930.12.11, RH1 X17 1222.

Turner's first letters home reflect a combination of frustrated soldierly ambition. Sent from New York's Camp Sherman to Camp Sprague in Washington, D. C. and back to Camp Sherman, Turner felt ever farther from the fighting—and touristic impressions, although some letters record the realities of camp life among strangers, as when Turner wrote to his father that "I have had a ten dollar bill, my knife and fork stolen from me."<sup>2</sup> Within a few weeks, he reported on a trip to New York City in early October, writing to his mother, that "[i]t would have made father's eyes shine if he could have seen the blue fish, tautog [blackfish], and all other kinds of fish which we saw all alive at Fulton Market."<sup>3</sup>

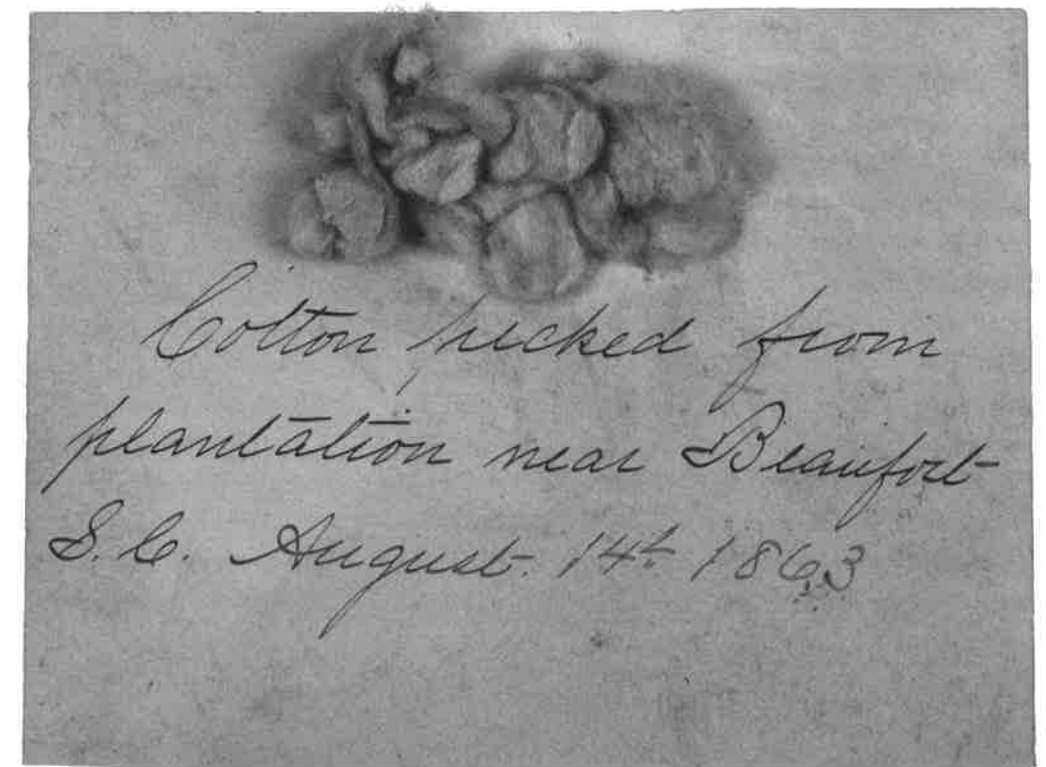
When his regiment was deployed to the South, Turner's impulse to share his experiences with family back in Rhode Island expanded to include

souvenirs as well as words. The snippets he sent home were tangible evidence of the strangeness and difference of the landscape, of war life and of people he encountered in the South. Only some of the pieces Turner sent home have survived, and the dates he assigned later do not always match the chronology we can assemble from the service records of the Third RIHA. From his letters, we know that he sent "a piece of wood" from a palmetto tree and fragments of a Confederate gun carriage that was destroyed in the Union assault on Fort Walker in Hilton Head, S.C., as well as small bits of a piano that had been hacked apart in a Union raid on a plantation in Hampton, Virginia.<sup>4</sup> In less than a square inch, the palmetto fragment embodied not only Turner's position in the Army—officers collected more flamboyant,

less fragmentary souvenirs—but also his relative geographic and emotional position far from home.<sup>5</sup>

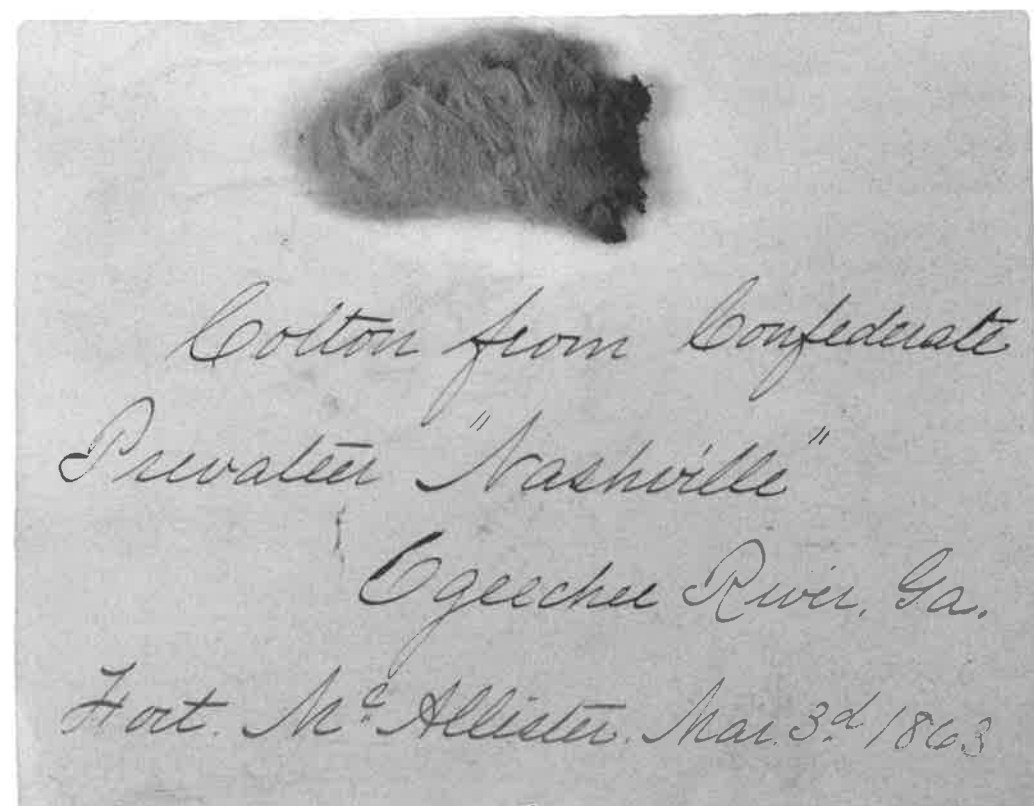
The Third Rhode Island regiment was one of the first regiments sent south to capture Confederate-held forts as the initial step in establishing a blockade of the South's Atlantic Coast. The Union army sought to capture forts in the Sea Islands off the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia to create Union bases for the blockade and pursue military operations against the mainland. In November, 1861, Union warships successfully attacked two Confederate redoubts, Fort Beauregard and Fort Walker that guarded the entrance to Port Royal Sound in the Sea Islands of South Carolina; Union forces, including companies of the Third Rhode Island Regiment, then occupied both Port Royal and Hilton Head Islands, as well as other islands in the coastal region. The two captured forts then provided a staging area for further incursions against Confederate coastal installations, with the ultimate goal to retake Charleston, South Carolina, the symbolic heart of the rebellion.

Cotton wad, labeled "picked from a plantation near Beaufort, S.C., August 4th, 1863." RIHS Museum Collection 1930.12.19, RH1 X17 1225.



George Turner and the rest of the Third Rhode Island Regiment were fortunate to have been sent to the Department of the South. While Union troops deployed to the Southern Department saw occasional action, they mostly escaped the wholesale slaughter of the battlefields of Pennsylvania, Maryland and especially Virginia—Gettysburg, Antietam, Fredericksburg—endured by other Rhode Island soldiers. The men in the Southern Department were exposed to potentially fatal diseases like measles, yellow fever and malaria, and the climate differed materially from that of Rhode Island. However, George Turner's chances of surviving the war improved when his regiment was assigned to the coastal Sea Islands.

The landscape and climate of the Sea Islands, so different from home, wore on Turner. The heat, even in the winter months, was suffocating. Turner missed the Rhode Island winter. By February, 1862, Turner wrote home to his father, "Oh, daddy, how I would like to have a sleighride."<sup>6</sup> The strangeness of the Southern climate was embodied in the plant fragments Turner collected and sent back to Rhode Island, and in the letters he wrote home begging for more shirts, as he sweated so much in the heat.



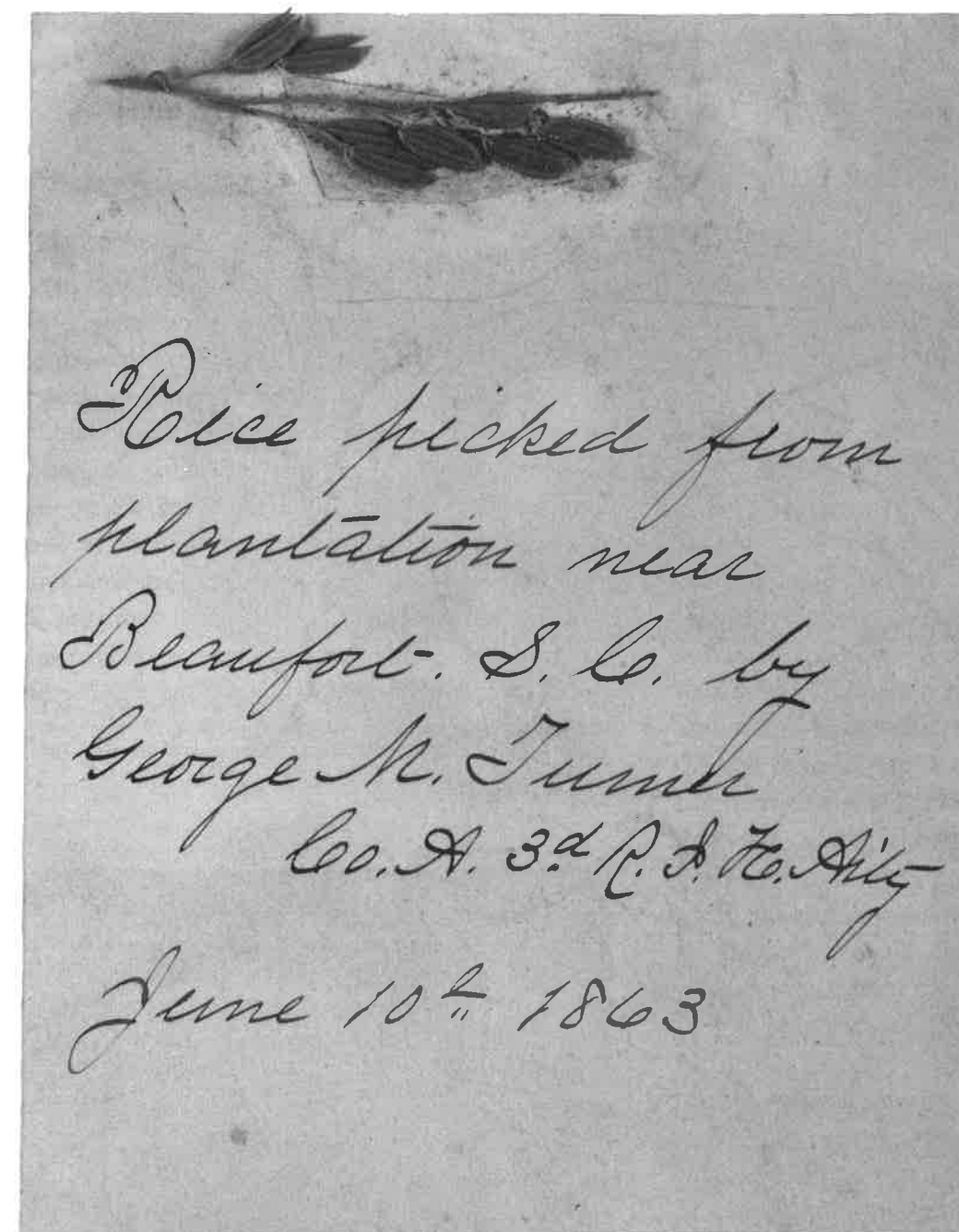
Wad of stained cotton affixed to card by George M. Turner, labeled "Cotton from Confederate Privateer 'Nashville' Ogeechee River, Ga. Fort McAllister, Mar. 3<sup>rd</sup> 1863." RIHS Museum Collection 1930.12.10. RHI X17 1221.

"Haven't you received any cotton in any of my letters," he wrote to his cousin in December, 1861, a month after settling in Hilton Head. "I sent some from Fortress Monroe [Va.] and since I arrived here..."<sup>7</sup> His interest in cotton continued, and in March, 1863, Turner sent a "piece of cotton" home from some bales removed from the Confederate blockade runner *Nashville*, which exploded after shelling by the Union ironclad *Montauk* near Fort McAllister below Savannah.<sup>8</sup> When sending the souvenir back to Rhode Island, Turner told his cousin to put the bit of cotton, "in a glass case and show it for 6 [cents] a sight. You may get rich by so doing."<sup>9</sup> After the war, when Turner cataloged his souvenirs, he mounted the cotton from the *Nashville* onto a piece of card and labeled it: "Cotton from

Confederate | Privateer "Nashville" | Ogeechee River, Ga. | Fort McAllister, Mar. 3, 1863." The *Nashville* was destroyed on February 28, 1863.

A few months later, Turner sent "some green rice from a rice swamp in South Carolina near Beaufort" to his aunt.<sup>10</sup> Like the palmetto, the cotton and the rice attested to the exotic and strange setting of Turner's military activities and the "touristic" aspect of his military experience. The rice that survives in the Rhode Island Historical Society Museum Collection is labeled "Rice picked from | plantation near | Beaufort, S.C. by | George M. Turner | Co. A 3d R.I. H. Ar'ty | June 10th 1863."

After spending months at or near his camp on Hilton Head Island, building fortifications, acting as a cook and a guard, and occasionally going out



Grains of rice on a stalk affixed to card by George M. Turner, labeled "Rice picked from plantation near Beaufort, S.C. by George M. Turner, Co. A. 3<sup>rd</sup> R.I.H. Ar'ty June 10<sup>th</sup> 1863." RIHS Museum Collection 1930.12.8. RHI X17 1223.

on picket duty, George Turner was assigned as a gunner on the Union gunboat *George Washington* in October, 1862. The gunboat was based in Port Royal Harbor, patrolling the harbor and the

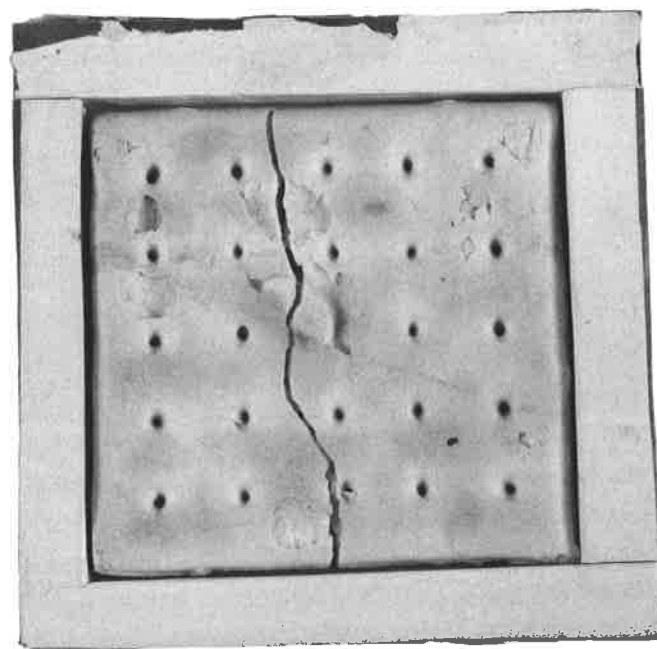
mouth of the Savannah River, adjacent to rebel-controlled territory. This was a welcome change in circumstance for George who had seen little action since joining up.<sup>11</sup>



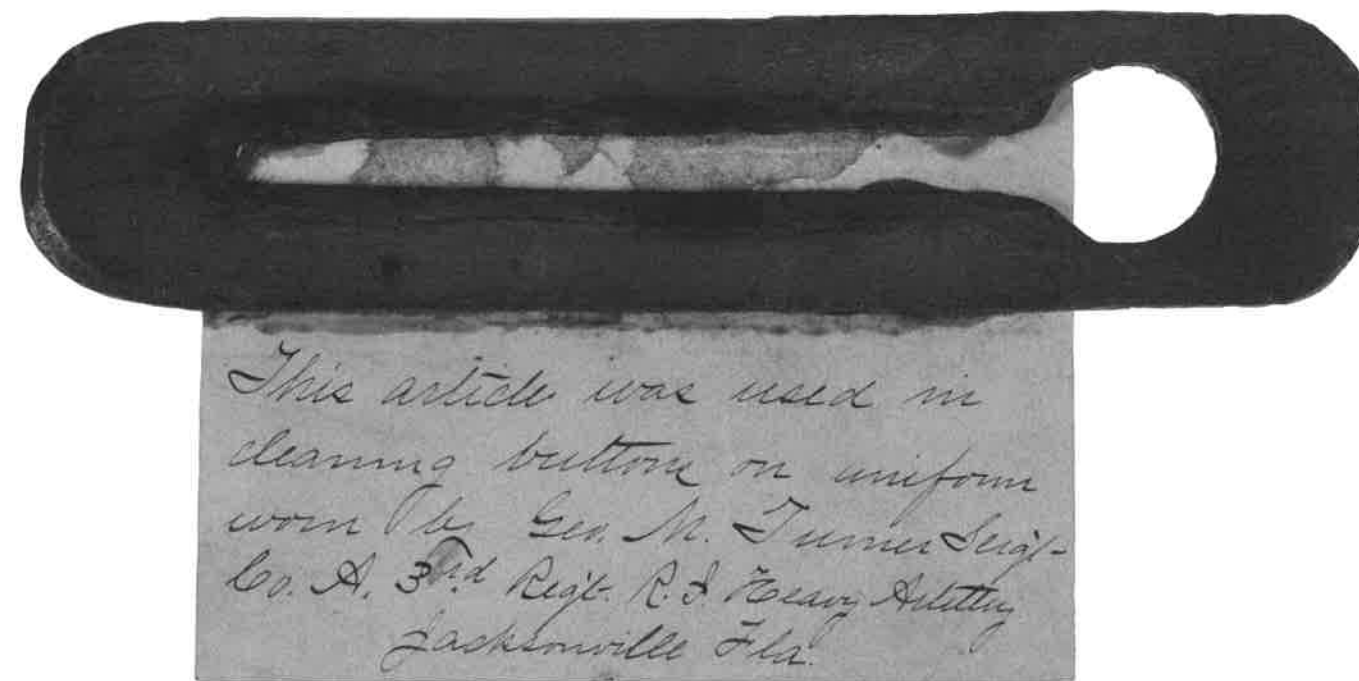
However, in April, 1863 while the *George Washington* patrolled Port Royal Sound close to the Confederate lines, disaster struck. A rebel battery near Port Royal Ferry opened fire on the gunboat, making a direct hit on its magazine which exploded, destroying the vessel. "How I got clear I hardly know," George later wrote his mother. Thrown into the water by the force of the explosion and under enemy fire, George managed to reach shore where he took cover in a "wide muddy marsh" with "rebel shot and shell flying around." Many of George Turner's Rhode Island comrades were "killed, wounded or missing" as a result of the attack. Of the seven men on George's gun, two were missing, one was killed, another had broken an arm and a leg, another "had his clothes burned off him, and he was completely naked, burned all over." A wounded comrade eventually had both legs amputated. The bodies of the two missing men were later found in a marsh near the site of the explosion. "Lyman Smith's head was missing and [John] Hyde was mangled very badly," George wrote his family. Although he often disparaged African Americans who lived on the islands under Union control, and the black regiments that trained there, George wrote of his narrow escape, "I cannot help speaking the highest praise of the Negro regiment, for they used us very well after we got ashore."<sup>12</sup>

Formerly enslaved people who lived on Hilton Head sold peanuts, oranges, berries and other local comestibles to the troops encamped nearby. The military diet was tiresome and lacking in nutrients, and the hunger for fresh food was intense. Although General Sherman, then commander in the Southern Department, eventually ordered an end to foraging, the practice was commonplace for much of the war. While on picket duty one night, Turner managed to obtain an "old champagne basket full of splendid oysters."<sup>13</sup> In May 1862, he reported that the "contrabands" (a term used

by the Union Army to designate formerly enslaved people) were selling blackberries for "six cents a quart and they are worth it." Other items supplied by civilian inhabitants included "nice new potatoes, string beans and milk."<sup>14</sup> Although their army diet consisted of unrelenting "hard bread and pork,"<sup>15</sup> George Turner and his fellow soldiers were able to supplement their monotonous and skimpy rations with local crops like sweet potatoes, chicken, and young pigs. For all soldiers, no matter where they were stationed, fresh food was a welcome treat, and they gorged themselves whenever they could.<sup>16</sup> George ravenously appreciated gifts of food from family in Rhode Island although the goods did not always arrive in edible condition. In one letter home, after he was settled at Fort Welles at Hilton Head, George acknowledged receiving a box from home with "bottles of preserves, broken, moldy pies, doughnuts and cheese, and a bottle of homemade catsup."<sup>17</sup>



Hard tack, typical of rations issued to Union troops, ca. 1861. RIHS Museum Collection 1982.37.1. RH1 X17 1219.



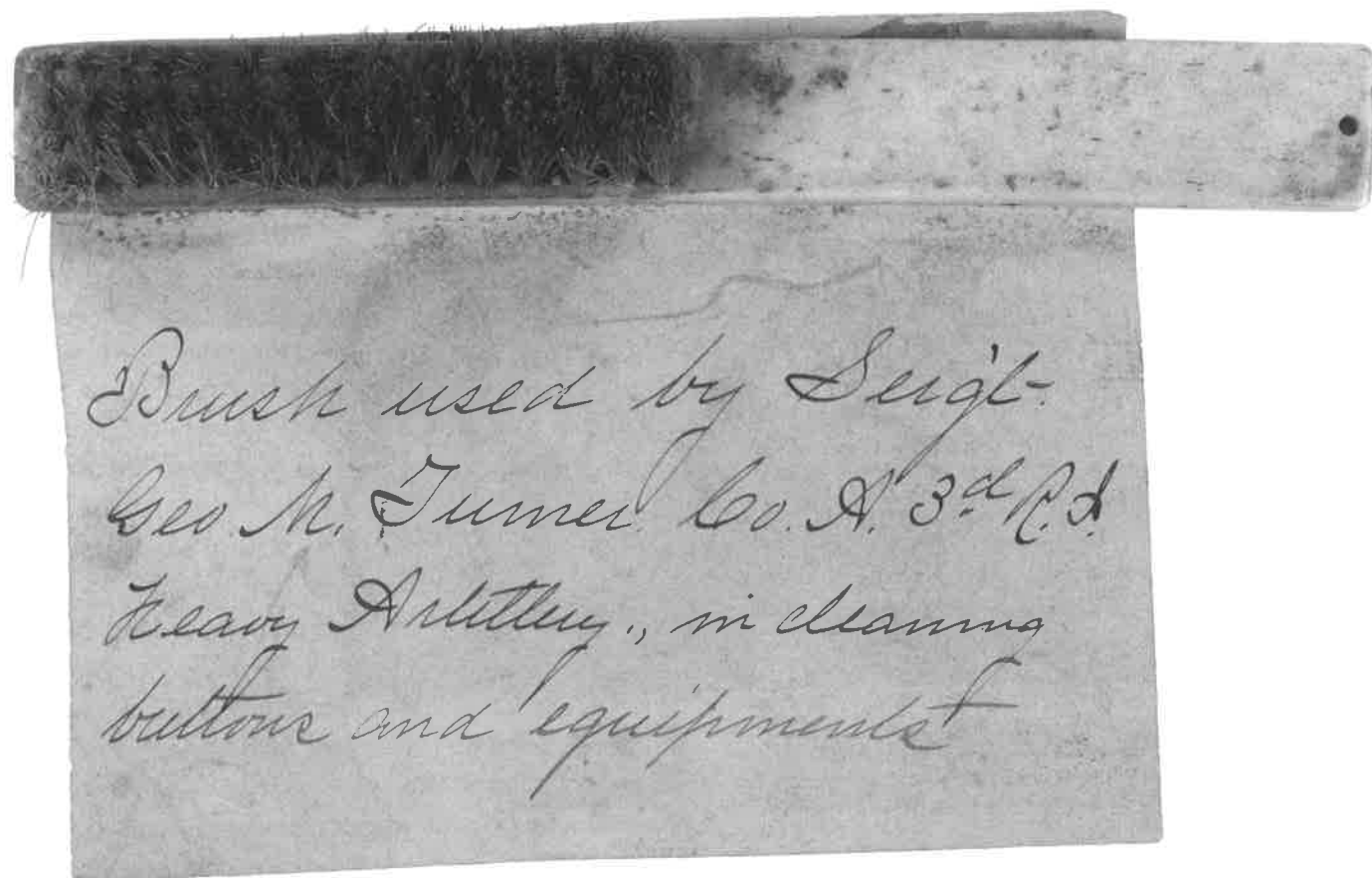
Tool for cleaning buttons, made of wood, affixed to card, labeled, "This article was used in cleaning buttons on uniform worn by Geo. M. Turner Serg't Co. A. 3rd Reg't R.I. Heavy Artillery Jacksonville, Fla.," 1861-1865. RIHS Museum Collection 1930.12.1. RH1 X17 1218.

Soldiers' domestic lives revolved around basic comforts: fresh food, when possible, and clothing. Turner enjoyed tent living, and improvised useful "household" items. His aunt sent a cake; the cake pan made a "splendid wash basin for our mess," Turner observed. A wooden packing crate full of items from home was converted to a good strong table, seat, and letter-writing surface for his tent mates.<sup>18</sup> The Rhode Island Historical Society Museum Collection contains Turner's button-cleaning brush and polish guard, and his sewing kit, each glued to a card and labeled in his clear script. These quotidian objects provide clues to how he lived, polishing brass buttons on his dress uniform, repairing the inevitable tears and holes in the thick, itchy wool jackets and trousers. While the RIHS collection lacks Turner's uniform, it does contain another sergeant's field uniform jacket. Made of coarse wool, it is ill-tailored and almost

asymmetrical; the buttons are plain dark blue, the deep and linty patch pockets are just the size for a piece of hard tack. Traveling by boat, along the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia and marching through inland Florida in summertime, George Turner endured the oppressive humidity of the South. Dressed in a scratchy jacket and trousers, he must have soaked his heavy cotton shirt and his braces as he watched his comrades contract yellow fever and dysentery, while he filled his pack and his pockets with souvenirs.

Turner collected these things, intentionally remembering; he was a keeper of memories. He gathered clues and objects, later assembled his scrapbooks, his *stuff*, glued to cards. These objects and his letters are all we have when we try to understand him, and his war. He left us the sock. "This sock was picked up in Confederate Camp Milton. Florida, July 1864, during a raid" reads





Brush for cleaning buttons affixed to card labeled, "Brush used by Serg't Geo. M. Turner Co. A 3<sup>rd</sup> R.I. Heavy Artillery in cleaning buttons and equipment," 1861-1865. RIHS Museum Collection 1930.12.2. RHi X17 1217.

George's handwritten label. It's a tiny sock, ribbed, deeper coral pink at the toe and arch, paler from there to the ankle; rib-knit, with neat turns at the heel and a flat, smooth sole for comfort. The sock, overall, is grey with dirt, and there's a dark, smoky grey stain on the side of the heel. It could be ink, or the grey pall could be soot. It is perhaps three and a half inches in length at the most. The color shift from toe to ankle looks intentional, not a result of fading. The wool is coarse, not fine and soft like the merino sock knitters prefer today.

What is the story of this sock? There is no way to know who knit it, who carried it, who wore it; no way to know if it was from a soldier's child, or the child of a female vivandière, or of a

civilian refugee. If the sock belonged to the child of a soldier, what does it mean that the man—and it probably was a man, and one hopes it fell from pocket or pack as he fled from camp—carried and dropped a sock and not a photograph? Could it mean he was too poor or too rural or both to afford a trip to a photographer's studio, too poor to have an ambrotype, tintype, or *carte-de-visite* made of mother and infant? In the sock, the man could carry his family, memories more tangible than he might find in a posed portrait. The sock was a reservoir of love, of the hours a wife and mother spent knitting the sock for the baby and knitting socks for her soldier husband, or a blanket or hat, perhaps. Did she knit him a coin purse? The ladies' magazines

published patterns for knitted purses and hats and mittens and muffs and even petticoats.

Perhaps the man remembered his wife sitting by the window, sitting by a lamp, knitting socks, knitting doilies, reading the monthly installment of a novel, reading the poetry meant to ease a family's grief, ease them into the death that would soon surround them in that war. Did she read to him? Perhaps neither of them read, perhaps the sock was knit from a pattern she made up, but I like to think they read, and like to think that he watched her knitting, watched her as she sat by the lamp growing rounder, bigger, watched her fill the wool with love and hope and fear and joy, and when the baby outgrew the sock, she gave it to the baby's father to carry their love, their family, with him while he was at war.

Of course speculation is sentimental, and cataloging is not sentimental, but factual. Where

could this sock have come from? One place to look for information about the "raid" on Camp Milton in Florida, where Turner found the baby sock, is in the regimental history, *Shot and Shell, The Third Rhode Island Heavy Artillery Regiment in the Rebellion*, by Frederic Denison. Denison's red-jacketed book, its title "Shot and Shell" embossed in golden script on the front cover, detailed the regiment's raids and actions. The July 1864 raids were part of the Union effort to recover the state of Florida.

Company A of the Third RIHA was sent to Jacksonville in April 1864, where they "remained for several months, finding lively exercise in raids," wrote Denison. He detailed their actions:

July 22. Late in the afternoon, with the 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. and other forces on steamers, Co. A moved out again from Jacksonville on a raiding expedition. Pushing up the St. John's as far as Black Creek, and about 4 miles up that stream, we landed and bivouacked on that road.

Sewing kit containing flannel with needles, empty pin paper, scissors, assorted buttons and pair of tweezers affixed to card, labeled, "Used by George M. Turner Serg't Co. A. 3<sup>rd</sup> Regt R.I. Jacksonville, Fla.," 1860-1865. RIHS Museum Collections 1930.12.3. RHi X17 1214.



July 23, 1864. Moved forward about a mile and halted, and finally marched to Middleborough Bridge.

July 24. Moved to a bridge over a tributary of Black Creek, where on the appearance of a troop of rebel cavalry, our guns gave them some specimens of ferruginous pepper not exactly to their taste, as so induced them to withdraw. In the evening we advanced to Webster's Courthouse and chose a bivouac.

July 25. Moved forward, the mounted troops having some leaden disputes. Having improvised a bridge over a creek, in the afternoon we reached and cut the Florida and Gulf Railroad at Trail Ridge and then aimed for Darby's [still] on the Florida Central Road.

July 26. Reached Darby's [still] only to find it in flames, together with a depot of rosin stored there. Onward we marched to Baldwin to find it also evacuated. To this point an engine came up from Jacksonville with supplies. This town—the objective point of the expedition—is at the intersection of the Florida Central and Florida and Gulf Railroads—in itself an inferior little town in a swamp. Here we remained a few days and then marched back, by Ten Mile Station, to Jacksonville.<sup>19</sup>

These are semi-official accounts of the movements and actions of Company A, the roundabout that Sergeant Turner went on with his comrades, as he oversaw the horses that dragged heavy artillery pieces through the unbearably humid countryside of coastal Florida. He must have been sweaty, mosquito-bitten, hoping not to get yellow jack or bone-break fever. By summer 1864, George Turner's letters home seem to have petered out. On assignment in Florida, with only weeks left of his wartime service, he may have planned to tell his family in person about his regiment's exploits during the summer of 1864.

Camp Milton was the largest Confederate fortification in Florida, with some eight thousand soldiers. In February, 1864, Union army forces sustained a terrible defeat near the camp at the Battle of Olustee. By June 1, 1864, however, only a small number of Southern cavalry were left

guarding Camp Milton. It is possible that by the time George Turner's company reached Camp Milton, the rebel base was deserted. Southern soldiers were desperately needed on the battlefields of Virginia where the Union army had launched a major offensive in May, 1864. Called away in a hurry to join Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, the Confederate soldiers must have left much evidence of their presence behind, including the memento, the sock. Turner's Company A evidently passed through the camp, moved on, and camped elsewhere. That story seems a plausible combination of Denison's outline and Turner's explanatory card about the sock written after the war.

In a volume of the *Confederate Military History*, Colonel J. J. Dickison describes the advance of the Third RIHA and the Seventh U.S. Colored Infantry from Jacksonville to Camp Milton between May 31 and June 3, 1864, and Union raids on Camp Milton between July 13 and 15. The dwindling Confederate forces that remained in Florida were aware of federal interest in Camp Milton and knew that the Union troops were planning to cut railroad lines and interrupt the beef supply lines that came up from South Florida. Dickison's volume puts the engagements around Black Creek, Baldwin, and back to Camp Milton earlier than the Rhode Island regimental history.<sup>20</sup> It is impossible to know exactly when in July 1864 Turner picked up his most unusual wartime souvenir. It is likely that the baby sock was found between July 24 and July 31, 1864, perhaps on one of the days the Third Rhode Island "remained a few days" at Baldwin near Camp Milton.

Today, Camp Milton lies amid still-rural, still-undeveloped land west of Jacksonville, now a Florida State Park and the site of many reenactments. Named for John Milton, the Civil War Governor of Florida, the camp was perhaps the most significant Civil War site in the state—at least for the Confederacy. The current entrance to

Camp Milton is west of Jacksonville, about twenty miles from the mouth of Black Creek; Baldwin, the small town where George Turner's company camped in the summer of 1864, still exists eight miles west of Camp Milton.

Official histories of Civil War regiments rarely provide the kind of detail catalogers and curious curators want; they rarely mention anyone ranking below second lieutenant by name in the narrative and never speak of the enlisted men as anything but "troops." Through diaries and letters, we can begin to understand who the "troops" were, and what their daily lives were like, what boredom, terror, hunger they experienced, what notes of grace they found. Their world becomes three-dimensional, tactile, when we consider the objects of war they found and kept, the fragments that curators assemble to tell a story of war.

The objects the soldiers kept and the objects we keep, a sub-set; not just what we keep in museums, but what we keep at home, remind us of a person, a moment, something we won't give up. In the museum, we exhibit these things, rosettes from Lincoln's funeral, mourning bonnets, and the baby sock, objects that form a repository of grief, tears made permanent by their keeping.



Mourning badge of black and cream silk mounted on card, labeled, "This badge was worn by Serg't George M. Turner Co. A 3<sup>rd</sup> Reg't R.I. H. Art'y on the day of the funeral of President Abraham Lincoln." RIHS Museum Collection 1930.12.4. RHi X17 1215.

## Notes

1. *Correspondence Relative to the 3rd Regt. R. I. Heavy Artillery 1861-1865*, p. 1. In the Printed Collection of the RIHS Library, the volume is comprised of selections from *The War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (U.S. War Department, 1880-1901).
2. George Turner [hereafter designated as "GT"] to "Father" [Amos Turner], 25 September, 1861, Rhode Island Historical Society MSS 763, Letter book 1, p. 26.
3. GT to "Mother" [Betsy Turner], 4 October 1861, RIHS MSS 763, Letter book 1, p. 31.
4. GT to "Cousin" [Ursula Trask], 13 December 1861, Harris Collection on the Civil War and Slavery, Providence Public Library Special Collections [hereafter cited as "Harris Collection, PPL"], Box 3, George Turner.
5. In a letter, Turner noted that a captain of the Third RIHA had collected "a large rebel flag" and sent it back to Rhode Island. GT to "Aunt," 24 November 1861, Harris Collection, PPL, Box 3, George Turner.
6. GT to "Father" [Amos Turner], 25 February 1862, Harris Collection, PPL, Box 3, George Turner.
7. GT to "Cousin" [Ursula Trask], 13 December 1861, Harris Collection, PPL, Box 3, George Turner.
8. Rev. Frederic Denison, *Shot and Shell: The Third Rhode Island Heavy Artillery Regiment in the Rebellion, 1861-1865* (Providence: J.A. & R. A. Reid, 1879), 139.
9. GT to "Cousin" [Ursula Trask], 3 March 1863, Harris Collection, PPL, Box 4, George Turner.
10. GT to "Aunt," 14 September 1863, Harris Collection, PPL, Box 4, George Turner.
11. GT to "Father" [Amos Turner], 1 November 1862, Harris Collection, PPL, Box 3, George Turner.
12. GT to "Father" [Amos Turner] 9 April 1863; to "Mother" [Betsy Turner], 28 April 1863, 11 May 1863, Harris Collection, PPL, Box 4, George Turner; to "Aunt," 11 April 1863, Scrapbook/Letter book, RIHS.
13. GT to "Father" [Amos Turner], 2 December 1861, Harris Collection, PPL, Box 3, George Turner.
14. GT to "Father" [Amos Turner], 8 May 1862; 31 May 1862, Harris Collection, PPL, Box 3, George Turner.
15. GT to "Father" [Amos Turner], 2 December 1861, Harris Collection, PPL, Box 3, George Turner.
16. *All for the Union: The Civil War Diary and Letters of Elisha Hunt Rhodes*, Robert Hunt Rhodes, ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 112. Elisha Hunt Rhodes wrote from "near Manassas Gap," on 27 July 1863: "the slopes are covered with fine blackberries. We live on them now, for we have had nothing to eat except hard bread and salt pork for several weeks."
17. GT to "Mother" [Betsy Turner], 30 November 1861, Harris Collection, PPL, Box 3, George Turner.
18. GT to "Father" [Amos Turner], 12 December 1861, 15 January 1862,

Harris Collection, PPL, Box 3, George Turner.

19. Denison, *Shot and Shell*, 250.

20. Col. J. J. Dickison, "Military History of Florida," in *Confederate Military History: A Library of Confederate States History, Written by Distinguished Men of the South*, ed. Gen. Clement A. Evans (Confederate Publishing Company, 1899), 11: 97-104. Volume 11, chapter 5 describes actions around Camp Milton between the end of May and early August, 1864.

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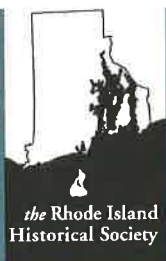
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A cigar box lid [ca. 1841?] paid homage to Thomas Dorr, the nineteenth-century champion of working-class rights. RIHS Collection (RH1 X3 566).