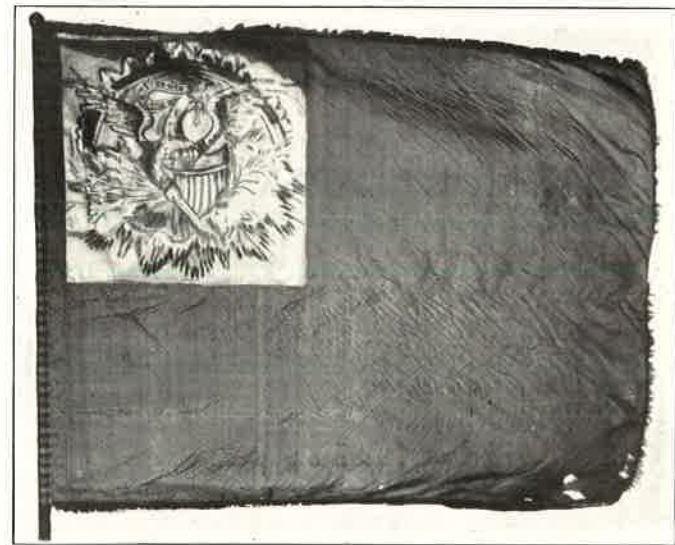


RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTIONS

Vol. XVIII

October, 1925

No. 4



First North Providence Company — 1834

In the Society's Museum

Issued Quarterly

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Early Rhode Island Flags, by Howard M. Chapin	129
Notes	141
Dr. Joseph Torrey's Records, by William Davis Miller	142
The Memoranda of William Green, by Henry S. Fraser	154

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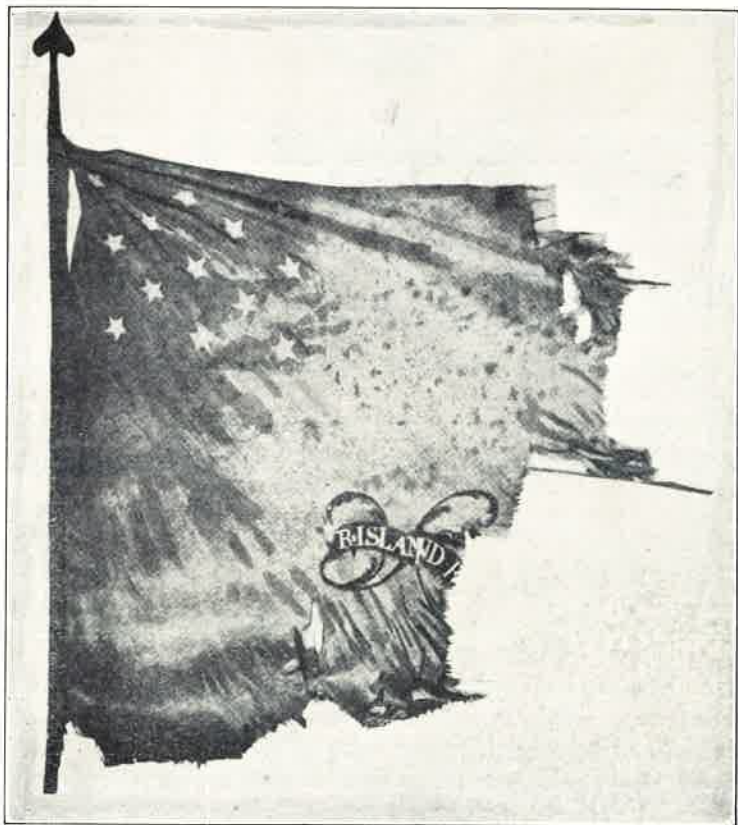
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Early Rhode Island Flags

BY HOWARD M. CHAPIN.

The flag of the First North Providence Company, Second Providence County Infantry, was recently added to the Society's museum through the generosity of Mr. Benjamin Whitman. The flag is of great historical interest not only because of its beautiful condition and its history, but because in addition it aids us in reconstructing other early flags of which only fragments have come down to our time. Unlike modern flags, there is part of the field of the flag between the canton and the staff. This is important in that it explains the similar appearance of the field in the fragments of two other flags preserved at the Society and makes it possible for us to picture them in the completeness of their original form. The reason for this peculiarity in regard to the field and canton is that in the early flags the canton was painted and so comparatively stiff and quite different from the dyed silk of the rest of the field, the flexible quality of which was needed where the flag was attached to the staff, usu-

ally by being wound once around it. In modern flags the canton is, as a rule, not painted, but made of dyed bunting of the same texture as the rest of the field. This flag also shows that some



First Rhode Island Regiment, Continental Infantry in the Revolution

At State House, Providence

of the companies had distinctive flags as well as the regiments, and so opens up the speculation as to whether or not all the companies had distinctive flags.

Distinctive regimental flags were carried by New England

militia at least as early as 1677¹, but little information in regard to these colonial flags has come down to our day.

Rhode Island sent two regiments into the Revolution, and the distinctive regimental flags in a tattered and battle-scarred condition are preserved at the State House in Providence. These flags were made of silk, and had a white field which has turned yellow with age. One of these flags has a blue canton containing thirteen white stars, arranged 3-2-3-2-3 and in the lower part of the field a blue scroll with an inscription in white letters "R. ISLAND REGT."² The canton in this flag is said to have given the idea for the similar canton that was adopted as part of the national flag.

The other flag also has a blue canton containing thirteen stars, arranged 3-2-3-2-3, but these stars are gold. In the field of the flag is a light blue foul anchor, the cable being dark blue, and above the anchor are four holes in the flag where the motto HOPE has been removed. The motto was probably also blue.³

It seems probable that each company as well as each regiment of the constituted militia had its own distinctive flag. The earliest one of these regimental flags now known was carried by the Second Providence County Regiment. It is a red silk flag with a black painted canton. On one side the canton bears the state arms, the foul anchor, the scroll and the outline of the shield being white, and the motto "IN GOD WE HOPE" in black letters. On the other side of the canton is a blue shield outlined

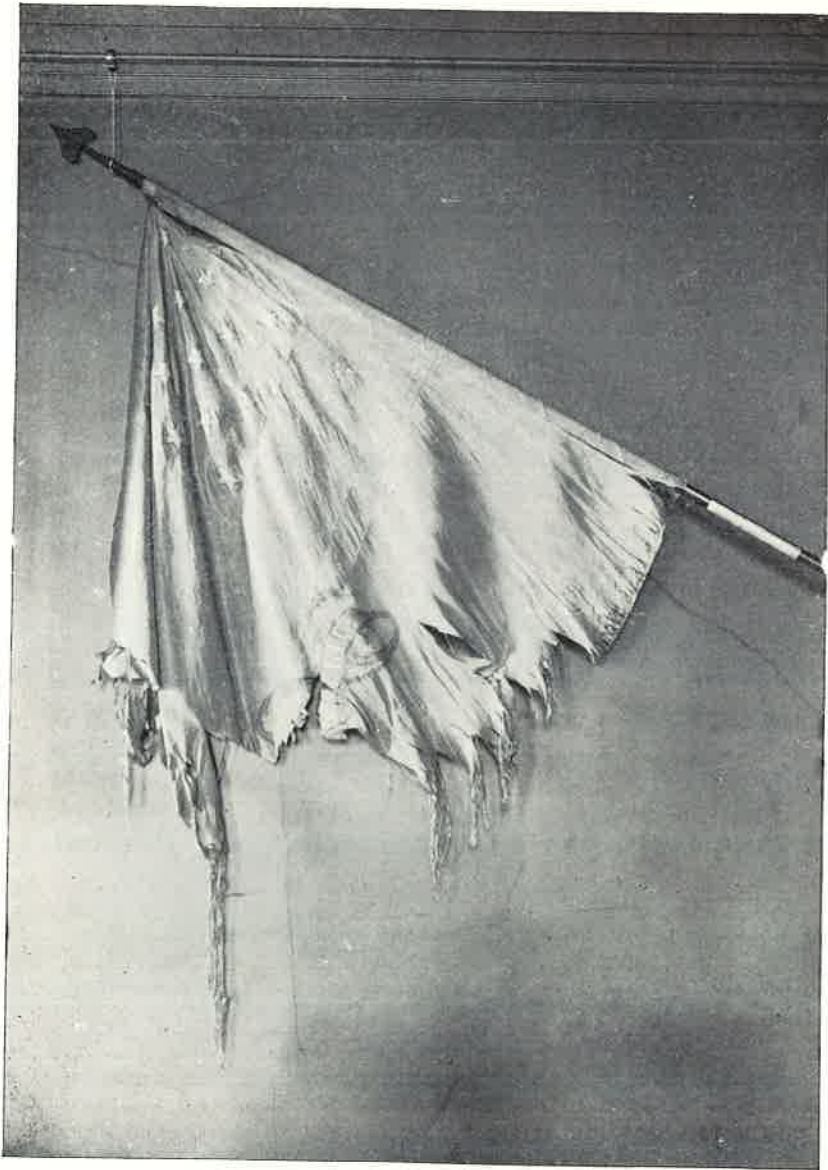
¹Preble's *The Flag of the United States*, p. 182.

²The flag is labelled "First Continental Infantry," but Field in the "Diary of Israel Angell" states that this is the flag of the Second Rhode Island Regiment (see frontispiece which shows reverse, and note on page xviii). It seems more probable that the flag bearing the wording "R Island Regt" would be the one adopted by the first regiment, when there was only one regiment, rather than by the second regiment. See note 3.

³This flag is labelled "Second Continental Infantry," but is not mentioned by Field. Stone in "Our French Allies," p. 453, gives an engraving of the Second Regiment flag, which is merely a plain flag bearing the lettering:

SECOND
RHODE ISLAND
REGIMENT

No colors are designated and no authority is given.



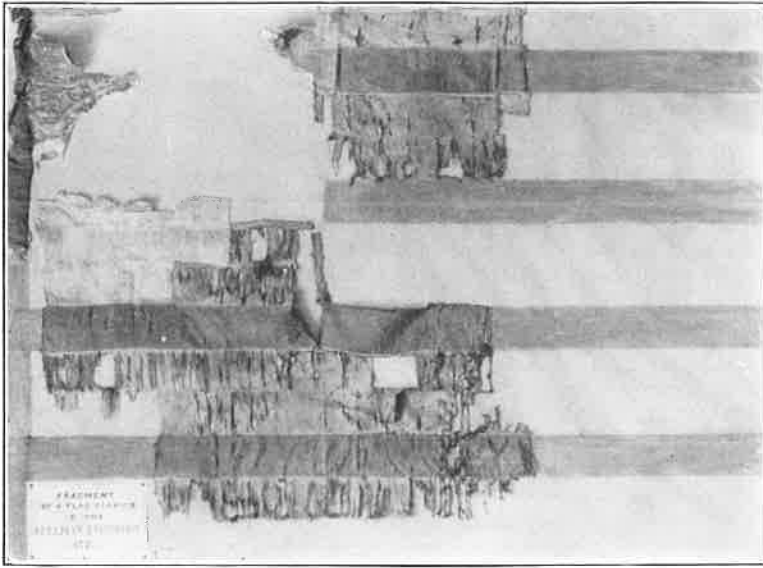
First Rhode Island Regiment, Continental Infantry in the Revolution
(Reverse)

At State House, Providence

in white, within which are seventeen gold stars and a golden American eagle. In the eagle's mouth is a blue scroll outlined in red bearing the motto "E Pluribus Unum" in black or dark blue. A white ring outlined in red surrounds the eagle's neck, and from this ring hang the arms of the United States—a white or silver shield with 9 red stripes (paly of 17 gules and argent) and red ornamentations in chief. The branch in the eagle's claw is red. Below the large shield is a white scroll with black lettering "2nd Regiment County of Providence, R. I." This flag was painted by Samuel Brown between 1803 and 1817 when there were 17 states in the Union, and was presented to the Society by Americus V. Potter in 1856. It was used during the War of 1812.

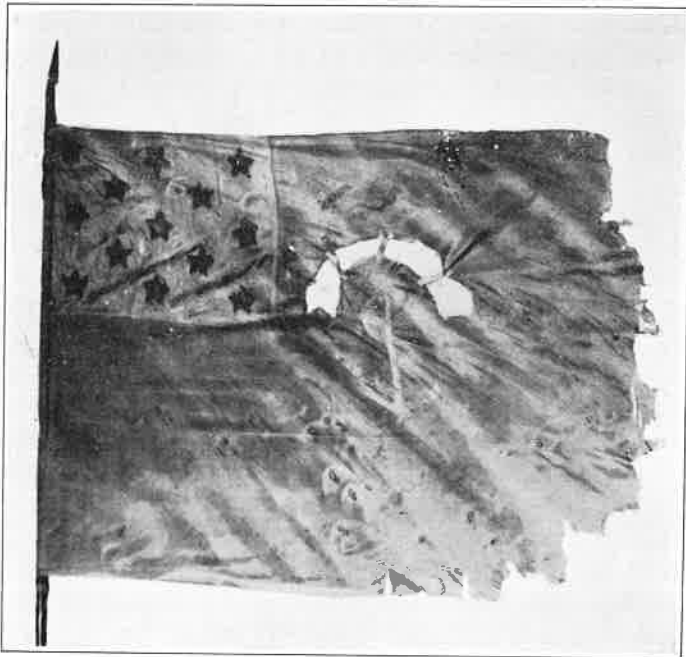
The flag of the First North Providence Company, Second Providence County Regiment, is a blue silk flag with red fringe and a green painted canton. On one side of the canton is a blue shield charged with a gold fowl anchor. The shield is surrounded by gold ornamentation and gold scrolls. Above the shield is the motto "Hope" in blue letters on gold, and above this another gold scroll bearing in blue letters the inscription "2nd Regt Infantry." At the left of the shield is a pink scroll edged with gold and lettered in gold letters with blue shadowing "1st Company" and at the right similarly "R. I. Militia." Below the shield is a similar scroll lettered in red "North Providence," and below this is a pink pendant surrounded by gold ornamentation and lettered in blue "A D 1834."

On the other side of the flag the green canton bears what is supposed to represent the arms of the United States; but with great license on the part of the painter. The arms are in gold. In the eagle's mouth a red scroll outlined in gold bears the motto "E Pluribus Unum" in blue letters. Above the arms is the motto "Liberty or death before dishonour" in similar coloring. The shield has a gold chief and a paly of 24 red, light blue, and dark blue stripes with gold edges, and across the base of the chief is the lettering "Painted by S. J. Bower." This flag was carried by Charles E. Swan, when the militia was mobilized in the Dorr War in 1842. Mr. Swan was at that time an officer in this company. His name appears on the militia roll of 1836, at



Flag carried in the Sullivan Expedition of 1778

In the Society's Museum



Second Rhode Island Regiment, Continental Infantry in the Revolution

(The letters HOPE have been cut out)

At State House, Providence

which time he is listed an ensign of the Second North Providence Company, Second Providence County Regiment. This flag was placed with the Society by Mr. Swan's grandson, Mr. Benjamin Whitman.

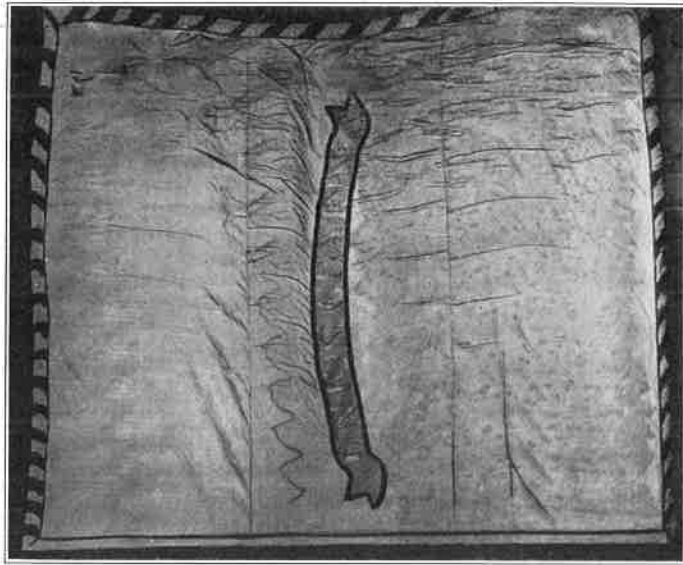
These two militia flags are of particular interest because they give us an idea of the distinguishing militia company flags of a century ago. There are doubtless other early militia flags stowed away in Rhode Island attics, and it is hoped that this article will serve to bring some of these out.

Each of the chartered commands had its own distinctive colors, and a few of these flags have been preserved and are now on exhibition at the Rhode Island Historical Society.

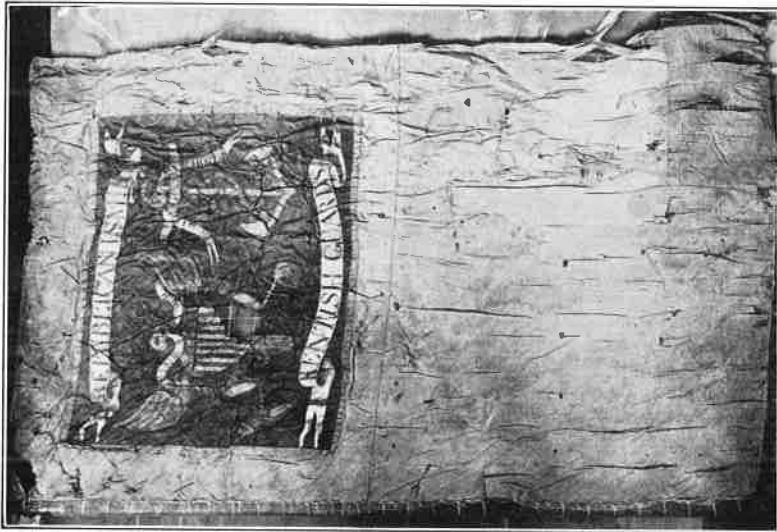
The Kentish Guards' flag is of yellow silk with a red silk canton on which the arms of the United States and of Rhode Island are painted. The outer half of the flag has long since worn away so that the remaining fragment is on this account of an unusual shape. The shield of the United States is represented by eight black and eight gold stripes, heraldically a paly of 16 sable and or, and from the number of stripes the age of the flag can easily be deduced. It was evidently painted between 1796 and 1802. The anchor, the stars and the eagle are gold, the scrolls or ribbons white, and the lettering black. The Rhode Island motto "In God We Hope" was used decoratively at this time instead of the official motto "Hope." This flag was presented to the Society in 1860 by Dr. D. H. Greene.

The flag of the United Train of Artillery of Providence is the earliest Rhode Island flag extant, for it was carried as early as 1776. The design apparently is not in a canton as was later the general custom, but was the principal charge on the field. It is the insignia of the company and is also used on the uniform button. The field of the flag is yellow, the snake yellow and blue, the stars blue, the cannon gold with black mounting, the scroll under the snake is pink with gold lettering and the scroll on the cannon light blue with gold lettering. The scrolls and stars are outlined in blue.

A letter sent to the Rhode Island Historical Society February 21, 1861, reads as follows: "The Providence Artillery parade to-morrow and with them the "Old Guard" who desire to carry



Union Guards of Providence — 1812

In the Society's Museum

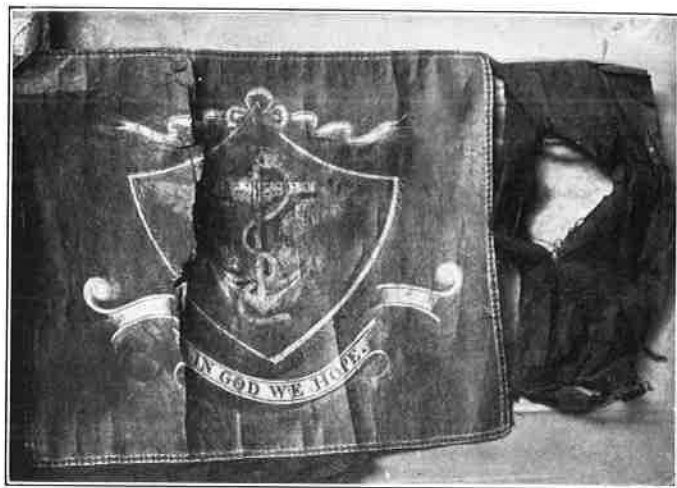
Kentish Guards — 1796-1802

In the Society's Museum

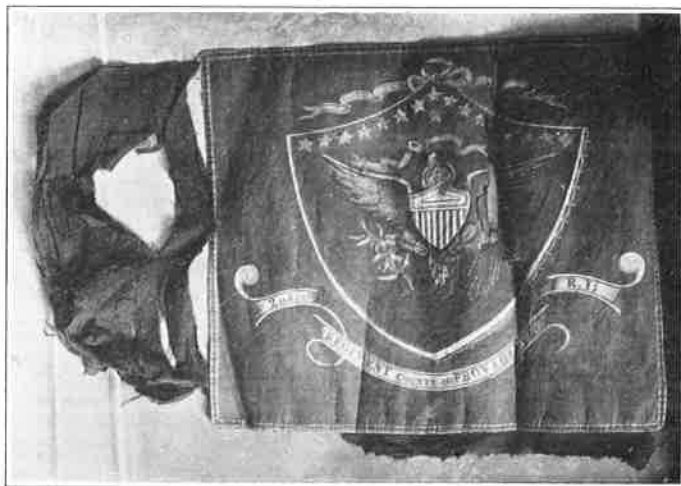
the flag of the company of '76 now in the Historical Society." The flag was carried during the American Revolution, though not apparently at the front.

Another chartered command flag preserved at the Society is that of the "Union Guards," an organization formed for the defense of Providence in the War of 1812. This flag is of white or yellowish silk and in the centre has a yellow scroll with a dark yellow border. The lettering is blue and the fringe yellow and white. The flag is about five feet high by four feet broad and was made for the Guards by the ladies of Providence. It was presented to the Society by Mr. George O. Gorton.

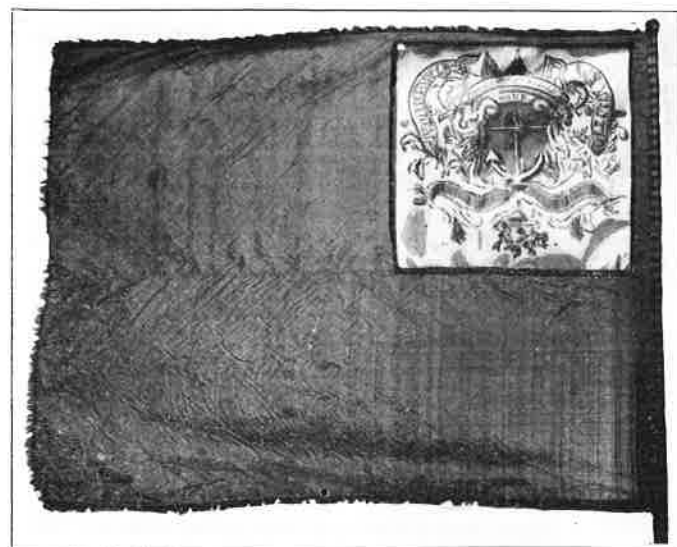
The flag of the First Light Infantry, Second Regiment, which was painted by S. J. Bowen in 1824, is preserved at the State Armory in Providence. It is a white silk flag, with a painted canton. On one side of this canton is a picture of an encampment with the words "First Light Infantry" above and "2d Regiment" below the picture. The other side of the canton bears the State's arms, a blue shield with a gold fowl anchor and the motto "In God we Hope." The shield is surrounded by a wreath and other symbolic ornamentation in gold and a scroll beneath the design bears the motto: "Nobile Est Pro Libertate Perire." In one corner of the canton is a pile of cannon balls also in gold and the inscription "S. J. Bowen Pinxt, Sept. 1, 1824." There is an account of this flag in the Brown Alumni Magazine for July, 1911.



Second Regiment Providence County — 1803-1812

In the Society's Museum

Second Regiment Providence County — 1803-1812

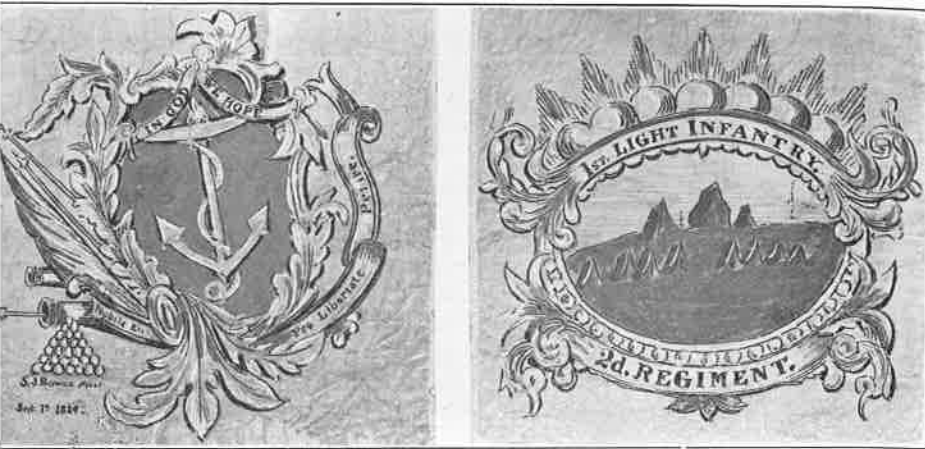
*(Reverse)**In the Society's Museum*

First North Providence Company — 1834

*(Reverse)**In the Society's Museum*

United Train of Artillery of Providence — 1776

In the Society's Museum



First Light Infantry, Second Regiment — 1824
(Canton, obverse and reverse)

At State Armory



Unofficial Rhode Island State flag of about 1824
From certificate of the Providence Association of
Mechanics and Manufacturers

From Society's Museum

An unofficial Rhode Island state flag of about the year 1824 is shown on the certificate of the Providence Association of Merchants and Manufacturers. If the engraver's lines are significant, it would appear that the flag was blue. The anchor was doubtless gold and apparently surrounded by a gold circle. The flag appears to be a pennant, and the anchor plain not foul. The first official enactment in regard to the state flag was not until 1877. (See Chapin's *The Seal, the Arms, and the Flag of Rhode Island*.)

Notes

Mr. Samuel G. Peckham of South Kingstown has recently deeded to the Society a tract of about 30,000 square feet of land containing the excavated ruins of the Jireh Bull garrison house.

The present and future citizens of Rhode Island should be especially grateful to Mr. Peckham for his generosity in making this important and tragic spot in the colony's early history a permanent public memorial. An account of the Jireh Bull house appeared in the last issue of the *Collections*.

At a meeting of the Society held on July 15, Mr. Gilbert A. Harrington was elected Treasurer.

The following persons have been elected to membership in the Society:

Mr. Russell Grinnell
Mr. Claude R. Branch

Mr. Albert E. Lownes
Mrs. T. H. de Coudres

The shorthand notes in the old Warwick Record book have recently been translated by Col. Fabyan of Geneva, Ill. They proved to be merely notes on sermons of no value historically.

The Society of the Colonial Dames in the State of Rhode Island has begun to compile a census of the Rhode Island houses built before 1830.

The Newport Historical Society Bulletin for July contains an historical account of the east shore of Middletown.

New books of local historical interest are:

A History of the Fabric of the First Baptist Meeting House, Providence, by Norman M. Isham.

The Home of Gen. Nathanael Greene at Coventry, Rhode Island, published by the General Nathanael Greene Homestead Association.

Conscience-Freedom, A Drama-Pageant of Social Progress, written by Clarence M. Gallup for the Centennial Celebration of the Rhode Island Baptist State Convention.

Notes on the Badge of Merit of 1782, by Howard M. Chapin, published by the Society of the Cincinnati in the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.