

R H O D E  
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# R H O D E I S L A N D H I S T O R Y

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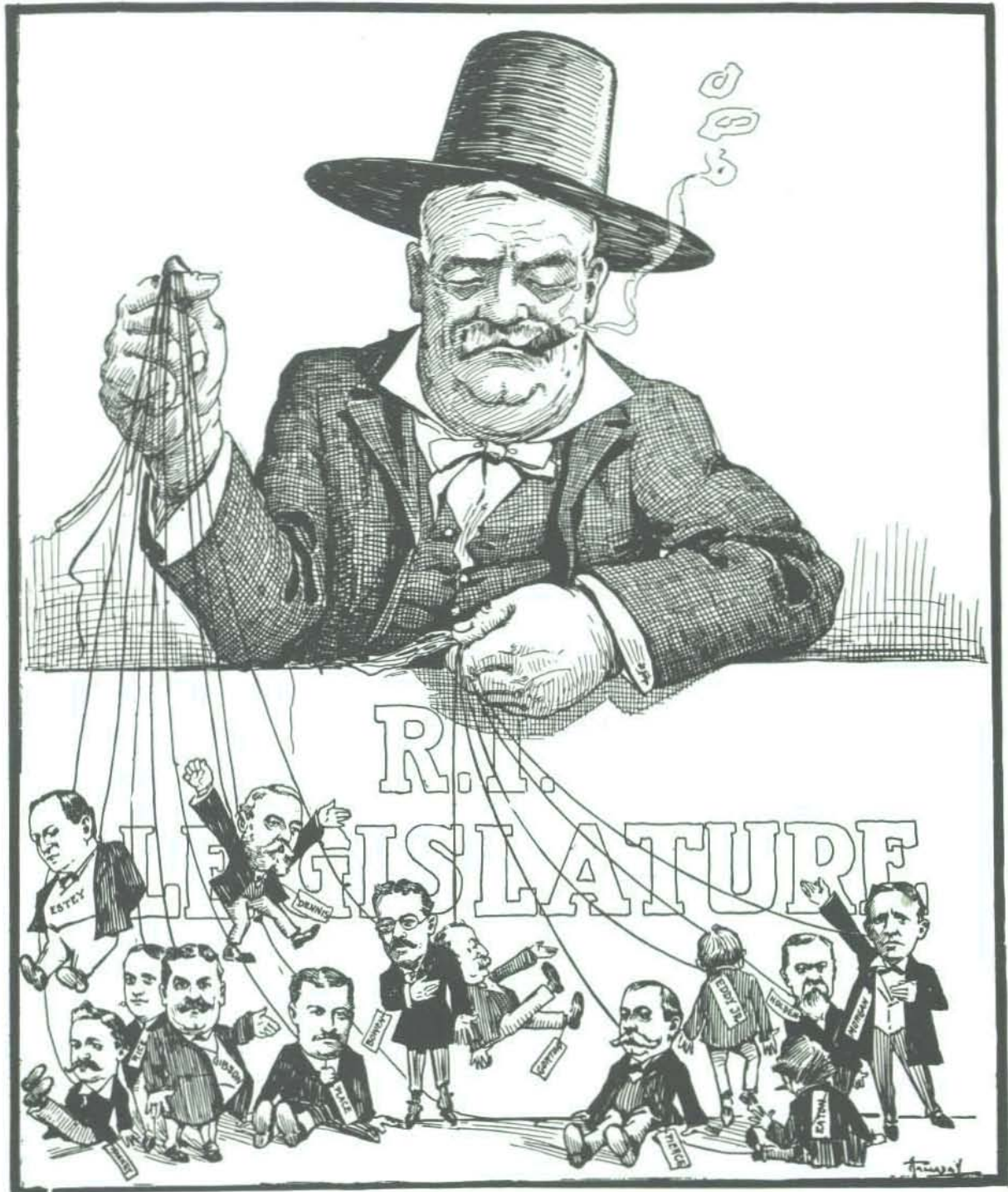
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*Here "under the Guns of the Fort" and "within sight and at a small distance from the Governor's house," occurred an incident that may have been the "chief Cause of the subsequent and unhappy fate of . . . his Majestys Schooner Gaspee." In "Charles Dudley and the Customs Quandary in Pre-Revolutionary Rhode Island" (page 53) the royal customs collector maintains that the unpunished burning of the revenue cutter H.M. Liberty, by angry colonists in Newport harbor three years before, encouraged the famous Rhode Island act of rebellion. In this picture of Newport, Governor Joseph Wanton's three-story house centers the shore line.*

*Detail of a lithograph copied from a painting of Newport as it appeared in 1730. The copy by J. P. Newell is dated 1864.*

Charles R. Brayton, astute boss of the Republican Party, was able to control the actions of Rhode Island's General Assembly by giving orders to the leadership from a

committee room just off the legislative floor. Cartoonist Milton R. Halladay caricatures Brayton's power over Providence legislators of the early 1900s.



## Urban Liberalism in Rhode Island, 1909-1919

by John D. Buenker\*

On the surface, at least, Rhode Island was little touched by the reformist turmoil which elsewhere characterized the Progressive Era. The regular Republicans remained in control even though Woodrow Wilson carried the state in 1912, and the Progressive Party elected only a handful of legislators to the General Assembly. A relatively small amount of typically progressive legislation was enacted, and Rhode Island was the only state to reject as many as three of the period's four amendments to the federal constitution. This apparent placidity, however, obscures the fact that there was a highly significant reformist group at work in the state in the first two decades of the twentieth century, one whose struggles against the established order were both vigorous and far-reaching. That their efforts have heretofore gone unheralded is due mostly to what one scholar has styled as "preoccupation with the syndrome of middle class anxieties and prejudices," and a virtual disregard for what J. Joseph Huthmacher calls "urban working-class liberalism."<sup>1</sup>

Until very recently, scholars of the Progressive Era have concentrated their attention primarily on the activities of the articulate, well-educated, economically secure American of traditional native Protestant stock, the type of reformer who joined good government associations and swelled the ranks of the Progressive Party. To the extent that most historians have considered the efforts of the urban, foreign stock, working class and their representatives, it has generally been to describe them as a part of the "potent mass which

limited the range and achievements of Progressivism."<sup>2</sup> More recent studies have demonstrated, however, that this latter group did indeed play a very constructive role in reform movements in such key states as New York, California, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Illinois, Ohio and Connecticut, and there can be no doubt that, acting largely through the medium of the Democratic Party, it was easily the most consistent exponent of meaningful change in Rhode Island.<sup>3</sup> Nor can there be any question that the Republican Party, built as it was on an old stock, rural and small town base, was the primary defender of the status quo.

As were the other New England states, Rhode Island was first settled by people of British ancestry and Protestant religion who developed its industries, established its political framework, and set its cultural tone. From the 1830s on, however, their hegemony was seriously threatened by a massive influx of immigrants who differed from the dominant Yankees. Beginning with the Irish and continuing with French Canadians, Italians, Portuguese, Russian Jews, and other East European migrants, the ethnic makeup of the population was so drastically rearranged that by 1910 only 29.5 percent of the state's residents were listed by the census bureau as native-born of native parents, and many of these were certainly no more than third generation Americans. Nearly one-third of Rhode Island's residents in 1910 were immigrants and the remaining 35.9 percent were offspring of parents, at least one of whom had been born abroad. Since only

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1 Edwin Rozwenc, "Progressive Era," in Howard Quint, Dean Albertson, and Milton Cantor, *Main Problems in American History*, II (Homewood, Illinois, 1968), 175. Huthmacher, "Urban Liberalism and the Age of Reform," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 49 (September 1962), 231-241.

2 Richard Hofstadter, *Age of Reform* (New York, 1955), 182-186.

3 See, for example, Huthmacher, "Charles Evans Hughes and Charles Francis Murphy: The Metamorphosis of Progressivism," *New York History*, 46 (January 1965), 25-40 and his *Massachusetts People and Politics* (Cambridge, 1959), 60-71. John Morton Blum, *Joe Tumulty and the Wilson Era* (Boston, 1951), 3-50. Michael Rogin, "Progressivism and the California Electorate," *Journal of American History*, 40 (September 1968), 297-314. John D. Buenker, "Urban Immigrant Lawmakers and Progressive Reform in Illinois," in Donald F. Tingley, ed., *Essays in Illinois History* (Carbondale, 1968), 55-74; "Cleveland's New Stock Lawmakers and Progressive Reform," *Ohio History*, 78 (Spring 1969), 116-137; "Progressivism in Connecticut: The Thrust of the Urban, New Stock Democrats," *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin*, 35 (October 1970), 97-109.

21.8 percent of these newest arrivals came from England, Scotland or British Canada, the great bulk of the remainder emanated from drastically different cultural and religious backgrounds than the state's Yankee Protestants. Although spread throughout the state, these new stock peoples tended to congregate in the industrial cities and mill towns so that first and second generation Americans together comprised over seventy percent of the population of Providence, Pawtucket and Cumberland, over eighty percent of that of Woonsocket and Central Falls, and at least half of that of Warwick, Cranston, East and West Providence, Bristol, Burrillville, Coventry, Johnston, Smithfield, North Smithfield, Portsmouth, Tiverton, Warren and Westerly.<sup>4</sup> Being largely without capital or skills, these new arrivals were generally forced to seek employment at the lowest paid and least prestigious jobs available, leaving the better positions to those of longer residence and creating a veritable occupational hierarchy. Their poverty also resulted in Rhode Island's having the lowest percentage of home ownership of any state, a fact of great political significance since property qualifications still applied in some local elections. Uprooted from their traditional cultural milieu and handicapped by native intolerance when they tried to reestablish those mores in their new homeland, the recent immigrants experienced great social disorganization and swelled the statistics of crime, mental disorders and juvenile delinquency.<sup>5</sup>

Although rapidly becoming a minority group in the state, the Yankee Protestant was nevertheless able to maintain economic, political, and cultural hegemony, thanks largely to the legerdemain of General Charles R. Brayton, the highly astute boss of the Republican Party. Although blind and holding no state office, Brayton was still able to control the actions of the General Assembly by giving orders to the Republican leadership from his station in a committee room just off the legislative floor. Although the director of several corporations and the careful guardian of the interests of the state's economic elite even as his ally Nelson W. Aldrich was in the U.S. Senate, Brayton nevertheless built his political organization primarily on the votes of the

rural and small town Yankees who feared the incursion of the alien populations of the cities. Under his direction the Republican Party became the "representative of business interests and rural Yankees," and he elevated many small town men to positions of leadership in the state.<sup>6</sup>

Brayton's greatest asset was the archaic apportionment system which grossly distorted popular representation in the General Assembly. In the senate, each of the state's thirty-nine cities and towns was allotted only one senator regardless of population, meaning that West Greenwich, population 481, had the same representation as Providence, which had 224,326 people in 1910, forty percent of the entire state. It was estimated by one expert that the twenty smallest towns with a combined total of 7.5 percent of the population were actually in a position to control deliberations in the upper house. The senate, future Congressman George O'Shaunessy of Providence once observed, "is a strong power exercised by the abandoned farms of Rhode Island." The lower house more accurately reflected the population distribution in its apportionment and provided for at-large elections in each city and town. Nevertheless considerable distortion still existed because there were minimum and maximum percentages for each incorporated area, limiting Providence, for example, to one-fourth the total number of representatives, no matter what her population.<sup>7</sup>

This malapportionment insured heavy Republican majorities in both houses and the Brayton forces augmented their control by other devices as well. Since the membership of committees was chosen by the leadership of both houses with little minority party consultation, the Republicans always dominated them, and were able to bottle up any troublesome legislation introduced by the Democrats or occasional Progressives and Socialists. The end of every legislative session found a host of progressive measures still languishing in committee. In addition the General Assembly had succeeded in tying the hands of the governor, since he was elected at large and therefore had to be more responsive to popular pressure even if, as was usually

4 U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, III, 619-631.

5 Rhode Island Bureau of Industrial Statistics, *Some Nativity and Race Factors in Rhode Island* (Providence, 1910). Earl C. Tanner, *Introduction to the Economy of*

*Rhode Island* (Providence, 1953), 1-6. Rhode Island State Planning Board, *Rhode Island Population Trends* (Providence, 1936).

6 Elmer E. Cornwell, Jr., "Bosses, Machines and Ethnic Groups," *Annals of the American Academy of Political*

Rural control of the legislature was graphically emphasized on the front page of *The Sunday Tribune of Providence*, on March 2, 1913, in a cartoon by Howard E. Branch.

HIS OLD POSITION - CAN HE STILL HOLD IT?



the case, he was also a Republican. By the passage of the so-called "Brayton's Law" the legislature had veto

power over all gubernatorial appointments while the executive, for his part, had almost no power to overrule

and *Social Science*, 353 (May 1964), 29. Duane Lockard, *New England State Politics* (Princeton, 1959), 174-178. Lincoln Steffens, *Autobiography* (New York, 1931), 464-467. *Providence Evening Bulletin* (hereafter referred to as *Bulletin*), January 20, 1909; January 5, 10, 13, 18, February 28, April 1, 1910; January 2, 1911; January 2,

1912; April 16, 1915. *Providence Journal* (hereafter referred to as *Journal*), February 3, 6, 1910.

7 Chester Jones, "Rotten Boroughs of New England," *North American Review*, 97 (April 1913), 488. Lockard, 178. *Journal*, February 28, 1910.

acts passed by the legislative branch.<sup>8</sup> On the local level, the Yankee Republicans had successfully stymied the impact of the new stock vote by retaining property qualifications for voting in common council elections, a circumstance which disenfranchised an estimated sixty percent of the electorate, the bulk of them new stock working class. Although the Democrats frequently elected mayors in the major cities, their efforts were often frustrated by the intransigence of the common councils.<sup>9</sup>

But even though the Brayton machine was basically rural and old stock, political realities required it to make at least a few gestures in the direction of the rapidly increasing numbers of immigrant voters. This meant granting them political recognition by slating a minimum number of stock candidates, a purpose illustrated by the choice of French Canadians Emery San Souci and Aram Pothier for governor during the Progressive years. It also meant the acceptance of a handful of Republican legislators such as Jacob Eaton, a Roumanian immigrant, the German born Carl Wendel, Max Levy, Silverio Giannotti and a number of Irish and French Canadians. At their highest point, new stock lawmakers never constituted more than twelve percent of the Republican total, however, despite the high percentage of foreign stock people in the general population.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the Republicans occasionally had to yield to urban, working class pressures by endorsing measures inimical to the interests they generally served. This was always done under duress and usually took the form of a less drastic version of a measure first urged upon them by the Democrats. Even with these attempts at recognition and legislative compromise, though, the majority party was still faced with periodic revolts in the ranks of its urban representatives seeking to make common cause with the Democrats on key issues.<sup>11</sup> In the long run, Brayton and his successor Charles Wilson did no more than retard the movement of new stock voters

into the Democratic Party, but their efforts did insure Republican dominance throughout the Progressive Era.

For it was to the Democratic Party that the state's recent arrivals increasingly turned for political action. The Irish had discovered early that political activity was one of the few avenues open to them and most other immigrant groups tried to follow suit, a circumstance attested to by their high incidence of voting regularity. As the minority party even in pre-Civil War days, the Democrats played for the Irish vote by endorsing liberalization of the franchise and opposing the religious bigotry of the Know-Nothing Era. In time the Irish accomplished a slow, steady climb through party ranks until, by the beginning of the Progressive Era, they had virtually come to control the party's apparatus on the state and local level. By 1900 the Irish held three-fourths of the party positions in the city of Providence, Irish Democratic mayors governed most of the major cities, the state central committee was almost their private preserve, and Irish lawmakers dominated the Democratic delegations at the state house. In 1913 seventeen of the thirty-six Democrats in the lower house were of Irish descent and six years later the figure had risen to twenty-two of thirty-two, most of them representatives of towns with heavily foreign stock populations.<sup>12</sup>

This Irish ascendancy was threatened somewhat by the arrival of such newer immigrant groups as the Italians and French Canadians, and many Irish leaders proved as reluctant to grant them power and recognition as did the Yankees, a condition which allowed the Republicans to cull a sizable portion of the new stock vote. In the long run, however, the realization by the Irish that they suffered from the same political, economic and social hardships as the newer immigrants and required the same ameliorative legislation caused the Democratic leaders to actively court the latter's votes. This process was long developing and the overwhelming allegiance of the more recent immigrant

8 Lockard, 175-177. *Bulletin*, January 24, 1911; January 5, March 21, 1912; April 15, 1916.

9 Steffens, 467. Lockard, 174-190. Cornwell, "Party Absorption of Ethnic Groups: The Case of Providence, Rhode Island," *Social Forces*, 38 (March 1960), 205-210. Murray S. and Susan W. Stedman, "Rise of the Democratic Party of Rhode Island," *New England Quarterly*, 24 (September 1951), 329-339.

10 Lockard, 177. Rhode Island, Secretary of State, *Manual with Rules and Orders for the Use of the General Assembly of Rhode Island*, 1911, 382-405; 1912, 386-408; 1913, 385-410; 1914, 385-410; 1915, 385-410; 1916, 385-410; 1917, 393-417; 1918, 394-419; 1919, 394-419.

11 *Bulletin*, January 3, April 21, May 11, 1911; January 2, 1912; January 7, February 18, March 6, 1913; January 5, 1915.



groups was not secured until the late Twenties, but even during the Progressive years the Irish Democrats could claim to represent urban, industrial, immigrant Rhode Island with far more credibility than could the Republicans. The Irish, despite their longer residency, were still aliens to the Yankees and shared religious affiliations with most of the more recent arrivals. They also closely resembled the newer immigrants because they too had congregated in the urban areas and taken the lowest paid industrial jobs. By the Progressive years the Irish were the perfect "middle men" between the native culture and the immigrant one and their frequent incidence in such positions as foremen, contractors, and public employees gave them political influence over the French Canadians and continental Europeans.<sup>13</sup> Not only did the Irish Democrats in the General Assembly often represent the newer immigrants themselves, but they also granted the leaders of these groups at least as much recognition as did the Republicans, and Italians, French Canadians, and East European lawmakers were as often found on the Democratic side as on the Republican. In short, "the Democratic party early became the spokesman for the underdog and the disfranchised immigrants and offered a nucleus for counter organization against the oligarchic elements which ran the state."<sup>14</sup>

As such, one of the primary goals of the Democrats was to democratize the archaic political structure developed by Brayton and the Yankee Republicans. Chief among their efforts was the abolition of property qualifications for voting in common council elections, a practice so highly valued by the Republicans that Charles Wilson, Brayton's successor as party leader, acknowledged abolition to be "distinctly a Democratic measure" and that its implementation would mean a Republican defeat. Each session of the General Assembly saw the Democrats introduce a constitutional amendment to abolish property qualifications only to have their efforts frustrated by the Republican majority.

"One of the primary goals of the Democrats was to democratize the archaic political structure developed by Brayton . . ." Halladay's cartoon reflects the discontent with Brayton's influence.



Occasionally they were joined by a few urban Republicans or a handful of Progressives, but the net result was still the same. In 1910 the resolution introduced by O'Shaunessy died in committee. In 1911 the Democrats mounted a massive campaign of petitions from the cities and the Republicans tried to counter by replacing property qualifications with educational ones. The attempt failed, however, and the

12 Stedman, 329-341. Lockard, 178-191. Rhode Island, *Manual*, 1913, 384-410; 1919, 394-419. *Bulletin*, January 2, 1911; January 7, 21, March 24, 1913.

13 Stedman, 329-341. Lockard, 175-192. Carey McWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin*, (Boston, 1964), 334.

14 Lockard, 192. Cornwell, "Party Absorption," 205-210. A comparison of the prevalence of new stock legislators in both parties can be gained by studying their biographies in the Rhode Island *Manuals*. They reveal the Republicans to have been dominated by Yankees, the Democrats by Irish, with newer ethnic groups about equally represented.

abolition of property qualifications itself was defeated in the house 52-39 amid Democratic pleas to aid the working man and Republican arguments that a voter needed to have a stake in society to act responsibly. In 1912 there was an almost daily attempt by Democratic leaders Albert West and William Flynn in the house to pry the measure from committee, all of which were unavailing.<sup>15</sup> In 1913 Democratic pressure forced the Republican leaders to declare the matter so important as to require consideration by a constitutional convention, a ploy which almost backfired when enough urban Republicans deserted to the Democratic-Progressive cause to pass West's resolution to that effect in the house. The senate again saved the day for the Republicans, however, as it did in 1914 by blocking the efforts of Democratic leaders Thomas McKenna and Addison P. Munroe to discharge the resolution from committee. By 1915 and 1916 the regular Republicans in the house had sufficiently regained their composure to bottle it in committee, although seven of their number voted to discharge it in the latter years. All told, it took the Democrats until 1928 to abolish property qualifications by constitutional amendment and by that time the union of the Irish and the newer immigrants in the Democratic Party had been effected and the reign of the Yankee Republicans was ended.<sup>16</sup>

Democratic concern for the working class voter was also evidenced by trying to liberalize registration procedure in the cities. The party backed all efforts to lengthen the period of registration and also endorsed the idea of having canvassers register people in their homes. In addition Democratic legislators introduced measures to protect employees from retaliation by employers, to replace the Board of Canvassers in Providence with an Electoral Commission, and to allow employees time off with pay to cast their ballots. This same desire to maximize the impact of the urban vote also animated their insistence upon the retention of annual elections when the Republicans tried to move to biennial ones.<sup>17</sup> By the same token it was the Democrats who evinced the most enthusiasm for another typically progressive innovation, the direct primary, since it could only enhance the chances of

urban-oriented lawmakers. The Republicans generally opposed the idea because it was in direct conflict with their habit of endorsing small town Yankees for high office.<sup>18</sup>

A similar consideration dictated the support of the Democrats for the popular election of United States senators in the face of Republican opposition. The malapportioned nature of the General Assembly guaranteed the selection of business-oriented Yankee Republicans like Nelson Aldrich and the change to direct election might remedy this situation. The Democrats sponsored a resolution in 1911 to petition Congress for passage of the proposed seventeenth amendment which the Republicans buried in committee. In 1913 James J. Dunn of East Providence introduced the resolution to ratify the amendment and his arguments were vigorously seconded by Patrick Dillon of Cumberland, West and Thomas O'Neil of Providence. The Republicans countered by urging the efficacy of the existing system, and pointing with pride to Rhode Island's current senators, while the Republican-controlled committee on special legislation recommended rejection of the resolution. A coalition of Democrats, Progressives, and such new stock Republicans as Wendel, Eaton, Joseph Murphy and Albert Renard combined to overrule the committee report in the house, but the senate, with a six to one Republican majority, killed the measure in committee, despite the efforts of Munroe and McKenna to rescue it.<sup>19</sup>

Democratic favor for the era's other political amendment, woman suffrage, was slower in developing but it materialized when the party leaders recognized the advantage inherent in enfranchising the great mass of new stock females. The native social conservatism of the immigrant combined with the politician's mistrust of female reliability accounted for the early opposition of many Democratic leaders like Thomas McKenna to the proposal, a position which was reenforced when the president of the Rhode Island woman suffrage association urged the legislature to enfranchise "American" females as a counterbalance to the "foreign vote." General Brayton also opposed the

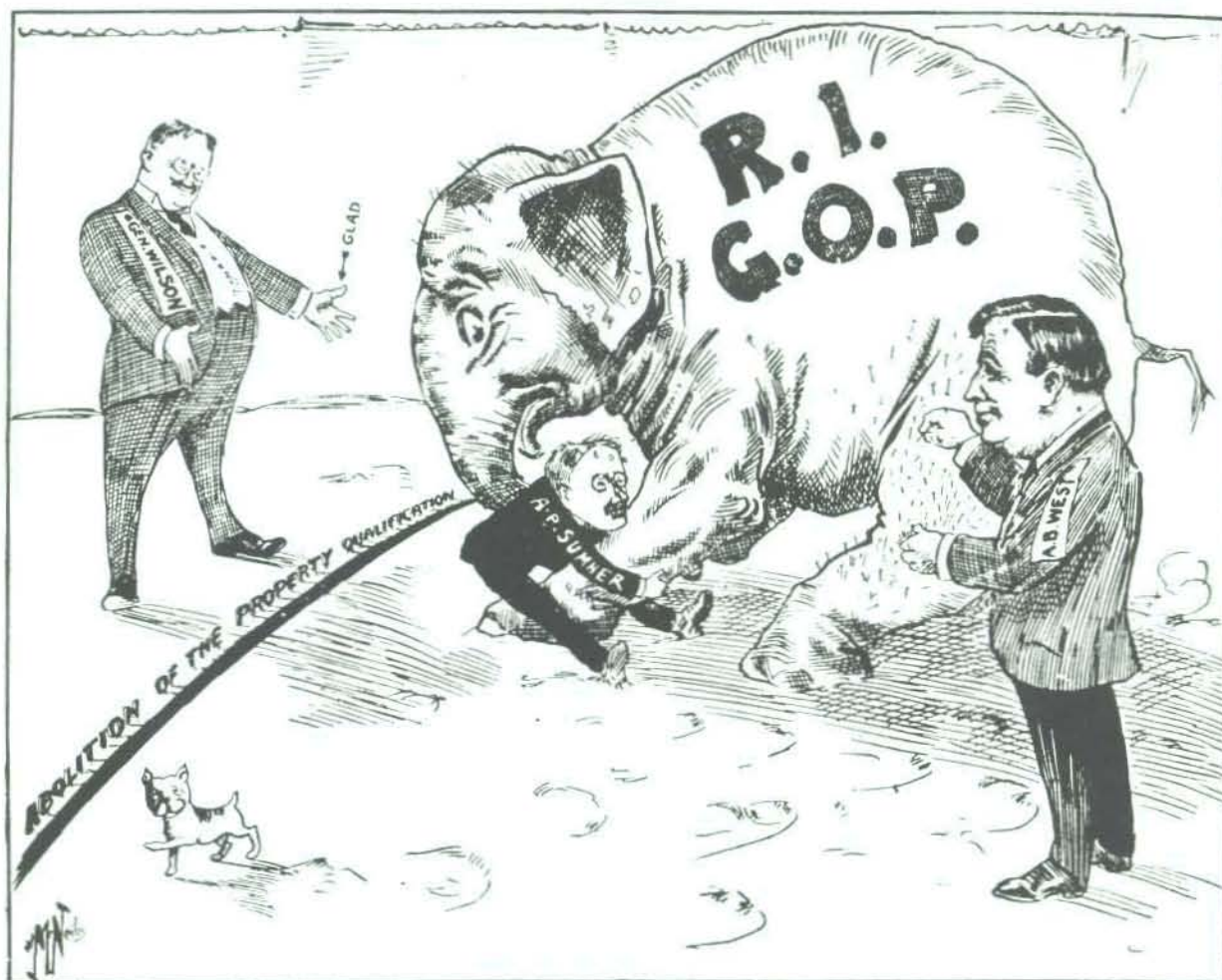
15 Lockard, 190-191. Stedman, 337-341. Cornwell, "Party Absorption," 206. *Journal*, February 18, 1910. *Bulletin*, February 7, March 2, 14, April 1, 4, 19, May 3, 1911; January 3, February 22, 24, March 7, 21, 22, April 2, 3, 10, 16, 18, 23, 26, 27, 1912.

16 *Bulletin*, January 8, February 10, 28, March 11, 12, 26, April 25, 1913; April 1, 1914; April 4, 1916.

17 *Bulletin*, February 28, March 2, 25, 1910; January 20, February 23, March 2, April 4, 20, 21, 1911; January 12,

Republican reluctance to abolish property qualifications for voting was pictured by cartoonist William C. McNeelis in *The Sunday Tribune* of March 1, 1914. Charles A. Wilson, Republican party leader, appears ready to greet the move

while Speaker Albert P. Sumner struggles to accomplish the step. Democrat Albert B. West continues trying to goad the majority party into action.



change, however, because he correctly recognized that most women would vote the same way as their husbands, thus greatly augmenting the forces of his opponents. Accordingly, the Republicans supported woman suffrage only if property qualifications were

retained for local elections. The Democrats, for their part, gradually came to endorse votes for women and tried to tie it to abolition of property qualifications. The nineteenth amendment, therefore, enjoyed seemingly bipartisan support in both houses and passed

April 26, 1912; January 30, 1913; February 18, 1915; April 9, 1918.

18 *Bulletin*, March 8, 1911; March 1, April 18, 1912; March 26, 1913.

19 *Bulletin*, January 12, 1911; January 22, March 6, 12, 13, 14, April 9, 1913. See also John D. Buenker, "The Urban Political Machine and the Seventeenth Amendment," *Journal of American History*, 61 (September 1969), 305-323.

easily. The Democrats, however, attempted to amend the enabling legislation so that property qualifications for women would be eliminated in the hope that this might eventually lead to "full male suffrage" as well. The Republicans sought to avoid the issue but eventually had to kill the amendment 29-57, "with party lines being strictly observed," underscoring again the great concern of the urban Democrats for the fullest possible suffrage. With a few exceptions, nearly all the party's lawmakers also supported the bill providing for woman suffrage in the presidential election in 1916, which passed after Republicans attempted to submit it to a referendum.<sup>20</sup>

In their quest for popular government, the Democrats also launched frequent attacks on the apportionment system. Demands to redistrict the house forced the Republicans to introduce a reapportionment measure in 1909, but the Democrats opposed it because it provided for election by districts, thus blunting their ability to elect entirely Democratic delegations from the large cities. The bill passed both houses, but failed at the polls in a referendum. The following session the Republicans proposed the creation of a redistricting commission which the Democrats again opposed because the malapportioned senate would have the largest voice in picking its members. The commission's proposals made it even more difficult for the Democrats by dividing Providence County so that part of it was distributed in all three Congressional districts, a plan which state chairman Frank Fitzsimmons and other prominent party leaders testified against vehemently but were unable to prevent. For the rest of the Progressive period the Democrats contented themselves with attempts to divide the senate into thirty equal districts based upon population, but were unable to make any headway in the face of solid Republican opposition.<sup>21</sup>

Another Democratic goal was the liberalization of the rules of the General Assembly to allow more latitude for the minority party. They regularly fought for more representation on committees, since the system of apportionment by the leadership of the house

and senate was so manifestly unfair that even one Republican asserted that "you cannot find any precedent for this procedure anywhere in Christendom." To further weaken the obstructive committee structure they unsuccessfully fought to have all committees elected, to require only a two-fifths vote to discharge bills, and to stipulate that committees be made to report all bills to the floor. To hamper the Republican practice of jamming through legislation in the confusion attending the end of the session, the Democrats favored a requirement that no new legislation be introduced after the fifty-second day of the sixty day session, and that no bill could be reported out of committee after the fifty-sixth day.<sup>22</sup> Concurrently the minority party regularly supported all attempts to increase the powers of the executive branch of the government on both the state and local level, since governors and mayors were elected at large and by universal male suffrage. Consequently they sought to give executives broader appointive powers and a meaningful item veto, in order to undo the pernicious effects of "Brayton's Law."<sup>23</sup>

Along with these attempts to strip the Republicans of their mechanism for controlling state government, the Democrats also moved to check much of the attendant corruption. Although urban political machines thrived on patronage and were generally opposed to much so-called "good government" legislation because it threatened to cut off one of their main sources of power, Rhode Island's Democrats were so far removed from any possibility of participation in the fruits of state government that they became the foremost advocates of corrupt practices laws. Each session of the General Assembly saw bitter struggles as they sought to trim the budget and opposed the hiring of clerks for various committees and commissions on the grounds that these were ill-disguised patronage positions. The minority party also sought to prohibit the practice of dual office-holding by state and city officials and to prevent office holders from taking positions with firms doing business with the city or state. Because of the close connection between the state's corporations and

20 *Bulletin*, March 15, 1912; January 28, March 23, 25, 26, 30, April 6, 7, 16, 1915; April 18, 1917; April 19, 1918. *Journal*, March 3, 16, 1910; January 7, April 17, 21, 1920.

21 *Journal*, January 5, February 11, 1910; *Bulletin*, March 26, 29, 30, April 2, 1909; January 13, 21, 1910; January 31, 1911; January 25, 1912.

22 *Journal*, January 11, 12, 1910. *Bulletin*, January 2, 4, March 21, 1912; January 7, 14, 1913; April 14, 1914; January 7, 13, 1915.

23 *Journal*, February 19, 1910. *Bulletin*, January 6, 18, 20, 1909; January 13, 1911; January 11, 1912; January 30, 1913; April 15, 1914.

Labeling Republican leader Charles A. Wilson "the new Moses," cartoonist Halladay comments on the railroads' gifts of free passes to legislators. Wilson is flanked by Richard W. Jennings, the state's general treasurer, and Christopher Champlin, senator from Block Island



the Republican organization, the Democrats also regularly sought to prohibit campaign contributions from business firms, restrict the activities of lobbyists, and abolish the free passes which the railroads bestowed upon lawmakers to ensure favorable treatment.<sup>24</sup>

Because most of their efforts to make state government more responsive to the public will failed, though, the Democrats also made numerous attempts to free the cities as much as possible from state control. The Republican majority frequently sought to hamstring the mayors of the larger cities by creating commissions which would operate independently, and the city representatives generally opposed these efforts or at

least sought to attach referendum provisions to them. More positively the Democrats introduced measures to allow city governments to condemn land, to increase taxation, and create public utilities commissions, but the majority party generally stifled all such attempts.<sup>25</sup> This urban frustration led also to Democratic support for initiative and referendum, a scheme which allowed the city voter to bypass the malapportioned legislature and exercise direct control over the legislative process.<sup>26</sup>

Ultimately, the complexity of the state's political problems caused the Democrats to urge the calling of a constitutional convention, in the hope that it would produce a document more compatible with an urban, industrial society. Once more in response to Democratic pressure, the Republicans in 1912 proposed the creation of a commission to study the possibility of constitutional revision. The Democrats labeled it a "lemon" and pressed for a referendum on the question of holding a convention in 1913, but in the end supported the measure as the best they could get, although introducing convention proposals of their own in each ensuing session. When the commission made its report in 1915 it advocated many of the Democrats' pet measures such as the abolition of property qualifications, prohibition of dual office holding, and reapportionment. The Republicans, therefore, refused to submit the report to a referendum and stymied Democratic attempts to discharge it from committee, a reversal so flagrant that even the Republican governor styled it a betrayal of party pledges.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps even more important to the urban Democrats than these political reforms were measures designed to meet the economic needs of their constituents. On the all important matter of taxation, for example, they attempted to reduce the burden on real property and increase that on such intangible holdings as stocks and bonds. The Democrats endorsed Governor Pothier's original plan for a state tax commission in 1911, but the senate Republicans killed it in committee. The following year, the Republicans accepted the plan but only after insuring that the senate

24 *Journal*, January 4, 21, 25, February 3, 1910. *Bulletin*, January 6, February 8, May 10, 1911; January 11, 24, February 1, 14, 20, March 1, 1912; January 15, 24, April 2, 1913; April 1, 7, 16, 1914; January 6, February 25, 1915; April 12, 18, 1917.

25 *Journal*, March 9, 12, 1910. *Bulletin*, March 16, April 24, 1911; January 17, April 17, 1912; April 23, 1913; April 13, 1915.

26 *Journal*, March 23, 1910. *Bulletin*, February 18, March 5, 1913.

27 *Bulletin*, January 18, March 19, April 17, 1912; April 8, 1913; April 1, 29, 1914; January 19, 25, February 17, 1915; April 7, 1916; April 6, 1917.

On March 5, 1914, the editorial page of the Democratic Evening News expressed one view of the proposed federal income tax.



would pick the commissioners and that strong limitations were placed on the right to tax corporations and profits from stocks and bonds. The Democrats then denounced it as a "rich man's bill."<sup>28</sup> Along the same

line, the latter tried unsuccessfully for four years to effect the ratification of the federal income tax amendment, beginning with O'Shaunessy's ratification resolution in 1910. The *Providence Bulletin* correctly

<sup>28</sup> *Bulletin*, April 25, 1910; April 12, 21, May 2, 6, 11, 1911; January 30, February 8, 9, 1912; March 18, 1913; April 14, 1915.

<sup>29</sup> *Journal*, January 7, 10, 1910; *Bulletin*, April 29, 1910; February 2, May 4, 1911; February 14, March 22, 1912; March 26, April 9, 1913. See also John D. Buerker, "Urban Liberalism and the Federal Income Tax Amendment," *Pennsylvania History*, 36 (April 1969), 192-216.

forecast in January that year that the regular Republicans would oppose ratification even though Nelson Aldrich had voted for submission of the amendment in the U.S. Senate because he had done so "only as a means of staving off the immediate enactment of an income tax law." The Democrats meanwhile gave it "unqualified endorsement" and reintroduced ratification resolutions in 1911, 1912 and 1913, but were never able to come near passage, thus ranking Rhode Island with Connecticut and Pennsylvania as the only states where the standpat Republicans were able to thwart the efforts of the Democrats and Progressives toward ratification.<sup>29</sup>

In their struggle for ameliorative economic legislation, the urban Democrats consistently backed what was probably the most lasting idea to come out of the Progressive Era — that government should undertake responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. One important manifestation of this new concept of the positive state was the principle that state government ought to regulate business in the interest of consumers. Democratic concern over the regulation of public utilities, for example, forced the Republicans to propose the creation of a Public Utilities Commission in 1912, but it once again provided for senate appointment of members and a number of exceptions among favored businesses like railroads. Democrats made several unsuccessful efforts to strengthen the measure, but they were all rejected. In addition they tried without avail to enact a statewide anti-trust law in 1913, but West's proposal failed on a narrow 46-45 vote in the house. Democratic spokesmen also introduced bills to regulate advertising and billboards, pure food and drug laws, and measures to curb the high interest rates charged by pawnbrokers and small loan companies. Concern among their constituents for the high cost of living also prompted many proposals to regulate prices of ice, bread, coal, and insurance rates, all items of vital interest to the working class.<sup>30</sup>

Of special importance were their efforts to protect the women and children who made up a significant portion of the state's work force. Since children's and

women's labor was often necessary to make ends meet in foreign stock families, the Democrats were anxious to eliminate abuses connected with it, as well as please the labor unions who felt that competition from minors and females adversely affected wages and conditions of labor. At almost every legislative session there were bills introduced by Democrats or such urban Republicans as Eaton or Giannotti, designed to reduce the hours and improve the conditions of labor for women and children, which had the support of organized labor, religious leaders, civic groups, women's clubs and social workers. Generally they were opposed by the representatives of the textile mills, department stores, jewelry manufacturers, telephone and telegraph companies and other employers and even by state officials such as the superintendent of the board of health who argued that Rhode Island's second ranking position in mortality rates was not due to child labor but to his efficiency in reporting statistics.<sup>31</sup>

In 1909 the Democrats introduced a fifty-four-hour-week bill for women and children which also prohibited night work, and it was eventually enacted into law after the Republicans amended it to fifty-six. In 1910 the Democrats backed a bill introduced by Cranston Republican Zenas Bliss, to prohibit night work for women and children in department stores, which unanimously passed the house at the urging of O'Shaunessy, James Nolan and Dennis Shea. The Republican controlled senate, however, amended it to exempt Saturday nights and the Christmas rush season. The following year they successfully opposed Republican attempts to remove the educational test required for minors to obtain a work certificate and tried in vain to bring telephone companies under the night work ban. In 1912, aided by the General Assembly's lone Socialist, James Reid of Providence, the Democrats sought to lower the work week to fifty-four hours, investigate the wages of women and children, and provide for the payment of damages to minors injured on the job. They continued their concern in 1913 by backing the fifty-four-hour bill introduced by Eaton which was eventually adopted,

30 *Journal*, January 20, February 3, 1910. *Bulletin*, January 12, 26, 28, April 14, 15, 20, 23, 29, May 5, 8, 1909; January 4, February 24, March 3, 1911; February 27, March 14, 20, 21, 26, April 27, 1912; January 9, February 4, March 4, April 2, 16, 1913; April 9, 1914; February 10, 16, 1915.

31 Stedman, 341. *Journal*, February 10, 19, 25, March 17, 1910; February 11, March 8, 9, April 2, 1909; March 7, 1912; February 20, 1913.

by seeking to provide women with maternity leave at full pay and, in 1915, by endorsing Giannotti's bill to prohibit hiring minors unless they could speak English and by sponsoring bills to increase the coverage of existing laws. Concern for children also motivated the Democrats' endorsement of industrial and vocational education, a stand also endorsed by the state's labor unions.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to particular concern for the lot of female and child laborers, the Democrats also manifested a great interest in the wages, hours and working conditions of other groups of workers. An eight-hour day for state and municipal employees and people on public works projects was regularly introduced by urban Democrats. This was done not only to benefit the workers in question, but also to provide an example for other employers, and the Republicans always stymied the attempts. Along the same line Democratic spokesmen introduced unsuccessful measures providing for the regulation of hours of labor for telephone, telegraph and railroad employees, and a resolution in 1913 to petition Congress to establish uniform hours and conditions of labor for all industries in interstate commerce. As far as wages were concerned, they pressed unsuccessfully for minimum pay scales for public employees and especially for school teachers. Since the industrial commission reported in 1912 that income was below the cost of living in most Rhode Island industrial centers, Democratic Senator Edwin Pierce of Cranston proposed a constitutional amendment for a statewide minimum wage scale, but it did not carry the General Assembly. The same session Pierce also failed to pass his measure to prevent the attachment of wages in payment of debt.<sup>33</sup>

The high incidence of disease and accidents among Rhode Island's workers also led to several proposals by the Democrats to regulate conditions of labor. A 1909 study revealed, for example, that 30.3 percent of all male laborers in the preceding decade had contracted lung diseases due to "industrial dust," and this gave impetus to the establishment of an industrial accident commission. Measures to this end were introduced in 1910 by Nolan and in 1911 by Pierce and West, but they

were all killed in committee, as was a proposal by Shea that factory inspectors be dismissed if they were not performing their function properly. Democrats also endorsed bills to require first aid stations in factories, to provide for full train crews, to prevent the firing of employees who made mistakes in weaving, and to outlaw the use of the suction shuttle, a weaver's device which had to be started by the worker's breath and which was so dangerous that it was popularly referred to as the "kiss of death."<sup>34</sup>

Since few of these measures were enacted and industrial accidents occurred with alarming frequency, the Democrats expended a great deal of energy on the enactment of a worthwhile workmen's compensation system. Threatened by unsuccessful Democratic attempts in 1910 and 1911, the Republicans also introduced a bill of their own in 1912. The chief difference in the measures was that the Democratic one provided for higher rates and administration by a board instead of by the courts. The senate judiciary committee further amended the proposal introduced by R. Livingston Beekman of Newport, future Republican governor, by exempting small business, cutting the length of time covered by the system, and setting up a series of conditions under which workers would not be eligible. The Democrats sought to remove these objectionable features, but in the end all but one of their number supported its passage. For the remainder of the Progressive Era they sought to strengthen the system by providing for more complete reporting of accidents, compelling employers to join, and allowing workers to decide for themselves if they wanted to apply for compensation. In 1913 and 1915 Pierce and John Cooney of Providence proposed a constitutional amendment to change the entire system, but no significant alteration occurred until 1921 when the decision was finally taken out of the hands of the courts and turned over to a commission.<sup>35</sup>

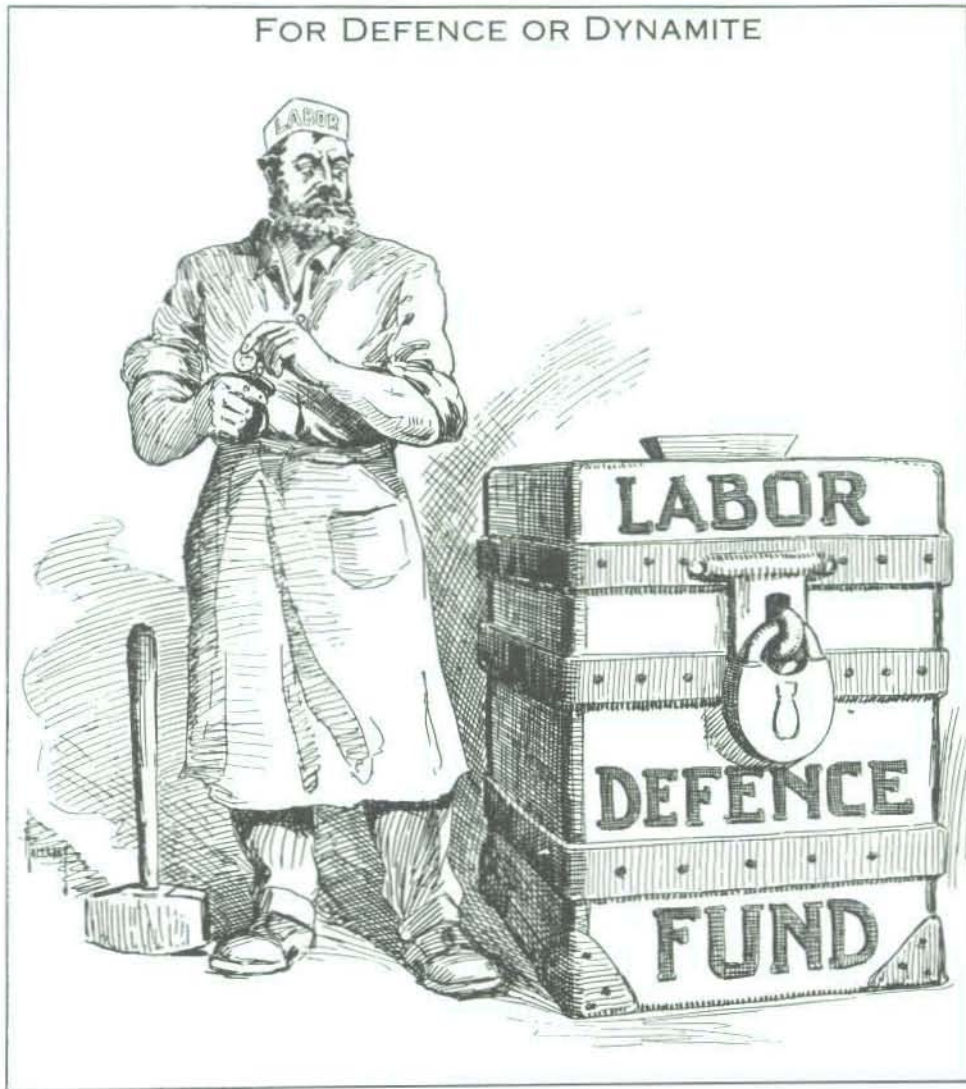
Since the leadership of the state's trade unions was also often derived from Irish and other recent immigrant stock, there was close cooperation between them and the state's Democrats, while the platform of the state Federation of Labor generally closely resembled

32 *Journal*, February 17, 1910. *Bulletin*, January 20, March 23, 25, April 7, May 5, 1909; January 13, February 10, May 14, 1911; February 7, 21, April 10, 16, 1912; January 30, February 4, 12, March 4, 1913; January 21, February 26, 1915; April 6, 1917.

33 *Journal*, March 24, 1910. *Bulletin*, March 15, April 27, 1909; January 6, May 4, 5, 1911; January 26, February 16, March 22, 1912; January 24, February 25, April 1, 2, 3, 1913; February 4, 9, 16, March 24, 1915; April 6, 1916.



*This newspaper picture reflects a more popular attitude toward Labor than that of the Democratic Party leadership which cooperated closely with the state's trade unions.*



From Cartoons by Halladay.

that of the minority party. Since Rhode Island had so many unskilled workers and the American Federation of Labor and its affiliates usually refrained from organizing them, the labor movement was exception-

ally weak in the state during the Progressive Era. "It is traditional," a 1926 study concluded, "that wage settlements and working conditions are established in most plants on an individualistic basis." Even so,

34 *Journal*, March 23, 1910. *Bulletin*, February 19, March 16, April 6, 1909; January 24, May 11, 1911; February 13, April 17, 1912; January 12, 1915; April 20, 1918.

35 Tanner, 106. *Journal*, February 15, 1910. *Bulletin*, February 14, 1911; January 3, March 20, 22, April 23, 1912; March 18, April 2, 8, 1913; January 14, April 8, 1915; April 18, 1917.

unions were very active during the period and the employers, generally backed by the press and public opinion, launched a ferocious counterattack featuring blacklists, spies, strikebreakers, injunctions and "yellow-dog" contracts. In this atmosphere, the urban Democrats generally constituted the largest pro-union force in government circles. Again without much success Democratic spokesmen sought to outlaw blacklists and yellow-dog contracts, provide for jury trials in cases involving violation of injunctions, require companies to note that they were being struck when advertising for workers, and to prevent discrimination against union members in hiring. To protect workers against unfair competition, they also sought to outlaw the use of convict labor or at least to require the labeling of convict-made goods. Because labor was weak and management strong the urban lawmakers also campaigned throughout the period for boards of conciliation and arbitration in labor disputes. Nearly all these efforts were unavailing, and Rhode Island labor remained weak until the thirties but the support given it by the Democrats again underscores the latter's role as the most progressive force in the legislature.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the above welfare measures, Rhode Island's urban Democrats also lent their support to a wide variety of ameliorative measures including public housing and tenement inspection, retirement pensions for public employees, public bath houses and auditoriums, playgrounds, comfort stations for commuters and reduced trolley car fares for workmen and school children. To take care of the needy and the unemployed during the pre-World War I depression they proposed the creation of a public market and public works projects in Providence. Their concern for their constituents who ran afoul of the law also led the Democrats to seek the abolition of imprisonment for debt and the third degree, as well as the prohibition of the use of confessions as evidence. In the midst of all this, they also found time to petition Congress on several occasions to lower the tariff on necessities and to try to appropriate money to aid flood victims in Ohio and Indiana.<sup>37</sup> All in all, they proved themselves to be,

When the Democrats proposed the creation of a public market during the pre-World War I depression, their suggestion met this response.



Drawing by Milton R. Halladay.

on a practical level at least, firmly devoted to the progressive principle of governmental responsibility for the promotion of the prosperity and security of its citizens.

In addition to their efforts at economic and political reform, Rhode Island's Democrats also emerged as the foremost champions of a culturally pluralistic society. Large scale immigration had produced serious cultural and religious tensions in the state, and the old stock citizens had determined early that they intended "to civilize, to Christianize and Americanize these people," by legislating conformity to the established cultural pattern. The Democrats had gained some of their earliest immigrant support by casting themselves

36 Tanner, 103. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Division of Industrial and Municipal Research, *Industrial Survey of Metropolitan Providence . . . 1926* (Cambridge, 1928), 75. *Journal*, March 10, 24, 1910. *Bulletin*, January 17, 25, March 9, 11, 1909; January 31, February 10, 14, 1911; February 16, 21, March 14, 1912; January 8, 24, February 7, 28, March 10, 1913; April 29, 1914; February 3, 1915.

37 *Journal*, February 18, March 24, 31, 1910. *Bulletin*, March 6, 1909; January 6, 31, February 3, 14, March 1, 3, April 5, May 5, 1911; January 12, 17, 18, 1912; February 5, March 5, 18, 27, April 2, 3, 1913; January 22, 26, 1915; April 2, 1918.

as defenders of religious and cultural freedom during the nativist hysteria of the 1850s, and these efforts had intensified as new stock, non-Protestant leaders came to dominate the party hierarchy.<sup>38</sup>

High on the list were the Democrats' attempts to overthrow the restrictive Sunday "blue laws," which the old stock generally clung to as a device to keep the recent immigrants from practicing a "Continental Sunday" and "secularizing the first day of the week." The Brayton organization seemed every bit as committed to maintaining these regulations as they did to preserving old stock dominance in economic and political matters, although they often experienced a great deal of difficulty in keeping their own urban, new stock wing in line. Generally the Democrats aimed at legalizing the sale of food and non-alcoholic beverages and permitting concerts and other forms of entertainment, but these efforts failed in 1910 and 1912 before a withering attack launched by Protestant ministers and store owners. In both 1913 and 1914 bills to this effect introduced by Adamo Aiello of Providence passed the lower house by the narrowest of margins, supported by a coalition of Democrats and urban, new stock Republicans, only to have the senate reject them. In 1915 Aiello and his Republican counterpart Giannotti introduced similar bills which also failed, as did William Troy's attempts to legalize Sunday baseball which passed the house in 1918, but failed in the senate.<sup>39</sup>

This desire of their constituents to be free to practice their own customs and religion also led the Democrats to work for the declaration of Good Friday as a legal holiday. The issue stirred up a great controversy in 1913 when a Providence principal refused to accept the excuses of several Catholic children who missed school to attend religious services. Father Thomas J. Gillan, a member of the board of education, resigned in protest when a majority of that body upheld the principal's action. Timothy Quinn, Woonsocket, then introduced the measure to make Good Friday a legal school holiday which provoked hot debates in General Assembly but failed to pass either house. Albert West, the Democratic

leader in the house, revived the issue in 1914, as did Woonsocket Democrat Adelard Soucy in 1917 and 1918, but without success.<sup>40</sup>

Sensitivity to nativism also led the Democrats to seek to place the General Assembly on record against the passage of the Smith-Burnett Bill which provided for a literacy test for immigrants. Aiello introduced the resolution in 1913 but it failed in the house twice with several urban Republicans again joining the Democrats. Giannotti introduced his own resolution, but it also failed. A similar attempt in 1915 was unsuccessful by a 50-20 vote, with several Republicans abstaining because of the touchiness of the issue. This solicitude for immigrants also led Democrat Richard Guilduff of Providence to propose that Congress establish an immigration station in Providence.<sup>41</sup>

The capstone of cultural tensions in Rhode Island, though, was the prohibition question, which divided the state fairly neatly along ethnic and religious lines. Many Yankee Protestants saw in prohibition the ultimate moral reform which would eliminate a wealth of other social evils ranging from industrial accidents and crime to political corruption, while the new stock, non-Protestant, having no religious scruples about alcoholic beverages, saw restriction as the greatest possible threat to his personal freedom. In this feeling the new stock opponent of prohibition was joined by a few Yankee liberals and intellectuals, who also had no ethical objections to temperate imbibing. In early skirmishes the Democrats, the representatives of the bulk of the state's foreign stock, also established themselves as the leading opponents of prohibition by seeking to liberalize the saloon licensing laws, but the issue really came to a head in the debate over the eighteenth amendment from 1918 to 1920. By this time the measure was so unpopular with the state's new stock citizens that even most Republicans were reluctant to go on record in favor of ratification. In 1918, the General Assembly postponed the matter on very close votes in both houses, with the Democrats unanimously in favor, after first proposing to submit it to a referendum vote. The following year, the senate

38 Stedman, 337. *Bulletin*, January 13, 1909; April 4, 1913.

39 *Bulletin*, April 18, 1910; February 29, March 13, 1912; January 28, April 2, 8, 14, 1914; January 8, February 25, 1915; April 18, 1917.

40 *Bulletin*, March 11, 1913; April 3, 1914; April 5, 1917.

41 *Bulletin*, March 8, 1912; February 3, 11, 12, 1913; January 21, 1915. A definite cultural split also occurred over Democratic attempts to aid the growth of professional athletics since it provided both cheap entertainment and possible careers for their constituents. See, for example, *Bulletin*, January 11, March 22, 1912; February 5, April 15, 1913; February 11, 1915.

again voted to postpone by a wider 25-12-2 vote, and Jacob Eaton introduced a measure to direct the state's attorney general to bring suit in order to test the power of Congress to propose the amendment. The measure passed both houses on a voice vote as most lawmakers seemed content to avoid voting on the issue of ratification. Attempts by small town Republicans to revive the matter in 1920 failed, and Rhode Island joined her neighbor Connecticut as the only states to reject the eighteenth amendment, with the negative attitude of the heavily foreign stock population in both states probably the determining factor.<sup>42</sup>

For all their concern for the rights of their constituents, however, it should be noted that Rhode Island's Democrats were not quite so ready to defend the prerogatives of other aggrieved minorities. Providence Democrat Addison P. Munroe, for example, sought to ban the Industrial Workers of the World from displaying their flag in parades because it stood for "no God, no master" and "resistance to organized government," and most of his fellow lawmakers were caught up in the anti-German hysteria which swept the nation in 1917. The Democratic leader in the senate, William Troy, was particularly vocal in urging the registration of aliens, and suggesting that anyone who was not one hundred percent loyal be "lined up against the wall." On one occasion he made an impassioned defense of the loyalty of all the state's minorities, and called Rhode Island "an excellent example of the melting pot," but scrupulously refrained from including German-Americans on his list. Irish Democratic Mayor Joseph Gainer also proclaimed severe penalties for uttering any disloyal word against the United States, all of which indicates that oppressed minorities are rarely able to abstract from their own experience.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps if Rhode Island had had more German-Americans, the Democrats would have been more solicitous of their well-being, but their attitude serves to diminish the lustre of their insistence upon an open society on most other occasions.

An analysis of Rhode Island during the Progressive Era, then, reveals that there was a viable reform movement at work, one which emanated not from the traditional old stock, middle class elements whom many historians have elsewhere identified as the bulwark of progressivism, but rather from the representatives of the new stock, working class, acting primarily through the agency of the Democratic Party. Indeed, to take liberties with the phrasing of one prominent historian, the "long religious hand of New England"<sup>44</sup> was, in Rhode Island at least, set against any alteration in the political, economic or social status quo, and, except for a few old stock, middle class members of the Progressive Party and an occasional Socialist, the Democrats found their main allies among those Republicans who also represented foreign stock voters. Their reform program, as revealed in the debates and voting records of the General Assembly, sought to effect sweeping changes in the state. Politically they aimed at the introduction of truly popular government for the first time since the native Yankees had sought to curtail it in the face of the immigrant invasion. Economically, they sought to promote the prosperity and welfare of the state's most disadvantaged groups. Socially, they generally sought to resist efforts at legislated conformity and create a pluralistic society where a person could be free to live life according to his own lights. Their triumphs were few and usually came when the pressure which they exerted forced the Republicans to endorse milder versions of their proposals, but what they did paved the way for the fundamental changes which were to transform the state a decade or two later. Then the increased intolerance exhibited toward new stock citizens during the Twenties drove virtually all of their number under the Democratic umbrella, a process which the nomination of Alfred E. Smith, the Great Depression and the policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt completed.<sup>45</sup> Then what the urban, new stock Democrats had sown during the Progressive Era finally bore fruit.

42 *Journal*, March 31, 1910. *Bulletin*, April 9, 1913; January 14, February 26, April 23, 1915; February 22, March 13, 1918; February 2, April 4, 17, 23, 1919.

43 *Bulletin*, April 4, 1913; April 3, 16, 19, 1917; April 5, 1918.

44 George Mowry, *California Progressives* (Berkeley, 1951), 87, argues that New England Protestantism provided the religious basis for progressive reform in California. In Rhode Island, if it had any effect at all, it would seem to be in the negative.

45 Stedman, 332-341. Cornwell, "Party Absorption," 207-210. Lockard, 187-199.

# MISCHIEF-MAKING ALIAS FILIBUSTERING.



The Sunday Tribune of April 6, 1913, expressed a Republican view of the minority party's tactics.



Portrait by Edward Savage, courtesy U. S. Naval Academy Museum.

*Abraham Whipple, a leader of the attack on the Gaspee, had commanded a privateer in 1759 against the French. In 1775 he was commissioned captain in the Continental Navy.*

## Charles Dudley and the Customs Quandary in Pre-Revolutionary Rhode Island

by Larry R. Gerlach\*

Unquestionably the most famous incident in pre-Revolutionary Rhode Island occurred the night of June 9, 1772, when an eight-boat flotilla led by Providence mercantile magnate John Brown and Abraham Whipple, descended upon an armed revenue cutter, H. M. *Gaspee*, which had run aground off Namquit Point that afternoon while pursuing the packet *Hannah*, opened fire on her crew, seriously wounding commander Lieutenant William Dudingston, and burned the cutter to the water's edge. What had originated both as an attempt by irate citizens to rid Narragansett waters of an effective instrument of the imperial customs service and a personal vendetta against Dudingston for occasionally exceeding the limits of his authority in performing his duties was transformed into an intercolonial *cause célèbre* in September when the British government appointed a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the audacious affront to royal authority. Meeting from January 5 to June 23, 1773, the Board failed to produce evidence sufficient to bring those responsible for the outrage to justice; it did, however, engender hostility throughout the colonies.

Thus a seemingly local event raised the Anglo-American controversy to yet another level by further discrediting the mother country and refining the machinery of the protest-independence movement by means of a system of standing committees of correspondence. The *Gaspee* affair has duly been accorded intensive investigation and extensive exposition.<sup>1</sup> Yet one potentially momentous development hitherto has not been explained: the unsuccessful attempt by Commissioner Frederick Smyth to broaden the scope of the hearing to include other provocative attacks upon royal vessels (specifically the *St. John*) perpetrated by Rhode Islanders during the previous decade.

Convinced by private intelligence received in mid-June that the "great irregularity, violence and disorder" which accompanied the shelling of the schooner *St. John* in July 1764 in Newport Harbor on order of local magistrates "might be considered as a leading cause to the destruction of the *Gaspee*,"<sup>2</sup> Smyth recommended on June 21, two days prior to adjournment, that the Board "take the affair into consideration, and receive such information as might be procured on

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1 The best general account of the *Gaspee* Affair is Lawrence Henry Gipson, *The British Empire Before the American Revolution*, 14v. to date (Caldwell and New York, 1936- ), XII, *The Triumphant Empire: Britain Sails Into the Storm, 1770-1776*, 24, 28. David S. Lovejoy, *Rhode Island Politics and the American Revolution, 1760-1776* (Providence, 1958), 158-66, presents an account more favorable to the colonials than does Gipson. See also William R. Leslie, "The *Gaspee* Affair: A Study of Its Constitutional Significance," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXIX (September 1952), 233-56; Eugene Wulsin, "The Political Consequences of the Burning of the *Gaspee*," *Rhode Island History*, III (January and April 1944), 1-11, 55-64; and Samuel W. Bryant, "HMS *Gaspee* — The Court-Martial," *ibid.*, XXV (July 1966), 65-72 and "Rhode Island Justice — 1772 Vintage," *ibid.*, XXVI (July 1967), 65-71. To appreciate the incident fully one must consult the sources which are conveniently available in published form. "A History of the Destruction of His Britannic Majesty's Schooner

*Gaspee* . . ." appears as part of John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England*, 10v. (Providence, 1856-65), VII, 55-192 and is preferable in every respect to William R. Staples, *Documentary History of the Destruction of the *Gaspee** (Providence, 1845).

2 In June 1764 the *St. John*, Lieutenant Thomas Hill, already the object of resentment by Newport residents because of petty thievery committed by her crew, seized the brig *Basto* engaged in smuggling sugar into the colony. Upon orders signed by two magistrates, the gunner of Fort George on Goat Island commenced cannonading the revenue schooner. Townsmen joined in the shelling. Only the protection of the larger H. M. *Squirrel*, Captain Richard Smith, saved the royal vessel from destruction. The incident evoked no substantive response from either provincial or imperial authorities. For further information, consult Lovejoy, 36-37, 39; and Gipson, *British Empire*, X, *The Triumphant Empire: Thunder-Clouds Gather in the West, 1763-1766*, 243. Lovejoy and Gipson again provide different perspectives.

the subject." The question was postponed when Rhode Island Governor Joseph Wanton assured his fellow Commissioners that his son, Joseph Jr., Deputy Governor at the time of the incident, and Benjamin Vaughan, the gunner who fired the shots, could "fully explain the affair." But when Smyth insisted the following day that "a strict inquiry ought to be made on the subject," the other three members of the Board declined to take up the matter. Wanton and New York Chief Justice Daniel Horsmanden felt that "no notice whatever" should be made of the incident; Boston Vice-Admiralty Judge Robert Auchmuty "doubted" the efficacy of the move. (The Commissioner most likely to have supported Smyth, Massachusetts Chief Justice Peter Oliver, had already returned to the Bay Colony.) Nonetheless, Smyth succeeded in inserting the minutes pertaining to his ill-fated motion into the official journal of the proceedings.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the cogency of the argument that there existed a relationship between the shelling of the *St. John* and the firing of the *Gaspee*, the rejection of Smyth's motion is understandable.<sup>4</sup> Governor Wanton, for obvious reasons, was inexorably opposed to enlarging the investigation because the outcome could only result in the further animadversion of his colony for its defiance of the navigation acts. Auchmuty and Horsmanden were sympathetic to the request, but were reluctant to open a veritable Pandora's Box. Although theoretically empowered to examine into the *St. John* incident,<sup>5</sup> to do so would have led inevitably to an investigation of the numerous altercations between residents and revenue agents which had occurred since 1764, symptomatic of the freewheeling brand of commerce which obtained in Rhode Island.<sup>6</sup> Besides, nearly six months of deliberations had failed to yield substantive evidence concerning the *Gaspee* despite the

*Peter Oliver, chief justice of Massachusetts. His absence on June 21, 1773, from the Commission of Inquiry into the Gaspee affair possibly affected the scope of the hearing.*



*Portrait by John Singleton Copley, courtesy Mr. Andrew Oliver.*

fact that the identity of many of those responsible for burning the vessel was common knowledge; additional inquiries would likely be equally fruitless and time consuming. Moreover, to broaden the inquiry could serve only to further alienate Rhode Islanders and cast additional aspersions upon the already much maligned Commission. These being the pragmatic realities, why did Smyth advance his provocative proposal?

3 Bartlett, VII, 177. The above quotations are from this source.

4 The foremost authority on pre-Revolutionary Rhode Island concurs with Smyth's assessment of the importance of the *St. John* incident. See Lovejoy, 156, 159.

5 The Commission (September 2) and the Instructions (September 4) of the Board are in Bartlett, VII, 108-12.

6 For additional information, see Gipson, *British Empire*, x, 242-45; and Lovejoy, *passim*.

7 The son of an Anglican cleric from the western part of England, Charles Dudley, Jr., succeeded John Robinson as Collector of the Customs in Rhode Island in the spring of 1768 when the latter was appointed to the newly-formed American Board of Customs in Boston. Headquartered in Newport, Dudley continually suffered considerable physical and verbal abuse from the populace and procedural harassment from government officials in attempting to execute the navigation acts. Predictably loyal to the crown, he fled the province in November 1775. Little biographical data on him exists, but see Lovejoy, 154-56, 189-90, for a brief account of his career.



Evidence points to customs collector Charles Dudley as having directly or indirectly influenced Smyth in his effort to enlarge the probe.<sup>7</sup> A conversation between the two men the morning of June 12 — the source of information referred to by Smyth in making his motion — prompted Dudley to pen a scathing indictment of the disingenuous “hindrances and obstacles” employed by Rhode Islanders to circumvent the imperial acts of trade. To his mind, the firing of the *Gaspee* was “not the effect of sudden passion and resentment, but of cool deliberation and fore-thought.”<sup>8</sup> The reasons for conveying his thoughts to Smyth in a private manner are unknown. Perhaps he was not summoned before the tribunal: there is no record of his having rendered testimony notwithstanding his position as head of the revenue service for the entire colony. Or perhaps the native of England felt Smyth, the only Briton on the panel, would be most amenable to his entreaties.<sup>9</sup> At any rate, there is no indication that he either conferred with or wrote to any of the other Commissioners.

A transcript of the letter in Smyth's hand, located among the Smyth Papers in the American Philosophical Society Library in Philadelphia, has hitherto escaped the attention of scholars and laymen alike. This is most unfortunate because the document provides additional background commentary on the *Gaspee* affair and sheds considerable light on Smyth's ill-fated motion of June 21. Further, it affords an incisive, personal account of the problems confronting the revenue service in Rhode Island. Although the discussion is limited to the pre-Revolutionary era, the implications are applicable to the colonial period as a whole. Because of its relative inaccessibility and importance to the student of the history of early America in general and Rhode Island in particular, the missive warrants printing in full. The spelling and syntax of the reproduction which follows

correspond exactly to that of the transcript in the Smyth Papers.<sup>10</sup>

CHARLES DUDLEY TO FREDERICK SMYTH

Rhode Island 12th June 1773

Sir

*The conversation I had with you this Morning has led me into a review of some of the hindrances and obstructions which the Officers of the Navy and Revenue have met with in the Execution of their Duty in this Colony within the last five Years, the time I have had the management of his Majestys Revenue. I find it wou'd be a very tiresome Business to relate every Instance; wou'd make a Narrative too long for my present time and be tedious for Yours; moreover I wou'd chuse to forbear a relation of Personal abuses and Affronts, as Events too frequently happening in other places, and confine myself to Circumstances which are less common, and perhaps not to be heard of in any Colony except this. I wou'd also forbear the mention of any Matter which is irremediable, but as a Remark upon the Case of the Sloop Liberty is pertinent to the business You are now upon I will just observe: that in the Year 1769 the Commissioners of the Customs<sup>11</sup> caused an armed Cutter to be fitted and to prevent illicit Trade and aid the Collection of the Revenue. In the Month of July in the same Year this Cutter Seized a Sloop laden with contraband Goods, brought her into the Port of Rhode Island, to put her into my charge to be proceeded against according to Law, when a Number of the People tumultuously [sic] assembled and having previously and by violation secured the Person who commanded the Cutter they gave the Seized Sloop her Liberty, set the Cutter on fire under the Guns of the Fort within Sight and at a small distance*

8 Dudley to ?, July 23, 1772, Bartlett, VII, 92. One assumes the letter was addressed to Rear Admiral John Montagu, among whose papers it was located.

9 Virtually nothing is known of the life of Frederick Smyth (Smythe). At the time of his appointment as Chief Justice of New Jersey in July 1764, he was a 32-year-old London attorney of no particular stature. He owed his position exclusively to friends with influence in the British government. The Revolution terminated his judicial career in 1776. Admired by rebel and loyalist alike, he was not forced to emigrate despite his pronounced Tory sentiments. During the war he removed to Philadelphia where he apparently spent the rest of his life. See Larry R. Gerlach, “Revolution or Independence? New Jersey,

1760-1776” (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1968), *passim*. It is not known why Smyth was named to the Commission. Certainly he was an obscure figure compared to the other members.

10 The document is published with the express permission of The American Philosophical Society.

11 In 1767 a five-member Board of the Commissioners of the Customs for America was created to facilitate the enforcement of the navigation laws. Headquartered in Boston, the American Board was responsible directly to the Treasury Department. Previously the Commissioners of the Customs resident in England had exercised jurisdiction over the colonial revenue service.

from the Governors house, where She was entirely destroyed with all her Tackle furniture and Apparel to the loss of the Revenue at least Two Thousand Pound Sterling.<sup>12</sup> This enormous and daring Act, so publicly done, and so unnoticed by the Civil Authority, I have always considered as a principal encouragement and perhaps the chief Cause of the subsequent and unhappy fate of Lieutenant Dudingston and his Majestys Schooner Gaspee.<sup>13</sup>

I will now speak of Matters of Record, and which stand verified by the Proceedings of the Court of Judicature in this Colony. In consequence of an Act of Parliament made in the 7th Year of his present Majestys Reign I have repeatedly applied to the Justice of the Superior Court for Writs of Assistants,<sup>14</sup> and after hearing Council thereon the Justices of the said Court, (to wit) Stephen Hopkins,<sup>15</sup> James Helme,<sup>16</sup> Metcalf Bowler,<sup>17</sup> Benoni Hall,<sup>18</sup> and Stephen Potter<sup>19</sup> Esquires at Newport on the 11th day of October 1772 did solemnly determine that such Writs are illegal and contrary to the constitution of this Colony and that the same ought not to be issued.<sup>20</sup> This determination of the Superior Court serves to shew the constitution of it,<sup>21</sup> for the Determination is certainly repugnant to the Act of Parliament before reached, and also contrary to

"Stephen Hopkins of Providence was the dominant political figure in 18th-century Rhode Island." This picture of him wearing his Quaker hat is a detail from an engraving by Edward Savage of Congress Voting Independence.



Courtesy Massachusetts Historical Society.

the Practice of the neighbouring Colonies touching Writs of Assistants<sup>22</sup> but of this Court something more extraordinary remains to be told — In the Month of October last Lieutenant Montagu<sup>23</sup> of his Majestys Ship

12 Dudley's account requires clarification. On July 16, 1769, H. M. *Liberty*, Captain William Reid, assigned to Rhode Island waters in May, escorted a Connecticut brig and sloop to Newport to undergo condemnation proceedings for violating the acts of trade. An altercation which erupted soon after arrival between the hands of the revenue vessel and the captain of the brig, one Packwood, ended with the former firing several musket salvos at the latter in full view of a sizable contingent of townspeople. The next evening, the 17th, after Reid had ordered his crew ashore to answer for their alleged misconduct, a mob later described as "Persons unknown" who were "chiefly from Connecticut" hauled the cutter to the dock, chopped down her mast, completely scuttled her, and climaxed a triumphant parade through town by burning two of her boats. Several days later the tide washed the wasted hulk ashore on nearby Goat Island where it was completely consumed by fire during the night. Needless to say, the seized vessels set sail during the confusion; neither British nor local authorities made a concerted effort to apprehend those responsible for the act of wanton destruction. For more details, see Gipson, *British Empire*, XII, 23; and Lovejoy, 157.

13 The Board of Inquiry concurred. In their final report to the crown on June 22, the Commissioners prominently mentioned the "plundering and burning" of the *Liberty* — along with the "violent and outrageous" treatment accorded Reid and the "impunity" with which the

perpetrators of the . . . outrage" escaped conviction — as a contributory cause of the demise of the *Gaspee*. Bartlett, VII, 180.

14 In essence a writ of assistance was a general search warrant issued for an indefinite length of time (except for mandatory renewal within six months after the death of a sovereign) designed to permit customs officials maximum maneuverability in curbing smuggling. The writ did not specify the object of a search; it stipulated, however, that a civil magistrate must accompany the revenue officer. A *cause célèbre* occurred in Massachusetts in 1761 when James Otis and Oxenbridge Thacher challenged the constitutionality of the device on the grounds that colonial supreme courts were not legally authorized to issue the instruments. The contention was technically correct; only Courts of Exchequer were then clearly empowered to grant such writs and none existed in the colonies. The Townshend revenue program of 1767 obviated the constitutional objection by specifically vesting supreme tribunals in America with the power to issue said writs. See Oliver M. Dickerson, "Writs of Assistance as a Cause of the Revolution," in Richard B. Morris, ed., *Era of the American Revolution* [New York, 1939], 40-75.

15 Stephen Hopkins of Providence was the dominant political figure in 18th-century Rhode Island. A noteworthy pamphleteer of the Revolutionary era and the leader of one of the two major factions, he clearly subordinated his mercantile interests to politics. During

*Charles Dudley's home in Middletown reflected the prestige of his office. The house, ca. 1750, has been demolished.*



*Courtesy Newport Historical Society.*

*Mercury (who is duly authorized to make Seizures) Seized a large quantity of uncustomed Goods which were put into my hands to be prosecuted: I accordingly libell'd them in a Court of Vice Admiralty<sup>24</sup> on behalf*

*of the Crown and Seizing Officers, when upon a full and fair hearing the Goods were Condemn'd and order'd to be Sold, and the Monies arising therefrom to be divided and applied agreeable to Law and his*

his lengthy career he occupied numerous posts in both local and provincial government including governor (1755-64; 1767-68), deputy (1770-75), and chief justice (1750-54; 1770-75).

- 16 A member of a prominent South Kingstown family, Helme served on the high tribunal both as chief justice (1767; 1769) and associate justice (1770-75).
- 17 Bowler had the distinction of representing two constituencies in the legislature: Newport (1764-66) and Portsmouth (1767-77). During the latter period he was annually elected speaker of the house. Associated with the "Ward faction," he was a delegate to the Stamp Act Convention of 1765 and an Ardent Son of Liberty who later (1776-1779) corresponded with the enemy, a discovery not made until the present century. Jane Clark, "Metcalf Bowler as a British Spy," *Rhode Island Historical Society Collections*, 23 (October 1930), 101-117.
- 18 Benoni Hall of Exeter.
- 19 In addition to judicial activities, Stephen Potter represented Coventry in the General Assembly from 1769 to 1770.
- 20 When admonished by the Earl of Hillsborough for failing to cooperate with the customs collector, Governor Joseph Wanton emphatically denied that Dudley had ever applied to the judges for a writ of assistance and asserted that they would "readily and cheerfully give their every assistance in the execution of

their duty, which the law puts in the power of the superior court to give." Moreover, he stated that Hillsborough had been "shamefully misinformed" in the matter, that in reality the revenue officials had been guilty of "abusing and misrepresenting the colony of Rhode Island and its officers." Hillsborough to Wanton and reply, July 19 and November 2, 1771, Bartlett, VII, 34-35, 42-43.

- 21 It should be remembered that the General Assembly annually elected the five judges of the Superior Court of Judicature, Court of Assize and General Gaol Delivery. In other words, the judiciary in Rhode Island was far from independent.
- 22 The action of the Rhode Island tribunal was not unusual. Most colonial courts refused to exercise the authority to grant the writs extended to them in 1767.
- 23 Here Dudley is mistaken on two counts. The event took place in November, not October, the commander of the *Mercury* was Captain Robert Keeler, not Rear Admiral John Montague of the Royal Navy.
- 24 Vice-Admiralty courts exercised jurisdiction over maritime cases and violations of the imperial navigation laws. Their procedure differed sharply from common law courts: testimony was written instead of oral and a single judge determined both the question and the sentence. (The same procedure persists today.) A detailed study is Carl Ubbelohde, *Vice-Admiralty Courts and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1960).

Majestys order in Council, after which Condemnation, Sale, and division, a Writ called a Writ of Restitution<sup>25</sup> issued from the Justices of the Superior Court (to wit) Stephen Hopkins, James Helme, Metcalf Bowler, Benoni Hall, and Stephen Potter Esqrs. at Newport the 11th Day of March 1773 founded upon a pretended Writ of Prohibition<sup>26</sup> on the proceedings of the said Court of Vice Admiralty and commanding me to restore to one Nathl. Straw the said uncustom'd Goods so Seized, Condemned, &c. or the like Value thereof in Sterling Money as the said Nathaniel shou'd elect. — To this very extraordinary and unprecedented Writ I answer'd & complained, but my Plea was overuled and deemed insufficient, and I now stand Condemned by this extravagant proceedings without a legal hearing, and contrary to the Rights of the Subjects, in a Case too in which I am not a Party, otherwise than as Manager of a Prosecution of the part of the Crown to which I am bound by the Duties of my Office.<sup>27</sup> This is a Cause so cruel and so oppressive that the Commissioners of the Custom have transmitted it to the Lords of the Treasury and I hope from that Board it will go before his Majesty in Councill from whence if I have no Relief I may suffer in my private fortune upwards of £500 Sterling, by a Proceeding as arbitrary as it is unjust, and such as I may safely say is not to be equalled.<sup>28</sup>

Having now Shewn You a very remarkable Instance of Oppression on an Officer of the Crown: a Solemn Determination of the Superior Court by which an Act of Parliament is eventually repealed: and a striking proof of obstruction to the Service of the Revenue in the burning of the Liberty, I shou'd lay down my Pen: but there is a Point or two still untouch'd which I think of equal importance, and they tempt me to go on.

The Acts of Parliament made in the 12<sup>th</sup> & 25 Years of the Reign of King Charles the Second and also in other later Reigns, having justly consider'd the Necessity of restraining the exportation of certain Goods the Produce of the Colonies, such as Peltry, Naval Stores, Masts, Yards &c to Great Brittain only,

have directed that Bonds shall be given upon the Exportation of such Goods in the Penalty of one or two Thousand Pound according to the Tonnage of the Vessel, that Such Goods shall be truly and bona fide carried to Great Brittain only. Now the Act directs that these Bonds shall be taken by the Governor of such Colony or plantation where such enumerated Goods are Shipped, and it is well understood that the Governors of the different Colonies and Provinces execute this part of their Duty by an Officer called the Naval Officer.<sup>29</sup>

Please to recollect Sir that the Governor of this Colony is Elective, the Governor nominates the Naval Officer, who sometimes is a Merchant, at others a Shopkeeper, at others a Tradesman. — I dare say the general Evil occurs to You already — but I will draw an inference from Facts. The present Governor has a Son, a Merchant concern'd in a very extensive Commerce, this Son is in fact the Naval Officer.<sup>30</sup> Suppose then he loads a Ship with Peltry, Naval Stores, Masts, Yards &c and gives Bond to export them conformable to Act of Parliament, and upon his own Certificate (as Naval Officer) that such Bond is given, obtains the Needfull Documents for the Clearing his Ship outwards from the Custom House; after which he finds his Account in ordering this Peltry, these Naval Stores, Masts, Yards &c to Holland or to some other Place on the Continent of Europe, rather than to Great Brittain; the Master of the Ship receives his Instructions accordingly, and by virtue of the Custom house Documents of which he is justly possess'd he navigates his Ship in safety thro' the Brittish Channel to whatever Port he pleases; lands his Cargo of enumerated Goods without the least hazard or danger in a Country where the Laws mean to restrain him, returns to his Power without Fear and openly avows his doings: The Officers of the Custom, knowing this, may apply (as is indeed their Duty) to the Naval Officer to Sue the Merchants Bond; but alas! they find the Naval Officer and the merchant are one. — Can any Man pause a moment to determine in his own Breast

25 A writ issued by a court ordering the restitution of either the goods or the value to the owner because of improper or unwarranted seizure or confiscation.

26 An order issued by a higher court to a lower court directing the latter to cease legal proceedings deemed to be outside its jurisdiction or authority.

27 For the *Mercury* affair, see Ubbelohde, 168-69. The author endorses Dudley's view, observing that probably

only in Rhode Island would the court "have dared to issue a prohibition on such thin legal grounds."

28 In 1773 the Superior Court permitted a damage suit in excess of £500 to be brought against Dudley for confiscating cargo from the schooner *Industry* in June 1772. The Privy Council later reversed the verdict. Ubbelohde, 170.

29 The naval officer, the lone patronage post at the disposal of the governor, was in reality a provincial customs

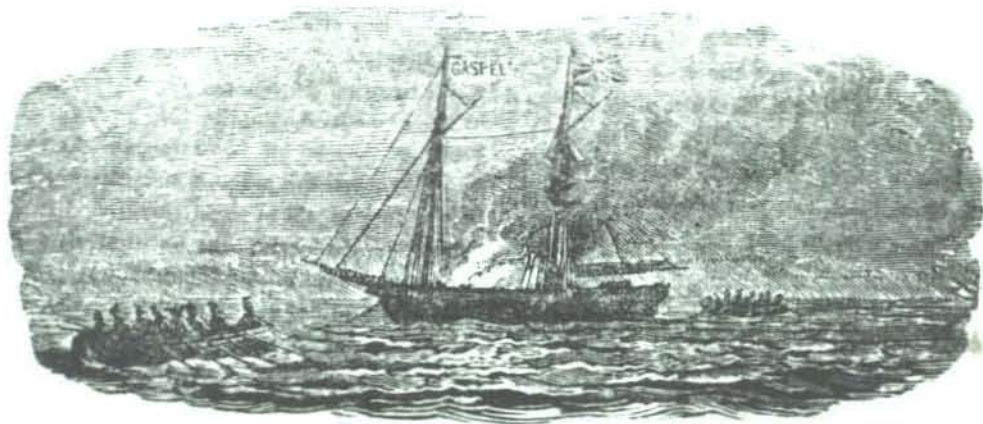
what has been the fate of this Bond? Perhaps you will say let the Naval Officer and his Sureties be sued and call'd to Account — You will find perhaps, that he has no Sureties that he is no longer Naval Officer; he may now be disposing of his last unlawfull Venture or moving in some other sphere; for by a Reverse of fortune not very uncommon, I have known a Man in the Seat of Government in one Year and in the humble Station of a Clerk the next. I have known a Man the Naval Officer one Year and in the next the same Man gaining an honest Livelyhood by Bleeding and Shaving for a Penny. It has been said that the disquietudes in this Colony are recent, and were not known untill a few late Years. — I believe indeed the disquietudes were not so general a few years ago as they are now, especially in respect to his Majestys Service — for as much as relates to the Revenue I will account; it is but Justice to myself. During the time the present Governor was Collector of the Customs in this Port, which was Twenty Six Years; I believe I can safely say that £500 was not remitted into the Exchequer; since I have had the management of the Revenue, which is just five Years, I have Remitted £16,000 —

You have had an opportunity of marking the principle People in this Colony, and You find them all

in Trade. The middling or lower Class are all in Trade also. — People who have been for many Years uncustom'd to restraint will naturally be impatient of it; and it is reasonable to suppose that some opposition would be given to regulations, and that the Aid of Government wou'd be sometimes necessary. — To whom was that Aid to be lookt for, why to a man whose Principles were certainly formed upon Ideas very opposite to mine, and from whom indeed upon a comparative view I had nothing to expect.<sup>31</sup> — Pray consider this Sir and draw Your conclusions, for I have almost fill'd my paper and must not engage You on another Sheet: and I must not part with this without observing that the Cases of the Writs of Prohibition and Restitution are too uncommon to gain Credit without reference to the Writs themselves, and as I have taken particular Notice of those Writs in this Letter You must give me Leave to offer You Copies of them,<sup>32</sup> for indeed they are so truly original that I wou'd not risk my reputation to speak of them without.

I am very Much  
Sir Your Humble Servt.  
Chas. Dudley

Mr. Chief Justice Smyth



officer. His duties included recording arrivals and departures, issuing sundry shipping papers, and superintending the acts of trade. Unpaid, he depended upon fees and (more importantly) gratuities for income.

30 William Wanton became naval officer upon his father's election as governor in 1769.

31 Commissioner Horsmanden was appalled by what he considered to be "a state of anarchy" in Rhode Island. As he apprised imperial authorities: "the Government

(if it deserves that name), it is a downright democracy; the Governor is a mere nominal one, and therefore a cipher, without power or authority; entirely controlled by the populace, elected annually, as all other magistrates and officers whatever." He recommended uniting Rhode Island and Connecticut (likewise anarchistic in his mind) into a single royal colony. Horsmanden to the Earl of Dartmouth, February 20, 1773, Bartlett, VII, 182-85.

32 There are no copies of the writs in the Smyth Papers.

*P. Deshayes*



NATICK,  
R.I.



*P. Deshayes*



NATICK,  
R.I.



## Cowesett Road 1870-1900

In the city of Warwick in 1971, Cowesett Road is to all appearances merely an ordinary street in developing suburbia. But a study of the road's background has led to a fascinating excursion into the folk culture of the area in a period little written about by Rhode Island historians.

Early in the town of Warwick's history, Cowesett Road was originally laid out as one of the main drive-roads to tidewater, an artery over which cattle and other stock from western Rhode Island and extreme eastern Connecticut could safely travel because of the stone walls lining the roadsides. Animals were driven from their point of origin to tidewater to board vessels sailing to southern plantations and to the West Indies. Embarkation point for the stock was Baker's Landing in Cowesett, now erroneously known as Folly Landing (*Map of the State of Rhode Island*, Henry F. Walling, 1855).

On that stretch of Cowesett Road lying today within the city of Warwick between the Post Road (U.S. 1) and Quaker Lane (R.I. 2), the inhabitants in 1870-1900 were an industrious, thrifty lot of farmer-business men typical of Rhode Island's rural communities. At least six of the residents conducted some business besides their farming, and there were probably others who did likewise to eke out a living.

At the intersection of Cowesett and Post Roads today stands one of the most prevalent public gifts of the 1870-1900 period — a handsome, pink, polished-granite, circular watering trough, given by Governor Herbert Warren Ladd in the late 1880s. A fine example

by Anne Crawford Allen Holst\*

of the governor's benevolence, it is now unfortunately buried in a traffic island and used as a planter for shrubbery, its never-failing flow of pure spring water shut off to a thirsty but too noisy public.

On the north side of this intersection stood a foursquare colonial house with great central chimney, the ancient Arnold homestead, built for the Arnold bride, Desire Joyce, daughter of Ester White, granddaughter of Peregrine White. On the south side stood the Victorian mansion of the second Governor William Sprague, owned during the latter part of the period by his son-in-law, Walter R. Stiness.

Traveling uphill due west along the road, one comes next to the former site of the huge farmhouse that serviced both the Amasa and William Sprague estates. It was located on the west side of what is now Patterson Avenue where it meets Cowesett Road. A short distance west, on the north side of the road, is the Cowesett Town Pound, a wonderful relic of the city's ancient past and still useful today. A very ancient institution, older than the Queen's Bench and probably older than the kingdom itself, a pound is an enclosure or strong place where cattle distrained or caught in any trespass are put till they are replevied or redeemed. It is either overt, open overhead, or covert, closed overhead. The Cowesett Town Pound is overt. Ancient English law stated that no distress of cattle could be driven out of the hundred where it was taken, unless to a pound overt within the same shire, and within three miles of the place where it was taken. An ancient territorial division intermediate between the village and the

*Farmer-businessman William Bennett made a comfortable income from his Sleepy Hollow farm, now obliterated by the pavement of Interstate Route 95 where it crosses Cowesett Road. These photographs of Bennett exhibiting the products of his farm were taken by Adélarde DesGranges of Natick more than seventy years ago.*

Courtesy Anne Crawford Allen Holst.

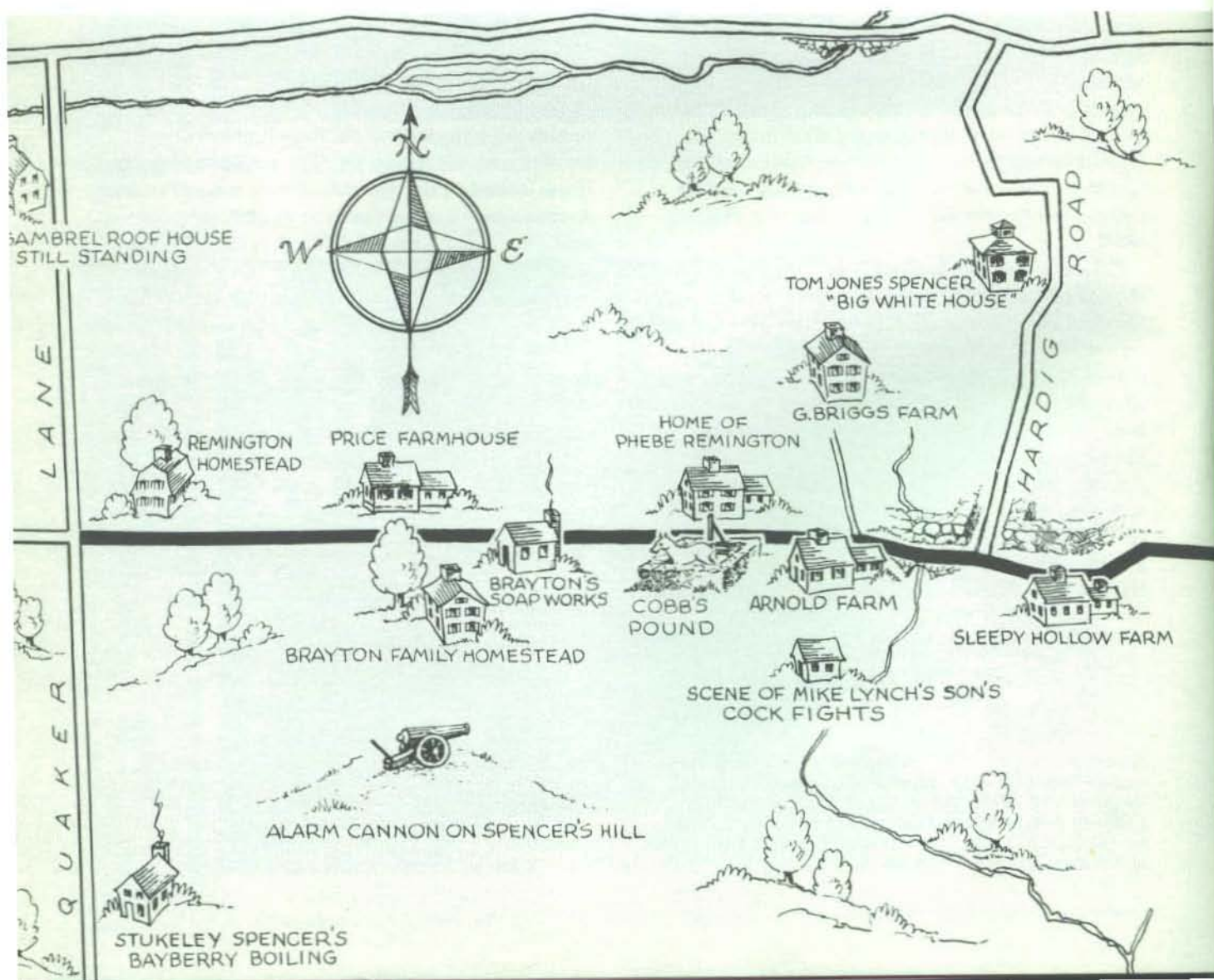
\*Mrs. Monterey L. Holst, of East Greenwich, farm life historian, is the author of numerous articles in the field of country writing.

county, the hundred denoted first a group of a hundred families and then the district which these families occupied. The Cowesett Town Pound served an area roughly three miles square (Holst, "Old Town Pounds of Rhode Island," *Rhode Island History* 3:1, January 1944).

Directly adjoining the pound on the west is the Lambert Farm, first of the farmer-business locations on the road during the 1870-1900 period. Daniel J. Lambert, "Honest Uncle Dan" as David Patten labeled him in the *Providence Journal* (February 21, 1955), manufactured poultry medicines in a building still standing. The most famous of his remedies, "Lambert's Death to Lice," based on nicotine and creosote, was offered as powder, liquid, or ointment ("Lambert's Death to Lice Ointment for head lice on chickens or children"). He sold several thousand chicks a year, had

a small dairy herd of cattle, and did a lot of writing (*Pocket Book Pointers, A Manual for Poultry Keepers*, 6th ed., Providence, 1898) and lecturing. "Honest Uncle Dan" had to have a hearing aid; this, in a day before the science of electronics, was a remarkable device of hard rubber shaped like a palm-leaf fan. He held the handle with one hand, clamped his teeth tightly on the upper rim, and in some mysterious way he heard.

West of the Lambert Farm, where the ancient "road at the head of the lotts"—now Love Lane—meets Cowesett Road, there is on the southwest corner an ash tree known as "The Riding Whip." Legend states that long ago a youthful gallant, who nightly rode to this corner to court a fair damsel living in the ancient Briggs house, stuck the ash branch he was using for a riding whip into the ground where he tied his horse. Later he left so precipately he forgot or did not have





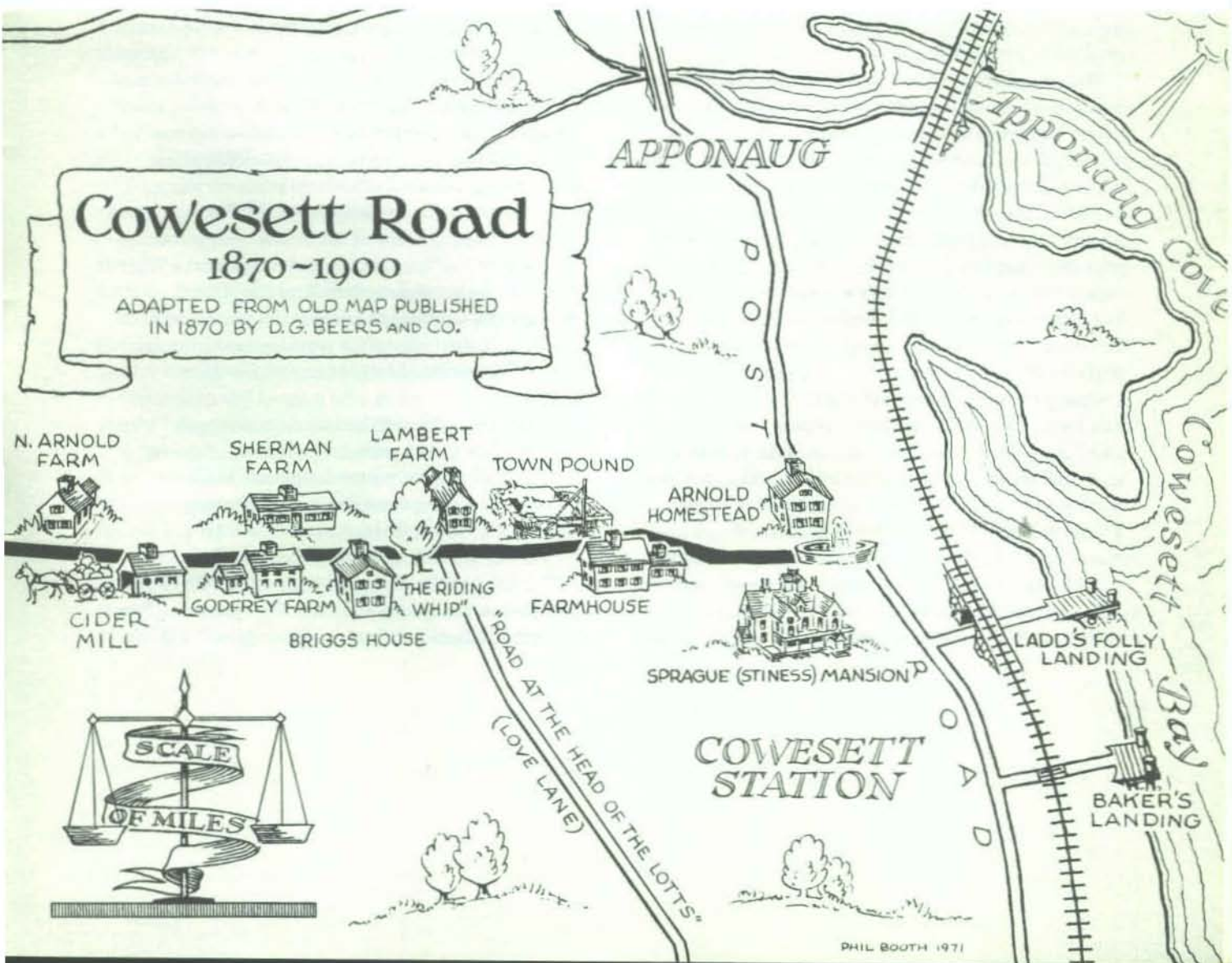
time to retrieve the branch, which took root and grew into a handsome tree. Memento of an unhappy love affair, it was always referred to as "The Riding Whip." However, Daniel J. Lambert, Jr., states that the present big ash is not the original "Riding Whip," since his uncle at the turn of the century shot a weasel in the tree with his shotgun, setting the tree on fire and burning it down. The present ash is coppice shoot or growth from the roots of the original.

The Briggs house above was an exact copy of the Arnold homestead already mentioned, having been built at the same time. In the 1870s and later the house was occupied by a Scotch family named McCreeden, who grew large hopvines on the bankment east of the house. This is the last place in the Warwick area where hops — those vitally necessary "cones" for brewing beer, making yeast for baking, and forming medicinal

poultices — were home raised. By the end of the period the Briggs house had been torn down and the farm's fields put into turf for the budding Cowesett Golf Club.

Diagonally across the road on the north, down in a hollow, stood an ancient house of some length but of little height, the John Sherman farm, tenanted at the beginning of the period by Moses and Henry Locke and their families. Henry Locke's daughter, who married Charley Godfrey, often told me that when she was a young girl (born 1870), old Mrs. Vaughn, who lived on the adjoining farm and who "was then in her 92nd year," had told her she could clearly remember Indians in the woods "drumming" on Drum Rock. Mrs. Vaughn had said the "drumming" could be heard at Warwick Neck's tip, where the lighthouse now stands.

Across the road from the Vaughns was the Charles S. Godfrey farm, on whose northeast corner is now



St. Gregory's Church. The house west of the church today is not the very ancient house which was moved off its foundation and the present house built thereon in 1900. Besides conducting a large general farm, Charles S. Godfrey operated a very profitable cider mill.

The mill was located in a one-story, deep-celled, stone-and-concrete building with walls more than two feet thick. The apple grinder, above the press in the cellar, was situated so that a wagonload could be backed in through the west door and the apples shoveled right into the big wooden hopper. The grinder was first powered by a horse, then by a steam engine, and finally by an old, make-and-break, "one-lunger" gasoline engine.

The press could hold one hundred bushels of ground apples. Charles Godfrey preferred to shovel them into bushel baskets before pouring them into the grinder, so he could properly measure the quantity. On a peg-board beside the grinder, as each basket was emptied, he would move the peg ahead one hole until it finally reached the mark 100.

The press beneath had been lined with rye straw before the first apples were poured into the hopper and power applied to the grinder's roller jaws. More rye straw and a layer of clean burlap sacks were laid on top of the full load of ground apples and boards were then put on against which huge wooden screws exerted their pressure as they were turned by man power. Amber juice flowed into a half-hogshead set into the ground before the press. From this sweet cider was ladled in huge measures and poured through another clean burlap sack over the big funnel set into the bungholes of the barrels; this was the only "filtering."

Charley Godfrey's product was mostly converted into hard cider. One of those who dearly loved it was Old Sweet, the Narragansett Indian. Tall, slender but powerful, Sweet, when warmed by hard cider, could be persuaded to do his famous war dance. Many a time as a child did I tremble at the ferocity of this dance and marveled at the old Indian's agility. It is sad to relate that the Godfrey Cider Mill caught fire on December 3, 1966, and was completely destroyed. Charles S. Godfrey had also served as pound keeper, and as road

supervisor for his district at times, working the roads with a split-log road drag hitched to a yoke of his oxen.

Past the N. Arnold farm, where a family named Jordan lived in that period, and on westward past the William S. Rice farm on the south side of the road, one comes to the brow of the hill leading down into Sleepy Hollow where William Bennett owned a farm. He made a living in the old New England fashion, prior to his death before World War I, by doing "a little of this and a little of that," which added up at the end of the year to a comfortable income. All trace of this lovely old farm has now vanished; Interstate 95 has spread acres of pavement across its heart.

On Sleepy Hollow Farm William Bennett had a fine cider mill that did a good business and a blacksmith shop with a huge ox sling for supporting that unwieldy animal while a hoof was picked off the ground to be shod (an ox cannot stand on three legs like a horse). Above the cider press in a building which adjoined the smithy he had a wheelwright-carpenter shop, and he made and lettered road signs for the town of Warwick, though it is unknown whether for the entire town or only the road district in which he resided; he also repaired clocks and conducted a general farm.

Mrs. Charles S. Godfrey attended the William Bennett auction and bought two pictures. She took them home and in cleaning them removed the backs from the frames. She was startled to find, screwed to the wooden backing, the silver coffin plates of William Bennett's father and mother. Real silver costs good money, and who was to know if the plates were removed before the coffins were lowered into the grave? This seems to have been a thrifty New England custom.

Across the fields northwest of Bennett's still stands the big white house with a cupola that belonged to Tom Jones Spencer, whose farmlands bordered Cowesett Road for some distance, and though the house is on Hardig Road, its owner was far too interesting a character to omit here.

The *Atlas of the State of Rhode Island* (Phila., Beers, 1870) labels the location as "Dr. Tom Jones Spencer's Vegetable Pill Mfg." Spencer was not an M.D. but

assumed the title for his business. For extra income above the returns of his general farm, these physic pills were made in a tiny building just north of his house. The old brass pill-mold he used was still in the loft after World War I but has since vanished. The potency of the pills is attested to in a folk tale concerning one farmer who purchased some, took the recommended dosage, presently went out to the privy, and did not reappear. After some hours, his family went looking for the farmer; all they could find was his broadbrimmed straw hat on the hole.

Tom Jones Spencer served at least one term in the State Legislature. He invited the entire General Assembly to attend a June clambake. After having his invitation accepted *en masse*, he rounded up every farmer in the vicinity who owned a team and mowing machine and hired them to mow his fields on the day of the bake. Luckily for him the day turned out clear. When an awed legislator asked him if all those men and horses worked on his farm, Spencer replied in apparent surprise, "Why, yes. Those men work my horses year-round. Why?"

Perhaps it would be well to pause here and review what was meant by general farming along Cowesett Road in the 1870-1900 period. The average flock of poultry was managed by the housewife who supplied eggs and meat for her household, with occasional extra dozens of eggs traded at the store for supplies that could not be raised. The small herd of dairy cattle furnished milk, butter, cheese, and an occasional calf, with extra milk from lush spring pastures made into butter and cheese to trade. Relatively little liquid milk and cream left the farm, though of course there were exceptions in the farmers who had a milk route in nearby villages or took their milk to the train for Providence. Every farmer raised at least a couple of pigs to supply hams, bacon, sausage, salt pork, lard, and some fresh meat, the pig being an excellent source of converting extra milk into good meat. Some farmers kept a small flock of sheep, but the hey-day of sheep raising in the area was over and no wool seems to have been homespun then. Fleeces were sold as a small "cash crop," while lamb and mutton were mostly

consumed at home or bartered.

Crops were hay, oats, and ear-corn for the livestock, rye and Whitecap Flint corn for grinding into rye meal and cornmeal for the household. Shell beans, especially "Wild Goose" (a tan and blue-back spotted bean) and "Cranberry" pole beans (pure white), were an excellent cash crop in that day of home-baked beans. The pods were allowed to dry on the vines and were then threshed out by hand with a flail. This old-fashioned implement was in much use then and into the 1920s. Charley Godfrey always threshed out his rye by hand on the threshing floor of his big barn. Pumpkins and winter squash were planted between hills of corn — food for man and beast. Some buckwheat was also raised both for livestock and for flour to make that best of all winter breakfasts — smoking-hot buckwheat cakes with sausage. Large vegetable gardens were the rule, with potatoes and other root vegetables most important.

Every farm had an apple orchard that furnished fruit as well as cider, hard cider, and vinegar. Practically every farm and most homes had at least a couple of quince bushes. Quince seeds were a requirement for women in the days before "beauty parlors" in every neighborhood; quince-seed water was used for curling and setting the wave in feminine tresses. Anyone who has ever examined the seed of the quince is well aware of their slippery, mucilaginous coating and can see the great holding power offered to put curl in straight hair. That the fruit was also edible and of a delicious flavor for preserves was simply an added benefit.

It is hard to comprehend the self-reliance of those rural dwellers in providing for their needs. Resources of the farm, Yankee ingeniousness, and strong, capable hands furnished most of what today must be purchased from a store. Take rosin — a more unlikely item to have been produced on Cowesett Road would be hard to name. Yet William Bennett made it as he needed it on Sleepy Hollow Farm from great white pine trees (*Pinus strobus*). From yellowed scraps of paper found at the farm bearing his handwriting come interesting instructions for making not only rosin, but the useful products based on it: hard salve, soap, and fly paper.

*Directions for Making Rosin — Scrape white pine pitch off tree trunks, or newly-sawn white pine lumber, with an old knife into a can that can be put over heat. Set can on back of stove until the pitch is melted. Strain through cheesecloth, then boil it down very slowly as far back on the stove as possible to keep it boiling. When it will form rosin when a little is dropped into cold water, remove from stove and let it cool and harden; then crack it up into lumps to store.*

Smokehouses were not an adjunct to every farm; curing and smoking of pork and beef products had passed to those who had a "bent" for handling the various steps involved. Old Amos Foster, the Quaker, over on Centerville Road west of Hardig Road, had a smokehouse as a profitable sideline to his general farming, smoking buckies or alewives in the spring-time, using the fragrant smoke from cobs of Whitecap Flint corn he grew in quantity.

Wastelands — swamplands, hedgerows — furnished small cash crops before the arrival of aniline dyes. Alderwood, that grows around damp places, was sold to commercial channels for dye, as were red sumac berries. William Bennett of Sleepy Hollow Farm once thought he was going to "make a killing" on this market. He filled an entire corncrib chock-full of red "stag-head" sumac heads that he had spent hours in gathering. Sad to relate, for this huge quantity he received the munificent sum of five dollars.

Along Cowesett Road after the intersection of Hardig Road a long lane led northward into the G. Briggs farm, owned during the period by Tom LeValley and at the end of it by William Gardiner. This very ancient farmhouse was an almost identical copy of the Arnold and Briggs houses already noted, indicating at least to this writer that the major farms along the road were established at about the same time.

On the opposite side was the Arnold farm, while deep in the woodlands still farther south stood an old house where Mike Lynch's son conducted his famous cockfights. Arrested for cockfighting once and, not wanting to embarrass his father — sheriff of Kent County — when appearing before the judge, he gave a fictitious name. Later, at the Kingston Fair with his

father, they met the judge. "Judge, this is my son," said old Mike genially. The judge looked young Lynch in the eye and said gravely, "Why, how do you do, Mr. Blank," giving the name young Lynch had used before him.

A short distance west and still on the south side is Cobb's Pound, a Revolutionary War relic of considerable interest. Here citizens of Cowesett, East Greenwich, and Apponaug penned their animals when the cannon on the crest of Spencer's Hill had fired its warning of an impending arrival of British raiding parties seeking livestock to take to the Island of Rhode Island to feed their troops.

Across the road from Cobb's Pound stood the home of Phebe A. Remington, who conducted a farm and wove rag rugs for residents of the area. The thrifty custom of the time decreed that all worn-out clothing and bedding should be cut into narrow strips and these sewed neatly into one long strip. Such lengths were wound into huge balls and, when a great number had accumulated, they were taken to the home of the rag-rug weaver to be woven into a carpet or runner of the desired size. Mrs. Charles Godfrey took her carpet rags to Phebe Remington, whom she considered a master-hand at weaving. As the bulk of rag strips came from dark work clothing, the housewife who desired a handsome rug would dye worn-out bed sheets with the most brilliant color-producing vegetable dye she could lay her hands on in the hedgerows. The designation of master-hand lay in the weaver's ability to stripe-in bright colors in an otherwise drab rug for the most pleasing effect.

On the last stretch of Cowesett Road that lies within the city of Warwick, the road curves and climbs a steep little hill, known since before the Revolutionary War as Soaphouse Hill. At its crest, on the south side of the road, stands a small ruined stone foundation, all that remains of Brayton's Soap Works. How old the foundation actually is, no one is quite sure. But a folk tale states that during the Revolution the English kept an American prisoner closely guarded and incommunicado within the Brayton Works. The English finally released the American, but this puzzling tale does not

reveal who the prisoner was, nor how this small pocket of British aggression maintained itself so far from the safety of the Island of Rhode Island.

The Braytons, it is believed, made mostly soft soap which members of the family took around the countryside and traded for rags and wood ashes. By 1880 and possibly before, the manufacture of soap had ceased and the little building had become the Brayton Bayberry Tallow Works.

It is something of a mystery that so widely practiced a Rhode Island folk industry, of such comparatively recent date, can have so utterly vanished without leaving a written trace somewhere. One may be wrong, but the following seems to be the first account to be written on the production in this state of bayberry wax for use in textile mills during the calendering process. This rural industry flourished here from about mid-nineteenth century to 1918.

The common grey-berried wax myrtle (*Myrica cetifera*) with the folk name tallow bayberry grows profusely on the poorer soils of central and southern Rhode Island and in scattered locations throughout the rest of the state. Harvesting the berries in autumn provided employment of a sort for many Rhode Islanders, one of whom in the Cowesett Road area was Terry Wilde. According to Mr. Daniel J. Lambert, Jr., who knew a great deal about the subject, Terry Wilde's method was quite interesting:

*He had a pan, and he would cuff the bayberries into the pan. When the pan was nearly full of berries, he would empty the pan into a two-bushel burlap bag. A bushel of bayberries represented long hours of picking. When he had about ten bushels, that is five burlap bags, of bayberries, he would drag the bags out to the nearest road or wood-road a wagon could travel. He would hire me to come with our horse and wagon to collect the bags and drive the load down to Clarke Wells, who lived on Mawney Street in East Greenwich, to whom Wilde sold the berries. Clarke Wells did not boil down the berries for wax; he took them up to his brother-in-law Stukely Spencer, on Rocky Hill, for boiling down and pressing out the wax. Then Clarke Wells would go up to Rocky Hill and bring back the*

*wax cakes to his smithy on Main Street in East Greenwich and barrel up the wax cakes for shipment to New York. Then the price of bayberry wax took a terrific drop, and it wasn't profitable to pick bayberries anymore.*

This was puzzling indeed. What was the bayberry tallow's use in industry, and why had the "bottom dropped out of the market" around 1918? In 1965 there was no one living in the Cowesett Road area who could answer either question. After months of questioning, one man remembered driving a sleigh load of bayberry tallow to the mill at Interlaken. A clue at last. The writer dispatched a letter to Arkwright-Interlaken, Inc., asking if, perhaps, somebody might remember how bayberry wax was used in the manufacture of book cloth. Back came a fine letter from Mr. W. Edwin Stevens, manager of quality control, dated 29 July 1965:

*Your letter of July 20th, with reference to the use of bayberries in the manufacture of bookcloths, has been given to me.*

*Interlaken Mills, which is now part of Arkwright-Interlaken, Inc., was incorporated in 1883. Interlaken at that time made only starch-filled bookcloths. The bayberry wax was used in the calendering process of the starch-filled bookcloths.*

*Back in the late 1800s there was an elderly gentleman down in South County who picked bayberries, melted them down into wax and sold us the wax. We still use some so-called bayberry wax, but the quantity is very small due to the process and material changes.*

*The pure bayberry wax was still used into the early 1900s and apparently worked well for the purpose for which it was intended.*

Jesse P. Dawley, ninety-one years old in the spring of 1971, states that during his boyhood the wooden second story of the Brayton Soapshouse was inhabited by a family who rented this unused part of the building. However, by 1904 that second floor was gone. Directly adjoining the Soapshouse on the south had been a much newer wooden building probably dating from the 1880s which now stands on the Dawley farm on Spencer's Hill, where it was moved shortly after the turn of the century.

In changing over to the manufacture of bayberry wax, the huge iron kettles of the Soaphouse could be used for boiling down bayberries. The press was probably installed in the newer building and has been described as follows:

*It consisted of a frame into which the boiled bayberries and liquid were poured; then shaped planks were put over the berries in the frame, and the wooden screw was turned to exert pressure on the berries. Very similar to a cider press. A hole in the bottom of the frame channeled the bayberry tallow into tin mold-pans, to harden into wax cakes. These wax cakes when hard were then removed from the molds and barreled, the wax cakes being held over the open barrel end and broken with a hammer until the barrel was full. Then the head was nailed on the barrel and it was ready for shipping out.*

Mr. Carr, who conducted the general store on top of Nooseneck Hill in West Greenwich, was one of the primary sources of bayberry supply for the Brayton Bayberry Tallow Works. Bartering groceries and other supplies for the bayberries, which he in turn sold to the Braytons for cash, Mr. Carr provided West Greenwich residents with a source of income desperately needed in that remote area.

At some point during the manufacture the Braytons decided that the pumice left over from pressing the berries could be ground into cattle feed. Nowadays Smedley's, Britain's largest fruit-canning firm, carefully collects from its operations all plum stones which they grind into cattle feed. For their times the Braytons exhibited advanced thinking.

A small millpond higher on the hill due west of the Soaphouse provided water which was conveyed in a large-diameter iron pipe laid on the ground. Where the ground pitched sharply the pipe was elevated on posts. A metal over-shot waterwheel eight or ten feet in diameter and about one foot wide had been installed in a pit still to be seen on the east side. Water was directed on this wheel from the elevated pipe and within the Soaphouse a run of very small millstones, probably for buckwheat, had been geared to the drive shaft of the

wheel. Tales about the Brayton mill say that this brilliant idea did not work, but whether because the small millstones could not grind the exceedingly hard bayberry seed with the limited power of the millpond, or because cattle would not eat the resulting feed, no one knows. Having inspected the millstones and water-wheel, the writer inclines to the first reason. Nothing harder than soft buckwheat could have been ground in that mill. (The gristmill where corn and rye were ground for Cowesett Road residents was located on Hardig Brook just west of where the brook crosses Tollgate Road. In the 1870s it was operated by A. Green and later owned and operated by Fred Smith.)

South and west of the Soaphouse, higher on the hill, the Brayton family homestead, similar in design to the other houses mentioned, burned to the ground in 1910. The Braytons had sold the farm to the Dawley family and Ladd Dawley was living there at the time.

Across from the Brayton home on the north side of the road was the old farmhouse built by the Price family. Some people called Soaphouse Hill "Price Hill" but by far the commonest name was and is Soaphouse Hill. Tenants by the name of Sanderson and later by the name of Carr lived in the Price house which burned a decade before the Brayton homestead. Following the fire, the Remingtons acquired that land.

One more ancient house is left on the road before the present West Warwick town line, the gambrel-roofed Remington homestead at the end of a long lane on the north side, close to Quaker Lane. Hidden today by the encrustation of modernization, the Remington house was definitely not Cowesett Road architecture but in the Quaker Lane style.

We have met among others a poultry medicine manufacturer, two cider mill operators, a blacksmith-wheelwright-carpenter, a vegetable pill manufacturer, a weaver of rag rugs, and manufacturers of soap and bayberry tallow. We have passed among others a road district supervisor and town pound keeper, men who picked bayberries for the tallow folk industry and gathered alder and red sumac for commercial dyes. Yet history today passes off Cowesett Road, if indeed it mentions it, as simply a rural farming area of the past.

## Director's Newsletter

With the opening of the David Patten Manuscript Reading Room on April 25th at our library, the Society took another step toward realizing our goals of quality and excellence in the collection, preservation, and interpretation of Rhode Island's historical materials. First of all the room will honor a distinguished Rhode Island writer and contain his collection of writings about the state. Secondly it provides a well lighted, comfortable, and pleasant setting where all of our manuscripts can be studied. The presence of our manuscript curator, Mr. Shipton, in the room along with the manuscript catalog means that all activities concerning manuscripts are now centralized, affording both better service to our readers and a higher degree of security for the collections. The introduction of air conditioning and humidity control to the entire library is also a major step in the direction of protection and preservation of materials. A balance remains to be paid on the air conditioning and we hope the members will help us out.

Memorial gifts have been received in memory of Herbert E. Easton of Barrington who died February 23, 1971. Mr. Easton was a member of the Society for twenty years. He was former President of the Easton and Burnham Company of Central Falls and the Pawtucket Manufacturing Company. The gifts have been added to our Library book fund and have been used to purchase early Rhode Island manufacturing papers, notably the records of the firm Harris, Greene and Company, one of the early cotton textile firms of the Pawtuxet Valley. The Society and future historians are indebted to Mr. Easton's family and friends for enabling us to add this important collection.

Interest and activity continue to grow with the Society's pioneering venture in motion picture film archives. The Society is grateful for the contributions of Rhode Island film subjects from collectors Russell S. Searles, Wallace E. Tillinghast, Jr., and George

*David Patten, distinguished Rhode Island writer, in whose honor the library's handsome new manuscript room is named.*



Richardson. Early films of national importance were among one hundred and seventy reels given by Mr. Henry Owens of Cranston. Mr. Owens also gave the archives two movie projectors made in Providence. Other support in this area has been received from Leonard Panaggio who supplied us with general R.I. footage and Mr. and Mrs. Clifton N. Lovenberg who have added greatly to our knowledge of the Rhode Island vaudeville stage and early picture industry.

Sesquicentennial plans for the Society are under way with tentative arrangements for a high-power symposium on Rhode Island history, a lawn festival for the general public, and a ball for members and their friends. In short, we think the next twelve months will be a major milestone in the history of the Society.

## The Rhode Island Historical Society

### *One Hundred and Forty-ninth Annual Meeting*

The one hundred and forty-ninth Annual Meeting of The Rhode Island Historical Society was held Sunday, January 17, 1971, at 3:30 p.m., in the Library, 121 Hope Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02906.

President Bradford F. Swan called the meeting to order. The minutes of the previous Annual Meeting were approved. Mrs. Phineas Sprague presented the list of officers and committee members to serve until the next annual meeting. Upon motion duly made and seconded, it was unanimously voted that said slate of officers, committee chairmen and members be duly elected.

Mr. Swan, in his presidential address, took note of the progress in air conditioning the Library and adding a manuscript reading room in honor of David Patten. He called upon the members to help pay the balance on the air conditioning. He also reported that a new plateau had been reached in the restoration of John Brown House, with the rooms having been recently painted and furnished.

Mr. Swan continued, "If John Brown House looks so fine today, great credit for that should go to a man whose generosity to this Society over the past three years has been really extraordinary. I refer to Norman Herreshoff, whose gifts and loans of John Brown material and furniture are almost beyond belief. Others have been inspired to donate Brown material, and we are well on the way to being able to restore John Brown House to its original magnificence and a good approximation of what it must have been like in John Brown's time."

Mr. Swan then spoke of the work done on the Society's various collections by Mr. Shipton, Mrs. Tilley, Mrs. Karr and Mr. Goodyear.

The director, Mr. Klyberg, called the members' attention to various sections of the Annual Report which had been distributed at the meeting.

The afternoon program featured Mr. George L. Howe who read from biographical tributes to his father, Wallis Eastburn Howe, in *American Heritage*, June 1962, and gave a warm and entertaining glimpse of Bristol life in the last century.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
FRANK L. HINCKLEY, JR.  
Secretary

### *Necrology 1970*

Mr. Daniel G. Aldrich  
Mr. Torrey Allen  
Earle B. Arnold, Esquire  
Mrs. Philip M. Barker, Jr.  
Mr. George L. Brady  
Mr. Curtis B. Brooks  
Col. Stuart D. Brown  
Mrs. Fred M. Burton  
Mrs. George E. Comery  
Mr. Roger Williams Cooke  
Mrs. Esther T. Dane  
Mr. Carl S. Darelus  
Gen. Herbert R. Dean  
Mrs. Hiram W. Emery  
Mr. Irving Jay Fain  
Mr. Joseph F. Flynn  
Mrs. Clarke Freeman  
Mr. Hovey T. Freeman  
Miss Katharine C. Greene  
Mrs. Clifford D. Heathcote  
Hon. Felix Hebert  
Mr. James D. Herbert  
Mr. Elmer S. Horton  
Mrs. Harold W. Ingram  
Mrs. C. Oliver Iselin  
Mr. Stanley Brown Jordan  
Mrs. Francis P. Kent  
Mr. C. Prescott Knight, Jr.  
Mr. Milton R. Macintosh  
Mrs. Kenneth B. MacLeod  
Mr. Joseph F. Malmstead  
Mr. Kent F. Matteson  
Mr. Howard L. Merrill  
Mrs. J. Frank Morrissey  
Mrs. Edward A. Mowbray  
Mrs. Neva O'Neil  
Mrs. Bradway S. Phillips  
Mr. Harold Minot Pitman  
Mr. Louis M. Ream  
Mrs. Ethelbert A. Rusden, Jr.  
Mrs. Carl Schrayssuen  
Mr. Clayton D. Sheldon  
Mr. Harold D. Stone  
Mr. J. Banigan Sullivan  
Mr. James A. Tyson  
Arthur V. Vaughn, M.D.  
Mr. Robert D. Wood  
Mr. Sydney L. Wright  
Mr. Lawrence C. Wroth



Statement of General Fund—Receipts and Expenditures  
Year ended June 30, 1970

RECEIPTS:				EXPENDITURES:	
Dues		\$26,680.50		Salaries	62,500.72
Contributions:				Pension	9,311.47
General	\$ 320.00			Social security taxes	2,970.65
Corporate	<u>200.00</u>	520.00		Directors' discretionary fund	937.70
State of Rhode Island		21,000.00		Supplies	1,906.50
City of Providence		2,000.00		Telephone	1,236.26
Patriotic societies		210.00		Promotion	298.49
Admission income		921.20		Membership	1,820.70
Outside services		2,072.03		Library	3,438.33
Special lectures		1,885.00		Quaker material purchases	823.00
Miscellaneous		54.64		Museum	4,979.42
Transfers from other funds for current operations:				Lectures	3,423.97
Consolidated endow- ment income	54,911.87			Publications	7,587.00
Restricted fund income	<u>3,244.94</u>	<u>58,156.81</u>	\$113,500.18	Heat, light, and housekeeping	4,579.28
				Grounds	4,543.46
				Buildings	5,655.66
				Insurance	2,999.72
				Group insurance and Blue Cross	1,775.80
				Microfilm	1,000.00
				Outside services	2,267.96
				Professional fees	4,200.00
				Miscellaneous	1,357.08
				Equipment	1,361.03
				Provision for John Brown House fence painting and repair	<u>500.00</u>
				TOTAL EXPENDITURES	<u>131,474.20</u>
				EXCESS OF EXPENDITURES OVER	
				REVENUES	<u>(\$ 17,974.02)</u>

**The Rhode Island Historical Society  
Officers and Committee Members  
elected at the 149th Annual Meeting to serve  
until the Annual Meeting in 1972**

Joseph K. Ott, *president*  
Bayard Ewing, *vice president*  
Mrs. George E. Downing,  
*vice president*

Frank L. Hinckley, Jr., *secretary*  
Mrs. Norman T. Bolles,  
*assistant secretary*

Townes M. Harris, Jr., *treasurer*  
Duncan Hunter Mauran,  
*assistant treasurer*

**FINANCE**

Bayard Ewing, *chairman*  
Foster B. Davis, Jr.  
Michael A. Gammino, Jr.  
John Simmen  
Charles C. Horton

**GROUNDS AND BUILDINGS**

William N. Davis, *chairman*  
H. Cushman Anthony  
Clifford S. Gustafson  
Harold Ingram, Jr.  
Thomas M. Sneddon

**JOHN BROWN HOUSE**

Mrs. George E. Downing, *chairman*  
Winslow Ames  
Mrs. John A. Gwynne  
Norman Herreshoff  
Frank Mauran, III  
John Nicholas Brown, *ex officio*

**LECTURE**

Mrs. Phineas Sprague, *chairman*  
Dr. Marguerite Appleton  
Richard B. Harrington  
Mrs. Clifford P. Monahan  
Leonard J. Panaggio

**MEMBERSHIP**

Patrick T. Conley, *chairman*  
Henry A. L. Brown  
Mrs. S. Bradford Tingley  
Walter R. Martin  
Joseph McNulty

**MUSEUM**

Mrs. Charles Robinson, Jr., *chairman*  
Winslow Ames  
Bayard Ewing  
Norman Herreshoff  
Joseph K. Ott  
Mrs. Peter J. Westervelt

**PUBLICATIONS**

Stuart C. Sherman, *chairman*  
Henry L. P. Beckwith, Jr.  
Mrs. Philip Davis  
Wendell Garrett  
Norman W. Smith  
Joel A. Cohen, *ex officio*

**LIBRARY**

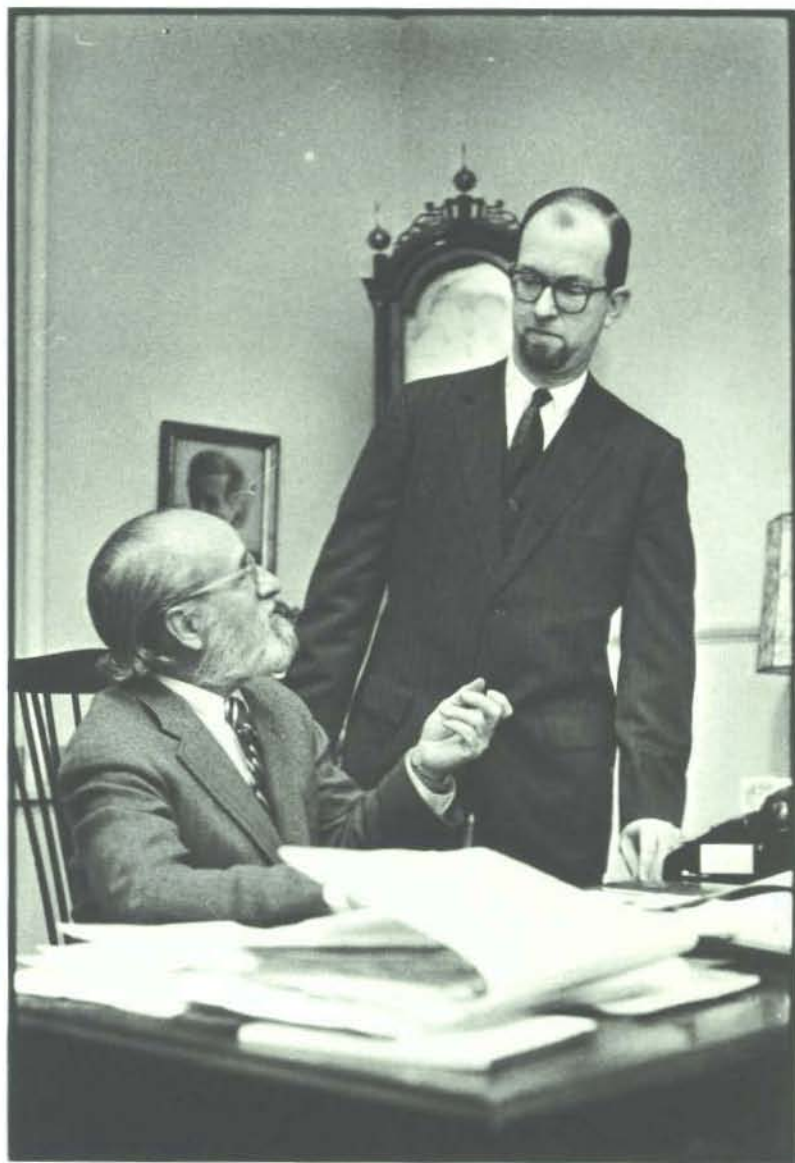
Malcolm G. Chace, III, *chairman*  
Charles W. Farnham  
Albert E. Lownes  
Mrs. Robert W. Hathaway  
Matthew J. Smith

**AUDIT**

John H. Drury, *chairman*  
Seth B. Gifford  
Robert H. Goff

The Executive Board is composed of the officers; chairmen of the standing committees; members at large: Norman T. Bolles, George C. Davis, Walter R. Martin, Bradford F. Swan; the director; and Elliott E. Andrews, state librarian, *ex officio*.

*Joseph K. Ott, newly elected president, listens to the counsel of his predecessor, Bradford F. Swan.*



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