Form of Legacy

"I give and bequeath to the Rhode Island Historical Society the sum of ..... dollars."

Roger Williams Press — E. A. Johnson Co.

Providence

Rhode Island Historical Society Collections

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THE HOYLE TAVERN

From a daguerreotype taken in 1857 by G. L. Hurd.

See page 33. *Photograph on file in the Society's Library.*

Issued Quarterly

68 Waterman Street, Providence, Rhode Island

and one-half acres was an award in her successful suit for her legal share (1778) and that bought in 1782 from Anthony and Lydia Westcott for 108 Spanish milled dollars was described as being "near Widow Martha Brown" so he apparently was reaching out to reunite the acres scattered by his father's death. In the earlier deeds he is termed "cooper" or "cooper, alias yoeman," but from 1777 on he is described as "yoeman." The Providence land records show 17 transfers of realty to him.

The deed was dated April 22, 1783. That was the day on which Providence celebrated the cessation of arms proclaimed by Congress on the 11th of April, following the signing of the treaty of peace between the United States and Great Britain at Versailles in January—the official end of the War for Independence.

The morning opened with a discharge of cannon and the ringing of bells in the town. The Continental frigate Alliance, then in Providence harbor, was decked with flags, as was the rest of the shipping. A civic procession escorted by the Artillery, marched from the house of Deputy Governor Jabez Bowen to the Baptist meeting house, where Rev. Enos Hitchcock, minister of the First Congregational Society of which Dr. John Hoyle was one of the founders, preached a sermon followed by an oration by Asher Robbins, later of Newport but then a tutor at the college here.

After the services at the meeting house, the procession marched to the court house, where the proclamation of Congress for a cessation of arms was read from the balcony, followed by a discharge of cannon from the State House parade, and a battery on the East hill near the beacon. The proclamation was also read in two other places, after which the procession returned to the State House where a dinner was served, followed by 13 toasts, each under a discharge of 13 cannon. In the evening the State House and the Market House, now the Chamber of Commerce building in Market Square, were illuminated and a display of fireworks closed the day.[28]

[28] *Annals of Providence*, Staples.

(*To be concluded*)

Alleged Runic Inscriptions in Rhode Island

By Edmund B. Delabarre

The first hint that the Vinland of the Northmen was in the vicinity of Narragansett Bay was given just about a hundred years ago, by Professor Rafn of Denmark, in the book called *Antiquitates Americanae*. The idea took firm hold of popular imagination and material evidences of the Northmen's presence were eagerly sought and ardently defended.

The evidence to be gathered from the Sagas themselves is conflicting and uncertain. Attempts to interpret it in terms of definite localities have been numerous and vacillating. Of recent writers, Edward F. Gray ("Leif Eriksson," 1930) tries to prove from the saga descriptions that the Norse headquarters were on Martha's Vineyard and Nomansland; while Dr. Wilfred Grenfell ("Romance of Labrador," 1934) is equally sure that they were in Labrador. Both of them examine every item of evidence with skill and care. The reader who, like myself, pretends to no expert knowledge on the subject, is inclined to agree with each as he reads him but to decide in the end that so far the question has not been settled. The situation is well expressed by Henry C. Kittredge in his book on "Cape Cod," where he says: "Human nature too readily bends the large phrases of the sagas to fit the contours of any desired landscape. The wisest men and the best authorities unite in their skepticism regarding all such alleged Norse itineraries."

With reference to alleged material records and indications of their presence, however, the case is entirely different. There is nothing dubious about them. If any unquestionable instance of the sort could be discovered it would be of the utmost importance. Time after time candidates for this dignity have been advanced, but one after another they have fallen in the light of careful examination and sound

criticism. They have been defended with much more of emotional wish to believe than with credible evidence. Nevertheless, the widespread popular desire to prove the presence of Northmen in these regions persists with remarkable but understandable fervor. It never yet has been rewarded by calmly acceptable verification. Like Dighton Rock, the inscribed rocks at Tiverton, Portsmouth, and Mark Rock in Rhode Island have been proved to bear no runic records. Like the famous "skeleton-in-armor" in nearby Massachusetts, the stone tower in Newport has been proved to have had no commerce with the Northmen; it is what remains of a well-authenticated Colonial windmill.

There is a rock on the storm-swept beach of Nomansland which bears an indubitable record in runic letters and a date in Roman numerals. I have studied it carefully, and when I report upon my conclusions I shall give what I believe to be convincing evidence that it was carved certainly not more than a hundred years ago and probably at some time within the present century.

The only other pertinent record in this vicinity is that of the rock lying on the shore near the base of Mount Hope. At the time when I wrote about it some years ago, it was widely believed that it was a Norse runic inscription, but so far as I knew no attempt had been made to translate it except an absurd and unsupported one by Ernest Fales. Very recently I have learned of an unpublished translation by a reputable scholar. I am glad to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mrs. Dorothy M. Barry of Portland, who has made it possible to add it to the historical data concerning this interesting rock.

On January 29, 1899, John E. Mullaly of Fall River, and a companion whose initials were B E G, chalked the characters on the rock as they saw them, photographed them (see illustration herewith), and sent the photograph to Professor Adrian Scott. Scott had been earlier connected with Brown University as a teacher of Germanic and Scandinavian Philology. He found it possible to see the characters as runic letters, and expressed complete confidence that he had read them correctly. I condense his exposition as much as possible. Anyone can see what Scott believed that he found if he will consult a Table of Runic Letters;* select the ones representing our letters "hallr vakkzt," writing the *l* and *k* only once but attaching a horizontal line underneath each as a sign of its doubling; and then imagine all these letters as rotated a quarter-turn to the right so as to lie sidewise in the line instead of upright. The "hallr" is the nominative form of the proper name "Hall;" the verb "vakka" means "to stray," and the "-zt" is the reflexive sign. Therefore, according to Scott, the whole means: "Hall went astray of himself and was lost here."

THE MOUNT HOPE INSCRIPTION AS PHOTOGRAPHED IN 1899

There are plenty of good reasons for rejecting this reading of the inscription. The lines as chalked in 1899 are shown in poor perspective, some of them are blurred, and my own later studies prove that many were mistakenly drawn. Scott did not accept them exactly as drawn in more

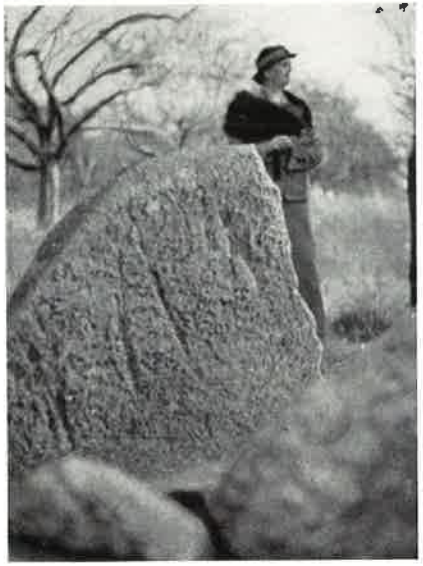
*Runic letters were variable. The Table in the Encyclopedia Americana gives them about as Scott wrote them, except that the runic *u* is to be used for *v*, and z is to be taken as the reverse of *t*.

than three or four cases, but supplied much by his own imagination. The message that he found would have been an unbelievably trivial thing for the Northmen to have taken pains to carve, when they left no other and more significant record anywhere on the coast of America. My own Cherokee-Wampanoag reading, attributed to about the year 1834, still remains the most probably correct rendering of the inscription.

In spite of repeated disappointments of the hope that alleged Norse remains may prove to be genuine, new attempts to find and defend them continually arise. Besides actual inscriptions, another class of marks upon rocks must engage our attention in this connection, such as glacial scorings, weathering phenomena, natural veins or intrusions in the rock, or marks due to other natural causes; or such as those produced accidentally by human agency in the course of grinding or ploughing operations. These are seized upon sometimes by the ardent advocates of runic inscriptions as examples of Norse writing. A recent case of this sort deserves examination.

Two letters were received by this Society last August, reporting the existence of a rock with mysterious markings at Chopmist Orchards in North Scituate. The correspondents were very fair in their attitude toward it. As one of them said: "I do not consider myself qualified to give an opinion on the characters; my judgment might be influenced by my hopes." Their hopes, evidently, were that the markings might turn out to be a runic record of genuine antiquity. No one can dispute their right to such a hope.

The problem having been placed in my hands, I went with one of the writers to examine the rock. It is a flattish stone, whose appearance on its marked face is shown in the accompanying photograph. It lies close to the base of a stone wall and evidently has been removed at some time in the past from somewhere within the neighboring orchard. The same is true of numerous other stones lying close to the wall, whose presence there is due clearly to no other cause



A PLOUGH-SCORED ROCK AT CHOPMIST ORCHARDS

than that they had become nuisances in the course of long-ago ploughing of the field.

The right edge of the stone as the photograph shows it measures about 2 feet 7 inches, the base 2 feet 4 inches, the left edge so far as it runs straight about 1 foot 6 inches. The thickness is 1 foot 3 inches at the right side, tapering uniformly to a thin edge at the left. The weight is about 500 pounds. The rock is fine-grained granite. The marked surface is almost flat, with the upper half much pitted and weathered and the lower half smooth, and with a slight angle between the two parts. It seems to have been shaped by glacial action, and not by artificial dressing as one observer suggested. The marks are from 6 to 8 inches long, about ½ inch wide, with a smooth rounded section.

It will be noticed that all the sure scored lines run almost straight in one direction only, vertically in the photograph,

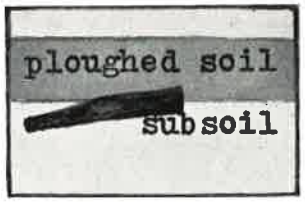
with only slight deviations in direction or curvature. Additional side-lines attached to them, such as would be necessary in order to make them resemble letters of any alphabet, runic or other, have been surmised. I am very sure that all such supposed additional marks are matters of guess-work only, with no support justifying one guess in preference to a dozen others, and are based actually upon weatherings of the rock. Whatever their origin, they are of no least value as evidence of ancient Norse wanderings, and one who seeks signs of the latter can not profitably appeal to any such dubious scratches and pittings in support of his belief.

The clear and indubitable scratches on this stone can be understood most satisfactorily as the scorings of a plough. To this opinion my correspondents have objected that farmers whom they have talked with are agreed that no team of horses would be powerful enough to make marks of such depth on granite, and that no plough could withstand the impact without breaking. The argument which I present below is essentially a repetition of what I have written to them in reply.

The earliest suggestion that markings of this kind could be made by plough was made to me many years ago at Sachuest Point by a farmer, by the side of whose field lay a stone on which I saw what at first I suspected might possibly be Indian pictographs. But he told me that the marks were made by plough, or some by crowbar in getting it out of the field. This was a new idea to me; but on looking around, I found a number of other stones similarly marked lying on the borders of the field and all evidently taken out from it. Since then, searching for Indian relics, I have seen many other examples of similar scorings on stones. There is hardly any possibility that the marks I have in mind were made in any other manner than by a plough. There is no doubt that in a stony field the plough often scrapes along on stones without damage to itself. A big stone lying high enough up to be seen would be avoided, by going around or by lifting over. But one far enough under the surface not to

be a very serious obstacle—though it might become such later by frost-heaving or soil-erosion or otherwise—would be scratched by the plough year after year in different places and to different depths, and no farmer would know or care how deeply he had scratched it if didn't annoy him much.

The ice-age was lavish in its gifts of glacial boulders to the fields of New England. In relatively few of them, of course, are the boulders such flattish slabs as we are considering; but such cases exist in fair numbers. In any one of them, few of the stones would be likely to lie with the upper surface nearly parallel to the surface of the ground and at just the right depth to engage the nose of a plough lightly; but there might easily be a number of them; and some of them might become worse obstacles as time went on, and eventually get dug out. The Chopmist stone may have lain originally with the now marked half of its face projecting just a little into the tilled soil, where it would become gradually roughened by weathering influences; and with the smooth half buried in the subsoil and so protected from such decay. If the ploughing was done repeatedly in the



same direction, along the gentle upslope of the stone, the plough would slide across it without much difficulty. It would get hit, year after year, in different places, rarely if ever twice in exactly the same way. A number of nearly parallel marks would be made upon it, sometimes running straight, sometimes a little curved. If now such natural agencies as I have mentioned at last brought the stone nearer to the surface and made it more of an obstacle, or if the direction of ploughing was reversed so that the stone

was hit squarely against its most projecting part, then conceivably the plough might break; but also it might happen that a stone no heavier than this would get dislodged slightly. In either case, the farmer might become exasperated enough to dig it out. The abundance of flattish stones now lying in and alongside such a field as that at Chopmist, and the one at Sachuest Point, and elsewhere, shows that farmers have often gone to that trouble. It is very sure that they would rarely take any interest in the marks that had previously been made on the stones. They might have later beliefs that the strength of horses and the resistance of ploughs to breaking would be inadequate for the production of such grooves as we find on the Chopmist stone. But they would not have founded those opinions upon actual observation.

I feel sure that the only Chopmist marks which can be accepted as due to human agency are the approximately vertical ones. If not made by plough, I would have to believe that they were somehow made by nature, perhaps as glacial scratches. A few further considerations are strongly in favor of the plough theory. The fields where I have observed stones thus marked have been under cultivation for a very long time. In old days oxen were used for cultivation much more often than horses. Oxen are more powerful and patient. Their slower motion and persistent pull would involve much less strain upon the plough and would produce these effects more easily. I am assured by an expert geologist, Professor Charles W. Brown, that fine-grained granite would take such marks without difficulty; though hard, it is not too resistant to abrasion. Finally, a pretty fair test of a theory is its capacity to serve as basis for successful prediction. After studying the Chopmist stone, I expressed the belief that there must be other stones within the orchard or alongside it, with similar markings on them; and without giving much time to the search, we found one lying on the stone wall.

In the light of these considerations, a stone found in

Hampton, New Hampshire, becomes a useful bit of corroborative evidence. I have spoken of it somewhat dubiously in earlier writings. Since then I have found the original and full description of it, in the Boston Weekly Journal for July 18, 1902. The writer says that the stone had been discovered not more than 20 years earlier, that it lies in the earth with its face near the top of the ground, and that the field has been under tillage for over 150 years. This description, and the pictures of the markings (one version of which I published in my book on "Dighton Rock") leave me confident that it is another case of plough-marks. Yet, along with many other impossible cases, it has been confidently accepted by many persons as a relic of the Northmen.

There are only two alleged runic records anywhere in America about which there is any present controversy: those at Yarmouth in Nova Scotia and at Kensington in Minnesota. I leave them in the hands of the disputants. Within the limits of New England, nothing which has ever yet been advocated as a material relic or record of the Vinland voyages has the least chance of being accepted by competent scholars as anything of the sort.

New Publications of Rhode Island Interest

A History of South Kingstown by Charles Comstock, 1806, has been privately reprinted by William Davis Miller, Esq.

A Letter written by Maj. John Talcott from Mr. Stanton's at Quonocontaug, July 4, 1677 has been issued by the Society of Colonial Wars in Rhode Island as a pamphlet of 15 pages, including two maps by Norman M. Isham.

More Recollections of the Hoppin Family collected by Eliza Hoppin Richmond Waller, December, 1934, is a pamphlet of 22 pages, containing an account of her family written in 1868 by Mrs. Harriet Dunn Hoppin ("Mother