

80. Kersten, *Labor's Home Front*, 98, and Irving, *Towards Equal Opportunity*, 26.

81. "Local President of Boilermakers Charges Assault," *The Providence Journal* (Providence), September 7, 1945, Urban League of Rhode Island Collection, Providence College Library.

82. Unattributed newspaper clipping, "Paul Hovey, Unionist, Held," n.d., Urban League of Rhode Island Collection, Providence College Library.

83. "Attention! Former Shipyard Workers," *The Providence Chronicle* (Providence), September 15, 1945, Urban League of Rhode Island Collection, Providence College Library.

84. The Howard Conference, 55–62.

85. Schmoke obituary, February 1972.

86. Kersten, *Labor's Home Front*, 81–91, and Irving, *Towards Equal Opportunity*, 25.

87. Kersten, *Labor's Home Front*, 98.

88. International Brotherhood of Boilermakers Archives, *Grace Under Pressure: A History of the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers, and Helpers*, AFL-CIO (Kansas City: International Brotherhood of Boilermakers Archives, 2006).

89. Many thanks to Mallory Smith of the IBB in Kansas City for help with this project. According to Smith, the international union's retention policies make it likely the records of Local 308, if they were ever collected, were destroyed some time ago.

90. Phone call to Judicial Records Center on 10/30/17.

ANDREW POLTA

Disorderly House Keepers and the Struggle for Respectability in Early Nineteenth-Century Providence

IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY, the town of Providence seemed to be sliding into chaos. It saw two destructive riots in 1824 and 1831. Complaints of disorder, vice, and immorality deluged the town council, and attempts to stem the tide yielded only more complaints. However, with an assist from the local courts and a step-up in the enforcement of Rhode Island's vagrancy laws, the council made a show of cracking down on social disorder in the late 1810s and 1820s. The primary targets were several neighborhoods in Providence's North End, where sailors between voyages sought out the grog shops, dance halls, and brothels and where many of the town's Black and poor residents made their homes.

Susan Parr Gardner and Rosanna Jones—the former White, the latter Black¹—lived and worked next door to each other in this notorious section of Providence. Their names appear throughout Providence town council and court documents of the early nineteenth century, often in connection with social disorder in their neighborhood. Historians of eighteenth-century Rhode Island have used similar records to assemble fine-grained portraits of colonial society and culture, providing a window into the lives of people who did not or could not write themselves into the historical record.² Nineteenth-century records reveal that Jones and Gardner tried to distance themselves from the disorder associated with their surroundings and to avoid the backlash of popular anger and government crack-down. Despite representing significantly different levels of threat to Providence's social and moral order,

both women pursued a strategy of cultivating good relations with the kinds of men trying to stem the disorder. The successes and failures of these two women's efforts to maintain their livelihoods present a picture of early nineteenth-century Providence where the distinctions between orderly and disorderly, and between reputable and disreputable, blur.

Providence's Recorder of Deeds demonstrates that both Jones and Gardner were substantial property owners and businesswomen. By 1821, Jones, a single Black woman, owned land worth more than \$1,000 on the "street leading from Stevens Bridge to Jabez Whipple's [house]," on modern-day Hewes Street, in a small neighborhood then known as Stampers Hill.³ In 1824, she purchased a second house in another infamous quarter of Providence, on the south side of Olney's Lane near where it ran into North Main Street.⁴ By 1820, Jones had a new neighbor, Gardner, a single White woman. Gardner's property, worth \$1,700 in 1821, also was on "the street leading over Stephens [sic] Bridge," right next to Jones.⁵ Like Jones, she also owned a house on the south side of Olney's Lane.⁶

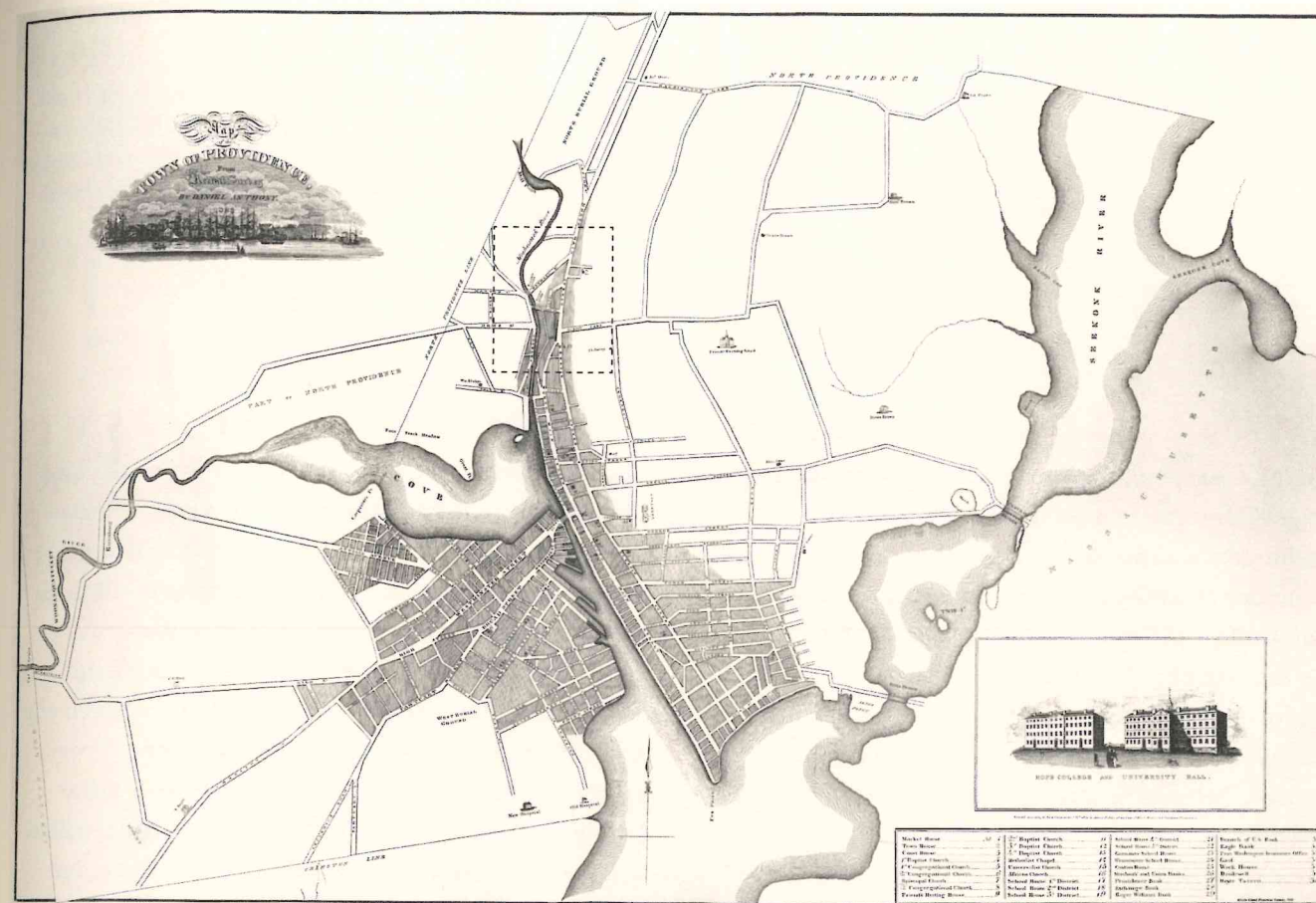
Despite their similar property holdings and location, Jones and Gardner ran very different establishments. Jones kept a boardinghouse catering to poor White and Black families at her Hewes Street house. Census records from 1820 and 1830 show that Jones's tenants were a mix of Black and White men and women of various ages, including children under ten, with what look like several established couples—pairs of men and women around the same age.⁷ William Greene was

typical, a Black man living with his wife and child on Hewes Street who ran a fruit and cake stand in Hard-scrabble, another poor quarter of Providence clustered around Charles and Orms Streets.⁸ It appears that Jones rented her house in Olney's Lane to business tenants. John Lewis, a former sailor of color accused in 1826 of selling beer on Sundays, told the council that he "hir[ed] his house from Rosanna Jones."⁹ The location on Olney's Lane would have been perfect for catering to fellow seamen. The town council never censured Jones for renting to a person of "bad fame" like Lewis; indeed the only complaint it ever lodged against her was in 1827, when she built a wall around her Hewes Street house that "encroached on a public highway."¹⁰ Overall, despite living and working in neighborhoods known for disreputable behavior and social disorder, Jones kept relatively respectable houses.

In contrast, Gardner—who sometimes went by Sukey and had tacked Gardner onto her original last name, Parr—was one of the most notorious brothel keepers in Providence. Census information from 1820 and 1830 shows that her tenants were almost all White women in their late teens or early twenties.¹¹ One of the women captured in the 1830 census may have been Henritt Washburn, a White eighteen-year-old whose testimony before the council that year had all the plot beats of a Victorian morality tale. Having been "enticed" from her home in North Carolina and later abandoned by a ship's captain, Washburn encountered Gardner while "poor and destitute" on the streets of Boston and agreed to come live with her. Once in Providence, Gardner charged Washburn a high rent and then, when Washburn could not pay, confiscated

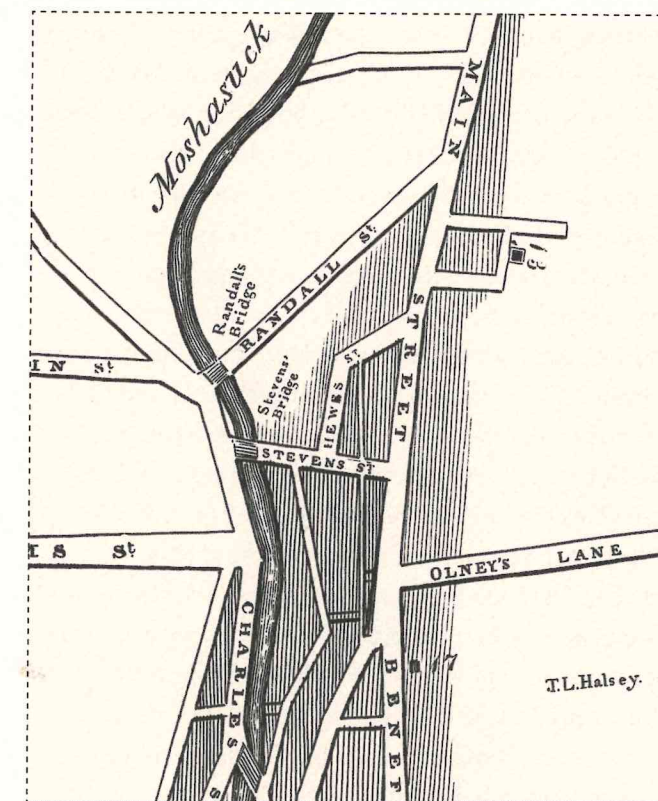
what little property she had as collateral, so that when Washburn fled seven weeks later, she had to leave her spare clothing behind.¹² Washburn's subsequent testimony strongly implied that, lacking money of her own and unable to leave, prostitution in Gardner's house had been the only way to pay the exorbitant rent. The Hewes Street house was also not Gardner's only brothel. During the 1844 trial for the murder of Cranston mill owner Amasa Sprague, one witness, Susan Field, revealed that she lived with Gardner in a brothel the latter had established on Benefit Street, close to the respectable members of Providence society, and in 1821, a blacksmith named Moses Haskel complained to the town council about four "houses of ill fame" in Olney's Lane, including one "occupied By Sucky Par."¹³ Gardner's reputation for sexual impropriety stretched back to December 1819, when an anonymous woman demanded that "Sucky Parr [and her] two sisters" be "removed from town" by the council.¹⁴ Apparently the woman's husband was spending all his wages carousing with the Parr sisters at the house of a Mr. Tripp in Olney's Lane.

The north Providence neighborhoods where Jones and Gardner lived, and which stoked Providence's fears of social disorder, were the products of the town's economic expansion following the Revolutionary War. In the early years of the American republic, the town's maritime commerce rapidly expanded as merchants like the Brown family pursued new trade connections in the Baltic Sea and the East Indies. Their success drew in sailors and dock laborers while also generating peripheral businesses in shipbuilding, blacksmithing, tavern keeping, marine insurance, banking, freight



ABOVE: Facsimile of Daniel Anthony's "Map of the Town of Providence from Actual Survey" (1823). The dotted rule indicates the area in the detail at right. RIHS collection, RHIX173952.

RIGHT: Detail of the facsimile of Daniel Anthony's "Map of the Town of Providence from Actual Survey" (1823). RIHS collection, RHIX173952.



hauling, and retail. A growing urban lower class performed domestic tasks—such as clothes washing, food production, and housecleaning—that previously had been done by middle-class wives or apprentices. The overall effect of Providence's postwar economic boom was a rise in population. From a prewar population of 4,321, the town grew to 7,614 by 1800 and continued rapidly thereafter.¹⁵ An especially sharp increase occurred between 1820 and 1830, when the population rose from 11,767 to 16,836.¹⁶

A significant part of this population growth came from in-migration, including Black men and women recently freed from slavery. During the war, many enslaved Blacks in New England had escaped or gained their freedom by serving in the Continental Army.¹⁷ Seeing the writing on the wall, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed the Manumission Act in 1784. This law freed children born to enslaved parents after March 1 of that year, though girls had to serve their parents' enslavers until age eighteen and boys until twenty-one. A growing port like Providence was especially attractive to these emancipated families because in Rhode Island, enslaved men often had served as skilled artisans or shopkeepers in commercial hubs like Newport, while others had been hired as sailors to ship captains when there was less need for agricultural labor.¹⁸ A career at sea was a tempting prospect for a newly freed Black man with the necessary skills, since a ship was one of the few places he had both a chance of earning equal pay to Whites and the rare opportunity for promotion based on merit and experience.¹⁹

These Black migrants, along with plenty of poor Whites, soon filled the densely packed tenements and

Providence Town Papers, MSS 214, Series 1, Vol. 6, p. 150, #2746, July 23, 1782. RIHS collection RHIX174454A.

"Gentlemen: You cannot be uninformed of the Riot of last Night and that a Dwelling House in the compact part of this Town was intirely Destroy'd. However bad the Inhabitants of the said House might have been, that is by no means an Excuse for the perpetrators of the Act."

boarding houses of Olney's Lane, Hardscrabble, and Stampers Hill. A fourth neighborhood called Snowtown grew up south of Smith Street, on the shore where the Moshassuck River and the Great Salt Cove met.²⁰ These neighborhoods all sported numerous grog shops, brothels, boardinghouses, dance halls, and food stands that catered to sailors ashore between voyages. William Brown, a prominent member of Providence's Black community, grew up next to a sailor boardinghouse near the south waterfront and recalled in a memoir that whenever the tenants lacked entertainment, "Olney street was their next port of call."²¹ These sailors and other pleasure-seekers provided North Providence residents the chance of easy money, especially women whose other options were meager wages from taking in washing or performing other domestic labor. As property-owning businesswomen, Jones and Gardner were at the upper end of this often informal and illicit economy. Other women, such as Black resident Mary Caesar, ran small food stands selling cakes and fruit or, like White resident Eliza Granger, sold liquor without a license.²² Still others earned money through prostitution, either casually or at one of the local brothels. Over time, these sections of Providence developed reputations for poverty, disorder, and vice. Respectable residents and the local newspapers also looked down on them as Black neighborhoods, though in reality Black and White residents lived and worked side by side, with Jones and Gardner being one literal example.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, complaints about these neighborhoods, and especially about disorderly houses, began reaching the town

Gentlemen // You cannot be uninformed of the Riot of last Night and that a Dwelling House in the compact part of this Town was intirely Destroy'd. However bad the Inhabitants of the said House might have been, that is by no means an Excuse for the perpetrators of the Act. If A can be accused of a Crime before the Mob, and they Decree his House to be pulled down, ~~for his being guilty of a supposed Crime~~. B may be condemned by the same Tribunal the next Night and so on to C & D. so that ~~this~~ this mode of Administering Justice in a short Time will Destroy all the Buildings of any Town whose such proceedings are suffered. Which is the Man of Confederation.

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CITY OF PROVIDENCE
2746

council. An eighteenth-century Rhode Island law "for breaking up disorderly Houses kept by free Negroes and Mulattoes," defined a disorderly house as one where "gaming, drinking, and other vicious practices" took place or where the proprietor entertained customers "at unseasonable hours, or in an extravagant manner."²³ In practice, the term "disorderly house" also signaled a threat to the racial and sexual status quo. In July 1782, a Providence mob destroyed the brothel run by a Black woman named Margaret Fairchild. Her tenants included two White women, Phebe Bowen and her daughter Betsey, "a Negro Woman called Black Bets . . . and a Molatto Girl about Eighteen or Nineteen Years."²⁴ It is likely this racial mixing in the house provoked the mob almost as much as the illicit sex. Anxiety over sexual impropriety also was apparent in the 1803 complaint against Luthania Lealand and Freeloove Ballou, two White women who kept "disorderly and bawdy houses . . . wherein riotous, tumultuous and lewd conduct [was] continually practiced."²⁵ Three years previously, Lealand also had been accused of "entice[ing] away the female help of many of the good Citizens of this Town" at night.²⁶

While not all disorderly house keepers were women, the narrowing cultural definitions of female respectability left them especially vulnerable to accusations of disorder and disrepute in the early nineteenth century. While eighteenth-century rural wives were expected to keep shop or conduct legal transactions during their husbands' absence in addition to engaging in domestic labor, by the nineteenth century married women were supposed to devote themselves wholly to cultivating a home in which to raise moral, Christian children as

well as a refuge for their husbands after a hard day's work.²⁷ In many families, however, wives and daughters still needed to contribute to the family income, but women who took in washing for wages or ran a small shop now fell outside the ideals of true womanhood.²⁸ Middle-class advocates of the cult of domesticity reserved particular scorn for female boardinghouse keepers like Gardner and Jones. A woman who took in strangers and performed domestic labor for money was the exact opposite of an ideal wife who did the same work out of love for and devotion to her family. In the minds of these middle-class moralists, if a woman took money from strangers to do domestic tasks like laundry or cooking, what else would she do if somebody paid her enough? By this logic, it could be a short, slippery slope from a boardinghouse to a brothel.²⁹

In addition to falling on the wrong side of the rift between reputable and disreputable women, Black boardinghouse keepers like Jones fell afoul of hardening racial boundaries. After the Revolution and emancipation, White New Englanders had to decide whether freed Blacks should be full citizens in the new, ostensibly egalitarian republic. According to one historian, by 1820, the answer was a "resounding 'No!'"³⁰ In the intervening years, characteristics Whites had once associated with enslaved Blacks' social and legal status, such as poverty or economic dependence, came to be seen as evidence of inherent inferiority and reasons to exclude free Blacks from civic life.³¹ New England Whites also worried about the loss of control over free Blacks, who now could socialize and enjoy themselves as they saw fit. Typical of this anxiety was an 1803 report by the Providence town

watch that "almost every Night one or Two frolicks or Dances is held in Some part of the Town which do not Break up till a very late Hour of the Night thereby filling our streets with Black people at all Hours of the Night."³² That same year, the watch also reported on two disorderly houses run by Black men: Samuel Spywood entertained "Servants and other Black People to the Great detriment of their masters & employers," while Harry Taber operated a so-called dancing school where "Servants [were] encouraged to Carry Stolen Goods."³³ This anxiety over unsupervised free Blacks and servants—around the same time as the complaints against Ballou and Lealand—roughly coincided with the maturation of the first freeborn generation after Rhode Island's Manumission Act. Girls born in 1784 reached eighteen in 1802, and boys turned twenty-one in 1805—the ages set down in the Rhode Island Manumission Act for when boys and girls finished their so-called apprenticeships to their parents' enslavers. White authorities concerned with disorderly Blacks reserved additional suspicion for Black women, whose bodies represented the potential for racial mixing and the blurring of the line between ideal White citizens of the Republic and Blacks deemed unfit for citizenship.³⁴ As a result, middle-class Whites associated Black women with sexual depravity and confirmed in their minds the association of Providence's Black community and the northern red-light districts.

The early flare-ups of concern for disorderly houses and unruly servants around the turn of the century were minor in comparison with what had become a near panic by the 1820s. Between 1821 and 1830, the town council heard as many disorderly house com-

plaints as in the previous two decades combined.³⁵ Public concern already was growing in the late 1810s, and it reached a peak in June 1817, when the town council received a petition with around sixty signatories, including leading citizens such as Moses and Obadiah Brown, Thomas Ives, and the Reverend Stephen Gano, minister of the First Baptist Church. The petition warned of "divers Houses of Bad fame not only among the Coloured People but Even among the Whites who come here from Neighbouring States." Such houses had the "Infamous and Degrading purpose of Seducing our Youth and Others to the Ruining of their Morrals and debacing their manners to their . . . parents Grief, and the Grief of all Good Citizens, and [especially] the Professors of all Denominations of Christians, and if continued unrestrained to the Ruin of the Morral Character of Our Town & State, and highly Injurious to their Civil & Religious Interests and the best feelings of our fellow Citizens who regard the Virtue of the Ripening youth as well as the Morrals of those in Riper years."³⁶ In addition to this and similar petitions, the council also received complaints from individuals such as Moses Haskel, whose December 1821 letter informed the council of four houses of ill fame operating near Olney's Lane and of several tavern keepers who sold liquor on Sundays in violation of their licenses.³⁷ The next year, in an even testier mood, Haskel complained that the "Houses of Ill fame which your Honors have been informed of do Continue their entertainment of Both sexes of bad Company."³⁸

The two riots in 1824 and 1831 confirmed Providence's fears of disorder and directed them at the northern Black neighborhoods. The Hardscrabble Riot

15

To the Honble The Town Council of Providence,
 The Subscriber, one of the Citizens, & Freeman of
 the said Town of Providence, Complains to the
 Honble. Council, That Harry Taber, living
 Eastward of the ^{first} Congregational Meeting House in
 S. Providence, & Saml Spywood. Occupying the
 Chambers of the first House southerly of said
 Meeting House, each keep disorderly Houses —
 Entertaining at the said Houses, almost nightly,
 Frequently in the Day time, Servants & other
 Black People to the great detriment of their
 Masters & Employers — That at the House
 of Harry Taber, is kept, what is called,
 among the Black People, a Dancing School,
 at which, those who attend, tarry all night
 Rioting & Drunking at which Place as
 the Subscriber is Informed. Servants are

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of October 17, 1824, began as an altercation between groups of White and Black men over the right of way on a sidewalk. Stung by a challenge to their supremacy, a White mob pulled down seven houses and damaged others in Hardscrabble. A perfunctory trial, which failed to convict any of the rioters, revealed that one of the primary targets had been a dance hall run by a Black man, Henry Wheeler.³⁹ Dance halls—probably similar to Harry Taber's "dancing school"—commonly were blamed for disorder in other ports such as New York and Boston, where they disgorged crowds of noisy, drunken revelers into the streets on a nightly basis and sometimes doubled as brothels.⁴⁰

The Olney's Lane Riot of September 21 to 24, 1831, began as a sailors' brawl—not uncommon in that neighborhood—that turned deadly when a Black sailor produced a gun and shot a White sailor. The fight occurred outside a building identified in court documents as a "brothel for black and white prostitutes" where the Black sailors were living while in port.⁴¹ Enraged by the killing, local White artisans attacked homes and businesses in Olney's Lane, then turned their attention to nearby Snowtown over the next three nights. In the end, the state militia quelled the mob, killing four rioters in the process.⁴² In its report, a committee appointed to investigate the unrest spared

OPPOSITE: Providence Town Papers, MSS 214, Series 3, Vol. 52, p. 125, #005539, April 22, 1803. RIHS collection RH1X174455A.

A complaint to the town council "that Harry Taber, living Eastward of the first Congregational Meeting House in S. Providence, & Sam[uel] Spywood, occupying the Chambers of the first House southerly of said Meeting House, Black men each, keep disorderly Houses."

little thought for the victims and described Snowtown and Olney's Lane as full of "houses tenanted chiefly by idle blacks of the lowest stamp."⁴³ One Providence newspaper went a step further in blaming the victims: it portrayed the rioters as performing a civic duty "to protect the town from houses of ill fame" and admonished them only that "the removing of improper inhabitants belonged to the Town Council and not the mob."⁴⁴ Such sentiments reflected those of many Providence residents, and the aftermath of the Olney's Lane Riot saw an ultimately successful push to form a city government with a powerful mayor and a professional police force to more effectively enforce order and crack down on vice.⁴⁵

Jones and Gardner were caught up in these concerns about disorder in the 1820s. Along with five other men and women, both were charged with running disorderly houses in the December 1823 session of the Providence County Court of General Sessions of the Peace. The indictments alleged that they allowed "men [and] women of evil name, fame, and dishonest conversation" to partake in "drinking, tippling, whoreing, & misbehaving themselves."⁴⁶

More frequently, though, Jones and Gardner dealt with the Providence town council's attempts to remove their tenants. Like those in contemporary city governments from Baltimore to Boston, Providence's councilmen tried to quell vice and disorder using laws against vagrants and the nonresident poor. These laws allowed the council to remove from town those who were poor or disturbers of the peace, with the threat of a whipping or fine if they returned.⁴⁷ This was the process set in motion when they received a complaint, signed by

Providence Town Papers, MSS 214, Series 3, Vol. 93, p. 13,
#0027950, July 25, 1817. RIHS collection RHIX174456A.

This complaint states that such houses had the "Infamous and Degrading purpose of Seducing our Youth and Others to the Ruining of their Morals."

Relief Thurber and eighteen others, that Gardner's "house of Ill Fame" was "corrupting the morals of the youth of the Town as well as children in the neighborhood" and disturbing them all hours with "the Quarreling, the Fighting, and filthy conversation."⁴⁸ The inciting incident may have been a particularly raucous celebration of the marriage of Gardner's sister Phebe to an English sailor named Griffith Davis.⁴⁹ Thurber wrote the complaint on August 6, 1821, and two days later, the council called in four young White women found living with Gardner: Louisa Stoddard, Emeline Bliss, Phebe Davis, and Gardner's other sister, the widow Betsey Lee. The council referred to all four as women "of bad fame" and ordered them to leave town.⁵⁰

The council removed Jones's tenants less frequently, but she did lose her Olney's Lane house as a result of the 1831 riot. The committee set to investigate the riot included her in a list of property owners who suffered damage and noted that they had "not been able to ascertain that any houses occupied by respectable inhabitants" had "been injured."⁵¹ Like these disreputable inhabitants, Jones also fell under the newspapers' blanket conclusion that the riot was an expression of popular anger at the disorder emanating from Olney's Lane.

Despite the differences between them, Jones and Gardner were lumped together as disorderly housekeepers because of where they lived and worked. At least one modern historian has assumed Jones was a brothel keeper like Gardner based on her location and her involvement in the Olney's Lane Riot.⁵² If such assumptions are still possible today, how much more

so in the 1820s? The merchants, shopkeepers, and professional men who governed early nineteenth-century Providence were fully invested in the cult of female domesticity and concepts of inherent racial divides. Such men saw the ideals of womanhood manifested in their and their peers' wives and sisters, who could afford to spend the bulk of their time managing a large home or taking care of their children. Women who earned money or ran businesses like Gardner and Jones fell outside this model of respectability and were suspect in these men's eyes. In addition to cultural class distinctions, Providence's respectable middle-class men also were physically separated from the town's poorer and less reputable residents. By the 1820s, working-class laborers and servants no longer lived in or next to their employers' homes but had congregated in new neighborhoods of their own, in what one historian calls a shift from vertical to horizontal zoning.⁵³ As a Black woman, Jones faced an extra set of racist assumptions, and when these were added to the fuzzy distinction between brothels and boardinghouses as well as the stigma of living in what respectable Providence saw as a red-light district, it is no wonder she faced accusations of "bad fame."

And yet, despite being on the wrong side of various cultural and social dividing lines, Jones and Gardner prospered for quite some time. In 1823, Jones's case never went to trial, and in the court ledger, next to the *State of Rhode Island v. Rosanna Jones*, there is only the short notation: "Not Pros[ecuted]."⁵⁴ Gardner also faced no long-term consequences from her run-ins with the Providence authorities. Despite calling her in for questioning about Washburn in 1830, the council

To the Honourable Town Council of the Town of Providence
The Subscribers respectfully represent That We have
been credibly informed that There are within the Borders of
Our Town several Houses of Bad Fame not only Among the
Coloured People but even Among the White who come
here from Neighbouring States, and collect Women of profane
Characters bring or cause them to come Among us for the
Infamous and Degrading purpose of Seducing our Youth
and Others to the Ruining of their Morals, and debasing
their Manners to their Parents Grief, and the Grief of
all Good Citizens, and especially the Professors of all
Denominations of Christianity, and if continued uncorrected
to the Ruin of the Moral Character of our Town &
State, and highly injurious to their Civil & Religious
Interest and the best feelings of our fellow Citizens
who regard the Virtue of the rising Youth as well as the
Morals of those in ripen Years, We therefore Solicit
The Council to make strict Examination into the Open
and Secret Houses where even they may be in the Town that
entertain our Citizens or those who may come Among us for the
purpose of Criminal Intercourse of the Sexes, or the
Seductive purposes preparatory to such destructive
Practices, and to have all such as do not belong to
the Town removed agreeable to Law, and if there be
any among us that are Legal Inhabitants that such
Measures may be taken to discourage their Mis
conduct in the most effectual Manner, and therein
Duty Bound vice Aid and support you in the execution
of Honourable Endeavour
Providence 7th Mo^y. 1821
Hester Brown
Wm Jones

never followed through on its threat to prosecute Gardner for bringing a pauper into Providence without permission.⁵⁵ After the council's 1821 attempt to clear out her tenants, Gardner got the removal of her sisters, Davis and Lee, overturned. She also bounced back from any business disruption caused by these threats of removal. When she faced the Providence County courts in 1823, she simply pleaded guilty, paid a fifty-dollar fine that she could easily afford, and then, as later records show, went right back to running a house of prostitution. Finally, unlike Jones, she suffered no damage from the two riots.

So how did these two women survive in Providence as long as they did? One key advantage was their wealth. As property owners, Jones and Gardner were legal residents of Providence, and so, unlike their tenants, they could not be removed under the vagrancy laws.⁵⁶ Wealth also served as a cushion when suffering setbacks like Gardner's fines or the loss of business after the removal of her boarders. Before and immediately after her run-in with the council in 1821—perhaps sensing trouble brewing—Gardner mortgaged some lots of land and sold others to generate cash quickly.⁵⁷ Certainly, poorer disorderly house keepers were not so lucky. Mary Johnson and Sally Andrews, two other women who pleaded guilty in 1823 and received lower fines than Gardner, were driven out of business. The latter had previously bought Gardner's house in Olney's Lane but owned no property when the council removed her in 1824.⁵⁸ Jones also had substantial value stored up in her Providence real estate: in 1837, at which point she had moved to Cranston, she took out a \$2,166 mortgage on the parcels she still owned in Providence.⁵⁹

In addition to the advantages of wealth and property, both women also used connections with neighboring White businessmen to cross the line between a good or a bad reputation. Jones maintained an intricate network of financial and business ties that can be reconstructed from the records of the Providence County Court of Common Pleas, which handled civil suits, including those for debt. Creditors sued Jones nine times between 1824 and 1837, more than any other woman accused of keeping a disorderly house during that period.⁶⁰ The amounts ranged from the \$22.35 she owed to shoemaker Charles Hadwin in 1827 to the \$124.33 to lottery broker Moses Baker in 1831.⁶¹ While she usually defaulted to avoid paying court fees, Jones was never in genuine financial trouble, since court records always note the payment of whatever she owed after the fact. Jones's other business activities during this period suggest she maintained a healthy disposable income, so she likely asked for credit not because she lacked money, but for convenience or for a short-term expansion of her liquid assets.

In addition to the financial advantages, Jones's relationships with her creditors gained her something more important: acceptance within Providence's business community. Of course, these men's readiness to sue her may have come down to racism, but it is striking that they continued to extend credit to her year after year, suggesting she had built up a level of trust. Many of them owned businesses in the north end of Providence and must have known Jones for years as a customer or a neighbor, so she clearly was not using subterfuge or the anonymity of a growing city to take advantage of businessmen unaware that she had failed

to pay previous debts on time. Hadwin's shoe store was on North Main Street, near Jones's Hewes Street boardinghouse, and George R. A. Olney and Caleb Mosher Jr., who sued Jones the same years as Hadwin, kept a grocery store nearby on Canal Street.⁶² In addition to Baker, at least three other lottery brokers sued Jones in the early 1830s.⁶³ Almost all of them maintained offices near one another on the Market Square, and they could have recognized Jones from her visits to their peers or had heard from them about her credit history.⁶⁴ In all likelihood, they also knew that she was good for the money eventually and felt comfortable extending credit to her anyway.

If all of these businessmen knew about Jones's reputation as a tardy re-payer of debts, it is also very likely they knew that she owned and operated businesses in Olney's Lane and Stampers Hill. Probably some of them even knew she had been indicted for running a disorderly house in 1823. As middle-class White men, they deplored the social disorder sweeping through Providence and the nightly carousing in the town's working-class neighborhoods. One of them, George Olney, went so far as to sign a petition to the town council in 1825, complaining "of the evils arising from disorderly houses . . . in Olney's Lane."⁶⁵ However, perhaps these men also knew Jones well enough to realize that she contributed little to the disorder in northern Providence and that she was no brothel keeper like her neighbor Gardner. When complaints arose about disorderly houses in Olney's Lane and Snowtown, maybe her contacts put in a good word for her with the council or the town watch or steered them toward houses where vice and disorder actually occurred. Her good

reputation also may explain why she was not prosecuted in 1823, with enough people knowing that she stood apart from the other defendants. On the other hand, it also is possible her business contacts only cared that they got their money back and overlooked any doubts about Jones's character.

In the end, Jones's efforts to establish a good reputation in Providence achieved mixed results. While she avoided running afoul of the courts and council for more than a decade, she fell victim to the popular anger unleashed in the Olney's Lane Riot. Yet she did not lose everything, and two civil cases, in 1833 and 1837, show she still had the wherewithal to purchase property and establish a new legal residency in Cranston.⁶⁶ While the large mortgages she took out in 1837 suggest Jones fell on hard times, she recovered eventually, and when she finally cut ties with Providence and sold her remaining property in 1864, she received \$2,700.⁶⁷

Like Jones, Gardner turned to the respectable members of Providence society, though rather than the general goodwill of her neighbors, she cultivated a close relationship with a single family to advance her interests. In the 1820s, Samuel Staples Jr. and his father were both successful house carpenters living among the other prosperous families of Benefit Street.⁶⁸ Staples's brother William, who lived nearby, later became a Rhode Island Supreme Court justice and wrote a history of Providence, so the family moved among the political and cultural elite of Providence society.⁶⁹ As early as 1817, Samuel Staples Jr.'s name appeared as a witness on a deed of property to Gardner, and later, in 1825, he sold her the house on Benefit Street.⁷⁰ His

help went further, and in 1821, Staples proved instrumental in reversing the council's removal of Gardner's sister Phebe Davis for "bad fame" by arranging a quick sale of property to Davis's sailor husband right before he went to sea.⁷¹ It is easy to see Gardner's guiding hand behind this intervention, which secured legal residency in Providence for her sister and brother-in-law. Beyond buying and selling property, Staples and Gardner also conducted other business together: in 1824, a woman named Elizabeth Hines told the council that she hired a house from Staples near or in Olney's Lane and furniture from Gardner.⁷² The council did not label Hines of "bad fame," suggesting that Gardner maintained legitimate business interests in addition to her brothels. An association with a respectable, upper-class man like Staples in a legitimate business arrangement may have provided Gardner with a sheen of respectability similar to Jones's reputation with her creditors. Acquiring a house on Benefit Street put some distance between her and the bad reputation of Olney's Lane and the other neighborhoods of northern Providence. Further evidence that Gardner projected the image of a respectable—i.e., married—woman comes from the 1844 testimony of Susan Field, who insisted on calling her landlady "Mrs. Gar[d]ner" rather than "Susan Parr" when the prosecution tried to undercut Field's own reputation by pointing out she lived in a brothel.⁷³

Staples and Gardner put on a good show of respectability, but the former was involved in the less respectable aspects of the latter's business as well. In her 1830 testimony, Henritt Washburn claimed that "Samuel Staples, Jr. and Susan Parr were in Boston and agreed

with her to come to Providence."⁷⁴ Thus, it appears that Staples played an active role in convincing Washburn to live with Gardner and was complicit in the operation of her brothel.

Staples's actions in Boston raise several questions about his relationship with Gardner. We can assume he understood that he was luring a vulnerable young woman into a brothel since he was very familiar with Providence's disorderly neighborhoods. The Staples family did not just build houses, they also owned and rented them out; the 1831 riot destroyed five that they owned in Olney's Lane.⁷⁵ These houses also had been the subjects of frequent complaints, with the council repeatedly asking Samuel Staples Jr. to evict unruly tenants. In a move reminiscent of its attempt to clear out Gardner's brothel five years before, the council ordered Staples to evict six women from one tenement in 1826.⁷⁶ Haskel also included "a red Haus on the Wright hand side of the Street . . . owned By Samuel Staples" in "Owlnay's Laying" in his complaint of 1821.⁷⁷ Still, traveling all the way to Boston and helping Gardner procure a young woman implies a much closer relationship between Staples and Gardner than the otherwise dry and legalistic property and municipal records have implied so far. Did they simply have a strong personal connection that is otherwise absent in these records? Evidence from later in Gardner's life suggests this is the case: in 1832 and 1836, she gave birth to daughters named Mary and Isabella Staples. While it is unclear to what extent his business and sexual relationships with Gardner were intertwined in the 1820s, Staples had financial motives enough to overcome any affronts to the moral and social stric-

tures of middle-class respectability.⁷⁸ Since both Staples and Gardner relied on income from Olney's Lane, steady business for her drew in potential tenants for him and vice versa. William Brown also noticed this interdependence among disorderly houses and wrote that Olney's Lane "had a correspondence with all the sailor boarding houses in town, and was sustained by their patronage."⁷⁹ Likewise, in 1802 the town watch described an arrangement between two houses that entertained a "Riotous and Disorderly Company" and a third that fueled the festivities with liquor—without a license, of course.⁸⁰ While the full implications of Staples's trip to Boston with Gardner cannot be fully known, it dramatically shows how deeply enmeshed Providence's respectable upper classes could become in the illicit and disorderly world of Providence's northern neighborhoods.

Samuel Staples Jr. was not the only outwardly respectable middle-class man with ties to disorder in northern Providence. Gardner sold her house in Olney's Lane to his brother William in 1821, when it was occupied by a Black sailor named Peter Reynolds, whom the council was accusing of running a disorderly dance hall.⁸¹ George W. Bowen, a grocer with a shop on North Main Street, also cultivated a relationship with Gardner, to whom he once extended a mortgage on her Olney's Lane house. He eventually bought her Hewes Street property in 1832.⁸² Presumably she used the money from this sale to set herself up permanently in the house she had bought from Staples on Benefit Street. Many of her neighbors there also had invested in Olney's Lane, including jeweler Ezekiel Burr, who owned the building—then serving as a brothel—

outside which the riot began in 1831. When the rioters reached the neighborhood of Snowtown, they also damaged or destroyed three houses owned by Nicholas Brown of the prominent mercantile firm Brown and Ives.⁸³ These connections between the reputable and disreputable residents of Providence were well known at the time, and in the aftermath of the riot, the local newspapers grumbled that a man like Burr, Staples, or Brown had "a right to invest his money as he chooses, but it is well for him occasionally to consult the morals and peace of the community of which he is a member."⁸⁴

By whatever combination of business savvy and contacts with respectable men like Samuel Staples Jr., Gardner avoided Jones's fate. Despite occasional setbacks, Gardner remained in business for the rest of her life in Providence. In 1844, despite the scrutiny brought on by her tenant Field's testimony in the Amasa Sprague murder trial, she still purchased, for \$2,050, three lots of land at the corner of Olney's Lane and North Main Street from Samuel Staples Jr.⁸⁵ Just before her death in June 1846, she bequeathed this land "for the love & affection which I have toward my children" to her two daughters.⁸⁶ Furthermore, unlike Jones, Gardner came out of the Olney's Lane Riot completely unscathed.

The question remains why Jones's good reputation failed to protect her from the backlash against disorder in Providence, while Gardner prospered there for another decade. The confounding factor is that, by all accounts, it was Gardner, not Jones, who represented the disorder Providence was trying to stamp out. Some possible answers can be found by taking a wider view

of the social changes and political unrest gripping America's Atlantic seaboard in the early nineteenth century.

The Providence town government's crackdown and the later mob violence against perceived social disorder was a local outgrowth of a nationwide push for a politics and society centered on White men. Town authorities enforced new cultural norms dictating the withdrawal of women into the private domestic sphere by targeting the most visible examples of deviance: women working as prostitutes. Boston Mayor Josiah Quincy launched a series of raids in 1823 to eradicate houses of ill fame in the city's West End.⁸⁷ Around the same time, Philadelphia saw a concerted effort by citizen reformers and the city government to enforce "rigid morality and punitive sexual discipline" on lower class—especially Black—women.⁸⁸ These government efforts to enforce social and cultural norms dovetailed with the popular demand—commonly associated with figures like Andrew Jackson—for universal White manhood suffrage by urban wage laborers and small-scale artisans, who in many states were excluded from the franchise by property qualifications. Frustrated by a lack of political power, these men doubled down on asserting their social dominance via violence against White women and free Blacks. In New York City, between 1825 and 1857, a rash of so-called brothel riots represented, according to one historian, a "misogynist attitude toward prostitutes and women in public life."⁸⁹ Combining the push for White male egalitarianism with the rising cult of domesticity, these attacks also sent a clear message that women were to "get off the streets, stay in the home."⁹⁰ In addition to

male violence against women, historians have noted a nationwide uptick in White mob violence against Blacks between roughly 1820 to 1850.⁹¹ White supremacy manifested itself in other ways as well, from economic discrimination to increased calls for the removal of free Blacks to Africa.⁹²

In Rhode Island, calls for universal White manhood suffrage meshed easily with state authorities' desire to isolate and control the free Black community. The General Assembly forbade interracial marriage in 1789, and on the local level, Providence enacted a curfew in 1808 that applied only to Black residents.⁹³ In 1823, the town council increased its powers of surveillance and enforcement by ordering constable Henry Alexander to conduct a census of just Providence's Black households.⁹⁴ However, despite taking some steps to ensure White political supremacy, like disenfranchising Black men in 1822, Rhode Island lagged behind other states, only easing property qualifications for White male voters after the Dorr Rebellion of 1841–1842.⁹⁵ The frustration of this desire among landless Whites for political representation probably contributed to the violence in Providence. An attempt to reapportion the state legislature had failed in the months leading up to the Hardscrabble Riot of 1824, and there were similarities between the attacks on vice in Olney's Lane and the New York brothel riots.⁹⁶ Both Providence riots can also be construed as violent demonstrations of White supremacy, assertions that Black freedom in the Early Republic did not mean equality with Whites.⁹⁷

This focus of White anger on Providence's Black community—both at the popular and governmental level—helps explain Jones's fate. While the riot-

ers were clearly sending a message to the tenants of the buildings they destroyed, they also knew who collected the rent. Ezekiel Burr's ownership of the brothel where the riot started was so well known that he took out a notice in a local newspaper to dispel rumors that he had given guns to his Black tenants.⁹⁸ The rioters put thought into their targets, and they were organized enough to post notices advertising their actions planned for subsequent nights and collectively to resist the sheriff's and constables' attempts to stop them.⁹⁹ While the destruction of Jones's house in Olney's Lane appears to prove simply that the racist association between Black women and sexual immorality trumped Jones's individual reputation, closer inspection reveals some nuances within the views of Providence Whites concerning race. First, we do not know whether Jones's creditors or neighbors participated in the destruction of her property. If they did, their actions indeed speak to the power of racism to turn Whites against their Black neighbors. If they did not and were instead among the many bystanders who neither raised a hand to help nor hinder the destruction, their identification with (or fear of) the rioters clearly was stronger than the connections formed with Jones over the years. This lack of active participation in the destruction, though it did not rise to actively protecting Jones from the mob, also hints at class divisions within the White community: Jones was no threat to the middling shopkeepers who extended her credit or the wealthy members of the council who ignored her in favor of bigger problems. However, White men lower down the social scale who were angered by their political powerlessness could have perceived her as a threat. Did Jones

become a target because, in the eyes of people who did not interact with her day in and day out, she embodied their anxieties about Black women and sexuality and personified the fears surrounding Providence's North End? Or was it because, through careful investment and savvy networking, Jones had become a well-known and successful Black businesswoman and thus a galling reminder that the rioters were not at the top of the social and economic hierarchy?

Does Gardner's Whiteness fully explain why the rioters left her alone? Not quite. The mob attacked plenty of buildings owned by Whites, including Gardner's friend Staples and the luckless Burr. The simplest explanation for Gardner's fate is that by the time the riot occurred, she no longer owned a house in Olney's Lane. However, a major factor in her long-term survival through all the turmoil of the 1820s and 1830s had to be, as with Jones, the strength of her relationships with respectable men like Samuel Staples Jr. and George Bowen. Partnership with wealthy White men allowed Gardner to pursue legitimate activities and imparted a veneer of respectability. Her wealth and air of respectability may have allowed the rest of the town to ignore or downplay her success as a brothel owner and how far she really deviated from the ideal of White female domesticity. Though Gardner did not always avoid the council's scrutiny, her connections saved her sisters from removal in 1821. A mostly positive reputation and her closeness to men like Staples and Bowen does a lot to explain the council's lack of reaction to Haskel's letter later that year. It could also explain why, after Gardner pleaded guilty and paid her fine in 1823, the council left her alone for seven years and

then let her involvement with Washburn quietly drop. The best symbol of Gardner's success in cultivating an image of respectability was her shift from Olney's Lane to a more reputable location on Benefit Street—despite continuing to operate the brothel in her old neighborhood.

The available archival evidence reveals much about the lives of Jones and Gardner and their place in local and national history, yet mysteries still remain. The greatest is the relationship between the two women. They lived next to each other for years, but the only hint of a connection is some tantalizing evidence from the period after Jones moved to Cranston. Gardner's partner Staples paid Jones's bail when she was again arrested for debt in 1833, and he also extended a long-term loan to her when she took out the six-year, \$2,166 mortgage on her remaining Providence real estate in 1837.¹⁰⁰ If nothing else, these fragments of evidence further confirm just how little distance there was between reputable boardinghouse keeper and disreputable brothel owner.

Despite these remaining questions, we can reconstruct a remarkably rich picture of Jones's and Gard-

ner's time in Providence. In a time when fears of social and sexual disorder and an ideology of White male supremacy constrained the options of free Blacks and White women, these two made a place for themselves and achieved prosperity in Providence. Part of their staying power clearly stemmed from their own financial successes as business owners and investors. However, their relations with wealthy men also were a major factor financially, legally, and reputationally. The stories of both women reveal how deeply complicit the wealthy and elite of Providence were in the disorder so many of them decried. However, the contrast between Gardner's long-term, successful operation of a brothel and Jones's eventual departure from Providence also reveals the power of racist associations among Blackness, sexual disorder, and the town's northern neighborhoods to negate any attempts to attain social respectability. Rosanna Jones and Susan Parr Gardner were unique individuals, but studying their lives reveals a struggle to stay on the right side of the boundary between order and disorder shared by poor and marginal residents in cities up and down nineteenth-century America's Atlantic seaboard.

Island history, see John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730–1830* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 9; and Christy Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work: The Business of Slavery in Rhode Island* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 160–161 n8.

2. See Ruth Wallis Herndon, *Unwanted Americans: Living on the Margins in Early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Penn-

sylvania Press, 2001) and Elaine Forman Crane, *Witches, Wife Beaters, and Whores: Common Law and Common Folk in Early America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), both of which draw heavily on records from Rhode Island.

3. Recorder of Deeds, 40:78, 43:169, 44:296, Providence City Archives. I also wish to thank the members of the Research Team of the Snowtown Project, recently begun by the Rhode Island State House Restoration Committee, for sharing their research into the precise locations of the neighborhoods in northern Providence.

4. Deeds, 47:144, 56:259.

5. Deeds, 41:38, 44:344, 351.

6. Deeds, 41:302.

7. US Census Bureau, *Population Schedules of the Fourth Census of the United States, Rhode Island*, vol. 3, Providence Co. (Washington, DC, 1956); US Census Bureau, *Fifth Census of the United States, 1830: Population Schedules, Rhode Island*, vol. 2, Providence and Washington Counties (Washington, DC, 1949), both in the Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS) microfilm collection.

8. Providence Town Council Records, 11:279, Providence City Archives.

9. Town Council Records, 11:515–516, 525, 528.

10. Town Council Records, 12:113.

11. Federal Census of 1820; Federal Census of 1830.

12. Town Council Records, 12:324–325.

13. Providence Town Papers, 111 doc. #0038544, RIHS MSS 214 sg 1; Edward [Edwin] C. Larned and William Knowles, *The Trial of John Gordon and William Gordon, charged with the Murder of Amasa Sprague, Before the Supreme Court of Rhode Island, March Term 1844* (Providence: Sidney S. Rider, 1884), 43–47.

14. Town Papers, 103 doc. #0033879.

15. John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, in New England*, vol. 7, 1770–1776 (Providence: A. C. Greene and Brothers, 1862), 299; US Census Bureau, *Population Schedules of the Second Census of the United*

States, 1800: Rhode Island, vol. 1, Bristol, Providence Town and Washington Counties (Washington, DC, 1954), RIHS microfilm collection.

16. Federal Census of 1820; Federal Census of 1830.

17. Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 206–209; cf. Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work*, 70–76.

18. Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work*, 46–55; W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 27–28.

19. Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 75–77, 159–170.

20. My thanks again to the Snowtown Project Research Team for providing this information.

21. William J. Brown, *The Life of William J. Brown of Providence, R. I. with Personal Recollections of Incidents in Rhode Island* (1883), in *From African to Yankee: Narratives of Slavery and Freedom in Antebellum New England*, ed. Robert J. Cottrol (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 124.

22. Town Council Records, 8:71; Providence County Court of Common Pleas and General Sessions of the Peace Records, 31:175, *John Howland v. Eliza Granger*, May 1830, Rhode Island Supreme Court Judicial Records Center; these record books contain summaries of court cases and are cited when original trial documents are unavailable.

23. *The Public Laws of the State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations* (Providence: Carter and Wilkinson, 1798), 612–613.

24. Town Papers, 6 doc. #2746.

25. Town Council Records, 8:258.

26. Town Council Records, 8:28.

27. On colonial women's economic activities, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 36–50; Lisa Norling, “How Frought With Sorrow and Heartpangs’: Mariners’ Wives and the Ideology of Domesticity in New England, 1790–1880,” *New England Quarterly* 65 (September 1992): 42–429; and Sara T. Damiano, “Agents at

NOTES

1. In this article, I use the term “Black” when referring to Providence residents of African descent. The few exceptions are when the records refer to someone as a “person of color,” which by the nineteenth century was a catch-all term that authorities used for any non-White person. Since “of color” could imply Native American or African descent, I do not assume such persons identified as Black. For in-depth analyses of racial categorization in Rhode

Home: Wives, Lawyers, and Financial Competence in Eighteenth-Century New England Port Cities," *Early American Studies* 4 (Fall 2015): 808–835; on the ideology of separate spheres, see Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America," *Signs* 1 (Autumn 1975): 1–29.

28. Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789–1860* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987) 46–54, 73–75; cf. Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988): 21–30.

29. Wendy Gamber, "Tarnished Labor: The Home, The Market, and The Boardinghouse in Antebellum America," *Journal of the Early Republic* 22 (Summer 2002): 194–196.

30. Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 2.

31. Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 2–3, 37–41; Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 9–11; Robert J. Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees: Providence's Black Community in the Antebellum Era* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 147–151.

32. Town Papers, 52 doc. #005553.

33. Town Papers, 52 doc. #005539.

34. Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 30–31, 122–123.

35. Calculated from Town Council Records, vols. 8–12.

36. Town Papers, 93 doc. #0027950.

37. Town Papers, 111 docs. #0038544 and #0038546.

38. Town Papers, 112 doc. #0039147.

39. Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 353–356.

40. Stansell, *City of Women*, 175, 187; Barbara Meil Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 13–17.

41. Deposition of Richard Johnson, *State of Rhode Island v. Richard Johnson and Augustus Williams*, Albert C. Greene Papers, RIHS.

42. "Committee's Report," *Rhode Island American and Gazette*, September 30, 1831; see also Joseph Sullivan, "Reconstructing the Olney's Lane Riot: Another Look at Race and Class in Jacksonian Rhode Island," *Rhode Island History* 65, no. 7 (2007): 52–54.

43. "Committee's Report," *Rhode Island American and Gazette*, September 30, 1831.

44. "Riot," *The Providence Daily Journal*, September 26, 1831.

45. Howard P. Chudacoff and Theodore C. Hirt, "Social Turmoil and Governmental Reform in Providence, 1820–1832," *Rhode Island History* 31, no. 1 (1971), 20–33.

46. Providence County Court Records, 25:253–254, *State of Rhode Island v. Rosanna Jones*, December 1823; *State of Rhode Island v. Susan Parr*, December 1823.

47. *The Public Laws of the State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations* (Providence: Miller and Hutchins, 1822), 271–279; cf. Clare A. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730–1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 339–340; Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 223.

48. Town Papers, 109 doc. #0038069.

49. Town Council Records, 10:485.

50. Town Council Records, 10:481–500.

51. "Committee's Report," *Rhode Island American and Gazette*, September 30, 1831.

52. Sullivan, "Olney's Lane Riot," 54.

53. Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 359–360.

54. Providence County Court Records, 25:253, *State v. Jones*.

55. *Public Laws* [1822], 278.

56. *Public Laws* [1822], 271–272.

57. Deeds, 44:248, 267, 344, 351.

58. Deeds, 44:92; Town Council Records, 11:232.

59. Deeds, 71:214.

60. Of these nine cases, files exist for five of them: Providence County Court of Common Pleas, *Philip W. Martin v. Rosannah Jones*, May 1824; *Charles Hadwin v. Rosanna Jones*, May 1827; *George R. A. Olney and Caleb Mosher Jr. v. Rosannah Jones*, November 1827; *Moses Baker v. Rosanna Jones*, May 1831; *William Dinneford v. Rosanna Jones*, May 1833. For the rest, see Providence County Court Records, 31:31, *John Pellion v. John B. Dexter v. Rosanna Jones*, May 1830; 31:536, *John Paine, Daniel Burgess, and Philip Case v. Rosannah Jones*, November 1830; 31:565, *Asa Pierce and Walter Paine Jr. v. Rosanna Jones*, November 1830; 35:285, *Parks v. Lippitt v. Rosanna Jones*, December 1837.

61. Court of Common Pleas, *Hadwin v. Jones*; *Baker v. Jones*.

62. *The Providence Directory, Containing the Names of the Inhabitants, Their Occupations, Places of Business and Dwelling-Houses, with Lists of the Streets, Lanes, Wharves, &c.* (Providence: Carlile and Brown, 1826) 59; *The Providence Directory, Containing the Names of the Inhabitants, Their Occupations, Places of Business and Dwelling-Houses, with Lists of the Streets, Lanes, Wharves, &c.* (Providence: H. H. Brown, 1828), 74, all directories from RIHS collection; Court of Common Pleas, *Olney and Mosher v. Jones*.

63. Court of Common Pleas, *Paine, Burgess, and Case v. Jones*; *Dinneford v. Jones*; William Dinneford sued Jones on behalf of a third lottery brokerage, E. W. Clark and Bro., run by Enoch and Joseph Clark.

64. *Providence Directory* [1828], 25, 31; *The Providence Directory, Containing the Names of the Inhabitants, Their Occupations, Places of Business and Dwelling-Houses, with Lists of the Streets, Lanes, Wharves, &c.* (Providence: H. H. Brown, 1830), 39, 62, 57, 103; *The Providence Directory, Containing the Names of the Inhabitants, Their Occupations, Places of Business and Dwelling-Houses, with Lists of the Streets, Lanes, Wharves, &c.* (Providence: H. H. Brown, 1832), 47.

65. Town Council Records, 11:415.

66. Court of Common Pleas, *Dinneford v. Jones*; Providence County Court Records, 35:285 *Parks v. Lippitt v. Jones*.

67. Deeds, 168:28; 171:191.

68. *The Providence Directory, Containing the Names of the Inhabitants, Their Occupations, Places of Business and Dwelling-Houses, with Lists of the Streets, Lanes, Wharves, &c.* (Providence: Brown and Danforth, 1824), 38.

69. *Providence Directory* [1828], 91; William R. Staples, *Annals of the Town of Providence: From Its First Settlement to the Organization of the City Government* (Providence: Knowles and Vose, 1843).

70. Deeds, 41:244; 59:74.

71. Town Council Records 10:485, 500.

72. Town Council Records, 11:185–186.

73. Larned and Knowles, *Trial*, 44.

74. Town Council Records, 12:324–325.

75. "Committee's Report," *Rhode Island American and Gazette*, September 30, 1831.

76. Town Council Records, 12:5.

77. Town Papers, 111 doc. #0038544.

78. Cf. Toby Ditz, "Shipwrecked; or, Masculinity Imperiled: Mercantile Representations of Failure and the Gendered Self in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (1994): 51–80.

79. Brown, *Life of Brown*, 123.

80. Town Papers, 47 doc. #003265.

81. Deeds, 44:267; Town Council Records, 10:428.

82. Deeds, 44:77; 62:71; *The Providence Directory, Containing the Names of the Inhabitants, Their Occupations, Places of Business and Dwelling-Houses, with Lists of the Streets, Lanes, Wharves, &c.* (Providence: H. H. Brown, 1836), 20.

83. "Committee's Report," *Rhode Island American and Gazette*, September 30, 1831.

84. "Another Riot," *Rhode Island American and Gazette*, September 27, 1831.

85. Deeds, 92:38.

86. Deeds, 101:119.

87. Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue*, 11–27.

88. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble*, 309–311, 321–392.

89. Timothy Gilfoyle, “Strumpets and Misogynists: Brothel ‘Riots’ and the Transformation of Prostitution in Antebellum New York City,” *New York History* 68, no. 1 (1987): 65.

90. Gilfoyle, “Brothel Riots,” 58.

91. See John M. Werner, *Reaping the Bloody Harvest: Race Riots in the United States during the Age of Jackson, 1824–1849* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986); cf. Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 201–204.

92. Rockman, *Scraping By*, 246–252; Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 349–352.

93. Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 371.

94. Town Council Records, 10:601; see also Town Papers, 112 doc. #0039155.

95. Patrick T. Conley, *Democracy in Decline: Rhode Island’s Constitutional Development, 1776–1841* (Providence: RIHS, 1977), 290–371.

96. Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 361–364; Sullivan, “Olney’s Lane Riot,” 51.

97. Sullivan, “Olney’s Lane Riot,” 51, 53; Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work*, 109.

98. “To the Public,” *Rhode Island American and Gazette*, September 27, 1831.

99. “Committee’s Report,” *Rhode Island American and Gazette*, September 30, 1831; the Hardscrabble Riot was similarly well-organized, see Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 353–354.

100. Providence County Court Records, *Dinneford v. Jones*, May 1833; Deeds, 71:214.

PATRICIA RAUB

“A Bewildering Variety”

The Beginning of Libraries in Providence

IN 1753, eighty-six “prominent citizens” in the town of Providence agreed to contribute twenty-five pounds or more toward the purchase of a collection of books to be borrowed among them.¹ Among this group of men were Stephen Hopkins, later a Rhode Island governor, a Superior Court chief justice, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence; and several members of the Brown family, the leading merchants in Providence. Other public officials, merchants, and early manufacturers joined the Browns and Hopkins as founding members of the Providence Library Company.² They ordered books from London that arrived the following year and were housed in the Town House council chamber on what is now Meeting Street.

Perhaps the most astonishing thing about the Providence Library Company is that it was founded at all. In 1753, the year of its formation, Providence had a population of only about 3,000 people—less than half the number of Newport residents.³ By the mid-eighteenth century, Providence’s wealthy neighbor to the south had become a cultural center, supported by a thriving trade in rum, molasses, slaves, and privateering. While Newport ranked with New York and Boston as one of the “commercial leaders of the New World,” Providence remained a provincial backwater.⁴ Nevertheless, Providence, too, had its successful merchants engaged in much the same activities as were those in Newport. These men supported the formation of the Providence Library Company, which began less than a decade after Newport’s Redwood Library was formed and lasted for more than eight decades, surviving a fire and relocating several times. It shared its books not only among the shareholders, or proprietors, but also free of charge

to Protestant ministers, members of the Rhode Island General Assembly, and, for a time, the officers and students at Rhode Island College, now Brown University, “until a library could be procured sufficient for that respectable establishment.”⁵

Like most libraries begun prior to the second half of the nineteenth century, the Providence Library Company was not a public library as we know it today, although at the time it often was referred to as such. Instead, it was a social library, funded and operated by “a voluntary association of individuals who had contributed money toward a common fund to be used for the purchase of books.”⁶ Library historian Jesse Shera divides social libraries into two main groups: the “proprietary library,” in which one bought shares in the property of the group, and the “subscription library,” in which one paid an annual fee for the privilege of borrowing books from the collection. The Providence Library Company was an example of a proprietary library: with the exceptions of those persons listed above, no one had borrowing privileges unless they had paid to become shareholders, or proprietors.

The Providence Library Company was incorporated by the State of Rhode Island in 1798, a half century after Newport’s Redwood Library was granted this status. Incorporation gave the organization the legal right to charge members for overdue books, tax shareholders, permit the selling or transfer of library shares, provide a salary to the librarian, and confer “such further powers as might be necessary to carry into effect the purposes of the company...”⁷ State governments at first passed specific acts of incorporation with provisions tailored for each library. However, as social