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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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William I. Tillinghast, Barber, headed the workingmen's corresponding committee of 1833. In an advertisement in the Providence Patriot and Columbian Phenix of December 29, 1832, a competitor of Tillinghast's presented this contemporary view of the barber's trade.

In 1903 when this scene was photographed on West Exchange Street, Rhode Island had the largest proportion of foreign-born in the Union.



Irish and Italians in Providence, Rhode Island,
1880-1960

Ethnic groups have been a significant factor in local politics in the United States since the latter half of the nineteenth century, and have received due attention. Such study has largely centered on analyses of ethnic affiliations as determinants of voting behavior and of the operation of urban political machines built on ethnic loyalties. Relatively little attention has been given to the task of formulating generalizations concerning the requisite conditions for their political power. One such generalization which has received considerable support is that an ethnic group must have a middle class to provide skilled political leaders in their struggle for power.¹

Often this hypothesis is found in "assimilation models" of ethnic political behavior. Robert A. Dahl presents such a model in *Who Governs?* This model posits three stages in the political behavior of ethnic groups: (1) when they are solely working class and used as political pawns, (2) when a small middle class emerges to lead the group and they seize political power for themselves, (3) when they are generally distributed in the class structure in proportion to their numbers in the population and class supersedes ethnicity as the primary base of political action.² Despite its logical neatness, this model appears to have limited applicability as ethnic groups have remained a visible force in politics long after their period of decline as predicted from the model.³

In recognition of this fact, particularly as seen in the politics of New Haven, Raymond E. Wolfinger has recently put forward a revised version of this model which he terms a "mobilization theory."⁴ Briefly this states that

the strength of ethnic voting depends on both the intensity of ethnic identification and the level of ethnic relevance in the election. The most powerful and visible sign of ethnic political relevance is a fellow ethnic's name at the head of the ticket. . . . Middle class status is a virtual prerequisite for

by Leo E. Carroll*

*candidacy for major office; an ethnic group's development of sufficient political skill and influence to secure such a nomination also requires the development of a middle class.*⁵

Both Dahl's model and Wolfinger's theory agree on the need for a middle class to emerge within the ethnic group before it may achieve political power. They differ in that Dahl sees this class as a small corps of elites in command of an essentially working class faction which disintegrates when it is no longer working class, while Wolfinger maintains that it does not attain its pinnacle of power until it is primarily or strongly middle class.

The "mobilization theory" appears to be the more descriptive of the political situation in New Haven. This study is a test of its stratification hypotheses:

1. An ethnic group will not achieve representation at the major levels of political power in a community until it has developed a strong middle class, and
2. the representatives of the group at the major levels of political power will be drawn from its middle class.

The setting for this study is the city of Providence, Rhode Island. During the era of great migration Rhode Island, in general, and Providence, in particular, were experiencing rapid economic growth. The key industries were cotton and woolen manufacture, metals and machinery-making, jewelry and silverware, rubber goods, and knitting mills. Between 1860 and 1888, Providence and Pawtucket were the nation's leading machine-making centers. In 1879 Providence became the national center of the jewelry industry, and has maintained this position.⁶

This industrial expansion, of course, attracted many foreign migrants to the state. They began to arrive in the 1830s and 1840s and, by 1850, 16.2 percent of the state's population were born abroad. Some 70

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1 For instance, see Samuel Lubell, *The Future of American Politics*, second edition revised (Garden City, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), 79.

2 Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1961), chapter 4.

3 Dahl, 40-61; Lubell, 61-64; Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1963).

4 Raymond E. Wolfinger, "The Development and Persistence of Ethnic Voting," *American Political Science Review* (December 1965), 869-908.

5 Wolfinger, 905.

6 Kurt B. Mayer, *Economic Development and Population Growth in Rhode Island* (Providence, Brown University Press, 1953), 40-44.

percent of these came from Ireland.⁷ By 1880 "Rhode Island had . . . the largest proportion of foreign-born of any state of the Union, a distinction it was to retain for thirty years."⁸

After 1860 the composition of the foreign-born element began to change. In 1860 the Irish represented 68 percent of the foreign-born. By 1880 this had fallen to 48 percent. From 1860 to the turn of the century the main stream of migration was from Canada, most of the migrants being of French descent.⁹ This stream, in turn, was replaced by migration from Italy, and to a lesser extent from Portugal and Eastern Europe. By 1910 Roman Catholicism became the religion of the majority of the population, and Rhode Island has remained the only state with a Catholic majority.¹⁰

In 1954 a survey was undertaken to determine the ethnic origins of Rhode Island voters. Identification of ethnicity was by surname on the voter registration rolls. The following ethnic distribution was found in Providence: Italian (27%), Irish (26%), English (21%), Jewish (8%), French (7%), Portuguese (3%), Others (9%).¹¹ As these figures point out Providence is a multi-ethnic community and the Italians and Irish are its most important groups.

A systematic sample of 5 percent of the male and female gainfully employed workers resident in Providence in the years 1880, 1910, 1930, and 1960 was taken from the city directories of these years. Each sample was categorized as Irish, Italian, or Other on the basis of surname. These groupings were classified according to the occupational classification developed by Alba M. Edwards.¹² Because of the tenuous nature of these classifications they were checked against the census classifications for those years. In each case the ethnic distribution obtained by the sample appeared reasonable, being mindful of the fact that the census distribution pertains to only first and second generations while the sample included all. Further, the sample distribution for 1960 was similar to that found by the State Board of Elections noted above, the difference being -2.6 percent for the Irish and -0.2 percent for the Italians. The validation of the occupational groupings

revealed that each sample was probably somewhat over-representative of the higher level occupations. It is not believed that this affects the findings to any significant degree. This is so because each occupational category is treated as a separate sample for purposes of description and inference and there is no evidence of systematic under- or overrepresentation of ethnic groups in these sub-samples.

A difference of proportions test was used to determine if a group's representation in a given occupational category was significantly different from its representation in the sample. Because of the influence of large numbers the .001 level of significance was adopted in an attempt to equate statistical and practical significance. For purposes of description a proportional representation index was developed. This may be defined as the ratio of the proportion of a given occupational category represented by an ethnic group to its proportion in the sample. An index of 1.0 signifies proportionate representation; below 1.0 signifies underrepresentation, while over 1.0 indicates overrepresentation. In addition an occupational rank score for each group was calculated by ranking each occupational category, professional to unskilled, on a scale running from six to one. This rank was then multiplied by the percentage of an ethnic group in that category; these sub-totals were summed and divided by 100.

The data on political officeholders were secured from the *Manuals of City Government* for the appropriate years. Officeholders were classified into ethnic groups on the basis of surname, and into major and minor levels. In the major level are such offices as mayor, other elected general officials, city councilmen, department heads, commissioners, police chief, and fire chief. The minor level is residual and includes such offices as policemen, firemen, clerks, and laborers. Included also in the minor level are data taken from the report of a study of the ethnic composition of ward committees in Providence.¹³ These data were analyzed in the manner described above.

To test the second hypothesis, data on the occupations pursued by Irish and Italians in major

7 Mayer, 40-41.

8 Mayer, 48.

9 Mayer, 48.

10 Mayer, 52.

11 State Board of Elections, *Survey of Rhode Island Electors* (1954).

12 Alba M. Edwards, *A Socio-Economic Grouping of the Gainful Workers of the United States* (Washington,

United States Government Printing Office, 1938).

13 Elmer E. Cornwell, Jr., "Party Absorption of Ethnic Groups: the Case of Providence, Rhode Island," *Social Forces* (March 1960), 205-210. The years do not correspond exactly to the years selected in this paper but are close to them—1876, 1910, 1933, and 1957. This probably does not distort the data to any significant degree, as membership on these committees is usually for a number of years—sometimes for decades.

offices before they assumed office were obtained from the city directory. No techniques were needed to analyze these—they are allowed to speak for themselves.

Table I depicts a rather clear picture of the history of each group's occupational mobility. Considering the Irish first, we find that in 1880 they were a solidly working-class group. Their representation among the unskilled workers was twice as much as what one would expect on the basis of their proportion in the sample. Further, the proportion of professionals which were Irish was only one-third of what one would predict, and they were significantly underrepresented in the managerial and clerical categories as well. The occupational rank score of 2.3 indicates that, on

the average, they were a semi-skilled stratum in 1880.

In the thirty years between 1880 and 1910 the Irish exhibited considerable upward mobility, as evidenced by the change in their occupational score, from 2.3 to 2.9. Probably a major factor in this movement was the often cited effect of new waves of immigrants entering at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy and pushing other groups upward. In any event, by 1910 the Irish were generally distributed among the occupational groups in accord with their numbers in the population. The only exceptions to this were that the Irish were underrepresented by some 40 percent in the managerial group, and overrepresented by about the same amount among the unskilled workers.

Irish-born James E. Sullivan, M. D., contributing to the increase in the proportion of professionals in his ethnic group, lived at 254 Wayland Avenue from the turn of the century until his death in October 1920. He was treasurer of the Sullivan Investment Company and a director of the Rhode Island Hospital Trust. His wife was the daughter of Rhode Island industrialist Joseph Banigan, president of the U.S. Rubber Company.

This side view of his home exhibits the barn and its occupants as well.



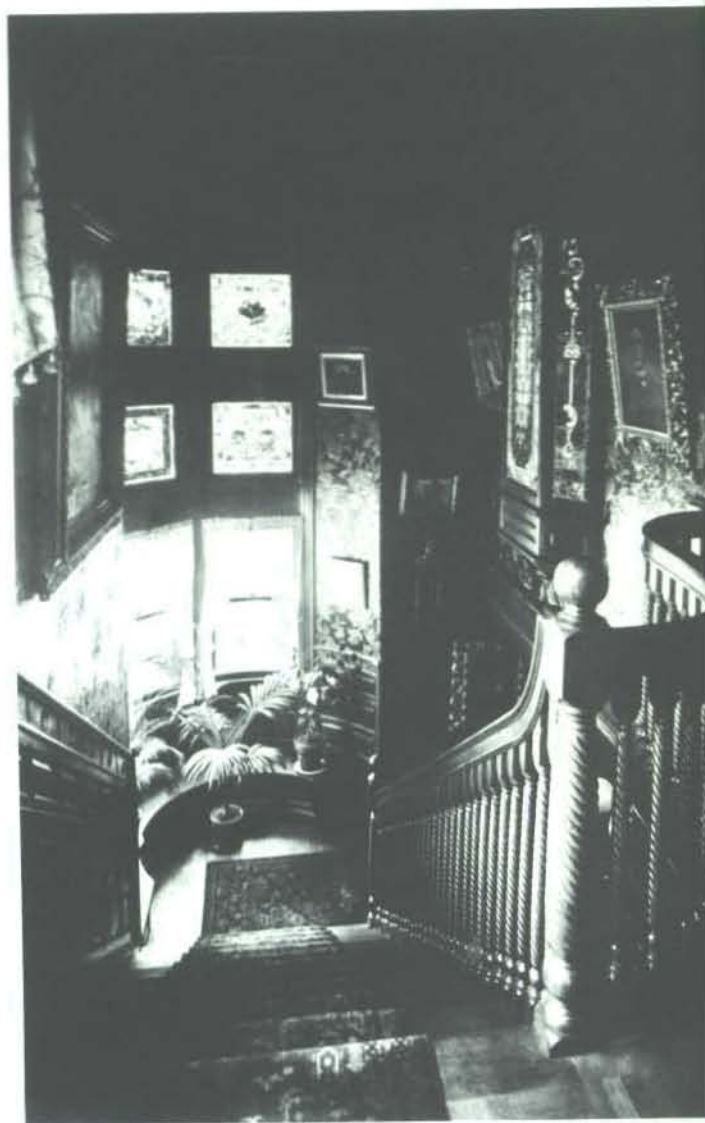
Table 1. PROPORTIONATE REPRESENTATION INDICES
FOR OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS AND OCCUPATIONAL SCORES

Ethnic Group	1880	1910	1930	1960
Irish				
Professionals	0.336*	0.857	1.275*	1.500*
Proprietors, Managers, Officials	0.544*	0.588*	0.732*	0.825
Clerks and Kindred Workers	0.460*	0.922	1.127*	1.197*
Skilled Workers	0.873	0.997	0.856	0.906
Semi-skilled Workers	0.982	1.119	1.039	0.842
Unskilled Workers	2.163*	1.425*	0.926	0.935
Occupational Score	2.3	2.9	3.4	3.3
Italians				
Professionals	—	0.219*	0.419*	0.338*
Proprietors, Managers, Officials	—	0.438*	0.794	0.911
Clerks and Kindred Workers	—	0.205*	0.406*	0.706*
Skilled Workers	—	0.959	1.231	1.052
Semi-skilled Workers	—	1.178	1.256	1.260*
Unskilled Workers	—	2.726*	2.175*	1.338*
Occupational Score	—	2.1	2.6	2.7
Others				
Professionals	1.317*	1.156*	1.063	1.123
Proprietors, Managers, Officials	1.218*	1.256*	1.196*	1.131*
Clerks and Kindred Workers	1.257*	1.128*	1.106*	1.066*
Skilled Workers	1.061	1.006	1.007	1.016
Semi-skilled Workers	1.009	0.924	0.906	0.937
Unskilled Workers	0.445*	0.604*	0.698*	0.847*
Occupational Score	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.3

* indicates that the difference between the proportion of a given occupational group which is of an ethnic group and the proportion of the sample which is of that group is significant at the .001 level or beyond.

During the next twenty years this pattern of upward mobility appears to have continued. By 1930 the Irish were no longer a working-class group as their occupational score of 3.4 indicates. Overrepresentation among the manual workers had

changed to slight underrepresentation. As foreshadowed in 1910, mobility for the Irish was into the professional and clerical groups and, in 1930, the proportion of Irish in these categories was significantly greater than their proportion of the population. Interestingly, however, they remained significantly underrepresented among the managers, proprietors, and officials.



Carpeted stairs of the Sullivan house led down to the decorated first landing.

Thirty years later, in 1960, this pattern persisted although the difference was no longer significant. The occupational score of 3.3 indicates that the upward mobility of the Irish, on the average, ended in this period. What this probably signifies, however, is a movement of upper and middle class Irish from the central city to the suburbs. This assertion appears to be warranted in view of the fact that the percentage of the Irish in the population decreased more in this period than in any other even though there was no large-scale in-migration. Still, the Irish remaining in the city may be characterized as a middle class group, being significantly overrepresented among the professional and clerical workers.

The wave of immigrants from Italy began to arrive in Providence around the turn of the century. As we find them in 1910 they are, as to be expected, a lower class group. Their occupational score at this time was 2.1, and they had almost three times as many unskilled workers, and only one-fifth as many professionals as their numbers in the population would warrant. Additionally they were also significantly underrepresented in the managerial and clerical groups.

As with the Irish before them, the Italians were upwardly mobile in the next two decades. By 1930 their occupational score rose to 2.6. Italian mobility seems to follow a different pattern than that of the Irish, however. The Irish remained significantly underrepresented among the managers, proprietors, and officials until 1960. As early as 1930, however, the Italians were no longer so underrepresented in this group, though they were among the professionals and clerical workers—the categories to which the Irish were most drawn. For a full explanation of this difference one would probably have to turn to a detailed examination of the cultures of these groups. One factor which immediately presents itself, however, is the difference in language and tastes of the Italians from those of the native population. This probably necessitated the establishment of a more or less self-sufficient community among them where it was probably not a factor among the Irish. What the implications of this difference in pattern of mobility have been for political repre-

sentation is not clear. That it may have been a factor operating through differences between Irish and Italians in providing leaders with requisite training for political office-holding is entirely possible, but difficult to assess because of the operation of other factors, such as language.

Between 1930 and 1960 the Italians continued their upward mobility into the managerial and clerical ranks, and their representation among the manual workers decreased considerably. This is particularly apparent in the category of unskilled workers. Still, however, they remain a working-class group as a whole as their occupational score of 2.7 indicates.

Our first hypotheses and this analysis of mobility allows us to make two predictions: that the Irish should have begun to be represented at the major levels of political power around 1930 while the Italians should be making their bid in this decade. However, we find that as far back as 1880 the Irish were represented at the major levels of political power. Interestingly the mayor at this time was Irish, and he held the office from 1864. Nevertheless, it is quite evident that, compared to the numbers, the Irish were conspicuously underrepresented in the city government at this time.

Table 2. PROPORTIONATE REPRESENTATION INDICES: POLITICAL OFFICES

Ethnic Group	1880	1910	1930	1960
Irish				
Major Offices	0.251*	0.595*	0.972	1.910*
Minor Offices	0.570*	1.463*	1.377*	1.748*
All Offices	0.520*	1.364*	1.303*	1.760*
Italians				
Major Offices	—	0.096*	0.463*	0.818
Minor Offices	—	0.192*	0.500*	0.907
All Offices	—	0.178*	0.488*	0.888
Others				
Major Offices	1.357*	1.292*	1.169	0.670*
Minor Offices	1.205*	0.878*	0.951	0.698*
All Offices	1.229*	0.926*	0.993	0.698*

*indicates that the difference between the proportion of offices at a given level held by members of an ethnic group and the proportion which that group is of the population is significant at the .001 level or beyond.

The reception room opened into Dr. Sullivan's well-stocked library.



Since 1880 the consistent trend has been for the Irish to gain an increasing proportion of city government offices. As early as 1910 they held significantly more than their share of all municipal offices. These were predominantly minor offices, however, and they remained underrepresented in the upper level. As predicted from our hypothesis it was precisely in 1930 that the Irish achieved proportionate representation on the major level of power. It was not until 1928 that the state legislature removed the property qualification for voting in city council elections in Rhode Island. Quite conceivably, a large body of middle class Irishmen, skilled in politics, was a requisite condition for the repeal of this law. An analysis of this dimension would be most interesting but is beyond the scope of this paper. In any event, the repeal of the property qualification was necessary for the Irish to achieve proportionate representation.

From 1930 to 1960 the movement of the Irish into the major and minor offices has given them a virtual stranglehold on city government. It seems reasonable to assume that the "other" category in 1880 was almost exclusively Yankee.¹⁴ Assuming this, we may conclude that, relative to their numbers in the population, the Irish have achieved greater representation

¹⁴ There were no other major ethnic groups in Providence at that time. Even if there were, they would probably not be represented in the city government to any great extent, as they would be of too recent entry. This assumption cannot be made for later periods, however, in view of the multi-ethnic nature of the Providence community.

This third-floor study was adopted by Dr. Sullivan's three sons for their own use.



in city government in 1960 than the Yankees had in 1880. What this means in terms of effective power, however, cannot be deduced and remains unclear.

As with the Irish, expectations concerning the Italians and based on this hypothesis are borne out. Significantly underrepresented at all levels in both 1910 and 1930, they are not so in 1960. At the very time that they appear to be moving into middle class occupations to a significant degree, they are achieving proportionate representation at all levels of city government. If the "mobilization theory" is correct and ethnic politics remains as strong in this decade as it has been in the past, we can probably expect one of two things to occur: a coalition of Irish and Italians or a struggle between them with political power in the balance. If the latter occurs, and past patterns prevail, then Providence may soon have its first Italian mayor, and control of city government may pass from the hands of the Irish to those of the Italians.

Our second hypothesis states that the major officeholders of an ethnic group will be drawn from its middle class. Table 3 presents the occupations of Irish and Italian elected general officials and city councilmen. The data clearly show the middle class origins of both the Irish and Italian major officeholders. Of 67 cases

A parade on Atwell's Avenue in 1906 appears to bear out the theory that the difference in language and tastes from the native population led Providence Italians to establish a more or less self-sufficient community of their own. The flag of their adopted country is conspicuously borne by the paraders, however.

Table 3. OCCUPATIONS OF IRISH AND ITALIAN ELECTED GENERAL OFFICIALS AND CITY COUNCILMEN, 1880, 1910, 1930, 1960.

Occupational Group	Ethnic Group		Total
	Irish	Italian	
Professionals	11	4	15
Proprietors, Managers, Officials	25	10	35
Clerks and Kindred Workers	5	3	8
Skilled Workers	7	1	8
Semi-skilled Workers	1	0	1
Unskilled Workers	0	0	0
Total	49	18	67

only 9 are from the manual working classes. However, this operationalization of major offices is not as rigid as that given by Wolfinger. He would restrict it to mayors. From 1832 to 1966 there have been ten mayors of Providence who were of Irish extraction; there were

Table 4. PROVIDENCE MAYORS OF IRISH EXTRACTION, 1832-1966.

Name	Term of Office	Previous Occupation
Thomas A. Doyle	1864-1869, 1870-1881, 1884-1886	Proprietor-Manager
Edwin D. McGuinness	1896-1898	Lawyer
William K. Reynolds	1905-1906	Pharmacist
Patrick J. McCarthy	1907-1909	Lawyer
Joseph H. Gainer	1913-1927	Lawyer
James E. Dunne	1927-1939	Proprietor
Dennis J. Roberts	1941-1951	Lawyer
William A. Cahir	1943-1944 (Acting Mayor)	Official
Walter H. Reynolds	1951-1965	Official
Joseph P. Doorley	1965-	Proprietor-Manager

none of Italian extraction. Of the ten Irish mayors five were professionals before assuming office, and five were managers, proprietors, or officials. Thus, either way we operationalize "major offices" the hypothesis is substantiated. Further it is interesting to note that,



Thomas A. Doyle, first of the city's ten mayors of Irish extraction, held that office from July 1864 to June 1869; from June 1870 to January 1881, and from January 1884 until June 1886 when he died in office. Providence voters re-elected him sixteen times.



with the exception of two years, since 1913 the mayor of Providence has been of Irish extraction.

This study has tested two hypotheses:

1. an ethnic group will not achieve representation at the major levels of political power in a community until it has developed a strong middle class, and
2. the representation of the group at the major levels of power will be drawn from the middle class.

The latter hypothesis has been definitely substantiated. One may wish to revise the first, however, in view of the fact that both Irish and Italians achieved representation at the major levels before the emergence of their respective middle classes. Representation, however, should be taken to mean more than occupying a position; it means representing the interests of the group. To what extent these early Irish and Italian political leaders did represent their respective groups has been impossible to specify within the context of this study. Certainly the strategy of using an ethnic group member as a figurehead was employed by political parties in Rhode Island as elsewhere. To be

This typical page of "business cards" in the souvenir program of the 1923 convention of the Sons of Italy in America held at Providence indicates the representation of local Italians in managerial and official categories.

Bennie Gambardella who lists himself as "A busy man" appears in the Providence Directory of that year as a deputy collector in the Federal building on Exchange Street.

<p>John D. Dine 100 Exchange Street, Providence, Rhode Island</p>	<p>Peoples Furniture Co. 100 Exchange Street, Providence, R. I.</p>
<p>Dr. Wm. Rosemont 100 Exchange Street, Providence, R. I.</p>	<p>Antonio Barba 100 Exchange Street, Providence, R. I.</p>
<p>Thomas C. Colburn 100 Exchange Street, Providence, R. I.</p>	<p>Bernardino Gambardella 100 Exchange Street, Providence, R. I.</p>
<p>Frank A. Gambardella 100 Exchange Street, Providence, R. I.</p>	<p>Victor J. Caproni 100 Exchange Street, Providence, R. I.</p>
<p>Bennie Gambardella 100 Exchange Street, Providence, R. I.</p>	<p>James Q. Dealey 100 Exchange Street, Providence, R. I.</p>

sure, the "yellow dog" Democrat was a cardinal fact of Rhode Island politics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁵ Even if they did represent ethnic interests it is apparent from the structure of government that they could not be effective to any great extent. Until the 1930s all effective power in the municipal government was vested in the city council, and this body was solidly Yankee Republican until the property qualification was lifted in 1928.¹⁶ As late as that year, it was possible for one astute observer of the political scene to write that the Republican Party has a "stranglehold on the government and nothing short of earthquake can shake it loose."¹⁷ That earthquake came in the form of the removal of the property qualification. A thoroughgoing historical study of the long and bitter feud surrounding this issue would do much to throw light on the role of the ethnic middle class in politics and the relationship between representation and effective power. This would perhaps be most enlightening due to the historical nature of most community power studies, and to the conspicuous absence of any consideration of ethnic groups in the majority of such studies.

15 See, for example, Erwin L. Levine, *Theodore Francis Green: The Rhode Island Years, 1906-1936*, (Providence: Brown University Press, 1963).

16 James Q. Dealey, "Government," in William Kirk, (ed.),

A Modern City (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1909).

17 James Q. Dealey, *Political Situations in Rhode Island* (Providence, 1928), 8.

Responses to the Rhode Island Workingmen's Reform Agitation of 1833

The political and constitutional issues that brought on the Dorr Rebellion in Rhode Island in 1842 had also agitated the state almost ten years earlier. In the spring of 1833 a group of artisans and workingmen began to demand suffrage extension and a new constitution to replace the old Charter of 1663, which still served as Rhode Island's fundamental law. These demands were voiced at public meetings, and according to an unfriendly observer, the workingmen orators "exhibited considerable talent."

*[Their speeches] though often spiced with satire and sarcasm, afforded evidence that those who delivered them had felt much and thought much, if they had not learned much. It was fashionable . . . to give the landholders the appellation of aristocrats and ruffled shirt gentry; and the speakers and their associates prided themselves in occupying an opposite standing. Hence, they frequently appeared . . . arrayed in green baize jackets to address the audience . . .*¹

An example of the militant tone of this workingmen's agitation of 1833 was the *Address on the Right of Free Suffrage* delivered in many Rhode Island localities that spring by Seth Luther, and widely distributed in printed form. Luther was a Providence carpenter and labor spokesman.² His suffrage speech advocated a number of radical ideas: non-payment of taxes by disfranchised citizens, passive resistance and even revolution. If the "aristocrats" of Rhode Island would not grant a new, reformed constitution, then the people of Rhode Island themselves, Luther maintained, could frame their own.³ If the established authorities dared to

*Edited by Marvin E. Gettleman and Noel P. Conlon**

resist this exercise of the people's sovereignty, then they would surely have to face the mighty and irresistible wrath of Rhode Island's 12,000 disfranchised non-landholders.⁴

Despite these radical pronouncements and threats of force, the results of the workingmen's agitation of 1833 were tame and inconclusive. No plans were made for radical action, and the initiative passed to the opponents of reform who came to the meetings with reports of the disastrous effects of suffrage extension in such states as Massachusetts and New York. On the defensive, the workingmen felt obliged to gather evidence to rebut their opponents more effectively. Thus, a corresponding committee headed by William I. Tillinghast, a barber from Providence, began writing to leading national political figures, as well as local notables. The original letters along with many replies are preserved in the John Hay Library at Brown University.⁵ These replies constitute a fascinating cross-section of American political opinion in 1833.

Eventually, however, the workingmen suspected that they had been maneuvered into the letter-writing campaign in order to divert them from more radical political activity.⁶ It was months in some cases before replies were received, and in the interim the agitation died down. Some of the workingclass orators toured the state on behalf of reform,⁷ but even the most militant of them eventually grew disillusioned and abandoned the struggle.⁸ Only a few of the participants in the workingmen's agitation of 1833 became involved in the later dramatic effort to transform Rhode Island's political system of the early 1840s—the Dorr Rebellion.⁹

*Mr. Gettleman is Associate Professor of History, Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn; Mr. Conlon is Reference Librarian, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

1 Jacob Fricze, *Concise History of the Efforts to Obtain an Extension of Suffrage in Rhode Island from the Year 1811 to 1842* (Providence, 1842), 22-23.

2 Louis Hartz, "Seth Luther: Working Class Rebel," *New England Quarterly*, XIII (September 1940), 401-418; Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* ([Albany, N. Y.], 1967), 87-90.

3 Seth Luther, *An Address on the Right of Free Suffrage, Delivered by the Request of Freeholders and Others of the City of Providence, Rhode Island, in the Old Town House . . .* (Providence, 1833).

4 The threat was made by Luther's associate in the reform cause, Providence barber William I. Tillinghast, at a meeting on May 10, 1833. Tillinghast's remarks are printed in the appendix to Luther, x.

5 They are in Vol. 17 of the Sidney S. Rider Collection of

Dorr Manuscripts. This entire collection is a rich storehouse of materials on the Dorr Rebellion and Rhode Island history in the 1830s and 1840s. It contains many thousands of items and not just the 770 reported to be here. Cf. Philip M. Hamer, ed., *Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States* (New Haven, 1951), 562.

6 See their letter to Vice-President Martin Van Buren, May 31, 1833.

7 Drafts of William I. Tillinghast's fiery speeches may be found in Vols. 5, 6, and 7 of the Rider Collection of Dorr Manuscripts.

8 See the 1834 broadside "To Working-Men," John Hay Library, Brown University. It was directed against Rhode Island politicians who were using the reform cause for their own opportunistic purposes; it urged workingmen not to allow themselves to be so used. See also the letter to Nehemiah R. Knight, July 25, 1833.

9 The best accounts of the Dorr Rebellion are: Arthur May Mowry, *The Dorr War: or, The Constitutional Struggle in Rhode Island* (Providence, 1901); Anne Mary Newton,

Although in this portrait Francis Baylies appears to be one of the "ruffled shirt gentry," his answer to the "humble mechanics" was a model of fellowship and tact.

From *History of Taunton, Massachusetts* . . . by Samuel Hopkins Emery, 1893.



TO FRANCIS BAYLIES¹⁰

Providence April 22, 1833.

Respected Sir,

At a meeting in this city on the 19th instant of persons favorable to the adoption in this state of the Massachusetts mode of Suffrage, the subscribers were appointed a committee to report on the subject at a future meeting.

We have since been told by persons interested in preventing such a measure that it would be the ruin of the state, and that the best part of the citizens of Massachusetts regret the extension of suffrage in that state, and would willingly adopt the R. Island plan were it practicable for them to do so.

Now as the subscribers yield to none in patriotic emotions, we would like to know from high authority if these things are so—for if they are we shall recommend to the adjourned meeting to abandon their enterprize and sacrifice their own rights on the altar of public good, but if these assertions prove as we suspect they will, to be a slander on our fellow

"Rebellion in Rhode Island: The Story of the Dorr War" (unpublished M. A. thesis, Columbia University, 1947); Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage: From Property to Democracy, 1760-1860* [Princeton, N. J., 1960], ch. XIII; and Peter J. Coleman, *The Transformation of Rhode Island, 1790-1860* [Providence, 1963], 254-294. None of these studies, however, adequately relate the Dorr Rebellion to the agitation of 1833.

citizens of R. Island and Massachusetts we should also like to know it that we may persevere, in what we at present consider a holy cause.

We regret the necessity that has compelled us to trespass on your valuable time, but we fondly anticipate that it cannot deprive you of much of it in answering what appears to us so plain a question, and as our adjourned meeting will be held in a few days,¹¹ we should deem it a lasting favor to receive at least a brief answer as soon as your other calls of duty will admit.

The undersigned tho' humble mechanics have seen enough of the world to know that gentlemen who have attained your lofty eminence are above being "respector of persons" and we therefore sign our proper names and occupations.

respectfully your fellow citizens.

William I. Tillinghast, Barber
Lawrence Richards, Blacksmith
William Mitchell, Shoemaker
Seth Luther, Housewright
William Miller, Currier
David Brown, Watch & Clock maker

Note—We thought it unnecessary for your information to state that no citizen of R. Island whatever his standing or whatever duties he may perform to his country can vote for his rulers unless he own a freehold estate worth \$134 or the eldest son of such freeholder.¹² But we are confidant from what we hear that there is a fire kindling in public opinion, in different parts of the state that will consume all the hay and stubble of aristocracy and primogeniture and leave to the land of Roger Williams and Nathaniel Greene the pure gold of democracy and republicanism. 8000 citizens of R. Island now vote. On the Massachusetts mode 20,000 would vote.

FROM FRANCIS BAYLIES

Taunton April 29, 1833

Gentlemen

Your communication of the 22d has been received. Occupation and indisposition are my excuses for not replying sooner.

¹⁰ Baylies [1783-1852] was a prominent scholar and diplomat, with close ties to the Democratic Party. He had served in Congress during the 1820s. See R[alph] D[avol], "Francis Baylies," *Dictionary of American Biography*, II, 75-76.

¹¹ The next meeting seems to have been held on May 10. For the proceedings, see appendix to Luther.

Sir Richard Arkwright, barber and inventor.

Engraving by J. Jenkins of painting by Joseph Wright, v. 4, National Portrait Gallery . . . by William Jerdan, London, 1833.



Whenever my fellow citizens have done me the honour to address enquiries to me on any subject relating to the public interest, I have, according to my information on the subject, answered the enquiries: it would be a poor return for your civility should I permit yours to remain without notice and without reply.

You wish to ascertain "whether the best part of the citizens of Massachusetts regret the extension of the right of suffrage, and whether they would willingly adopt the Rhode-Island plan were it practicable so to do."

I can only say that I have heard but few complain of the extension of the right of suffrage, and none express a preference of the "Rhode-Island plan."

It is true when the amendment of our Constitution which changed the qualification of voters from property to the payment of a tax was referred to the people in 1821,¹² many voted against it:—since then, it has seldom been made the subject of conversation, and from the general silence I infer a general acquiescence.

Charles Abbott, Lord Tenterden, barber's son and "great law lord," Chief Justice of England, 1818 to 1832.

Engraving by W. Holl of painting by J. W. Wright, v. 2, National Portrait Gallery . . . by William Jerdan, London, 1831.



Although you have assigned to me a much "loftier eminence" than I ever took to myself even in my vainest dream of self-importance,—yet, in one respect you judged rightly,—I am no "respector of persons." I acknowledge no other aristocracy than that which all good citizens should be willing to acknowledge—the aristocracy which nature herself seems to have established amongst men.—The influence which is exercised over society by men of genius, moral worth and personal accomplishments:—by men who possess a capacity for usefulness and have rendered services to their country,—and by men of wealth who use it for the public benefit—for promoting the happiness and advancing the knowledge of their fellow men—is a just and salutary influence. There is certainly no occasion for self-abasement amongst such as pursue mechanical employments, if rank be graduated according to the standard which I have assumed, and "barbers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, housewrights, curriers and clockmakers," the professions which you designate, are not "humble men" if their virtues bring them within this circle of excellence.

12 For the evolution of Rhode Island suffrage, see Williamson, *American Suffrage*, 242-246; Mowry, 18-21; Edwin Maxey, "Suffrage Extension in Rhode Island down to 1842," *American Law Review*, XLII (July-August 1908), 541-577; Patrick T. Conley, "Rhode Island Constitutional Development, 1636-1775: A Survey," *Rhode Island History*, 27 (April-June 1968), 49-63, 74-94. For the later story see Chilton Williamson, "Rhode Island Suffrage since the

Dorr War," *New England Quarterly*, XXVIII (March 1955), 34-50.

13 For the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention of 1821, which changed a freehold qualification into a tax-paying one, see Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Democracy, Liberty, and Property: The State Constitutional Conventions of the 1820s* (Indianapolis, 1966), Part I, esp. p. 11.

Major General Nathanael Greene, Rhode Island's hero "blacksmith."

Engraving by R. Whitechurch from a portrait by Rembrandt Peale.



If the inventions of an English barber have multiplied beyond measure the wealth of his own country—ameliorated the condition and increased the comforts of man, even in your own State—employed its citizens and doubled its capital—none need take shame to themselves for pursuing that profession. The spinning jenny of Arkwright is a truer emblem of British power than the sword of Wellington—for had it not been for the wealth which that machine and its improvements have poured into England, the nations of Europe would never have triumphed at Waterloo.

The eldest son of a barber who became "the great law lord" of England, may with propriety assume a rank equal at least to that of the eldest son of a Rhode-Island freeholder who votes on the strength of \$134 in land held by his father.

If profound genius for military affairs—if native greatness and grandeur of character—if high reaching chivalry—the loftiest honour, the most enduring fortitude and the most devoted patriotism can enoble man—then the hero "blacksmith" of Rhode Island

Roger Sherman rose from the "shoemaker's" bench to become a signer of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as a representative from Connecticut.

Portrait engraved by S. S. Jocelyn from a painting by Earle in Biography of the Signers to the Declaration of Independence by John Sanderson, Philadelphia, 1823.



might well have claimed a rank equal or superior to that of his noble competitor.

If the deepest sagacity—the application of the soundest and clearest intellect to the science of law and government can constitute a political philosopher—If the person who had the rare good fortune to have signed both the declaration of independence and the constitution of the United-States has thereby acquired any title to distinction—then the descendant of an Earl of Rivers who from the "shoemaker's" bench ascended to the highest elevations of society, rose above the level of his ancestry noble as they were.

When our ancestors were engaged in that dire conflict with the savage race on the issue of which their existence depended—as well as the question whether the fair regions which now constitute New-England, should become the seats of learning, law, religion and civilization, or be yielded back to desolation and barbarism—the sword which rescued them was wielded by a "housewright."

I could swell this catalogue with the names of many

Colonel Benjamin Church was the "housewright" who wielded the rescuing sword against the Indians in King Philip's War.

Engraving from *The Book of the Indians* . . . by Samuel G. Drake, 8th ed., 1845



other illustrious men who have instructed and delighted the world, but these instances are enough to shew that

"Honour and shame from no condition rise." Within the last half century, the application of mechanical science to the arts by practical mechanics, has done more to accelerate the progress of man in knowledge, and to increase his independence, wealth and comforts, than all the labours of all the theoretic philosophers of the same period;—the labours of the first have consolidated and strengthened the social institutions—the theories of the last would have made them a vast ruin.

Unless public sentiment should indicate in the clearest and most unequivocal manner that changes in the provisions of existing constitutions of government are necessary (and the people must determine whether they are) I should oppose them on the ground that

"It is sometimes better to endure the ills we have Than fly to others that we know not of."

I have often wondered when arguments founded on

the notion of the natural and abstract rights of man have been applied to the social regulations which communities have adopted:—it is an undeniable truth that the social man is deprived in some measure of his native independence, and cannot be "a law to himself," but must be restrained by the rules which govern the community of which he is a member—if it were not so, he would be a savage. The formation of social communities governed by laws, negatives the principle of absolute entire independence. Men when they come into Society surrender a portion of natural liberty to secure more than an indemnity. Amongst the advantages secured by this surrender is the protection of individual property, the privilege of "sitting under their own vines and fig-trees with none to molest or make them afraid"—but those "vines and fig-trees" only become "their own" in consequence of social regulations.

Feelings and sympathies arising from particular associations, ancient usages and historical recollections—peculiar local circumstances—the modes of life—the pursuits of the people whether agricultural, commercial, manufacturing, literary or mechanical and the extent and predominance of each—religion—the degree of knowledge and moral refinement, must all be consulted in the formation of political constitutions, and therefore it is that no instrument of government can be so fashioned that it can be applied with equal advantage to all conditions of men and to all nations—even some of the States of this Union would become restive under constitutions congenial to others.

In some countries a despotism may be the only alternative against anarchy: it would be as impossible to sustain a free government in Russia, as it would be in the United States to sustain a government of King, Lords & Commons.

The freehold qualification in Rhode-Island might have been expedient once:—the population being entirely agricultural when the charter was granted, it was not unwise, perhaps, to provide that the qualification should consist of that species of property which constituted the entire property of the Colony—but circumstances have changed—Society has assumed a new aspect—other interests have sprung

into life and activity which would seem to render it expedient that other classes besides agriculturalists should have some voice in the election of their rulers and some influence in legislation: Much property exists in personal effects which often constitute the entire capital of many merchants, traders, manufacturers, mechanics, sea-faring and professional men. Once, one hundred and thirty four dollars would have purchased a farm and a permanent residence:—now, that sum, invested in real estate, is not enough to bind the freeholder to the State, or to create any strong interest in its prosperity:—to secure the attachment and support of the people other and higher feelings must be relied on than those which arise from a trifling property in the soil.

The provision in your charter making a freehold qualification indispensable to the exercise of the right of suffrage, operates with much inequality in the City of Providence and in the compact and populous towns:—in such places the smallest house and shop-lots are worth more than \$134—therefore men of small means must either associate in the purchase of real estate of greater value, or throw away the sum necessary to constitute the qualification in strips of land far from their domicils, or abandon the most invaluable privilege of an American citizen.¹⁴

"The right of electing and of being elected," is, in my opinion, the most important of our civil rights and everyone is justified for attempting by constitutional and proper means to obtain that right.—Without it, he has not, in his own country any privilege superior to the privileges of the stranger and sojourner.—he is protected in person and property—and so is the foreigner—nay a short residence and \$134 in land will impart to the foreigner this high privilege denied to native born Americans.—The possession of \$134 in land imparts no superior intelligence or moral worth, and I know no good reason why the want of that particular qualification should deprive a native-born Rhode-Islander of that which may now be called a birth-right in Massachusetts.

With respect [to] universal suffrage I can [missing] say that the current [of] the opinion both in the United States and England [run]ning in that direction, the temper of the times is favourable to the

John Quincy Adams, Massachusetts representative to Congress, replying from his home in Quincy, signs himself "your fellow Citizen."

Engraving by J. W. Paradise of a painting by A. B. Durand, from v. 4, The National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans, 1859.



notion. In Europe the experiment may be dangerous—in America it cannot be, until the character of the people is totally changed—We have but few of that class which in Europe constitute "the rabble," and there is a high degree of independent and manly feeling amongst our poorest citizens which will long preserve them from the influences of bribery, corruption and intimidation.

I am gentlemen
with much respect
Your obedient servant
Francis Baylies

FROM JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

Messrs, William I. Tillinghast, Lawrence Richards, William Mitchell, Seth Luther, William Miller, and David Brown. Providence R. I.

Quincy 10 May 1833

Gentlemen

I have received your Letter of the 22^d of last Month enquiring my opinion with regard to the adoption, in the State of Rhode Island of the mode of practice, in Massachusetts, of the political right of Suffrage—

¹⁴ Baylies here is mistakenly assuming that owners of real estate in cities were disfranchised. See the sources in note 12.

The Administration of the Government, and the modification of the Constitution in each State of this Union, are exclusively at the disposal of the People of the State itself—As the point upon which your enquiries turns, is one, upon which I conclude from your Letter that there is a great diversity of opinions among the People of your State, it might be considered obtrusive in giving his opinion, for a Stranger to pronounce on one side of the question, or the other—The right of suffrage is in every State of the Union subject to some limitation, but scarcely any two States have the same.

With the system of suffrage established in Massachusetts, so far as concerns the right of voting I do not know that there is any dissatisfaction among the People—If there were, it is probable measures would be taken for amending in that respect the Constitution. I see no occasion for dissatisfaction with it myself, and feel none—Whether it would be expedient for the People of Rhode-Island to adopt it, I am not competent to give an opinion deserving to be considered of any authority—Were it otherwise, I would cheerfully give it in compliance with your desire; being with great respect and consideration, your fellow Citizen

J. Q. Adams¹⁵

TO MARTIN VAN BUREN

Providence May 31, 1833

Respected Sir,

At a meeting held in this city on the 19th ultimo of persons favorable to the adoption in this state of the Massachusetts mode of Suffrage, the subscribers were appointed a prudential committee with an understanding that they should report their proceedings at subsequent meetings.

For many years the proposed plan has been much on the minds of some of the committee but whenever proposed some objection or other has always been interposed by the timid or the interested.

For four or five years past the election of Jackson to the Presidency has been urged by a majority of freeholders in this state as an insurmountable objection against General Suffrage from the well known fact that he was emphatically the choice

In this picture, Martin Van Buren seems to reveal the receptive thoughtful attitude of his reply to the six Rhode Islanders.

Portrait engraved by E. Wellmore from H. Inman's painting, v. 3, The National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans, 1836.



of the democracy or common people and from their real or pretended fears that he would use his military prowess to subjugate the liberties of the people and build a despotism on their ruins.

Notwithstanding the committee is composed of individuals of all parties now existing in the State yet they all agree that whatever differences of opinion may at present prevail on minor political questions, yet that the real or pretended fears alluded to have been completely annihilated and that those who formerly urged them to defeat our enterprise must acknowledge one of two things: either that the democracy of the country decided safely in choosing our present Chief Magistrate, or having decided unsafely—the strength and purity of our glorious republican Constitution is sufficient to regulate any temporary error which the system of General Suffrage may occasion.

Soon after our appointment our former opposers not having the effrontery to urge their exploded objection must needs create new ones. The first was that "the Massachusetts mode of Suffrage would ruin Rhode Island" and that "the best part of the citizens of that

¹⁵ For Adams' later response to the Rhode Island reform movement, see Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams* (Philadelphia, 1874-1877), XI, 152; XII, 10.

State regret their extension of Suffrage and would willingly adopt the Rhode Island mode were it practicable for them to do so."

We immediately addressed letters to Hon. Francis Baylies, Hon. J. Q. Adams and Hon. Daniel Webster¹⁶ to ascertain from such high authority if those things were so.

The answers of Messrs. Baylies and Adams have been published pretty generally in the newspapers. From Mr. Webster we have received no answer.

Having so completely proved this first new coinage of our opponents to be a counterfeit we were in hopes that the time had at last arrived when our favorite project would be adopted without further opposition; but our hopes were vain for their mint has issued another objection in this shape:—

"If General Suffrage is allowed in this State it will be the same as it is in New York where vessel loads of foreigners land and go immediately to the polls and vote away the rights and monies of American born citizens."

Now if it would not infringe on your valuable time nor the dignity of your high office (both of which every American citizen has an equal interest in) the subscribers would consider it as a great favor to receive from you answers to the following questions: 1st—What are the laws in New York concerning the Right of Suffrage?

2d—Do you consider there is any evil arising either under the present law or practice in New York so great as that one would be, of sacrificing the true Democratic principle of General Suffrage to any notion of expediency arising from a fear that some are now allowed to vote who are incapable of exercising that high privilege?

And lastly—Have you any doubts of the perfect safety of trusting to the virtue and intelligence of the aggregated voters of New York under your present election laws, to manage the public concerns?

As these questions relate solely to the affairs of the state of New York we can see no impropriety in a distinguished native born citizen answering them, but if our humble opinions (on this last point) are overruled by those who certainly have a better op-

portunity and a better right to judge, the only part we can act is to submit without a murmur.

very respectfully your fellow citizens

William I. Tillinghast, Barber

Lawrence Richards, Blacksmith

William Mitchell, Shoemaker

Seth Luther, Housewright

William Miller, Currier

David Brown, Watch & Clock maker

FROM MARTIN VAN BUREN

Washington July 9th, 1833

Gentlemen

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter requesting information concerning the manner in which the right of Suffrage is regulated in the State of New York, together with my opinion upon the utility and practical operation of the system now in force there.

I can have no objection whatever to furnish the information you desire, but I feel some delicacy, under the circumstances of the case, in expressing an opinion on the several points to which you refer. The right of Suffrage not only controls the election of the State functionaries, but that of the elective officers of the General Government, is, by the Federal constitution, made dependent on it; and in this respect, it is undoubtedly to be considered not only as a matter of primary importance to those who are immediately interested in it, but as a subject of interest to all parts of the Union. The settlement of all questions connected with this franchise in any particular State, has however, usually been regarded as belonging exclusively to the people of that State, and under ordinary circumstances any interference by a Citizen of another State, would justly be considered as improper. Thus viewing the matter, I certainly should not have ventured an opinion upon any point bearing on the question now under discussion in Rhode Island, had it not been for the request contained in your letter, which the relations I hold to the people of the U. States, make it my duty to respect.

By the first Constitution of N York, the possession of a freehold estate of the value of \$250 over and above

¹⁶ The letter to Webster, dated April 22, is in the Webster Papers, The New Hampshire Historical Society. Its text is substantially the same as the letter to Francis Baylies, written the same day. For this information we are indebted to Mr. E. C. Beer, The Papers of Daniel Webster, Baker Library, Dartmouth College.

all debts charged thereon, was necessary to entitle a person to vote for Governor, Lieut. Governor & Senators—Members of Assembly were chosen by persons paying taxes, and possessing freeholds of the clear value of \$50, or renting tenements of the annual value of five dollars. The obvious injustice, and ascertained inutility of this regulation, together with other causes, led in 1821 to the call of a Convention for the revision of our State constitution—of that convention I had the honor to be a member, and in the discharge of the duties imposed upon me by that situation I laboured, and in conjunction with a majority of the convention, laboured successfully, to abolish the freehold qualification. The principle which I then advocated and which was established by the amended constitution, extended the right of voting for all elective offices of the State Government, to any Citizen who should contribute to the support of Government, either by the payment of taxes in money, or by labor on the highways, or by service, according to law, in the militia. The results of experience & the progress of liberal opinions soon led to a further extension; and by an amendment to the constitution finally adopted in 1826, the right of suffrage was given to every male Citizen of full age who shall have been an inhabitant of the State for one year, & of the County for six months, preceding the election. This provision however does not extend to persons of colour, who by the constitution of 1821 are not allowed to vote, unless they have been for three years Citizens of the State, and for one year before the

election seized & possessed of a freehold of the clear value of \$250, & have been rated & paid a tax thereon.

The Government of N York has for several years been administered under the liberal system established by the new Constitution, and the still more liberal amendment of 1826, in a manner which appears to have been satisfactory to the people. It is possible that there may be some who reject the extension of the right of suffrage, and who would be gratified by the revival of the old qualification; but I do not believe that such a feeling is entertained by considerable portion of our Citizens. I am very sure that any attempt to restrict the exercise of the right, and more especially to restore the freehold qualification, would be put down by an overwhelming majority.

In acting upon this subject, my own course has never been influenced by any apprehension that it would be dangerous to the rights of property, to extend the right of voting to those who were without property. Our experience has, I think fully demonstrated, that in a community like that which composes a great majority of every State in our confederacy, there is no reason for alarm in this respect.

At an earlier period of my public life, I was not entirely free from apprehension of the influence of wealth upon so extended a suffrage [as] that which is now possessed in New York. Upon this head, however, we are now able to speak from full & later facts [†] [of] experience; and it has given me the highest gratification to be convinced that my fears were without adequate foundation. Numerous opportunities to test the firmness of our Citizens, and their ability to resist the seduction of wealth, have been furnished within the last twelve years; and although some local & temporary advantages may have been occasionally gained through such means, the general incorruptibility of our Citizens has been triumphantly established. Nor have I any doubt that such will long continue to be the history of our people; for although a greater disparity in their condition may naturally be expected from an increase of population & other causes, yet on the other hand it



Courtesy, Brown University Library.

As Vice President of the United States, Van Buren used his franking privilege in posting his letter.

may be hoped that the means of education, and of moral improvement will be proportionally increased, and that under their influence the spirit of independence, & of intelligent patriotism, which now prevails among all classes will be cherished and exhibited by every succeeding generation.

With my best wishes for your individual prosperity, and for that of the State to which you belong,

I remain, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servt.

M. Van Buren

TO NEHEMIAH R. KNIGHT¹⁷

Providence July 25, 1833

Respected Sir—

The subscribers are a prudential committee, appointed at a very large meeting of citizens favorable to the adoption in this state of the Massachusetts mode of Suffrage, held in this city on the 19th of April last.

It has been well ascertained that the present excitement on this subject originated on the 1st of April last, among the militia of some parts of our state, particularly in this city, in consequence of their being compelled to do military duty, without being allowed to vote for any of their military or civil officers.

In 1811, an attempt was made by the democratic party in this state, to obtain the right of Suffrage for all citizens residing in the state 1 year and who contributed to the support of government, either by taxes or military duty. The Providence Patriot, then conducted by Jones & Wheeler, was the champion of the cause.—A Senate was elected in the spring previous, with the avowed object of carrying the above principle into effect; & such a bill did pass the Senate, with only two dissenting voices; but the federal party, still retaining a majority in the house, defeated the measure by a vote of 39 to 25, every one of the 39 being federalists.

In 1829, a memorial was presented to the General Assembly, signed by about 2,000 citizens of all parties, including 700 freeholders; stating among other things, that out of 20,000 free adult male inhabitants, in this state, 8,000 (that number owning

Governor Nehemiah Rice Knight was elected to the U. S. Senate to serve out the unexpired term of James Burrill, Jr., who died in office, December 25, 1820. Returned to the Senate for successive terms, he took an understandably active interest in Rhode Island's August, 1833, congressional election.

Photograph by Leo P. Reardon of portrait by James Sullivan Lincoln in the Rhode Island State House.



\$134 worth of land or being the eldest sons of such) were allowed to vote for their rulers, and 12,000 more were refused that privilege.¹⁸ Also that this state and Virginia, were the only remaining states which required a landed qualification, to vote. These statements were not denied at that time, nor have they been since. Virginia has since fallen in with the system of the other states, leaving Rhode-Island as the only state in this Republican Union, which now adheres to the landed qualification. The prayer of the memorial was, that the Assembly would so alter the present election law, as to extend the elective franchise to at least a majority of the male adult inhabitants of the state.

The memorialists were denounced in the house as "vagabonds and renegades from other states," and the memorial was rejected, without being read in that body.¹⁹ These last melancholy facts would not have been mentioned on this occasion, had not some of our committee been among the memorialists.

Since our appointment, it has become our duty to solicit information from gentlemen of distinction in

¹⁷ Knight (1780-1854) had been governor of Rhode Island from 1817 to 1821. In 1823 he was elected to the U. S. Senate, where he opposed the banking policies of the Jackson administration and so drifted into the Whig camp. See his apologetic pamphlet, *Address to the People of Rhode Island* [Providence, 1832]. Cf. *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1949* [p. 1422],

where Knight's Whig affiliation is not acknowledged. Tillinghast also claimed that the workingmen had written a similar letter to Democratic governor of Rhode Island, John Brown Francis, without receiving a reply. See Tillinghast's speech, Rider Collection, v. 17, document 45, John Hay Library. For calling this speech to our atten-

other states, in order to controvert the false and crude statements of those who oppose our enterprise. These gentlemen have generally expressed some reluctance, in interfering in a subject which they considered as belonging exclusively to the people of the state itself. This objection, of course, cannot be made by a citizen of Rhode Island.

Since correcting the falsehoods and crudities above mentioned (the correspondence connected with which you must have seen published) we have looked around our own state to find some distinguished citizen who would have the independence to give us advice in our course.—Our eyes have rested on you, our fellow townsman.—We looked on you as one, who, being an extensive landholder yourself, have received every mark of confidence from the landholders of this state; and as one descending from ancient landholders, who possessed the same confidence; but we also remember you as one who has always used that confidence with candor moderation and urbanity towards your fellow citizens of all parties and all classes.—We therefore appeal to you with confidence, and though we have but one question to ask, yet it is a comprehensive one and one, which, in our opinion involves the great question whether Rhode-Island shall or shall not be a Republican State, according to the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States and according to the example of our 23 sister states Question—Do you believe that any mode of Suffrage can be adopted in this state, short of landed qualification, so as to admit the great body of the male adult inhabitants of the state to vote for their rulers, without endangering the rights or property of the citizens?—If so, please to state what mode suggests itself to you as the most safe, considering our long established habits, and most just, considering our present circumstances.

Three of our committee happen to own freeholds and three not; but we can see no good reason for either of us being excluded from the polls; we all feel equally interested in the welfare of the state having all contributed to its support; and such is our confidence in your moral and mental qualification to answer our question equitably, that without any pre-

vious knowledge of your opinion on the subject, we could (were it not inconsistent with our inalienable rights) make an umpire of you to settle this controversy.

very respectfully, your fellow citizens

William I. Tillinghast, Barber

Lawrence Richards, Blacksmith

William Mitchell, Shoemaker

Seth Luther, Housewright

William Miller, Currier

David Brown, Watch & clock Maker

P.S. Though the committee is made up from all the political parties now in the state, yet to avoid all suspicion of sinister motives, we would suggest, that an answer is not expected by us, till the approaching Congressional election is decided.

FROM NEHEMIAH R. KNIGHT

Providence September 2, 1833

Gentlemen

Your letter of the 25th of July enquiring whether any mode of suffrage can be adopted in this State short of landed qualification &c. &c. has been recd. and would have been replied to at an earlier day had you not suggested that an answer was not expected until after the August election—that having passed I will now give the result of my reflections on the subject of your enquiry—

With truth it may be said that this subject is not attached to any of the political parties that agitate and afflict our State at the present day—

It is not a component part of the Jackson, the National Republican or Antimasonic party, but on the contrary is a great question of itself, a fundamental principle in our Government that is proposed to be altered or amended—It is a question that merits the attention of the whole people, and should be freely but fairly discussed by them, without passion, party or prejudice, but upon the eternal principles of right, justice and sound policy. Let it be so discussed and so decided & the will of the people must be obeyed—

The State in which we live is a community of persons all of whom are equally protected by general laws—The poorest is protected in his rights, his

tion we are indebted to Patrick T. Conley, Assistant Professor of History, Providence College.

18 The memorial of 1829 was reprinted as an appendix to Luther.

19 The memorial was referred to a committee of the General Assembly headed by Benjamin Hazard of Newport.

Hazard's report amounted to a forceful defense of Rhode Island's traditional political institutions and a denial of the need or desirability of reform. It is reprinted in U. S. Congress, House, *Interference of the Executive in Affairs of Rhode Island*, Report No. 546, 28 Cong., 1st Sess. (1844), 377-401.

person, his family & effects as well and as truly as the richest. Our laws extend to every citizen the same liberty of conscience, freedom of speech and of action. The law compels the rich to contribute to the maintenance and support of the poor, when by casualty, sickness or other cause they are unable to provide for themselves. All those who possess property largely contribute to the education of the children of the poor in the form of public schools—In short the same privileges, afforded by our laws to one person is extended to all, except the right of suffrage or privilege of voting at elections. The right of voting is not given exclusively to a few, but is open to all who will avail themselves of it—The law knows no classes & if any exist they are not created by law—To extend the right of suffrage to a greater number of our citizens seems to be the object of your solicitude. To a proper and judicious extension of the privilege but few will object—The question is the mode of doing it—about which there may be some diversity of opinion—Were we to extend the right of suffrage to all, it would not make them freemen without education, wisdom and virtue to direct their actions—nor would it increase civil liberty, or add stability or permanency to Republican principles—It may be remarked as a general rule, that those who will not by industry, frugality and good moral habits take care of themselves & families are not the best guardians of others—By so broad an extension of the right of suffrage we may increase the power of a few, without benefit to the many—By extending the right to all, it is feared many might be improperly controlled in their franchise by others, who possess greater power but less virtue or patriotism—perhaps by the designing demagogue, a character as dangerous to the welfare of a State as an Aristocracy—Power wielded by a demagogue is as potent for the time as power wielded by a Monarch—It often assumes the substance of despotism under the guise of democracy, and in its effect may be as tyrannical as power in a legitimate or constitutional Monarch—We should be anxious to avoid those evils, and endeavour to extend the right of suffrage to every intelligent, industrious and frugal citizen—By so doing we shall add to the means

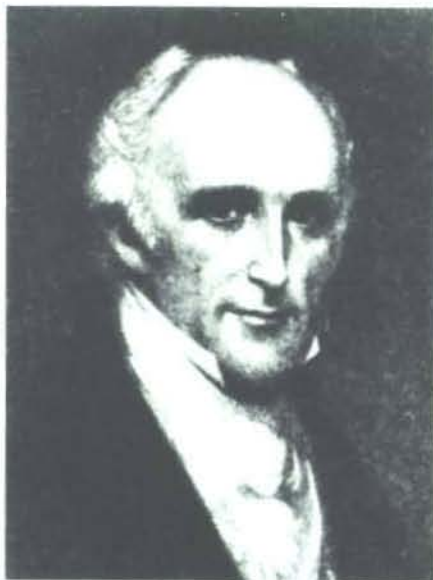
of human happiness and give stability and prosperity to our commonwealth—In an agricultural community where land is divided as equally as it is in this Country I do not perceive any objection to the extension of the right of suffrage to the utmost limits desired by any person, but in a dense and crowded population it is otherwise—Your own observations will not fail to suggest objections to it—If you do not see them on this side the Atlantic, turn your eyes to the most liberal government of Europe—There it is said the price current of votes for a member of parliament is as well understood as the price current of cotton or other article in the Market—And it is with sincere regret I learn instances of similar violations of liberty have occurred in this Country. To guard against such violations of the rights of freemen should be the constant care of every legislator, patriot & friend of liberty—

An aristocracy may exist in our Country, but it is rarely combined on political questions—it never can be composed for a long time of the same individuals—The statute regulating descents of real estate distributing the property of the parent among all the children and the intermarriage of all denominations are sure barriers against a family aristocracy or an Aristocracy of blood—And the frequent changes of property do not threaten great danger (at present) of a permanent Aristocracy being based on so uncertain & evanescent a substance as wealth—

It is admitted much may be said in favour of the real estate qualification as the rule governing the right of suffrage—It is a rule difficult for knavery & cunning to evade. It better protects the honest and bona fide freeman against fraud than a personal property qualification—Real estate is always to be found to answer the wants of the government in times of necessity, altho it may daily change owners, its liability to the government is inalienable—Hence a preference may be urged in favour of a real estate qualification—But the question you propound is, "can any mode of suffrage be adopted short of the land qualification, so as to admit the great body of the Male inhabitants to vote at elections without endangering the rights & property of the citizens"?

²⁰ Knight was anticipating the developments in 1834, when attempts were made at a number of levels to bring about constitutional reform in Rhode Island. Knight himself, running as Whig candidate for governor, also accepted the nomination of the Constitutional Party in 1834. This latter party was organized earlier in the year to bring about political reform. Its most active member was Thomas W. Dorr. Workingmen like William Tillinghast, who had been active in the agitation of 1833, resented

Knight's presumption to run as a reformer in light of his conservative views, revealed in this letter. See broadside "To Working-Men" (1834). In any case, Knight lost the election to Democratic-Antimasonic incumbent John Brown Francis. See Edward Field, ed., *State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations at the End of the Century: A History* (Boston, 1902), I, 326-327. Later that year the General Assembly, yielding to popular clamor, authorized a constitutional convention. However, the

*Richard Rush, lawyer and statesman.**Portrait, reproduced from the Dictionary of American Portraits, Dover Publications, Inc., 1967.*

From the consideration I have given to the subject I am of opinion that to abolish the real estate qualification of a freeman would not at this time be judicious, were it practical, nor would it conduce to the interest and welfare of the State—I am also of the opinion that the elective franchise may be extended without endangering the rights & property of the citizens, and with safety to our republican institutions, by adding another rule or mode of qualification to the one existing by law—Were it practicable, moral & intellectual qualifications might be adopted as the rule, but believing such a rule could not be carried into effect according to its intent and meaning, another has suggested itself to my mind, which however has not been fully considered & matured in all its ramifications, & therefore is not at this time prepared for your consideration—Besides I understand the matter is pending before the legislature of the State and probably will be discussed at the next session,²⁰ therefore it would be considered improper if not presumptuous in me to present a scheme under such circumstances—At a proper sea-

good faith of the legislature was doubtful on this occasion. Even a conservative writer at the time flatly stated that this call for a convention in 1834 "was a sham movement designed to amuse that portion of the citizens . . . who were loudest in their demands for a constitution and extension of suffrage" (Frieze, 26). When the convention met in the fall, known opponents of reform, such as Benjamin Hazard, were present. These men fought most reform proposals and finally stayed away from con-

*son you shall be furnished with it, if requested—
With great respect, I have the honour to be,
your most obt. humble. servt—
N. R. Knight*

TO RICHARD RUSH²¹

Providence Dec. 10, 1833

*Respected Sir,
In April last there was a numerous meeting of citizens, of this city and vicinity, to consider the expediency of altering the present law of R. Island, by which all persons are prohibited from voting at elections, but such as own freehold estates, and the eldest sons of such freeholders.
The subscribers were appointed a Committee to collect information on the subject, and although we consider the land qualification a monopoly, which ought not to exist in a government professedly republican, yet were we met at the threshold of our enquiries, by assertions from our own citizens, that the best part of the citizens, in all the other States of the Union, regretted their extension of Suffrage,*

*vention sessions, insuring the absence of a quorum. See the proceedings of the convention in *Manufacturers and Farmers Journal* (Providence), September 8, 15, 1834. Cf. Mowry, 41; Newton, 16-17. Coming directly after the failure of the workingmen's agitation of 1833, this defeat of reform efforts in 1834 helps explain the desperation which attended the radical Dorrite movement of 1842.*

²¹ Rush (1780-1859), son of Benjamin Rush, was a prominent Pennsylvania lawyer and diplomat. A supporter of Presi-

and would gladly exchange their election laws, for that of R. Island.

We have written several distinguished gentlemen in other States, on the subject. The answers of Hon. J. Q. Adams, Francis Baylies and Martin Van Buren, you may have seen published. They triumphantly disprove the existence of any such "regret," in their respective States; but as we would be more fully satisfied on the subject, before taking further steps in the business, we now respectfully enquire of yourself; If the best part of the citizens of Pennsylvania regret their extension of Suffrage? And as our opponents also interpose, as an insuperable objection to our plan, the necessary admission of naturalized foreigners to the polls, we would also respectfully enquire; If any fears exist, in your State, of the consequences of admitting naturalized foreigners to vote for those who govern them? Four of the subscribers happen to be freeholders, and two not; and not only the Committee, but all our friends, are scattered through every political party in the State.

very respectfully, your fellow citizens,

William I. Tillinghast, Barber
Lawrence Richards, Blacksmith
Franklin Cooley, Stone-cutter
Benjamin Joy, Machinist
William Miller, Currier
David Brown, Watch & Clock maker

FROM RICHARD RUSH

Sydenham, near Philadelphia
December 23, 1833.

Gentlemen:

I received your letter of the 10th of this month, in which you express a desire to know, through me, whether the citizens of this state regret the footing upon which the right of suffrage is placed by its laws; also, if any fears exist as to the consequences of allowing naturalized foreigners to vote in Pennsylvania. I can have no objections to answering your inquiries as far as I am able. I do not suppose that my opinions or views on the subjects in question, can be of much

account; but such as they are, I place them at your service.

The right of suffrage may be said to be, in effect, universal, or nearly so, in this state; the payment of any state or county tax no matter how small, assessed six months before the election, being the only requisite, after citizenship and two years residence. I have not heard of any objection to this principle, nor do I believe that any exists. The elections on the whole are conducted in an orderly manner, nor do I imagine that any one dreams of altering the law. The first words of the state constitution as of that of the United States are, "We the people." I cannot well see how anyone can be denied a vote under such a system of government. It would be out of harmony with the genius of all its other parts. These first words of both constitutions, point to the true character of our country, where there is but one great order—the order of the people. The poor as the rich, the common labourer as the freeholder, are required to bear their equal share of the public burdens. The names of the former, are not seen on the list of exempts. They find no substitutes, for the hardships and perils of all personal service. If they pay no taxes in virtue of fixed property, they pay the "blood tax" as the late governor Wright of Maryland once said. They are the rank and file in war, defending the country and contributing to its glory. They fertilize the earth by their toil. They give to life its accommodations, its embellishments, by the work of their hands in every species of artisan industry. They are the great class, in short, the most numerous in every country, upon whose shoulders mainly rests the civilization of the world. And are those who compose it to be excluded from the polls, because they have no freehold in land? Let us hope not; let the spectacle of such injustice be spared, under governments professing to dispense equal rights.

The cause of non-freeholders might be pleaded even on the doctrine of its adversaries. Labor is property. Actions at law are founded upon it. It is the individual wealth of the poor, whilst it makes the collective wealth of the whole. In the United States especially, where land is over-abundant and labor relatively scarce, the latter is often much more

dent Jackson's side in the bank war, he later served as minister to France in the Polk administration. Earlier he had been ambassador to England and participated in the forming of the Monroe Doctrine. See D[exter] P[erkins], "Richard Rush," DAB, XVI 231-234.

valuable than the former. It ought therefore to confer at least as good a title to vote. Nor do I here confound cause with effect; and if I did, that which produces the advantages of property, ought to be followed by the enjoyment of its rights. There is another kind of labor—the labor of thought, which is also, in effect, property. Patent-right, and copy-right, have this as their basis. It is a kind of freehold in mind. Pope I believe was the son of a linen draper, Shakespeare of a woolstapler, Akenside of a butcher, Moliere of a maker of tapestry, the author of *Don Quixote* served as a common soldier, and Ben Johnson worked as a bricklayer. How many of these men and a thousand others whose works have delighted and instructed mankind, have owned land, we need not stop to inquire. Many of them we may be sure did not. Now, would it not be strange in the eye of reason, apart from prejudices springing from feudal and dark ages, to maintain, that the copy-right in their immortal works, where it so happened that they owned no land, should give a less qualification to vote, than the proprietorship of a log house, or a cabbage garden! This is one of the results to which the adversaries of your cause must come; it plainly follows from their doctrine of land qualification. It would be but just in them to admit, that freeholders are not always more enlightened than others; and surely it is a narrow sentiment that would confine to them, all stakes in the prosperity of a country. How many men are there in this country—how many thousands I may ask—engaged in mechanical life, or only as labourers, of intelligent minds, as well as orderly and correct habits, who read think and talk about our public affairs at intervals of their toil, who yet do not own a foot of ground! As a class, it is admitted on all hands that they are neither selfish nor intriguing; and is it not probable that such citizens will drop a fair vote in the ballot box! We may be assured that this is not the class that will bring ruin or injury on any country. Apprehensions would often be more judiciously directed to other quarters.

As to fears from letting naturalized foreigners vote, I as little believe that any exist in Pennsylvania, I cannot conceive the least foundation for them. I have heretofore publicly said, and still think, that

the laws of the United states give less encouragement to emigrants than a wise policy would dictate. Strict naturalization laws may be compared to an ill-arranged tariff. They tend to shut out, or lessen, the most enriching of all imports for a new and thinly-peopled country—men; may I add too, without levity, imports never interfering with the home article, but augmenting in all ways its social and statistical value. Our country will be in a condition for ages, to be benefited by foreigners casting their lot among us. This was a policy ever inculcated by the celebrated lawgivers of antiquity, and is recommended, to an extent the most ample, by the conduct of great and powerful modern states; an extent much greater than any to which we have ever gone. England in the early stages of her history, though with a territory so small, and even then as might have been thought sufficiently full of inhabitants, invited foreigners to her shores by premiums and other inducements. So did France, up to a date more recent.

Russia has hastened her advances, wonderfully, in civilization, commerce and power by making no distinction under her laws between native subjects and strangers; nay, even exempting the latter who bring property with them, from taxes and other burdens for the first few years of their residence in her territory; a policy that began with Peter, and continues I believe to the present day, or has only been altered recently, if altered at all. The Dutch conferred the same political rights as well as the same privileges of trade, upon foreigners and natives, as soon as the former set foot upon their soil; an equality that greatly accelerated and enlarged the progress of that famous Republic in commercial riches and grandeur no less than political renown, in the 16th and 17th centuries. And what benefits have not the United states derived from foreigners, notwithstanding the clogs which our naturalization laws impose upon them! Look at the English, the Irish, the Scotch, the Germans, who come to settle among us, and who can say that the country is not annually carried forward by them in all its cardinal points! See how useful great bodies of them immediately become as labourers, artisans, tillers of the earth—sometimes seen on our public works; then

employed in aid of private undertakings whether in our towns, or in the country. See how other portions of them, in a little while, stand side by side in honorable competition with the first of our native citizens in active and successful enterprise upon the broadest scale of operation; in civic virtues; in every kind of private worth; and, looking to a higher sphere, often in that noble ambition that signalizes itself by the generous and munificent application of their funds to public ends, serving even to raise the fame of the country doubly dear to them as the theatre of their success and object of their chosen allegiance. Under this head I could make out, were it proper to mention names, a proud list for Baltimore, for Philadelphia, for New York, as doubtless you and others could, for other parts of our extended country. In sight of where I write, has just risen above ground, the outline of an edifice fit, by its architectural magnitude and proportions, and the beneficent purpose of its erection, to be an honor and ornament to any metropolis from ancient Rome to modern London—an edifice consecrated to interests among the dearest of mankind, the education of orphans; this edifice, designed by its massive materials to last throughout ages, and to diffuse its moral and intellectual blessings over a whole land, rears its majestic columns under the exclusive endowment of Stephen Girard, by birth a Frenchman. Our country afraid of foreigners! how is the idea to be reasoned with! In reference to the duration of nations, it is but as yesterday that we, of this continent, were all of foreign birth; and foreigners are even yet making hourly additions to the industry, knowledge, wealth, comforts and power of the country. They soon and zealously become a part of it; add to the amount of public freedom and individual happiness within its borders; are proud of that freedom, sometimes with a loftier feeling than the natives, by the contrast of what they left behind them, and richly repay the inestimable boon. If worthless foreigners are seen to swell the criminal calendar in our courts, this is but as dust in the balance to the manifold advantages we derive from the industrious and virtuous portions; and, let us not deceive ourselves, the worthless of our own people can commit

crimes too. Do they interfere too soon, or too actively, in our politicks! Let them, as much as they please. They often bear a useful part in them, and it may always safely be left to the American people, without whose confidence they can do nothing, or be nothing, to pass upon their merits or demerits. After all, the class of politicians is small compared to the whole bulk, and infinitely small compared to the whole body of our native citizens.

We have no jealousy of introducing among us, beautiful and instructive works of the mind from Europe; the poetry, the philosophy, the general literature of Britain; the science and wit of France; the drama, the legends, of Germany, and so of other countries. We import, we reprint, we naturalize all with avidity. Yet we fear to trust men from the same skies. In my humble opinion, the former do not tend more to our intellectual pleasure and advancement, than the latter to augment our physical resources, to accelerate us in the career of national industry, the useful arts, and all that enters into the elements of power, opulence, and every kind of solid prosperity. True, we increase fast in all these ways on our native stock of population; but I would never say fast enough, as long as we can go faster. The old and powerful nations of the other hemisphere, are still much ahead of us in riches, and the number of their inhabitants; and we shall come up with them the faster in both, by accessions of both from abroad. These are some of the sentiments occurring to me under your letter. In expressing them in answer to your call, I remain with great respect,

Your obedient
Servant and
fellow citizen,
Richard Rush

TO JAMES L. HODGES²²

Providence, Dec. 10, 1833.

Respected Sir,
The subscribers are a prudential Committee, of the friends of an extension of Suffrage, in Rhode-Island. In a conversation a few days since, with our mutual friend William H. Smith Esq.²³ one of our Committee

²² Hodges [1790-1846] served in the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention of 1820-1821 and later as Congressman. *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1949*, p. 1318.

²³ Smith, Clerk of the Rhode Island Supreme Court (*Providence Journal*, October 21, 1841), later served as Secretary of State in the rebel government of Thomas W. Dorr. See Mowry, 135, and William H. Smith to Thomas Dorr, September 3, 1842, Dorr Correspondence, John Hay Library, Brown University.

From James D'Wolf's Bristol mansion "The Mount" came his reply to William I. Tillinghast and the other artisans. This photograph of the drawing room was taken in the 1890s, a few years before fire destroyed the house designed by Russell Warren and decorated by the Neapolitan artist Michele Felice Corné.



was informed, that you was a member of the Convention, which introduced the present mode of Suffrage, in Massachusetts, and that you advocated its passage in Convention, and its adoption by the people.

As many modes were doubtless proposed, besides the one adopted, we would thank you, if convenient, to give us the reasons which induced the Convention to adopt the one they did; and to inform us if it has answered the purpose, as well as was expected, by you and its other friends.

very respectfully, your fellow citizens,

William I. Tillinghast, Barber.

Lawrence Richards, Blacksmith.

Franklin Cooley, Stone Cutter.

Benjamin Joy, Machinist.

William Miller, Currier.

David Brown, Watch & Clock Maker.

FROM JAMES L. HODGES

Taunton December 25th 1833.

Gentlemen,

I have duly received your communication of the 10th inst. and assure you that nothing but circumstances of a personal nature relating to myself, has prevented an earlier reply to your inquiries. You desire me to give "the reasons which induced the Massachusetts Convention of 1820 to recommend the existing mode of Suffrage in this Commonwealth, and to inform you whether it has answered the purpose as well as was expected by myself and its friends." Recurring to the domestic history of this State, it will be perceived that a property qualification for one claiming the elective franchise, has always been highly appreciated. And when our Constitution of 1780 was formed, the principal difficulty to be obviated related to the question of

property and whether it should be personal or freehold, or the latter only, which should qualify the claimant of suffrage. The minimum absolutely necessary was finally fixed at sixty pounds, or a freehold of the annual income of three pounds. For many years, however objectionable might have been the principle, the practice under it, occasioned no serious or general complaint. But, in the course of later years antecedent to the Convention of '20, such had been the evasions in this particular, and the facility of their commission, as to inspire a general doubt as to the propriety or usefulness of the property qualification. This doubt in many, or settled conviction of existing wrong on this subject, in others, became very manifest in the late Convention. It was well asked, if the sum required for voting were the true one in 1780, did it follow that it was so in 1820, and would continue to be in all after time?—and, considering the great depreciation in the exchangeable value of money within those periods and any supposable future period, surely the question was both pertinent and argumentative. Moreover, the more diversified condition of Society, together with the almost universal and more minute distribution of property, bestowing on every man of sound mind and body enough to entitle him to vote or to be used by the designing for that purpose, presented a clear case of wrong, or of inexpediency, in the property qualification of 1780. And, too, at what point of property should you affix the seal of right? Ascertaining the fact of citizenship and proper residence, why not adopt the principle of potentiality of acquisition, as the prominent qualification for the exercise of the elective franchise? These were substantially some of the arguments urged on one side, in the late Convention. On the other, a commendable filial piety, willing to sustain the ancient instrument of our Government, as the work of patriotic fathers and noble Sages, and to keep in being and respect, the importance of property in the persons voting, as well as those voted for, resisted the change which was effected. You inquire whether the existing mode has answered the purpose of its friends? From my own observation and from information, I have no reason to doubt a decided prefer-

Byron Diman, a Whig politician, was a member of the upper house of the state legislature when he replied to the committee. Elected lieutenant-governor in 1840, he was appointed to the Governor's Council of seven members in 1842 when the Dorr uprising threatened and became governor in 1846 for one term.

Photograph by Leo P. Reardon of portrait by James Sullivan Lincoln in the Rhode Island State House.



ence is given it over the old one and indeed over any mode whatever. This, truly, is subject to some inconveniences and even abuse, and so would any one requiring tangible evidence of citizenship and its consequent claims in popular elections.

Tendering you my esteem & good wishes

I am gentlemen,

Your friend and humble
Servant,

James L. Hodges

FROM JAMES D'WOLF²⁴

Bristol, 11th Decbr, 1833

Gentlemen,

Your polite letter of yesterdays Date, on the Subject of a Constitution & extension of the right of Suffrage, is just received; to which I have only to Say, that I am, and always have been, in favour of a Constitution for this State; and I have no Doubt that what you State as the Proceeding, of the General Assembly, of Feb. 7 1811, is correct, and that I Expressed myself as mentioned. I was, and still am,

Rhode Island [Providence, 1881], 151-152.

²⁴ D'Wolf [1764-1837], merchant prince and one of the wealthiest men in the United States, leading Jeffersonian politician, United States Senator from 1821-1825, represented Bristol in the General Assembly for nearly thirty years. *Biographical Cyclopaedia of Representative Men of*

²⁵ Diman [1795-1865], a prominent Whig politician from Bristol, engaged in various commercial and manufacturing ventures in Rhode Island. He served in the General Assembly and as both lieutenant governor and governor.

When Byron Diman answered their letter, members of William I. Tillinghast's committee were William D. Terry and Thomas Doyle. Terry was a skilled engraver as shown in this example of his work. By 1836 he had organized his own Boston firm.



in favour of an extension of the right of Suffrage. I may not wish to go as far as Some of my fellow Citizens. To have no restrictions, or qualifications, I think would not be good policy, I think some are necessary and proper, to prevent those that hold no Stake in the Govt. from interfering with it, and to keep out Strangers & transient people, as well as the worthless and unwholesome inhabitants, who might abuse the right. I make you this candid reply, as I never have any Secrets in politics, or Scarcely anything else. I am very respectfully,
Gentlemen, your obt. Servt.

Jas. DWolf

FROM BYRON DIMAN²⁵

Bristol R. I. March 10. 1834.

Gentlemen

I have received your letter of the 7th inst, in which you ask me, how I should vote on the Subject of a State Constitution. In reply to which, I am happy to inform you, that I am, and always have been, in favour of a written constitution, for the government

of our State, and whether I occupy a seat in our Legislature, or not, shall be in favour of calling a convention, for the purpose of framing one.— How far I shall be willing to extend the right of suffrage, will depend on facts & arguments, which may be brought forward [at] the convention.—

I am respectfully Gentlemen

Your obt servant

Byron Diman

Wm. I. Tillinghast

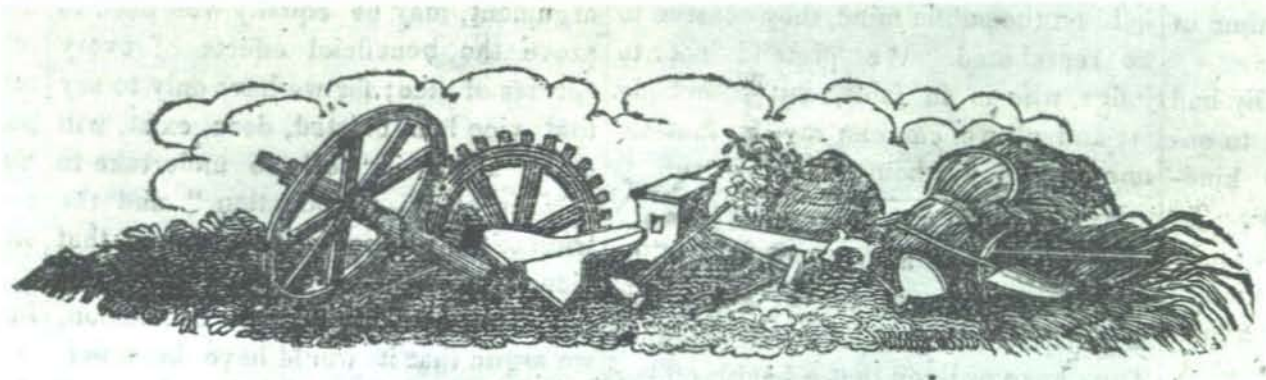
Wm. D. Terry²⁶

& Tho Doyle

Committee

In 1842 Diman was a bitter opponent of the Dorrite rebels. *Representative Men and Old Families of Rhode Island*, v. 2 (Chicago, 1908), 871-872.

²⁶ Terry, Wm. D., engraver. Doyle, Thomas, book-binder. *Providence Directory* (1832), 117, 55.



TO
WORKING-MEN.

YE WORKING-MEN! YE FRIENDS OF AN EXTENSION OF SUFFRAGE in Rhode-Island! the BONE and MUSCLE of the State! **YE 150 WORKING-MEN**, who, sacrificing party considerations, subscribed for a JACKSON PAPER, called the PROVIDENCE PATRIOT, last summer, only because it then advocated an Extension of Suffrage! **YE WORKING-MEN**, who have been told by the JACKSON LEADERS that they are the real DEMOCRATIC PARTY—the real friends of your SUFFRAGE CAUSE—read the following extract from a HANDBILL printed by these very leaders, at this very PATRIOT OFFICE, and circulated so exclusively among the Farmers that a friend of an extended Suffrage was obliged to ride SIX MILES into the country to procure a single copy.

We have ascertained that this treacherous handbill was circulated widely in the country several days ago; and the fact of our being ignorant of it till now, is accounted for, in the declaration of the printer, who, when we suspected him of this *conspiracy* against the patrons of his paper, and requested of him a copy, replied that "he had promised THE COMMITTEE not to deliver a single copy but to them."

EXTRACT.

"Farmers!—pause! The apostate KNIGHT has put himself at the head of the Free Suffrage Ticket. Are you prepared to have your Election Laws overturned—your usages prostrated by a man who has once turned traitor to you and to his own principles? Are you prepared to yield up your rights, and throw them into the hands of a set of men, who are seeking to enact laws for Free Suffrage, that they may acquire and forever keep the power?"

"The enemies of your privileges are knocking at your doors—and asking admittance, that they may *riple* you of your dearest rights. This is no fiction. Look at KNIGHT's answer to the Free Suffrage Committee last fall! Look at the basis on which that party requires a candidate to act—and you will see you are to have Free Suffrage forced upon you—if KNIGHT succeeds!

"Farmers are you prepared for this?"

YE HARD WORKING MEN, who cheerfully pay your taxes by the sweat of your brow, and only ask for a voice in the choice of your rulers in return, read the above extract, and ask yourselves whether you have any prospect of obtaining your Right of Suffrage by the favor of any party in power. These men in power have two faces. One they turn towards the towns and villages, and the other towards the country. They have two tongues. With one, they tell you, non-freeholders, that they are your friends; with the other, they tell the Farmers that they are your enemies. With one tongue they espouse your cause; with the other, they warn the Farmers against you.

Come then, to the polls, ye Working-Men, who are voters, and support the CONSTITUTIONAL PROX, without regard to any other party!

✂—N. B.—All WORKING-MEN are informed that the handbill from which the above extract is taken, is at the shop of Mr. WILLIAM I. TILLINGHAST, for GENERAL INSPECTION.

Thomas Doyle, another signer of the letter to Diman, was a bookbinder, publisher and bookseller, according to A Directory of Printing . . . in Rhode Island . . . by H. Glenn Brown and Maude O. Brown, 1958. He published the short-lived *New England Artisan*, and *Laboring Man's Repository* of 1832 which carried this decoration in its title. The fact that Doyle was also active in the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers may account for the similarity between this design and some of the decoration of that organization's membership certificate. Since the name of Thomas Doyle and that of Thomas A. Doyle appear in successive issues of the Providence Directory at the same home address, it may be that the reform agitator was the father of the noted Providence mayor.

A broadside of 1834 reflects the anger and frustration of the correspondence committee toward the end of the campaign. In 1837 when William I. Tillinghast died of "consumption" at the age of 39, the Providence Republican Herald of February 15th commented, "His pen, which was by no means weak and powerless, has oft times been used with effect in the cause of truth and justice."

Courtesy, Dorr Collection, Brown University Library.

Director's Newsletter

During the past summer several major steps have been taken in John Brown House. An electric fire detection system has been installed which is the most rapid means known of detecting the beginnings of a fire, and a similar system has been installed in the Library. The restoration of the House is at the point where the white paint that covers so much of the woodwork can be removed and the proper early colors applied. This process will be part of the fall program and is a major step in bringing the House back to its original appearance. It is hoped that before the Christmas party, most of the rooms will be repainted. Recent and important additions to the House are two of John Brown's original mirrors, which are classical in design and large in scale. These mirrors were made for the House and were removed in the middle of the nineteenth century. They descended in the Herreshoff family to Norman Herreshoff who has made it possible for them to be returned to their original positions. As always, the objects in the House are placed as much as possible as they were during John Brown's lifetime so that a true understanding of the original concept of the House becomes more and more evident. They have been hung very high so that they reflect the candlelight of chandeliers and act to open up the space of the room at night, just as the windows do during the day.

It is with real sadness that we bid farewell to Wendy Cooper who has acted as the Assistant to the Director for the past two years. Miss Cooper came to the Society from Pembroke and during her two years she helped with many projects including restoration work, cataloging of objects, handling of newspaper articles, organization of the Lawn Festival in the Fall of 1968, organization of bus trips, lecture programs, and endless other important details. Her most obvious achievement was the recent exhibition of silver spoons held at John Brown House during the past summer. It was beautifully displayed and annotated. Mrs. Virginia Kennedy has joined us in Miss Cooper's place.

Two new positions at the Society have recently been filled. On September 1st, Frank H. Goodyear, Jr., took

charge of the paintings, prints and drawings of the Society. This was made possible by a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation. Mr. Goodyear will sort, catalog and analyze the collections, preparing them for museum purposes and making them more available to students and scholars. It is the hope that the work will culminate in a published record of our holdings.

In the Library Nathaniel Shipton has been appointed curator of manuscripts. His immediate task will be to sort and organize over a million items many of which are still wrapped in their original eighteenth or nineteenth century wrapper. Later, the process of cataloging, analyzing and publishing the most important will begin.

In recent months Mr. Klyberg has been in communication on behalf of the Library with some of the state's most recent governors, to determine their intended disposal of their papers. We have, to date received commitments from former Governors Christopher DelSesto, John Notte and John Chafee, and Governor Licht has expressed an interest in having his papers preserved here. We hope to contact other governors and their descendants in the coming months, as well as other notable Rhode Island figures. The deposit here of this kind of material continues the Society's stated purpose of obtaining, preserving and making available important Rhode Island material.

The Library has begun a program, in cooperation with local television stations, to preserve filmed news items that pertain to Rhode Island. This new, and still modest, effort to amass material in another medium of historical value is being done largely through the volunteer efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence F. Karr of Providence. They are editing and compiling the film archives for us, selecting from material made available to us on a gift basis from television stations. We believe that we are the first historical society in the country to form such an archive, and it is our hope to show some of the earlier tapes at our annual meeting in January.

Beginning in October, when our regular library hours resume, the Library will be open all day Saturday and closed all day Monday rather than the half-day schedule of last Fall. It was felt that this change better served those who can use our collections only on week-ends.

As announced in the previous Director's Newsletter, the Society has received gifts in memory of the late John H. Wells, and six handsome glass cases have been constructed each side of the fireplace in the Library to house our collection of Rhode Island imprints. These books, our most important printed works, will, by this means, be prominently displayed and more safely housed. Additional money from the memorial funds will be used to make slip-cases for those imprints which currently lack them. These cases will be dedicated at one of the Sunday afternoon lectures during the winter.

One of the most important groups of items ever to come to The Rhode Island Historical Society has been sent to the Library by Norman Herreshoff. The items include the libraries of John Brown and his son, James Brown. John Brown's library, which specializes in useful, instructive works, such as C. Varlo's *A New System of Husbandry* (Philadelphia, 1785), includes

approximately thirty items. The James Brown collection, much larger and different in nature, is a true gentleman's library that emphasizes the classics. Since James Brown numbered his books (the highest number is 289) we can tell that about two thirds are still in the collection, and we can deduce the titles of some of the missing ones when they belong to a run or set. These two libraries are of major importance for very few private eighteenth-century libraries are known. To have this kind of material available is in itself of interest but to have it associated with its original home, John Brown House, and many of the House's original furnishings, means that this Society is more and more able to present a total picture of a particularly important late eighteenth-century way of life. In addition the James Brown books contain a large percentage of his diary. Not only did he write in special diary books but he often made detailed notes of events in his books. It may turn out that this extensive diary is one of the most important items of colonial America. Several of the books need restoration and at the completion of the work the libraries will be put on display, perhaps in John Brown House where they were used originally.

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