

**Providence Institution
for Savings**

Established 1819

A Mutual Savings Bank

where interest is allowed
from day of Deposit to
day of Withdrawal

MAIN OFFICE
86 South Main Street

OLNEYVILLE BRANCH
1917-21 Westminster Street
Olneyville Square

EMPIRE-ABORN BRANCH
Between Westminster and Washington Sts.

Open all business days and Tuesday evenings
5 to 8:30. Olneyville Branch open
Saturday evenings also.

"The Old Stone Bank"

THE J. C. HALL CO., PROV., R. I.

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The Slave Trade



Presented by

"The Old Stone Bank"

Providence, R. I.

May 22, 1933

The Slave Trade

SLAVERY, one of the oldest institutions in the history of the human race, probably began when the victor realized that it was more advantageous, from an economical standpoint, to put the vanquished to work than to slay him. Most of the ancient nations countenanced the holding of people in servitude, and many of the immortal sages of the past defended the practice on the ground that might was right, and that inferior races must be subject to the superior. The Roman jurists considered that all men were free by natural laws, but decreed that all captives were treated much better in servitude than they would have been had they been put to death. With the advance of western civilization the custom of enforced servitude developed among all of the civilized nations, and even England became an active participant in the traffic in human flesh for, between the years 1680 and 1700, she exported nearly three hundred thousand slaves from the coast of Africa. Many of these were shipped to the home market, and many were shipped to several points in North and South America, the discovery of which had



opened up rich treasures of gold and silver. Mining was arduous work and it was believed that such labor required a much stronger race than the Indians who were native to these continents.

Although Rhode Island was most active in the slave trade in the early days of the Colony, it is erroneous to contend that the industry had its beginnings here, for negro slavery was first introduced into the Colony of Virginia seventeen years before the founding of Providence by Roger Williams in 1636. In 1619, a Dutch ship brought twenty negroes to Jamestown and there they were sold into slavery for life, marking the beginning of American slavery. Naturally, the practice spread to other Colonies as their populations increased and few could see anything wrong with it since the mother country had long bought and sold slaves, then regarded as a most practical method of providing labor for plantations and for mines. If the question of the right of a man to own his fellow was ever raised, it was readily explained that it was far better for an uncivilized human to be the slave of a civilized man than to live on some dark continent in a barbarous state. The moral question did not often enter into the case, therefore our

ancestors should not be too severely censured for their part in the encouragement of an activity that later brought untold misery upon the heads of both slave and master and nearly caused the downfall of a civilized and liberty-loving nation.

At one time or another slavery was regarded as a legal institution in all of the original thirteen Colonies, but the honor must go to Massachusetts Bay Colony for the first legislation against this trade in America. An act passed by the General Court on November 4, 1646, disclosed the disapproval of slave trading in the minds of Massachusetts legislators. Rhode Island was next to pass an anti-slavery law when the General Assembly met in May, 1652, and ordered that no man could be held to service more than ten years from the time of his coming into the Colony, at the expiration of which period he was to be set free. It was also ordered that any person failing to observe this law by refusal to allow a slave his freedom at the end of ten years, or who sold a slave elsewhere for a longer period, was subject to a fine of forty pounds. Thus, it can be seen that there was a definite sentiment in Rhode Island against holding men in bondage for life, and this sentiment grew in strength with

the passing of years in spite of the fact that many less sentimental and extremely avaricious traders continued the traffic until as late as 1820, years after slavery had been abolished by an act of Congress.

In the Spring of 1676, the Rhode Island General Assembly ordered that no Indian in the Colony should be a slave except for debts, etc., and another bill passed later the same year stipulated that all Indian captives under five years of age should be held as simple bond-servants. Older captives were ordered to serve correspondingly shorter periods of bondage. The average price for an Indian bond-servant was about thirty-two shillings. Some captives sold for twelve bushels of corn, some for two pounds ten shillings, and others for one hundred pounds of wool. One recorded transaction shows that a prominent Providence citizen purchased one desirable bond-servant for the price of three fat sheep. About the time when King Philip was tracked down and killed at the foot of Mount Hope, near Bristol, a town meeting was held in the open near the home of Thomas Field, a structure that stood on the present site of the Providence Institution for Savings "The Old Stone Bank" on South Main Street. At this meeting

the disposal of Indian captives in the town was discussed and finally agreed upon, the meeting ending in a general auction sale under the direction of Arthur Fenner, William Hopkins and John Whipple, Jr. All of the captives were sold at varying prices; the period of bondage was limited in each case; and all profits from the sale were divided among thirty men, in shares and half-shares. This transaction showed that Rhode Island held a merciful attitude toward prisoners of war, whereas, in other Colonies, Indian captives were either put to death, made slaves for life, or sold as slaves in the West Indies.

According to Thomas W. Bicknell, from whose writings several of the facts in this account have been gathered, the first cargo of human beings imported from Africa, to be sold into slavery in this Colony, was entered at Newport in 1696. There was no great demand for slaves in Rhode Island at the time for the Colonists were generally poor, especially those who lived in the vicinity of Providence and Warwick. At the turn of the century, business conditions improved, and the local merchants had every reason to regard slave trading as a very practical, if not humane, means of gaining

riches. Such trading was carried on in a sort of endless chain operation. The West Indies raised sugar cane with slave labor, and the cane was the source of sugar and molasses; sugar and molasses could be converted into rum, and rum was in heavy demand at home and abroad. The rum was transported to Africa where it was exchanged for slaves; the slaves were sold for gold; some of the gold purchased sugar and molasses for distilleries here in Rhode Island. Thus, these interdependent ventures, engaged in by the ships that hailed from these ports, realized a continual return of gold that soon placed Newport, Bristol and Wickford among the wealthiest communities along the entire Atlantic coast.

Slaves were usually purchased from native chieftains whose tribes had vanquished other tribes. The white traders would journey regularly to certain points along the African coast, meet with the headmen or chiefs of victorious tribes, and bartering would quickly follow. It is believed that these sales would be preceded by elaborate banquets at which the traders would shower trinkets upon those fortunate enough to be in a position to do business with the American strangers. Rum

flowed freely during the transactions; the trading part of the program was carried on without delay; and then the ship or ships would sail away to America carrying their valuable cargoes of human souls. The realities of this unpleasant phase of Rhode Island history are brought to light when one reads the following note written to Captain James De Wolf of Bristol by Jeremiah Diman, a captain of a slave-trader from that local seaport:

St. Thomas, April 1, 1796.

This will inform you of my arrival in this port safe, with seventy-eight well slaves. I lost two on the passage. I had sixty-two days passage. I received your letter and orders to draw bills on thirty days sight, but I have agreed to pay in slaves,—two men slaves at twenty-eight Joes, (A Joe was a Portuguese coin worth about \$8) and one boy at twenty-five Joes, and another at twenty Joes. I found times very bad on the Coast. Prime slaves are one hoghead and thirty gallons of rum or seven Joes gold, and boys one hoghead of rum. I left Captain Isaac Manchester at Anemebue with ninety slaves on board, all well. Tomorrow I shall sail for Havana, agreeable to your orders. I shall do the best I can, and without other orders load with molasses and return to Bristol.

Slave trading flourished for many years in Rhode Island despite the fact

that popular sentiment against it had been expressed by a legislative act in 1652. But, there always comes an end to any enterprise that derives profit from human misery. Rhode Island Quakers were the first to inaugurate a reform early in the eighteenth century; their sentiments soon spread among other groups, and a wave of resentment steadily grew until, in 1774, a committee was chosen to use its influence with the General Assembly to make laws that would abolish slavery in the Colony. Such a law was passed that same year, but this and other anti-slavery laws, subsequently passed, were flagrantly disregarded by certain individuals and interests as long as money could be made in the trade and a Southern market existed. But, there was an end to this—enlightened public opinion, laws, lack of markets, hazards of procuring slaves, and genuine American ideals of liberty, eventually drew men and ships away from an industry that defied the first law of human civilization.

Additional Copies of this Booklet sent upon request

ADDRESS

"THE OLD STONE BANK"
86 South Main Street, Providence

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THE PROVIDENCE INSTITUTION FOR SAVINGS, familiarly known as "The Old Stone Bank", is in its own right a historic institution of Rhode Island. Founded in 1819 as one of the first mutual savings banks in the country, it has since contributed vitally to the development and life of this community.

Proud of its own historical significance, "The Old Stone Bank" has adopted this method of educational advertising to bring to light much that is of value and significance in the colorful annals of Rhode Island and national history.

The sketches and vignettes of old-time Rhode Island and Rhode Islanders that are broadcast weekly and then printed in this form are selected from local historical records which are full of the picturesque, romantic, and adventurous. In the hope that these glimpses into the lives, customs, and environment of our progenitors may be both revealing and inspirational to young and old, this booklet is presented with the compliments of

"THE OLD STONE BANK"