

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEW MEMBERS

April 1, 1952 — June 30, 1952

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| Mrs. Edmund Armstrong | Mr. E. Andrew Mowbray, Jr.
Edgewood 5, R. I. |
| Mr. Samuel W. Brown | Mrs. Gardiner S. Reynolds
Rumford, R. I. |
| Mr. S. Daniel Cohen | Dr. Franz E. Robinow |
| Mr. Elisha Dyer
Brookville, Long Island, N. Y. | Mr. Earle F. Saunders
Rumford, R. I. |
| Mr. Elisha Dyer, Jr.
Brookville, Long Island, N. Y. | Mr. David R. Wilmerding
Berwyn, Pennsylvania |
| Mrs. Charles A. Kilvert, Jr. | |

The total membership is now 1517, the largest number in the history of the Society.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Except holidays

Monday through Friday nine to five
Sunday afternoon three to five

Library only

Tuesday evening seven to nine

*Closed Sundays and Tuesday evenings,
June, July, and August*



RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

Wak'd to new life, by my creative power,
 The press thy mint, and dunghill rags thy ore.
 Where grow'st thou not? If vain the villain's toil,
 We ought to blame the culture, not the soil;
 Fix'd to that isle, it nowhere passes free,
 But fled from Congres, C_____s dwells with thee.

Hail! realm of rogues, renown'd for fraud and guile,
 All hail; ye knav'ries of yon little isle.
 There prowls the rascal, cloth'd with legal pow'r,
 To snare the orphan, and the poor devour;
 The crafty knave his creditor besets,
 And advertising paper pays his debts;
 Bankrupts their creditors with rage pursue,
 No stop, no mercy from the debtor crew.
 Arm'd with new tests, the licens'd villain bold,
 Presents his bills, and robs them of their gold;
 Their ears, though rogues and counterfeiter lose,
 No legal robber fears the gallows noose.

Look through the State, the unhallow'd ground appears
 A pen of dragons, and a cave for bears;
 A nest of vipers, mix'd with adders foul;
 The screeching night-bird, and the greater owl:
 For now, unrighteousness, a deluge wide,
 Pours round the land an overwhelming tide;
 And dark injustice, wrapp'd in paper sheets,
 Rolls a dread torrent through the wasted streets;
 While net of law th' unwary fry draw in
 To damning deeds, and scarce they know they sin.
 New paper struck, new tests, new tenders made,
 Insult mankind, and help the thriving trade.
 Each weekly print new lists of cheats proclaims,
 Proud to enroll their knav'ries and their names;
 The wiser race, the snares of law to shun,
 Like lot from Sodom, from Rhode Island run.

IN OLD PAWTUXET

by HORACE G. BELCHER

HANDED DOWN from generation to generation in one of the oldest of Pawtuxet families is a tradition which had its beginning in the days when vessels from that Rhode Island village were frequent visitors in the ports of the West Indies and our southern states. Among the members of the family was a lively, spirited lad, who with his associates used to annoy an old woman who lived at the edge of the village. They would jeer at her when they caught her outside her house and steal up after darkness to rap on her windows.

She was a lone body, making a scant living by gathering herbs and simples in the woods for their medicinal value, concocting healing salves and potions from them and selling them to villagers.

She was at once respected and feared—respected for her ability to heal fevers and agues, feared for her ability to cast spells, for it was a day when any crone who lived alone with only a pair of cats for company was distrusted. That she knew more of the medicinal virtues of common plants that grew all around than most doctors did, only added to the distrust in which she was held. Yet more than once, when the doctor seemed to have failed, she had been called on to break a fever with her herbs.

Young women, it was said, went to her for love potions, and it was generally believed that the draft she furnished when she was in the mood, would work wonders in securing or retaining a young man's affections. But behind her back some of the villagers called her a witch, and most of the boys, this lad among them, even did so to her face, while keeping out of reach. They used to come stealing up to her house at night and set a ticktack on the window, to see her come rushing out while they hid in the darkness and jeered at her.

A group of boys were annoying her one evening when she opened her door suddenly and ran out at them before they expected it. This boy was one of them and was taken by surprise and almost caught. She recognized him and called his name.

It was his last night on shore, for like many another Pawtuxet boy the sea was in his blood, and he had coaxed his parents to let him make his first voyage, with the captain of a Pawtuxet vessel, who was a friend of his father. His ship was to sail from Pawtuxet Cove in the morning, wind and weather permitting. His sea chest, which his

father had used before him, was in the forecandle of what he referred to as "my ship," and like almost everyone else in the village, the old woman knew this.

"Witch! Old witch!" he yelled at her, as he ran back into the darkness.

"You," she called, "I see you running to your home. Take a good look at it before you sail tomorrow, for you'll never see it again and live to get home again!" Then she turned and entered her doorway and shut the door.

It was a dispirited group of boys that met in the woods a little later. All had heard what she said; and while they did not really think it meant anything, recognizing it as a curse put on their associate, they were afraid. They agreed to say nothing about the old woman's imprecation when they went home, but someone must have talked, for most of the village knew of it by next morning when the ship sailed.

After that the old woman was avoided as much as possible in her few public appearances, and the neighborhood of her home was deserted after dark. Everyone said that of course they did not believe anything would come of it, but —

The ship was on a coasting voyage to southern ports. About the time she was due to return some of the boys of the village used to spend as much time as they could on the highlands of Warwick Downs just below Pawtuxet and on the edge of present day Gaspee Plateau. One day a boy came running up to a group standing on Pawtuxet bridge with the news that the ship had been sighted just below Namquit (now Gaspee Point) and would soon dock. By the time she had sailed up the channel and rounded into Pawtuxet Cove, a number of the villagers had gathered and were waiting.

The lad on the ship, who had been cursed by the witch before he set sail, had meanwhile worked off his first depression. At the start of the voyage he had been reluctant to go aloft and had used extra care in everything he did. But as time went on and nothing happened to him, he forgot his fears. He began to enjoy the voyage, for he was a born seaman. He was in high spirits as the ship came up to her anchorage in the cove.

He ran nimbly up the ratlines to a perch on the crossbeams where he could see his home. The other members of the crew watched him while going about their duties — and waited.

He called down to them so loudly that he was heard on shore, "She said I'd never see home again and live to get there, but there it is, and we're home again! We're home!"

He turned to wave at the seamen on the deck far below or perhaps at someone he recognized on shore. Suddenly he lost his hold on the mast and fell.

They picked up his crushed and broken body and carried it ashore to the home he was to see, but never to return to alive. The prophecy had been fulfilled.

NEWS - NOTE

The Society has been fortunate in the receipt of two legacies of early American furniture. From the estate of the late Henry A. Hoffman of Litchfield, Connecticut, have come about forty very fine pieces, mostly of colonial Rhode Island origin. One of the third floor rooms has been redecorated and furnished with a part of this collection, and other pieces have been placed in the dining room and the back parlor. Under the will of Dr. Louisa Paine Tingley of Providence and Boston the Society was given a choice of furniture and household effects from the estate in addition to a monetary legacy. The third floor room used by various patriotic organizations will be refurnished with the pieces chosen from Dr. Tingley's collection.