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The Newport Historical Society has maintained a library and museum of Newport and Rhode Island history since its incorporation in 1854. Three centuries of political, business and family manuscripts, including the early records of the Town Council housed for the City of Newport, together with important holdings of maps, prints, photographs, newspapers and maritime memorabilia, are preserved by the Society as are furniture, silver, paintings and ceramics which give it a representative regional collection of the American decorative arts.

Incorporated into the Society's fireproof building is the 1729 Newport Seventh Day Baptist Church. In addition, the Society furnishes and maintains the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House (1675) and owns Green End Fort (erected 1777).

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# NEWPORT HISTORY

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## "SOME OF THE KING'S HORSES AND SOME OF THE KING'S MEN"

by

ALBERT T. KLYBERG

*The following is a paper read before the Newport Historical Society at the Summer Meeting on the evening of Wednesday, August 30, 1972. It was also read before the Jamestown Historical Society, at one of their meetings.*

*Mr. Klyberg, Director of the Rhode Island Historical Society, used as his complete title to the paper: "SOME OF THE KING'S HORSES AND SOME OF THE KING'S MEN — PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR PUTTING RHODE ISLAND'S HISTORY BACK TOGETHER AGAIN." We feel, as did the large audience, that he has emphasized many very salient questions from an historical point of view which should be passed on to those who were, unfortunately, unable to attend the meeting. It contains a great deal of food for future thought.*

I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity to speak before you, tonight. Not only because I enjoy coming to Newport under any pretense, but because this is a great and venerable society. More importantly in this particular year because we share a great common anniversary.

One hundred and fifty years ago the Rhode Island Historical Society was chartered by the State with a Northern cabinet in Providence and a Southern cabinet in Newport. The curator for the Newport material was Stephen Gould; collections were stored for many years in the Redwood Library. As Dr. Gilbert Doane pointed out in his study of the Newport Historical Society in 1958, it appears that some of the impetus for the Rhode Island Historical Society in 1822 stemmed from an attempt to organize a similar group here in Newport two years previous in 1820. Stephen Gould was a participant in both movements. Later on, in 1853, the Newport Historical Society was founded by George C. Mason and others, largely due to the tapering off of activity of our Southern cabinet. Although the Providence operation continued to maintain the Newport cabinet for a few more years, the division of labor and the lines of the two separate spheres of activity became clearly drawn. Whether or not there was ever any transfer of our Newport materials to your collections is something I can't document, although several historical ac-

counts have suggested that our Southern cabinet became the Newport Historical Society. My reading of the evidence suggests the tie was not so direct.

Oddly enough, neither society published an historical discourse about itself on its hundredth anniversary. Howard Chapin sitting by himself in the old cabinet building on Waterman Street in 1922 no doubt set his researches aside long enough to eat a cupcake or two in honor of our anniversary, and your society was not publishing the *Newport Historical Bulletin* when your anniversary occurred in 1953.

Therefore let us pause briefly tonight during the Sesquicentennial observance of our common interest to take stock in our mutual effort to collect, preserve, and interpret Rhode Island's past. And let us begin tonight to think seriously about the central deficiency and lack of a new state history; and to ponder now in general terms how we might begin to work jointly and cooperatively on a closer basis than ever before to tackle together some of the historical needs of Rhode Island.

As the Rhode Island Historical Society emerges from its current 150th anniversary we have taken a good hard look at what we've accomplished over a century and a half, what we have left undone, and what is left to be done in the future. One area of interpretation we have charged ourselves with is the preparation of a new state history. The last one of any comprehensive scope was done nearly seventy years ago — Edward Field's *State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations at the End of the Century, a History*. We have nothing that really covers the last century from the Civil War to the present at all. The preparation of a new state history we think is at this time the most positive effort we can make toward our central purpose of advancing the historical interests of Rhode Island.

Two main points before I describe the work involved in writing a state history. First of all we know from our experience that with all the best intentions, the work will be carried out by a relatively few people and that we shall have to rely on only partial records — only some of the King's horses and some of the King's men will put Rhode Island history together again. And secondly, that to a large degree the support and vitality of the local historical societies like yourselves will be absolutely crucial.

To discover and to assemble all the missing pieces of Rhode Island's history — particularly since the Civil War will be a tremen-

dous undertaking. Long periods of uninterrupted study as enjoyed by Howard Chapin will be not available to us. The additional task of interpreting and synthesizing this history in a richly-polished literature form will be an equally challenging job.

But let's take just a few moments here and examine the so-called state of the art of writing Rhode Island history. Let's see what we know and what we shall need to know, and then how we shall proceed, and why.

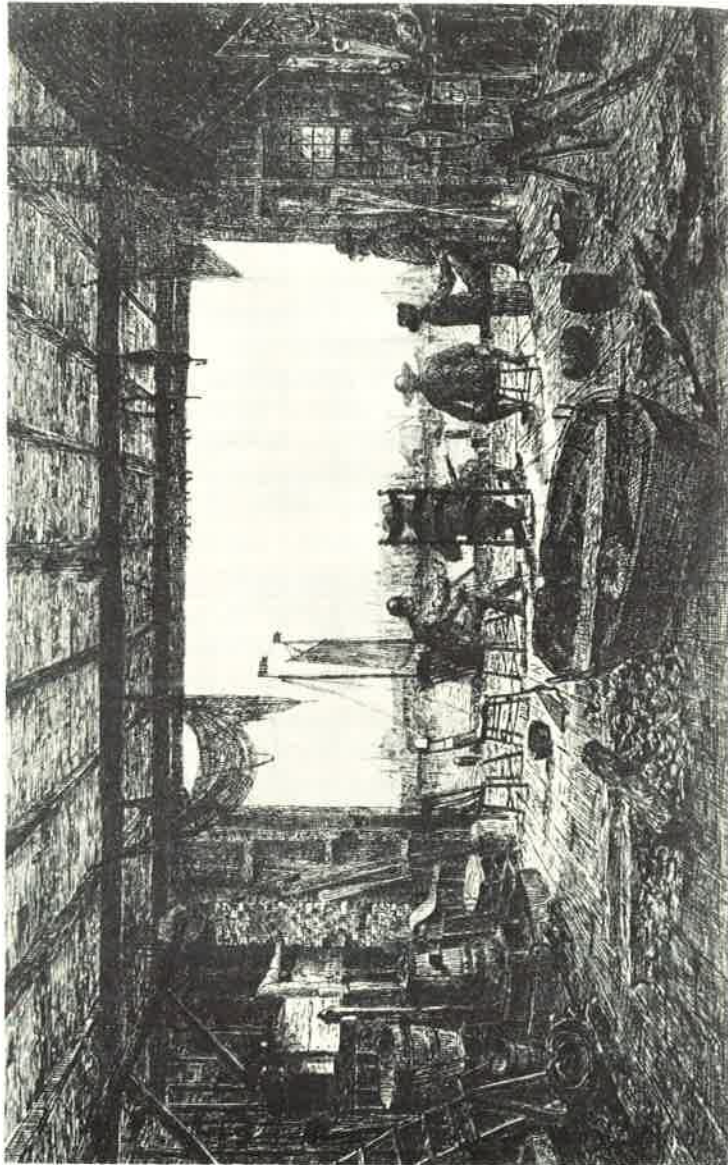
In some respects nature was unkind in its endowment of the land we know as Rhode Island — rocky, sandy soil, swampy, and little in the way of mineral deposits. To be sure the area we call South County has supported plantation-size farms since the coming of the white men, but in terms of the total number of acres involved or the percentage of the population affected by this kind of agriculture, it never became a fundamental base for the State's economy. In the area of natural mineral wealth it would be an oversight not to mention one of the oldest continuous industries in the nation, the lime extraction operation of old Smithfield and later Lincoln. But here, too, while it was lucrative and long-lasting, it was a tightly-held monopoly of the Dexter and Harris families, and it hardly ever employed a work force of more than two hundred wood choppers, charcoal burners, pickmen, teamsters, and kiln operators.

Rather, from the first, it was Narragansett Bay shipping and the related maritime industries which made it possible for an initially flimsy economy to survive and flourish. Hundreds of miles of shoreline, sheltered coves, deep harbors — the geographical center of the State, a great commercial womb, an arch from Sekonnet to Providence to Point Judith, waterside communities, a good luck golden horseshoe in stark contrast to a parsimonious nature's endowment of the surrounding countryside. Around the Bay sprouted the colony's earliest settlements, Aquidneck, Moshassuck, and Shawomet: Newport, Portsmouth, Providence and Warwick. Others followed: Bristol, Warren and East Greenwich. The absence of much in the way of local products resulted in the development of carrying trade — an intricate system of buying products in one market, transporting them to another, selling, and purchasing other types of goods and carrying them to a third or fourth location. This activity first involved a coastal trade along the Atlantic seaboard which was rather quickly extended to the British Isles, Northern Europe, the Mediterranean, Africa, South America, the Carribean, the East Indies, and eventually, by the end of the 18th century, to China. The success of

such enterprise depended on several factors. It involved first, a sound knowledge of international customs and intelligence about the competition. It depended on skillful navigation, astute trading acumen, good vessels and stable international relations. While such conditions as wars and strife could open opportunities for high profits, risks of seizure and destruction were likewise high. That the Rhode Island merchants grew wealthy and prevailed is testimony to their skill and ability, a quality their competitors regarded as opportunism or sharp trading practices. Since nearly the entire colonial economy depended upon the success of maritime activity, a threat to that activity such as that posed by the British Parliament's attempt to regulate and control trade in the 1760's and 1770's was sufficient to propell nearly the entire colony into rebellion by 1776.

A precariously and delicately balanced economy, however, was only one of the difficulties confronting the early Rhode Islanders; another was the survival of self-government, and Rhode Island's nearly unique brand of civil and religious liberty. To begin with both of Rhode Island's larger neighbors, Connecticut and Massachusetts made claims to the very borders of Narragansett Bay. Secondly, their inability and unwillingness to treat peacefully with the New England Indian tribes resulted in frequent spill-over warfare — with Rhode Island being drawn into Indian conflicts it would have avoided by itself. In addition there were periodic threats from Britain to have the basic rights outlined by the Great Charter of 1663 rescinded. As you will recall, Rhode Island was one of the few colonies actually to possess its charter, physically, and that charter provided for a great latitude of self-government and civil and religious freedom in an age when they were severely circumscribed both in the colonies and in Britain itself. On top of all these external threats was a considerable amount of internal discord and jealousy derived partly from the inherent nonconformist personalities of people like Roger Williams, Samuel Gorton, William Harris, John Clarke, William Coddington, and Ann Hutchinson. At least on four occasions before 1700, the little colony was nearly snuffed out by jealous neighbors, Indian warfare, actions of Parliament, or through internal discord. That it survived at all was a real triumph; that it prevailed over all its adversaries was a miracle.

The 18th century in Rhode Island was at once both a time of terrific expansion and consolidation. Self-assured merchants thrust their fleets into all parts of the world. Newport became a cosmopolitan colonial center and heaven seemed to reward nonconformity as



Etched by Charles Mielatz

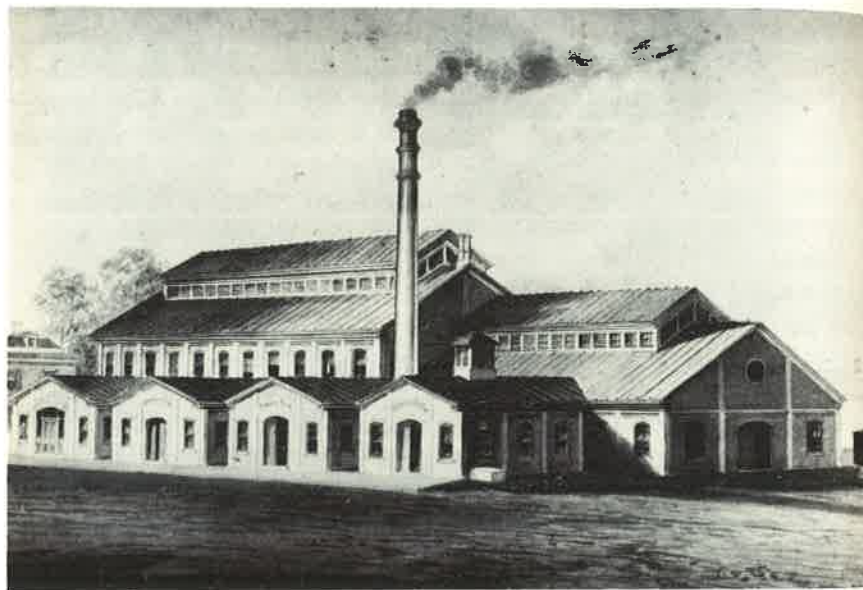
HART'S BOAT HOUSE, LONG WHARF

Newport Historical Society

Quakers, Baptists, and Jews prospered equally if not always congenially.

Distinctive colonial crafts flourished, education, humane letters, law, philosophy, and interests in the arts and science vied competitively with the older intellectual occupations of theology, religion and government. Providence developed as a second commercial center at the head of the Bay.

When the British Parliament's series of acts designed to control colonial trade and raise revenue for the British Empire began to threaten Rhode Island's economic and civil liberties, the colony jumped into the vanguard of the Revolutionary movement. Twenty years later when the new United States government sought to impose similar controls and restrictions, Rhode Island refused to join the union and later joined only with great reluctance and coercion.



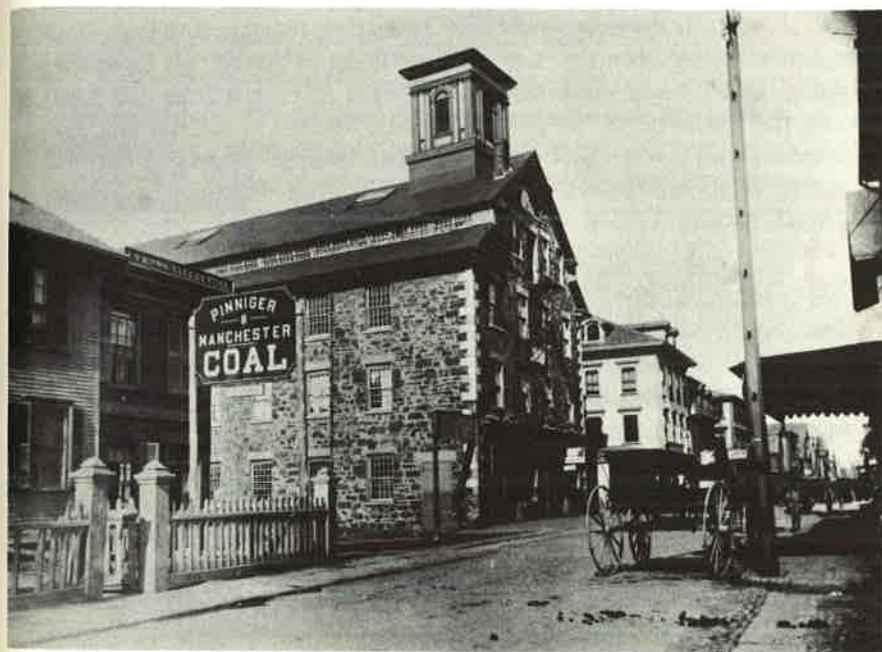
Original Drawing by John P. Newell

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NEWPORT MANUFACTURING COMPANY 1871-1878  
Brass and Iron Foundry; later the Newport Water Works

The decade of the 1790's ushered in a dramatic change in the Rhode Island economy. The success of Almy and Brown's work with Samuel Slater in setting up a cotton textile mill at Pawtucket Falls signaled a large scale shift in investment capital from the maritime

interests to cotton manufacturing. Fleets of mills replaced the sea-going conveyors. Mill villages like mushrooms sprouted almost overnight along the Pawtuxet and Blackstone Rivers, the tall, turreted mill towers lording over the neat rows of operatives' cottages. Schools, churches, and stores all belonged to the mills. Patterns were established which were to last a hundred and twenty-five years until the time of the First World War when the industry became caught between increased labor costs, changing technology, Southern competition and antiquated equipment. An exodus began to the South in the 1920's. Conditions were worsened by the Depression of the 1930's and only slightly improved by war production requirements of the Second World War. The post war economic adjustments witnessed the final reduction of the old style textile industry and a quest began for a new equilibrium in diversified manufacturing for the State's economy.



Newport Historical Society

PERRY COTTON MILL ON THAMES STREET

The industrialization which overtook Rhode Island in the 19th century consisted of more than simply the manufacturing of cotton. The production of woolens and worsteds comprised nearly as im-

portant a part of the economy. Following in the colonial traditions and skills of silversmith Samuel Casey, Nehemiah Dodge and his apprentice Jabez Gorham helped to launch a third area of industrial activity — products of precious metals — production of silverware and jewelry. Then, deriving from the requirements for machines for the textile industry, a fourth area of production, the machine tool industry developed in the State. Among the variety of products from the forges and foundries were steam engines, small arms and cast iron materials of a thousand uses. The interplay of the industries was obvious: new machines for textile and jewelry, steam power replaced water power in the mills, making it possible for factories to be located in port towns with easy access to coal sources, resulting in the transformation and growth of maritime communities like Bristol, Warren, and East Greenwich. Toward the end of the 19th century a fifth industrial activity was added, the production of rubber, with centers in Providence, Bristol and Woonsocket.

A major consequence of the transition from a maritime to a manufacturing economy was the rapid expansion of an industrial and urban population based on the influx of people from the rural areas of the State to the cities, and later, waves of immigrants first from Ireland in the 1840's and 50's, then, French Canada in the late 1860's, from Italy in the 1880's and finally from Portugal beginning around World War I.

Even before the waves of new immigrants arrived, however, the population shift from the countryside to the cities put a tremendous strain on the Charter of 1663 which was still Rhode Island's instrument of government until the 1840's. Under the Charter only those citizens who held property valued at \$134.00 could be admitted to the status of freeman, thereby gaining the privilege of voting. During colonial times with most of the white adult males holding property — usually a farm — Rhode Island was to a large degree a real democracy. By the 1840's, however, with large concentrations of people in the towns and mill villages as property-less mill operatives and renters, nearly 60% of the adult white males were disenfranchised. The lively experiment set forth by Roger Williams had gone sour and democracy was in decline.

In addition, under the old Charter, the fixed ratio of apportioning representation in the State legislature discriminated against the growing urban centers and vastly over-represented the dwindling rural towns. With all governmental power in the hands of the legislature and with no provisions in the Charter for amendment, con-

stitutional conventions were required to alter the imbalance. But convention after convention failed to bring about change as they were largely comprised of the very forces in control of the government. Finally there was the inevitable boiling-over of frustrations and the State witnessed the comic-opera spectacle known as the Dorr Rebellion.

The new constitution of 1843 eased some of the immediate complaints of the suffragists but contained nearly a dozen provisions which mitigated against the participation of naturalized citizens in politics and continued the rural domination of the State which, under the brilliant management of the Republican leaders like Henry B. Anthony, Nelson Aldrich, and Charles Brayton, was able to shut the Democrats out of power for nearly ninety years until Theodore Francis Green scored his "Bloodless Revolution" of 1935 and changed the entire structure of Rhode Island government in fourteen brief minutes of legislative activity, after which he was able to claim that the spirit of Thomas Wilson Dorr had finally triumphed.

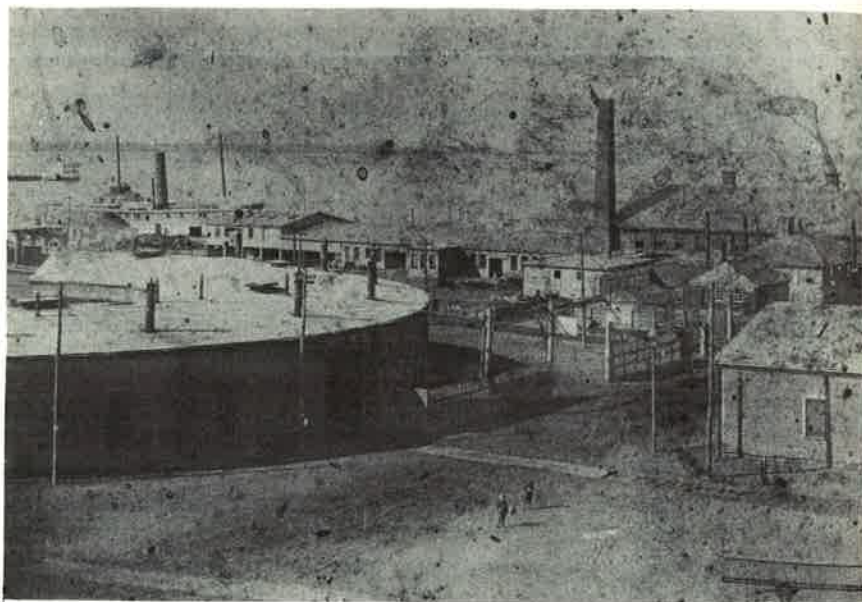
So much for a brief over-view of Rhode Island economic and political history. What, then, are the steps toward a new comprehensive history of the State? In the first place it is not enough merely to have an outline of the State's economic and political history; that outline ought to be analyzed and fleshed out with dozens of monographic studies. In the area of social and cultural history, however, we don't even have an outline of the three and a half centuries of Rhode Island's experience. Before any new State History can be written, then, there are a whole series of building blocks which must be produced. Taken chronologically, here is a sample of a series of topics which require attention.

In the 17th century, while we know quite a bit about the personalities of Roger Williams and his contemporaries and about the struggle to set up the colony, border disputes, Indian wars, religious controversies, we really don't know too much about every day life: the size of families, customs, legal processes for holding and transferring land, agricultural techniques, early crafts. If, as Professor Carl Bridenbaugh asserts, that history is really about "chaps" — the every day people — then we have to put flesh and bones on the hundreds and thousands of names our genealogists have been tracing and make some attempts at reconstructing 17th century Rhode Island society.

A crucially important but neglected period is the age of con-

solidation and emergence of the early maritime economy. For thirty years the colony was ruled by Governor Samuel Cranston, 1697 to 1727. Although under the Charter, Rhode Island governors were little more than figureheads, surely the administration of Cranston was a stabilizing force and worthy of detailed investigation. In other areas, Doctor Carl Woodward notwithstanding, the final word has not been said about the South County Plantation system. We need to know more about the men who owned the plantations, about their business affairs which connected them with the merchants of Boston and Salem and New London. We need a study of the vaunted political dominance of the so-called Quaker party and a whole series of inquiries under the rubric "Is it true what they said about Rhode Island?" Let's test the charges of it as a licentious democracy, a haven of nonconformists – what was behind the disenfranchisement of Jews and Catholics in the Digest of the Laws of 1719? Again as in the 17th century there is a need to trace and analyze the change and development of society and life in the colony.

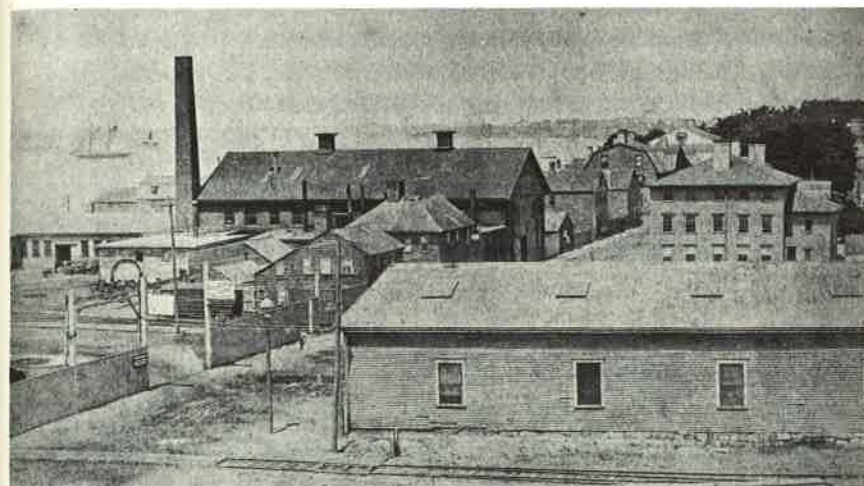
In the post-colonial period between 1790 and the Civil War there needs to be parallel studies of the growth of the four major



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RAILROAD ROUND HOUSE  
Old Colony Repair Shop in the Background

industries; particularly woolens and worsteds and base and precious metals. We need a study of the early development of the railroad, of the whole realm of reform organizations; anti-slavery, temperance, women's rights. The intellectual and religious developments marking the ascendancy of the Anglican Church over the Baptists and Quakers, as well as the Unitarian and Universalist movements bears attention. Nativism and the arrival of the immigrant is an important topic. The domination of the country party from 1790 to the 1920's is a major political study. Modes of agriculture and small town life would be another. Rhode Island technological advances and their authors – men such as George Corliss and Zachariah Allen



Newport Historical Society

OLD COLONY AND FALL RIVER R. R. COMPANY REPAIR SHOP

plus the whole area of banking, insurance, and investment activities of Rhode Islanders requires scrutiny. The growth of urban centers – Newport, Providence – the development of city services – public utilities, sanitary systems, building of roads, bridges, markets – developing of police and fire departments – the remarkable sixteen-terms of administration of Mayor Thomas Doyle of Providence. The developments in Greek Revival, Gothic, and Victorian architecture – Rhode Island music, literature, art and education.

In the 20th century we need everything: politics, economics, social history, technology, business, religious history. We need to analyze the demise of basic industries, changes in State government, the impact of immigration – the works.

All of these studies are required before a new State history could be written, but there is even more. New town histories for nearly all thirty-nine towns are required, bibliographical building blocks like guides and catalogs must come into being, and, most importantly, the basic documents, pamphlets, and primary materials themselves must be sought out and assembled. All the King's Horses and all the King's Men could not put Rhode Island's history back together again today because we haven't even yet collected the materials needed for the job.

This, then, is what must be done — how are we doing so far? In the past fifteen years our Societies have published dozens of significant articles in our quarterlies, *Newport History* and *Rhode Island History* which pertain to the nineteenth and early twentieth century period. The Rhode Island Historical Society has collected mill records and sought out the papers of 19th century leaders.

In recent years we have encouraged and co-sponsored co-operative efforts in the fields of church history, immigration, and mill-life, incorporating modern techniques such as oral history and innovating in such areas as the collection of motion picture film.

This activity, though, is just scratching the surface. Before we begin to achieve real substantial gains in the area of collecting modern materials of history we all have to accomplish a major educational task. We must infect our societies' members with a sense of urgency and enthusiasm to the degree that they will fan out across the State as a great volunteer army of collectors. Hopefully, too, they will remember the societies generously in their estate plans, insuring that the work will be perpetuated. But it is in the area of collecting that every member can join in the great pursuit. We begin by convincing our members and our friends that the time to collect for posterity is the present. Things that happen today will be history.

We're having some success in the area of architectural preservation. People are now taking Victorian architecture as seriously as the colonial; we're beginning to appreciate industrial architecture, too, but we're still not at the point of saving samples of perhaps our most famous and widespread form, the Quonset Hut (though Harry Kizirian's electric post-office may survive as a kind of "Quintessential Quonset") and we're still a long way off from putting a plaque on the first gas station in Rhode Island. In any event the point is one of attitude, of approach. Raising the level of consciousness among our members as to what should be collected or preserved is the crucial

first step. The rest will follow: collection, preservation, and interpretation.

Now, finally, back to our main point — the practical realities of our task and the reason for doing it. The practical realities of trying to collect, preserve and interpret the materials of any civilization — even an area as circumscribed as Rhode Island, are that with all the best intentions only a remnant will be saved and that surviving remnant will be preserved by only a handful of people. Only some of the King's horses and some of the King's men will care or be able to put Rhode Island history back together again. Random whimsey rather than scientific, logical collection is responsible for transmitting most of what is handed down from generation to generation. Too many private collections of letters have been consigned to the flames by well-intentioned widows or relatives to make us believe otherwise. The sheer nature of 20th century oral and visual communications replacing such written records as letters and diaries is against us. The basic decisions today are made by telephone; face to face conferences are possible anywhere in the world by means of jet plane. Thus we are in danger not only of losing touch with the distant past but with the recent present as well. Hence, there's not a moment to lose or an ounce of energy to waste, or a penny to be spared on anything peripheral to the central challenge.

And what of the end result? Why bother? What is really lost if Rhode Island's history is not preserved and transmitted to others? Will the universe become unhinged? Probably not. Nor is it likely that life as we know it on this planet will end. What will be lost, though, is a knowledge about specific men, who lived in a specific place during a specific time — men and women who made distinct contributions to their world in the areas of business, science, education and the arts — people, too, who affected their world for good or evil by befriending savages and nonconformists, by burning a revenue cutter at Namquid Point, or by sending thousands to their death at Mary's Heights. If history is really just about "chaps" this would be lost. If the study of history in depth is possible anywhere, it has to be possible here. For our State, however, something else would be lost. A trust would be broken with our predecessors like the Reverend John Callender who wrote our first history as a sermon in 1739, or Theodore Foster and Moses Brown who snatched furtive moments from busy life-times to record and gather traces of their antecedents and contemporaries or like our early Society's President, Revolutionary veteran, John Howland, who rescued a

packet of Roger Williams letters from a pile of filth on Market Square.

They were busy men — bankers, lawyers, jurists, politicians, ministers. Only a few were gentlemen scholars with leisure time to play at history. Their materials were randomly assembled, their descriptions imperfectly arranged, sometimes hurriedly thrown together. Yet there will probably never be an ideal time to assemble all our materials, never probably will there be quite enough money, never will the evidence be quite all there — but these are the practical realities of our craft, and we accept them. We do not seek a vacation from our responsibilities, only as much cooperation as possible in the job of collecting, preserving, and interpreting and as much support and understanding as you are able to lend in this greatest of all humanizing endeavors, the process of transmitting a people's history. So let us join together in this great adventure: the local historical societies across this state with their knowledge of detail about the towns and neighborhoods and our state society with its resources and talents to organize this detail in a new interpretation. In so doing we shall honor not only those who have gone on before in this work, but ourselves and our posterity as well.



## POINT JUDITH LIGHT — THE EARLY YEARS

by

RICHARD L. CHAMPLIN

At Point Judith, the coastline of Rhode Island makes a right angle turn. Northward the way leads into Narragansett Bay, westward to Long Island Sound, southward to Block Island and the open sea, and woe to the vessel that tries to cut corners. It must have seemed to Narragansett men that if Watch Hill had needed a light and got it in 1807, much more should Point Judith have one. Shipwrecks and disasters had made the history of the Point. For example, as early as 1719 a sloop from Barbadoes was "cast away at Point Judah", and all lives saved except one.<sup>1</sup>

Again, that faithful (though ungrammatical) recorder of events, Nailer Tom Hazard, scribbled in his Journal for March 21, 1805, "I

District and Port of Newport August 16<sup>th</sup> 1809

Received of Thomas Tudor Tucker esquire Treasurer of the United States, the sum of seven hundred thirty one dollar, thirty three cents, being the cost of a Lot of Land on Point Judith, purchased for the purpose of erecting a Light House thereon, including the expense of recording the deed, and advertising proposals for building the Light House, together with my Commission at 2 1/2 per cent, agreeably to an account adjusted at the Treasury, which sum I have discounted out of monies arising from duties on Imports and Tonnage and charged as a remittance to the Treasury in my account as Collector for the quarter ending Septe mber 30<sup>th</sup> 1809, having signed a duplicate of the same tenor and date

\$ 731.33  
100

Wm Ellery Collector

Newport Historical Society

Photo by John Hopf

RECEIPT FOR MONEY TO PURCHASE LAND  
ON WHICH TO BUILD POINT JUDITH LIGHT  
Money received from Thomas Tudor Tucker  
Receipt signed by William Ellery, Collector

1. *The Boston News Letter*, Nov. 27, 1719, as quoted in *Historical & Genealogical Notes & Queries*, Jan. 7, 1899.