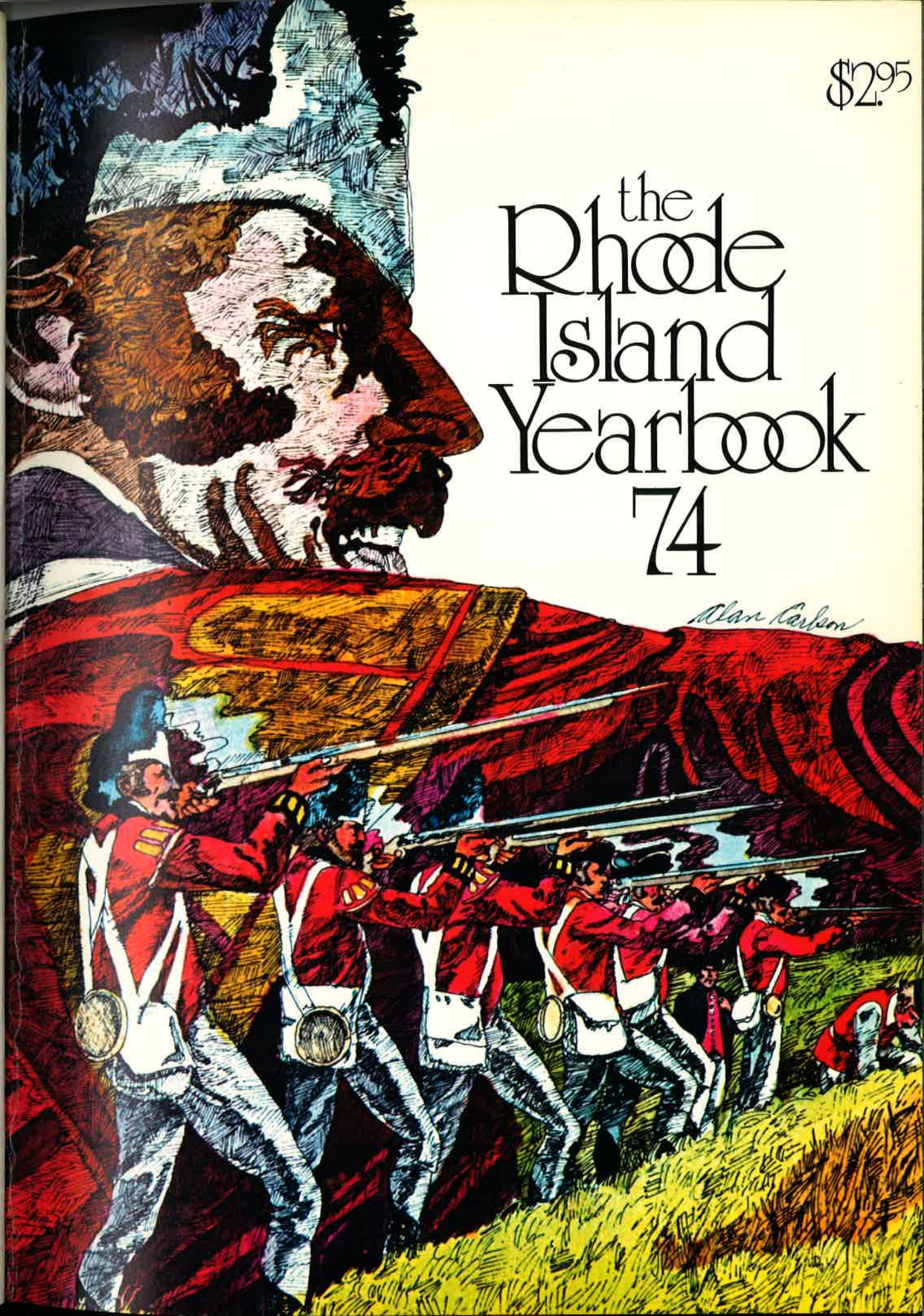


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# the Rhode Island Yearbook 74

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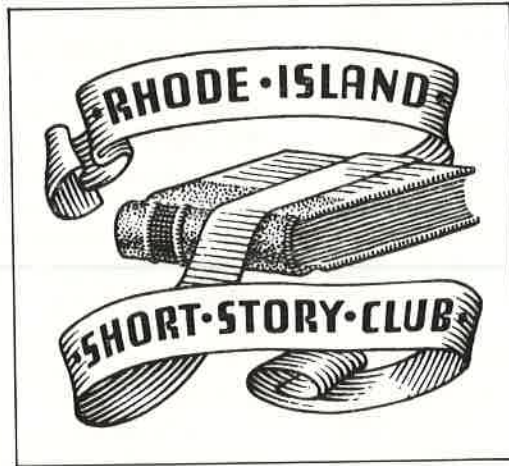




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# the Short Story Club



*a History*  
by Katherine Patricia Tucker



In 1894 President Grover Cleveland was in the White House; Governor D. Russell Brown was in the Rhode Island State House, and Mayor Frank Fuller Olney presided over the Providence City Hall. The same year witnessed the publication of Rudyard Kipling's "The Jungle Book" and George Bernard Shaw's "Arms And The Man".

Here in Providence on May 29, 1894, Mrs. Fanny Purdy Palmer, writer and lecturer, invited some women interested in the literary field to her home at 272 Rugby Street to discuss the formation of an organization of writers. The idea originated with Mrs. Palmer while she was chairman of the project representing women as part of Rhode Island's contribution to the Chicago World's Fair the previous year. At that time she compiled a brochure on 165 literary women of Rhode Island.

Fanny Purdy Palmer was born in New York on July 11, 1839. She married Dr. William H. Palmer. Mrs. Palmer served as a State Inspector of Factories and Workshops and was the first woman member of the Providence School Committee. She was also active in Rhode Island's share of the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876.

The literary ladies who met at Mrs. Palmer's home on that memorable May day agreed to form a club "to foster personal acquaintance among Rhode Island women engaged in literary or journalistic work." The club would also include "a representative of each of the arts, education, law, and medicine and occasionally of the ministry."

According to the minutes as recorded by Fanny Purdy Palmer, Secretary, pro tem, "the meeting adjourned to meet on the fourth Friday in June when Miss Caroline Hazard agreed to present some production from her pen."

The next meeting was held on June 22. There were sixteen charter members. By unanimous vote, the club adopted as its official name, "The Short Story Club". Mrs. Palmer was elected President and Miss Campbell, Secretary. A committee was appointed to draft a constitution. Caroline Hazard read her poem, "A Seventeenth Century Episode", which related the Great Swamp Fight between the colonists and the Indians in South County. A letter was read from Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, author of "The Battle Hymn Of The Republic", accepting an invitation from the club to read a story at its August meeting.

The third meeting was held in July in Peacedale where Caroline Hazard was the hostess. Katherine Austin read her story, "Mrs. Brown's Crisis". The members and two guests, Mrs. Pierce of Philadelphia and Mrs. Easbee of Baltimore embarked on the 2:10 p.m. train from Providence and were met at the Peacedale station by carriages which con-

veyed them over country roads, arriving at their destination at 3:30 p.m.

At the August meeting, Mrs. Palmer again was the hostess and Julia Ward Howe read her play "Hippolytus, The Son Of Thesus", which she had written about thirty years before for production with Edwin Booth in the title role and Charlotte Cushman as Phedia, the heroine, but the play was never produced.

Marianna Tallman was a girl who was in the right place at the right time. From Mount McGreger New York, she wrote a descriptive story of the cottage on the mountainside, the sorrowing throng and the mournful note of church bells which proclaimed the news of the tragic death of President Ulysses S. Grant. Mrs. Tallman sent her story to Martin Day, at that time the editor of *The Providence Journal*. She became a roving reporter for that newspaper and was known in journalistic circles as a "talented descriptive writer". She was one of the first women reporters in the country. She wrote special feature stories for Alfred M. Williams, then editor of the Sunday edition. Mrs. Tallman wrote a story about Rhode Island Lighthouses and about a stage coach trip to Danielson, Connecticut. In addition to special articles, she authored many books, including *Pleasant Places In Rhode Island*.

Mrs. Tallman wrote a poem which was read on June 9, 1926 at a dedication ceremony at Roger Williams Park for 100 Japanese cherry trees which were presented to the City of Providence by Mrs. Allardice in memory of her sister Irma, a musician. The ceremony was held just before sunset and two trumpet melodies were played. The theme of the "Memorial Poem" was "Remembering one who loved all loveliness".

Marianna Tallman was a charter member of The Short Story Club.

Sara Hopkins, a pioneer journalist and an author, was also a charter member of The Short Story Club. A descendent of Stephen and Esek Hopkins, she was born in Warwick in 1838. She originated the Women's Department of *The Providence Sunday Journal*. Her first newspaper assignment was to cover the Mardi Gras in New Orleans. In 1899, Sara Hopkins went to Cuba with Mrs. Emma Shaw Colcleugh to investigate conditions of the poor suffering from the effects of the war.

Emma Shaw Colcleugh, a Rhode Islander and a famous world traveller, wrote vividly of her adventures in areas ranging from the Arctic Circle to the South Seas. On October 18, 1920, Mrs. Colcleugh, while a member of the *Providence Journal* staff, was "specially commissioned to make a daring and perilous trip into the heart of Central Africa by way of Zanzibar".



Julia Ward Howe picture from "Boston Days" by Lillian Whiting. Courtesy Providence Public Library.

Mrs. Colcleugh, a popular lecturer as well as graphic writer, was an honorary member of The Short Story Club. She also inaugurated a department for club women in *The Providence Sunday Journal*.

Another honorary member was Maud Howe Elliott, the daughter of Julia Ward Howe and Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe who founded the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston. Maud Howe married John Elliott, an artist. She campaigned actively for Theodore Roosevelt in the days of the Progressive movement and worked for the cause of women suffrage.

Dr. Howe served as Surgeon-in-Chief to the Greek Army during that country's War of Independence. An ardent admirer of Lord Byron and his devotion to the Greek cause, Dr. Howe prized the poet's helmet which he had acquired. Maud Howe Elliott tells the fascinating story in her book, *Lord Byron's Helmet*.

Maud Howe Elliott was awarded by the Greek Government "the beautiful decoration of the Order of the Golden Cross of the Redeemer" in recognition of her return of the prized helmet to Lord Byron's "dearly beloved Greece".

Mrs. Elliott published in 1904 *Beata Roma*, a compilation of letters sent from Rome to several American papers, thus earning for herself the distinction of being the first woman syndicating journalist in America. In 1917, Mrs. Elliott was awarded the Joseph Pulitzer Prize by Columbia University.

Anne Crosby Emery Allison, Dean of Pembroke



Julia Ward Howe became a member of The Rhode Island Short Story Club at its second meeting. Courtesy Providence Public Library.

College in Brown University, wrote the popular column, "The Distaff", which was published daily for nearly six years in *The Providence Evening Bulletin*.

Caroline Hazard, President of Wellesley College, continued "The Distaff" after Mrs. Allinson's death. Her book, *Anchors of Tradition*, won for the Yale Press the medal of the Society of Graphic Arts as the best printed book of 1925. In an autographed copy, the author noted: "The stories in this volume were first read in the Story Club in the 1890's."

Caroline Hazard presented to the Wellesley College Museum a collection of the love letters of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning and the door to the Barrett's at 50 Wimpole Street. The *Providence Journal's* story about this gift was under the by-line of Myra Blosser, a member of The Short Story Club.

A story, also in *The Providence Journal*, about Carl Sandburg's visit here and his appearance on February 28, 1930 at Moses Brown School was by-lined by Elsie Lustig, a member of The Short Story Club.

While lecturing at Brown University, Robert Frost was a guest of The Short Story Club and that story was written by Grace Bird, a member.

Lillie Chace Wyman's stories on the human phases of factory life in her native town on the Blackstone River, first attracted attention when published in *The Atlantic Monthly* and later in 1886 in her book *Poverty Grass*. She also wrote a com-



prehensive biography of her mother, Elizabeth Buffam Chace, long time President of the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Association.

On May 20, 1935, *The Providence Evening Bulletin* printed a story about The Short Story Club's plan to gather records of women writers as its project for the Rhode Island Tercentenary. According to the article, "Women who have written Rhode Island's name into literary Americana are being honored by their successors".

In 1944 to celebrate its 50th Anniversary, The Short Story Club held a contest and awarded a \$50.00 War Bond for the best story written by a Rhode Islander who was not a member of the club. Gertrude Hughes received the prize for her story, "You Can Get So Lonely". The author became a member.

In 1947, an interesting story appeared in *The Providence Journal* about Sarah A. Chandler, a Providence poet and a member of The Short Story Club, on the occasion of her 103rd birthday. According to the article, "Henry Clay was running for president the year she was born".

Annie Laney, author of *Never Let The Fairies Go* was awarded the \$50.00 prize offered by the Poetry Lovers of New York for the best definition of poetry in poetry, and containing thirty-five words. For the contest over forty-five hundred definitions were submitted from all parts of the world.

Among the members representing art were Mary C. Wheeler, founder of the Wheeler School, and Mabel Woodward who designed the Club's bookplate. Music representatives were Ruth Tripp, pianist and critic and Mrs. Florence Newell Barbour, talented musician and gifted writer, wife of the President of Brown University. Drama was represented by playwright, Dorothy Allan, a member of the High Hope School faculty.

The Club proudly numbered among its members, Margaret B. Stillwell, Curator of the Ann Mary Brown Memorial and author of scholarly articles on bibliographical research; Professor Magel C. Wilder of the Biology Department of Brown University who wrote learned scientific papers; Elizabeth Nicholson White and Alice Collins Gleeson, writers of interesting and colorful historical stories; and Mabel Neikirk, noted author of children's books.

The Rhode Island Short Story Club has a rich and wonderful tradition - - - high ideals and sensitive creativity. Only some highlights are set forth in this brief chronicle. The great debt of inspiration can never be fully repaid.

# impact

If you live in Rhode Island, no matter what you do - go to school, go to business, seek legal advice or medical services, have dealings with the government, etc., at some point in each day you will be dependent on the knowledge of someone who was educated at Providence College.



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