

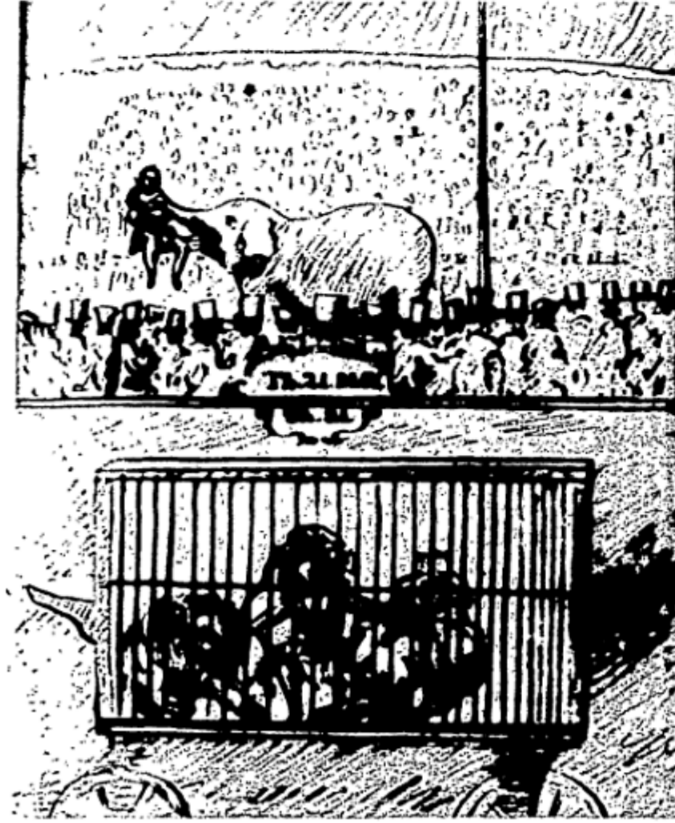
THE STRANGE AND CRYPTIC PICTURE DIARY OF CHARLES DEWOLF BROWNELL



The Diarist and his world of full days. Charles De Wolf Brownell, self-pictured as he sat down to inscribe the fascinating vignettes and sketches which make up a sometimes cryptic record of his life.



"Mannie a house thou showeste whereinne he has tarried." Upper left, 107 Westminster Street, where Brownell was born in 1822. Industrial Trust corridor marks site.



Needs no explanation. This was the day Brownell went to the circus. The elephant act interested him, as it did all the other plug-hatted gentry. So did the lady lion tamer.



A room in which the picture-diarist "tarried." He had, so entries of the preceding day inform us, returned to Hartford from Washington, via Baltimore and Philadelphia.

Born on Lower Westminster Street, Lawyer-Artist Who Painted 'Burning of Gaspee' Left Curious Record

BY ROBERT L. WHEELER



Charles DeWolf Brownell.

CHARLES DE WOLF BROWNELL (1822-1909) was born in Providence in a house that stood where the corridor of the Industrial Trust building makes a by-pass from Westminster Street to Exchange Place. His grave is in Juniper Hill Cemetery in Bristol. His life was long and active and full. Twenty solid years of it he put into one of the most unusual diaries that has ever come to light.

Samuel Pepys tried to hide the truthful story of his life among the pot-hooks of a shorthand which in due course of time delivered up its key and revealed him to public gaze practically naked. Brownell, an artist, a traveler, a lover of life and of books and of music and of trees and of the sea, a brilliant lawyer who took down his shingle and turned landscape painter after becoming convinced that he could not be a successful attorney and remain an honest man, baffles intrusion upon the record of his private life by putting it into pictures.

The Brownell diaries, contained in two small volumes bound in red, are in the possession of his granddaughter, Mrs. S. W. Taffinder of Newport. They cover the period from 1840 to 1860. While the cumulative impression given off by the lively sketches in which the artist-diarist recorded his comings and goings and doings is that of a sensitive and perceptive mind, they defeat any and all attempts to unscramble them and render them over into a prose chronicle of the life lived by a young man of some means in the mid-19th Century. Certain obvious objective "entries," such as a full-page drawing of a hotel room, of course, require no explanation. The diarist is simply noting the fact that he is at the Hotel Nacional in Havana or the Commercial Hotel in Louisville.

There are coherent picture accounts of sea voyages and train trips. A fantastic drawing of an animated lobster claw menacing a nightcapped head plainly indicates that somebody—perhaps the diarist—ate too much lobster for dinner the night before. Much of the diary, however, remains elusive. Brownell kept it for his own amusement and not for the edification of posterity. To further confound and baffle the curious

he accompanied many of the sketches with a certain amount of text, using the Greek alphabet to spell out English words. The person who thinks he can corner Brownell by getting this lingo translated is merely inviting himself up a blind alley. Here is the translation of a typical page:

- "1851. Home. Dec. Sa. 20. Tea at Obispo's, Davis's. "Cist and Boulet (under sketch of fenceers)." "Tu. 23. snow. "Church's Life." Rad. by Tude. C. over.
- "Th. 25. office. melodeon. Christ Church, Davis's M. C. and Ka dine turkey, deviled beef, brandy, plum P. etc. Eve. Walk home with C. cold wind and snow.
- "Su. 21. church. Eve. Miss Julia. Fiddle "Mercury."
- "M. 22. "Phillip's War." First rest from study. Eve. Prin. French News.
- "W. 24. 1 M. over. Eve. Christ Church, then Davis's, Minnie, Nancy, Christmas tree. Lunch and walk home with Ka.
- "Fr. 26. office all day. stew, Mary's. Kon's dancing school 9 1/2 Eve. Tom and Jerry."

A LOVER of good food, a moderate drinker (diarists who are serious tipplers do not itemize their Tom and Jerries), a player of the melodeon and violin, a steady churchgoer, a student of the Indian wars and a follower of news dispatches from abroad. After all, it does add up to a kind of picture of Charles Brownell, a man worth knowing if we could get at him.

There are indications that Brownell not only sketched in his diary the world in which he zestfully moved but that he also drew pictures of the world within himself. Drawings of unrelated objects tempt the thumber of the two small, neat books to a feeling that the artist's graphic sense sometimes served as an outlet for his subconscious. On the other hand, such drawings may be as un-cryptic as the famous "Chops and Tomato Sauce" note which made so much trouble for Mr. Pickwick at his trial. As Gertrude Stein might say, a guitar is a guitar. A picture of one may mean only that on a particular day Mr. Brownell was engaged in musical studies.

The facts of Brownell's life are that he was born Feb. 6, 1822, at 107 Westminster Street; when he was two years old the family moved to East Hartford, Conn., where his father, Dr. Pardon Brownell, practiced medicine. His mother was Lucia Emilia De Wolf of Bristol, a descendant of the privateers and slavers of Colonial days and the early republic. On the paternal side, his genealogy threads back to Little Compton and Capt. Benjamin Church, the potent 17th century Indian fighter. Charles DeWolf Brownell

had good New England blood in him. Brownell, too, is a solid Yankee name.

He was educated in Hartford and graduated from Trinity College, where his uncle, Thomas Church Brownell, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, was president. He was admitted to the bar in 1843 and practiced for 10 years. Deciding, finally, that the practice of law entailed too much rationalization of personal ethics, he characteristically abandoned it and became a painter of landscapes, developing a talent encouraged by or inherited from his mother, herself an excellent artist. An artist he remained the rest of his life.

As a painter, Brownell was strictly of the realistic, literal school. Healthily extroverted, he never had much use for the impressionist school and continued, as long as he lived, to paint and sketch the world as he saw it. He married Henrietta Knowlton Angell of Providence. With her he moved to Rhode Island in 1878 and built a house in Bristol. It stood on High Street for 10 years and was then moved to its present location, 30 Whalley Street. A daughter-in-law, Mrs. Edward I. Brownell, lives there now.

The old house still smacks of his vibrant personality. His portrait (painted in his skull-capped years) hangs in the hall. In the living room are the books, the gilt-lettered solid Victorian bindings that contain Cowper and Shelley and Tennyson and Keats. Above one case hangs the painting in which he dramatized the poetic version of the Andromeda legend ("The sea beast stiffened and stood brown rock in the wash of the wandering water"). Across the room is his painting of the harbor of Martinique. The Mexican mountain Ixtaccihuatl. ("The Woman in White") looks down upon the dining room table. His most famous painting, that of the Charter Oak, is in Hartford. In the Rhode Island Historical Society is his painting of the Burning of the Gaspee.

AS long as he was able, Brownell, the descendant of stout Yankee seafarers, sailed a catboat on Narragansett Bay and out along the New England coast as far as Nantucket. He walked on High Street with cane and silk hat; he smoked a single cigar after dinner. His sons adored him and he insisted on treating them to beer in pubs no matter what their age. With a microscope he excitedly examined the bark of trees; nothing that lived above ground was alien to his interest. Regularly to Providence he went to attend to matters of business at the Brownell Building, on the site of his birthplace. In the 1840's (the diary years) he had, like many young men, the notion that he had

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1849. ΚΟΛ ΠΙΛΣΟΝΣ ΣΕΠ
 @.27. Κουλ, πλεας. Βουρ Ση σουγυ ποκ κρευ ο
 ΚΥΤΟΦ ΜΥΣΤΑΧΕΣ! μερετε Λουκυμ. Με
 Βου'ορεκ το Βουρ Ση σουγυ ποκ κρευ ο
 πλεας νου. ΣΑΛΕΜ. Ανδ Ση ελδερ το Ση σουγυ ο
 Βε, μουν. Πινκλερ. Δαιδ.
 Φ.28. Πλ Ριδε'ομε, Βροθερ ινε μανν αυτα. -
 μητ Δη γιελς. ΣΕΡΑΚΙΝ Π'εν Ση σουγυ οκ Ση σουγυ οκ
 Σα.29. 44. 4πλε ταν ιδ μουν τοδ σου-
 Η. Πανκινγ, ι μιλε σουγυ. Σταρε το Λιδ Με Π'ορε
 Σα.30. Κλα ρουν. ΠΡΑΤΕΡ Φ'ΟΚ ΦΡΟΜ Π
 ι μιλε σουγυ. Π'ιντε ομε. Π.3. Σ. σουγυ οκ
 'Εαυν οτορε νουκ βλιερε ινερε, ουαρεβαλ τρουκ, οκ
 ιταλη το Χαλοδουκ Π'ορε
ΟΚΤΟΒΕΡ.
 Μ.1. Σ'Εταρερετα. @.4. Κε. Βεουοτιε
 Κερεμ & 'ουικωλ Π'ορε. Μεξ, σου. Λοκ. Ιουκ &
 Οη γουδ Καλ. Π'ανουορε. Ση γουδου. Δουκ.
 Τυ.2. Ποερε ιταλη Δη. Σ'Αηουορετ'ουορε.
 'Οημαρενη λουκς; ανδ 'ΑΤΥ
 'Εαυιλυ ινεδ κλουδς."

1849. COL. WILSON'S SEP
 Thurs. 27 Cool pleasant. But the cock crow
CUT OFF MUSTACHES! merry (Lincum?)
 Bay horse to Bot Spring. And the wild fowl clipped
 places none. SALEM. for day
 Br. moon. Winkler. And the elder to the younger
 Fri. 28. Pl ride home. Brother we mean ewa.
 met the girls P.Allen. When the dawn o'er the
 Lewisburg with Col. mountain is misty and gray-
 Sa. 29. H. Webb. Stage to Lib. Mt Prospect.
 H. Packing. ι mile sump. When shall we 2 meet again.
 Su. 30. Clo. rain. PRAYER BOOK FROM YA.
 ι mile sump Write home. W. 3. Scotch mist.
 Heavy storm at night, biten Write, overhead traps, 6.00
OCTOBER walk to chalybeate (spring)
 M. 1. Stearns & Col. Th 4. Clear beautiful
 Cream & Whisky!! Pack. Mex pony to Lib. Jones and
 The good Col. Glorious moon. the tailor. Davis.
 Tu. 2. After little sleep. Lunch with Virginian
 "The morning lowers. HAT!
 And heavily with clouds

Left, a page from Brownell's diary, showing the private language which he employed to baffle readers. He simply used the Greek alphabet to spell out English words. Translation, right, is by Prof. Benjamin C. Clough of Brown University.

THE BROWNELL DIARY

Continued from Preceding Page

not long to live. He out-ran the 19th century with which, it somehow seems to me, he had not much in common. There was, and remains about him, a flavor of the Renaissance Man. In a pallid, contained and inhibited world he contrived to live with the gusto of Benvenuto Cellini.

There is absolutely no accounting for his diary except on the ground that he found it fun to do. Why he dropped it no one knows. On the flyleaf of one of the little volumes is his "Ode to Ye Logge." It seems to tell as much of the man as he wanted known.

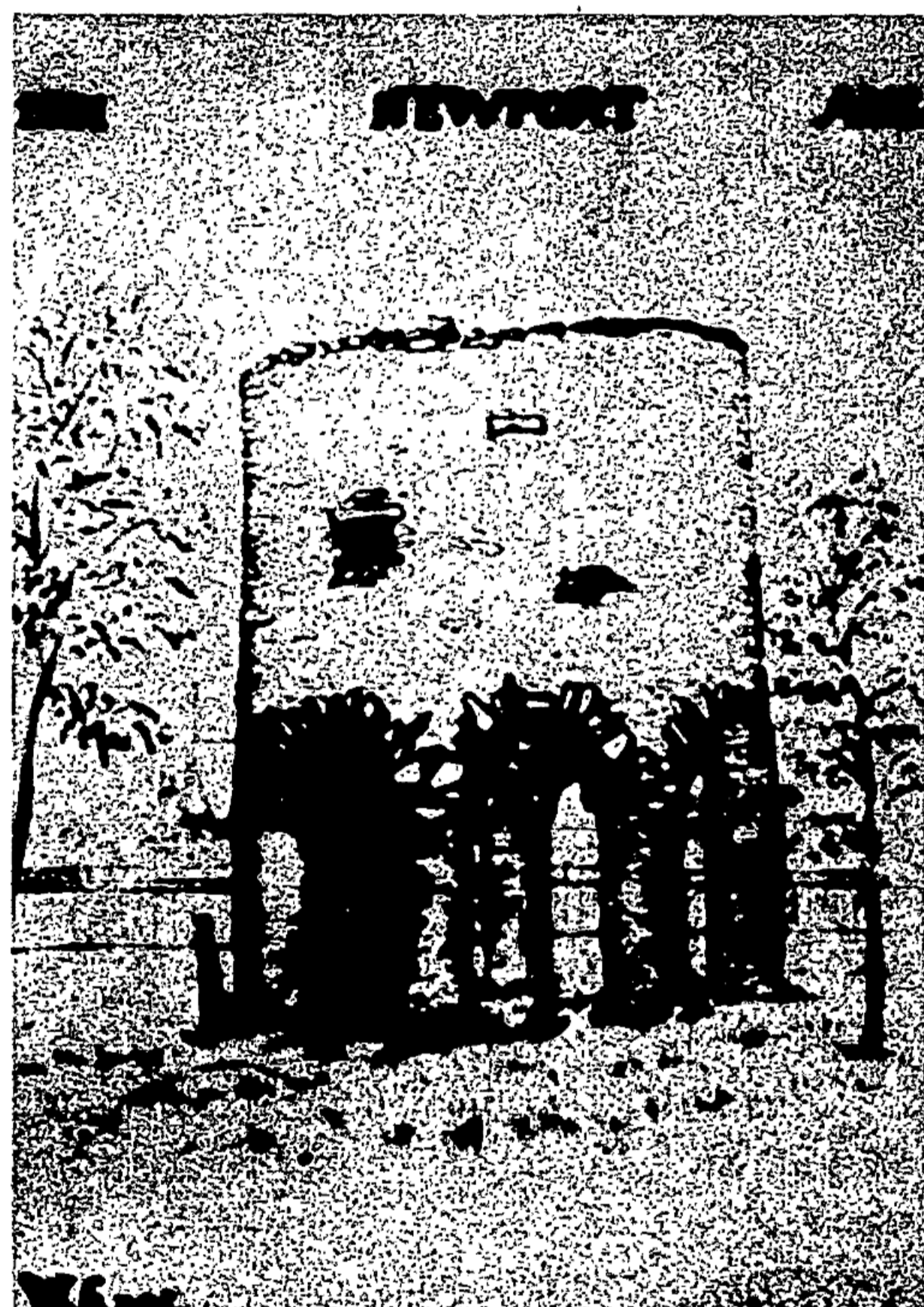
*"Boke whose waste bin thinna
 A longe time ago,
 Butte with yeares thou thickneste
 Inches three thorowe!*

*Mid brokene rockes
 Onne high mountaines standinge,
 Orre from shippes landinge
 Inne unknowne dockes,
 Mannie a house thou showeste
 Whereinne he has tarried;
 Now whenne he is carried
 To ye laste one,
 Where hee shalle dwelle alone,
 Onne ye laste page,
 His name and age,
 With his tombstone,
 And ye longe grasse theronne, . . .
 So shalle his workis bee compleate,
 And his tale tooled."*

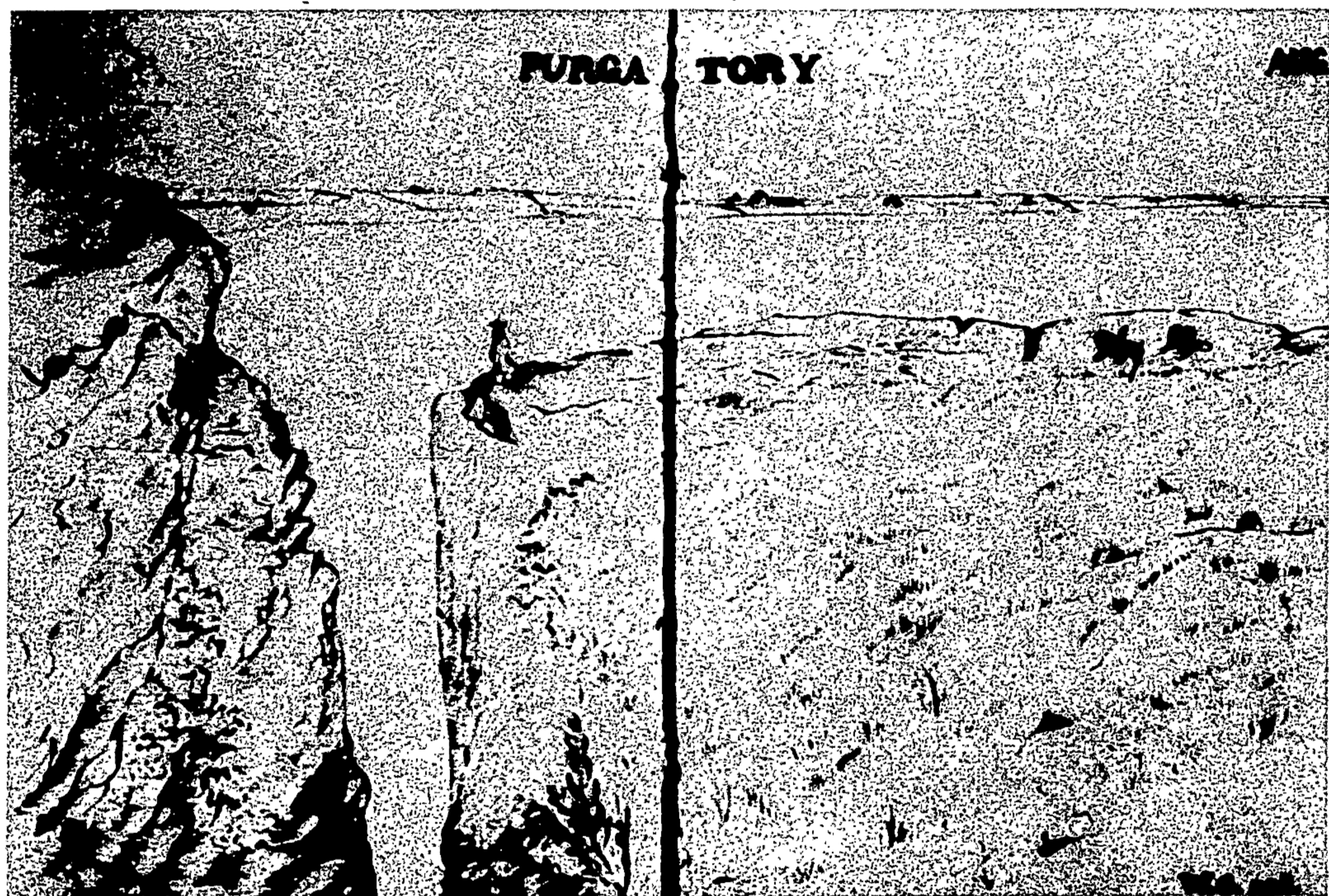
"I do not think," Mrs. Edward I. Brownell said to me as we parted at the door, "that he would have liked the idea of this publicity. He was very conservative. An old New Englander."



In Providence, Charles DeWolf Brownell's best known work is "The Burning of the Gaspee," which hangs in the Rhode Island Historical Society, commemorating the famous pre-Revolutionary exploit. He had a bold style.



Newport's Old Stone Mill was archeological what-is-it as long ago as Charles DeWolf Brownell's day.



Purgatory. Brownell, although he lived in Hartford, was much in Rhode Island as a young man and spent some time sketching in Newport and Little Compton. Took three pages of his picture diary to describe a day at Newport.



The Brownell home at 30 Whalley Street, Bristol, where the picture-diarist spent the latter years of his life. He is buried in Juniper Hill Cemetery in that town.



A corner of the Brownell living room. Books reflect artist's personality. Over the bookcase is the painting in which he dramatized a version of Andromeda legend.