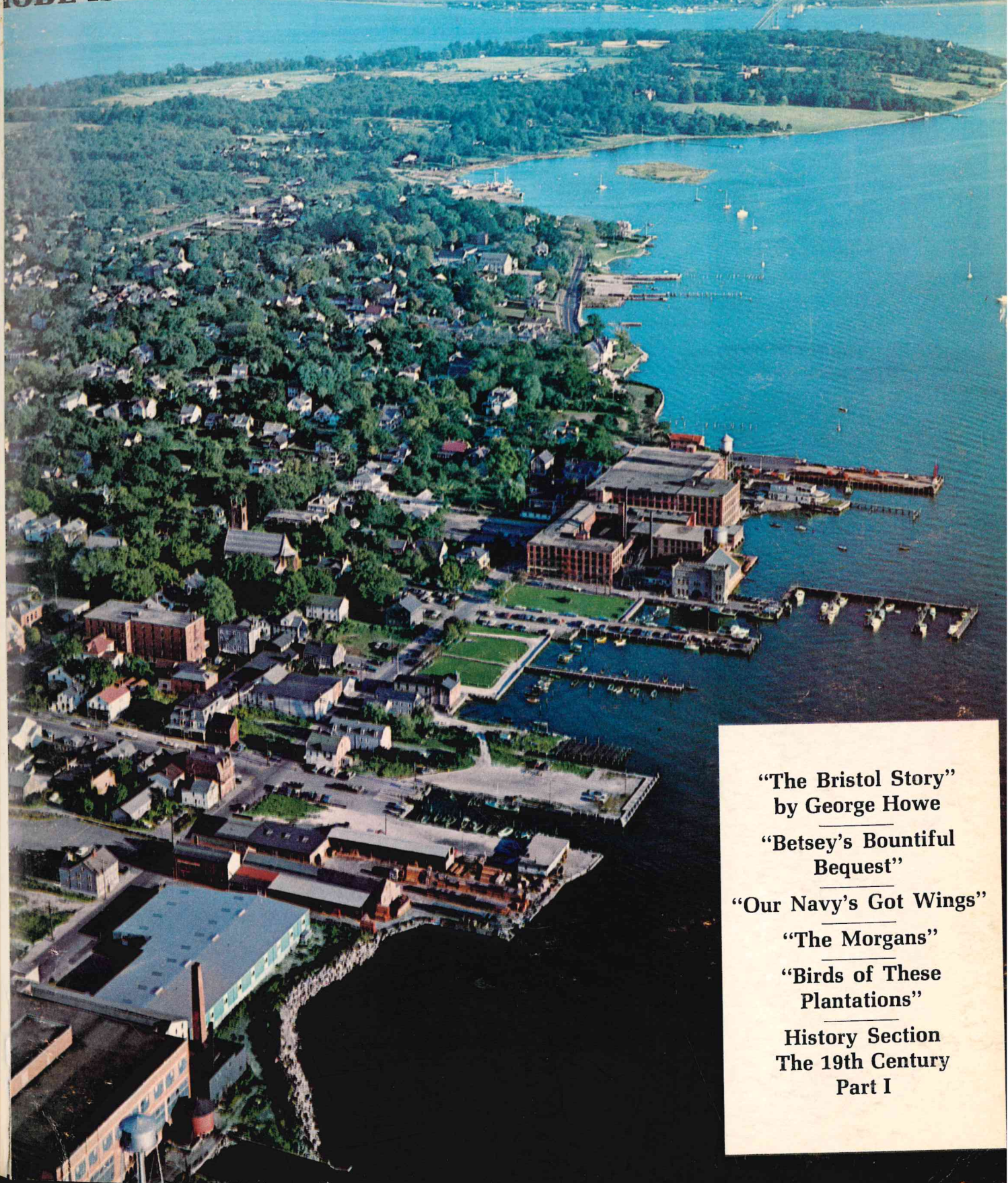


YEARBOOK

RODE ISLAND, BIRTHPLACE OF TEXTILES AND HAVEN OF HOPE



"The Bristol Story"
by George Howe

**"Betsey's Bountiful
Bequest"**

"Our Navy's Got Wings"

"The Morgans"

**"Birds of These
Plantations"**

**History Section
The 19th Century
Part I**

SOME PROMINENT FIGURES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

BY FLORENCE PARKER SIMISTER

THE nineteenth century in Rhode Island presents an embarrassment of riches in the form of famous men and women. We have, therefore, set a rule: to include those people who achieved national and international fame.

They are not all native-born, but those who came here from elsewhere accomplished their major life's work here. Others who were born in Rhode Island had spectacular careers away from this state. In other articles in this YEARBOOK the giants of the century—Dorr, Burnside, Slater, Oliver Hazard Perry, the Spragues—are discussed. We wish to call attention to the people who are perhaps not as well known, but who nevertheless made immense contributions to our culture and to human thought and progress in the nineteenth century.

Matthew Calbraith Perry was one of these. He was born in Newport in 1794 and, when still a young boy, participated in the War of 1812. At the age of 19 he became a Lieutenant in the United States Navy, in 1826 a Commander and a few years later a Captain, then the highest rank in the Navy. He was in command of the first steam vessel and planned the first two steam frigates of the United States Navy. He was a leader in the training of naval scientists and he is also responsible for adapting shell-firing cannons to warships. His outstanding achievement, however, was the opening of Japan to the world in 1854. The United States in the 1850's expanded its borders to the Pacific coast and it also wanted to expand to Japan. Whalers were in the waters of the Pacific in those days and steamships were plying between the United States and islands in that ocean. Both whalers and steamships could well use Japan's harbors as bases of supply, for Japan lay in the direct line of commerce in the Pacific. England held the coast of China, America now had California and Oregon and the Sandwich Islands, but needed Japan. Perry's was the first American expedition. He arrived in Japan in 1853 and went into the interior to deal with a Japanese of equal rank to his own. He had prepared himself well by studying the history of the country and had assembled a strong force to take with him. He persevered in his conferences and explorations of the islands where others had failed. On March 31, 1854 the first treaty between Japan and the United States in the interests of peace and lasting friendship was concluded. It has been said that in that year Commodore Perry's name was on the lips of nations.

Another Newporter was Clarence King who was born there in 1842. He attended the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale, studying mineralogy and geology. In 1863 he went on a horseback trip across America and became a volunteer on a geological survey of California. This lasted three years and when it was over, in the fall of 1866, King conceived the idea that was to make him famous; he proposed to show the relationship of the geology between the eastern and western halves of America by conducting, under government auspices, a geological exploration of the fortieth parallel. King was placed in charge of the expedition and in the course of the survey found on Mount Shasta the first active glaciers known to exist in the United States. As a result, he was made Director of the United States Geological Survey when it was established in 1897. He became a famous writer as well as a renowned geologist and a member of many learned societies. The survey of the fortieth parallel was the most important scientific study of his generation. Clarence King himself—brilliant, daring, charming and popular—has been referred to as the "richest and most many-sided genius of his day." Newport, the city of his birth, always drew King back; he often came there to write. He lies buried there in the Island Cemetery.



Commodore Matthew Perry



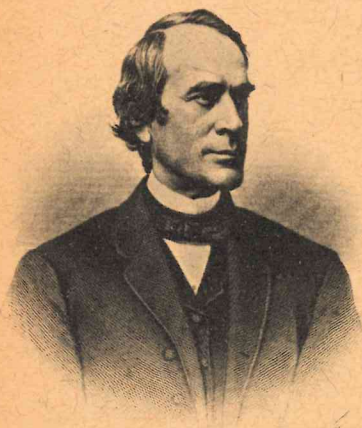
Clarence King



Ida Lewis



Jabez Gorham



George H. Corliss

One other Newporter, this one a female, deserves to be included in this album of famous persons. She was Idawalley Zorada Lewis, born in Newport the same year as Clarence King—1842. By her early teens she had learned to row a boat extremely well. This came naturally because her father, Hosea, was keeper of the Lime Rock Light in Newport Harbor. When he became ill his wife and then his daughter, Ida, took over his duties. Ida made her first rescue at the age of 16. Her fifth rescue, of two soldiers from Fort Adams whose boat had capsized, brought her great publicity. She received a silver medal and money from the Life Saving Benevolent Association of New York and the General Assembly of Rhode Island adopted a resolution acknowledging her valuable services. Soon her fame spread so far that she received mail from all over the world and visitors, including President Grant, thronged to the light house on Lime Rock. In 1899 on the death of her mother she was formally appointed Keeper of the Lime Rock Light by the Secretary of the Navy. Two years later she was given a gold life-saving medal by the United States government and in her honor one Fourth of July celebration in Newport was celebrated as Ida Lewis Day. Boys wore Ida Lewis hats and ties and the girls knotted scarves "Ida-wise." On that day she was presented with a new surf boat called *Rescue* and a new waltz (called the Ida Lewis Waltz) was played for the first time. In this century the light was renamed the Ida Lewis Light; it is now part of the Ida Lewis Yacht Club.

Inventiveness as well as adventurousness possessed many Rhode Islanders in the nineteenth century. There were, for instance, the Gorhams, Jabez and John, father and son. Jabez was born in Providence in 1792, served an apprenticeship with a jeweler and then went into business with several other young men. After five years this partnership was dissolved and Gorham continued alone. It is said that he occasionally put some of his jewelry in his beaver hat and rode to Boston where he hired a room, displayed his products and invited merchants to come and see what he manufactured. It was from these men and his contacts in Boston and other cities in New England that he became aware of the need for coin silver spoons. He began to manufacture them and by 1840 the chief product of his factory was spoons although thimbles, combs, napkin rings and forks were also manufactured. He retired at the age of 55 and his son took over the business. John Gorham was not satisfied with the products made in his father's plant and he undertook a survey of the entire American market. Three years later the Gorham Company was turning out hollow ware and every kind of silverware for use or for ornament. By 1872 John Gorham employed 450 persons and in 1886 one writer said, "The manufactory is one of the wonders of the country if not of the world." A few years later Gorham's moved to Adelaide Avenue, to a new, modern plant. By this time Edward Holbrook, an associate of John Gorham's, had become the prime mover in expanding the company's reputation to include Europe and to this end he began exhibiting Gorham's products at international expositions where they took grand prizes, gold medals and other citations. He also established the statuary bronze foundry at the plant in Elmwood which became the largest foundry of its kind anywhere. Today Gorham's is a household word around the world.

Grand prizes at international expositions were also won by Mr. George H. Corliss. He came to Providence about 1844 to try to secure some backing for a sewing machine he had invented. He did not raise the money but was persuaded instead to take a job as a draftsman on steam engines. In three years he was a partner in the firm and a little while later he owned it. He was only 30 years old when he perfected the Corliss mechanism which was to revitalize steam engine design and construction and was to bring him prizes and world fame. His invention controlled the steadiness of power and the regularity of speed which resulted in savings in coal consumption. In all he finally held 70 patents on his inventions. His plant was on the site of the West River Industrial Park and one of the most fascinating stories about Mr. Corliss and his plant is the one to do with the *Monitor*. The North was rushing

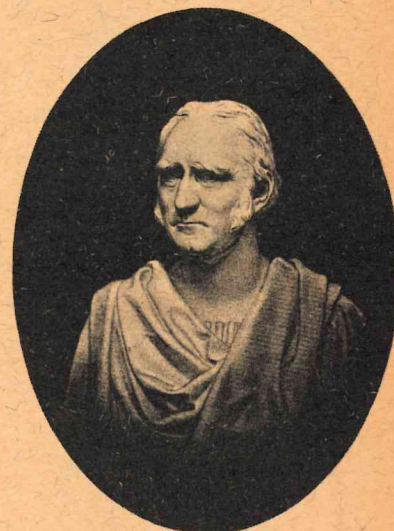
to complete this ironclad and the South was rebuilding the *Merrimac*. Word came that the *Merrimac* was finished, but there was no place in New York large enough to machine the turret-bearing for the *Monitor*. Corliss was consulted and he urged the authorities to send the bearing to his factory. A special train brought it and stood by while the work was done. The train took the bearing back to New York, the *Monitor* was completed and she sped to her rendezvous with the *Merrimac* at Hampton Roads. The rest is history. George Corliss is buried in Swan Point Cemetery. His gravestone is carved with the words: "Serving God in his life with his wealth. Serving man with a kindness that was both careful and generous. By the gift of God he increased magnificently as an inventor the world's resources in the use of steam machinery." There is also a quotation from Ezekiel: "The Spirit of the living creature was in the wheels."

In the field of education in the nineteenth century Francis Wayland, fourth president of Brown University, must be mentioned. He was an educational reformer who wrote textbooks on such subjects as ethics and economics. He advocated temperance and anti-slavery movements and a free school system for Providence. He was active in prison reform. He was ahead of his time in advancing his ideas on the elective system in colleges where a student could choose courses which would be of use to him later in life. Francis Wayland was called a political economist and educator and the First Citizen of Providence, but beyond the city where he lived and taught he was known as the foremost educator of his time and as being among the few college presidents of the early nineteenth century who might be described as educators. He devoted his whole secular life (he was a Baptist minister) to making education available to the ordinary American citizen. His book *Elements of Moral Science* was one of the most popular textbooks of the day and was republished in England and Scotland and translated into Hawaiian, modern Greek, Armenian and Syrian. He made such an impression on his time that a sketch of him may still be found in the current Encyclopaedia Britannica.

Mary C. Wheeler was also an educator. She was born in Concord, Massachusetts in 1846 and grew up there with the Alcotts, the Emersons and the Thoreaus for neighbors. After teaching in Concord for a while she came to Providence where first she had a position in a girls' school and then taught drawing and painting privately to a few girls. She desperately wanted to train herself as an artist and to study drawing and painting and so she went to Europe. She stayed abroad for many years but finally returned in 1882 to Providence where she opened a studio on North Main Street, gave lessons and painted her own pictures. In a few years she built a home on Cabot Street and there her school developed slowly from the classes in painting. By 1892 she had 43 day pupils and 5 boarding pupils. All the girls were required to take some art training for she considered this a firm basis for education. She became extremely well known and in 1904 she was one of the six official delegates appointed by the United States Secretary of State to the Second Drawing Congress in Berne, Switzerland. She had been a delegate previously to the Congresses of Drawing Teachers of France (she had taught there, too) and of Secondary Education. She was given an honorary degree by Brown University and was made an Officier d'Académie by the French Government. The school that bears her name has come to be an important institution and draws girls from all over the United States and from other countries as well.

The Transcendentalist movement began in Miss Wheeler's native home, but it spread to other places and in Providence, too, it had its followers.

Mrs. Sarah Helen Whitman was one of the leaders of the movement in Rhode Island. She was known as the "seeress of Providence" because she dabbled in mysticism and spiritualism. She is also sometimes referred to as "Poe's Helen" but it has now been proved that this poem of Poe's was dedicated to another Helen. Edgar Allen Poe and she were in love with each other and, in fact, were engaged



Francis Wayland



Mary C. Wheeler



Sarah Helen Whitman



George W. Curtis



Capt. Nat Herreshoff

to be married, but that engagement was broken by Mrs. Whitman. When Poe was in Providence once he saw her in the moonlight as she stood among the roses in her garden on Benefit Street. He asked to be introduced to her sometime later and they corresponded after they met. When Poe died his reputation was attacked by the critics and she immediately sprang to his defense. For 20 years she defended his reputation not only with words but with her pen. She wrote *Edgar Poe and His Critics*; she corresponded with his biographers. Mrs. Whitman's greatest contribution to letters was the work she did on behalf of Poe for she left no stone unturned to keep the true facts before the public. Her connection with this writer alone would have brought her fame but she also had a fairly wide-spread reputation as a poet.

George William Curtis, a Providence native, was also a participant in the Transcendentalist movement. He boarded at Brook Farm, that experiment in communal living near Boston and he also spent some time in Concord to be near Emerson. He then went to Europe and when he returned he became a writer and a lecturer. He wrote for *Putnam's Magazine* and for *Harper's Monthly*. He was active in the presidential campaign of 1856 and in 1863 became political editor of *Harper's Weekly*, an influential magazine. He served the Republican Party so well that more than once he was offered nominations for important offices. He declined because he felt he could render more service as an editor and public speaker. He was a leader in the reform of the Civil Service and in 1871 was appointed by President Grant to be chairman of the Civil Service Commission's report on reform. His column, "The Easy Chair," in *Harper's*, was extremely well known and his books, *Prue And I*, *The Potiphar Papers*, *Nile Notes of a Howadji* and others, were popular. He died in 1892.

In art Edward M. Bannister, a landscapist who lived and worked in the nineteenth century, made a reputation which has grown with the years. He did most of his painting in Rhode Island; his first picture "Under the Oaks," a scene at Potowomut, received the highest award at the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia. In 1901, the year of his death, a memorial loan exhibit of his work was held at the Providence Art Club, which he was instrumental in founding. On March 24, 1966 another exhibition of his work opened at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum. The news release for this show stated that "Bannister was America's most important Negro artist of the nineteenth century." This exhibition was assembled on behalf of the Museum of African Art of the Frederick Douglass Institute for Inter-Cultural Understanding in Washington, D.C. Douglass was a slave, an abolitionist and orator, the "father of the civil rights movement." A prophecy was made when Bannister died: "Skies, rocks, trees and distances were all absorbed and distilled through his soul and projected on canvas with a virile force and a poetic beauty which in time will place him in the front rank of American artists." The prophecy has been fulfilled.

Nathanael Greene Herreshoff of the family of boat-builders of Bristol can also be included in a category of famous Rhode Island artists. This is borne out in a foreword to a book written at the time of an exhibition of his work in the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford. "... He followed the principle that efficient design is necessarily also beautiful and that lines of power and speed inevitably flow into forms of beauty. One is convinced that the life of Nathanael Greene Herreshoff was devoted to the creation of beauty and that the art which his genius guided is worthy of preservation as the product of a great artist beside the other deathless works which adorn the walls of this institution." So vast was his reputation and that of his family that Bristol was sometimes identified in the nineteenth century as the place where the Herreshoffs built their racing yachts. In the tradition of Rhode Island's long line of marine architects the Herreshoffs, about the middle of the

nineteenth century, began to build yachts and sailboats. Later they advanced to steam yachts and from about 1880 they built racing yachts including, for many years, all the successful defenders of America's Cup. Captain Nat did not retire until the age of 85 but even then he worked on models until his death at 90. His contributions to sailing and to the development of this craft are too numerous to mention here. He was a designer of genius and an artist.

One other man belongs in this article on famous men and women of the nineteenth century. He is in a category by himself and yet he fits most of the categories mentioned. He was an inventor, educator, philanthropist, writer, historian and scientist. He was an example of the polymath—a man who exists no longer in this twentieth century age of specialization. He was Zachariah Allen. Mr. Allen's biographer has said that he cared more for principles than for forms and ceremonies. "A man of perfect physical and moral courage who spoke what he thought and stood by his convictions of right . . . he was a Rhode Islander of Rhode Islanders . . . He was a promoter of worthy causes, an active and honorary member of many scientific, literary and benevolent institutions and was at the time of his death the president of four public societies." He wrote prolifically and one of his books, *Solar Light And Heat*, received favorable comments from advanced scientific men on both sides of the ocean. He believed that the winds, waves and electricity would be used in future times beyond any conception of his generation. He invented a cut-off valve for steam engines, a hot-air furnace, and made many improvements in his own textile mills, the most important being a new system of transmitting power which became known as the American System of High Speed Belting. He was the founder of the Manufacturers Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Rhode Island and it was Mr. Allen who conceived the idea of a system of reservoirs for mills so that the winter snow and rain could be stored for spring and summer drought use. He was a historian of some note and the founder of many of the state's organizations still in existence today. He was truly a Rhode Islander of Rhode Islanders.

Readers will no doubt have their own nominations for this gallery of portraits. There are dozens of men and women we have not mentioned. We have discussed only the ones we consider to be some of the most prominent men and women of the nineteenth century.



Zachariah Allen