

# RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

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Mural by R. H. Ives Gammell

Courtesy of Providence Union National  
Bank and Trust Company

SAILING OF THE *GENERAL WASHINGTON*

[see inside front cover]

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### SAILING OF THE *GENERAL WASHINGTON*

[reproduced on front cover]

On December 19, 1787, John Brown's ship, *GENERAL WASHINGTON*, dropped down the river from Providence, the first Rhode Island vessel outward bound for China and the East Indies.

The cover illustration is one of a series of murals relating to important events in Rhode Island history, prior to the founding of the Providence Bank in 1791. These murals by R. H. Ives Gammell have been recently placed in the new banking room of the Providence Union National Bank and Trust Company at 35 Weybosset Street, Providence, R. I.

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## THE VOYAGE OF THE *MERCURY*

by EARL C. TANNER\*

IN the Rhode Island Historical Society's extensive manuscript collection may be found two volumes bound in coarse, weather-beaten sailcloth: the log of the *Mercury*. These volumes contain the day-by-day account of one of the most extraordinary voyages ever made out of Providence in a square-rigger. It was the usual practice for sailing vessels clearing from Providence to proceed to a specific port and then to return. In the early 19th century, however, it became increasingly common for large ships furnished with considerable sums of cash to shop about the world, from continent to continent, searching out opportunities for high profits. Such was the practice of the *Mercury*. From 1820 to 1825, the period covered by the log, the *Mercury* was chiefly engaged in trade with the newly independent republics on the West Coast of South America.

The following narrative of the *Mercury's* voyage has been extracted from the ship's log and from a mass of evidence assembled for a litigation over the ship's accounts.<sup>1</sup> Since this narrative is intended as one chapter in a longer study on trade between the port of Providence and Latin America, it may be useful to summarize in a few paragraphs information supplied in other chapters on West Coast conditions in the early nineteenth century.

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<sup>1</sup>This evidence may be consulted in the printed transcript of the record filed in the Supreme Court of the United States on appeal of the case under the title Henry Mathewson, Respondent and Appellant v. John H. Clarke, Adm'r of Willard W. Wetmore, certified Dec. 9, 1842. A copy is available at the Rhode Island Historical Society.



Chile was, until 1817, a captaincy-general of the Spanish Empire; Peru was a viceroyalty until 1824. Before the close of the 18th century, practically no foreign traders were allowed into either of these areas. At the turn of the century, however, Spanish colonial monopoly was somewhat relaxed because of Spanish preoccupation with the Napoleonic Wars. A few foreign vessels ventured into Chilean ports, and were well received, but in 1802, some of them, including the ship *Hazard* of Providence, were seized and despoiled. Between 1811 and 1814, Spanish authority having been still further reduced by Napoleon's occupation of Spain, Chilean patriots ousted the imperial authorities and opened Chilean ports to foreign shipping. An American agent was received and a visiting American frigate cordially saluted. But very little trade could develop before the War of 1812 broke out and prevented American shipping from taking advantage of this new opportunity. Even less trade took place before 1812 with Peru, for the Viceroyalty was Spain's stronghold on the South American continent. Operating from Peru, the imperial forces reoccupied Chile in 1814.

The year 1815 saw peace reestablished in Europe and in the United States, but not in Spanish America. The colonies which had had a taste of freedom while Spain was overrun were unwilling to return to their pre-war submission. Revolts broke out in the North under Bolívar and in the South under San Martín. Eventually the two armies of liberation met in Peru. Long before the contest was settled, however, aggressive Yankee merchants were on the Coast, trading with the belligerents. Among the earliest arrivals were vessels belonging to the leading ship-owners of Providence, Edward Carrington & Company. Armed with these facts, we may proceed to *The Voyage of the Mercury*.

\* \* \*

On the morning of November 22, 1820, the ship *Mercury*, Benjamin James master, moved out of Providence before a stiff west wind and passed down Narragansett Bay west of Conanicut Island. At 6 p. m., Beavertail light bearing east, the *Mercury* dismissed her pilot and stood to sea. Her course was easterly and her destination the mouth of the Texel in Holland. With a burden of 364 18/95 tons, she measured 108' x 27' 8" x 13' 10". She had two decks, three masts, and a figurehead representing the god Mercury.<sup>2</sup>

Besides Captain James, she had on board one mate, Mr. Wheaton, and some twenty-five seamen. The cargo of the *Mercury* consisted of forty hogsheads of rum, provisions for eighteen months to two years, and two very important letters addressed to a Captain Henry Mathewson.

Having got the *Mercury* safely past Beavertail, let us return to Providence, to the office of Edward Carrington & Company on Williams Street, overlooking the harbor.<sup>3</sup> General Carrington had a particular interest in the *Mercury* and, we may suppose, had watched her departure from the captain's walk on top of Carrington House. When she had passed from sight, the General probably came down to his office on the first floor at the rear. There he could peruse the latest dispatches from his correspondents in Europe, Asia, North America and South America.

Since 1817, the attention of the mercantile world had been drawn to an area previously of small interest: the west coast of South America. The liberation of Chile by General San Martín had put an end to Spanish commercial restrictions, had thrown open the ports of Chile to foreign shipping, and had encouraged the establishment of foreign business houses. Edward Carrington & Co. had immediately dispatched ships and had entered into correspondence with the Valparaíso firm of Higginson & O'Brien. More recently, a serious disagreement over accounts current had caused Edward Carrington & Co. to transfer its business to another Valparaíso firm, Lynch, Hill & Co.

By 1820, General San Martín had reorganized his forces and was ready to advance against Peru, the last Spanish stronghold in South America. He had the soldiers, but he foresaw a need for more arms. In his efforts to fill this need, he turned to every likely source includ-

<sup>2</sup>Survey of Federal Archives, Division of Community Service Programs, Work Projects Administration, *Ship Registers and Enrollments of Providence, Rhode Island, 1773-1939* (Providence, 1941), I, 738. This work is based principally on original documents at the Rhode Island Historical Society.

<sup>3</sup>Edward Carrington & Co. was founded in 1815 by Edward Carrington and Samuel Wetmore. By 1818, the partners owned 13 ships, 2 brigs, and a number of smaller vessels — more than any other Providence firm. The house of Edward Carrington and the office of the company are now owned by the Rhode Island School of Design and are preserved as a museum, open to the public. L. E. Rogers, ed., *The Biographical Cyclopaedia of Representative Men of Rhode Island* (Providence, 1881), I, 81; Edward Field, ed., *State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations at the End of the Century: A History* (Boston, 1902), II, 471.



ing his friend Estanislau Lynch of Lynch, Hill & Co. Thus it happened that, in due course, a letter was received at the office of Edward Carrington & Co. inviting cooperation with Lynch, Hill & Co. in obtaining

20,000 muskets  
7,000 carbines, and  
7,000 cavalry sabres.

It was a big order and one not to be undertaken without careful consideration. The fact that San Martín had driven the imperial forces out of Chile did not necessarily mean that he would be successful in taking Peru. If he should be defeated, he might not be in a position to pay for the arms. But in this case, there would be a compensating factor: Chile would probably need arms to defend herself from a Spanish counter-attack. As a third alternative, purchasers might be found in the armies of Bolívar, then advancing through New Granada towards Ecuador. Everything considered, General Carrington decided that he would undertake the commission, but that he would not do it alone. He therefore proposed a joint venture to Cyrus Butler, prominent merchant of Providence, and with him purchased the ship *Mercury* for \$11,000. She was then fourteen years old, Philadelphia built, and not in the best condition, but after investing \$1,800 in repairs, General Carrington was prepared to say, "we think she is a prime ship."

Messrs. Butler and Carrington determined to entrust their dangerous venture to Captain Henry Mathewson, an experienced Providence mariner. Having reached an agreement, they dispatched him to Europe with orders to purchase arms and an assorted cargo for shipment in "a vessel to be provided." Captain Mathewson was to assume command of this vessel immediately upon its arrival at the mouth of the Texel and was to retain the officers who had brought her over as his first and second mates. Captain Mathewson left Providence on October 20, 1820. The first entry in his expense account reads, "Passage to Boston and dinner \$4.50."

Captain Mathewson proceeded to Holland in November and began the work of assembling his cargo. In accordance with instructions, he worked largely through Messrs. Crommelin & Co., Dutch correspondents of Edward Carrington & Co. His business proved more difficult than had been anticipated and caused him to travel

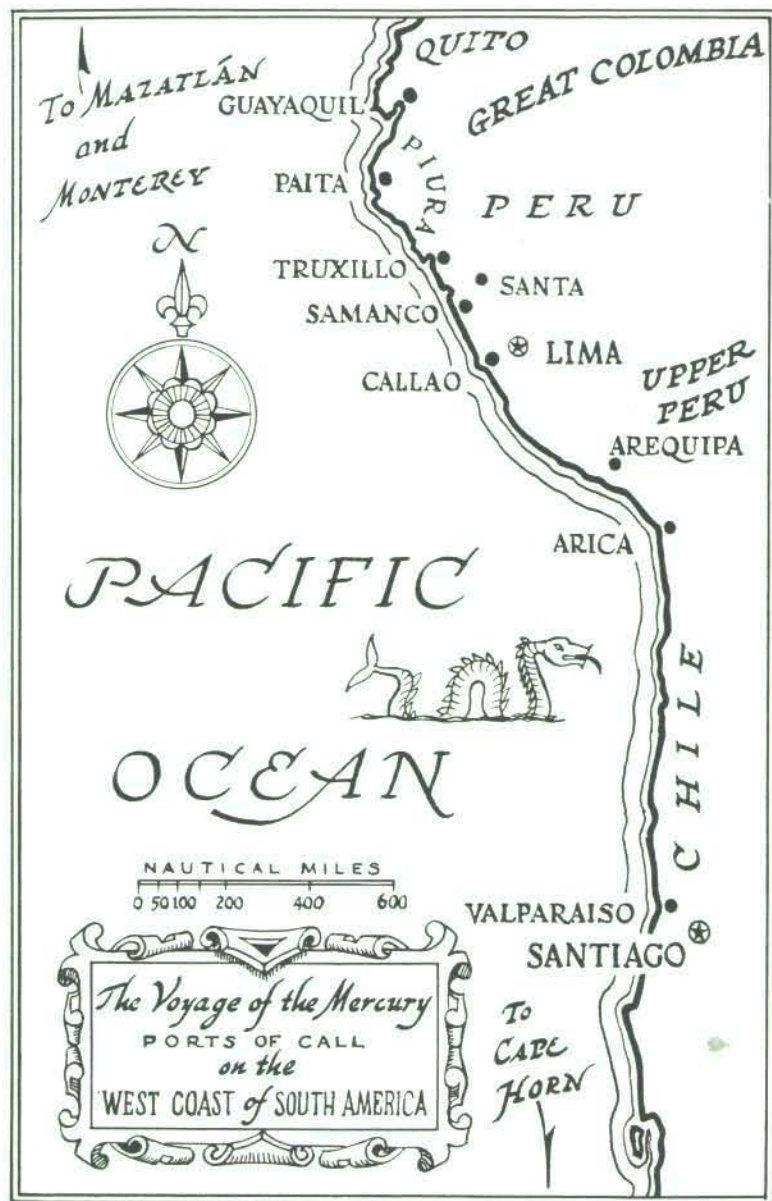
up and down the coast from Rotterdam to Hamburg. The job was hardly begun when, on December 22, 1820, the promised vessel arrived at the mouth of the Texel. She was the *Mercury*, thirty days out from Providence, bringing forty hogsheads of rum and two letters of instructions addressed to Captain Henry Mathewson.

\* \* \*

Upon the arrival of the *Mercury*, Captain Mathewson immediately took command, retaining as junior officers Mr. James and Mr. Wheaton, who had brought her over. The first of his two letters of instructions was dated Providence, November 13, 1820, and provided a detailed outline of procedure for the voyage. One of the many hazards of the enterprise, the letter pointed out, was the possibility of being boarded by a Spanish man-of-war. In such a case, it would not be easy to give a satisfactory explanation for 34,000 weapons bound in the direction of Peru, a Spanish colony in revolt. Fortunately, however, it was not unusual to carry a smaller quantity of arms around Cape Horn for trade with the Indians on the Columbia River. Taking advantage of this fact, Messrs. Butler and Carrington advised Captain Mathewson as follows: "We should recommend your having your arms divided in your invoice—that is, invoice 2,000 arms with your gin, glassware, powder, &c., as bound for the Columbia River, &c.; the remaining muskets, carbines, and sabres, have stored low down and have no account in your log book, or elsewhere, of their being on board." To facilitate the procedure, it was arranged that Crommelin & Co. should make out the invoice and bill of lading in the manner requested by Captain Mathewson.

Having cleared for the Columbia River, the *Mercury* was to proceed to Valparaiso, where, on approaching the harbor, she was to show a "blue flag at the fore and a white flag at the main" to inform Lynch, Hill & Co. of her identity. A messenger with further instructions was, at that signal, to come on board. Should no messenger appear, the ship was to come to anchor, report herself bound for the Columbia River and in need of fresh water. Should General San Martín have been successful, Lynch, Hill & Co. would, no doubt, advise the *Mercury* as to the port at which the arms were wanted. The price to be received was \$8.50 each for the 20,000 muskets; \$6.00 each for the 7,000 carbines; and \$6.00 each for the





Drawn by Robert L. Timmins, 1951

7,000 cavalry sabres. No import duties were to be charged on the arms nor any export duties on the proceeds. Payment was to be taken in specie or, by mutual agreement, in the products of the country at current prices. Should General San Martín have been unsuccessful, Captain Mathewson was to consult with Lynch, Hill & Co. and take the course most calculated to secure the property and promote the interests of Messrs. Butler and Carrington. Markets, in this case, were to be sought in Chile, New Granada, or elsewhere.

The proceeds, it was suggested, might be put into copper and specie, taken to Canton, and delivered to Messrs. S. Russell & Co., the Carrington China correspondents. An alternative cargo was cochineal, which was judged a "good article in Canton." Captain Mathewson was cautioned against taking on cocoa for New York or Cadiz: both markets being overstocked, "we have a poor opinion of a cocoa voyage." A word of warning about Lynch, Hill & Co. was in order, even though dealings with them in the past had been wholly satisfactory. "Should any circumstance have occurred to have affected the reputation of Lynch, Hill & Co. . . you must endeavor to employ any other good house; still there would seem to be some difficulty in this, as the contract is made in the name of Mr. Lynch; all we can say on this point is, that you must do the best you can under the circumstances."

There was one other detail. Edward Carrington & Co.'s disputed account with the Valparaíso house of Higginson & O'Brien was still outstanding, "he [Higginson] having made some demands for bad debts in the sale of the *Lyon's* cargo, of which we know nothing about." A law suit was pending and Higginson was in hopes that a Carrington vessel might appear at Valparaíso so that he might have it attached. Therefore Captain Mathewson was instructed, "You will let it be understood at Valparaíso that the ship and cargo belongs to Mr. Butler."

Finally, "You will also be mindful to put this letter [and] the contract . . . in a private place so that they cannot be found in case of being boarded or detained."

Such were the instructions of November 13, 1820. The second letter of instructions, dated November 14, 1820, need not detain us, for it was meant only for the eyes of Spanish captains that might board the *Mercury*. It contained elaborate directions for trading in



"sea otter, land otter, and seal skins" at the Columbia River and in Alaska.

The difficult work of assembling a cargo went on through January, February, and March, 1821, during which time Captain Mathewson was unable to obtain more than half the arms required. He was beginning to feel "quite unwell" by reason of "fatigue and anxiety of mind" and determined that further delay could not be justified. Accordingly he got under sail on April 13, 1821, with a cargo worth \$65,706.87 including forty hogsheads of rum laden at Providence and the balance in arms, gin, glass, and cloth laden at Amsterdam and Bremen. The amount of arms obtained was 10,848 muskets, 60 carbines, and 4,650 sabres. The officers all carried small ventures authorized them by contract and consisting of swords, cologne water, gin and glass.

The long haul from Bremen to Valparaiso provided the first real test for General Carrington's "prime ship" and she did poorly. Captain Mathewson reported that besides leaking at an alarming rate, "her bends are very rotten . . . ; her standing rigging is not fit to trust the masts to in bad weather; . . . her running rigging has nearly all been rove new since she left Providence; her blocks are the most miserable that ever I saw on board of a ship, and I am fearful that you have been much deceived in the purchase of this vessel."

The passage occupied four months during which rations consumed were approximately one barrel of beef, one barrel of bread, and one hogshead of water per week; one barrel of pork per month; plus a small quantity of molasses, fish, flour, and fresh provisions. Sales of clothing and tobacco made to the crew from time to time amounted to \$585.32, a substantial portion of their total wages. On the 20th of August, 1821, the *Mercury* stood off Valparaiso waiting for favorable winds to enter the harbor. Ten days later she finally dropped anchor. Weather, at this point was only one of the problems facing the captain of the *Mercury*. The log entry for the first day in port reads in part, "at 6 am a mutiny began with the crew, or part of them. Viz. Charles Cropper & Paul Warren. Captain Mathewson went on shore and brought off a gard and took Charles Cropper & Paul Warren, to Prizen. . . ." Next day, the log continued, "found that the peopel had broke through the Bulk-

head in the forcastle, and stole a number of Cases of Gin, eight we have all ready discovered to be out., we find that Charles Cropper, Paul Warren, & Henry Onkers, are the heads of it and the others has help<sup>d</sup>. drink it—put Henry Onkers in Irons. and put him in the steerage."<sup>4</sup> A slightly different version of these affairs was submitted to the owners by Captain Mathewson. "The crew, unbeknown to me, broke through the bulkhead forward, and drank out about a dozen cases of gin that we have found. Charles Cropper and Paul Warren, I find, began the embezzlement; the former I had seized up and gave four dozen the latter two and a half dozen, and then sent them to prison. As it is not likely these men will go any further in the ship, you had best stop their draw bills."

Meanwhile, contact had been established with Lynch, Hill & Co. Prospects were excellent. San Martín had occupied Lima almost unopposed though the royalists still held Callao (port of Lima). So sanguine was Captain Mathewson that he reported "as they now have plenty of cash at Lima, I feel in hopes that I shall have no difficulty in getting my pay. . . ." He could have sold his linens to advantage in Valparaiso, but he was advised by Horatio Gerauld, a Rhode Island merchant resident in Chile, that "everything we have will answer much better at Lima." Mr. Lynch, himself, determined to accompany Captain Mathewson to Lima, but could not be ready until the middle of September. The interval was occupied by repairs, a severe storm, and sightseeing. On the 17th, "C. Cropper & Paul Warren was taken out of Prizen and ordered on board but they runaway. . . ." Next day the *Mercury* cleared for Peru with several passengers: Mr. Lynch, his clerk, two servants, Judge Prevost (the American agent), Mr. Laurain, (a Chilean gentleman), and servant. All provided their own stores; none were charged passage. On this same day Henry Onkers, the gin embezzler, was let out of irons.

A short passage of eight days put the *Mercury* in Callao, where everything was found to be in confusion. The port had been surrendered to the patriots just three days before and "there was neither laws nor regulations in the country." On October 1, San

<sup>4</sup>The log of the *Mercury* was apparently written by Benjamin James. As quotations from this source are easily distinguishable by the language, and as all other quotations are from the evidence in Mathewson v. Clarke reference footnotes will be omitted.



Martín agreed to take the arms in accordance with the contract and by the 8th, they were all landed. (1,500 were immediately shipped for Guayaquil.) Then began the long hard task of collecting the account. The optimism which Captain Mathewson expressed in Valparaiso turned to despair in Lima. He reported to his owners on October 16, 1821, that "from the maneuvering of the general in respect to this contract, I believe him to be a shuffling fellow and no confidence can be placed in him." And Captain Mathewson continued, "I have no doubt but he [General San Martín] will make all kind of excuses to prevent the payment of those arms at the time specified in the contract; and should the royalists again get possession of Lima, your demand on the Government would be of but little value."

The captain's pessimism proved well founded, for it was June, 1822, before his affairs were sufficiently in order for him to leave Callao. During his nine months in port, he was engaged not only in trying to collect his bill from the government, but also in disposing of the *Mercury's* assorted cargo. Most of the items were in demand at Lima and sold at satisfactory profits. 2,600 pounds of powder were shipped back to Valparaiso consigned to Horatio Gerauld with instructions to remit the proceeds to E. T. Jenckes, a Carrington supercargo then resident in Chile, or direct to the company in Providence. At about the same time, Captain Mathewson made a partial recovery on the government debt by accepting goods to the amount of \$7,872.86 representing one-third of the cargo of the ship *Nancy*, condemned by the Peruvian government. The other two-thirds were taken by Lynch and by a merchant named Maskline Clark. The latter undertook to dispose of the entire cargo of the *Nancy* and also of \$3,610 worth of *Mercury* gin at Guayaquil. This he did, taking cocoa in payment and selling it at Valparaiso. The proceeds of the cocoa eventually reached Providence partly through Captain Mathewson and partly through Jenckes. By such devices Captain Mathewson gradually collected from the Peruvian government most of the balance of his account.

During the long stay in port, Captain Mathewson found that the business of the owners did not occupy all of his time. He became widely acquainted in the city of Lima and engaged in social and commercial activities on his own behalf. For example, he accepted

\$2,700 from a J. S. Martínez for the purchase of military clothing in Europe. And he came into possession of considerable sums of money which he said were given him by old Spaniards for confidential services such as helping them to conceal their fortunes.<sup>5</sup> He also entered into a profitable flour speculation with Lynch.

There were, meanwhile, repairs to be made on the ship and discipline to be maintained in the forecabin. A recurrent complaint about the food seems to have given most trouble at this period. On February 18, 1822, for example, the log records, "I have been informed that our People has written a letter to the Capt. of the frigate *Constellation*, stating that they had not half enough to eat, and that they had to work very hard, the whole of which is false—for they have a barrel of good Pilot bread standing in the Forecabin—on inquiring I found James Smith, the Ringleader., and had him put in Irons—"

At length the accounts were nearly settled and an opportunity for profitable employment of the ship presented itself. The patriot army's occupation of Lima had placed the old Spaniards in so precarious a position that many of them decided to return to Spain. The *Mercury* was available and was chartered by a merchant named Rodolpho for \$15,000 to carry passengers to Gibraltar. In addition, Captain Mathewson carried on board about \$135,000 in specie for the owners and others. Before leaving Callao, Captain Mathewson dispatched a messenger to Providence by way of Panama asking the owners' opinion of another arms contract with San Martín. But at the first opportunity after leaving Lima, he wrote proposing a return voyage from Gibraltar to Peru with arms—not for San Martín, this time, but for the royalists. "The Spanish general would gladly pay \$15 each for 20,000 stand of arms, cash on board, at the port of Arcker [Arica], and I do not think there would be any difficulty in landing them. . . ." advised Captain Mathewson, who was apparently indifferent as to who won the war. He hoped to have an answer at Gibraltar.

The *Mercury* sailed from Callao on June 18, 1822. On June 20, the Peruvian fleet appeared and the *Mercury* was brought to.

<sup>5</sup>The "old Spaniards" were colonials born in Spain, most of whom opposed the Spanish American wars for liberation. As their fortunes were subject to confiscation by the patriots, many of them attempted to conceal their property until it might safely be taken out of the country.



The log records "the officer that came on Board was very polite, the officer left us and we went on our course—." A week later the monotony was again broken when "one of the Passengers being tipsy came on deck with a long knife to kill some of the people, took him and put him in irons." Off Cape Horn the *Mercury* ran into an ice field which stretched as far as could be seen from aloft. The only casualty, however, was the main stock of the rudder which broke and had to be replaced.<sup>6</sup> Seventy-two days out from Callao, the *Mercury* put into Rio for supplies and repairs. There she picked up one new passenger, whose fare Captain Mathewson, by mistake, neglected to credit to either Rodolpho or General Carrington. After sixteen days in port and some minor trouble with the crew, the *Mercury* got underway again on September 16, 1822. The passage from Rio to Gibraltar took fifty-four days and was uneventful except that the pumps had to be manned continuously.<sup>7</sup>

At Gibraltar, the passengers were discharged and extensive repairs were undertaken, particularly around the bow. The log book sadly records that in the course of these repairs the figurehead was sacrificed: "what was my thoughts, at seeing him who had with me faced the cold winds of the North, and of the South, cut from his station, no more to face the stormy blasts,—"

<sup>6</sup>On August 5, "one of our Passengers who has been sick all the passage, died, he was committed to the deep, about 10 am, after the Padrez had passed the seremonies. &c." On August 24, a baby girl was born.

<sup>7</sup>On November 2, "this day Henry Onkers is drunk and not fit for duty, but very insolent, his shipmates with much difficulty got him below."

[to be concluded]

## NOTICE

The Society is eager to borrow samplers for an exhibition during the month of May. If you are willing to lend them, will you please call Mr. Monahan, DE 1-8575.

## PICTURES OF PROVIDENCE IN THE PAST, 1790-1820

THE REMINISCENCES OF WALTER R. DANFORTH

edited by CLARKSON A. COLLINS, 3rd.

[continued from January, 1951, v. 10, no. 1, p. 13]

On North Main near the junction of Randall St. about 55 years since might be seen a sign board displaying a gilt rising sun, and underneath was lettered—"The best manufactured goods under the sun." The store was kept by Benjamin Robinson<sup>21</sup> then extensively engaged in manufacturing corduroys, an article much used in male attire in those days.

In the neighborhood lived Mr. Wilkinson, husband of the once celebrated preacher, prophet and elect lady, Jemima Wilkinson, whose influence for a long time was so great as to disturb domestic peace by leading captive silly men, who left families and business to follow this enthusiast or hypocrite and listen to her wild effusions.<sup>22</sup>

Where the Canal Market<sup>23</sup> is was an old building of a dark brown color, where might be seen daily displayed on the shop board, which was formed according to the fashion three score years ago by the window shutter folded down and resting on a post in front, an iron basin in which was a cake of hand soap to indicate a grocery, and over the door was a sign board inscribed—"John Nash sells cheap for cash."

An honest glazier named Recompence Healy had his shop opposite on whose small sign was painted—"Good Putty."

At the corner of North Main and Smith streets stood a venerable edifice fifty years ago, which had been a Baptist Meeting House nearly a hundred years before and where probably more than three

<sup>21</sup>Probably Benjamin Robinson (1784-1864), son of Christopher and Hannah (Atwood) Robinson. He is listed as a baker in the 1824 *Directory* and as a grocer in later editions.

<sup>22</sup>Published biographies of the famous "Universal Friend" make no mention of her ever having been married. Indeed her advocacy of a state of celibacy and her attempts to dissolve the marriages of her followers led to considerable dissension among the ranks of those who considered her divinely inspired.

<sup>23</sup>The Canal Market at the junction of North Main and Mill Streets was erected in 1826. For a brief history of the Canal Market Corporation see *The Narragansett Historical Register*, VIII, no. 1, p. 1, January, 1890. The records of the corporation are in the Rhode Island Historical Society.



generations had worshipped God before they were gathered to their fathers. Elder Samuel Winsor officiated there as pastor many years, and until the present large church was built.<sup>24</sup> When the old house ceased to be a place of worship it was successively used as a sugar refinery, as a depository of cotton and linen rags or waste for Thurber's paper mills, and for stone lime, molasses, staves, heading, hoop poles, and sugar. Our Father's house had indeed become a house of merchandise. In the neighborhood some of the most substantial and highly respected citizens lived or kept their stores—such as Benjamin Stelle, Samuel and John Whipple, Michael and Joel Metcalf, George Weeden, Samuel Thurber, Samuel Young, and others.<sup>25</sup> One of this coterie being troubled with rats borrowed a trap of another of them, and after having used it for awhile loaned it to a third, who in turn loaned it to a fourth, from whom it went to others in succession until the owner, when he wanted it for use, found much difficulty in its recovery. He considered himself an injured man and sought redress by an attempt to have the delinquents punished. He therefore assembled those who had made so free with his rat trap and made a grave charge against the original borrower for loaning another's property, who in his turn preferred a charge against the next for the like offence, and he another, and so on, as in a court of law on an action for breach of covenant in a warranty deed, summonses ad warrantizandum are issued to successive grantors to make good the warranty. And in this way the trap lenders were all successively arraigned and tried in the old Meeting House by a disinterested court in the midst of many spectators, who had been called in on the occasion, and were each and severally sentenced to pay two bottles of wine, together with cost of court, in the same currency. The fines were promptly paid, and the court and parties and officers in attendance and spectators, all

<sup>24</sup>Samuel Winsor (1722-1803) succeeded his father Samuel as Pastor of the First Baptist Church in 1759. Mr. Danforth was somewhat in error as to these events, which took place before his birth. Winsor with a following of Six-Principle Baptists separated from the First Baptist Church in 1771. He was succeeded by Dr. James Manning. The "present large church," still a cherished landmark of Providence, was erected in 1775.

<sup>25</sup>Biographical details and many of the prominent townsmen mentioned may be found in *The Mechanics Festival* (Providence, 1860) and *Annals of the Town of Providence* (Providence, 1843) by William R. Staples. The locations of their shops and homes can often be found on the excellent maps in *Owners and Occupants of the Lots, Houses and Shops in the Town of Providence . . . in 1798* (Providence, 1914) by Henry R. Chace.

staid, grave, and sober men, most of them never having been on a spree in their lives, had execution forthwith done. As the shades of evening came on, their vision became not a little obscure and one of them found himself precipitated downwards through a scuttle among the rags and waste, making such a ludicrous appearance as to set the company in an ecstasy of delight. He was, however, extricated from his embarrassing situation and lifted out of the pit by his associates, and soon after all retired to their homes in peace. This incident *per se* is trifling, but it illustrates the fact that in those days and up to the modern era of total abstinence the most sober men would occasionally put aside their gravity and relieve the labors of the day with festivity and a little dissipation, and not a few who generally walked upright *during the day* would sometimes *at night* return to their homes with a *stone in their hats*.

This neighborhood was the hot bed of practical jokes of which I will detail a few. At the foot of Star Street Samuel Young kept a dry goods and grocery, and on his broad window board with which every shop was then furnished he had the figure of a black boy carved in wood, and his black, glossy face and white eyes and teeth were chiseled and painted to the life: their verisimilitude to nature was so perfect that it could not have been made by any one but John Bowers,<sup>26</sup> the ingenious sculptor in wood. There had been a difficulty of some sort existing between Mr. Young and John Brown, which originated in some business transaction. In closing his store one evening, Mr. Young unwittingly left his black boy outside, which being perceived by a practical joker, he borrowed this "counterfeit presentment" of one of Africa's race; he seized him, *in advance of the law for catching "fugitive slaves,"* and then entering some shop he indited a formal challenge to Mr. Brown in the name of Mr. Young, inviting him to meet him, armed for mortal combat, on Prospect Hill near the Old Powder House.<sup>27</sup> He placed the challenge in the dexter hand of the sculptured darkey, and that was put in an erect posture on the steps in front of Mr. Brown's door, who generally rose before it was light, and who on that morning coming out and seeing the figure dimly, took the paper from his extended hand. Having ascertained its con-

<sup>26</sup>John Bowers was probably the most noted carver of figureheads and shop signs in Providence at the end of the 18th century.

<sup>27</sup>At the northwest corner of Prospect and Meeting Streets.





Original in R. I. H. S.

Sketch by Zachariah Allen

KING'S CHURCH, 1722-1810

North Main Street, Providence

replaced by St. John's Cathedral

[see page 54]

tents by the aid of an entry lamp, he passed out by the stationary figure and mute messenger or second, at the door, remarking as he went, "I'm a peace man; I can't fight a duel. Tell your master that we must settle our affairs in some other way."

The other practical affair was this. A dealer in flour, George Weeden, had sold a few barrels to another on a short credit, and the purchaser, to make assurance doubly sure to the seller, promised that at the expiration of that credit he would call and pay the bill, *if he should then be alive*. The time came round; the term of credit had expired, and the debtor, having suffered the affair of his strong assurances to pass out of memory did not appear to discharge the bill. "Of course," said the creditor, "the man must be dead." He therefore called on John Lassell, who was for many years undertaker in this town, and directed him to call at the late residence of his debtor and take his measure for a coffin. The undertaker went, and to his great surprise found the supposed defunct at breakfast. He stated for what purpose he had been sent there, but not by whom, and added that he supposed there must be some mistake. "No," said the living debtor, "there is no mistake—I know who sent you. Come, we will go together and see him." They went. The flour bill was paid, and the undertaker received a liberal reward without breaking ground and without the delay of presenting his bill to an administrator.

To return to the old meeting house. The venerable pile was taken down over forty years since, and on its site Thomas and Josiah Snow, industrious and enterprising mechanics, housewrights, erected the brick block which now stands there.

In surveying and contemplating that antique structure, built by dissenting Christians who thought that the human voice was the only proper music of the sanctuary and that the organ was a desecration of the house of God, and at a time before it was considered that painted pews, cushioned seats, carpeted aisles, domes, or Corinthian capitals were necessary accompaniments to public worship, I have thought that the successive generations of worshipers there must have been of that old-fashioned, unsophisticated character, who occasionally manifested their heartfelt approbation of the preacher's gift in prayer or sermon by ejaculating aloud AMEN. It might have been here; if not it was in some other old church where this circumstance occurred:—[Here give Amen—hit or miss]



The brick house of Samuel N. Richmond<sup>28</sup> has taken the place of an old wooden building which had probably stood for a century at the bottom of Bowen Street, formerly called Bowen's lane. Dr. Benjamin Bowen<sup>29</sup> more than sixty years ago kept a druggist's store in the basement. It was afterwards occupied by Benjamin Thurber as a dry goods store, who protruded a long signboard over the door on which was suspended the similitude of a bunch of grapes carved of wood.<sup>30</sup> An honest cordwainer, who could make rhymes with as much facility as he could roll the bristle into the end of his waxed thread, concluded one of his poetical advertisements thus—

A bunch of grapes is Thurber's sign  
A shoe and boot are made on mine  
My shop doth stand in Bowen's lane,  
And Jonathan Cady is my name.

The house in North Main Street, a little north of the Court House Parade, called the Sim Olney tavern,<sup>31</sup> was in its time and for many years up to 1810 of great notoriety. It was the headquarters of the Anti-Federal-Republicans or Democratic party as it was successively termed; and there might be found Arthur Fenner, the governor; John Beverly; Nicholas Easton; Wheeler Martin; William Peckham; Jonathan Woodbury Coy; William Tyler; John Carpenter; and others of the town; and James Aldrich of Scituate, a politician of extensive influence; and Peleg Arnold of Smithfield, for many years Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; Judge Remington of these parts; and other country members, who there concocted and arranged plans highly inimical to the old Federal party. Sim

<sup>28</sup>Samuel Nightingale Richmond (1781-1854) was one of the leading dry goods merchants of Providence. His house on the northeast corner of Bowen and North Main Streets is still standing at 22 Bowen Street.

<sup>29</sup>Dr. Benjamin Bowen (1727-1784) was a son of Dr. Jabez Bowen, who had occupied the same house before him, and a first cousin of Dr. Ephraim. He served for many years in the militia and for a period during the French and Indian War was Colonel of the Providence County Regiment.

<sup>30</sup>Benjamin Thurber's original bunch of grapes now hangs in the museum of the Rhode Island Historical Society. His store under varying names has survived to the present day and is now Gladdings, Inc., the oldest dry goods store in America. It continues to use the bunch of grapes as its trademark.

<sup>31</sup>Simeon H. Olney (1754-1804) succeeded his father, Richard Olney (1711-1795), as proprietor of the tavern. Its proximity to the Old State House made it a convenient meeting place for politicians.

Olney's was the Republican armory, from which their troops in all parts were supplied with arms and ammunition, and here the officers of the various detachments were drilled for active service.

In a small one story building a little south of the old Packard or Sterry house, where Cleveland Hall is,<sup>32</sup> some fifty years since Aaron Wright kept his tailor's shop. He was diligent in his calling, and thrift rewarded his industry. He was small in stature, but was energetic in all his movements and in his speech. His gait was light and quick, and in walking or working he seemed impatient to get to the end. When on his board, plying the needle, he would throw himself backward and forward in a seesaw motion at every puncture of that instrument, much to the amusement of the passing multitude, which he heeded not. His working hours were many and well employed, and his hours of relaxation were devoted to the enjoyment of his family and to the society of his neighbors to whom he made himself agreeable by his flow of good feeling and by his amusing and instructive conversation. He owned the valuable estate in Westminster Street, now the residence of David Barton,<sup>33</sup> where he lived till his removal to Charlestown, Mass., more than forty years ago. On an alarm of fire one day, during his dinner hour, he rose, went to the door, and enquired of a person passing where the fire was. To which the man answered, "It is somewhere up town; and I believe it is your shop." Mr. Wright in his impetuous and hurried manner, but without his usual reflection, rejoined, "That can't be—for I locked my shop up when I left it and have got the key in my pocket." With such confidence in his key he was not the man to dread the incendiary's brand or to encourage fire insurance offices.

Where Steeple Street is, opposite the First Baptist Meetinghouse, the tide water flowed in a dock (or slip) to the line of North Main, except a small spot near the stove store and tinman's shop, where an engine house was standing for many years; and by its side was an oyster bench which supplied many a lover of that bivalve delicacy.

<sup>32</sup>Apparently a building on the southwest corner of North Main Street and Throop Alley. In the 1850's it was owned by G. E. Cleveland & Co., furniture manufacturers.

<sup>33</sup>This estate, No. 204 Westminster Street in 1850, was located on the southwest corner of Westminster and Symonds Streets. The property ran back from Westminster to Chapel Street.



The Earl House<sup>34</sup> was built as a family dwelling by Jonathan Tillinghast, or his widowed mother, a little more than half a century since on the site of an ancient building of much smaller dimensions. Mr. Tillinghast, who was termed an old bachelor, was an amiable man of pleasing manners and took much delight in conversing with and sometimes teasing the school boys as they passed to and from The Brick School House.<sup>35</sup>

In a shop formed in that house Dr. John H. Spurr<sup>36</sup> opened his office and a druggist store. He came from foreign parts, was tall and erect, had one artificial eye, which gave a sinister expression to a physiognomy otherwise symmetrical and pleasing. He was eccentric in his manners, but minded his own rather than his neighbor's affairs, was studious and had a taste for literary pursuits. But he was a stranger; and that was sufficient to throw a mystery around him in the eyes of the curious and inquisitive. Some said he was a Jew, and a live Jew in our borders at the time of his advent would have been a *rara avis*; although since that period, we have had many worthy citizens of the Hebrew race to run a competition with Yankee enterprise in various branches of trade and commerce. But Dr. Spurr was a constant attendant in the worshiping assembly under the pastoral care of Rev. Dr. Hitchcock,<sup>37</sup> and that finally settled the question. Dr. Spurr drew around him many friends, who were amused by his description of foreign scenery and manners and instructed by his extensive information and original remarks, and amongst his intimates was Col. John Mawney. The latter was deeply read in the Roman classics and

<sup>34</sup>The Earl House stood on the corner of Steeple and North Main Streets opposite the First Baptist Church. It had previously been called the American House, under which name it appears for the last time in *Moore's Providence Almanac* of 1845. A year later it was under the management of Robert Earl and the name had been changed. In 1847 The Columbian House at 77 North Main Street, was renamed The American House.

<sup>35</sup>The Brick School House on the north side of Meeting Street between North Main and Benefit was built in 1768 and still stands today.

<sup>36</sup>The only Spurr of whom there is record as living in Providence during Danforth's boyhood was Col. John Spurr. Unlike Dr. John H. Spurr he appears to have been in no wise mysterious or "foreign." His obituary in the *Providence Gazette* of Oct. 30, 1822, when Danforth himself was editor, states that he was in his 74th year, was born in Dorchester, Mass., came to Providence in 1774, and served in the army during the Revolutionary War.

<sup>37</sup>Rev. Enos Hitchcock (1744-1803) after serving as a pastor in Beverly, Mass., and as Chaplain in the army during the Revolution, was called to the pulpit of the First Congregational Church in Providence. His pastorate lasted from 1783 to 1803.

was an enthusiastic admirer of Virgil and Horace; while Spurr delighted in modern poetry, and his favorite was Thomson's *Seasons*. Many an evening would they meet and discharge quotations from their favorite authors at each other. Mawney, who was erudite in the Latin tongue, would recite a long passage from the pastorals of the Mantuan bard; while Spurr would be prepared to meet it with some descriptive lines from *The Seasons*, and so they would continue, till midnight or a later hour would warn them to their places of rest. Dr. Spurr was an amiable man, but never had an extensive practice and remarked to a friend once that he was merely able to obtain a *bare* living in this place and that was after the mode of the *bear*, living in winter quarters by sucking his own paws.

John Mawney was a well-known character, and his name is identified with the dawn of a revolutionary struggle by the part he took in the attack and destruction of the *Gaspee*. He was afterwards for several years Sheriff of the County of Providence, and after that time removed from this town to his country residence in Cranston. He was eccentric and entirely independent in all his actions and opinions, and was not unlike that judge, mentioned in St. Luke, "which feared not God, neither regarded man." I recollect that when Mawney was Sheriff, a member of the General Assembly rose in his seat and complained that after he had addressed the chair, Mr. Mawney had come to his seat and told him that what he had just stated in his speech was a lie. It was a time of high party excitement. A debate ensued, but ended without a vote of censure on the sheriff, who declared that he would make no retraction. Before that same body he was at one time examined as a witness on a petition for a new trial, the litigating parties having once been intimate friends. A question arose on that point, and he was asked if he knew of the former friendly intercourse of the parties. "Certainly I do;" and drawing from the store house of his classical recollections, he continued, "they were indeed Orestes and Pylades," leaving three quarters of the members as much in the dark as to his meaning as though he had stood mute. I speak of the legislature of a remote period. Near his house in Cranston stood the trunk of an old forest tree, which he called his thundering stump, and in severe storms of thunder and lightning, he would take a seat on that charmed spot, or place or refuge, and defy "the red artillery of heaven."



St. John's Church was completed in 1811 and was consecrated on the 11th day of June in that year by Bishop Griswold,<sup>38</sup> assisted by its time honored rector, Rev. Mr. Crocker,<sup>39</sup> Rev. Mr. Wheaton,<sup>40</sup> and others. Its predecessor was an antique building, of small dimensions, neatly built, and commodious, having a tower in front which pointed its "taper spire to heaven." It was distressing to those who had been accustomed to worship there to see the venerable pile totter on its base, and then be razed to the ground, to be, as a preacher of that day said, "consigned to the demon of destruction," and many were the tears shed by those who had drawn waters of life from that fount, more especially the softer sex, who are more susceptible to pure emotions, to devotion and reverence, when they saw their late loved church, their sacred altars, a heap of ruins. The architect of the present structure was John Holden Greene,<sup>41</sup> whose genius has adorned this city with other monuments of architectural beauty.

To make room for the National House,<sup>42</sup> as it has been heretofore called, but now the What Cheer House, which was erected by Stephen W. Hunt and Lyman Cady, was removed a very old building which had for a series of years been occupied as a tavern by a succession of hosts of various character such as Wesson, Hemenway, Wakefield, Winch, Munro, and others.<sup>43</sup> In the basement fronting on North Main Street were two stores, in one of which Field and

<sup>38</sup>Rt. Rev. Alexander Viets Griswold (1766-1843), rector of St. Michael's Church at Bristol, R. I., had been consecrated Bishop of the Eastern Diocese of the Episcopal Church a few weeks earlier.

<sup>39</sup>Rev. Nathan Bourne Crocker (1781-1865), rector of St. Johns Church for a brief period beginning in 1803 and again between 1808 and 1865.

<sup>40</sup>Rev. Salmon Wheaton (1782-1844), rector of Trinity Church at Newport (1810-1840).

<sup>41</sup>John Holden Greene (1800-1850) also designed the present First Congregational Church, the Franklin House on Market Square (now incorporated into the Rhode Island School of Design), the Roger Williams Bank Building, which stood next to it on the north, and the Granite Block (demolished in 1939 to make way for the School of Design Auditorium). A number of private houses also remain as monuments to his architectural skill. See Mabel M. Swan "John Holden Greene, Architect," *Antiques*, v. 52, no. 1, p. 24, July, 1947.

<sup>42</sup>The National House stood at No. 2 North Main Street. It presumably was built shortly before 1838, for in that year Hunt and Cady previously listed in the Directory as butchers at various locations appear together there.

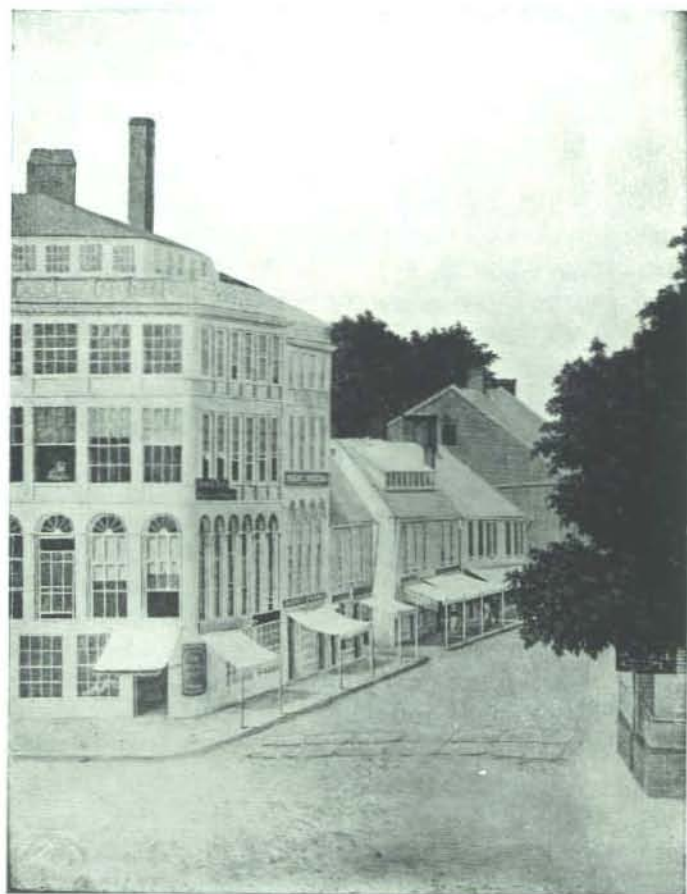
<sup>43</sup>The only one of these occupants of the building who can be positively identified is Abel Wesson, Jr., who had a Coffee House over No. 2 North Main Street in 1824. In the same year Daniel Hemenway kept an inn at 87 Benefit Street.

Rugg opened an Auctioneer Office, and were succeeded in the same line by Hodges and Burr, who in their turn were succeeded by Darius Shearman, grocer, and others not recollected. In the other store Joseph Taber for several years kept his tailor's shop, and turned out of that snug berth some of the most costly, fashionable, and best made clothes of the day, acknowledging none of woman born to surpass him in material, cut, or finish. He was seen one day by a merchant's clerk opposite on Cheapside to step out and go into a barber's shop (Luther's I think) to undergo the comfort of shaving. A charcoalier at that moment was silently approaching, it not being the fashion of that day to cry out charcoal, and the young clerk, without a hat on, was soon standing at Mr. Taber's door and called for charcoal. When the charcoal was carried in, neither bins, box, nor barrel could be found, and the charcoalier was directed to empty his basket on the shop board. The man was surprised at the turn things were taking, but believing that he was dealing with the occupant of the shop, and impressed with the importance of the old nautical maxim, "Obey orders, if you break owners," threw down the contents of his basket as directed. On receiving his pay he departed, and our young clerk soon after cut stick, and was off like a locomotive. What was the dismay of Taber on returning, to see a pyramid of charcoal on the board where he had been sitting and sewing his garments, and gossamer particles of dust floating throughout the room, whilst the heavier particles in obedience to the laws of gravitation were settling on his finest work! He probably soliloquised in the words of Fisher Ames—"On this theme my emotions are unutterable."

This house and estate was the property of Arthur Fenner, who resided there for many years till he built his new house, afterwards the residence of James Fenner, and now of Samuel Dexter.<sup>44</sup> Arthur Fenner was governor of this state for many years and died while in office. He was a man remarkably plain in speech and attire, but bland and affable in his manners. He was a Republican, a disciple of the Jefferson school, and possessed an unbounded influence over

<sup>44</sup>Gov. Arthur Fenner's "new house" in the midst of the meadows and orchards of his What Cheer Farm stood on the site of the present St. Maria's Home on Governor Street between Preston and East George Streets. Samuel Dexter (1781-1862), who lived in the house in 1850, was a leading manufacturer and a son-in-law of Gov. James Fenner. (1741-1846).





Oil by George W. Harris

Rhode Island Historical Society

## CHEAPSIDE, 1843

The Providence shopping district on the west side of North Main Street between Market Square and Steeple Street was called Cheapside until the mid-eighteen-forties. This view was painted by Harris in 1843 from the steps of the Franklin House, the building at the foot of College Hill which has been incorporated into the School of Design.

the minds and will of the men of that party. Vigorous attempts were repeatedly made by the old Federal party to remove him from the gubernatorial chair, but they always proved abortive. He had the country influence in his favor, with a few strong partisans in town, and he smiled at the threats and attempts of all his political foes.

It was about the year 1802 that a trial was held before the Court of Common Pleas in this town, in which John Dorrance<sup>45</sup> was plaintiff; and Arthur Fenner, defendant. It was for slanderous words alleged to have been spoken, amounting to the charge that the plaintiff as president of the town council had been bribed by the present of a beaver hat from Dr. Pardon Bowen to prevent a process threatened against one or more medical students in regard to the disinterment of a dead body in Scituate. It excited an unusual interest in both political parties, amongst the numerous personal friends of the litigants, and in the whole community. On impaneling the jury at the court, the throng of spectators was so great that the Court adjourned to the old town house to hold the trial. It cannot be expected that I should give a detail of this case, except that it resulted in a verdict in favor of the defendant without in the least injuring the character of the plaintiff. The trial was reported with great minuteness and published in a pamphlet with blue paper covers;<sup>46</sup> and as it developed some partisan feeling in the court and jury, it was said by one of Fenner's friends, W. P., before the next election when the Federalists had William Greene in the field against Fenner, that if Fenner should get beat, it would be owing to "*that devilish blue book.*" Eminent counsel was engaged on both sides: on the part of the plaintiff James Burrill, Jr. then Attorney General and Ray

<sup>45</sup>John Dorrance (1747-1813), judge of the Court of Common Pleas for Providence County 1794-1801, President of the Town Council 1797-1813 and member of the General Assembly 1799-1804, was a violent political opponent of Gov. Arthur Fenner.

<sup>46</sup>*Report of the Case John Dorrance against Arthur Fenner . . . To Which Are Added the Proceedings in the Case Arthur Fenner vs John Dorrance* (Providence, Bennett Wheeler, 1802). Fenner, according to Dorrance, not only accused him of accepting the bribe but also of having "the impudence to wear the aforesaid hat on his . . . head, while he . . . officiated as Moderator of a Town-Meeting of the town of Providence aforesaid." The *Report* throws interesting light on Rhode Island court proceedings in the early 1800's. Particularly edifying are some of the remarks made by Chief Justice Daniel Owen, such as "We'll hear what the parties ha' to say before the Courts done. Ye ha'n't no objection, I spose to that, ha' ye? Heh!"



Greene; and for the defendant David Howell and Asher Robbins;<sup>47</sup> and seldom in any trial since have I seen advocates display more energy, industry, or eloquence.

Next south of this old residence of Gov. Arthur Fenner and in the building long known as the Manufacturer's Hotel, lived Jabez Bowen, the owner of that estate. He had been Lieutenant or Deputy Governor, as then termed, before the adoption of the constitution. He was a well-educated man and emphatically a gentleman of the old school, dignified in his deportment, rather aristocratic in his bearing, contrasting strongly in his manners and exterior carriage with his nearest neighbor, Gov. Fenner. For many years up to his death he was Chancellor of Rhode Island College and Brown University and president of the Providence Bank. He was a warm political partisan of the Federal School and ever found himself in the majority in the town of Providence. For many years he was the only moderator of the town meetings. Mr. Bowen seemed indeed to have held that place by a prescriptive right; and on one occasion it is said that the hour of meeting having arrived before he had, it was proposed to organise the meeting, when his aged father, Dr. Ephraim, exclaimed, "How can you organise? Jabez hasn't come yet." Probably three-fourths of the freemen held the opinion that no other person was competent to do the duties of the office; and all would unite in opinion that no one could surpass him in promptness, decision, or impartiality. It seemed at that time to be a prevalent opinion that business talent was a rare gift and particularly in the management of monetary affairs. The only moneyed institution then was the Providence Bank with John Brown at its head as president, with a board of prudent and opulent men as directors. When a charter for the Exchange Bank was asked for [1800], the people were surprised, and the wise ones enquired, "Where will they find men capable of being president and directors?" What a question that would be for this present day when a regiment of bank directors might be assembled on Weybosset Bridge at fifteen minutes' notice.

<sup>47</sup>James Burrill, Jr. (1772-1820), Attorney General 1797-1814, Speaker of the R. I. House 1814-1816, Chief Justice of the R. I. Supreme Court 1816, U. S. Senator 1817-20; Ray Greene (1765-1849), Attorney-General 1794-97, U. S. Senator 1797-1801; David Howell (1747-1824), long prominent in the affairs of the College and as a lawyer, U. S. District Judge 1812-1824; Asher Robbins (1757-1845), U. S. District Attorney 1812-1820, U. S. Senator 1825-1839.

Gov. Arthur Fenner and Gov. Bowen were the antipodes in political sentiments, but dwelt together in harmony as next neighbors. Gov. Bowen was an esteemed acquaintance of Washington, and when that illustrious person last visited Providence, he called on Gov. Bowen, and from his balcony fronting on Market Square exchanged civilities with the citizens. The balcony was removed several years since, but the door which led to it was preserved till the old house itself was taken down last spring [1850] to make way for the splendid edifice now being erected to be called the What Cheer Building.<sup>48</sup> In the rear of these late old buildings, which have been long encumbered with sheds, stables, hostleries, etc., were beautiful gardens and a choice variety of fruit trees. Next south of Gov. Bowen's, and where now stands the granite block in which are the Roger Williams and the Eagle banks, Franklin Hall, and merchant's stores, was a large wooden building owned by the Jenckes family. It stood back about fifteen feet from the street and was entered by ascending a long flight of steps, and at the commencement of these reminiscences was the residence of David Leonard Barnes, who afterwards built a house in Benefit Street<sup>49</sup> and lived there the residue of his life. He was an eminent lawyer of extensive practice, his office being in College Street. He afterwards became judge of the United States District Court and was highly respected for his private and judicial character.

The Franklin House erected by Charles Potter<sup>50</sup> and long known as a popular hotel under a succession of courteous keepers covers the lot where stood the venerable dwelling of the equally venerable Dr. Ephraim Bowen, a man according to my earliest recollections then far advanced in years, but active in mind and body. He generally wore a full bottom white wig, such as Goldsmith placed on the head of Dr. Primrose, vicar of Wakefield, and such as pictures represent to have been worn by Dr. Johnson and other grave characters across the Atlantic waters; and such as many other elderly men wore here, as we may have occasions to designate. He was much

<sup>48</sup>Still standing at 20 Market Square.

<sup>49</sup>Judge Barnes's house is now no. 49 Benefit Street on the south corner of Benefit and Jenckes Streets.

<sup>50</sup>Charles Potter (1788-1857) began his business career in Elisha Dyer's counting house. He was subsequently an extensive importer of dry goods, a cotton manufacturer, and a successful investor in real estate.



esteemed and went down to the grave nearly forty years since deeply mourned by as numerous and respectable descendants as any other ever had. He had four sons—Jabez, Dr. William, Dr. Pardon, and Col. Ephraim. Of the first we have spoken at large. The two doctors were eminent in their profession and had an extensive practice. Col. Ephraim Bowen was invested with offices of trust; he was a man of great energy of character. At various times he was a merchant, an agriculturist, a distiller, was for some time Sheriff of the County of Providence, and after he removed to Warwick, was a representative of that town in the legislature. He was also one of the brave boys who manned the Torchlight, which on the eve of the Revolutionary War, carried swift destruction to the Gaspee schooner in our river below.

[to be continued]

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Career Women of America*, by Elizabeth Anthony Dexter. Francess town, N. H., 1950. xiii, 262 p. \$4.00.

Having read a tremendous mass of material, printed and unprinted, running from 1776 through 1849, Mrs. Dexter has imposed both order and wit upon it and has given us, not without bibliographical aid, a sound but lively account (and what a boring compilation it might have been!) of women as teachers, doctors, and nurses; preachers, singers, and actresses; writers, tavern-keepers, and shopkeepers; dressmakers, farmers, and millworkers—and others. She does not forget, nor allow her readers to, that during most of the sixty-odd years dealt with, a very common view of woman's place was that thus described by Catharine Beecher:

"The more intelligent a woman becomes, the more she can appreciate the wisdom of the ordinance that appointed her subordinate station, and the more her tastes will conform to the graceful and dignified retirement and submission it involves."

Luckily, not all women felt as Miss Beecher says she did. This book deals, and fascinatingly, with the exceptions. Its sociological significance is obviously outstanding, but as Mrs. Dexter has been cursed by no compulsion to distill her discoveries into dogmatic jargon, she has produced a work that one can really savor. *Res ipsa loquitur*.

The volume is appropriately dedicated to Margaret Bingham Stillwell, the Curator of the Annmary Brown Memorial.

BEN C. CLOUGH

Providence.

*Paddy Wilson's Meeting-house in Providence Plantations, 1791-1839, being an Account of a Genial Irish Parson who shaped a Community's Culture and Life*, by Arthur E. Wilson. Boston, the Pilgrim Press, 1950, vii, 278 p. \$3.50.

We are not yet ready for a comprehensive history of religion in New England. The present volume is one of several local studies which must first be completed. We are already indebted to its author for *Weybosset Bridge* with his account of Beneficent Church under Joseph Snow's patriarchal pastorate, and now he introduces us to an Irish Methodist preacher who broke with John Wesley by persisting in being married before he finished his apprenticeship. Coming from Dublin to Providence in 1791, James Wilson accepted a call to the West Side (Second) Congregational Church as Joseph Snow's assistant. In 1793 he supplied the pulpit of St. John's Church and was even invited to become its rector. A church controversy over matters personal, administrative, and doctrinal marred the record of Father Snow's later years and split his congregation. Snow and his followers withdrew and founded Third Church with an edifice, "Old Tin Top," on the southeast corner of Richmond and Snow (now Pine) Streets. Wilson stayed by the Beneficent Society. The record shows, contrary to a common opinion, how weak the influence of organized religion was in the early days of Rhode Island, particularly when compared with other colonies. Later the churches increased in power under strong men like Manning, Hitchcock, and Wilson. With them religion was culturally progressive. They put the Church into the center of the community where it is today.

In this book one can read about the famous state lotteries of the late 18th century by which several churches and colleges were reinforced financially; about the beginnings of private, then of public education under the stimulus of men like John Howland (who was not, however, first president of the R.I.H.S.), James Wilson, John Innes Clark, and the civic-minded Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers which was formed in 1789; of the belated planting of Methodism in Providence in 1815; of the Calvinist fear of "so dangerous a doctrine" as Universalism; of the novelty of decorating a church and observing Christmas Day, when as late as 1834 sermons were still being preached against the observance of this festival and Easter was rarely mentioned by the nonconformists; of the growth of American church music; of Samuel Slater and the new Sunday Schools for his mill communities; of the introduction of a neoclassical type of public building in stone still to be seen in James Wilson's "Round Top" Church, St. John's, First Congregational, the Arcade, Manning Hall, and the Athenaeum. Dr. Wilson's description of the city can now be supplemented by "Pictures of Providence in the Past, 1790-1820, the Reminiscences of Walter R. Danforth," currently appearing in *Rhode Island History*.

For much of this a historian has at his disposal the 48-volume diary of Stephen Snow Wardwell, covering the years 1820-39. Of these and many other original sources Paddy Wilson's present-day successor at Round Top has made rich use, closely relating the history of the Church and the West Side community. May his tribe increase!

Brown University

WILLIAM J. ROBBINS



# JOHN BROWN'S ATTEMPT AT CONCILIATION WITH THE BRITISH, 1775

JOHN BROWN's attempt at conciliation with the British, which took the form of a motion in the General Assembly (May 5, 1775), has recently been found in the Rhode Island Archives.

My attention was first directed to this subject by a reference in the *Diary* of the Reverend Ezra Stiles (v. 1, p. 548). Subsequently the late Allen French told me there was much unpublished material to be found in the transcriptions of the British Admiralty Records in the Library of Congress.

There I found a partial transcript of this document, which was published in "The Seizure of John Brown," an installment of the "Patrol of Narragansett Bay," published April, 1949, p. 52.

W. G. R.

Providence, May 5.<sup>th</sup> 1775

GENTLEMEN

The Unnatural and Unhappy Contest between Brittain and America which seems every Day to be Increasing, Causes me to set down and thro together some of my thoughts on this malancholly Occasion, and for which I beg your Honors pardon of my presumption in Addressing you on this Important Subject.

I am clear in Opinion with Lord Camden, Chatham, and many others most Noble worthys of England that Taxation and Representation are Inseperatly connected, and can never agreeable to the English Constitution nor to common sence be put a Sunder, and that the Parliament of England have no more Just right to Tax America then the General Assembly of any One Colony has to Tax another, but yet notwithstanding the Claim of Parliament to Govern America in all Cases whatsoever, I think it the Indispensible Duty of every American to Deliberate at this Importent Crisis in the most Cool and Dispasionate manner, that the Nature of the Case will possibly admit off, and that th'o all the preperations for our Just and lawfull Defence may be absolutely necessary, and that Every Colony on the Continent are by the Ties of Honor Justice and Humanity, Obliged to stand by and support Each other in their Just rights and privileges altho the Sword has been drawn and the Scabbord as yet seems to be lost, I am not out of Hopes that the Latter may be found and the Former returned theirin to its usual rest and Quiet, altho many are of Opinion that if this Dispute must be Determined by might and not by Right that America can wish for no better time then the present, that we are now United and have it in our power to Blockade Boston in such a Manner as the Regular Troops cannot march from thence to the

Country and that their scituation their, living wholly on Salt provisions, will be renderd so disagreeable, that better Terms of peace may be obtained now then at any futer time, but in my humble Opinion we ought at the same time we are prepairing for Defence to Spair no pains in our Endeavors for Conciliateing measures, this will be no more then taking the same precaution against the Effusion of Humane Blood, then is done by those whom we so Justly Complain off. The Secretary of States letter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March I think is Evidently held out to the Colonies as a Test of their Inclinations towards a Compromise of our Unhappy Disputes. Theirfore I give it as my Opinion that its now in the power of this Colony and Connecticut to make such propositions to His Excellency General Gage, as will Effectually put a total Stop to any Hostilitys till the Contentental Congress and Each Colony can consider of an answer to the Secretary of States Letter and till we have an Account of the Reception our Answers meets with which proposal might be as followeth or something Similar Vizt, Tell the General of our determination of Defence, but that we realy wish their would be no Occasion of our Forces going into the Field, but that those of the Massachusetts &c already assembled round about Boston Should with draw and return to their Respective Homes and that all prissoners on both Sides Should be Immediately delivered up and that a Free passage into, and out of Boston should be immediately Established, by which the Troops and all others may be supplied with fresh provisions &c &c, In Consequence of all which the General with all his principal Officers to Engage and be Obligated in some satisfactory manner that their shall be no further Hostilitys Committed on any person whatever nor their Estates till an answer be received from his Majesty to what the Colines may send to him in answer to the Secretarys Letter above said I think this Cannot by any means be Considered as too forward in these two Colonies or if New Hamsheir can be United in the same request it would Doubtless have the more weight, but as they cannot from many Circumstances be so soone Introduced into the measure it may with propriety be Offerd to the General for his Concurrence and then Immediately transmited to the Continental Congress &c &c which I have not the least Doubt of having a Good Effect, pray Excuse this Imperfect Scrawl from your

Honors most Obedient Hum. Serv<sup>t</sup>.

JOHN BROWN

P S. As their may not be time to Consult the General Assembly of Connecticut on this Subject in time to make the proposition to His Excellency General Gage During the sessions of our present Assembly, why might not the proposition be made by us alone, not to be binding unless agreed to by them and New Hampsheir.—

The Honob<sup>l</sup>. The Gen<sup>l</sup>. Assembly now Setting at providence.



## NEWS NOTES

A. C. Burnett, 3700 Montrose Boulevard, Houston 6, Texas, is trying to secure all possible information about persons who migrated in early days from New England to Texas. Particularly he desires date of birth, birth place, and information concerning the life of the people before they arrived in Texas. He is interested in knowing of the descendants of these men and biographical information about their wives. Mr. Burnett would like pictures, which he may borrow for reproduction, especially if the subjects became prominent in the affairs of early Texas.

If our readers have information helpful to Mr. Burnett, he will be grateful to receive it. His list of Rhode Islanders, who migrated to Texas, follows:

Barney, Jabez	Cady, D. C.
Bowen, Sylvester	Martin, Moses T.
Brown, Jeremiah	Peck, Nicholas
Williams, Samuel May	

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The Society has recently completed a card index of all of its periodicals since 1871. These are indexed according to subject as well as author. The first ten volumes of the *Collections*, 1827-1902, and the monographs published by the Society contain separate indexes.

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Mr. Edwin P. Hill, 5421 Broadway, Indianapolis 20, Indiana, is gathering and preserving genealogical records of the Hill family. He would be glad to receive any information readers may have on this family in Rhode Island.

\* \* \*

A former president of the Rhode Island Historical Society, Richard LeBaron Bowen, has been elected vice-president for Rhode Island of the New England Historic Genealogical Society. Another of our members, Arthur Adams, formerly librarian of Trinity College, has been elected librarian of the same organization.

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In the January, 1951, issue of *Rhode Island History* the name of a new member, Mrs. Stuart T. Coleman, was incorrectly listed as Mrs. Stuart T. Cole.

## ACCESSIONS

Gift of the author, *Two Huguenot Families*, by Frank B. Fox.

By purchase, three ms. books of the Brenton family.

Gift of the author, *Richard Swan and some of his descendants*, by Frank H. Swan.

Gift of the author, *Early Rehoboth*, v. iv, by Richard LeBaron Bowen.

By gift of Mrs. George A. Smith, relics and papers of the Wilcox-Smith families.

Two salt spoons, two tablespoons, and three teaspoons, which belonged to Captain Benjamin Seabury, the gift of Mrs. Frank A. Cummings.

By purchase, R. I. Census for 1830 and R. I. Census for 1840 (micro-film).

By gift of Howard L. Anthony, relics and mss. of Henry J. Anthony.

By gift of Mrs. Leah Allen, miscellaneous genealogical records.

Gift of Henry D. Sharpe, pictures of old barns in Providence.

Gift of Miss Ann Putnam Browne, material relating to the Malbone family silver.

Gift of Mrs. Elliot Flint, corner cupboard, swell front bureau, Goddard tall clock, cane, and books.

Gift of Mrs. Richmond Viall, ms. Gardiner material and books from the estate of Cyrus P. Brown.

Gift of Donald E. Leach, *The Causes and Effects of King Philip's War* (ms. thesis).

Gift of Mrs. Henry C. Hart, three ms. books of gravestone records.

By purchase, ms. material of the Joseph Tillinghast family.

Gift of Mr. Perry Avery, a piano stool.

From the estate of George C. Barton, a "Martha Washington" chair.

The library has acquired by gift, purchase, or exchange genealogical material on the following families: Abbe, Adams, Albee, Alden, Aldrich, Alvord, Andrew, Backus, Barber, Barnes, Beach, Bowen, Boynton, Brainard, Briggs, Bunge, Burnham, Burrage, Butler, Carter, Cary, Chandler, Chetwode, Clough, Colburn, Cole, Collamer, Converse, Corbin, Cox, Davis, Dewing, Dodge, Dowse, Draper, Eddy, Ela, Eliot, Farnsworth, Felton, Foote, Fox, Gates, Gilman, Giroux, Glendinning, Goding, Gorges, Grant, Gunnison, Hannay, Harmon, Heath, Holloway, Hopkins, Houston, Hoxic, Hughes, Huston, Kellogg, Kelsey, Kimberly, King, Knox, Lapham, Lawrence, Lawton, Leete, Leming, Loomis, Lyman, Martinez-Fortun, Merwin, Miles, Montague, Moran, Murdock, Newcomb, Newton, Paine, Pardee, Parke, Patten, Peabody, Pease, Peltz, DeWitt, Pepper, Perkins, Peverly, Phelps, Phillips, Pierce, Pond, Prescott, Prindle, Raymond, Reynolds, Rhodes, Rice, Ridgely, Robbins, Salter, Sands, Sargent, Sayward, Scott, Shepard-Sill, Slack, Smith, Smyth, Snow, Soule, Sprague, Stearns, Stilwell, Taylor-Mills, Thompson, Tompkins, Tuttle, Van Voorhees, Wakefield, Warde, Watson, Woodhull, Wyatt.



# RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## NEW MEMBERS

*December 1, 1950 — February 28, 1951*

Mr. Norris G. Abbott, Jr.	Hon. Austin T. Levy
Mrs. C. Raymond Adams	Harrisville, R. I.
Mr. Ernest P. B. Atwood	Dr. Robert V. Lewis
Mr. and Mrs. Norman V. Ballou	Pawtucket, R. I.
Mr. William J. Blessing, Jr.	Mr. William MacLellan
Mr. William P. Buffum, Jr.	Warren, R. I.
Mr. Foster B. Davis, Jr.	Mr. Stephen C. Miller
Miss Margaret T. Dunbar	Mr. Aram A. Milot
Mrs. Rufus C. Fuller	Johnston, R. I.
Mr. Arthur L. Gardiner	Miss Esther P. Parsons
Kenyon, R. I.	Johnston, R. I.
Mr. Clarence H. Gifford, Jr.	Mrs. Emery M. Porter
Mr. Dixwell Goff	Mrs. Arthur M. Read
Rumford, R. I.	Cranston, R. I.
Mr. and Mrs. Paul J. Grimes	Mrs. Cecil W. Salisbury
Mr. Carl W. Haffenreffer	Mr. Perry J. Sherman
Mr. Louis H. C. Huntoon	Portsmouth, R. I.
E. Greenwich, R. I.	Miss Florence D. Smith
Mrs. Ernest G. Jones	Mr. John T. Spicer
Mrs. Howard Richmond Kent	Mrs. William H. Storrs
Chepachet, R. I.	Hingham, Mass.
Mr. Bradford H. Kenyon	Mr. Nathaniel M. Vose, Jr.
Coventry, R. I.	Barrington, R. I.
Miss M. Florence Krueger	Miss Pauline K. Weaver
Dr. William L. Leet	Newport, R. I.
	Mr. Gerritt Weston

## LECTURES

April 11	8:15 p. m.
STATED MEETING	
The Story of Nicholson File Company, 1864-1905	
PAUL C. NICHOLSON, JR., Secretary, Nicholson File Company	
April 25	2:15 p. m.
Preserving Early New England Houses	
<i>(Illustrated with slides)</i>	
BERTRAM K. LITTLE, Director, The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities	
May 16	2:15 p. m.
American Samplers	
MRS. L. EARLE ROWE, Curator of the Hobart Moore Memorial Collection, Yale University Art Gallery	