

R H O D E  
I S L A N D  
H I S T O R Y

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# R H O D E I S L A N D H I S T O R Y

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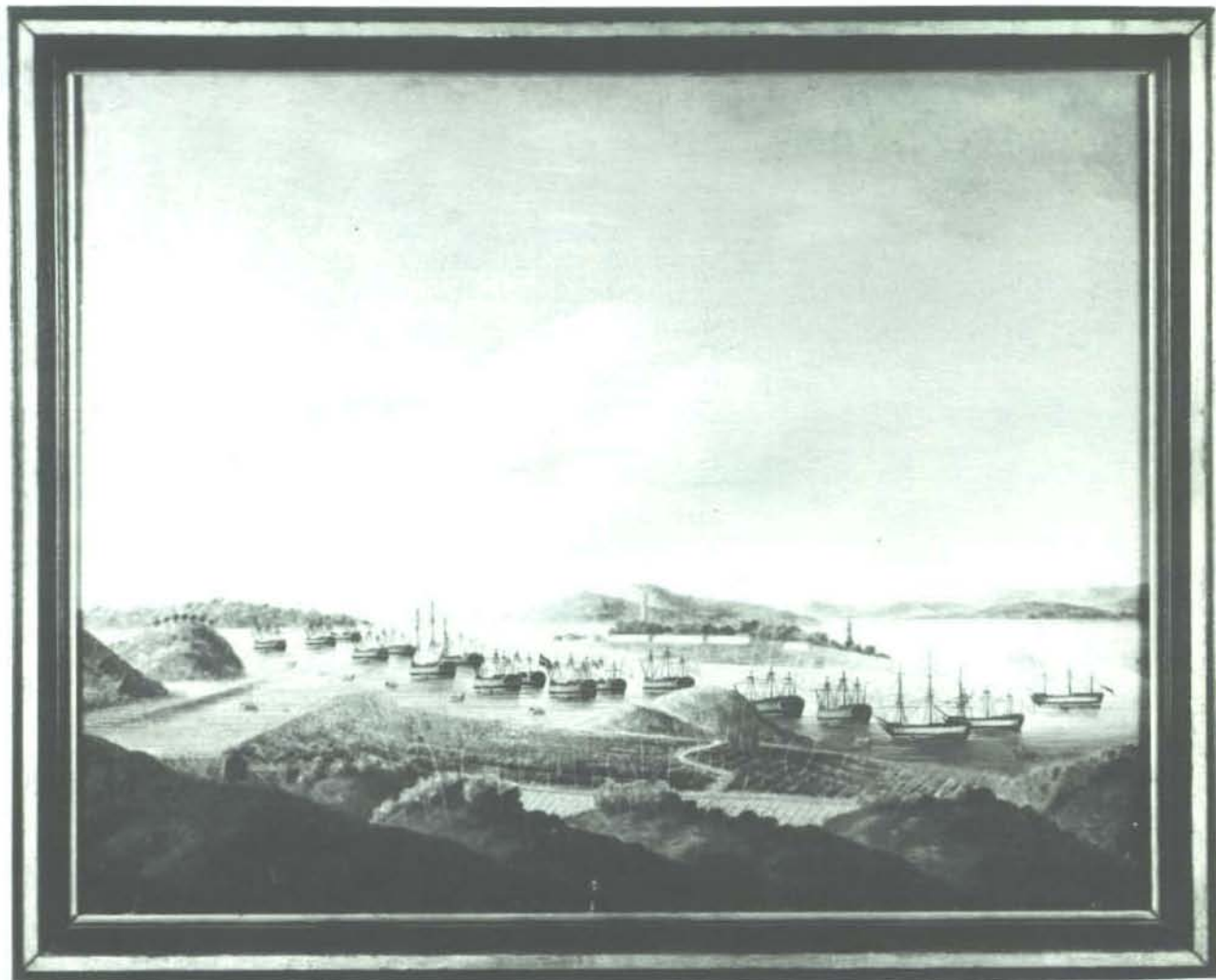
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*On the 150th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, 1926, the G.A.R. 4th of July celebration in Providence was recorded by a newsreel camera. This 35mm. nitrate film of the occasion was given to our Society by the late Edward Albee of the vaudeville theatre chain, for viewing again in 1976.*

*Whampoa Reach, more than ten miles from the city of Canton, was the shiproads where the cautious Chinese required the vessels of William F. Megee and other foreigners to remain at anchor while their cargoes were transshipped to Canton. This Chinese painting, one of the earliest of a frequently depicted scene, hangs in John Brown House.*



## The Merchant As Gambler: Major William Fairchild Megee (1765-1820)

by Jacques M. Downs\*

It is said that Fortune favors the bold. It often appears, however, that the difference between a shrewd speculator and a compulsive gambler is the success of the former. Thus, through the proverb a tautology becomes the wisdom of the race.

The life of the colorful and venturesome William Fairchild Megee provides a case in point. A self-made man in the Franklin mold, Megee came within arm's length of a major fortune before his luck ran out. His daring, imagination and luck transformed him from an obscure clerk into a merchant prince within a dozen years.<sup>1</sup>

In the early maritime history of Providence, Megee was a rather important figure, for in his intense activity he touched many of the people who built the little town into the second seaport of New England. He was aboard the first Rhode Island vessel to reach the Far East, and in the next dozen years or so amassed a fortune and a fleet. He built a magnificent country estate with extensive grounds, luxurious Chinese furnishings and an aviary filled with exotic Oriental birds. In 1799, at the height of his commercial career, Megee was described tersely as "age 38, height 5 feet, 5 inches, dark complexion, born at Newport, R.I."<sup>2</sup> A decade later he was a picturesque innkeeper at Canton sporting a long, grey beard and was "so much at home . . . he only wants a tail to make a China man out of him." In the intervening years, Megee had engaged in some colossal commercial gambling and had made a desperate attempt to repair his sagging fortunes by undertaking a slaving voyage just before that unsavory trade became illegal. Failing in this rather discreditable enterprise, Megee cheerfully went bankrupt, infuriating business associates, in-laws

and even disinterested citizens of Providence. He then sailed for China one last time, leaving his debts, his quarrels and his wife behind him.

Megee was born in Newport, on March 26, 1765, the son of John Megee, a baker, and Phebe Fairchild, who was related to several prominent merchants of that port. At the time, Newport was one of the leading commercial cities on the eastern seaboard, and a boy growing up there could hardly have avoided intimate contact with international trade and seafaring life generally. After the Revolution, of course, it was swiftly outdistanced by its neighbor at the head of Narragansett Bay, a humble town bearing the lofty name of Providence.

John Megee prospered for a time, especially when he worked for the great merchant Isaac Stelle in the 1750s, but not long after he struck out in business for himself, Megee went bankrupt (1767). Ten years later he died, leaving his wife with small children to support, including 12-year-old William.<sup>3</sup> The following grisly entry appears in the Fleet Greene diary, which was kept at Newport during the British occupation of the city: "last night the body of Mr. Megee was taken up and robbed of the linen after being buried for upwards of six weeks."<sup>4</sup>

Phebe Megee apparently supported the family thereafter by following her dead husband's trade, for on August 25, 1781, she advertised in the *Newport Mercury*:

*Mrs. Megee hereby informs her customers and the public in general that she now carries on the Baking Business in the bake house belonging to Mr. George Gibbs, where she hopes a continuance of their custom, which will be gratefully acknowledged. August 3, 1781.*

\*Department of History, St. Francis College, Biddeford, Maine

1 The sources for this article are scattered all over New England. Basic are the William F. Megee Papers, part of the Nighthale-Jenckes Collection at The Rhode Island Historical Society. The Edward Carrington Papers at The Rhode Island Historical Society and Brown & Ives Collection at the John Carter Brown Library also contain a number of references to Megee, since both the Browns and Carrington were friends and sometime business associates of Megee. In Massachusetts, the various Perkins-Sturgis-Forbes Collections at Harvard and the

Massachusetts Historical Society include a number of letters of interest for the same reason. Finally the Brown & Ives Collection and The Rhode Island Historical Society have several logs of the ships on which Megee sailed or in which he had an interest.

2 Register of Seamen's Protections, Port of Providence, Book 2, May 2, 1799, Providence Custom House Papers, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

3 The Rhode Island census of 1782 lists six people in the Megee household.

4 November 21, 1777. A typescript of this diary is to be found at The Rhode Island Historical Society.

It is quite possible that here—in his relative poverty and the humiliation of being supported by his widowed mother—is the origin of Megee's very strong motivation.<sup>5</sup>

Whatever the case, we know very little about Megee's early life, education, religious convictions, friendships and other ties—material which would help greatly in filling out a picture of his character. Fragmentary evidence indicates that he probably went to work in John Brown's countinghouse in Providence in the early 1780s.<sup>6</sup> Brown was one of the foremost merchants in the state, and was particularly noted for his energy and his creative commercial imagination. He was one of the prime movers of the Rhode Island economy of the period, being a founder of the first bank and the first insurance company in Providence and owner of the first local ship to sail to China. An apprenticeship under Brown, therefore, afforded a young man an unusually good commercial education. One can only guess at the power of such a stimulus upon the talented and ambitious Newport youngster.

The next step in a young merchant's career was generally a sea voyage for the firm, often as clerk or supercargo. Although it is not clear what his job was, Megee sailed aboard Brown's *General Washington* with Captain Jonathan Donnison, on Providence's first voyage to China. The supercargo, Major Samuel Ward, blazed a trail which Megee and several others aboard the vessel were to follow for the better part of their later lives.<sup>7</sup> The ship set sail on Christmas Eve 1787, only 40 days after Megee's marriage to Mary ("Polly") Sweeting of Providence.<sup>8</sup>

Megee must have been groomed to take over Samuel Ward's place, for on the ship's next two China voyages (1790-91 and 1792-93), Megee was supercargo.<sup>9</sup> It was during the second of these, only two months after the ship had left Providence that Mrs. Megee

died, possibly in childbirth, since William Fairchild Megee, Jr., was born the same year.

Megee arrived home to the news that he was a father and a widower on May 14, 1793. With a small baby on his hands, Megee was in a rather awkward position for a seagoing man. However, in the practical atmosphere of the day, widowers, particularly prospering ones, did not last long. On December 21 of the same year, he married Susannah Nightingale and settled in Providence. Megee's new wife was well connected. The Nightingales were among the leading merchants of Providence. Altogether, with his successes in trade and marriage, Megee seemed well along the road to becoming a major commercial figure in the young nation.

One of his new in-laws, Joseph Nightingale, became part-owner in Megee's next ship, the *Halcyon*, while a former in-law, Captain Benjamin Page, was hired to command the vessel. Page had only recently returned from a pioneering voyage to Australia and China, which were to be her destinations on the current expedition.<sup>10</sup> Of course, since not only the market but also the weather and the seas in that part of the world were at best very imperfectly known, the voyage was something of a gamble. Apparently Megee counted on the salability of rum at the Botany Bay prison colony, for spirits constituted a major part of the cargo. In implementing this calculation, Megee probably guaranteed the success of the voyage.<sup>11</sup>

The *Halcyon* arrived at Port Jackson (Sydney) on June 14, 1794, almost exactly four months after weighing anchor in Providence. Finding four other vessels already anchored in the bay, Page and Megee feared that the market would be glutted. But Megee's luck held; the ships in the harbor were short of the very provisions the *Halcyon* was carrying. Megee promptly sold out. In addition, he disposed of some

5 Certainly a number of New England's most active merchants were similarly circumstanced in their youth. In the China trade alone, one thinks of Thomas Handasyd and James Perkins, John Murray and Robert Bennet Forbes, John Perkins Cushing and Samuel Russell. Relative poverty and the loss of at least one parent seem to have been powerful stimuli. Indeed, the Puritan view of poverty still had a strong hold on Yankee consciences, for as William Sturgis was to write John P. Cushing some forty years later, "to be poor is with us to be criminal in the highest degree," March 23, 1812; Bryant & Sturgis Letterbook, 53, Baker Library, Harvard Business School.

6 Megee's name appears on documents for the Browns during the period. Signing for the principals of the firm was a common duty of apprentices. See the maritime protest (witnessed by Megee) dated June 10, 1782, on a loose page in Samuel Chace's Book of Cooper Papers both at The Rhode Island Historical Society. Megee himself noted in his bankruptcy petition that he had been "regularly brought up as a merchant in . . . Providence," but he failed to mention the name of the firm. Petitions to the General Assembly, vol. 37, 120; Rhode Island State Archives, State House, Providence.

7 Ward's journal of this voyage is in the Ward Papers at The Rhode Island Historical Society. Megee's log of the same cruise is in the Brown & Ives Papers.

*Sydney Cove, Port Jackson, as it appeared to an artist six years before Megee's Halcyon arrived with a profitable cargo of spirits and other provisions.*



*Drawn by E. Dayas from a sketch by F. Hunter, published by I. Stockdale, Picadilly. Print, courtesy of Mitchell Library, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia.*

5,000 gallons of spirits at an "advanced price" to the colony's officers, who monopolized the local liquor trade.

During his stay at Botany Bay, Megee seems to have taken the opportunity afforded by the quick sale of his cargo to do some sight-seeing, and reportedly was greatly impressed with the colony's prospects.<sup>12</sup> The colonists were quite another matter, for Megee was beaten and robbed by convicts during one of his strolls about Sydney.<sup>13</sup> Thus, when the *Halcyon's* officers discovered a stowaway en route to Canton, they could not have been overly sympathetic. The commander of another vessel reported that they intended landing

him at another British colony. Megee arrived home with a China cargo on April 29, 1795, fourteen months after he had left.

The voyage of the *Halcyon* apparently strengthened Megee's confidence in his business ability and encouraged him to use his imagination in his commercial activities. Thus, within a year of his return, he again embarked for China with a complex plan for another unusual voyage. He sailed in February 1796, as supercargo and part owner of the famous ship *Grand Turk*,<sup>14</sup> Captain Bernard Megee (no relation). In all, the vessel had seven owners living both in Providence and Boston.<sup>15</sup> The Providence venturers

8 Polly Sweeting Megee was the sister of Ann, wife of Captain Benjamin Page, later Megee's business associate.

9 Megee's log of the second voyage is in the Brown & Ives Papers.

10 Page had built the vessel, but seems to have relinquished title before she sailed. At that time the owners were Megee, John Innis Clark and Joseph Nightingale. The information on the voyage of the *Halcyon* is taken largely from Thomas Dunbabin, "Rhode Island and Early Australia," a typed M.S. at The Rhode Island Historical Society dated October 20, 1948.

11 David Collins, Judge Advocate General at Sydney, in explaining a large purchase of spirits from Page on his first voyage to Australia noted the fondness expressed by these people (the convicts) for even this pernicious American spirit was incredible; they hesitated not to go

to any lengths to procure it, and preferred receiving spirits for labour to every other article of provisions or clothing that could be offered to them. Dunbabin, 6.

12 *ibid.*, 7.

13 *ibid.*, 7-8.

14 The *Grand Turk* was sold by her builder, Elias Hasket Derby of Salem, by March 1795. Robert E. Peabody, author of *The Log of the Grand Turks* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1926) 152, conjectures that her name must have been altered when she changed hands, since the New York papers of the time do not list a sailing date for her thereafter. This is unquestionably the same ship, however.

15 The large number of owners may be an indication of the risk and/or expense involved.

sent along a second vessel, the small but speedy snow *Susan*, which was able to make two or three voyages to the *Grand Turk's* one. For three-fifths of the commission, Megee also agreed to help a young friend conduct the business of the Newport ship *Russell*, once she had arrived in China. Finally, Megee hatched two other ventures while at Canton, one of which failed and the other, while apparently successful, landed him in court.

The Captain of the *Susan*, 129 tons, was William Trotter, who had been first mate aboard the *Halcyon*, and who was as intrepid and clever a man as Megee himself. At Canton, Megee loaded the *Susan* for the Isle of France (Mauritius) and dispatched her more than two months ahead of the *Grand Turk*. It is not entirely clear where the *Susan* spent the next few months, but by the following September she was in the Pacific gathering furs—as dangerous a trade as the times offered. However Megee was still very lucky, and the *Susan* dropped anchor at Macao again on November 3, 1797, less than a year after she had left that anchorage. Trotter landed some 1400 skins and put to sea again two months later, making a very speedy passage. He had arrived in Providence by May of 1798 with another China cargo, very probably making a killing for Megee.<sup>16</sup>

But the *Susan's* cruise was only a small part of Megee's plan. Like many Yankees of his era, Megee had few compunctions about taking advantage of the disturbances occasioned by the war in Europe. Not only did he apparently intend to buy prize goods at Mauritius, but while the *Grand Turk* rode at anchor at Whampoa, Megee made a secret agreement with Rodolf Jacobus Dozy, a member of the Dutch East India Company's organization at Canton. Whatever their specific plans, the two clearly envisioned some evasion of the British maritime rules on trading with Europe and Europe's colonies. The deal fell through when Dozy was ordered home late in 1797.<sup>17</sup>

A snow was a square-rigged vessel differing from a brig only in having a trysail mast close abaft the mainmast. Megee's small speedy snow *Susan* was built in North Providence in 1795.



Megee also was involved in the voyage of the ship *Russell*, belonging to Gibbs & Channing, family friends and merchants of Newport. Megee was joint agent, together with young George Gibbs, Jr., who sailed as supercargo of the *Russell* for Canton. Megee apparently was to direct young Gibbs in conducting the ship's business in China. The commission was 5% on the price of the homeward cargo. Megee was to get 3% and Gibbs 2%, but Megee does not seem to have been present at Canton when the *Russell* arrived.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, while in China, Megee got into difficulty when he purchased a cargo of sealskins from Ebenezer Dorr, of the Boston ship *Otter*. Dorr had taken the furs aboard at Amsterdam Island, where they had been collected by one Peter Peron. Dorr's title to the skins was not clear, and the matter went to the courts in the United States. As late as 1799, Megee was obliged to file a deposition on the affair.<sup>19</sup>

16 Megee's Account Book and Rodolf Jacobus Dozy, Canton, to Megee, Providence November 6, 1797, and January 9, 1798, Megee Papers. See also "The Log of the *Susan* from Canton toward Providence, January 15, 1797, to May 16, 1797" The Rhode Island Historical Society and Ship Registers and Enrollments of Providence, Rhode Island, 1773-1939. Providence: National Archives Project, 1941, vol. 1, #3283.

Trotter was an interesting person. Although born in England, he served as boatswain aboard Samuel Shaw's famous *Massachusetts* on her voyage to Canton in 1789. He had remained aboard the ship after it was sold to the Danish East India Company late in 1790. His later

life is full of adventure, but very early in the nineteenth century he settled in Bradford, Vermont, with a comfortable fortune. There he became a prominent citizen, selectman, cotton manufacturer, distiller and philanthropist (Silas McKeen, *A History of Bradford, Vermont* (Montpelier, Vt., 1876), 194-200.

17 Dozy to Megee, November 6, 1797, and January 9, 1798, Megee Papers.

18 Instructions from Gibbs & Channing, Newport, to William F. Megee, George Gibbs Jr. and William Wood Jr. (1796). See also Megee's letter of introduction to James Chalmers, Canton, for Gibbs and Wood, November 10, 1796, and to Gibbs & Channing, December

So it was that upon his arrival home in 1798,<sup>20</sup> Megee could look back on 22 months of very complicated business. It had, in fact, been a series of ventures rather than a single enterprise, including two rather orthodox China voyages and three gambler's ventures, two of which probably involved evading British blockades. The third ended in litigation. Obviously, these were not the actions of a cautious man. The *Susan's* cruises were the only part of his tortuous dealings which clearly paid handsomely. So long as his luck lasted, Megee would be able to cover his losses and still cut a figure as a leader of Providence's new commercial elite. But the law of averages was against him.

Megee soon developed a new scheme for fishing in waters troubled by war. During the summer of 1798, he outfitted the new ship *Palmyra* at Providence. She was the joint property of Megee and John Innis Clark, Joseph Nightingale's partner and a financial backer of Megee so long as he lived. After a maiden voyage to Hamburg, during which she suffered major damages in a bad storm, the *Palmyra* went to Buenos Aires with a cargo designed for that market. Her captain was the same William Trotter who had done so nobly for Megee and Clark in the *Susan*.

In Buenos Aires the ship was sold to Pedro Duval, a wealthy merchant of that city, and dispatched to "friendly foreign ports."<sup>21</sup> This sale seems to have been an artifice to assure the vessel a favorable reception upon her return to Buenos Aires, whose venal officials were notorious both for accepting bribes and for seizing foreign vessels. Indeed, at least one cargo of Trotter's was seized, apparently. The total amounted to approximately \$80,000 of which one-third or \$26,666.66 was Megee's.<sup>22</sup> Trotter was still petitioning the government for redress in 1807, when Megee needed the money badly.

Of course, illegal voyages and paper devices for obscuring a vessel's true ownership do not make a

business venture very easy to trace, especially after a time lapse of a century and a half. Thus, the whereabouts of the *Palmyra* over the next few years are not always clear. She appeared at Rio de Janeiro in 1800 under her new name, *Nuestra Senora de Belen*. In January and February of 1801, she was again in the Rio de la Plata. Shortly thereafter she returned to Providence only to leave for Liverpool very speedily. By the following November she appears to have changed captains, and in February 1802 she was back at Rio de Janeiro. This time, however, she was the property of Clark alone.<sup>23</sup> Precisely what she had been doing and whether she had made Megee a profit is a mystery. It seems evident, however, that she had been engaging in dangerous business.

Megee himself ventured into perilous water once again in 1799, when he set out as supercargo and part owner of the ship *Resource*, with Captain Nathaniel Pearce. Again, the number of owners may be some indication of the danger as well as of the expense of the voyage. Judging from the heavy armament, Megee expected trouble. The ship mounted 16 iron six-pounders, carried 52 men and was otherwise formidably accoutered. At this time, the United States was engaged in the undeclared maritime war with France, and the *Resource* was granted a letter of marque. However if she met any French ships on the trip out, she made short work of them, for the ship touched at Sydney September 6, only four months after leaving Providence. She was in Whampoa Reach November 18 and reappeared in Providence in the last week of July 1800.<sup>24</sup> Once again Megee had ventured into war-ridden areas, this time as a national of one of the contending powers, and once again he had come home with a profit.

No sooner had he set foot on shore than Megee began to plan another risky voyage, but his luck was beginning to ebb. In February 1801, he dispatched the *Hazard*, under Captain James Rowan, on an extended

18, 1796, Col. George Gibbs Papers, Newport Historical Society.

19 Megee Papers.

20 The *Grand Turk* was driven ashore at Portland, Maine, on January 4, 1798.

21 Charles Lyon Chandler, "The River Plate Voyages, 1798-1800," *American Historical Review*, vol. 23, 4 (July 1918), 821, 824.

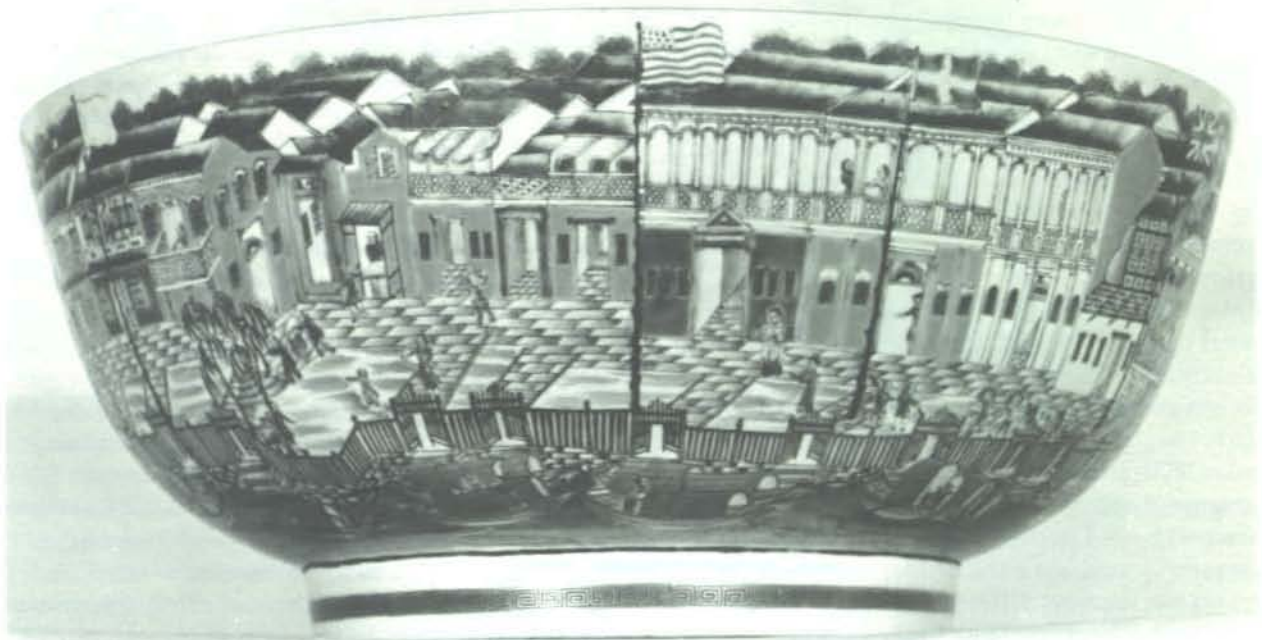
22 See Megee's Account Book and the documents in Spanish on the subject in the Carrington Papers. For a classic example of the uncertainties a ship faced, see T. L. Halsey Jr., Buenos Ayres, to Brown & Ives and

John Corlis, Providence, October 16, 1800, Brown & Ives Papers.

23 For information on the *Palmyra* see "Log of the ship *Palmyra* from Providence toward Hamburg, Oct. 14, 1798," "Log of the ship *Patterson* bound from Madeira in Oct. of 1800," "Log of the ship *Palmyra*, of Providence in the River of Plate in January and February of 1801" all at The Rhode Island Historical Society; T. L. Halsey Jr., Buenos Ayres, to Brown & Ives & John Corlis, January 25, 1801, Brown & Ives Papers; and Charles Lyon Chandler, "List of United States Vessels in Brazil, 1792-1805, Inclusive," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 26 (November 1946), 613.

By boat from Whampoa Reach, merchants approached Canton and the hong or warehouses where they could conduct their trading. The hong, with the flags that identified the traders' countries, became a favorite subject

for Chinese artists who found Western merchants eager for Oriental scenes. This "Hong" punch bowl, showing in the center a view well known to Megee, is on loan to John Brown House from Mr. Norman Herreshoff.



trading cruise to the Northwest Coast, the west coast of South America and the islands of the Pacific. In this venture, Megee was joined by two other Providence merchants, his former brother-in-law Benjamin Page and John Corlis.

Over the next several years, the *Hazard* lived up to her name. In the cargo was a large quantity of muskets, an item which was bound to arouse suspicion in Latin America. In February 1802, while the *Hazard* was anchored in the harbor of Valparaiso, Don Antonio Francisco Gracia Carrasco, Acting Governor, heard of the muskets and demanded they be surrendered. Rowan refused, whereupon Don Antonio seized every American who happened to be ashore, a spiteful action which gained him nothing. He ulti-

mately won his point when he managed to sneak a considerable number of men aboard the *Hazard* by a subterfuge. There, they reportedly behaved in a most ruffianly fashion, not only confiscating the weapons, but also plundering the ship, killing one of the crew, and manhandling the others. Rowan was thrown into prison. Although he later extricated himself somehow, the owners' loss was substantial.<sup>25</sup> From Canton, where the ship appeared later in the year, Sullivan Dorr reported to his brothers in Boston that Rowan had lost \$20,000 in the incident.<sup>26</sup>

The *Hazard* sailed again for the Northwest Coast and California on February 6, 1803, in company with the *Alert*, Capt. John Ebbitts, of Boston. Rowan made two trips between Canton and the Pacific Northwest

24 The sources of this voyage are: Megee to James & T. H. Perkins, May 4, 1799, Megee's Account Book; Megee to John Lippett, May 17, 1802, Megee Papers; Sullivan Dorr to Joseph & John Dorr, November 21, 1799, in Howard Corning, ed., "Letters of Sullivan Dorr," Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings*, vol. 67 (1941-44), 193; and the *Providence Gazette*, August 2, 1800. Incidentally, the young Chinese Megee brought home with him proved enough of a curiosity to warrant half a column of type in the newspaper.

25 Probably the best available description of this affair is in Richard J. Cleveland, *A Narrative of Voyages and Commercial Enterprises* (Cambridge, 1850), 163-174.

26 Dorr to Joseph, John & Andrew C. Dorr, November 17, 1802, Corning, 343.

27 Megee held a part interest, with John Corlis, in this vessel.

28 The *Ship Registers . . . of Providence . . .* lists the following craft in his name at that time: the brig *John and*

before he finally sailed for home in the spring of 1805. Presumably the operations of the *Hazard* at least recouped the losses at Valparaiso, but this venture, the seizure of the *Palmyra's* cargo and the loss of his ship *John and Charles*, 148 tons, in April 1801,<sup>27</sup> indicated that Megee's luck was no longer so spectacular as it had been in the previous decade. Moreover, by the time the *Hazard* arrived home, Megee was in deep trouble.

Although we do not know how rich Megee became, he enjoyed great success over a substantial period of time when many other Americans won fortunes in precisely the trades in which he engaged. Megee was at least part owner in six vessels in 1801.<sup>28</sup> For some time he had been acquiring land in North Providence where he established his country seat, appropriately named "Canton Retreat Farm." He also purchased real estate in Providence itself, where he kept his town house, a home for his mother and other buildings. He also seems to have financed the building of part of the American Factory at Canton. Earlier, he had bought a one-third interest in this complex of several honges from Samuel Snow, United States Consul for Canton.<sup>29</sup>

Megee certainly behaved like a rich man. Like other successful merchants of his day, he confirmed his social position by leadership in the local militia company. He was a captain in the Providence Independent Light Dragoons in May 1802 and from May 1804 to 1808 he was a major in this organization.<sup>30</sup> Hence his title. Another indication of his wealth may be his indulgence in luxuries. One of the more exotic was an aviary, which he shipped home from China in January 1800. The invoice included:

- 1 cage & 50 birds
- 1 pr Silver & Gold Feasants & Cage
- 3 pr Mandarin Ducks & Cages
- 1 pr fowls & 1 pr White Mandarin Ducks
- 1 pr Large Ducks
- 1 pr partridges & 1 pr Wild Pigeons  
& Canton Feasans

as well as "Half of 3 Ewes & one Ram in Company

*China's influence on the sailors who manned the ships of Rhode Island merchants is reflected in this detail from a sketch in the 1809 account book of seamen's wages on the ship Baltic's Canton voyage. The exotic bird perched on the sailor's queue recalls Megee's ship-borne aviary.*



with Mr. John Corliss . . . and one Large China Sow" (spelling in original).<sup>31</sup>

Apparently, when Megee bought his share of the Canton factory from Samuel Snow, the two merchants agreed to spell each other at Canton in managing the honges.<sup>32</sup> As he had promised, Megee again sailed for Canton May 18, 1802, on the *Resource*, hoping to meet the long-absent *Hazard* in China later in the year. He sailed as captain, supercargo and sole owner. Assisting him was young Edward Carrington, who was later to become the premier merchant of Rhode Island. Megee planned to remain in China for two years, or at least so he informed J. & T. H. Perkins of Boston.<sup>33</sup> Megee commissioned Carrington to transact all his business in Canton and to manage his share of the American Factory.<sup>34</sup> Megee's experience, advice and patronage were unquestionably very valuable assets to the young man and must have been a considerable factor in his early success.

Perhaps justifiably, Megee was gaining a name in some circles for sharp trading. Indeed, much of his fortune had been won as a result of smuggling and a very close calculation of opportunities opened by the war's disruption of normal trade patterns. In this

*Charles* (#1811), and the ships *Hazard* (#1479), *Palmyra* (#2609), *Susan* (#3282), *Persis* (#2680), and *Resource* (#2901).

29 Snow, Providence, to Dorr, Canton, May 10, 1802, quoted in Vincent P. Carosso and Lawrence H. Leder, "The Samuel Snow—Sullivan Dorr Correspondence," *Rhode Island History*, vol. 15, no. 3 (July 1956), 82. For further material on Snow see my article, "A Study in Failure, Hon. Samuel Snow," *Rhode Island History*, vol. 25, no. 1 (January 1966), 1-8.

30 Joseph H. Smith, *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island* (Providence, 1900), vol. 2, 45, 61, 75, 88, 100, 113 and 126.

31 Megee's Account Book, 1797-1800.

32 Megee to Snow, December 18, 1800, Megee Papers.

33 February 3, 1802, Megee Papers.

34 Although not yet firmly established, Carrington was a reliable and gifted businessman who already enjoyed the confidence of several other leading Providence merchants including Snow, Samuel Butler, Seth

regard he was no different from many other New England merchants of his era, but Megee seems to have taken more chances than most. One person who took a particularly jaundiced view of Megee was Sullivan Dorr, then resident at Canton. Although Dorr was a competitor in the very chancy ginseng trade and could not be expected to approve wholeheartedly of Megee, he knew him well. Dorr had noted earlier in a letter to his brothers that he was obliged to be civil to Megee, as "it can't be helpt, money gives a face, when modesty and merit is pushed out of doors."<sup>35</sup> While he conceded Megee's ability, Dorr viewed him with disapproval, an opinion others would soon share and not without reason.

Megee landed his tea in Providence on July 13, 1803. Although it seems doubtful that this voyage was very profitable, Megee was still a wealthy man. Fifteen days after his arrival home, he purchased three vessels. In addition, he still remained owner or part owner of at least three others<sup>36</sup> and possessed real estate both in America and China.

For the next two years, Megee remained at home continuing his pursuit of imaginative, if risky commerce. His trade was on a larger scale than ever before, and it became increasingly complicated. The *Resource* seems to have imported the bulk of the Oriental goods which were the basis of his trade in the Western world. She plied between Providence and the East, especially to Canton and Batavia. In the Atlantic, working the sea routes to Europe, the West Indies and the islands of the Eastern Atlantic, were the *Abby & Sally*, the *Industry*, the *Little James* and occasionally a chartered vessel or two. Finally, Megee had an interest in the *Hazard*, which was still cruising in the Pacific. Although he placed heavy reliance on his captains and supercargoes, Megee dealt through agents in other cities whenever possible. Three of the most important of these agents were Wils & Company, Amsterdam, J. & T. H. Perkins in Boston and Edward Carrington at Canton. It was an expansive system, well conceived

Megee's critic, Sullivan Dorr, was, according to the Providence Daily Post of March 4, 1858, "... distinguished for his large business capacity and high integrity of character. All the transactions of his life were marked by punctuality, system and honor ..."

From a portrait by Charles Loring Elliott, courtesy of the Providence Washington Insurance Company.



and probably as diversified as the times and trade allowed. However foreign commerce was as dangerous as it was profitable, especially when a merchant took chances like Megee.

Also, the China trade probably took more capital than any other commerce of the times. Like many other China merchants in the young, capital-shy United States, Megee was compelled to borrow large sums of money often at high rates of interest to finance his voyages to the Far East. He was frequently unable to pay these debts until his China cargoes arrived and were sold. Thus, Megee was gambling for very large stakes. It is not surprising that he even-

Wheaton and Benjamin Hoppin. Thus it is not surprising that Megee took advantage of Carrington's determination to stay in China.

35 Dorr to Joseph & John Dorr, Boston, November 1, 1799, Corning, 188. Nearly three years later, Dorr wrote his brother that he intended to make the Chinese merchant Mowqua a witness to any ginseng sale he made, thus "putting out [of] anyones power to say I render false accounts as has been said of Magee of whom shall say more when I see you." Dorr continued, admonishing his kinsmen, "I thought you knew enough of Magee to

give proper weight to such a Story as his having written the Merchants here much Ginseng might be expected" [July 28, 1802, Corning, 316-317]. Evidently Megee had outmaneuvered Dorr by means the latter regarded as unethical.

36 The *Abby & Sally*, 152 tons, the *Silvia*, 82 tons, and the brig *Industry*, 141 tons. His other ships were larger but only the *Resource* exceeded 400 tons.

37 The gross proceeds on the *Superior's* cargo, invoiced at \$74,255.47 [Wils & Co. to Megee, October 6, 1803] were \$80,859.13 [Wils & Co. to Megee, January 13, 1804].

tually failed; indeed, it is remarkable that he was so successful for so long.

Within a few months after he returned from China, Megee undertook the largest speculation of his entire career. Possibly the Western world's largest concentration of consumers of China goods lay in Europe, and the principal entrepôt for this great market was Amsterdam. Megee's agents there, Wils & Company, had encouraged him to send teas for sale at the Dutch East India Company's auctions and for reexportation to various North Sea ports, especially Emden. Between August 1803 and January 1804, Megee sent five ships to Amsterdam or Emden wholly or partially laden with goods consigned to Wils & Company. Had this speculation been successful, Megee would probably have become one of America's leading merchants. But Fortune was now against him.

The first two vessels to arrive were the chartered brig *Superior* and the *Abby e/ Sally*, whose combined cargo was invoiced at \$147,183.96. The *Superior* was lost on the return trip and the *Abby e/ Sally* ran aground briefly at Calais, damaging her cargo. More importantly, all five of Megee's ships arrived to a bad market. Tea prices were low and little was available for a return cargo. Possibly one of the developments which hurt Megee was the temporary peace between the warring powers of Europe. The Peace of Amiens lasted from March 27, 1802, to May 16, 1803, a period during which normal trade was partially resumed, thus putting more goods in the European market than Megee had anticipated back in China, when he had left instructions with Carrington.

A confusing factor is the charge of a Megee captain, one Thomas Holden of the *Abby e/ Sally*, who was convinced that his employer had been badly defrauded by Wils & Company. "Amsterdam," said Holden, "don't produce a more completely finished set of villains than Wils & Co." According to his bankruptcy petition, Megee never really knew exactly how he had lost his once imposing fortune.<sup>37</sup>

Whatever the occasion for his losses, Megee seems to have run out of luck. Faced by a huge deficit, he gambled once more. In the fall of 1805 he put to sea in the *Resource*, with Amos Throop Jenckes,<sup>38</sup> supercargo, bound for Baltimore, Lisbon and Canton. On this voyage, Megee's good faith again was impugned, this time by powerful merchants and ex-friends. His creditors, who included J. & T. H. Perkins, Brown & Ives and Samuel Nightingale Jr., were led to believe that he would sail from Portugal to China and return with a rich cargo to pay his enormous debts. Instead, Megee altered his course for Senegal, where he took on a cargo of slaves for South America. It should be remembered that the international slave trade would become illegal for Americans on January 1, 1808. Thus, Megee's voyage appears to have been a desperate attempt to cash in on the final moments of that brutal and increasingly disreputable commerce. Megee also probably hoped to get some action on the long-delayed claim against the Buenos Aires government for the goods left by Captain Trotter years before.

Megee defended himself in his bankruptcy petition, in which he stated that "owing to a fall in the price of goods he carried to Europe, he was unable to proceed to the original place of destination and sailed with a cargo for the River of Plate." It is interesting that the trip to Africa and the composition of the cargo went unmentioned.<sup>39</sup> Another remarkable circumstance indicating that this was no ordinary voyage is the timing of a series of real estate transfers and their registry. Megee sailed for this fateful journey sometime around the end of October, 1805. Before leaving, he sold or hypothecated virtually all of his remaining real property, mostly to good friends or relatives. However, none of these conveyances was recorded before November 13, by which time Megee was safely out of reach of the sheriff.<sup>40</sup> Had they learned of the transfers in time, his other creditors might have become suspicious and attached his ship and cargo. By mid-November, however, they had no

The ships' expenses would more than cancel the profit, and the interest on borrowed money would take a big bite of the principal. The *Abby e/ Sally's* cargo was invoiced at \$72,928.49 [invoice dated August 15, 1803]. It would seem that Megee was running very close to the edge, since by January 1804, charges amounting to \$176,000 had accumulated against the shipments on the *Superior*, the *Abby e/ Sally* and the *Industry* (Wils & Co. to Megee, January 13, 1804). Megee's comment in his bankruptcy petition was noncommittal: "he suffered an immense loss in a shipment of property to Amsterdam, which misfortune was the consequence of

a sudden fall in the markets, or the unfaithfulness of his consignees and correspondents."

38 Jenckes, a half-owner of the ship, went bankrupt at the same time as Megee. There was also a family connection [Jenckes' brother was married to Mrs. Megee's sister].

39 For a brief account of this voyage see Earl C. Tanner, "A Question as to Buenos Ayres," *Rhode Island History*, vol. 24, no. 3 [July 1965], 89-91.

40 See Providence Deed Book #31, 108 and 109 (Providence City Hall) and North Providence Deed Book #3, 354 and 355 (Pawtucket City Hall). After such losses as Megee

alternative but to hope for a successful voyage.

Thus, the enterprise was conducted on borrowed money, for which Megee had pledged his home and most of his other property. Moreover, he had done so without informing his creditors. Possibly they might have accepted the slaving voyage had it been profitable, but the success of the voyage depended upon too many variables. Nothing went right. When the *Resource* arrived in South America, Buenos Aires, his destination, was occupied by the British under Sir Home Popham, and Megee was not permitted to land. He managed to sell some of his Negroes at Montevideo during the summer of 1806, but he suffered the loss of "a large part of his cargo in consequence of informations lodged against him for breaches of the revenue laws."<sup>41</sup> He remained at Montevideo until March 1807, experiencing many other difficulties including runaway slaves and the seizure of the ship's arms. He finally set sail for home with shattered hopes, arriving in Charleston, South Carolina, sometime in May and in Providence shortly thereafter.

The voyage was a disaster, and the creditors expecting a valuable cargo of tea were outraged. A presumably disinterested Providence merchant, Benjamin Hoppin, commented:

*Capt. Megee & Jenckes arrived here a few days since from off a long voyage to South America with (to use an old saying) their fingers in their mouths. A more shocking voyage could not scarcely be made. Megee is many thousands in the background.*<sup>42</sup>

Megee announced that he planned to return to Canton to recoup his fortunes, but his situation was hopeless. His creditors were undoubtedly less inclined to be merciful than they might have been, since 1807 was a difficult year, and they believed Megee had abused their confidence. Seeing that bankruptcy was inevitable, shortly after his return, Megee deeded to his mother a life interest in "land and buildings on the south side of High Street in Providence" apparently to secure her a home safe from his collapse.<sup>43</sup>

With such bleak prospects for the future, why did Megee wait another seven months before filing his

petition for bankruptcy? Since no firm evidence suggests the answer to this question, one can only offer an hypothesis. The war in Europe was being waged with ever-increasing intensity. The British victory at Trafalgar had taken place late in October 1805, and the French now had no navy. On the other hand, a series of French triumphs on land (Austerlitz, December 1805, Jena and Auerstadt, October 1806, and Friedland, June 1807) had removed all Britain's continental allies from the contest. Each of the two great antagonists was supreme on her element but impotent on her enemy's. Hence, Britain and France resorted to a program of maritime restrictions in an attempt to destroy each other's economy. Unfortunately for Megee, neutral traders were probably hurt more than either belligerent, and the most important neutral with a commercial fleet was the United States. Since Britain was mistress of the seas and had so recently been the national enemy, America was more sensitive to her depredations than to those of Napoleon.

In June of 1807, the British ship *Leopard* fired upon the American naval vessel, the *Chesapeake*, and took off several alleged deserters from His Majesty's Navy. The American public was furious over this wanton outrage, and by the end of December, President Jefferson had persuaded Congress to pass the Embargo Act, which banned all foreign ships from American ports and kept American craft at home. All foreign trade ceased.

Thereafter, what could Megee hope for? His creditors were keeping close watch over his property so that any ship he owned would be attached immediately upon its arrival in an American port. Moreover, the Embargo would keep it inactive thereafter. Earlier there might have been a chance that some property could be slipped into the country, but even this remote possibility was now gone. In the meantime the interest on his borrowed capital was killing him. He did not even have a gambler's chance.

Despite his misfortunes, Megee seems to have maintained a jaunty air which must have been

had suffered, his creditors must have become uneasy. Indeed, it is a wonder they were so quiet. Perhaps they were reassured by the arrival of the *Hazard* in the spring before the *Resource* sailed.

41 Bankruptcy petition. Petitions to the General Assembly, vol. 37, 120, Rhode Island State Archives.

42 Hoppin to Carrington, July 21, 1807, Carrington Papers.

43 Providence Deed Book #30, 299.

*From 1801 to 1807, according to Providence fire insurance records, William Magee [sic] carried insurance on this house, then on George Street. Built by Edward Dexter about 1796, the dwelling was moved from that location in 1860, when Brown University acquired the land, to its present site at 72 Waterman Street.*

maddening to his creditors. Benjamin Hoppin wrote Carrington on July 5, 1808:

*Megee has obtained the benefit of the insolvent act of this state & boasts of paying all his debts except 180,000 (italics in original). He can never get up again in the world. You therefore must look to the Factories to your demands against him.*<sup>44</sup>

After his bankruptcy Megee became involved in a bitter quarrel with his wife's family, particularly his brother-in-law and creditor, Samuel Nightingale Jr. Megee's whereabouts for the next 18 months are something of a mystery, but it is certain that when he left Providence, he left alone. He does not seem to have abandoned his family altogether, however. He sent his wife gifts and funds through both Edward Carrington and William F. Megee Jr., who soon became a China captain in his own right.<sup>45</sup>

Early in 1810 Megee arrived in Canton for the last time. His friend Carrington, having made a handsome

fortune, was preparing to leave the Chinese city. He had taken Hoppin's advice and seized Megee's factories,<sup>46</sup> but he may have aided Megee by doing so. Moreover, he seems to have helped his former patron to begin business in Canton as an innkeeper.<sup>47</sup> Megee managed to supplement the income from his hotel by acting occasionally as an auctioneer and a building contractor. His biggest customers in all three endeavors appear to have been the British, even during the War of 1812. He catered particularly to captains and other ships' officers plying the trade between Canton and India.

During the remaining nine years of his life, Megee was an institution at Canton. His was the first inn established in the foreign community there, and his table and whist parties were renowned all over the Orient. He maintained several "racing clipper boats" and a crew of Malays to row his tenants and friends to Whampoa and back, a convenient, if illegal service

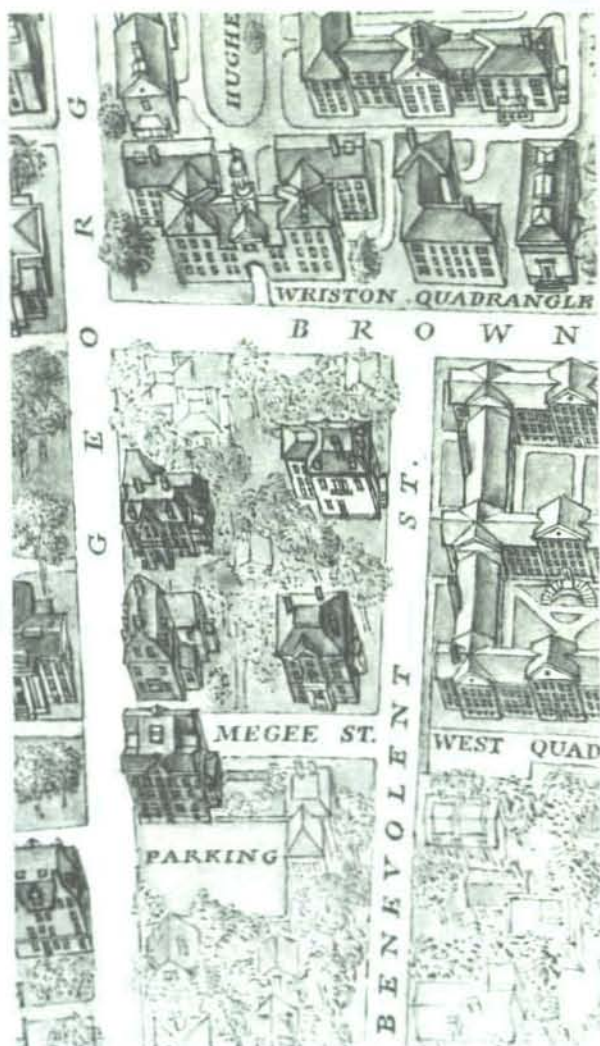


which they performed at record speed. Indeed, Megee seemed to be prospering once again. He lived well and died suddenly, surprising those who had seen him in good health and apparently affluent only a few hours before.<sup>48</sup> His son, in command of a ship then at Canton for Edward Carrington, was present during his final hours.

A short while after Megee died, his wife's nephew, Edwin T. Jenckes, who was also in China at this time, wrote home the following account of Megee's death:

*He went to Macao with me in the (ship) Viper at my instigation and by abstaining from his usual habits so far recovered as to return to Canton in a few months, much better—but his constitution was so broken by his manner of living and long residence in this unhealthy climate that a short illness carried him off. His remains are interred on French Island near Whampoa and a handsome stone placed over them—he had his reason perfectly at the last hour of death & appeared calm & collected & perfectly aware of his situation giving directions about many little affairs which should be attended to—I am glad that Wm (Megee Jr.) was here as he might not have been perfectly aware of Capt M's affairs, altho' I was fully satisfied about them before I left here last year. I really think it is most fortunate for himself & his friends that his death took place when it did, as I do not believe but what he must have relinquished everything he held in his name this year. Every vein had been bled to the last & it must have come to a point soon.—Consequa (a hong merchant) (tho probably exagerrated) makes a claim of five Hundred & Fifty Thousand Dollars. Innumerable other demands are made and there are some cases that are really distressing—I say nothing of this subject to my mother & aunt as I can add nothing satisfactory to what they already know.<sup>49</sup>*

Although it differs radically from all other accounts of Megee's last days, Jenckes' story rings true. He had access to more information than the others, and his story seems far more characteristic of Captain Megee.



Today a one-block street in Providence commemorates the name of the merchant gambler whose properties once included land on it. The Providence Town Council decreed on November 12, 1805, that "The street from George to Benevolent Street Westward from the School House" should be named Megee Street.

Detail of map, courtesy Brown University.

44 Carrington Papers.

45 Young Megee received the advantages his father had lacked. He attended preparatory school under William Woodbridge in Newark, N. J., entered Yale in the fall of 1805. It appears, however, that he did not graduate.

46 J. & T. H. Perkins, to Megee, June 6, 1807, Megee Papers.

47 Peter W. Snow, Canton, to Edward Carrington, Providence, April 15, 1812, Carrington Papers. It seems Megee's optimism did not fail him even in his extremity.

Although his credit must have been destroyed with his bankruptcy, he wrote Girard that he expected to conduct a commission and agency business at Canton! Megee to Girard, February 8, 1810, Girard Papers; on microfilm at the American Philosophical Society.

48 Bryant P. Tilden, "Father's Journal," 201-202, typescript at Peabody Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.

49 Jenckes to Samuel Nightingale Jr., July 31, 1821, Megee Papers.

## Still More Notes on Rhode Island Cabinetmakers and Allied Craftsmen

by Joseph K. Ott\*

There is a classic story about a little girl who wrote to the publishing company which had just distributed a book on penguins. "This book," the letter read, "told me a good deal more about penguins than I care to know."

I trust this and my two preceding articles<sup>1</sup> will not tell the readers of *Rhode Island History* more than they care to know about our early makers of furniture. There is a continuing fascination about old manuscripts that makes the search for information both appealing and worthwhile; and so, the story goes on.

A certain amount of printed biographical information exists about Isaac Senter and his family, whose furniture and other records were discussed in the first article, but he comes more alive when we can read: "... Our other friends are in their usual situation except Dr. Senter—who has opened a hospital on Conanicut [the island of Jamestown, a short distance west of Newport, accessible by ferry then and regretably only by bridge today] for innoculating the small pox and has his time entirely engrossed in his practice. Mrs. Senter does not go to the Assembly this Winter—owing I believe to some little fraca [sic] with some ladies—the D<sup>r</sup> told me it was her own inclination—and he refused subscribing on that account."<sup>2</sup> Senter was also president of the Society of the Cincinnati when he certified in Newport on Oct. 28, 1790, that Col. Samuel Ward was a member of the Rhode Island group.<sup>3</sup> And of the son who was later to be killed in a duel, Ray Clarke, studying in Cambridge, wrote to his father on Nov. 16, 1800: "... Horace Senter is returned [from London]. I raced throughout Boston in order to find him, but in vain, give my love to him. Will he settle in Newport By attending prayers I have contracted a bad cold . . ."<sup>4</sup> Incidentally, voicing a pique well understood by any student or loyal alumnus, Clarke wrote his apparently preoccupied

father on Nov. 28: "In your address to this University you stile it Yale instead of Harvard" and also commented his "cough was wearing off" and so on.<sup>5</sup>

The search for new cabinetmakers also uncovers such men as Meshack Potter of Cranston, who married Temperance Burlingame and made two beds for Deliverance Waterman.<sup>6</sup>

Further examination of the Society's manuscript collections has resulted in the discovery of new cabinet and chair makers, and additional information about known workers. The significance of these new listings can be ascertained by an analysis of existing records.

Wendell Garrett in the June 1958 issue of *Antiques* listed about 141 workers in the Newport area and, in October 1966, in the same magazine, he presented about 172 men in the Providence area. These are the two major sources of information available and are the results of Mr. Garrett's considerable new research, together with the findings of earlier students, particularly Mabel Munson Swan, concerning Newport, and Ethel Hall Bjerkoie. Together with one maker from Barrington listed in Bjerkoie,<sup>7</sup> the known R.I. workers numbered about 314. The total includes cabinetmakers, chair makers, turners known to have made furniture, and men described as "joiners," all working before the 1840-1850 period and actually making things, not merely selling them. The inclusion of all "joiners" is justified as there seems to be a definite usage, in R.I. at least, of the term "house wright," "house carpenter," "ship wright," etc. when the joiner worked primarily on things other than furniture. Previous authors have, furthermore, always included them, and consistency indicates we should do the same. The number of men listed must be somewhat approximate, as a worker often helped build a house, made furniture, mended fences and other things, and did a variety of odd jobs, and distinctions between

\*Mr. Ott is the author of *The John Brown House Loan Exhibition of Rhode Island Furniture* (Providence, 1965).

1 "Recent Discoveries among Rhode Island Cabinetmakers and Their Work," *Rhode Island History*, v. 28, no. 1, Winter 1969 [hereafter cited "Recent Discoveries . . ."].  
 "More Notes on Rhode Island Cabinetmakers and Their Work," *Rhode Island History*, v. 28, no. 2, Spring 1969 [hereafter cited "More Notes . . ."].

2 Anna Clarke to Phebe Ward in New York City. Samuel Ward Papers, The Rhode Island Historical Society, undated but before Senter's death in December 1799.

3 Samuel Ward Papers.

4 Ethan Clarke Papers, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

5 Ethan Clarke Papers.

6 See "Potter, Meshack" in listing at end of article.

7 Ethel Hall Bjerkoie, *Cabinetmakers of America*, New York, 1957.

Newport's Quaker Meeting House underwent many changes between the time in the 17th century, when it was first built, and the 1850s when this lithograph was done. Here the famous Townsends did some "prosaic carpentering work" at the rate of seven shillings, sixpence per day.

Lithograph drawn by William Dame for T. Sinclair, Philadelphia.



carpenters or day laborers and cabinetmakers can become blurred. The illustrious Edmund Townsend, Job Townsend, and Thomas Townsend, for instance, did prosaic carpentering work for the Quaker Meeting House in Newport, often at a rate of 0-7-6 per day,<sup>8</sup> in addition to creating some of the finest Rhode Island chests, tables, and other forms.

In these three articles in *Rhode Island History*, 61 new names have been added, including 29 from Providence and 8 from Newport, increasing the total almost 20% to 375 workers. The earliest known Providence joiner, James Dexter in 1719,<sup>9</sup> and 24 more makers who worked in outlying towns such as East Greenwich, North and South Kingstown, Warren, Bristol, Cranston, Scituate, and Coventry have also been brought to light. Additional data on about 65 known workers and 48 other craftsmen has also been given. A few new makers in Massachusetts were also discovered in passing.

Some of these new men were probably sophisticated workers, and pieces some may credit to those too-familiar names Goddard and Townsend could well be by their hand. The vast bulk of the men working in the field, however, have probably been far less exciting, and made the common and useful objects all households needed. The same holds true for all the states: not everyone in Massachusetts was a Frothingham nor a Seymour, nor a Randolph nor an Affleck in Pennsylvania.

What has been dismissed as an early owner's name on a piece of furniture, perhaps pencilled on some drawer side in years past, should prompt us to re-examine such writing today in an attempt to assess the capabilities of these new workers.

The quantity of names does reflect the thriving nature of Rhode Island commerce and local industry in the 18th and early 19th centuries and justifies the search among the Society's archives for men from

8 Rhode Island Monthly Meeting of Friends, Misc. Mss F-912 (1787, 1783, 1785, and 1791) The Rhode Island Historical Society.

9 "More Notes . . ."

10 Wendell D. Garrett, "Providence cabinetmakers, chairmakers, upholsterers, and allied craftsmen, 1756-1838," *Antiques* (October 1966). ———, "The Newport cabinetmakers: a corrected check list," *Antiques* (June 1958). Both hereafter cited "Garrett."

Abel Allen, a maker, to Zuriel Waterman, a customer.

Some of the names and transactions discovered among the manuscripts expand our knowledge of allied craftsmen. Far too little is known about the activities of painters, gilders, and picture and looking glass frame makers and their relationships with cabinet-makers throughout the colonies, for instance. This is particularly true for Rhode Island and Providence, where the post war period saw great mercantile fortunes being accumulated and with them a demand for elegance.

Peter Grinnell and Son, and Grinnell and Taylor, have been treated in Garrett's article on Providence makers in *Antiques*,<sup>10</sup> in my first article, and in other articles and various books. They advertised themselves as a "manufactory," but opinion has always been divided as to whether or not they actually made some of the looking glasses and frames they sold along with imported articles. Certainly they and their sub-contractors were painters who ornamented a variety of objects, as their advertisements and labels state.

PROVIDENCE ANNUAL ADVERTISER.

15

### Cabinet Ware-House. Reuben Burdon,

No. 60, WESTMINSTER-STREET,

Opposite the Sign of the Great Boot,

**H**AS constantly on hand, a complete assortment of CABINET FURNITURE, of a superior quality, consisting of Mahogany Sideboards, Secretaries, Bureaux, Tables, Bedsteads, Sophas, Stands, &c. &c. &c. together with a general assortment of Chairs, of almost every description; comprising altogether an assortment not to be surpassed by any in town, all of which will be sold on the most liberal terms.

N. B. Furniture made and repaired at the shortest notice.

January 21.

*As in the instance of Jeremiah F. Jenkins, the complications of attributing pieces of furniture to specific makers are illustrated in this advertisement from The Providence Directory of 1824. Reuben Burdon's nota bene warns that his label or signature might identify an import, an original piece, or an item repaired by him.*

A bill to Rev. Enos Hitchcock from Grinnell and Taylor reads:

"May 9, 1789 To Gilding 16 picture frames @ 1/	0-16-0
July 20 To Painting a Wine Cooler twice over	0-2-6
Sept. 1 To Painting 5 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> yds. canvas for sulky top @ 2/	0-11-4
Dec. 3 To Painting, gilding and varnishing a picture frame	0-4-0
1790 Mar. 1 To Painting your slay	1-0-0
	<hr/>
	2-13-10 <sup>11</sup>

Hitchcock's fire buckets were painted by the same firm in Oct. 1790 for 0-6-0.<sup>12</sup>

However, other workers in Providence were also patronized who are new to the records. On Sept. 4, 1798, George Lugden billed Hitchcock:

"To Japanning, White and Gilding 2 members of frame	0-12-0
4 Composition ornamental Studs, Gilt and fin <sup>d</sup>	0-3-0
Varnishing and Bronze Gilding a Guitar	0-6-0
	<hr/>
	1-1-0 <sup>13</sup>

On Feb. 16, 1799, Samuel Brown billed him for "Gilding and Painting two frames glass etc. @9/ 0-18-0."<sup>14</sup> This may be the Samuel E. Brown listed in the 1824 *Providence Directory* as a painter at 150 North Main St. and 46 Benefit St. Hitchcock had purchased on Mar. 15, 1793, a pair of "Elegant gilt frame looking glasses 18 x 25" for 10-0-0 from Jeremiah F. Jenkins,<sup>15</sup> but as the latter appears to have been a shop keeper, these may have been imported in their finished state.

Hitchcock's activities with these objects may possibly be explained by the fact that he was the preacher for the "Benevolent Congregational Church and Society," and some may have been used in the church. Hitchcock was born in Springfield, Mass., in 1744, graduated from Harvard in 1767, and after being ordained in 1771 began preaching in Beverly, Mass. In 1783 he settled permanently in Providence.

He purchased picture frames from John Carlisle, Wallen and Rawson, and Joseph Rawson in the 1780s.<sup>16</sup> He may have done the same from others, as the Hitchcock Papers, while representative of his family's affairs, are not nearly as complete and

11 Enos Hitchcock Papers, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

12 *ibid.*

13 *ibid.*

14 *ibid.*

15 *ibid.*

16 See listing under each name at rear of article.

numerous as, for example, the Isaac Senter Papers in the Greene Collection.

The frames may have been sold to be used as is, or perhaps were improved or "finished" with gilding and/or painting by such men as Brown, Lugden, or Grinnell and Taylor. As imported silvered glass was available, it would seem a short jump to the conclusion looking glass frames would have been made here by cabinetmakers as well, despite current tentative opinion to the contrary.<sup>17</sup> There is no sure documentation to support this, however. Isaac Senter, in Newport, followed the pattern and bought picture frames in 1790, 1792, and 1793 from makers Benjamin Pabodie, and in 1795 from Benjamin and John Hammond.<sup>18</sup>

Not every painter or gilder seemed to have been interested in, or capable of, work on picture and looking glass frames. An account book recently found in the Society's collections by Clarkson A. Collins 3<sup>rd</sup> is that of William Allen of Providence, and covers the period of 1774 through 1790. It would appear Allen painted and gilded the chaises [carriages] of most of the important people in Providence, as well as for actual chaise makers such as Nathaniel Frothingham. Enos Hitchcock's was done in June, 1785. He was also a signpainter, and the entries include, on March 4, 1785, "painting a Shopboard 0-3-6" for "Shackleford the Barber," the charges balanced by being shaved over a period of time. Additional signs were for cordwainers and others, including Truman and Company, for whom Allen painted in 1784 16 "Specia Bottles," a signboard at 0-19-6, and "To painting an owl to stand on ditto 0-4-6." One is reminded of the carved wood squirrel and polychromed busts of Athena and Milton that stood on the interior door or fireplace pediments of the John Brown House,<sup>19</sup> but there is no entry in the account book for these (of course other account books may have existed: one could hardly compress 17 years' activity into one book). Allen was capable of such fine work; there are many entries for "Painting Flower on chaise 0-6-0," "Painting a flour cypher," and painting letters. Even more interesting are entries "To painting a figure on a Chair," and sometimes gilding as well. Allen's date can be extended to 1791, as the Almy and Brown Papers<sup>20</sup> include a

bill "To Painting their sign 1-0-0" in April of that year.

Another painter, Thomas P. Clarke, billed Almy and Brown on July 8, 1795, for "painting 4 window blinds green @ 9/ 1-16-0"; "To ditto writing desk 0-9-0"; and "To my bill for Painting Bake House 2-2-5." A bill of 1798 covers, with details, the painting of the interior of the bake house, evidently a detached structure, for 2-1-8.<sup>21</sup>

Fine looking glasses were valuable possessions in any household. An interesting comparison of values in the total context of mid-18th century standards and practices can be obtained by studying a few selected items from the estate inventory of prosperous Robert Hale of North Kingstown, taken on March 22 and 23, 1765:

	old tenor	Lawful money
"1 case of drawers	50-0-0	2-2-10-1
1 joynt stool	6-0-0	0-5-1-3
1 large looking glass	100-0-0	4-5-8-2
1 low case of drawers	30-0-0	1-5-8-2
1 negro man called Newport	1300-0-0	55-14-3-2
1 negro woman	1100-0-0	47-2-10-1
1 pair oxen	380-0-0	16-5-8-2
3 cows	350-0-0	15-0-0-0
1 2 yr old mare	180-0-0	7-14-3-1
1 3 yr old mare	230-0-0	9-17-1-3" <sup>22</sup>

The last figure in the "lawful money" column probably refers to farthings, of which there are 4 to a penny. The wide difference between the two columns shows the extent of inflation in old tenor in this period, and also illustrates the pitfalls in comparing prices without knowing the money standard employed.

As with other forms of furniture, the case pieces offer somewhat of a problem in visualizing. In Rhode Island inventories there are several types occurring which may overlap, or may each be a specific form: low case of drawers, chest, high case of drawers, and high chest with drawers.

The estate inventory of Mrs. Mary Ward of Newport, taken Oct. 26, 1767, is also intriguing not only for a few odd items, but also for the manner in which various items were placed or stored: in the keeping room, a "couch" [a daybed?] was valued at 15-0-0; and elsewhere, "1 desk 10-0-0," "a Case of Drawers with glasses 20-0-0," "3 small tables with the China upon one of them 15-0-0," and "1 Candlestand

17 Charles Montgomery, *American Furniture, the Federal Period*, New York, 1966.

18 Isaac Senter Papers in the Albert C. and Richard W. Greene Collection, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

19 Joseph K. Ott, *The John Brown House Loan Exhibition*

*of Rhode Island Furniture*, Providence, The Rhode Island Historical Society, 1965, No. 90 and 91 (hereafter cited as *BH*).

20 Almy and Brown Papers, The Rhode Island Historical Society, Box 35.

fixed upon a stand 6-0-0." A quantity of earthenware, china, glass and valuable "wrought plate" was "in a closet."<sup>23</sup>

In a later period, our knowledge of terminology is further increased by reading the inventory valuation of the ship *George and Mary*, sailing for Buenos Aires for the account of Brown and Ives. On board when it "left the lighthouse at 1 PM April 9, 1810," were: "Sham Secretaries . . . cabriole sophas . . . straight front sophas . . . white and gold chairs" and many more fascinating items.<sup>24</sup> A detailed list is appended at the end of this article. Charles Montgomery, in his *Federal Furniture*, states the belief "cabriole sofas" were ones with the back rail blending into the tops of the arms in a smooth arc; that this form was listed separately from "straight front sofas" together with the fact the latter were considerably more expensive might help indicate this indeed was the case.

Perhaps one of the most significant features of this manifest is the entry at the very end for freight and packing charges from New York, indicating Brown and Ives had bought, and/or had had consigned, furniture in that city and had it brought to Providence and then shipped as venture cargo for Argentina. If furniture was brought in for exportation, it is quite likely it was brought in for wholesale distribution among shop keepers, and perhaps even cabinet and chair makers (as in Thomas Howard's case). This sophistication of commerce, repeated no doubt in other active seaports, complicates the student's attempts at defining regional characteristics of furniture, particularly in the Federal Period. A case in point involves a set of chairs generously given the Society in the past year and pictured in the Spring 1969 issue of *Rhode Island History*. In the "Director's Newsletter," a case is made for a Newport origin, based on the secondary woods and a style analogous to that of a set of 4 (not 3, as stated) "New York type" chairs labelled in Newport by John Townsend and recently pictured in *Antiques*.<sup>25</sup>

By a curious coincidence, John Townsend also becomes important in connection with the two upholstered back and seat arm chairs with stop fluted legs shown in "Recent Discoveries. . . ." These chairs can be traced to the estate of William P. Sheffield

The lighthouse which the *George and Mary* left at "1 PM April 9, 1810," was probably Beavertail, Jamestown, shown in this detail from William Hamlin's 1798 engraving for the Providence Marine Society's membership certificate.



who, with his sister, was mentioned in the will of Ellen Townsend. As she died with no close relatives, the executor was instructed to dispose of her things as she would have desired. The Sheffields were very close friends and they received much fine furniture and other items of historic significance, as is well documented. Ellen Townsend had inherited things from her father, John F. Townsend (son of John the cabinetmaker), as well as all the household furniture of her brother Christopher. Christopher, on his part, had inherited various things, particularly all the household furniture from his aunt, Mary Townsend Brinley [not mother, as in JBH.] Mary Townsend was John Townsend's daughter, apparently a favorite from the amount of furniture and other things left her in his will, born in 1769, married to Thomas Brinley in 1823, and died in 1856. Among the things she left her nephew Christopher were: "2 Large arm chairs Stuf<sup>d</sup> \$6.; 1 square mahogany table \$6.; 6 mahogany flag seat chairs \$6.; 1 dining table 2 tea tables \$8.; 1 sofa

21 Almy and Brown Papers, KAB [Bills and Receipts], The Rhode Island Historical Society.

22 Beriah Brown Papers, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

23 Samuel Ward Papers.

24 Misc. MSS [uncatalogued] Series A, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

25 Joseph K. Ott, "John Townsend, a chair and two tables," *Antiques*, [September 1968].

\$2.50; 1 easy chair \$1.50"; and "1 arm chair with cushion \$.37." It is quite likely the two chairs illustrated in "Recent Discoveries . . ." were these two stuffed arm chairs belonging to Mary Townsend, and had been given her by her father John Townsend before he died. The chairs can be well related to John Townsend stylistically. Certain family descendants have been very kind in helping to develop this attribution.

The new information on Rhode Island cabinet and chair makers and other craftsmen follows. An asterisk before a name indicates a worker previously unlisted.

*Adams, Ezekial.* On May 24, 1833, described self as "Cabinet-Maker" on a printed sales slip for a "cherry work stand \$4.50," giving address as "No. 71, Westminster St." Providence. The customer was "S. Whitermore" (?), probably Samuel Wetmore, for whom Edward Carrington also paid furniture repair bills to John Carlile.<sup>26</sup> It was this Wetmore, a partner of Carrington and much involved with the China trade, whose descendants' effects were sold at auction by Parke-Bernet in Newport, in September 1969. Corrects Garrett.

\**Allen, Abel.* In 1796 was repairing looms, in Dec. 1798, billed "work 2 days making Writing Table and Desk and covered the same with baize 0-16-0," in pine; and on Feb. 7, 1799, "to work and stuff" and "making large chest dovetailed with partings [partitions?] for papers and books 1-13-0," all for the account of Almy and Brown and perhaps for their offices. Providence.<sup>27</sup> Almy and Brown were merchants and had other interests including textile factories.

\**Allen, Abel and Darius.* In 1792 billed Rev. Enos Hitchcock for making bed rails, taking down curtain boards, altering a mahogany bedstead, putting up a milk shelf, making an axe handle, and sundry other work.<sup>28</sup> The Almy and Brown Papers also have a reference to the partnership in 1796. Providence.

*Allen, Benjamin.* In 1790 billed Rev. Enos Hitchcock for mending a gate, putting a cover on a box and on a trunk, mending a "cot bedstead," and fixing windows and the stable. Providence.<sup>29</sup> Probably more of a carpenter than a maker.

\**Atwood, Thomas.* Described as "Joyner" in an action recorded in 1752. Newport.<sup>30</sup>

*Barker, William.* In 1789 billed Almy and Brown for sets of spools, mending chairs and baskets, and a spinning wheel, some for the factory and some for a Brown or William Almy [a common practice].<sup>31</sup> In 1795 billed the same customer for bottoming chairs in leather and cane, whips, dippers, canes, etc.<sup>32</sup> Barker's account books also show he worked through 1797. Providence.<sup>33</sup> Extends dates in Garrett. JBH.

*Bates, Jonathan.* Billed Beriah Brown in Oct. 1784 for mending a chair and in 1785 for sash lights, a spool and a whirl etc. Probably Kingstown.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps more of a turner than a maker.

*Brown, Benjamin.* On June 13, 1799, billed Obadiah Brown for 8 mahogany chair frames \$48.; and on June 8, 1799, billed him for an additional 8 mahogany chairs at the same price. Providence.<sup>35</sup> May extend the dates for the Benjamin Browns listed in Garrett, or may be a new worker.

*Carlile, John.* On Aug. 29, 1796, billed Rev. Enos Hitchcock for a picture frame \$1.50.<sup>36</sup> It appears from many manuscript collections that Carlile also supplied the coffins for many, if not most, of the more prominent people of Providence. Providence.

*Carpenter, Kingsley.* In 1793 billed Almy and Brown for turning spindles, whirls, and cylinders and for supplying picker sticks (in modern textile mill terminology, the long stick on either side of the loom that pivots and is the instrument by which the shuttle is banged across the width of the fabric). Providence.<sup>37</sup> A turner, and may have been a maker.

\**Cox, William.* On Nov. 15, 1782, appears to have supplied a maple desk and 2 tables valued at 5-0-0 to balance cash, tallow and sundries to the account of Mark Anthony DeWolf. On Sept. 14, 1782, a man of the same name appears to have supplied "one riding chear 12-0-0" to balance cash, hay and sundries to the account of Elizabeth DeWolf, Bristol.<sup>38</sup>

*Coy, J. W.* In 1784 (1789?) billed Rev. Enos Hitchcock for a "Mahogany easy chair 1-14-0." Providence.<sup>39</sup> Extends dates in Garrett.

26 Edward Carrington Papers, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

27 Almy and Brown Papers, Box 28.

28 Enos Hitchcock Papers.

29 *ibid.*

30 Court of General Sessions of Peace, MSS (1746-1837), The Rhode Island Historical Society.

31 Almy and Brown Papers, Box 35.

32 *ibid.*, Box 18.

33 "Recent Discoveries . . ."

34 Beriah Brown Papers.

35 Almy and Brown Papers, Box 34.

36 Enos Hitchcock Papers.

37 Almy and Brown Papers, Box 26.

38 Misc. MSS. [uncatalogued] titled "Andrews, Arnold . . . Malbone . . .", The Rhode Island Historical Society.

39 Enos Hitchcock Papers.

40 Carrington Papers.

41 Enos Hitchcock Papers.

Curry, Aaron. In July 1829, billed Benjamin Hoppin "To 1 Dozen fancy curle Maple Chairs at \$4.50 \$54." Providence.<sup>40</sup> See Garrett, "Recent Discoveries. . . ." Apparently more than a painter, but whether a merchant or maker is uncertain.

Danforth, Job. On Jan. 22, 1790, billed Rev. Enos Hitchcock for 6 mahogany chairs @ 24/7-4-0; and on Dec. 24, 1795 billed him for an arm chair 1-10-0. Providence.<sup>41</sup>

Dexter, James. Described as "joyner" in deed of August 31, 1719, making him earliest recorded joiner in Providence. See "More Notes. . . ." where this entry was out of alphabetical order.

Easton, Nicholas. Described as "Cabinet Maker" who leased the upper part of a shop on Main St. from Arthur Fenner, acting as agent for owner George Champlin of Newport, on Oct. 6, 1798. Providence.<sup>42</sup> See "Recent Discoveries. . . ."

Edmunds, Lemuel. In 1790 billed Almy and Brown for putting casters on a chair 0-1-6, making shafts for a sly and making 2 fire boards 0-10-0. Providence.<sup>43</sup> Probably not a maker.

Engs, William. In 1800 and 1804 billed Clark Rodman for nails and glue, the receipt signed by George Engs, "For my father."<sup>44</sup> Another bill of the 1840s is by "Finch and Engs," presumably a successor firm, and covers chestnut posts, lumber, nails, etc.<sup>45</sup> In all the many bills and receipts involving the Engs, there has never been any reference to anything like cabinetmaking, and I am tempted to believe the name should be struck from the rolls. In the famous "Goddard and Engs" partnership, Engs may have covered the hardware end of the trade. See Bjerko, Garrett, and "Recent Discoveries. . . ."

\*Frothingham, Nathanael. In Sept. 1787 billed Rev. Enos Hitchcock "To weel barrow 1-4-0" and "To Twilight table 0-15-0." Providence.<sup>46</sup> Probably the same man as listed in "Recent Discoveries. . . ." as a chaise maker.<sup>47</sup> Providence. "Twilight," as well as other interesting variations such as "tylight" tables occur from time to time in the records and are probably "toilet" tables; their exact appearance in the Rhode Island idiom is somewhat difficult to visualize, although they are probably what we call "bedside tables" today, with 1 drawer.

\*Gardner, Caleb. On Jan. 29, 1790, billed Rev. Enos Hitchcock "To making a Easy Chair and Case 1-16-0." Providence.<sup>48</sup> Although listed in Garrett as an upholsterer in 1783, appears to be making furniture on this date.

\*Greenwood, Isaac. This practical joker was discussed in Recent Discoveries . . .<sup>49</sup> but the following advertisement indicates he practiced at least some of the arts of the cabinetmaker: "Isaac Greenwood . . . Ivory Turner, Mathematical and Medical Instrument Maker . . . West side of Bridge . . . makes and sells quadrants . . . flutes, fifes, violins . . . walking sticks . . . billiard balls and maces . . . lemon squeezers, Tea and Coffee Pot handles . . . neat wood and ivory cases, boxes of all sorts . . . sand boxes, syringes . . . umbrella sticks, bobbins . . . Chess and Back Gammon Men, Boxes and dice, castor stands . . . electrical machines . . ." and in general all sorts of turned work in "silver, brass, iron, ivory, Turtle shell, bone, horn, and wood." This versatile fellow, a dentist in addition, also repaired compasses and "Davis's and Hadley's Quadrants."<sup>50</sup>

Greene, John. In Aug. 1789 sold a coffin to the heirs of Joseph Holden for 0-15-0, a rather high price for the time for such an article, and perhaps indicating Greene was more than a mere carpenter. Probably Warwick.<sup>51</sup>

Hammond, John J. In 1790 billed Almy and Brown for making a "finishing table 0-12-0," putting rockers on a chair, framing and raising a house, mending a wheel barrow and window frames, and "making three leg bords (?)." Providence.<sup>52</sup> Probably more of a carpenter than a maker.

Hudson, Robert. In 1791 billed Almy and Brown for making a "writing desk 0-6-0" and a "Stanning Stool for Wm Almy 0-5-0," both inexpensive and probably quite utilitarian. Also repaired looms, tables, and other objects. Providence.<sup>53</sup> Probably more of a carpenter than a maker.

Hudson and Tefft. In 1792 billed Ambrose Robinson (who did much work for Almy and Brown) for a writing desk and framing and setting a wood saw 0-4-6. Providence.<sup>54</sup>

\*James, Allen. Reynolds Barber of Exeter, "house carpenter," brought suit for money due him from James, described as "shop joiner alias cabinet maker," on Oct. 20, 1776. South Kingstown.<sup>55</sup>

42 Champlin Papers, II:47, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

43 Almy and Brown Papers, Box 35.

44 Rhode Island Monthly Meeting of Friends.

45 *ibid.*

46 Enos Hitchcock Papers.

47 "Recent Discoveries . . .", 15, see "Carmer."

48 Enos Hitchcock Papers.

49 "Recent Discoveries . . .", 6, 7.

50 *United States Chronicle*, Oct. 19, 1786, published by Bennett Wheeler, Providence. Page MSS. [Misc. MSS. P-143], The Rhode Island Historical Society.

51 Warwick Papers, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

52 Almy and Brown Papers, Box 35.

53 *ibid.*, Box 35.

54 *ibid.*, Box 17.

55 Beriah Brown Papers.

- \**Kimball, Dean*. Described as a "Joyner" in a deed to John Thornton dated May 22, 1741. Scituate.<sup>56</sup>
- Knowles, Edward*. On Aug. 6, 1791, billed Almy and Brown "To a Bedstead dld [delivered ?] to Mr. Robinson 0-18-0." Providence.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps more of a carpenter than a maker.
- Martin, David*. In the 1792-1800 period billed Almy and Brown for carpentering, especially window sash work, for their factory, "factory house," the houses of the Browns and Almy, and the "meeting house." Providence.<sup>58</sup> May be the same man as in "More Notes. . .", now more of a carpenter.
- Miller and Lee*. On June 17, 1841, billed Edward Carrington for 6 mahogany arm chairs for \$48., and repairing table and chair. Providence.<sup>59</sup>
- Moody, James*. In 1767 billed Edward Thuston of the Rhode Island Monthly Meeting of Friends for setting a fence and "a lot of joyning 50/." Newport.<sup>60</sup> Extends dates in Garrett and Bjerko.
- Murray, Robert*. On Mar. 22, 1817, billed Edward Carrington "To turning 8 posts for Riteing Desk @ /6 \$6.67" and "do 32 colloms for Chiminy Coll [ar ?] @ 11/ \$5.33." Providence.<sup>61</sup> Extends dates in Garrett.
- Nestell, Christian*. On June 28, 1824, billed Edward Carrington for repairing 4 chairs for \$1.62; and on April 17, 1826 billed the same customer for "Painting and Gilding 8 chairs at 7/6 \$10.00," and the same treatment for 6 chairs at 6/ for \$6.00. Providence.<sup>62</sup> See Garrett, "Recent Discoveries. . . ." Apparently more than a mere merchant.
- Nichols, Walter*. Billed the Society of Friends in 1774 and 1784 for "dinners for Committee 1-0-0" and sundries<sup>63</sup> and therefore was apparently involved in the operation of The White Horse (a famous inn run by his father Jonathon Nichols) while a cabinetmaker as well. Newport. The inn bills are in the same handwriting as Isaac Senter's furniture bills, clarifying a moot point in Bjerko as to whether there were two Walter Nichols. See also Garrett and "Recent Discoveries. . . ." It is interesting to note in a will witnessed June 6, 1774, his father bequeathed him various items of furniture, land, and part of his title and interest in both the Susquehanna and Delaware Purchases [land development companies of the 18th century].<sup>64</sup>
- Norton, B. A.* On July 3, 1841, billed Edward Carrington "To Covering 12 French Chairs, 1 Spanish do, 1 Nurse (?) do, 3 Antique do, and 2 sofas," all for \$7.50. Providence.<sup>65</sup> Intriguing for the variety of forms upholstered.
- Oatley, Nichols K.* On Mar. 30, 1833 billed Edward Carrington for "1 Mahogany high post bedstead etc. (?) \$20.50. Providence.<sup>66</sup> Extends dates in "Recent Discoveries. . . ."
- \**Potter, Meshack*. On April 7, 1767, billed Deliverance Waterman for 1 bedstead 0-12-9 and for "another bedstead 0-12-0." Cranston.<sup>67</sup> Seems cheap, but amount may be figured in hard currency, instead of the inflated paper money of this time. Potter married Temperance Burlingame on April 10, 1774.
- Proud, Samuel and Daniel*. From 1789 to 1798 billed Almy and Brown for turned parts for looms, etc.; "bannister chairs," "shop chairs" (quite inexpensive); and mending, coloring, and bottoming and making other chairs. Providence.<sup>68</sup>
- Proud, Joseph*. In a bill to the Society of Friends dated May 25, 1752, there is a reference to "Joseph Proud, chair maker." Newport.<sup>69</sup>
- Proud, William*. From 1763 through 1765 billed Randall Holden for sugar, tobacco, spices, molasses, etc. Providence.<sup>70</sup> Extends dates in Garrett, JBH, and "Recent Discoveries. . . ."
- Rawson, Joseph*. In 1787 billed Rev. Enos Hitchcock for a "flag bottom chair 0-10-0," repairing a mahogany table 0-9-0, 2 picture frames 0-10-0, 1 small frame 0-2-6, and 1 quart of oil. Providence.<sup>71</sup> Extends dates in Garrett, Bjerko and "Recent Discoveries. . . ." A "flag bottom" chair is one with a rush seat.
- Rawson, Joseph, and Son*. On July 6, 1811, billed Edward Carrington for "One Sweld front mahogany Bureau \$30." Providence.<sup>72</sup>
- Rawson and Spencer* (written "Rosson" but probably Grindall Rawson and Daniel Spencer). On July 20, 1772, billed Silvanus Jenckes for 2 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> foot dinner tables 5-5-0, a breakfast table 1-4-0, and 6 chairs 8-2-0. Received by Daniel Spencer. Providence.<sup>73</sup> See Garrett and JBH; this is the first recording of the two men working together.

56 Paine-Thornton-Waterman Papers, Misc. MSS. P-161, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

57 Almy and Brown Papers, Box 26.

58 *ibid.*, Box 16 and others.

59 Carrington Papers.

60 Rhode Island Monthly Meeting of Friends.

61 Carrington Papers.

62 Carrington Papers.

63 Rhode Island Monthly Meeting of Friends.

64 Misc. MSS. [uncatalogued], Series A.

65 Carrington Papers.

66 Carrington Papers.

67 Paine-Thornton-Waterman Papers.

68 Almy and Brown Papers, Boxes 28, 35.

69 Rhode Island Monthly Meeting of Friends.

70 Warwick Papers.

- \**Richmond, William and John*. Billed Almy and Brown May 4, 1799, for a low bedstead \$4.; June 29, for a "folder" and yardstick \$.28; July 3, for a boot jack and skimmer handle, \$.37; August, for repairing a desk, \$.25; and 12 bedstead pins \$.25; Sept. 11, a mahogany yardstick \$.20; Oct., bed rails and rods \$.67; a cherry chair \$.6.; Nov., repairing a chair \$1.50; Dec. 23, a wood horse \$.75; Jan. 1, 1800, 2 fire screens \$.4., altering a case of drawers \$.7.; Mar., mending a stand "for Almy," a small candle table and a bedstead for Almy \$.2., and repairing a chair \$.17; and in May for a picture frame and varnishing a chair \$.50, repairing a desk and book case \$.33, and various lot of lumber. Providence.<sup>74</sup> Extends dates in Garrett, and adds a brother's name as a new maker.
- Salisbury, Daniel M.* In June, 1830 billed Timothy Dean for a coffin for his wife \$4. Burrillville.<sup>75</sup> Probably more of a carpenter than a maker.
- \**Sheffield, Jeremiah*. Is described as a "shop joiner" when committed to jail as a result of a suit brought by Thomas Howland in Dec. 1790. South Kingstown.<sup>76</sup>
- Spencer, Daniel*. Is known to be in Providence in 1772, 1773, 1777, and 1789-1792. A Daniel Spencer is recorded in Bjerkoe and Garrett as in Newport in 1775 and 1776 and is likely the same man, either sojourning there for two years, or merely selling to Newporters from Providence (an iconoclastic concept if further research proves this true). Providence. See Garrett, Bjerkoe, and "Recent Discoveries..."
- Stone, Jabez*. Described as a chairmaker of Coventry in a deed date 1769 (1779 or 1789 ?). Coventry.<sup>77</sup> Probably the same man as listed in Cranston in "Recent Discoveries..." and therefore extends dates therein. Otherwise is a new worker.
- \**Taylor, Ambrose*. On Oct. 24, 1798, billed Randall Holden for 6 chairs @ 9/ 2-14-0. On May 14, 1817, billed Thomas L. Green for bottoming and mending 4 chairs \$1.66. Warwick.<sup>78</sup>
- \**Thornton, Stephen*. Described as a "joiner" in a lease agreement of 1736 and also in the inventory of his estate taken after he died intestate April 2, 1737. Among the items listed are: "one hand saw and sundry carpenter's tools." The estate's considerable household and farm equipment is listed in great detail, but with the items described only casually. Providence.<sup>79</sup>
- Veazie, Benjamin*. On Mar. 23, 1794, billed Rev. Enos Hitchcock for 6 black birch chairs @ 8/ 2-8-0, and on Mar. 22, 1797 (1799 ?) billed the same customer for 6 chairs \$8.<sup>80</sup> On Nov. 4, 1816 billed "Mr. Carrington" for bottoming 6 chairs \$2.50 and repairing 2 chairs \$.33. Providence.<sup>81</sup> Extends dates in "Recent Discoveries..."
- Vickary, Joseph*. Beriah Brown billed the State of Rhode Island on Feb. 25, 1785, for: "Cash paid Mr. Joseph Vickary for twenty seven chairs for the use of State House in the County of Washington [South Kingstown] 16-13-0"; "To cash paid Mr. Thomas Cottrell for the Freight of said chairs from Newport to Updike New Town [in same year called "Whickford," now "Wickford"] 0-5-4"; and "To Carring said chairs from Updike New Town to the State House 0-10-0." Newport.<sup>82</sup> Extends dates in "Recent Discoveries..."
- \**Wallen and Rawson* (Jonathan Wallen and Joseph Rawson). In 1788 billed Rev. Enos Hitchcock for a mahogany stand 1-7-0, a flag seat chair 0-10-6, repairing a mahogany table 0-10-0, 2 quarts of oil, and 3 picture frames @ 7/ 1-1-0, all balanced in payment by his subscription to the Congregational Society. This bill is curiously similar to, but different from, that of Joseph Rawson's to Hitchcock listed above. Providence.<sup>83</sup> It would appear Wallen and Rawson were more than five manufacturers as stated in Bjerkoe, and, by association, Wallen was a maker who was working with Rawson about this time. Other bills for various buyers seem to bear this out.
- Waterhouse, Timothy*. In account with Clarke Rodman in May and July 1786, Waterhouse supplied "1 doz. chairs at different times 4-16-0"; "by a small chair 0-5-0"; "by mending 2 chairs 0-5-0"; and "5 months lost time [?]" as a contra account against schooling "G. Waterhouse 3 yrs 7-4-0," "3 winters firing 0-11-3" and other entries. Newport.<sup>84</sup> Extends dates in Bjerkoe and Garrett.

## MASSACHUSETTS MAKERS

(an asterisk indicates name not found in Bjerkoe)

- \**Clark, Robert*. On July 1, 1743, Rachel Inman of Gloucester, R.I., asked for the discharge of "Robert Clark of Uxbridge, Joyner," from the Providence jail.<sup>85</sup>

71 Enos Hitchcock Papers.

72 Carrington Papers.

73 Collection of Clarkson A. Collins 3rd.

74 Almy and Brown Papers, Box 16.

75 Dean Papers, Misc. MSS. D-345, The Rhode Island Historical Society.

76 Beriah Brown Papers.

77 Typed MSS. by Rosalie Fellows Bailey, April, 1955. The Rhode Island Historical Society.

78 Warwick Papers.

79 Paine-Thornton-Waterman Papers.

80 Enos Hitchcock Papers.

81 Carrington Papers.

82 Beriah Brown Papers.

83 Enos Hitchcock Papers.

84 Rhode Island Monthly Meeting of Friends.

85 Almy and Brown Papers, Box 36.

Figure 1. Windsor chair, 1770-1800, probably Rhode Island, is an outstanding example of the ubiquitous "green chair" found, often by the dozen, in the house inventories of rich and poor. With its boldly raked legs, balanced turnings, and graceful crest, it is in old green paint, but with traces of an earlier red and brown. It was part of the furnishings of the Lawtondale Farm, Thornton, R. I., the home of



1

descendants of Christopher Robinson of South Kingstown and Robert Lawton of Newport, and was discussed in *The Providence Journal* of October 13, 1935. It is privately owned.

Figure 2. A similar fan-back Windsor, but with a brace back, in original green paint, was found with the chair in Figure 1.



2

\*Hall, Andrew and Edward. Described as "cabinetmakers of Boston" and sons of Andrew H. Hall, who married in 1723 and died in 1768. Edward Hall is listed in Bjerkoef, but Andrew, born in 1724, appears to be a new worker.<sup>86</sup>

\*Jones, Benjamin and Son. On Dec. 17, 1772, billed Rev. Enos Hitchcock "To a turned up Bedstead 0-12-0"; "raising springs on your Shay 0-1-4"; on Aug. 30, "To a large Table 1-1-4"; on Nov. 26, "To planing and polishing table 0-3-0"; and on Dec. 29, "To polishing Stand Table 0-1-0." In a note of Dec. 1773, Hitchcock instructed Captain Cleaves to pay Jones 6-18-0, presumably for additional goods. Beverly.<sup>87</sup> This is before Hitchcock moved to Providence.

\*Manning, Edward. In 1770 billed "Sir Hitchcock" in "old tenor" for making a table 2-5-0 and "to mending chairs and putting up Shelves use for library 3-7-6." Probably Beverly.<sup>88</sup>

\*Messer, Nathaniel, Jr. Described as "Joyner" in deed of Dec. 12, 1768. Methuen.<sup>89</sup>

\*Woodward, Artemas. An undated, but circa 1790-1800 note states: "Artemus Woodward living in Medfield Massachusetts cabinetmaker Son of Deacon Woodward of New Town."<sup>90</sup> Whether New Town is in Massachusetts or Rhode Island is uncertain.

86 *Halls of New England*, Albany, N. Y., 1883.

87 Enos Hitchcock Papers.

88 *ibid.*

89 Misc. MSS. (uncatalogued). The Rhode Island Historical Society.

90 Almy and Brown Papers, Box 29.

PARTIAL INVENTORY OF THE SHIP  
 GEORGE AND MARY, OUT OF PROVIDENCE  
 AND BOUND FOR BUENOS AIRES,  
 APRIL 9, 1810

3 Dozen white and gold chairs	@\$3	\$108.	1 ditto 2 ditto	@\$15.	30.
3 ditto single cross	@\$2.67	99.	1 ditto 1 Dining Table		12.
1 ditto brown and gold chairs	@\$2.25	27.	1 ditto 2 Pembroke Tables	@\$15.	30.
1 ditto double cross	@\$3.	36.	1 ditto 2 ditto	@\$10.	20.
72 Comb Back (uncertain)			1 ditto 2 ditto	@\$18.	36.
Winsor chairs	@\$1.38	99.?	1 ditto 1 ditto		6.
(?) Straight (uncertain) ditto	@\$1.35?	?	1 ditto 1 ditto		17.
12 Who fancy ditto	@\$3.	36.	1 ditto 1 Secretary		55.
1 Settee		18.	1 ditto 1 High post bedstead		12.?
96 Chairs	@\$1.25	120.	8 Cabriole sophas	@\$12.	96.
1 High Post Bedstead		28.	2 Straight front sophas	@\$17.50	35.
60 Bent Back Coquillicot			1 Mahogany Secretary		40.
[poppy red] Winsor Chairs	@\$1.25	75.	1 Mahogany Bureau		25.
12 ditto Yellow ditto	@\$1.25	15.	10 Burch Bedsteads	@\$10.	100.
72 Bamboo Coquillicot ditto	@\$1.12?	81.	12 Black Winsor chairs	@\$1.50	18.
144 Yellow Brown and Red			18 ditto	@\$1.50	27.
ditto	@\$1.	144.	6 Plane cherry 3 feet Tables	@\$6.	36.
1 Box contg 2 high post			6 ditto	@\$6.	36.
mahogany bedsteads	@\$22.	44.	2 Mahogany ditto	@\$10.	20.
1 ditto 2 ditto	@\$24.	48.	10 Burch bedsteads	@\$10.	100.
2 ditto 4 Maple ditto	@\$13.	52.	3 Swell'd Cherry Bureaus	@\$15.	45.
3 ditto 5 Field ditto	@\$12.	60.	1 Gentleman's cabinet		120.
2 ditto 3 Dining Tables	@\$18.	54.	1 Ladies' ditto		130.
1 ditto 2 Breakfast ditto	@\$14.	28.	1 pr Card Tables	@\$18.	36.
1 ditto 2 Tea ditto	@\$12.	24.	1 Straight front Bureau		17.
2 ditto 8 Square and round			1 Night Table		18.
Tea Tables	@\$ 8.	64.	1 Night Table and Wash Stand		25.
2 ditto 2 Bureaus	@\$28.	56.	6 Cherry Bureaus	@\$11.	66.
1 ditto 1 Bureau		20.	Paid Truckage furniture to the		
1 ditto 1 Bureau		18.	packet in New York		3.75
2 ditto 2 Sham Secretarys	@\$28.	56.	Paid labourers puting goods on		
1 Box contg 1 Sham Secretary		25.	board packet ditto		1.28
1 ditto 1 Pillar and claw			Comd paid on purchase of		
Pembroke Table		33.	cordials (beverages that were		
1 ditto 2 Pembroke Tables	@\$9.	18.	also shipped in quantity)		
			furniture, etc. ?		118.?
			90 Boxes for and packing		
			furniture		95.
			Matting chairs		10.
			Freight of Cordials furniture		
			etc. from New York		220.
			Covering for sophas		63.37

[Note: Only dry goods came from Boston on this shipment.]



Under this heading, The Providence Gazette of April 14, 1810, reported, "... Cleared. Ship George and Mary... Buenos Ayres ..."

## The Rhode Island Historical Society Film Archive:

### A Progress Report

Organization of a film archive appears outwardly simple: locate a large quantity of historically relevant film, find a place to store it, and obtain funding for cataloguing purposes, preservation, and the purchase of editing and viewing equipment.

In the case of the Rhode Island Historical Society's burgeoning film archive, the problems were somewhat more complex. The opportunity to begin a pilot project in the film archive business first presented itself when Joseph Fogarty, the administrative assistant to the public service director of WPRI-TV suggested to Albert Klyberg, the Society's librarian, and to this author, that the Society might have an interest in the latent potential of WPRI-TV's backlog of newsfilm as a basis for a very lively look at Rhode Island's current history. After some thought the Society accepted both the tremendous opportunity and challenge of the proposition.

Once the proposition was accepted, the other Rhode Island stations—WJAR-TV and WTEV-TV—were contacted and both agreed to assist the project by donating their pertinent newsfilm. Thus the foundations of the archive were set. There followed a period of much carting and hauling of over a quarter million feet of film—no mean task in itself.

Even while handling the job of film acquisition, it was obvious that more formidable problems would arise soon. How should all that film be catalogued and stored in the most economical and preservation-conscious manner? Here it should be noted that while large film archives do exist (and they are invariably government-supported), even the International Society of Film Archivists (FIAF) has been unable to standardize cataloguing methods, due largely to the nature of film itself. Most archives (e.g. the Library of Congress Film Archive) specialize in the preservation of artistically historic films (i.e. principally feature films) and only secondarily do they preserve items such as the old Pathé newsreels. The Rhode Island Historical Society found itself in somewhat of a unique position

by Kathleen Karr\*

in that it was attempting to store and catalogue items of film relating to political figures and news events that are sometimes only as long as 10 feet (or roughly 15 seconds of screen time, a very small quantity of film when compared to more easily handled feature films in units of 3000 to 4000 feet).

The problem, clearly, was either to find precedents, or to make them. Visits were made to the film archival centers of the United States. In Washington, D.C., under the tutelage of Sam Kula, the head archivist of the American Film Institute, studies were made of the film storage and cataloguing systems of the Library of Congress and the National Archives. While there was much useful information gained, there was no practical cataloguing system in use. The Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City was helpful, but the system closest to the Society's peculiar needs was finally located in the "stock-shot" library of the Sherman Grinberg Company, the largest film library of its kind in the world. Here, through an elaborately cross-indexed card filing system, the films of several major film studios, as well as the entire newsfilm output of ABC-TV are organized for quick retrieval.

The Society's cataloguing process, an adapted version of the Sherman Grinberg system, is a very time-consuming one. It involves the viewing of every foot of film and writing a concise, yet complete summary of what is seen and said. Complete cross-indexes must be made up for filing purposes, and the film itself must be cleaned and repaired as necessary, as well as prepared for long-term storage. Time must also be spent in deciding whether or not a given piece of film is to be preserved permanently, a sometimes difficult decision to make.

Of course, the first item needed for the proper running of a film archive is funding. Film, again due to its peculiar nature, is much more expensive to store archivally than manuscripts or newspapers, while having about the same life span (200-300 years)

\*Mrs. Karr teaches a course on the film at Providence College. She and her husband Lawrence Karr, who is in the Physics Department at Brown University, have volunteered to help the Society establish its film archive.

*"Hurricane Carol," a 1954 Peabody-Award-winning documentary film by WJAR-TV is a sample of the irreplaceable material in the Society's new archive.*



as fine quality paper. However, the act of looking at a film in a projector or viewer causes some small damage each time the film is viewed, and shortens its lifespan, due to torn sprocket holes, scratches in the emulsion (picture layer), etc. The only way to preserve the film close to its original condition is to maintain at least two copies of a piece of film: one print for screening and the other as a master print, from which additional copies are made when the screening print wears out. At the present time, most films in the archive exist only as an original copy. Thus, in the future, as the films become damaged through use, additional funds will have to be devoted toward making master preservation copies.

Here the next problem arises. To have an adequate collection of regional current history to attract historians at the present time, it is necessary to retrace the film history of Rhode Island to the beginning of

film itself (a usable beginning date of the industry in the United States is 1894). Theoretically, then, there is the possibility that historically interesting events relating to Rhode Island as recorded on film might exist as far back as the turn of the century, by which time camera enthusiasts existed in a surprisingly large quantity in the northeastern part of the United States.

Turning the theoretical into the practical is a large question mark, and the reason is again traced to the "film-ness" of the motion picture. From its inception, film base was made from cellulose nitrate (the N in TNT also stands for nitrate) which is highly flammable and has been responsible for a number of rather ferocious movie theatre fires. Nitrate film was manufactured and used in this country until 1951, which marked the introduction of "safety" film made from cellulose acetate. "Safety" film did exist before 1951, mostly in 16mm. and smaller gauges (typical of that

used by the home movie enthusiast). The legal restrictions on the handling of nitrate film that arose from early theatre fires required expensive storage and projection facilities that could be afforded only by commercial operations. The film used by professionals and shown in theatres is 35mm. wide, and is invariably nitrate, if taken prior to 1951. Nitrate film poses difficulties beyond its flammability, since it has a tendency to shrink and to deteriorate with age. Such deterioration is accelerated by improper storage conditions, and, even under the best of storage conditions some shrinkage is inevitable. This shrinkage sends the costs of transferring the images to safety film skyrocketing drastically. Thus, in order to obtain a reasonable film picture of pre-1951 Rhode Island, nitrate film and its costs inevitably have to be dealt with.

Although the Historical Society is organized to operate on a 16mm. film basis, since all of the TV stations work in 16mm. (and because it is cheaper than 35mm. film), there remains the problem of locating pertinent early footage, invariably on 35mm. nitrate film, and transferring it to 16mm. safety film. The Society already owns one piece of 35mm. nitrate film that can serve as an example of the entire problem. In 1926 Edward Albee, of the vaudeville theatre chain, donated to the Society and the people of Rhode Island 15 minutes of film showing the Grand Army of the Republic marching through downtown Providence on the 4th of July in 1926. The donation specified that the film be preserved in order that it be screened on

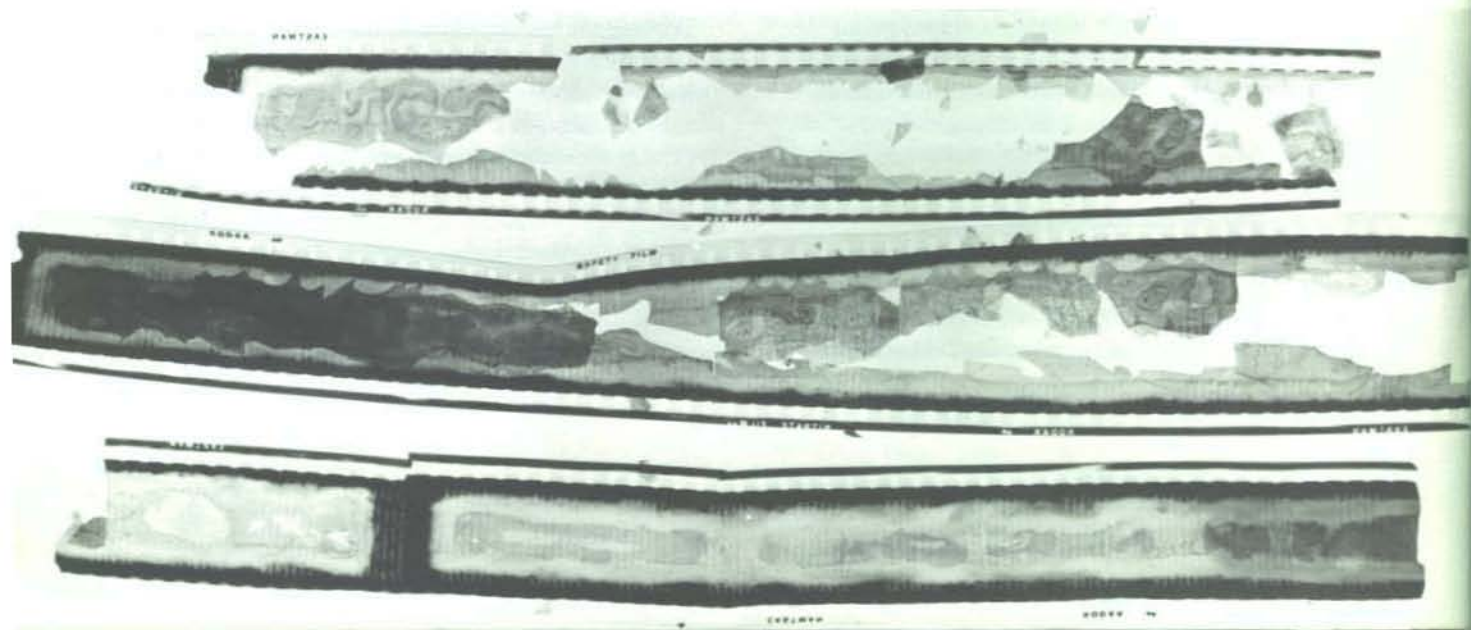
the 4th of July in 1976. The film itself is on an amber-tinted stock, except for a short portion tinted in blue and pink showing the American flag waving against the words of the "Star Spangled Banner."

Clearly this piece of film must be transferred to safety stock before it deteriorates beyond saving. It has already shrunk by about 2%, which makes it impossible to project on a standard movie projector without the danger of destroying the film. The estimated cost of just this one transferral to 16mm. safety film is \$300. Consider the escalation of preservation costs as other and even more important 35mm. nitrate footage is located.

Beyond the issue of saving nitrate is that of finding it. The Society has begun to put out its feelers for old film in such obvious ways as the recent feature article in the *Providence Journal* asking people to stretch their memories and hunt through their attics for these prizes. Thus far the Society does have a number of other important and/or highly interesting pieces of early film, luckily already in 16mm. Among these acquisitions are: about 10 minutes of footage of the 1915 Labor Day parade in Providence; a film of the 1930 America's Cup races off Newport; a Peabody-award-winning documentary on Hurricane Carol in 1954; and footage of the late Senator Green, to mention a few.

In conclusion, the Rhode Island Historical Society has taken a large job upon itself in initiating the first state-wide film archive in the country. But with the

*An example of badly deteriorated nitrate film in its ultimate stage shows the need for early attention to reels still in usable condition.*





*TV coverage of the late U. S. Senator Theodore Francis Green preserves a moment of history.*

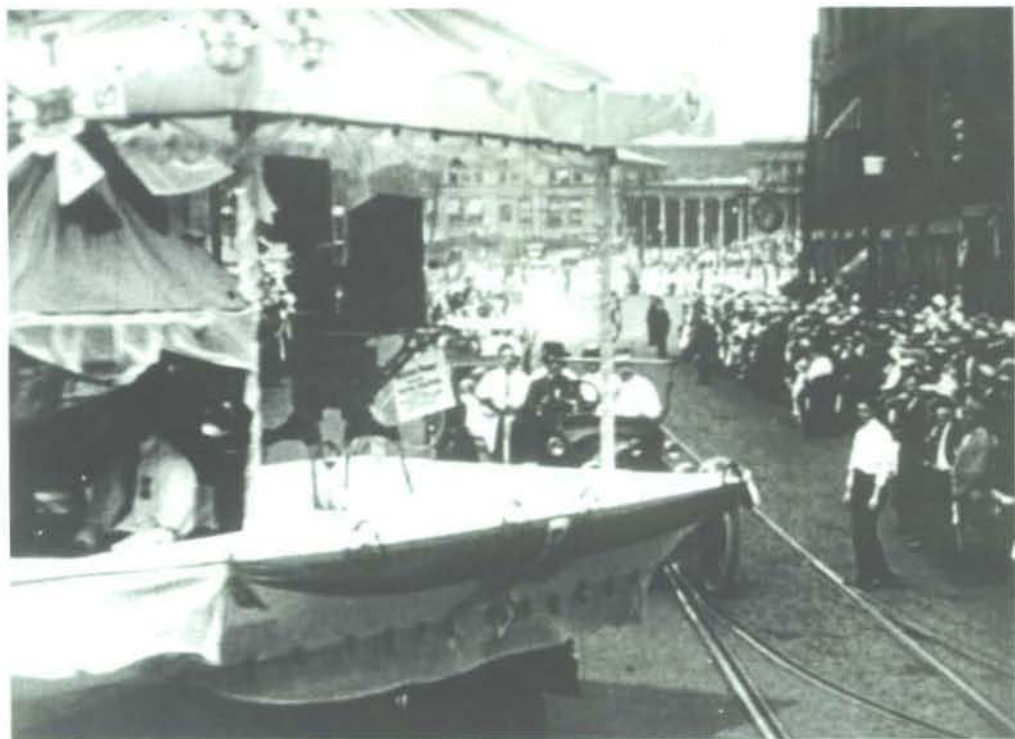


*Now film archivists are asking, "Is there, somewhere, footage of the colorful NRA parade of October 2, 1933, when Governor Green marched at its head?" This picture is from a poster made for the Town Criers of Rhode Island.*



*Sound added force to the Community Fund appeal made to Providence audiences in the 1930s as the country was "... soon to pass through the fourth winter of the depression ..."*

*This single frame is enlarged from a 16mm. film of the 1915 Providence Labor Day Parade now in the Society's archive. Followed by union members, the float of the Theatre Projectionists' Union of the International Alliance of Theatrical and State Employees carries a Powers motion picture projector. The 8-minute film was saved from disintegration by Mr. Russell S. Searles, and illustrates the important contribution private collectors are making to the archive.*



problems come the contingent benefits: for the first time, scholars of today and the future will be able to view at the archive real political figures in the wheeling and dealing process of creating their careers and reputations, will be able to see history literally being made not only in these and other state figures, but also the history that occurs by natural causes. A picture is indeed worth a thousand words, but a mov-

ing, living picture, complete with the spoken word may be worth many more. D. W. Griffith perhaps voiced the issue better in 1924 when he said:

*The motion picture is a child that has been given life in our generation. We poor souls can scarcely visualize or dream of its possibilities. We ought to be kind with it in its use, so that in its maturity it may look back on its childhood without regrets.*

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Rhode Island Historical Society has had the help of many individuals in the process of inaugurating its film archive. Among those it would particularly

like to thank are Joseph Fogarty and Mario Svacina of WPRI-TV; Ray Fass, Tom McDermott, and Gus Cordeiro of WJAR-TV; and Jack Delaney and Truman Taylor of WTEV-TV.

## Richard LeBaron Bowen, 1878-1969

With the death of Richard LeBaron Bowen on August 9th the Society lost a longtime member and devoted supporter. Mr. Bowen had served in many capacities after becoming a member on February 10, 1932.

For several years he was a member of the Buildings and Grounds Committee, holding the chairmanship in 1943-4, and giving up this office to become vice-president in 1944.

In 1948 Mr. Bowen was elected president of the Society and remained in office until he retired in 1951. On that occasion the annual meeting adopted the following resolution:

*"During his terms of office the Society has derived great benefit from his excellent judgment and executive ability; his administration has been outstanding, not only in an executive way, but also as a distinguished author and historian, realizing that 'The roots of the present lie deep in the past,' he has given freely of his time, talent and labor to the Society and to the community at large . . ."*

Mr. Bowen contributed numerous articles on historical and genealogical and heraldic subjects to New England periodicals. In the Society's *Collections and Rhode Island History* he published "The Arms of Richard Scott," 1939; "The Scott Family Needle Work," 1943; "The Society's Original Manuscripts, Capt. Robert Keayne's Note Books," 1943; "John Scott, Merchant," 1945; and "Godfrey Malbone's Armorial Silver," 1950. Articles on the early families and history of the Rehoboth and Providence areas also appeared in the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*.

*Early Rehoboth, Documented Historical Studies of Families and Events in This Plymouth Colony Township, 1945-50*, was his most important publication.

Of the first volume Clifford K. Shipton of the American Antiquarian Society wrote ". . . this is one of the most solidly useful books of its kind published for many years. Of the second volume he said, "In fact, the only fault one can find with the volume is that there is not more of it." Of the third volume his review stated, "The style has the crisp, factual quality of a legal brief."

Another major work was his *Index to the Early Records of the Town of Providence*, published by the Society in 1949 with the financial support of the City of Providence. Of this work Clarence S. Brigham wrote ". . . scholars are greatly indebted to him and rejoice that he has produced so valuable a reference book," and the Society in the 1951 resolution previously quoted from called it ". . . in itself an outstanding memorial of his administration, and the financing . . . by the City of Providence . . . a tribute to his diplomatic handling of the matter."

He also supervised the facsimile reprint of the scarce volume XXI of *The Early Records of the Town of Providence*, issued by the Society in 1950.

In 1942 the Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Rhode Island published Mr. Bowen's *The Providence Oath of Allegiance and its Signers 1651-2* and in the same year issued his *Rhode Island Colonial Money and Its Counterfeiting*.

Mr. Bowen served on several committees of the New England Historic and Genealogical Society, was an honorary member of the Society of the Cincinnati and a member of the Rhode Island Society of Colonial Wars and the American Antiquarian Society. Elected a Fellow of the Society of Genealogists of London, England, in 1955, he was one of four men to hold membership in both the American and English Societies of Genealogists.

Besides his scholarly pursuits, Mr. Bowen served in the Spanish-American War and in the Rhode Island National Guard and was elected to a term in the Rhode Island House of Representatives in 1915.

A textile manufacturer, Mr. Bowen was President and Treasurer of the Coated Textile Mills, Inc. of Providence and the Bowen Mills of Pawtucket.

Mr. Bowen was born in East Providence April 4, 1878, son of Thomas LeBaron and Clare Francis (Carpenter) Bowen. He was educated at the Rhode Island School of Design and studied three years at Brown in the class of 1901.

## Director's Newsletter

Since the previous Director's Newsletter, many important items have come to the Society, principally to the library by purchase and gift. Nearly nine months of negotiation on the part of the Librarian resulted in the acquisition of an important Roger Williams' document, a four-page account of his parleys with the Indians prior to their destruction of Providence in King Philip's War, 1676. The document is not in the hand of Williams, but it is a contemporary copy and the only evidence thus far known to substantiate various traditions about those talks. At a future date we will do a full publication of this document and it will appear in a newspaper article. Other purchases include: Civil War letters of George Bliss; a 687-page letter press book of Ambrose Burnside for the years 1869-1871; the original petition for the establishment of the Barrington Congregational Church, 1771; another volume of James Brown's diary; a collection of former Governor and United States Senator George P. Wetmore's papers; and two Revolutionary War tax books of the town of Johnston.

Among the gifts we received were over 700 photographic negatives from Mrs. Frederick Mason of Barrington which were taken by Harold Mason (1881-1944) for his work, *Doorways of Providence*. We are also grateful for the Sessions Family Papers from Mrs. Madeline A. Sessions, and the Nightingale Family Records from Mrs. Norman Baker. Through the kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Burges Green we received a large collection of Rhode Island pamphlets and

books from the library of former United States Senator Theodore F. Green.

This Fall, along with our notices of membership dues, each member will receive a map as a gift from the Society. The map is a reprint of the Caleb Harris map of Rhode Island, 1795, the first map made of Rhode Island after it joined the Union. The map was reprinted from the original copper plate engraving, which is in the Society's library. The Society looks forward to cooperating with the newly-formed State Commission established to oversee the celebration of Rhode Island's two hundredth anniversary, 1976, of independence from England. State Representative George F. McDonald, Jr., is the Commission chairman.

It was with regret that we canceled the Fall lecture series on Victorian Taste. Because of many other Fall programs the subscription was not sufficiently large to finance the venture. The program has been rescheduled as the Spring's lecture series when many people have more free time and when it will coincide with the Providence Preservation Society's Street Festival. The Preservation Society plans to open many Victorian homes and it seems providential that our Victorian series will coincide with their event.

Since this is the last Director's Newsletter that I will have the pleasure to write, I wish to thank first the staff for its continued efforts to increase the Society's programs and also the Board of Trustees for its guidance and support.

JOHN T. KIRK

*Designed by Malcolm Grear Designers, Inc.  
Type set by Craftsman Type, Inc.  
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