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MANIFEST of the Cargo on board Schooner *Federal*
Caleb Greene — Master, Burthen 86 ³⁰/₉₅ — Tons,
 from *Providence* — bound for *Alexandria*

Shippers.	Marks and Numbers.	No of Entries	Packages and Contents.	To whom consigned.
<i>Jas B Dabney</i>			1 Four Trunks 2 Eight Boxes 3 One Bale & 4 Ten Bundles 5 Two Lb. Melaphes — 6 Twelve Boxes of soap 7 One hun ^d of forty-four pack Lime 8 One pack Hyder 9 Twenty-eight thous ^d Shingles 10 One pack Nails —	<i>Rogerson</i> <i>Dabney</i>
<i>Sam Allen</i>			11 Seven Lb. M Alum 12 Six bb. of Hyder —	
<i>J. Ward & Co</i>			13 Fifteen W. of Beef — 14 Twenty Trunks 15 Six Boxes 16 Two bundles 17 Several Bed. & Bedding 18 One Table 19 Two cases with Bottles	<i>Providence</i> <i>May 9-1792</i> <i>Caleb Greene</i>
<i>Forster Brown & Moorem</i>			14 Twelve Trunks 15 Six Boxes 16 Two bundles 17 Several Bed. & Bedding 18 One Table 19 Two cases with Bottles	<i>Forster Brown & Moorem</i>
<i>Sworn before</i> <i>Geo. Olney</i>				

Rhode Island Furniture Exports 1783-1800 Including Information on Chaises, Buildings, Other Woodenware and Trade Practices

by Joseph K. Ott*

There are many references to the export of Rhode Island furniture, but no systematic analysis of this trade has previously been made. Three reasons explain why such a study is worthwhile — it is useful to know how much of what types of cabinetwork went to which ports, both as a point of knowledge and as a comparison to other states' production — it helps explain stylistic similarities in furniture made in widely separated areas — and it establishes the relative importance of the craft in the local economy.

The most familiar forms exported in the eighteenth century were desks, and some of the earliest references to these as trading commodities can be found in the ledgers of Newport merchant John Bannister.¹ In the 1747-1749 period, Bannister bought desks from John Goddard, John Hookey, Clement Packcom [Peckham?], James Pitman, Job Townsend and others, for shipment to the West Indies in lots of one to a dozen. They were frequently of maple, with some of cedar and black walnut, but most were of unspecified woods. As the price of the last might sometimes be higher than that for maple,² it is likely a few were mahogany and probably similar to one illustrated recently in *Antiques*.³

Though Newport was the commercial and style center in the early and mid-eighteenth century, it was not alone in this trade. Captain John Wheaton, working for Providence merchants Obadiah and Nicholas Brown, requested on

August 5, 1758 that they fill an order for the governor of Monte-Christo (Hispaniola) including "6 Duzen of vearry Good house chears," 1 dozen round back chairs, "2 Vearry Good couches," and a table clock. The Browns undoubtedly responded with goods probably made by Hunt, Rawson, Potter or other Providence men active at the time. Earlier in the year Wheaton had sold in Monte-Christo mahogany and maple desks, tables and stands, and bills survive showing these men as the makers.⁴ Objects reached the coastal states by various means. In 1758 the *Prudent Hannah* belied her name, was seized on the high seas, convicted of engaging in illegal foreign trade by the vice-admiralty court in Williamsburg, Virginia, and the desks and chairs in her cargo were auctioned.⁵ Although it is generally considered that trade with southern colonies was not nearly so important before the war as that with the West Indies, Europe and Africa, substantial amounts of furniture from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and to a lesser extent from Piscataqua (Dover-Portsmouth, New Hampshire), New York, Philadelphia, "Great Britain," and other ports, did reach at least some southern destinations. Desks, chairs, tables, bedsteads, and "scrutoirs" — many of mahogany — reached Edenton (Roanoke), North Carolina in the 1770s along with chaises and other objects.⁶ There are many other instances of furniture exported from both Newport and Providence to the

*President of this Society 1971-1974 and presently a member at large of its board of trustees. Mr. Ott is an authority on eighteenth-century business, furniture and decorative arts. A much abbreviated portion of this essay appeared in *Antiques*, January 1975; that article contained different illustrations which might be useful to consult.

Indies and the coastal states as venture cargo and to answer specific orders.

But these are isolated cases; no comprehensive tabulation has been possible that would show yearly trends and totals. Further, there is evidence that smaller merchants — whose records have been more likely lost over the years — traded more actively in furniture at least later in the century than the larger ones whose interests centered around "big" cargoes of molasses, rum and the like.

Therefore it is necessary to examine official records of the Impost Office or Collector of Imposts before Rhode Island joined the republic in May 1790, and of the Customs House from June 14, 1790 on, the date Providence and Newport districts were established by federal authorities. Areas south of Conimicut Point were in the Newport district; north, in Providence's.⁷ It is also necessary to examine actual manifests for every voyage — a long and tedious effort — to ensure complete descriptions and coverage of the coastal trade.⁸ Dependable records do not begin for Providence until 1783 and for Newport, 1786; the final year of 1800 was taken arbitrarily as an ending to this study. Prior to these beginning years, records are incomplete and unreliable. Destinations are often given merely as West Indies or Virginia, and cargoes are vaguely described as merchandise or so many bales or cases without mentioning contents. After mid-1790, the advantages of a federal bureaucracy can be illustrated since manifests then normally included consignors and consignees, detailed contents, destinations and much more useful information. Newport remained somewhat more informal than Providence, at times giving a state not a port as the destination. Results for the main product groups are shown in Tables 1 and 2.⁹

Providence exports can be detailed as follows. Destinations most significant in quantity are italicized, the years in which at least some objects reached there in parentheses,¹⁰ and the main items exported if sufficient to merit attention.

When the figures in Table 1 are plotted graphically the trends of exports (both in totals and by regions) of desks, chairs and tables are strikingly similar. One exception, a seemingly sharp increase in chair shipments in 1800, is curious but may involve industrial developments which will

be discussed in a later article on Rhode Island furniture imports. From a low in 1783 — aftermath of the war — deliveries rose to peaks in 1786 and 1787; declined to lows in 1789; rose somewhat in 1790; then began sinking irregularly to lows in 1799. These trends seem to be in inverse relationship to Rhode Island's (and the nation's) economic health — hard but not impossible to explain for what I should call discretionary spending items. Reasons for the patterns are complex: local, international and Caribbean politics; inevitable laws of supply and demand; availability of more lucrative and/or less bulky or fragile cargo; and lack of capital for the smaller merchants. One of the most important reasons for the downturn, however, knowing that manifests show over-all trade activity remaining strong, was the increasing sophistication and output of craftsmen in the growing cities of New York, Baltimore, Charleston and elsewhere. These makers had seen furniture from Rhode Island and other places as imported goods. Their patrons had also seen much more by vacationing along Narragansett Bay, usually in Newport, which "was a delightful abode. People came in droves from the South to restore their health, which the hot southern climate had undermined."¹² Out of this melange of impressions and purchased objects came the eclectic designs that have made it so difficult in the past to identify southern furniture.

A second important reason for the downtrend in exports was the decline in quality of Rhode Island cabinetwork. Newport had an excuse in that the war affected its local market adversely, though many capable workers were still in residence, but there was no such excuse for Providence, where great mercantile fortunes were being accumulated and a demand for fine furniture created. There was furthermore a proliferation of workers — many more than standard references show. While calling themselves cabinetmakers and chairmakers, perhaps because these were more prestigious terms, one concludes they must have worked frequently on houses, ships and the increasing demands of industry (as on textile machinery) in addition to making furniture.¹³ Certainly the great era of Rhode Island genius in cabinetwork had passed after the war. Some men such as Rawson, Howard, and some of the God-

TABLE 1 — PROVIDENCE EXPORTS

	1783	1784	1785	1786	1787	1788	1789	1790	1791	1792	1793	1794	1795	1796	1797	1798	1799	1800
DESKS																		
Southern coastal ports	7	2	28	124	98	95	27	42	14	28	8	8	17	8	1	2	3	0
West Indies	6	19	48	47	43	18	17	20	9	9	8	0	0					*
Other	0	0	20	7	17	7	10	9	16	21	22	4		0	2	9	0	1
Totals	13	21	96	178	158	120	54	71	39	58	38	12	17	8	3	11	3	1
Cumulative totals	771 (1786 through 1800)																	
	901 (1783 through 1800)																	
CHAIRS																		
Southern coastal ports	60	18	66	163	335	147	114	148	42	54	78	42	0	24	36	0	0	150
West Indies	0	0	132	126	0	10	0	50	24	24	90	30	0					*
Other	2	0	201	428	72	36	36	47	23	44	48	4	6	4	20	0	6	40
Totals	62	18	399	717	407	193	150	245	89	122	216	76	6	28	56	0	6	190
Cumulative totals	2501 (1786 through 1800)																	
	2980 (1783 through 1800)																	
TABLES																		
Southern coastal ports	2	0	16	31	73	38	8	21	13	3	2	2	6	3	2	2	0	2
West Indies	2	32	21	30	14	0	6	4	5	2	4	4	0			4		*
Other	0	0	22	4	11	12	0	22	6	5	4	1	24	1	5		0	6
Totals	4	32	59	65	98	50	14	47	24	10	10	7	30	4	7	6	0	8
Cumulative totals	380 (1786 through 1800)																	
	475 (1783 through 1800)																	
CHAISES																		
Southern coastal ports	2	3	6	15	16	16	8	18	12	7	13	44	110	69	40	60	31	108
West Indies	6	11	9	10	18	3	9	1	2	1	0	0	0					*
Other	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	12	1	2
Totals	8	15	15	25	34	19	17	20	14	9	14	44	111	69	40	72	32	110
Cumulative totals	630 (1786 through 1800)																	
	668 (1783 through 1800)																	

*1796 through 1800 not examined as considered negligible in view of trend lines.

SOUTHERN COASTAL STATES

Georgia

Savannah (1793 through 1800); desks, many chaises, oars, boats

Maryland

Baltimore (1784-1786, 1788-1790, 1793-1800); many desks, chairs, chaises, boats

Georgetown (1792)

Vienna (1792)

North Carolina

Edenton (1790-1795, 1798-1799); many desks, many chairs, including thirty-six "corner chairs," bedsteads

Hartford (1798)

Newbern (1792); desks

Nixonton (1790)

Plymouth (1795)

Washington (1789-1795, 1797-1799); many large and small green chairs (windsors), many chairs, many desks, tables, bureaus, a sideboard, boats

Wilmington (1790-1792, 1795-1797); desks, bedsteads

South Carolina

Charleston (1784-1800); many desks, many green chairs, many chairs, many tables, bedsteads, bureaus, clocks, many chaises, boats

Georgetown (1797); chairs

Virginia

- Alexandria* (1785-1788, 1790, 1792, 1795, 1800); many desks, many green chairs, many chairs including six of mahogany, stands, many chaises, boats including a yawl
Folly Landing (1793)
Norfolk (1790, 1792, 1794-1800); desks, chairs, bedsteads, walking canes, boats, oars
Petersburg (1786); many oars
Richmond (1791-1792, 1795); desks, tables

WEST INDIES AND THE MAINLAND

- Cape Francois, Hispaniola* (1785-1787, 1789-1790); desks, many chaises, boats
Cayenne (1786-1788, 1793); desks, chairs, tables, oars, a boat
Curacao (1785); desks
Demerara (1786, 1789); desks, boats
"Desirequibo" (1783)
Grenada (1784); chaises
Guadaloupe (1785-1786, 1790); desks, green chairs, chaises
Havana (1798); clocks
"Hispaniola" (1792-1793); desks, many green chairs, many chairs, boats
Jamaica (1784); desks
Martinique (1787-1789, 1791-1792); desks, tables, chaises, boats
Port-au-Prince, Hispaniola (1787-1788); desks
St. Croix (1790, 1794); green chairs
St. Eustatius (1786-1788, 1790-1793); many desks, chairs, boats
St. Martin (1783, 1790, 1793)
Surinam (1783-1794, 1798); many desks, many "Green Windsor chairs," many tables, many oars
Tobago (1785-1787); many desks, chairs, tables, oars, boats
Trinidad (1787-1788); desks
Turks Islands (1785-1786, 1794); green chairs, chairs, oars

OTHER PORTS

- "Africa"* (1793)
Cape of Good Hope (1792)
Cape Verde Islands (1785-1789); many desks, the most chairs to any port but only three windsors listed, many tables, many [seamen's] chests, many wheelbarrows, many boats
Connecticut
 Hartford (1795, 1797); a sideboard
 Middletown (1795); "tea tables"
 New London (1783, 1793)
French West Africa (1792); desks, tables
Halifax (1785); chairs
Madeira (1787, 1794); many "common" chairs, boats
Maine
 Bath (1792)

- Kennebec* (1793)
Kennebunk (1787)
Passamaquoddy (1790, 1792-1793); many desks, many windsors, many "kitchen chairs," "tea tables"
Penobscot (1797)
Pleasant River (1788); chairs

Massachusetts

- Barnstable* (1796)
Boston (1791-1794, 1798)
Marblehead (1787)
Martha's Vineyard (1790)
Nantucket (1783, 1788, 1792-1793); desks, chairs, tables, cradles
New Bedford (1791, 1793, 1799)
Yarmouth (1786)

New York

- Albany* (1784, 1791); desks, cases of drawers, bedsteads
Claverack (1784)
New York (1783-1785, 1787-1800); many desks, many chairs, many tables, many bedsteads, cases of drawers, chaises, boats, compass boxes
Troy (1798)

Bonavista, probably Newfoundland (1786)

Pennsylvania

- Philadelphia* (1791-1794)

Rhode Island¹¹

- Bristol* (1793, 1796-1798, 1800); green chairs, chairs
Newport (1791-1792, 1794-1795, 1798); many desks, cases of drawers, bedsteads, chaises
Warren (1792-1800); six "framed chairs," chairs
St. Pierre and Miquelon (1786); chairs

dards and Townsends, produced on occasion great pieces and there were some chair forms of high distinction. On the whole, however, it seems most were unable or unwilling to master the new styles of the 1780s and 1790s.

Of the total number of desks exported from Providence in the 1783-1800 period, 199 were of maple, four of cedar, three of mahogany, two of cherry and the rest of unspecified woods. While some of these might have been mahogany and rather fine, the inference is that they were a standard trading commodity and probably of maple or other inexpensive wood. It is curious that all the cedar, mahogany and cherry desks noted went to the Indies, with the exception of one to South

Carolina; perhaps the love of worms for maple had something to do with it. At times, but rarely, desks or other objects would be returned to the home port unsold as the markets would be glutted and prices too low or they had been damaged in transit. These returns are insignificant, but have been deducted from the totals shown anyway.

Chairs for the same period include 365 *green* or *windsor* types (one name was as popular as the other), sometimes *large* or *small*; 130 *sitting*; eighty *dining*; and 489 *common* or *common straw bottom*. There were also *kitchen*, *corner*, *round-about* and *framed* chairs. Twelve of the last were specified, and six others listed as *mahogany*.

Tables for the period include sixty-three of maple (with several shipped in pairs) and fourteen of mahogany. Of the total tables, some were *square*, *card*, *oval tea*, *tea*, *four foot*, "3½'" (tables were often sold by the foot of length); and there were *candlestands* and *stands*.

Other forms exported included eleven cases of drawers, forty-six bedsteads, two sideboards including one shipped by John Carlile, a chest on chest, a "caberoal" [cabriole?] sofa, and three mystery shipments totalling twenty-seven cases of "Cabinet Work." Other wooden objects included oars, axes, hoes, cedar pails, warming pans, ox yokes, [ships'] blocks, mast hoops, wheelbarrows, spinning wheels, cradles and boats of cedar and oak (Moses boats, long boats, yawls, etc.). Also shipped were window sash and window frames in bulk lots: to Charleston went 1200 lights of window sash at one time, and a similar amount to Virginia in 1787. Frames, shutters and doors went in smaller amounts. Intriguing items included a "Cotton Ginnin Mashine" — an unusually early use of the term — sent to New York in the sloop *General Greene* in 1791 (the year before Eli Whitney graduated from Yale and three years before he patented his famous invention) and probably re-shipped.¹⁴ Objects such as pianofortes and organs, shipped to New York and Charleston for instance, were imported and so are not included; neither are looking glasses as most were imported, though some frames and some silvered glass were undoubtedly made locally. Not wooden, but interesting to a Rhode Islander, were exports of kegs and pots of lobsters and oysters — sometimes "pickled" — to Surinam and other areas, inclu-

ding the coastal states. An enterprising merchant once even sent five casks of orange juice to New York in 1788.

A little-known export was that of pre-fabricated buildings which had begun in New England in the mid-1600s, and the first documented house from Rhode Island left for Jamaica in 1766.¹⁵ Providence continued this practice to a greater extent than Newport, shipping seven store and house frames to Alexandria, Virginia and Charleston, South Carolina and six house frames to the West Indies from 1783 through 1800. During this period Newport shipped but two house frames to the south. The sizes are listed as "20x40," "36 feet," and often state "with plank, etc. to inclose the frame." As if to emphasize the ingenuity of local housewrights, Clermont-Grèvecoeur notes in 1780 that in Newport "Sometimes they build them [houses] outside the town, and, when completed, put them on rollers and pull them to the lot on which they are to stand."¹⁶ Related exports — not infrequently found — were "steam jacks," "jack screws," and "house jacks." Wood was also imported and exported. Types such as *lignum vitae* and mahogany were both for use and trading items, but it is curious to speculate whether thousands of feet of "white pine," "pine," and merely "boards" — some even maple — that went to primarily the southern ports were destined for buildings, ships, or to confuse the furniture expert carefully analyzing secondary woods.

Even more interesting — and of major economic importance — was the export of *chaises* shown in Tables 1 and 2, including *riding chairs*, *sulkies*, *shays*, *kittereens*, *carriages* (few) and *phaetons* (very few), but excluding *sleighs*, *horse carts*, *wagons* and other utility vehicles and parts. Often brightly painted and gilded, these were fine examples of woodworking and decorative skills. Others were merely utilitarian. Clermont-Grèvecoeur in 1781 speaks enviously of native American hardwoods that helped make them strong and light: "As for the wood, it is superior to all others for carriages. It is used to make wheels and shafts of incredible lightness. It is inconceivable how wheels so delicate can last as long as the most massive ones. I wish our cabriolets and pleasure carriages were built of such wood."¹⁷ Silas Deane suggested to John Jay in 1776 we ship one as a

gift to the French court, as well as a "narrow-gangsett horse or two," as "she [the Queen] loves riding on horseback."¹⁸ Many chaises in the early years went to wealthy and cosmopolitan Cape Francois, a demanding market. Apparently, however, it was not until Ephraim Starkweather and his son Oliver aggressively entered the trade as merchants did exports begin to boom about 1793. From then on, most chaises from Providence went to Charleston consigned to Seth Lothrop — apparently for local consumption there. From the profits of this and general trade Starkweather

built a fine brick mansion in 1801 at the corner of Main and Walcott streets in Pawtucket.¹⁹ Chaise makers were numerous: Nathaniel Frothingham, James and Lemuel Pitcher (who sometimes also acted as consignors for shipments to southern ports), Noah Smith and others.²⁰

Newport exports can be seen in Table 2 detailed as follows. Destinations most significant in quantity are italicized, the years in which at least some objects reached there in parentheses, and the main items exported if sufficient to merit attention.

TABLE 2 — NEWPORT EXPORTS

	1786	1787	1788	1789	1790	1791	1792	1793	1794	1795	1796	1797	1798	1799	1800	
DESKS	Southern coastal ports	40	76	35	16	35	41	26	40	23	12	27	17	7	3	37
	New York	2	8	3	11	22	57	83	119	136	110	30	16	10	0	0
	West Indies	11	1	13	6	1	4	2	0	0	0					*
	Other	2	10	13	2	16	3	5	2	3	15	1	0	1	1	2
	Total	55	95	64	35	74	105	116	161	162	137	58	33	18	4	39
Cumulative totals 1156 (1786 through 1800)																
CHAIRS	Southern coastal ports	63	142	46	12	51	140	3	54	12	0	18	6	21	24	10
	New York	0	0	0	6	12	100	12	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0
	West Indies	0	0	20	0	0	18	14	0	0	0					*
	Other	1	18	36	0	0	12	23	12	27	15	0	7		0	8
	Total	64	160	102	18	63	270	52	66	39	15	18	13	27	24	18
Cumulative total 949 (1786 through 1800)																
TABLES	Southern coastal ports	21	32	5	9	37	29	11	35	9	3	17	4	3	1	16
	New York	0	0	0	0	9	16	2	1	8	7	2	0	5	0	0
	West Indies	0	10	8	0	0	0	0	2	0	0					*
	Other	0	2	4	0	0	2	4	5	0	2	0	0	2	6	0
	Total	21	44	17	9	46	47	17	43	17	12	19	4	10	7	16
Cumulative total 329 (1786 through 1800)																
CHAISES	Southern coastal ports	6	32	5	3	14	8	8	9	14	8	11	4	4	9	7
	New York	0	0	0	0	0	5	3	2	3	1	1	0	1	0	2
	West Indies	0	2	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0					*
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
	Total	6	34	6	7	14	14	11	11	17	9	12	5	6	9	9
Cumulative total 170 (1786 through 1800)																

*1796 through 1800 not examined as considered negligible in view of trend lines.

SOUTHERN COASTAL STATES

Georgia

Savannah (1790-1796, 1798); many desks, many chairs, many tables, bedsteads, cupboards, cases of drawers, chaises

Maryland

Baltimore (1789-1796); many desks, many chairs, tables, bedsteads, chaises, oars

Cedar Point (1791)

Salisbury (1794)

Vienna (1792, 1794)

North Carolina

Bacon Island (1800)

Camden (1799)

Edenton (1790-1791, 1793-1794, 1796-1797, 1799-1800); many desks, chairs, tables, many "linen" and "spinning" wheels, oars

Newbern (1791, 1793, 1796-1797, 1799-1800); desks, chairs, tables, a clock

Pasquotank (1790-1791, 1796); chairs

Swansborough (1793)

Washington (1790-1791, 1798, 1800); desks, chairs, tables, linen wheels, "shaving glasses," a sideboard, a bureau

Wilmington (1790-1795, 1798); many desks, tables, a case of drawers, a clock, and a "box of clocks and weights" shipped by Caleb Wheaton to Daniel Wheaton, spinning wheels

South Carolina

Charleston (1787, 1790-1800 and probably all other years as well when merely "South Carolina" was named — but those years not included); many desks, many chairs including sixty green chairs, many tables, cases of drawers, bedsteads, book cases, a sideboard, many linen and spinning wheels, many chaises, wooden bowls, wheelbarrows, oars, many boats including "One Pleasure Boat" and two large "Two masted" boats

Georgetown (1791, 1794, 1796-1798, 1800); many desks, tables, chaises

Virginia

Alexandria (1791-1793, 1795, 1797); desks, "waiters"

Norfolk (1790-1800); many desks, many green chairs, chairs, bureaus, many tables, a book case, stands, linen wheels, wafer boxes, "joiners ware," oars

Richmond (1790, 1794, 1796, 1799-1800); desks, tables, sets of wooden measures

NEW YORK

New York (1786-1798, 1800); many desks, many green chairs, many chairs including thirty mahogany and five "large mahogany" in 1791, many tables, many cases of drawers, many bedsteads, a "high case of Drawers," a sofa, spinning wheels, clocks, a desk and book case, a "mahogany case," many chaises, wheelbarrows, boats, oars

WEST INDIES AND THE MAINLAND

Bahama Islands (1792); chairs

Cape Francois Hispaniola (1790)

Cayenne (1788); desks, tables

Demerara (1791); green chairs, spinning wheels

"Hispaniola" (1792)

Jamaica (1787); oars

Martinique (1791, 1792)

Port-au-Prince, Hispaniola (1791)

St. Croix (1789, 1793)

St. Eustatius (1787, 1789); desks, tables

Surinam (1787, 1789)

Trinidad (1788-1789); desks, tables, a clock, chaises

OTHER PORTS

"Africa" (1786); oars

Straits of Belle Isle (1791)

Cape Verde Islands (1790); desks, chests

Connecticut

New London (1786, 1789, 1795); chairs including one easy chair

France

Dunkirk (1787); oars only

Ireland

Dublin (1787); oars only

Maine

Kennebec (1789, 1793)

Portland, Casco Bay (1791, 1799)

Sherbourne (1791); chairs

Massachusetts

Boston (1791, 1793-1800); green chairs, chairs, tables and a "Printed Press Stand" with "12 boxes and part of a box of types, one bundle printing forms" shipped by Gibbs, Channing and John Faxon in 1791

Dighton (1793)

Falmouth (1792); chairs

Nantucket (1788-1789); desks, tables

New Bedford (1790)

New York

Albany (1791-1792, 1794, 1796, 1798-1799)

Pennsylvania

Philadelphia (1787, 1791-1796, 1800); desks, chairs, tables; and four small mahogany boxes, five medecin boxes and two cases of "Cabinet Work" all shipped by Robert Lawton to George Lawton in 1795

Rhode Island

East Greenwich (1790)

Providence (1790-1792, 1794-1800); many chairs, a sideboard

Tenerife (1795); desks

It is curious so few intra-state shipments are recorded; perhaps a certain casualness was allowed. Another more likely explanation is that daily local packets — not coasters — carried many goods and their arrangements with the customs house were such that no formal documents were needed. In 1782 the *Phebe* carried two desks, a case of drawers, a bookcase and a table (as well as passengers) from Providence to Newport for a charge of three to six shillings each, and a "parcel of window frames" for 0-12-0, but there are no customs house records to cross check this.²¹ A third possibility, that each town was more self-sufficient in supplying furniture than previously thought, would upset the time-honored thesis that Newport continued to be "the" cabinetmaking center while at the same time help vindicate current thought that Providence had many makers of ability as well.

New York City is shown separately in Table 2 as it dominated Newport commerce in furniture as well as other goods. The pattern of exports is similar to that for Providence, except for 1793 and 1794, when all items rose rather sharply but, other than desks, did not pass their previous peaks. Reasons are the same as for Providence patterns and of course Newport had even less capital to tie up in long expensive voyages and little burgeoning industry that might support furniture exports as a sideline. Newport however did export its cabinetwork, a labor-intensive product, to a greater extent than Providence: approximately one in four manifests include some woodenware from the former compared with one in eight from the latter. Newport exports also included much more produce and livestock — even bricks.

The reasons for such heavy New York-Newport trade are several: as the century progressed New York became more and more important as a colonial city, its Dutch and other traders offered an active, varied and inexpensive source of goods, and its political and cultural climate was conducive to trade. Most important, though, was its accessibility.

The writer, with others, has long puzzled over the similarity of some popular eighteenth-century forms, such as side chairs, from New York and Rhode Island. This similarity is far stronger than that for local and Massachusetts chairs, though the latter state is adjacent and its capital city

much closer. No really satisfactory theory has yet been offered for this seeming anomaly. To begin to understand, one must first realize that almost all goods moved by sea — even on short hauls.²² Boston was "to a great extent barricaded from the waters to the south by George's Bank, Nantucket Shoals, and the great sand Cape [Cod]. Although the waters just east of the cape saw the heaviest coastal traffic of the continent, every year a considerable toll was collected, paid in wrecked ships and drowned sailors. Southern New England and the rich valley of the Connecticut fell easily under the influence of New York."²³ Vessels from the West Indies, other foreign ports and the southern coastal states came in from outer waters and though still having to face the trials of the bay and harbor, had fewer difficulties in general — so the port of Boston thrived, but without much furniture from Rhode Island.

The ease of sailing to New York had not been lost on merchants who earlier in the century, during Newport's golden era of cabinetmaking, shipped fine pieces that served as the models or inspiration for Manhattan's less-developed makers. Thus it was inevitable New York work showed Rhode Island influence. As the century progressed, and certainly in the 1790s and early 1800s, New York stood on its own and this influence probably flowed the other way. The logistical advantages of this city were of much more importance to the smaller merchants who, as stated earlier, were more active in this trade than men like the Browns, who used furniture usually only as items of accommodation from time to time.

The sharp rise in exports to New York beginning in 1790 and 1791 seems to coincide with activities of the sloop *Aurora*, with John or Stephen Cahoon as masters and often consignors. Other makers and merchants used the sloop as well. As an example of this activity — the reasons for which are unclear, but probably because the Cahoones were making a good saleable product at a low price and others did the same — the *Aurora* carried twenty-three desks and many other items to New York in thirteen voyages between March 14 and October 12, 1791. The sloop *Peggy*, with Robert Lawton frequently master, also became active that year. These sloops — with the *Apollo*, Stephen Cahoon master 1792

and later; the *Friendship*, Edward Peterson master and usually consignor and consignee; and the *New York Packet* — accounted for over ninety percent of the furniture trade with New York (at least through 1795). Other ports were served by other ships. It should be noted that seldom was furniture the main cargo in a voyage from either Newport or Providence, even on the *Aurora*. These ships, with the partial exception of the *Friendship*, sharply curtailed their furniture cargoes to New York in 1796 and by 1797 ceased completely. The *Aurora*, with the Cahoones still involved, traded in other ports with other products after 1796; its papers were surrendered in Charleston in 1800 and the ship sold.

Owners of these vessels were Gibbs, Champlin, and other merchants in Newport; Rowland Hazard and John Robinson of Charleston; George Lawton of Philadelphia and at times Robert Lawton and the Cahoones. Almost all merchantmen out of Newport used the sloop rig — as opposed to the variety of ships, brigs, schooners, snows and sloops out of Providence — and in the sixty to eighty-ton range.²⁴ Other Newport makers and their families were involved directly with furniture shipments as consignors (unlike Providence, where exports were handled only by merchants with rare exceptions) and included Thomas Townsend, David Huntington, Joseph Sanford and George Bardine of East Greenwich.

Of the total number of desks exported from Newport in the 1786-1800 period, 340 were of maple and one mahogany. Three "Desks and Bookcases" went to Virginia in 1787 and another to New York in 1796 but their quality is unknown.

Chairs for the period include 152 *green* or *windsor* (although probably many more of these went unspecified), and other types as *kitchen*, *dining* and *house*. One *easy chair* was also shipped. The *Aurora* carried thirty mahogany and five "large ditto" chairs to New York in 1791, an absolutely boom year for this product.

Tables for the period included forty-three of maple, fourteen of which were tea tables. Five mahogany types were shipped, four to southern ports. Seven stands were exported.

Other forms included thirty-eight bedsteads, one of mahogany; twenty-one cases of drawers (the term "bureau" was now becoming more popular

in Newport); one high case of drawers; one sideboard; two "mahogany cases"; twelve "shaving glasses," seven clocks and a "box of clocks and weights"; cases of "joiners work"; one sofa; four bookcases; two cupboards; and miscellaneous items sent from Providence. A "cutting machine" was shipped from East Greenwich to Charleston in 1800.

Almost all the furniture went to southern ports as the years went on — the New York market seemed too difficult to penetrate and the "others" (such as the West Indies) long gone. Charleston became by far the leading market as the end of the decade neared.

Newport had its own chaisemakers, shipped the same types as Providence and one *stage coach* as well. Even the painter Samuel King consigned a ring chair to the master of the *Aurora* in 1791 to New York — probably a used one he had repainted.

Other commerce increased steadily during the period, especially after 1796, for both Newport and Providence, the latter predominating of course. In addition to quantities of paper, candles, nails, shoes and the like in the coastal trade, Providence sent Swedish iron, oil and teas to Surinam and the Indies; and articles such as cocoa, sugar, cotton and tea to Cadiz, Hamburg and Bordeaux. Newport's exports were not so complex — rum and farm produce seemed popular — and went to fewer ports. Havana became the biggest market in the Caribbean. Both ports shipped the ever-present pickled fish; if I never see another pickled fish manifest it will be too soon.

It is worthwhile to price these furniture exports and rank them in value. This is not easy, as so many were unspecified and their degree of sophistication and price unknown. However, it is assumed in the following figures that unspecified forms were simple types of inexpensive wood, as maple desks with straight bracket feet, simple interiors with few if any drawers and straight fronts; tables with or without plain drop leaves, no inlay, simple square tapering or turned legs; and chairs probably slat back or with elementary splats, round legs and backposts — mostly turner's work — and flag (rush) seats. Chaises are without harness. Unit prices are derived from selling prices in Providence, Newport and East Greenwich by a

variety of makers, within the same time span as the years covered, for the same forms, and weighted to include the few more sophisticated and/or mahogany items listed.²⁵ No attempt was made to include random miscellaneous cabinet-work such as bedsteads, cases of drawers and the like as there is so little to go on in valuation; in any event even if this were attempted it would probably not add more than ten percent to the furniture total. The period is 1786 through 1800.

DESKS

From Providence:	771 @ 3-0-0	or £ 2313	or \$ 7679.00
From Newport:	1156 @ 3-0-0	or £ 3468	or \$ 11514.00
TOTALS	1927	£ 5781	or \$ 19193.00

CHAIRS

From Providence:	2501 @ 0-8-0	or £ 1000	or \$ 3320.00
From Newport:	949 @ 0-8-0	or £ 380	or \$ 1262.00
TOTALS	3450	£ 1380	or \$ 4582.00

TABLES

From Providence:	380 @ 1-10-0	or £ 570	or \$ 1892.00
From Newport:	329 @ 1-10-0	or £ 494	or \$ 1640.00
TOTALS	709	£ 1064	or \$ 3532.00

CHAISES

From Providence:	630 @ 40-0-0	or £ 25200	or \$ 83664.00
From Newport:	170 @ 40-0-0	or £ 6800	or \$ 22576.00
TOTALS	800	£ 32000	or \$106240.00

The most surprising figure is obviously the strong showing of the chaise or carriage trade. Providence, whose total value for this period is almost four times that of all furniture combined, easily outsold Newport as it had increasing trade, population and makers — but the value for Newport is significant also. All this data breaks entirely new ground. Even if unspecified furniture forms were of higher quality — unlikely — it would be difficult to raise those totals by more than twenty percent and vehicles would still dominate. One of the explanations for the strong chaise market may be that a high percentage of the production was exported, while a low percentage of furniture production was exported — most being used locally. Nevertheless, Rhode Island chaisemakers deserve much credit — and further study — as their goods were selling in very competitive markets.

In total values from each port Newport holds a slight edge as it sent so many desks; Providence's

chairs outnumber its rival's but they were much cheaper. It is also interesting to put some of these values in perspective, and incidentally confirm unit prices, by examining one of the few manifests that cost each part of the cargo. The sloop *Relief*, sailing from Providence to North Carolina December 29, 1787 listed, among other things:

1 chaise	40-0-0
1 3½ foot table	0-30-0
1 desk	3-6-0
1 bushel potatoes	0-1-6
1 barrel cider	0-9-0
1 saddle	0-48-0
1 barrel herring	0-12-0
1 barrel apples	0-6-0
1 hogshead carrots	0-18-5
1 pair shoes	0-6-0
1 gallon New England rum	0-8-0
1 gallon molasses	0-1-6
1 hatchet	0-3-6

Regardless of dollar amounts, quantities of cabinetwork seem large and impressive. Comparable statistics for other states are lacking, or at least not readily available, and so direct comparisons are impossible; but it is certainly apparent Rhode Island was one of the major furniture-exporting states in this period. This generalization may disappoint those who wish to see proof that Rhode Islanders continued their ascendancy and shipped great mahogany pieces everywhere after the 1770s — and in furniture of unspecified woods or types there may indeed be some corroboration after all.

In any event, it is important to remember that in this period merchants were continuing the business patterns of early and mid-century that saw the greatest examples of American cabinetwork grace their houses in Newport and Providence and also leave their docks for shipment to the West Indies and the other colonies. In this trade the reasons for stylistic similarities in furniture from different areas becomes clearer, and previously unknown export commodities such as chaises have new significance. The value of Customs House papers — particularly manifests — thus takes on even greater importance than that attributed to them in the past.²⁶



- 1 RIHS Library.
- 2 Maple desks were priced from 21-0-0 to 32-0-0, with most on the lower end. Cedar was more expensive, and black walnut even more so, one recorded at 44-0-0. Desks of unspecified woods ranged from 28-0-0 to 47-0-0. These prices seem much higher than in the late 18th century but the value of this money was much lower. In 1748 and 1749 a wax candle cost 0-10-0, a meal 0-8-0, and two quarts of beer 0-10-0. Admiralty Papers, v. 7, p. 34, R.I. State Archives.
- 3 February 1973, 319.
- 4 Obadiah Brown Papers, RIHS Library.
- 5 Obadiah Brown Papers.
- 6 Records of the Port of Roanoke, James Iredell Collection, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, compiled by Miss Elizabeth Vann More, supplied courtesy Frank L. Horton, Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.
- 7 Forrest R. Holdcamper, "Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Bureau of Customs" (1968) National Archives, Record Group 36, pp. 69, 73.
- 8 At the following locations — R.I. State Archives (before 1790), RIHS Library (Port of Providence and the largest single Customs House collection), and Federal Records Center, Waltham, Massachusetts (Port of Newport). Outward foreign manifests from 1792 are in the National Archives and are basically the French Spoliation Records (perhaps not complete for all years). Other early Customs House records, excluding manifests, are at the Newport Historical Society and elsewhere. (see note 26).
- 9 Household furniture of migrating individuals or families and re-exported goods have been excluded; totals represent Rhode Island production.
- 10 Some of these specific ports were probably reached earlier but entered merely as Georgia, North Carolina, etc.
- 11 There were probably exports in other years but as they were intra-state, not always recorded. See comments in text after the detailed Newport destinations.
- 12 Anne S.K. Brown and Howard C. Rice, "Journal of Jean-Francois -Louis, Comte de Clermont-Crevecoeur," *American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army* 2v. (Princeton and Providence: Princeton Univ. Press and Brown Univ. Press, 1972) 1: 20. See also Joseph K. Ott, "John Innes Clark and His Family — Beautiful People in Providence," *Rhode Island History* 32:4 (November 1973).
- 13 Ott, "Recent discoveries Among Rhode Island Cabinetmakers and Their Work," "More Notes on Rhode Island Cabinetmakers and Their Work," "Still More Notes on Rhode Island Cabinetmakers and Allied Craftsmen," *Rhode Island History* 28: 1, 2, and 4 (February, May, November 1969); "Rhode Island Housewrights, Shipwrights, and Related Craftsmen," *Rhode Island History* 31: 2 and 3 (May and August 1972).
- 14 The fact that Whitney made his machine while working for the widow of General Nathanael Greene on her plantation in Georgia (and at her partial instigation) creates the speculation she had been writing to Rhode Island previously suggesting some bright lad work on the South's cotton-picking seed problem. In any event, Rhode Islanders were interested in textile equipment: several looms were exported and a few imported during the period and objects such as [weaver's] sleys were common export items. Newport shipped "a cotton machine" to New London in 1789, and an "Instrument for spinning and weaving" to Albany in 1791.
- 15 Carl and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972) 370. Gladys E. Bolhouse, "18th Century Building Agreements," *Newport History* 43:1 (Winter 1970) 16.
- 16 Brown and Rice, 1: 28.
- 17 Brown and Rice, 1: 28.
- 18 Francis Wharton, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the American Revolution* (Washington, D.C., 1889) 2: 214, Deane to Jay, Paris, Dec. 3, 1776.
- 19 Carleton Lee Starkweather, M.D., *Robert Starkweather and His Descendants* (Occoquan, Va., 1904).
- 20 Ott, "Rhode Island Housewrights" includes a section on chaisemakers.
- 21 *Phebe* was owned mostly by James Cahoon, but Charles and John Cahoon also had shares. "Account Book of Charles Cahoon of Newport, 1781-1787", RIHS Library.
- 22 A later article will explore land transportation, particularly as concerned with imports.
- 23 W.H. Bunting, *Portrait of a Port: Boston 1852-1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971) 1. The statement that the "waters just east of the cape saw the heaviest coastal traffic" may not be accurate for the late 18th century.
- 24 Customs House Records and *Ship Registers and Enrollments of Newport, R.I., 1790-1939* (Providence: National Archives Project, 1938-1941).
- 25 Three articles cited in note 13, an unpublished fourth article, and various standard reference books on antique furniture.
- 26 Earl C. Tanner, "Providence Federal Customhouse Papers as a Source of Maritime History since 1790," *New England Quarterly* March 1953. Samuel Eliot Morison, "Custom-house Records in Massachusetts as a Source of History," *Proceedings Massachusetts Historical Society* 54 (June 1921) 324-331.



RIHS Library

Lieutenant George N. Bliss in camp with First New England Cavalry near Bull Run, Va., June 1862.

George N. Bliss in camp at Gettysburg, Pa., July 4, 1913 for 50th anniversary commemoration of the celebrated battle.



RIHS Library

**Chaos Still Reigns in This Camp —
Letters of Lieutenant George N. Bliss,
1st New England Cavalry,
March-September 1862**

*Edited by Edward G. Longacre**

An adage given much credence in the mid-nineteenth-century army held that two years' training was necessary to develop an efficient cavalry outfit. By spring 1862 mounted troops in the Army of the Potomac, beginning their second year of campaigning, were midway through this formative period. But in the ranks of the 1st New England Cavalry — later designated the 1st Rhode Island — little progress appeared to have been made. Typical of so many volunteer units in the great Union army in the eastern theater of combat, the 1st New England was plagued by incompetent field officers, shortages in equipment and rations, lack of regular pay, laxness in discipline, and crumbling morale. With the regiment's first stint of active service drawing near, many of its members expressed concern over its ability to acquit itself honorably in the field, given such handicaps.

One so concerned was Lieutenant George Newman Bliss, executive officer of Company G of the 1st. Born in Tiverton in July 1837 to an old-line New England family, Bliss as a youth had lived in Fall River, Massachusetts; at age sixteen had moved with his family to Pawtucket; and still later had settled in Providence. In Pawtucket he attended the University Grammar School and in Providence Brown University, in 1858 transferring to Union College, Schenectady, New York, from which he was graduated two years later. From

September 1860 till May 1861 — during which time civil war broke out — Bliss was a student at Albany (New York) Law School.

A few months after admission to the New York state bar, Bliss decided to defer his career and go off to war from his native state. Enlisting as a private in the 1st New England — most of whose members were Rhode Islanders — in September 1861, he rose rapidly through the grades of corporal, quartermaster sergeant, and lieutenant. Eventually he attained the rank of captain and command of Company C.

Despite Bliss' fears, his regiment went on to achieve a reputation as one of the finest bodies of volunteer cavalry to serve in the Army of the Potomac. It saw honorable service in every campaign from Second Bull Run, July-September 1862, to the closing fighting in the Shenandoah Valley almost three years later. Much of its skill was the product of training and discipline given the regiment by Colonel Alfred N. Duffie — French-born veteran of combat in Algiers, Senegal, and the Crimea — who in July 1862 replaced inept Colonel Lawton as its commander. Under Duffie the 1st Rhode Island particularly distinguished itself at Kelly's Ford on March 17, 1863, the first battle in which General J.E.B. Stuart's vaunted Confederate horsemen met defeat, as well as at Brandy Station three months later, the largest mounted battle ever waged in the wes-

*A member of the department of history at Temple University, Philadelphia, Mr. Longacre has published two books and twenty articles on the Civil War. He wishes to note that he has inserted paragraphing and in a few instances added missing punctuation to this selection of Bliss letters.

tern hemisphere. The regiment suffered severely for its active participation, particularly on June 17, 1863 at Middleburg, Virginia — where on a suicide mission it was surrounded by ten times as many enemy troopers and almost cut to shreds — and at Waynesboro in the Shenandoah on September 28, 1864. At Waynesboro then Captain Bliss was captured, his horse having been shot from under him by some of Stuart's men. He spent the next five months in Richmond's Libby Prison and upon his release served on court-martial duty for the remainder of the war. During this period he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for gallantry in action at Waynesboro.

In post-war years Bliss again located in Rhode Island and pursued distinguished careers as lawyer, politician, and judge. A member of the state House of Representatives from 1868 to 1873, he then served three terms in the Rhode Island senate. Beginning in 1872 he also served for fifty years as a judge in East Providence's district court, trying no fewer than 24,000 cases prior to retirement. Town solicitor of East Providence for many years, he was its superintendent of schools for over a decade. Beyond all these endeavors he maintained an interest in things military, serving from 1879 to 1883 as major in command of the First Battalion Cavalry, Rhode Island Militia and helping to found the Rhode Island Soldiers and Sailors Historical

Society, whose publications of Civil War personal reminiscences he edited. As a devoted husband and father, he and his wife Fannie raised a family of six children in their long-time home at 400 Taunton Avenue, East Providence. Judge Bliss died August 29, 1928, aged ninety-one, last surviving Civil War Congressional Medal of Honor winner in Rhode Island.

During his war years, Bliss kept up an extensive correspondence with many friends and acquaintances. The following letters — the originals of which repose in the manuscript collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society — he wrote to a civilian friend, David Gerald of Providence. In them the young lieutenant purged himself of frustration and anger generated by the waste, inefficiency, incompetency, and political chicanery that hamstrung his regiment during the crucial phase of its training period. Unlike most extant Civil War letters, Bliss' reveal a candor, a sharpness of wit, a biting sarcasm and an unabashed vulgarity that provide deep insight into his frame of mind. He also imparts much information about the manner in which Union cavalrymen passed day-to-day life in camp and on the march, where they spent at least as much time fighting mud, dust, hunger, disease, and the obtuseness of their superiors as they did against their enemy.





Washington D.C.

March 15 1862

Dear Dave;

We arrived here last night at 9 P.M. having accomplished the trip from Balt. to W[ashington] (40 miles) in just 8 hours. I had a boy to hold my hair on; don't want to ride on a rail[road] again at that rate. Have just finished my dinner, viz. 1 plate roast Beef, 2 Plates raw oysters, 4 boiled eggs with liberal allowance of bread &c

It is now 2½ P.M. and raining like the devil. We had orders to march 1 or two miles out of the city, pitch our tents and picket our horses under the canopy, but they have been countermanded and God knows where we are going now. I don't care, if I get my regular rations Still it rains but my bowels are lined with ale, and I defy the elements, specially water; it has nary power over me, no winning ways, not a way

There is a regular unmitigated diarrhea of soldiers here. I feel like a huckelberry in a bear's anus and think if by some unaccountable and mysterious providence I should be taken away it would make no perceptible difference as to the ultimate result.

We started at short notice and without baggage wagons and other necessary equipage and consequently everything has been butt end foremost, all along the route. They gave us a gay supper in Phila., also a dinner in Baltimore. Md. has 5000 men in the Union Army and about the same number in the Secesh.

Direct to me as follows.

Lieut. G.N. Bliss

G Troop 1st Regt. N.E. Cavalry

Washington, D.C.

Write soon. Give my respects to friends. Yours truly

G.N. Bliss

*Camp East of the Capitol
March 18 1862*

Dear Dave;

Chaos still reigns in this camp but we have at last succeeded in getting rations for the men and forage for the horses, our horses were without feed for four days but they do not appear to have suffered much. If anyone should ask you about this regiment knowing that you heard from me, tell them that everything is all right &c. I don't wish you to say anything to anyone about what follows.

Candidly then I am forced much against my will to believe that Col [Robert B.] Lawton is a God damned fussy old pisspot utterly incompetent for the position he holds. This is entirely unmilitary but it is most damnably natural and relieves my mind considerably. I am not alone in this matter and I am convinced [that I] indeed would be willing to swear if called upon that to the best of my information and belief the majority of the officers of this regiment would resign if they could do it honorably and without fear of their motives being misrepresented. We have good men and good inferior officers but we need a Col. Efforts are being made to get this regiment into the regular service and I should not be surprised if they were successful. We have at present a better camp than Camp Arnold but the Col. says we shall take the field in 10 days. Between you and I [, I] think it will be the damdest take you ever saw. Things may come out all straight. I hope most fervently they will but that damned Col will be hung I fear like a mill stone about our necks.

Burn this letter or if you do not be exceedingly careful [that] none but yourself ever sets eyes on it. To guard against accidents I shall leave it without a signature.

I am sitting in my barrack with the door wide open and am perfectly comfortable. The grass is green in the fields and it seems very much like the month of May in R.I. I visited the Capitol yesterday but can't give any respectable account of my travels on paper.

Washington is not remarkable for architectural beauty with the exception of the public buildings, they loom up like diamonds in a dung hill. Maryland and New Jersey are God forsaken looking countries. The railroad through the latter State is guarded by soldiers, especially being strongly defended at all bridges. Soldiers still continue to pour into Washington from all quarters and I am told an army of 8000 whores is quartered in the city to supply them with all the pleasures of home. In the city yesterday two passed us in a splendid barouche and threw kisses at Capt. [J.B.] Wood and myself. I saw yesterday a patent medicine advertisement [to cure venereal disease] upon the steps leading to the Capitol grounds. I should not be much surprised to find one on [the] Statue of the Goddess of Liberty [on the capitol dome]. Write soon.

[George N. Bliss]



Camp East of Capitol
March 22 1862

Dear Dave

. . . It has been raining for the last three days and the mud is awful, perfectly indiscribable, a nasty sticky slippery solution of clay which fills my soul with inexpressible loathing at every step, and if you take a ride to saddle, when you come in you can hardly tell (if you trust to your eyes) whether you are sitting on a horse or a mud bank.

. . . I have nothing of interest to write you since the Col forbids any commissioned officer leaving camp. Consequently I might as well be in Prov[idence] as within a mile of the Capitol so far as sight seeing is concerned.

All the first battalion and two troops of the second are mounted with some horses remaining while more are expected in a day or two but the supply of saddles, bridles &c is insufficient. We are destitute of our army forges, baggage wagons, saddler's tools &c, while many of our horses need shoeing before they can be used. Everything is in the same delightful state of confusion and uncertainty as when I last wrote and many of the officers are getting desperate, in some cases resignations are already written and waiting for Gov. [William] Sprague's return when they will be presented, unless something turns up.

I have never yet been insulted by the old puke [Lawton] and intend to avoid him for fear it may occur and I say that [which] I should be sorry for. He is constantly blowing to outsiders about this regt, saying it is the finest volunteer regt in the service &c, never remarking that half the regt is just mounted and without any drill as horsemen. The result of all this if believed tends to disgrace us when the truth shall be know, if through his misrepresentations we are hurried into the field totally unprepared, with horses over which the riders will lose all control at the first discharge of a musket. I am as anxious to get into the field as anyone but I do not wish this regt to be a terror to its friends on the field of battle. We can do all than man can do. Give us six weeks with competent drillmasters and we can do something.

Damn this pen and ink business, it's too slow. Give me five minutes [to] talk and I could give you some idea of our position.

Yours truly, G.N. Bliss
Respects to Mrs. G. &c

Camp East of Capitol

March 23d 1862

Dear Dave;

I suppose I am in duty bound to grind out a letter to you today but I don't feel the slightest inclination. . . . Since I have been here my bowels have been most unaccountably irregular . . . besides I have an almighty cold from which complaint nearly all the regt suffer. 29 men marched up to the hospital from one company yesterday, all with colds. Still I do not by any means feel sick. [I] ride my horse every day and eat tremendously.

I fear however that this will be an unhealthy neighborhood if some sanitary precautions are not taken soon. Within half a mile of our camp hundreds of dead horses smell to heaven and the contents of innumerable honey carts have been emptied upon the grass. My stomach is pretty strong, but happening to get to leeward of the place the other [day] I put spurs to my horse and moved out of it magna celeritate.

There is no enterprise here, no competition, so that a man runs a risk of being skinned if he wishes to purchase anything; you can get a better dinner in Prov. for 25 cents than here for \$1. Milk is 19 cents a quart, oysters 30 cents a quart (last year you could buy them for 12 cents a bushel), eggs 30 cents a dozen, &c. We live with the men on government rations. Some of the officers board at the poor house and pay \$1 a day for no better board than Mrs. Walker used to furnish [in Providence] . . . There are plenty of chances here for ordinary yankees to make their everlasting fortunes. Papers are five cents a copy with the exception of one or two contemptible sheets at three.

I judge we shall soon leave this camp . . . Col Lawton says we have been attached to Genl [John P.] Hatch's Brigade, Genl [Nathaniel P.] Banks' Division. If this is so we shall soon go towards Winchester [Virginia], I presume.

. . . . The mail has just arrived and with it your poetical requests and with deepest melancholy and disgust I am compelled to announce that there is narywhiskynary a drink within these barracks and that I have been beastly sober for many a day. I hope, however, to be permitted to grant your last request if the festivities are not closed before we are in working order.

I was somewhat astonished by a snow storm yesterday and today it rains; ergo, mud also reigns. When it is dry it is fearfully dusty. Hope we shall soon strike the Sacred Soil and be "welcomed with bloody hands &c."

Yours truly

G. N. Bliss



Camp East of Capitol
March 28, 1862

Dear Dave;

. . . . Went down to the Capitol a few days ago and attended a session of the Senate. Heard [Massachusetts Republican Henry] Wilson make a speech and was entertained with a spicy debate on the District [of Columbia] Emancipation Bill, during which it was asserted that one of the Vice Presidents of the U.S. from the South had notoriously lived with a negro wench and had children by her, and that another Southern Senator's negro children were at school in the State of Ohio. The Senator from Iowa proceeded to state that there were but three cases of white men marrying negroes in his own State and all three of these gentlemen came from slave states and probably found their peculiar taste there. I noticed that the Senators from Del. and Maryland spoke of slavery as a doomed institution while senators from Ky. made no remarks in opposition.

The capitol may truly be called a gigantic ruin although splendidly finished within. I went down to the city yesterday and the dust in the streets was fearful to contemplate. On Penn. Av. you could as a general thing see but a few yards in advance and never more than 50. It was almost equal to a Newport fog. I think W[ashington] small potatoes. There is only one theatre here and not a single respectable daily paper, and I have not seen a building worthy of notice except public buildings.

. . . . The Army of the Potomac is moving within a week; probably 150,000 men will be concentrated upon some point [in Virginia] and will probably produce an evacuation [by the enemy].

I saw a remarkable picture on a card a day or two ago representing a fair maid who had fallen on the ice in such a manner that a part of the human apparatus which modesty requires concealed was exposed to the astonished gaze of two Cockneys Give me particulars of your adventures in pursuit of the fair sex when you answer this. I am going on [duty as] Officer of the Guard in a few minutes and must shut up this shop.

Yours truly
G. N. Bliss

Camp East of Capitol [c. April 1] 1862

Dear Dave;

I must let out or burst. The officers of this regt have got their courage up to the sticking point and don't hesitate to talk right out in meeting. They call the Col . . . [a] lunk headed old fool, and many other forcible but not flattering invectives are used whenever he is mentioned. Every officer from the Lt. Col. [Willard Sayles] down is his open enemy and I rather think the old fool suspects the true state of the case . . .

At present, I don't see any immediate probability of our regt entering the Sulphurous clouds &c, notwithstanding our Col announced last Monday that we should take the field in 10 days. R. I. troops have achieved honorable distinction for themselves and their State at New Bern [North Carolina], and I pray God this regt be not allowed to disgrace it. Perhaps you can get some idea from this of the state of things here, we have no head. The Col says he has nursed us for 5 months and now we must take care of ourselves. Lt [Hiram P.] Barker says he has nursed us upon a dry teat . . .

Write soon. Keep this to yourself.





Camp East of Capitol
April 3 1862

Dear Dave;

... It is after tattoo and we take up our line of march for Warrenton Junction [Virginia], beyond Manassas, on the sacred soil, tomorrow. For the first time I shall tread the land of him born insensible to fear.

G Troop has not yet been mounted and remains here. I have been temporarily assigned to C Troop ... I carry nothing with me except what I take on my horse, leaving my trunk, over coat, sash, dress coat &c in Capt Wood's care, who will probably send them home by express. This, however, depends on circumstances. We take no tents, but are supplied with India rubber arrangements of some kind which I do not yet understand, each man carrying his own.

The probabilities are that we shall see some cutting and slashing soon. I turned [the] grindstone today while the old meat axe was sharpened up for service. All our men are armed with Burnside carbines or Colt Navy six shooters.

There was considerable excitement in some of the troops tonight. The men swore they would not leave this camp until they received their pay and refused to do duty in C Troop. They were almost unanimous and Capt. [Lycurgus] Sayles and myself had to speechify considerably before they came round. I made the last speech and it was the first time I ever tried public speaking in the open air. Judging by the result I was very successful since they came out all right a short time afterwards. I can not blame them much under the circumstances. Six months in the service and no pay, many of them with families suffering for want of the money. And for this state of affairs Gov. Sprague primarily and Col Lawton secondarily are in my opinion responsible ... Paymaster Potter says he shall pay us off within ten days, but the regt has been [so] often deluded by false promises that they do not now put their trust in Princes. I think Gov. Sprague is a man of little heart and less principle, controlled by unbounded ambition. Still he has made his mark and if he don't slop over may get to the U. S. Senate.

Direct letters as formerly and they will be forwarded to me.

Yours truly
G. N. Bliss

*On Picket near
Falls Church Va. Sept. 6/62*

Dear Gerald;

You now see what made me feel blue about a month ago. What I feared has happened; we have met the enemy and been licked like hell.

Our soldiers have fought as though each man was he on whose sole arm hung victory, but our generals have been infants in opposing the military talents of [Robert E.] Lee & [Stonewall] Jackson. Now little Mac [Major General George B. McClellan] again holds the helm and I hope to see brighter days. McClellan is the only General that has the entire confidence of the army.

The paper may inform you that our troops fell back to Centreville [Virginia] in good order on the 29th Sept, but it is not true. Such a sight I hope never to see again. Our men did not run, but regiments were scattered like the leaves of autumn and all semblance of military organization lost.

I think, however, that about half of our forces retired in good order. Our regiment covered the retreat; drew sabres, faced the enemy, then retired a short distance and again formed line of battle toward the enemy. I never saw the regiment drill better than on that lost battle field. The enemy did not trouble us, however, except by shell[ing us,] which hurt no one. . . . Our regt has behaved splendidly in this campaign and won many compliments from various Genls but we are now suffering from want of horses and opportunity to shoe those we have. . . . When our new recruits have been drilled, our old regiment filled up and refitted, Dixie will have a hard road to travel. . . .

G. N. B.



The Rhode Island Historical Society

One Hundred Fifty-fifth Annual Meeting

The one hundred fifty-fifth annual meeting, held in the ballroom of Aldrich House on January 30, 1977, was called to order at 3:30 p.m. by president Duncan Hunter Mauran.

Minutes and reports of the 1976 annual meeting were approved as printed in *Rhode Island History* 35: 1 (February 1976).

Members stood in silence while the president read the names of members who had died during the preceding year.

The nominating committee — Benjamin L. Cook, Jr., chairman, Bayard Ewing, and Nathaniel Tingley — submitted its report through its chairman and its slate as presented was duly elected.

The president, treasurer, librarian, and the director each presented a report, printed in full below along with the museum curator's report.

The meeting was followed by the showing of "The Making of a Classic," a documentary on the filming of *The Great Gatsby* in Newport during the summer of 1973. Several members of the Society could be spotted among the "extras."

Respectfully submitted,
DAVID W. DUMAS
Secretary

Annual Report of the President

I want to welcome you all and appreciate your interest in the Society.

The past year has been eventful — the John Brown House has been accredited by the American Association of Museums. The Aldrich House has been designated a National Historic Landmark. A grant of \$40,229 from the National Endowment for the Humanities for the first exhibition at Aldrich has been received. This exhibition is tentatively entitled "The Lively Experiment — A Tribute to 400 Years of Rhode Island History," and will open hopefully next November. The first volume of the Greene Papers has been published; and on the practical side from a timely anonymous gift a much needed and long overdue parking area has been constructed on the grounds of John Brown House.

Although many of the financial problems of the Society were caused by the completion of commitments made in the past for necessary and needed improvements, cost overruns, many the result of inflation, made it necessary to use endowment. (The John Brown House outside restoration cost \$250,000 but was originally estimated at \$100,000.) The board is very cognizant of this problem and is now most cautious in taking on any new commitments

which involve unknown future financial obligations. The Friends campaign under the leadership of James F. Twaddell raised \$27,000 and we thank those friends for their support. However, we need and would like more friends.

For the membership I would like to thank the staff under the leadership of Mr. Klyberg for their dedication and outstanding performance and also those many volunteers who contributed many hours with the only reward the satisfaction of helping the Society.

Mr. George C. Davis and Mr. Lawrence Lanpher are stepping down this year as vice presidents to less active roles. However, both have indicated their willingness to serve in other capacities; so their wise counsel and knowledge will not be totally lost. I for one have appreciated their support.

Inflation continues to be the culprit and one of the most pressing problems of the Society because our day to day costs continue to escalate without any corresponding increase in income. We have initiated many businesslike practices to cut expenses and are working on others so we will not have to curtail any of our current programs. However, it still rests ultimately with the membership to provide that needed support and I ask you that it be continued and increased.

Thank you.
DUNCAN HUNTER MAURAN

Annual Report of the Treasurer

While certain positive trends in our finances have developed, we are not out of the woods yet. The year ending June 1976 saw the most critical of our cash flow problems end after we no longer served as contractor for the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission. Similarly and partly as a result of this, our endowment level began to come back with improving market conditions. We began the year with a consolidated fund of \$600,000; it is now up to \$690,000. By the end of the fiscal year our substantial investment of nearly \$90,000 in the restoration of Gaspee House concluded, but income from its rental units had barely begun to produce.

We finished the year with an operating deficit of \$43,442. Chief contributors to that situation were short falls in income production from endowment (\$4,000) — dues (\$7,000) — City of Providence (\$1,000) — annual giving (\$1,500) — special events (\$3,000) — library fees (\$1,500) — and rentals (\$6,000) — for a total of \$24,000. Among factors leading to the \$20,000 overrun in expenses were salaries and payroll taxes, increases in heat, equipment, telephone, grounds and buildings.

Canvassing options available for improving our picture does not produce a wide range of choices for action. They are really limited to two directions — first to obtain a larger appropriation from state government for support of our library operation — second to increase the number of people belonging to the Society which would have impact

on both dues and annual giving. There is of course always the hope of a generous bequest to the endowment fund, but that is an imprecise and uncertain program. Sale of the Gaspee House and the return of our capital endowment would help substantially.

Basic to our dilemma and central to our strategy for Aldrich House is that both John Brown House and our Library are high cost and low public visibility operations. A major portion of our funds goes to looking after elm trees, repaving brick walks and walls, cutting lawns and supporting a house which though a spectacular one with nationally significant collections, is admittedly a limited public attraction. Even allowing for differences in location and other factors we still must face the reality that Newport's mansions draw over 600,000 visitors while we attract 6,000. Comparison with the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design perhaps is more apt — only three blocks away, the museum received over 70,000 visitors last year.

A house museum by definition is a narrowly focused exhibition which doesn't change very much. We still feel it is the appropriate use for John Brown House; we wouldn't have it any other way; but costs are colossal and the return from admissions is not great. Similarly, an important collection like our library holdings requires a professional staff and a sturdy building replete with sophisticated environmental and security systems. Good library service is just something a community tends to expect and not to wonder how it all comes about.

Therefore, for major public impact, for visibility, contact, activity, and a changing parade of events and exhibits, we believe Aldrich House can become our major showcase to the Rhode Island community. We are depending on it to boost door receipts, membership, and annual giving. If it happens, it won't take place overnight, but by all odds, it's our best hope yet.

GEORGE H. CICMA

Financial Statement for Year Ending June 1976

OPERATING BUDGET:	INCOME
Investments	\$ 38,254.20
Dues	37,606.75
State of R.I.	44,000.00
State Council Arts	10,000.00
City of Providence	2,000.00
Annual giving	28,413.34
Patriotic societies	100.00
Outside services	4,445.38
Misc.	9.20
Preservation Commission	3,788.00
Library fees	1,420.10
JBH admissions	5,429.87
Special lectures	2,411.62
Rentals	482.50

Special events	4,189.59
TOTAL	\$ 182,550.55

EXPENSES	
Salaries	\$ 102,816.53
Pension, General	8,565.20
Monahan	5,416.58
Employee Taxes	10,441.86
Blue Cross	4,009.51
Workmans Compensation	763.00
Heat	8,160.57
Electricity	7,608.35
Housekeeping	1,138.68
Equipment	4,388.20
Grounds	3,264.72
Buildings	4,366.35
Insurance	3,620.00
Maintenance reserve	1,328.55
Director's fund	1,787.98
Accounting	5,556.53
Supplies	3,768.05
Postage	2,149.50
Telephone	5,677.22
Xerox	2,814.44
Investment fees	18.00
Audit	-0-
Fund raising	2,482.50
Promotion	1,806.74
Library	2,823.14
Microfilm	784.46
Museum	4,705.49
Membership	2,928.17
Newsletter	3,029.26
R.I. History Magazine	11,171.46
Lectures	672.36
Misc.	2,256.14
Outside services	3,067.09
Special lectures	1,218.20
Special events	1,387.78

\$ 225,992.61

DEFICIT (\$ 43,442.06)

ALDRICH HOUSE	INCOME
Endowment	\$ 11,534.59
Grant	10,000.00

\$ 21,534.59

EXPENSES	
Gardens	\$ 5,975.60
Building	
Telephone	425.93
Insurance	1,500.00
Equipment	323.75
Security	2,545.27

Electricity	856.31
Heat	327.92
Housekeeping	-0-
Hardware	283.58
Staff	27,600.00
Administration	1,000.00
TOTAL	\$ 40,838.36

SPECIAL PROJECT FUND BALANCES

Library book fund	\$ 10,766.07
Chace Fund	2,812.22
Publications	9,419.86
Special gifts	-0-
Maintenance reserve	938.00
John Brown House Fund	1,917.40
State newspaper microfilm	(5,879.33)
Special museum fund	(5,035.36)
Cataloguing	(3,047.91)
Aldrich exhibition	13,824.30
Petty cash	25.00
Nathanael Greene Papers	13,418.38
Capital improvements	(1,415.55)
Black History	(7,442.41)

Annual Report of the Director

Measured by almost any standard the year 1976 was one of fulfillment for the Rhode Island Historical Society. Against the multicolored background of Rhode Island's celebration of the nation's Bicentennial — in which the Society was a heavy contributor — stands a substantial array of singular accomplishments, some of them several years in the making.

The American Association of Museums has granted museum accreditation status to John Brown House, recognizing our program for high standards of professionalism in the manner in which our collections are housed, managed and interpreted. The National Park Service, Department of the Interior has conferred the status of National Landmark upon Aldrich House, noting its connection to Senator Nelson W. Aldrich and the contributions of the senator and his family to the political, economic and cultural life of our nation. With a three-year grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities we have begun our long awaited Business and Industrial Archives project, and the first volume of the *Papers of General Nathanael Greene* has appeared.

Substantial accomplishment was registered in every area of our staff's activity. Mrs. Chudacoff, our librarian, has a report detailing the growth of our library's collection, its use, and the progress made in book cataloguing. In our museum program our present year's gains were scored in the area of membership events under the direction of our assistant director, Mrs. Fox, while a team led by our

new curator Mr. Campbell laid plans for the development of Aldrich House and our new exhibition program.

Mrs. Fox coordinated our regular lecture series and the Forum as well as introduced a new program of evening and day classes offering a broad variety of history and decorative arts topics. The classes were well received in the spring and autumn seasons. Mrs. Fox devised the thematic materials for our FRIENDS campaign and produced new brochures for John Brown House, children's tours, and membership recruitment. She also organized the successful turn of the century garden party at Aldrich House, our fall open house reception, and the annual Christmas party. In addition she played a key role in arranging the Reeves exhibition, edited our newsletter, issued press releases, and worked on a number of grant proposals. She was the principal author of our NEH grant for the opening exhibition at Aldrich House. Over 2500 people attended these membership events; over two hundred and fifty new memberships were taken out.

Since joining us last May as museum curator, Christopher Campbell has addressed his attentions to working with architect Zane Anderson in development of renovation plans for Aldrich House and for sketching outlines of the opening exhibit. Working with our registrar Thomas Brennan, Mr. Campbell has become acquainted with our collections and has supervised various loans to other exhibitions, while developing a collections policy for our holdings. In September designer Edwin Gregory joined our team on a grant made possible by the arts employment program of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts. In December he became a regular member of the staff. Mr. Gregory's chief responsibility is as an exhibit preparator. He created the prototype exhibition system displayed at our fall open house and remodeled our little exhibit area at John Brown House for the show of the Reeves Collection of Chinese export porcelain graciously loaned us by Washington and Lee University. He is now at work on a new show for John Brown House of objects given to the Society in the last ten years as well as planning for the first Aldrich House exhibit.

Also joining the John Brown House staff this past year were Dorothy Hiller and Kate Waterman. Dorothy had been a volunteer docent at the House for some time as well as a regular weekend staff person at Slater Mill Historic Site. As head tour guide she is responsible for scheduling tours and the interpretation of John Brown House. She also provides us back-up help on a variety of membership record duties. Miss Hiller replaced Frieda Place and William Pacheco who had previously conducted the tour program at John Brown House. Mrs. Waterman became the Director's secretary when Virginia Catton retired last May. Mrs. Catton gave the Society many years of service both at John Brown House and at the Library.

In May Mrs. Charles Reynolds who had devised several museum education programs for us joined the staff of the Worcester Historical Society. We were sorry to lose Mame's services.

Two major projects in Mr. Cone's domain were happily completed. Gaspee House has been renovated and landscaped. Five rental units were created and Williams Street

has a new address of distinction. A foundation grant made it possible to create a good-looking parking area at John Brown House, providing parking for nearly twenty cars, while improving the clutter around our side entrance considerably. Carl Papino and Jeffrey Quaranta assist Mr. Cone in caring for our buildings and grounds; they replaced William Corrigan and Mark Russo about mid-year.

As an historical society, certainly one of the key indicators of how well we are fulfilling our excuse for existence is to measure the amount of history we are producing. Perhaps it is a distortion to talk about a "product" in connection with a scholarly organization. If we have anything approaching a product, however, it is in the form of works of history. Chief among the works of history we produce is our quarterly magazine, *Rhode Island History*. This year we have a new editor, our librarian, Nancy Chudacoff. Noel Conlon continues to preen and prune the copy and Marsha Peters has handled the difficult task of illustrating the issues. Our major product this year has been volume one of *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, begun four and three-quarters years ago. We are absolutely pleased and proud of the results. We offer congratulations to our team of editors and researchers Richard K. Showman, Margaret E. Cobb, Robert E. McCarthy, Joyce A.E. Boulind, Noel P. Conlon, Nathaniel N. Shipton and David Shields. We also take pride in the continuing flow of town preservation plans accomplished by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission. Many of them were done under our aegis when we acted as a contractor to the state of Rhode Island; all of them have used our library sources, particularly our graphics, liberally and with great effect. This past year over a third of Rhode Island cities and towns published local histories as part of the Bicentennial celebration. Half a dozen other works appeared. It would be nearly impossible for us to account for the thousands of hours given by our staff on behalf of the Society to these efforts. I can only assure you that members' dues money and our state appropriation which underwrites part of the support of our library has been returned to the people of Rhode Island manifold in the form of published information. It is our hope soon with the help of David Dumas to finish preparation of Brad Swan's edition of Roger Williams' letters.

Needless to say the job of the director is one filled with the activity of coordinating a host of details involved with the day to day running of our publication program, our library, our grounds and buildings and our expanding museum program. Fortunately, and obviously, a great deal of the primary responsibility is being well carried out by those directly in charge. I think we have one of the best staffs possible; I am personally grateful to them and the Society is truly in their debt for the exemplary efforts and long hours they perform. The planning team consisting of staff drawn from both John Brown House and the Library, which is putting together ideas for the opening exhibit at Aldrich House has been one of the best examples of staff cooperation I can think of as well as a very exhilarating experience in historical interpretation.

Running the business affairs of the Society fills an

absorbing segment of the director's time, too. With a staff of twenty-five and a budget of nearly \$300,000 to administer, there can be no doubt we are running a small business. Paying our bills, crediting our income, is all made easier with the help of our business manager Frederic L. Chase, Jr.; keeping track of other details, not the least of which is preparing and recording decisions of our committees and trustees, is aided immensely by the skill, tact and interest of my secretary, Kate Waterman.

This past year, in addition to administering grants for the Greene Papers and the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society and applying for new grants like the one for our Business Archives, the director taught a spring and summer course on museums and historical societies at University of Rhode Island, wrote two magazine articles, a book review, lectured frequently and served on a variety of boards and commissions.

On our horizon for the year ahead we are to be much engrossed by readying Aldrich House. If all goes well we should see volume two of *The Greene Papers* completed. We shall need to pay close attention to our fund raising. Both our annual giving and membership dues programs require vigilance and energetic pursuit. Though it is somewhat improved we still have a cash flow problem. Our efforts at membership growth and better performance in annual giving do not seem to succeed as we would like them to. The staff can prepare pamphlets, letters, and prospect lists, but only members who have personal friendships can make these recruiting and giving programs work. The staff has done well with foundation grants, raising over \$180,000 since July, but grants are not enough. They are for one-time projects and very specific in their application. We need general funds such as those raised by increased numbers of members and annual giving. We hope to enlist more members in this area in the year to come.

While we don't anticipate appreciable staff growth in numbers, we certainly want to do more in attending to the salary needs of the people we have. Also though our attention must focus on Benevolent Street we must be aware that our library has reached its growth limits and we must begin our plans for expanding into the adjacent property that is now ours to use. Consolidating our efforts and our resources will probably mean the sale as soon as is feasible of the restored rental property of Gaspee House.

All of these measures will require not only the staff's best efforts but those of members who serve on our Board and committees as well. Fortunately we have been blessed by a great many workers and volunteers without whose help and generous contributions of time we would accomplish much less. To our board, our committees, our volunteers, we offer deepest thanks. To those no longer among us who worked so hard — like Mary and Norman Bolles and Brad Swan — we can pledge renewed appreciation of their unselfish contributions by extending our own efforts to make successful the causes they supported so long and so well. Much has been accomplished; there is much to be done.

ALBERT T. KLYBERG

Annual Report of the Librarian

Nineteen seventy-six was a year of change, of rewards and of progress for the library. In the area of change Nancy Peace, librarian for five years, left to pursue a doctor of library science degree. Under her leadership the library moved into a respected and highly visible position in the Rhode Island library community.

Activities of the Bicentennial year proved rewarding to the staff as many projects which utilized our collections came to fruition. We were pleased that so many projects could have been done only with our resources and our help.

Another more tangible reward came in September from the National Endowment for the Humanities. After three years of effort we received a grant of \$69,000 spread over a three-year period, to sort, arrange and describe our important collections of commercial, business and industrial records. Harold E. Kemble, Jr., an experienced archivist, joined the staff in September under the grant. B. Michael Zuckerman, Brown University Ph.D. candidate and expert on nineteenth-century Rhode Island businesses, is assisting Mr. Kemble. Nathaniel N. Shipton, manuscript curator, is devoting one day a week to the project. Two collections are already completely processed and work has begun on the Saylesville collections, largest of the group.

The Society's history over the past 154 years has involved progress on one front or another. For our first 150 years most emphasis was placed on collecting, and we constantly acquired new materials. Unfortunately few of our materials ever were arranged according to accepted library or archival standards. As we hired professional curators — first in manuscripts, then in graphics — they were faced with over 150 years of accumulated items. Not until the end of 1975 were we able to acquire the services of a full-time professional book cataloger to tackle a backlog of over 100,000 volumes, continuing work Nancy Peace had begun on a part-time basis. After a full year of work our cataloger, Tevis Kimball, and her assistant, Ursula McFarland, processed over 3,000 volumes. These 3,000 volumes are books which were not previously accessible or which only had limited accessibility. I wish I could convey my excitement each time I see a new card placed in the catalog signifying that that title can now be easily found, easily located on the shelf and easily returned to its proper place. Anyone who looks in the catalog can see the progress we have made. We cannot yet be complacent, however. Three thousand volumes represent only three percent of our collection.

Rewards and progress are not without accompanying problems. As our library has increased its visibility — becoming known as *the* place for Rhode Island historical and genealogical materials — demands upon the staff by letter, by telephone, and especially by in-person visitors have often made it difficult for our curators in manuscripts and graphics to spend as much time as they wish processing and arranging collections and preparing guides and bibliographies. Still both Marsha Peters in graphics and Nathaniel Shipton in manuscripts made significant

strides in processing material.

The graphics division, headed by Marsha Peters, serviced 540 patrons, thirty-seven in film; answered 544 telephone calls, thirty-seven about film; and responded to sixty-five letters. Local television stations used twenty-five pieces of film from our archives. Two books published in 1976 made extensive use of our graphics: Johnette Isham's *DISCOVER PROVIDENCE*, a visual handbook for school children; and Roger Brett's *TEMPLES OF ILLUSION*, a popular history of Providence theater. The Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission's published reports were heavily illustrated with our maps and photographs. A written policy for use of graphic material established clear guidelines for researchers to follow.

Reorganization in the film archive progressed under Marsha Peters' supervision. Amy Zehnder who left the staff in December processed and logged television newsfilm.

Marsha Peters attended two meetings of the American Studies Association's Standing Committee on Bibliographic Needs and Policies and one meeting of the New England Document Conservation Center's Advisory committee. She presided over a workshop on archival storage equipment at the Society of American Archivists' annual convention and presented a paper at Brown University on the use of still photographs as historical documents.

Nathaniel Shipton, manuscript curator, assisted 561 researchers, wrote fifty-four letters and answered 105 telephone inquiries. He processed thirty-four collections and fifty-nine individual manuscripts. A written policy was also prepared for manuscript users.

Mr. Shipton lectured on Rhode Island in the War of 1812 as part of the annual forum series, attended the fall meeting of the New England Archivists and served on a subcommittee of the Rhode Island Bicentennial Commission.

The reference staff was busy handling demands of the Bicentennial year. 6,215 persons visited the library while 2,607 telephoned and 733 requested information by letter. Of 1,003 researchers visiting the library for the first time, thirty-three percent were from colleges and universities, thirty-one percent pursued genealogical research, twenty-seven percent sought information on general topics of Rhode Island history, and ten percent were high school students. Twenty-three percent of daily visitors indicated that they were doing genealogical research.

Lisa Krop, reference assistant, left the Society in May. Susan Blain assumed responsibility for the reference desk in June. The position of reference librarian was left vacant in August when Nancy F. Chudacoff became librarian.

As librarian, Nancy Chudacoff continued work on refining the library's book collections. Duplicates and books which did not fit the library's collecting policy were sold at auction several times during the year, providing funds to acquire Rhode Island and New England materials.

With the February issue Nancy Chudacoff became editor of *RHODE ISLAND HISTORY*. Working with Marsha Peters as picture editor and Noel P. Conlon as copy editor, the journal's format was altered slightly and a new feature "From the Collections" was added to display images from our graphics collections.

Mrs. Chudacoff attended meetings of the New England Archivists, the American Historical Association, Rhode Island Library Association (RILA) and the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians. She spoke about collecting local history and genealogy at an Adult Book Meeting sponsored by the Providence Public Library and her article "The Revolution and the Town" was published in the August issue of *RHODE ISLAND HISTORY*. Along with other responsibilities the library staff and the director continued to seek new collections to fill the many gaps that exist in our sources. A problem of our successful collecting efforts over so many years is that we are now virtually out of space. Work space for new staff and projects has been carved out of stack space. Books, manuscripts, film and graphics are encroaching upon each other's territory. We have almost no room for more collections but we cannot stop collecting. What is offered today will be far more expensive tomorrow or probably not available at all. As you know, the Society now owns property south of the library to Williams Street. We must begin planning now for an addition. We can deal with a space problem in no other way than by creating more space.

Significant gifts and additions to the library collections, which added to our already overflowing shelves, included the important bequest of Bradford F. Swan, including not only his personal papers, but many rare and valuable seventeenth- and eighteenth-century manuscripts, broadsides and books. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century books from Mr. Swan filled gaps in our own collections or replaced worn copies with others in better condition.

Gifts to our manuscript division included Norman Herreshoff's donation of Herreshoff-Brown family manuscripts. The Women's Christian Temperance Union donated their extensive archives which had long been here on deposit. The Plymouth Union Congregational Church also transferred previous deposits to gift status.

Business records continued to flow in. From New Jersey came fifteen books of the North Kingstown Bank for 1823-1860. Warning of an imminent business closing sent staff dashing to rescue twenty cubic feet of Rumford Chemical Company records, a collection whose track we had followed for some time.

The Society took advantage of an unusual number of opportunities to buy outstanding manuscripts. We were especially pleased to obtain records of Hydraulion No. 1, a private fire fighting company in early nineteenth-century Providence. Our feeling of accomplishment doubled when these rare and sought-after records were placed on a shelf beside those of Hydraulion No. 2.

In all, through gift or purchase the manuscript division entered forty-three accessions in 1976. Since a number of these contained multiple collections they resulted in sixty-two new collections and individual items.

Our graphics division also had some valuable accessions. Mr. and Mrs. David Walker kindly donated an important collection of glass plate and film negatives by Avery Lord of aerial views and activities in Rhode Island during the 1920s and 1930s. Dennis Tillberg gave modern silk screen prints made from original photographs in our

collections. To our film collections we added 1973 TV newsfilm and scripts from WPRI. We purchased "We're Here To Stay," a film by Oren Jacoby about the strike of black students at Brown University in April 1975.

As you can tell, we had an active year on many fronts. No annual report is complete, however, without thanking — and deservedly so — those who helped an organization accomplish its objectives — in our case collecting, caring for, and making available research materials for Rhode Island history. I have already mentioned some of the staff members who have worked so hard. Let me also thank Georgeanne Lima who joined the staff in September as library assistant and Doris Sher, the librarian's secretary. It has been my pleasure to begin working as librarian with this dedicated group of people.

As in past years our staff has received invaluable assistance from volunteers, interns, work-study students, graduate assistants and Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) high school students. Among the volunteers I would like to mention Irene Eddy, a loyal worker for six years now, Jeffrey Osborne, who has been in almost every day since summer, Mrs. Leslie Allen Jones who arranged the marvelous exhibit of deltiology (postcards) and Tracy G. Thurber who continued his diligent work on our currency collection. Students who have contributed to our efforts in processing and organizing materials, filing and copying, and keeping the building clean were Angela Sciotti, Barry Harrison, Patricia McDonough, Leo Blackman, Jayne Savage and Debra Stephens in graphics and film; Kate Dunigan, Christine Simmons and Lisa Molho in manuscripts; Carl Machado and Mark Henderson in janitorial services and Rochelle Monteiro and Debby Faria in the reading room. Marcia LeFranc and Mary Ellen Finnerty helped with general library tasks.

The library committee deserves special appreciation for the time and especially the support they have given. Committee members have helped us formulate new policies to make the library operate more efficiently and have backed the staff when problems arose. Our thanks go to Franklin S. Coyle, Mrs. Sydney L. Wright, Mrs. Rufus C. Fuller, Edwin C. Brown, Philip B. Simonds, Joseph Fogarty, Mrs. C. Richard Steedman, Tracy G. Thurber and David Dumas. I look forward to working with them in the year to come.

Although the Bicentennial year is now behind us its effects remain. It served to awaken interest in local history and to increase demands for products and materials of historical research. In 1977 I look forward to working with the staff to continue to provide the stuff of which histories are made.

NANCY F. CHUDACOFF

Annual Report of Museum Program

John Brown House — Miss Dorothy Hiller, head tour guide, has been assisted by a loyal group of volunteers

including Rosemary Commette, Clara McQuaide, Dorothy Budlong, Janet Woolman, Ann Sullivan, Marie Cooper, Susan McKeough, Frieda Place, and Desirée Caldwell. In addition to helping with research and cataloguing, our student interns — William Butler, Susan Chapdelaine, Barbara Grossman, and Lynn Fitchet — guided many a summer visitor through the House. Attendance during 1976 included 3,112 individual visitors and 2,892 group visitors for a total of 6,004.

We have made only slight modifications to John Brown House room settings, assembling our major pieces of Rhode Island Queen Anne furniture in the southwest bedroom on the second floor, and placing a labelled Rawson Brothers dresser — on loan from Mr. Joseph K. Ott — in the Zachariah Allen bedroom.

Major changes over the year past have occurred in the special exhibition area on the first floor where, in spring, Mrs. Reynolds installed an exhibit on the Brown family including an informative slide show used as an introduction to the House for visitors, and recreated Edward Carrington's early nineteenth-century China trade office.

In November, with the addition of Edwin Gregory to the staff as assistant curator of exhibitions, we installed "Selections from the Reeves Porcelain Collection," involving a total revamping of the special exhibition area, including installation of a new lighting system. We are not only happy with this particular exhibition but also with the fact that the space is now adaptable for many different types of exhibitions and will now be used for small changing shows appropriate to John Brown House.

Revelers at our successful Christmas party were treated to, among other things, an imaginative installation of our Neapolitan creche figures on the second floor landing.

Aldrich Museum — The staff is currently working closely with architects on new lighting systems and other details in an attempt to create as versatile an exhibition space as possible.

We are also engaged in compiling a script and lists of appropriate artifacts, manuscripts, and graphics for our first major exhibition, "The Lively Experiment."

Collections — During 1976 the Society received eighteen gifts of museum artifacts, among the most important a 1770 Tower musket from the DAR, a collection of Rhode Island silverware from Gorton Thayer Lippitt, and the third and final installment of Mrs. Henry Dexter Sharpe's collection of Chinese export porcelain. We made one museum purchase and accepted six items on loan.

The Society loaned from its collections to several significant Bicentennial exhibitions — the British grenadier's hat to England's National Maritime Museum for "1776" — the Carrington wallpaper panel to the China Institute and Seattle Museum of Art for "200 Years of China's Contributions to America" — Joseph Stone's portrait of Deborah Sampson Gannett and a sampler by Amy Randell to "Remember the Ladies" — Ann Barton's sampler to William Penn Museum for "Mourning Becomes America" — and Samuel King's portrait of Dr. Isaac Senter to Boston's Museum of Fine Arts for "New England Provincial Painters."

Thomas Brennan, museum registrar, processed 3,800

catalogue cards pertaining to some 630 museum artifacts.

A new museum committee has formed, composed of members from former John Brown House and Aldrich House committees. Its members will continue to be extremely helpful in matters of collecting, deaccessioning, gifts, loans, and exhibition planning.

This year I intend to solve problems of textile storage and thoroughly investigate the possibility of using reproduction fabric in John Brown House rooms. Certain gaps exist in the Society's holdings which we hope to identify and hopefully rectify. I look forward to 1977 as a year of preparation for our new Aldrich Museum and for the satisfaction of creating a program there which will indicate to the public the worthwhile activities of this Society.

Respectfully submitted,
CHRISTOPHER M. CAMPBELL
Curator

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