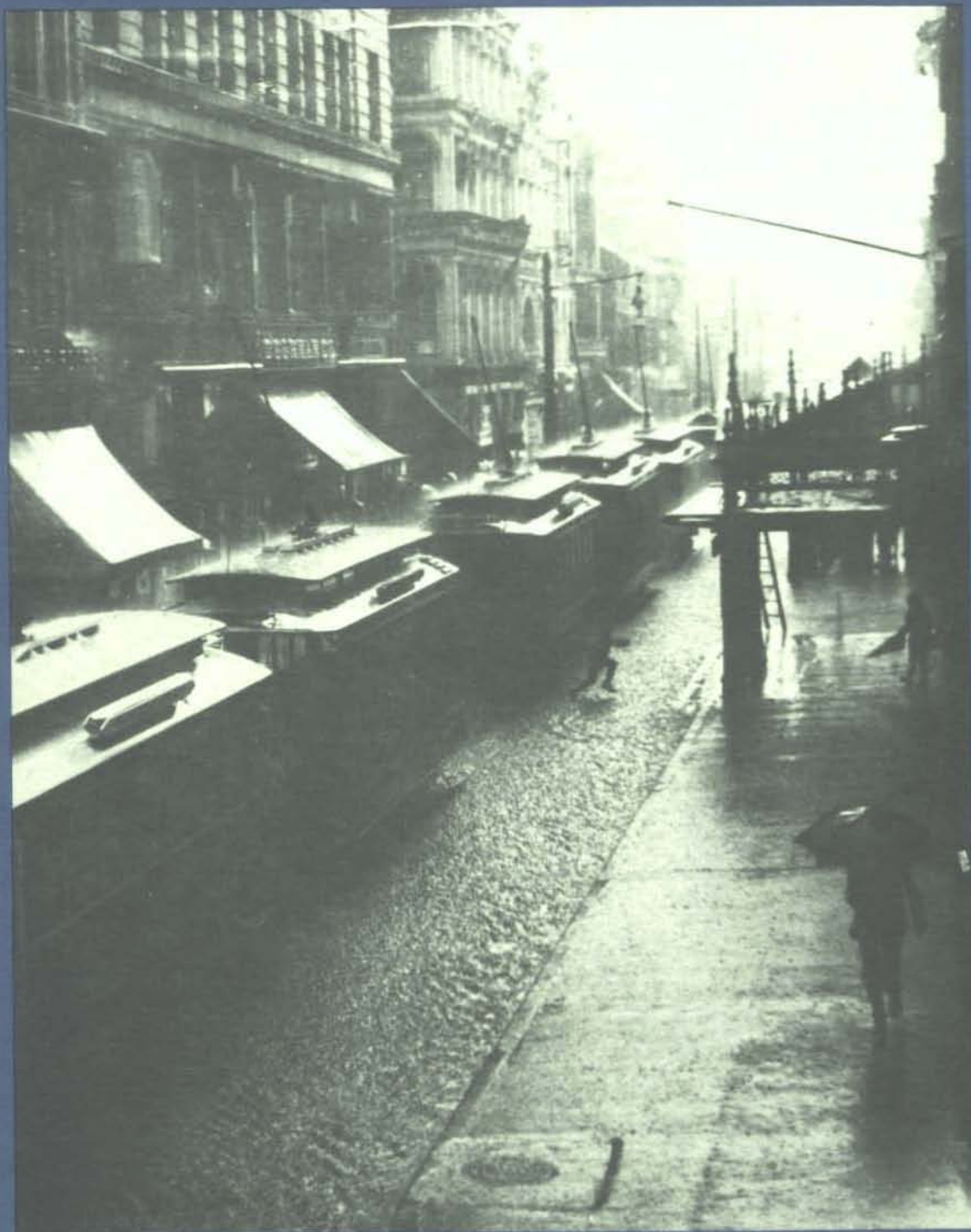




Rhode Island History

Volume 41, Number 1 February 1982





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*View of the East Side of
Providence from across the
Seekonk River. Watercolor by
Edward Lewis Peckham, 1830.
Courtesy of Rhode Island
Historical Society Library
(RHi x3 954).*

Providence: A Century of Greatness,

1832-1932

by George H. Kellner and J. Stanley Lemons*

Providence has been called a number of things, and those who know the city can find some truth in all of them. But, during its century of greatness, it truly earned the respect of New Englanders as a city of industry, a city of homes, and a city of prosperity. What made the century great was the evolution of Providence from a Yankee town to a diverse metropolitan community. Its economy was transformed from commerce to industry and finance, and in the shift Providence gained domination over southern New England.

Having bested Newport in the race to be the state's leading town, Providence faced three major problems: an outmoded town government, under-representation and disfranchisement in the state government, and economic development. The first two required a spasm of violence before solution, while the third engrossed the imagination and toil of the city's inhabitants for the rest of the century.

The town form of government was inadequate for a growing commercial center with a population of nearly 17,000. Still, the voters, who numbered less than 1,000, twice rejected a city charter. But, this was changed by the riot of 1831.

It began on the evening of September 21, with a fight between disorderly sailors out on the town and some blacks living on Olney Street. A black man standing on his steps ordered the sailors to "clear out or he'd shoot." One sailor shouted, "Fire, and be damned!" So, he did, killing the sailor. Because a black man had killed a white man, a mob surged through the street, destroying houses occupied by blacks. The next night an even greater mob went rampaging. After demolishing some houses on Olney Street, the rioters crossed the canal to a poor neighborhood on Smith Street, called Snow Town, and wrecked more houses.

A third night of rioting was followed by a fourth. The desperate authorities summoned the First Light Infantry, but the mob showered the soldiers with rocks, injuring twenty of them. They withdrew to the Smith Street bridge, the sheriff read the Riot Act, and the order to fire was given. Three minutes later the riot had ended. Four of the mob lay dead. The very next day a special town meeting was held which led to the city charter of 1832.

The problem of voting and representation required another decade and a vest-pocket civil war to force a solution. Under the antiquated

*Mr. Kellner is an associate professor of history at Rhode Island College. Mr. Lemons is a professor of history at Rhode Island College. They wish to thank the staffs of the Rhode Island Historical Society Library, Providence Public Library, and the John Hay Library, Brown University, for valuable assistance, and they acknowledge a grant from the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities and a matching grant from Rhode Island College that made possible much of the research for the multi-image production, "Providence: A Century of Greatness, 1832-1932." This paper is a slightly modified version of that work's narrative. They have also collaborated on a history of Rhode Island entitled *Rhode Island: The Independent State* which will be published in the fall of 1982 under the sponsorship of the Rhode Island Historical Society.

The attack on the Cranston Street Arsenal during the Dorr Rebellion from an 1842 broadside depicting the major events in the uprising. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 2).



100 Dollars REWARD.

At a Town Council helden within and for the town of Providence, on Thursday the 22d day of September, A. D. 1831.

Whereas a very serious riot occurred last evening in the north part of the town, which resulted in the death of one person by shooting, and wounding three or four others, the destruction of two houses, and the partial destruction of others, and otherwise disturbing the peace and good order of the town; therefore, in order that the persons concerned in promoting said riot may be brought to justice, and future tranquility secured to the citizens, it is resolved by the Town Council of the town of Providence, that a reward of One Hundred Dollars be paid to any person who shall give such information of the persons engaged in the aforesaid during outrage as may lead to their conviction.

A true copy: Witness,

RICHARD M. FIELD, C. Clerk.

Broadside issued by the Providence Town council following the riots in September 1831. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 1597).

charter of 1663, representation in the General Assembly was so malapportioned that Providence with 23,000 people had four representatives, while villages of a few hundred elected two *each*. Consequently, the rural areas dominated the General Assembly, which refused to change the requirement that one must own \$134 of real estate to be eligible to vote. As this excluded the growing number of propertyless urban workers, it is not surprising that Providence became the center of reform agitation. Repeated attempts to replace the colonial charter had failed. Finally, the reform movement, led by Thomas Wilson Dorr, drew up the People's Constitution, saw it overwhelmingly approved in a referendum, and elected a government. Dorr, the People's governor, was inaugurated in Providence on May 3, 1842. However, the regular state government still existed so that now Rhode Island had one unpopular, legal government and another popularly-elected illegal government. When the charter government refused to budge, Dorr tried to overthrow it by force. His attack on the Cranston Street arsenal fizzled, and he fled the state. He returned in late June to Chepachet to head a force of three hundred, but three-thousand militiamen marched out to end the rebellion. The only fatality was a Massachusetts man who was shot by a fearful militiaman guarding the border at Pawtucket. Nevertheless, the uproar produced the state's first constitution in November 1842.

The First Light Infantry saw action in both the 1831 Riot and the Dorr War, and it volunteered two companies immediately upon hearing President Lincoln's call to arms in 1861. On April 20, 1861, the First Rhode Island Regiment ceremoniously embarked from Providence with Governor William Sprague and Colonel Ambrose E. Burnside at its head.

At the Battle of Bull Run, Rhode Island's regiments were hotly engaged and lost 167 men that day. Sprague had his horse shot from under him, so he retired to Rhode Island having seen all the war he was to see.



Thomas Tefft designed the largest railroad depot in the United States for Providence in 1848. This station stood as a symbol of Providence's dominance in railway transportation for over fifty years. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 376).

By the end of the war, 24,423 Rhode Islanders had served, and Providence was a major source of them. Burnside rose to serve briefly as commander of the Army of the Potomac, but during the war he was responsible for two of the Union's greatest disasters: Fredericksburg (1862) and the Crater at Petersburg (1864). U.S. Grant later wrote: "General Burnside was an officer who was generally liked and respected. He was not, however, fitted to command an army." He was, however, fitted for politics and industry to which he successfully returned after the war.

Armed with a city charter, a new constitution, and the glory of helping preserve the Union, Providence turned its attention to developing its potential. Even before the Civil War, the city's economy had shifted from trading to manufacturing. Foreign commerce steadily declined, and the last China trade ship docked in Providence in 1841. Instead, railroads had arrived. After 1835 the construction of various rail lines brought all industrial sites within twenty-five miles of the city into its grasp. This accelerated and secured the city's growth and supremacy in this region. As a measure of its confidence in the future of rails, Providence built the largest railroad station in the country in 1848. Designed by Thomas Tefft, the elegant Romanesque structure dominated the central city for the next fifty years.

Textiles were the heart of the industrial scene in the city and the state, and were central to the development of a wide range of related enterprises, such as textile machinery, belt, webbing, and pulley manufacturers. Providence's industry came to include foundries, tools, boilers, stoves, locomotives, steam engines, paint, rubber, fire extinguishers, bicycles, and soap.

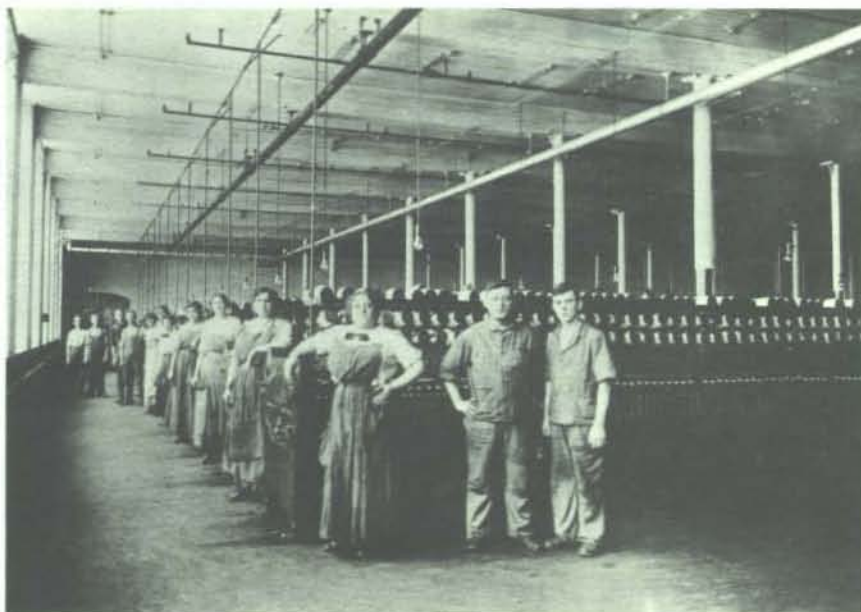
The first cotton spinning mill was begun by Samuel Slater and Moses Brown in Pawtucket in 1792, but by 1815 Rhode Island had a hundred such mills. Textiles were the state's leading industry from the 1820s to the 1920s, but most of it was built by Providence money and governed from headquarters in the city. Providence was never the site of a large

RALLY, BOYS! —OF— RHODE ISLAND, AND JOIN BURNSIDE'S RIFLE BATTALION.

The undersigned having been detailed to open a recruiting office, respectfully informs all those desiring joining Burnside's Rifle Battalion, that their office will be open daily, at
169 WESTMINSTER ST.
Where all able-bodied men who wish, will be immediately received into service.
THE PAY OF PRIVATES IS \$13.00 PER MONTH.
With a bounty from the State of \$15. and
ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS
FROM THE GOVERNMENT, WHEN BRINGING ONLY ONE RECRUIT.
D. S. REMINGTON, WM. A. ARNOLD, Recruiting Officers

A call for volunteers, 1861.
Courtesy of Rhode Island
Historical Society Library
(RHi x3 4082).

Workers pose proudly before their cotton thread twisting machines at the Royal Weaving Company in Pawtucket, ca. 1910–1918. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 1192).



number of textile mills, even though it could boast of having some large mill complexes, such as the Atlantic Mills and the Wanskuck Mills. Instead, it developed a diversified industrial base. The Providence Board of Trade boasted in 1915: "Providence is the first city in the country in the manufacture of woolens and worsted, jewelry and silverware. . . . She has the world's largest tool factory, file factory, engine factory, screw factory, and silverware factory." These firms, called the city's "Five Industrial Wonders of the World," had begun to mingle industrial smoke stacks with church steeples in the skyline even before the Civil War.

First, Jabez Gorham started making silverware in 1831. By the 1890s his company would be the largest manufacturer in the world and capable of casting monuments, such as Bartholdi's statue of Columbus for the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. By then Providence was America's leader in the manufacture of jewelry and silverware.

In 1833 Joseph Brown and his father opened a watch repair and jewelry findings shop, and Lucian Sharpe joined as a partner in 1853. Building upon the invention of precision machine tools, Brown & Sharpe grew into the world's largest manufacturer of machine tools by the 1890s.

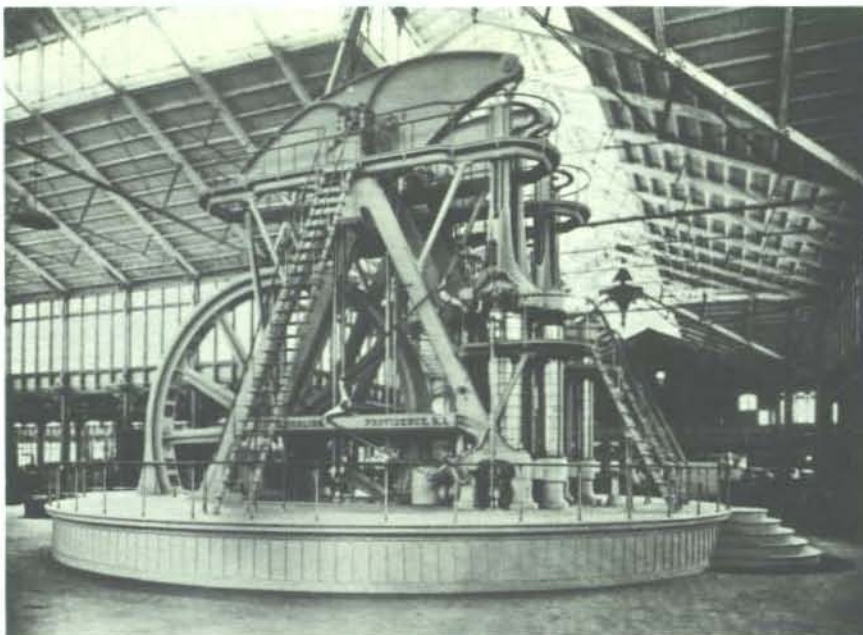
The American Screw Company started in 1838 and developed the first practical machine to make pointed screws in 1849, which soon made it the leading manufacturer of screws. Another business related to the metal trades opened when William T. Nicholson began making files in 1839. He transformed the entire industry by inventing machinery in 1864 to mass-produce high-quality files. By 1897 Nicholson manufactured 60,000 files daily, in 3,000 varieties.

The fifth of the industrial wonders was the Corliss Steam Engine Company. George Corliss came to Providence from Greenwich, Connecticut, in 1844 hoping to get his newly invented harness sewing ma-

chine put into production: but he had to settle for a position as a draftsman and designer in a local firm. In 1857 he began the Corliss Steam Engine Works on Charles Street to manufacture steam engines of the highest perfection incorporating his own inventions. By the Civil War the Corliss Works was the only company capable of milling the ring and bearings for the turret of the revolutionary iron ship, the *Monitor*. In this way Providence had a part in the dramatic naval battle between the *Monitor* and the *Merrimac* in 1862.

The genius of George Corliss symbolized the transformation of Providence industry from water to steam power. Corliss steam engines also became the symbol of Providence invention and manufacturing in the post-Civil War era. A Corliss machine won the prize medal at the Paris Exhibition in 1867, and another engine was the center of attention at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876.

This colossal engine stood five-stories high and generated fourteen-hundred horsepower and drove all the eight-thousand machines in Machinery Hall. The Centennial Exposition opened in a grand ceremony with President Grant and the Emperor of Brazil pulling the lever which set the monster in motion. But contemporaries saw more than a machine: Auguste Bartholdi, the sculptor of the Statue of Liberty, reported to the French Government on the arts in America, saying: "The lines are so grand and beautiful, the play of the movements so skillfully and simply arranged, and the whole machine so harmoniously constructed: that it has the beauty, and almost the grace of the human form." When the exposition came to a close and the giant engine was turned off, Professor Radinger of the Polytechnic of Vienna described the scene: "The people wanted to cheer, as they had done on other occasions; but instead of bursting out with joy, they choked with emotion; the hurrah



This Corliss engine provided power for 8,000 machines at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876. Courtesy of Providence Public Library.



*Joseph Banigan (1839–1898).
From Richard Bayles, ed.,
History of Providence County,
Rhode Island (1891). Courtesy of
Rhode Island Historical Society
Library (RHi x3 4226).*

stuck in their throats, and some of them were so overcome that they shed tears."

The perfection of the Corliss steam engines cast a spell over Providence's industrial imagination. They produced steam boilers, locomotives, and when the automobile arrived, the steam auto. In fact, at the turn of the century, Providence had six auto and truck makers. Most, however, manufactured steam-driven vehicles, which turned out to be a dead-end road of development. Despite such an occasional false direction, Providence's economic base was sufficiently diversified that it escaped the extreme calamities that befell most single-industry cities in New England in the 1920s. She had become the financial center of southern New England, and a host of banking institutions emerged. By the end of the nineteenth century, Providence claimed to have the highest per capita savings in the nation. Many corporations had their headquarters here, and their demands for white-collar workers created other enterprises and services.

Most industries were owned by the Yankee establishment, but one conspicuous exception was an Irish immigrant named Joseph Banigan, who came to Providence in 1847. After only one year of schooling, he went to work at age nine in the factory of the American Screw Works. Later he was a jeweler's apprentice before beginning the manufacture of rubber bottle stoppers. Banigan adopted a vulcanizing process and became manager of the Goodyear-India Rubber Bottle Stopper Company of Boston. Eventually he rose to become the president of the U. S. Rubber Company in the 1890s. He established the Joseph Banigan Rubber Company, was president of five corporations, erected the Banigan Building in 1896, which was the largest and first steel-framed building in Providence, and lived in a mansion on Wayland Square.

At the time of the Civil War, Providence's 51,000 residents still lacked most essential urban services. But that began to change with the election of Thomas A. Doyle as mayor in 1864. Doyle, a Providence-born

*A group of Providence policemen
patrolling the city on bicycles
as part of the improvements
initiated by Mayor Thomas
Doyle. Photograph by Wm.
Mills. Courtesy of Providence
Public Library.*



Unitarian and Mason, recognized that an expanding community required increased government. However, people out to make money did not always see it his way. For the dedication of the Doyle monument one reporter wrote: "He has been opposed at one time by Democrats, and by Republicans, then by Independents, then by chief tax payers, then by every department of the city government. . . . He has been opposed by every journal published in Providence." Nevertheless, during his nineteen terms that ended in 1888, Doyle transformed the police from an ununiformed watch to a professional force with expanded powers, drastically improved the fire department and supplied it with the latest equipment, worked tirelessly for a municipal water system with reservoirs and the latest pumps, and labored for the completion of an adequate sewer system that would prevent the Cove and Providence River from becoming a cesspool. As a sign of its new power, the municipal government moved into a palatial new City Hall in 1878.

While the City Hall symbolized a growing government, an important task was the improvement of the quality of urban life through advances in municipal health and recreation. Between 1856 and 1932, Edwin M. Snow and Charles V. Chapin gave Providence a litany of "firsts" in public health in America: first bacteriological laboratory, first complete medical examinations for the entire school population, first to abandon fumigation for control of contagious disease, first systematic medical care for the poor, first city hospital to adopt aseptic nursing. As Commissioner of Health, Chapin was involved with everything from garbage disposal to pure foods. He had the city post five-hundred signs against spitting. While some regarded him as a "harmless sanitary crank," Chapin placed Providence in the forefront of municipal health in America.

They also needed parks and playgrounds. In the 1850s the principal park and showpiece was the promenade encircling the Cove. By the 1870s, however, the Cove drove people away. As the surrounding land



As commissioner of health, Charles V. Chapin had the city post 500 of these signs. Courtesy of Norman S. Watson (RHi x3 4223).

Lithograph view of Providence from the south, 1849. Drawn on stone by C. W. Burton after a drawing by E. Whitefield. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 1373).

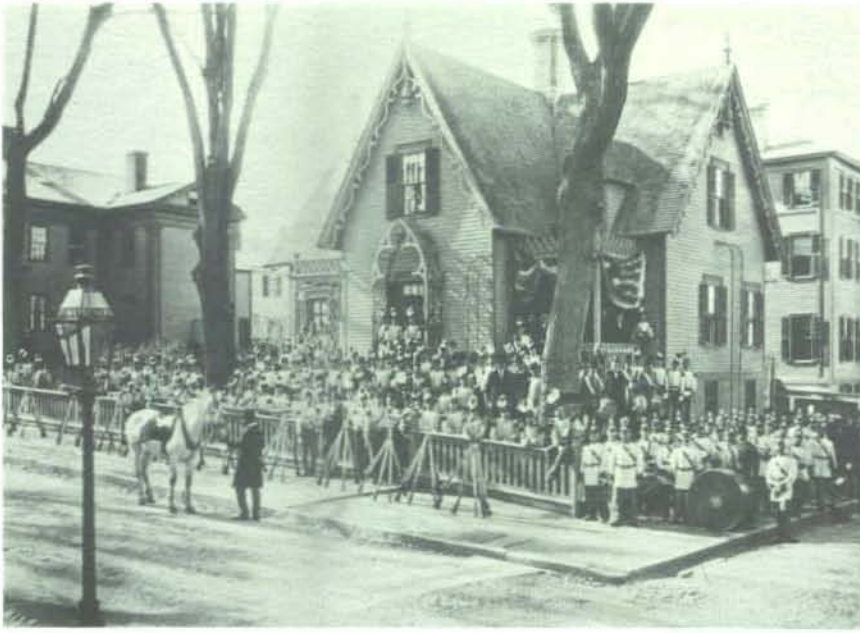


Hard-working men labored to transform the condemned cove into a railroad yard. Workers paused to pose for a series of construction photographs while building a channel for the Moshassuck River. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 4233).



gave way to more factories, tenement houses, and rail freight yards, the Cove became the city's summer stinkpot. The Public Park Association was formed in the 1880s to save the Cove from railroad encroachment, but the courts ruled in favor of the railroads. So, it was filled, railyards installed, and the new Union Station erected in 1894 on the site. Thomas Tefft's old station was abandoned and then conveniently burned. Other park sites lay undeveloped. Even Betsy Williams's farm was reluctantly accepted for a park because it was "so far out in the wilderness." Not until the late 1880s did the Park Commissioners hire H.W.S. Cleveland to develop Roger Williams Park into one of the finest in New England. It became the playground of the people. On summer nights in the 1890s, crowds of 10,000 would flock to the park to listen to the famous American Band under the direction of D.W. Reeves. The American Band was a fixture in nearly every civic, festive, and political gathering or parade.

Parades were one way that a city divided by geography, ethnicity, and wealth created a sense of community. Providence boasted that it, like Rome, was built on seven hills; but this geography fostered both a sense of loyalty to the immediate neighborhood and a feeling of city-wide division. For example, at the time of the charter some wanted to incorporate the West Side as a separate town called "Westminster." Later as immigrants and industrial expansion competed for space, neighborhoods emerged with distinct economic and ethnic identities. Old-line Yankees reigned on College Hill and the East Side. The growing industrial and professional middle class developed the Elmwood section, and surrounding these were the neighborhoods of the industrial workers amid the smokestacks and towers of factories and mills. These people, too, were divided by religion and nationality.



It was one of William Clark's last requests to have the American Brass Band play at his wake. Afterwards, the band members posed in front of his house on the corner of Williams and Thayer streets in Providence, 1912. Courtesy of Providence Public Library.

In 1830, Providence had been a native-born, white, Protestant town, although about ten percent of its population was black. Irish immigration before the Civil War began changing that condition, and by the end of the century thousands of Irish, Italians, French-Canadians, Poles, Jews, Portuguese, and others were arriving. In 1913, for example, Providence had become an official port of entry; Fabre Line ships with direct connection with the Mediterranean landed nearly 12,000 immigrants here. Seven years later, nearly two-thirds of Providence's population was foreign born or had foreign-born parents. Providence was the fifth largest port of entry in the nation, Catholics outnumbered Protestants, and the signs of ethnic diversity were everywhere. The town of Roger Williams had become a city of immigrants.

The immigrants performed the heavy labor on the streets, sweated in foundries, manned textile machines, and worked at jewelry benches. They also were a concern to city builders. As one resident expressed it: "The tide of immigration . . . excites grave thought if not apprehension. . . . A very large number of these immigrants appear to be locating in one city. . . . Such a course . . . will cause overcrowding and lead to increasing vice and poverty."

While poverty reduced some to scrounging in the dumps, adequate housing was the main problem. The Irish had congregated around the harbor and Federal Hill. Later arrivals and industrial expansion intensified crowding and created ethnic slums north along the Moshassuck and west along the Woonasquatucket. Largely through the efforts of Charles Chapin, Providence enacted a housing code that limited the size of houses to eighty percent of lot-size and mandated one fresh-air window for every room. Consequently, the two- and three-decker houses mushroomed across Providence's West Side. The swift rise of



A Portuguese woman and child arrive in Providence. The city became an official port of entry after 1913. Courtesy of the Providence Journal.

hundreds of these tenements caused the Board of Trade to warn: "We are building up the center of our city in metropolitan fashion, and yet it is being surrounded by miles of kindling wood." The East Side was spared both tenements and immigrants because appreciable development did not begin until the tramway and trolley tunnel made the hill more accessible. One East Sider observed: "I had never before realized how thankful we should be. That bothersome old hill had, after all, preserved our quaint buildings." Many proclaimed that Providence was the "City of Homes," and proudly declared, "Probably no city in America has so large a variety of private homes, and they serve to show how much more comfort can be enjoyed living in a city like ours, with leaves and foliage, which are productive of pure air. This is more than can be possibly secured in cities like New York or Chicago." In fact, Providence actually had a low rate of private ownership; by 1930 only 32.2 percent of the homes were owner-occupied.

Improvements in transportation brought the suburbs to city dwellers being squeezed by new arrivals. Between 1861 and 1894, horse-drawn omnibuses gave way to the street railway and they in turn surrendered to the electric trolley of the Rhode Island Company and its king, Marsden J. Perry. The system was a huge success, operated 313 miles of track and in 1923 carried over 138 million passengers. The automobile promoted suburbanization and at the same time further congested city streets to the point where one observer commented that it was "down-right hazardous to be a pedestrian." Although the city built new bridges, widened streets, removed the produce market to a new location along

Many immigrants lived in dwellings similar to these on Acorn Street in the Federal Hill section of Providence. Courtesy of the Providence Journal.





The immensely popular electric trolley replaced horse-drawn omnibuses. Photograph by Frank Warren Marshall, ca. 1900–1905. Courtesy of the Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 1905).

the Woonasquatucket, and cut the transit tunnel to Thayer Street, traffic congestion remained unsolved. Various plans were advanced to build easy grade streets up College Hill and even to construct a subway system. D.F. Sherman of the Rhode Island Company told the Providence Board of Trade: "Subways are the thing, gentlemen, now for heaven's sake go at it—right now is the time. We cannot solve the traffic problems without subways."

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, people spilled out of Providence's 5.4 square miles, but these towns were not always able to meet the demand for urban services. Consequently, between 1868 and 1919, Providence annexed almost thirteen square miles, containing ninety-five thousand people and forty-five industrial establishments.

Expansion accentuated the divisions within the city. The wealthy lived in mansions and comfortable homes on tree-lined streets, belonged to exclusive clubs, played on the shores at Newport or sailed out of Squantum, enrolled their children in private schools, and were treated to intellectual fare at the Providence Athenaeum or Brown University. Those below them lived in tenements in crowded neighborhoods, socialized in the home or ethnic fraternal society, played in the streets, at Vanity Fair, Crescent Park and Kirwin's Beach, sent their children to public or parochial schools, and fed their curiosity through the local newspapers.

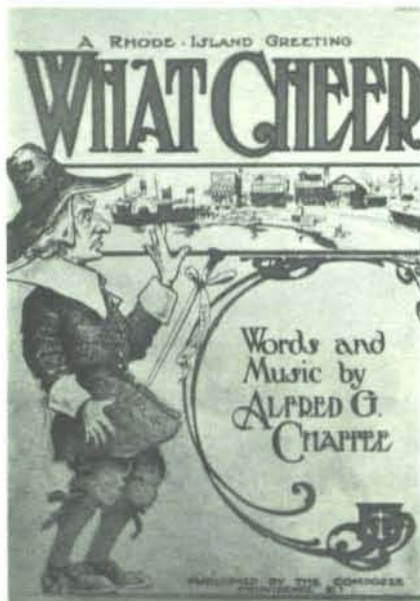
Philanthropists reached across the gaps in an attempt to improve the quality of life. Many of Providence's institutions came from philanthropy. For example, Rhode Island Hospital was opened in 1868 because of a \$75,000 gift from the Robert H. Ives family. Mrs. Henry Lip-



People from all over the city and beyond gathered at Crescent Park to enjoy rides such as the Flying Eagle, ca. 1900. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 1138).



From John Hutchins Cady, *Civic and Architectural Development of Providence, 1636-1950*. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 4228).



Sheet music cover. Courtesy of the John Hay Library, Brown University.

pitt started the Rhode Island School for the Deaf in 1876. The Roger Williams Chapel and Wanskuck Boys Club were only some of the contributions of the Metcalfs. Butler Hospital, the Public Library, land for parks and schools, the homes for girls and boys and the aged were all benefactions of the well-to-do.

Providence developed a sense of community at the baseball park, the circus, Dexter Training Grounds, and in the central business and shopping district that boasted of New England's largest and oldest stores. One might even find it in the thriving theater district. Over the years the public enjoyed minstrel shows, musical reviews, and vaudeville. If you attended Keith's Vaudeville Theater about 1905, you might have heard Alfred Chaffee's latest hit, "What Cheer."

WHAT CHEER

Words and Music by Alfred G. Chaffee

If Roger Williams should now return it's clear he'd never know,
The shore he put his foot upon two hundred years ago,
With telephones, electric cars, why nothing is the same.
There's a lot of things that money brings, and some now bear his name:

A public park, a mill and one insurance companee,
The words "What Cheer" the folks have used to name a breweree.
A stable too, a laundry, and on every single day,
You'll see our pride on which we ride go puffing down the Bay.

Oh, he'd say, "What Cheer?"
What have we here?
I declare, ev'ry where,
They have used my name for fair.
It seems quite clear,
My mem'ry's dear.
Now I'm dead, I'm glad I said
Those two words
"What Cheer."

The city's civic center was Exchange Place. It was the focus of Providence's government, banking, and transportation networks that anchored the adjoining retail and commercial areas. But Exchange Place was *more* than the hub of a thriving city. It was the neutral ground, the meeting place between East Siders and West Siders. It was an outdoor community center for a city divided by geography, wealth, and ethnicity. A visitor's first view of the "City of Homes" was Exchange Place; and when famous men such as Theodore Roosevelt, General John J. Pershing, or Charles Lindberg came, thousands thronged Exchange Place to watch. Here, the parades, pageants, and public assemblies were held; for example, the Preparedness Day Parade in 1916 had fifty-four



thousand marchers and a human flag of fifteen-hundred school girls. This was only one example of the patriotic feeling of the people. When World War I came, Providence men enlisted in record numbers, and citizens oversubscribed the war bond drives. Brown & Sharpe employees even grew \$40,000 worth of produce in the company war gardens. Patriotic feelings were so intense that the Boston Symphony Orchestra was forced to go home for failing to play the "Star Spangled Banner" at a Providence concert. And a "one-hundred percent" American declared: "War has been forced upon this country by a malignant foe of humanity, civilization and common decency. We are fighting for the liberty of the world, and we are going to win. Our hand cannot be stayed; our sword cannot again be sheathed until all the gross outrages have been avenged."

Providence had boomed in the thirty years before World War I. Its population rose from 105,000 in 1880 to 267,000 in 1925 and it became the undisputed capital of the state. The architectural firm of McKim, Mead, and White won the competition for the design of a new State House in Providence. Begun in 1895 and occupied in 1901, it ended the legislature's sessions that had alternated between Providence and Newport, as a great white State House rose to crown Smith Hill. The scene from the new capitol saddened park advocates but brought smiles to politicians and businessmen. It had long been a custom for business and politics to be bedfellows in Rhode Island. Lincoln Steffens perhaps expressed it best: "Senator Nelson Aldrich, Marsden Perry, and Charles Brayton are your representative men. But they have not . . . represented the best interests of your people. Rhode Island has become a state for sale."

Still, civic leaders took pride in their conservative approach to growth. As the president of the Board of Trade declared:

An Italo-American group marches during a parade held in Exchange Place, ca. 1900. Photograph by Frank Warren Marshall. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 4232).

In 1907 the Providence Board of Trade constructed a triumphal arch on Weybosset Street as part of the Old Home Week Celebration. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 4230).



Colonel Theodore Roosevelt and Governor R. Livingston Beeckman receive a liberty bond award after a rally in Providence, 1918. Courtesy of Providence Public Library.



We have not annexed vast areas of territory solely for making the city bigger and more populous; we have not opened wide our doors to admit all sorts and kinds of illegitimate enterprises; we offer no reduction in rates of taxation; neither do we give away acres of land to speculative industries to lure them to Providence. . . . To legitimate business enterprises we offer the soundest banking facilities . . . and skilled mechanics unsurpassed the civilized world.

In celebration of the achievements of its city and in promotion of civic pride, the Board of Trade sponsored Old Home Week in the summer of 1907. It decked the city with bunting, turned Exchange Place



View of downtown Providence from College Hill showing the Industrial Trust Company under construction, 1928. Courtesy of Providence Public Library.

into a Court of Honor, erected a triumphal arch on Weybosset Street, and produced a week-long festival that left the city happily exhausted.

Still, civic leaders worried about weakness. For three decades they attempted to connect with the Canadian Grand Trunk Railway in order to break the monopoly of the New Haven Railroad in Providence. The Chamber of Commerce declared harbor improvements to be the single most important issue for Providence's future growth and progress. Mayor Doyle had advanced a grand design for the harbor in the 1880s. The Chamber promoted Providence alternately as the "Center of the World" and as the "Gateway to Southern New England." Some improvements were made, a new state pier was built, and the Fabre Line did give Providence direct shipping connections with Europe. Yet, *almost nothing* was exported from the harbor; it remained principally a landing point for fuel, lumber, and immigrants.

Undoubtedly one of the greatest achievements of the city was the construction of a water reservoir system that would be adequate for the next hundred years. When it was begun, one official boasted: "The Scituate Reservoir will be without equal in this part of the country, if not anywhere in the states. It will include the largest artificially created body of water in New England, requiring the flooding of the greater part of the present township of Scituate." Begun in 1915, a vast area was graded and small towns and factories moved or demolished. It all became operational in 1928 when it was connected to the city water system. The new reservoir was the last great public project of the city in the early twentieth century.

During the boom years urban improvements had saddled Providence with one of the highest per capita debts of any city in the nation. From here on the city called upon the state government for development or relied upon private enterprise for growth and construction. In addition to a state pier, Providence's civic and business leaders pressed for a public airport in order to capitalize on the newest form of transporta-



The Providence Chamber of Commerce adopted this poster stamp in an attempt to revitalize the port of Providence. From the Providence Magazine, January 1915. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 4227).

tion. This resulted in the establishment of the first state-owned airport in the United States, created at Hillsgrove in Warwick in 1930. In addition the state built a new courthouse in Providence between 1929 and 1932. Private development brought the construction of the sixteen-story Turk's Head Building in 1913, followed by the Rhode Island Hospital Trust Building in 1919. At the City Hall end of Exchange Place the skyline was transformed when a collection of stores and garages was replaced by a luxury hotel, the Biltmore, which opened in 1922. Between the Hospital Trust Building on the east end and the Biltmore on the west of Exchange Place arose the twenty-six story Industrial Trust Building. Opened in October 1928, it was the tallest structure in New England and symbolized the bank's faith in Providence. That same month the cavernous Loews State Theater opened on Weybosset Street. Up on North Main Street, the Rhode Island Auditorium had opened in 1926, and a million dollars of private investment had produced a new Terminal Produce Market in 1929.

The evidence of progress and a faith in continued growth caused the president of the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce to announce in February 1929: "Our industrial survey has proved beyond a shadow of possible doubt that a new era of prosperity awaits Providence." He was mistaken. The boom had been fading since the depression of 1919–1920. The textile industry of New England was dying and strikes erupted almost yearly in Rhode Island as workers rebelled against repeated pay cuts and production speed-ups. The national economic collapse in 1929 brought the era to a close.

Providence had a century of greatness in passing from town to metropolitan center, from childhood to maturity. It had suffered through the pains of growth, socialization, and accommodation. And it would need the experience to face the Great Depression and the difficult years that followed.

Aerial view of Providence, ca. 1930. Photograph by Avery Lord. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 4231).



Hostages to Local History

by H. Nicholas Muller, III*

Severe cuts in federal funding will cause pain and adjustment; these cuts should not threaten the health of the state and local historical societies and museums. Their vitality depends upon the value the public gives to their objectives. In recent years the public and, for the first time, the corps of professional historians have begun to place local history and the institutions which nourish it in high esteem. This new emphasis on the value of local history, vigorously nurtured, in the long run will attract the support necessary to sustain local and state historical societies and museums. The public must understand that history exists. To be ignorant of history is not to avoid it; it is only to become its hostage.

The tremendous rise in the appreciation of local history derives from two different but complementary sources. First, in an uncertain age of rapid change, people have eagerly sought in their roots the affirmation of tradition and time-tested values. Even though the nostalgic popular view of the past often fails to understand historical reality, the public has expressed a fundamental need which it will support. For example, Robert A. Gross has pointed out that one-third of the babies born in Concord, Massachusetts, in 1776, when Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence, were conceived out of wedlock.¹ Despite that fact the public does not hesitate to point to that year as the symbol for national virtue and a model for future generations. The urge to find personal roots has also supported the genealogists' attempt to find a link in a family chain and so bring greater meaning and a sense of immortality to a single life.

In recent years professional historians have ceased to belittle state and local history and, instead, embrace it in increasing numbers. This change represents a major development in historical theory and methodology. The professionals usually treated local history with disdain. Their concept of "general" history caused them to view local matters as less important. Serious historians, they contended, studied great statesmen, campaigns and wars, broad social movements, or national political events under the rubric of political, military, diplomatic, and administrative history. Another part of their contempt derived from the perception that local history had become the refuge of the antiquarian, genealogist, rank amateur, and handful of professionals who, in their harsh judgment, lacked either ambition or ability. The local historian, they thought, rarely exhibited control of historical methodology, an understanding of external events, or a willingness to syn-

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1. Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York, 1976).

2. Pierre Goubert, "Local History," *Daedalus*, C, No. 1 (Winter 1971), 113 and 119.
3. Bruce C. Daniels, *The Connecticut Town* (Middleton, Conn., 1979), 4.
4. Charles C. Eastman, "My Uncle Jerry," in Abby Maria Hemmenway, ed., *Poets and Poetry of Vermont* (Rutland, Vt., 1858), 67-70.
5. Goubert, "Local History," *Daedalus*, C (1971), 117.
6. J. Kevin Graffagnino, "The Vermont 'Story': Continuity and Change in Vermont Historiography," *Vermont History*, XLVI (1978), 77-99.

thesize. This brand of local history usually followed an arrangement of detail on a town, village, or county basis which resembled a genealogical treatment. The value of these efforts should not be overlooked; nor should they be confused with good history.

The attitude of the professional historians has changed and so, too, has the quality of "local history," which according to Pierre Goubert, the dean of a new school of French historians, "has risen again and acquired new meaning." Some historians have gone so far as to "maintain that only local history can be true and sound." The careful "practice of local history and the multiplication of monographs on specific regions" can provide the material from which a broad understanding of national affairs emerges, and as Goubert observed, it "may serve to destroy many general conceptions that once seemed so strong and were embodied in so many books, papers, and lectures."² Events in a town, county, or state, when carefully explored, can prove important to the delineation of the national experience. The local scene demands description before the development of "secure new generalizations to replace the discarded ones."³ Emerging new national treatments profit from this change in attitude. Even those historians of great intuitive genius who can postulate a broad national hypothesis must wait for the work of others to confirm it.

Anticipating history from the bottom up by more than a century, a mid-nineteenth century sometimes poet from Vermont, Charles G. Eastman, caused the ancient and bent, but unbending, Uncle Jerry to remark "about Vermont / For history and song, / Much to be written yet, and more / That has been written wrong." Eastman sensed that despite the repeated chronicles of the pantheon of Vermont heroes, of Ethan Allen, Seth Warner, Thomas Chittenden and other Green Mountain Notables, "of even more important men / No record has been made."⁴ Uncle Jerry held his neighbors in higher regard than the enshrined for whom he harbored faint suspicion and not too well disguised contempt. He sensed that "good local history" can provide "a closer understanding of how the common man reacted" and that it can treat "the history of a whole society, not only the happy few who governed it, [or] who judged it."⁵ (A focus on the "whole society," despite the obvious disregard for the "common woman" in this latter comment, opens new vistas for the understanding of the past, including the important developments in women's history.)

In recent years serious historians have heeded Uncle Jerry's admonition. Vermont historians, for example, have discovered a century later that neither the Allen version of Vermont history nor the work which conceives of that history as an expanded edition of Allen's biography provide an adequate account of Vermont's past.⁶ Yet the tyranny of the Allens over Vermont history stubbornly persists, resting now on a foundation of a body of secondary literature which has become the point of departure or the contextual framework for subsequent works. This weakness in Vermont historiography, or similar problems in that

of other regions, engenders problems in the hypotheses and generalizations which describe national history. The "building block" concept construes local history as the essential building material in the construction of a broad national history. Flaws in local history threaten to become structural problems for the edifices built on them. The theory of the "building block" conceives of writing history as a deductive process, building step by step with each element resting on the preceding one until it reaches a logical conclusion. The quality of the whole rarely achieves a quality greater than its constituent parts.

Historians, not unlike builders, must begin with a plan. The historians' plan defines the evidence or the building materials they employ. The deductive process of the "building block" approach must have a starting point (Genesis will not do), and as with builders and architects, that point derives from a conception of the finished product. The historian curious about Shays' Rebellion, landholding patterns in the Hudson River Valley or the shrill response in Vermont to the *Patriote* uprising in Lower Canada in 1838, for example, will search for clues which describe and explain those events. The historian who asks questions about the economic causes of these events or who conceives of economic forces as central to the understanding of human endeavor will probably find economic forces evident.

In this manner historical questions, as all questions, to some extent dictate historical answers. First, the questions posed limit the avenues of inquiry. The historian can rarely, if ever, consider every shred of available information. The questions help define what evidence is pertinent, a determination which limits the evidence employed to an hypothesis. The larger the topic, the wider the inquiry, the smaller the portion of the total available evidence the historian usually manages to consider. More limited topics tend to allow a greater degree of consideration of a body of evidence. In this way local history has a methodological advantage.

Answers, conversely, may dictate historical questions. Historians usually pose questions because of the fact of the answer. The fact of Shays' Rebellion invites questions about its causes. To observe social or economic consequences of an event provokes inquiry about its social or economic origins and, consequently, answers which define the events in social and economic parameters. In this manner generalizations dangerously precede the collection of evidence and frequently limit that collection to items relevant to, if not supportive of, the hypothesis. The broader the scope of the issue, the greater the possibility that generalizations will precede the collection and analysis of evidence and the less the chances to bring to bear all of the pertinent evidence, which might improve or destroy the generalization. Herein rests an important advantage of a state or local focus where a limited scope often permits a thorough evaluation of a major portion of the evidence. Of course, sound evidence properly employed will modify the original hypothesis and, perhaps, even destroy it, as it will also lead logically to

7. Daniels, *Connecticut Town*, 4.

sound generalizations. Weak or incorrect evidence, such as an inaccurate local history, will weaken the hypotheses and generalizations used to explain larger events. Historians of national events, by using unsound materials to erect or to confirm their work, become hostage to local history.

The view of the American response to the Canadian rebellions of 1837–1838, for example, as the manifestation of the annexationist impulse, the organic sense of mission to spread democracy, early rumblings of Manifest Destiny, or the release of pent-up frustrations created by the Panic of 1837 all contain a measure of validity. But these interpretations do not adequately explain the response to these events in Vermont, and, thus, they fail also to serve as a sufficient explanation for these events at the national level. A serious understanding of the response in Vermont to the *Patriote* uprising offers a firm block in the foundation of a sound national treatment, as well as suggestions for useful questions to pose elsewhere.

Limits placed on a topic do not necessarily reduce its value. Local history demands synthesis; it is not parochial on conception. Good local history transcends the self-limiting concept of the case-study, and local historians must remain wary of the seductive and often limited construction of the case-study, the technical jargon which some scholars employ to lend respectability to their excursions into local events. The preface of most case-studies contains the accurate, modest, and often ingenuous disclaimer that its conclusions should not be transferred or extrapolated, thus paying homage to the reasonable assumption that, with infrequent exceptions, no two sets of conditions are identical. (If this caveat to the case-study has become "cliche-ridden, it is no more so than the inevitable call of the local historian for his fellow historians to test the hypotheses he has developed by employing his model to other communities" or areas. This rational request ignores the dynamics of the profession in "that no one above the level of graduate student wants to use anyone else's model," much less publish it.⁷)

In the first place historians have come to believe the definition of well-conceived history is not a function of geographic area, political level or other factors used to define "local." Good history is just that: good history. The most universal aspects of human behavior do not conform to national or continental boundaries; they occur on a local setting and demand (and in recent years have begun to receive) the full attention of the best historical methodology. In the second place, an accurate analysis of particular human behavior under one set of conditions will submit to useful, if not direct, extrapolation to other conditions. There is nothing random about the fact that national movements, trends or ideas can almost always be detailed at the local level. The suggestion that national trends have local expressions flirts with tautology, but that fact does raise important questions about cultural diffusion and the dynamics of national leadership and change. A sound

local history details the origins of trends perceived as such on a larger stage. It can suggest the reasons for broad rejection or acceptance of once alien ideas or concepts.

History, viewed as an intellectual construction which provides a convenient tool to aid in the analysis and explanation of human behavior, employs essentially similar methodology at all levels; its scope differs largely in the limits suggested by events and arbitrarily imposed by historians. The Age of Jackson, for example, never existed; it developed in the minds of historians as a convenient means to understand and describe a set of phenomena and events related through time and sequence, through similarity in form and participants, and through the historians' attempt to ascribe clear cause and effect to the murky affairs of past generations. The concept of the Age of Jackson provides a useful set of arbitrary limits to help select and arrange evidence. Choosing other arbitrary limits such as confining an historical investigation to a geographic area or locality, the only operative definition of local history, does not diminish the potential for historical validity. The only limiting aspect of local history is the territorial definition, which is, of course, logically similar to the definition of state, regional, national or continental history. The nature of the boundary, not the concept of history, sets aside local history.

Good local history matches good national history in most aspects. Their combination prevents the spread of "a gloss of hazy generalities over clear specifics."⁸ Broad national treatments without the benefit of a well-developed local or regional historiography must generalize from evidence weakened by the limits of time or capacity. Even the historical account of a state, as Uncle Jerry warned, will suffer if it focuses on the major national characters and events and bypasses the local and regional level.

The broad-based objectives of the institutions which work with state and local history have developed great value as conceived theoretically by the professional historians and as expressed by the demands of the public. The future of these historical societies and museums rests on serving those needs, not on the temporary largesse of federal or state agencies. To build a sound future, these institutions must vitalize their mission and state and restate their case. Continued vitality during the current transitional period and growth in the future depends on keeping the value of local history high. Museums and state and local historical societies must seek more than mere survival; they must understand and believe the importance of their role in promoting a mature understanding of the past and its importance to the future of society.

8. Goubert, "Local History," *Daedalus*, C (1971), 115.

Book Reviews

Artifacts and the American Past. By THOMAS J. SCHLERETH.

(Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981. vii + 294 pp. Illustrations, appendices, notes, and index. \$13.95.)

Teaching history from artifacts is the craft of educators and curators in museums, archives, historical societies, and preservation organizations. It is a strategy employed by some teachers in schools and universities to introduce students to historical evidence, to improve their visual literacy, and to enliven textbook curricula. Adoption of these unfamiliar techniques in the classroom has been slow, however, perhaps because the methodological literature is meager. Curators and archivists have not produced many general statements for their classroom counterparts, and the few excellent articles in this area are seven to fifteen years old and badly in need of reexamination and critical review.

By contrast, there is a rich but obscure literature of artifact analyses which focuses on particular objects or environments. These works are often the products of successful interpretive exercises: thesis research, exhibitions, or school programs. These short, detailed pieces can provide the evidence and examples for generalizations on this teaching technique. Juxtaposition and comparison of several narrowly-focused studies by a skilled educator would yield, by induction, some field-tested principles for artifact study.

Artifacts and the American Past, by one of the most prominent practitioners of this craft, attempts to begin that process. Thomas J. Schlereth is director of the graduate program in American Studies at the University of Notre Dame, where he has taught since 1972. He is a skilled and enthusiastic pedagogue, spreading the work of this lively new history in lectures and papers nationwide. Finally, he is an indefatigable bibliographer who seems aware of many exciting projects, at least in the vast and under-documented middle section of the country. Schlereth is certainly the right person to tackle this neglected literature, which only makes *Artifacts and the American Past* more disappointing.

The title itself is misleading, and perhaps demands more from Schlereth than he was prepared to offer in this collection of ten essays, nine of which have appeared elsewhere. The book is divided into thirds, focusing on graphic materials (photographs, mail order catalogues, maps), historic sites, and landscapes as artifacts. Surely, all are "artifacts" of American social history in the terminology of the cultural

anthropologist. But they are not what many readers would enumerate as the primary objects used as the documents of history: three dimensional museum objects. As a university professor, archival materials and features of the built environment are the artifacts accessible to Schlereth in his work, and the bias is understandable. He does not purport to have a curator's grasp of the meanings and uses of collections of historic objects, and has left that portion of the analysis, one assumes, to those professionals. Readers should, however, recognize the limits of this study.

A second parameter imposed by the author is that of generalization. In his introduction he states: "I have proposed no new or novel interpretive models, but I have tried to elucidate those that have surfaced to date, and those whose hypotheses deserve further testing. I feel very strongly, however, that research on artifacts and the American past must now move beyond the merely descriptive stage of investigation into the more problematic area of historical analysis and interpretation" (p. 5). Although the reader must accept the author's intent to produce "a sampler . . . of teaching and research techniques," one can still regret an opportunity for analysis passed by as well as feel dissatisfied at the lack of interpretive focus.

Seen as a collection of good ideas from his own and others' files, the book begins to make sense. The publisher, the American Association for State and Local History, has another title in its catalogue: *101 Ideas from History News*, and the works bear some similarity. There are more clever, insightful nuggets here than anyone could possibly absorb, much less apply in his own teaching. Moreover, most are mentioned only fleetingly, with little detail, leaving the interested reader with many unanswered questions. Nor are these good bibliographic essays: one must consult 604 footnotes at the back of the book for citations. That soon becomes distracting, and the thread of the text, which is often weak, is lost.

In those chapters in which Schlereth takes a longer, more detailed look at a teaching strategy (generally one of his own), the product is far more satisfying. Even when the example is closely tied to a particular place and time, the clarity of the analysis makes generalization easy. His discussion of Chicago history in "Past Cityscapes: Uses of Cartography" and the appended "Exercise in Urban Map Analysis: Metropolitan Chicago" are blueprints for the dissection of any community from cartographic sources. He discusses explicitly the availability of sources, their use and limitations, and provides secondary references on topography, geography, and cartography. There are a few of these sections, and they stand out as the truly successful parts of the book.

A related area into which Schlereth delves is museology, and several of his suggested student projects involve the investigation, analysis, and critique of interpretive programs in museums, historic houses, and villages. This is an exercise museum professionals should welcome: the dual outcomes of thoughtful evaluation and an educated museum-

goer benefit us all. The appendix on "Historic Exhibit Review" is an excellent guide to this activity. My question centers on Schlereth's own command of museology and its history. In trumpeting artifact analysis as part of the "new history" he credits John Dewey and Francis Parker as antecedents (p. 1), but does not acknowledge education pioneers in museums. And in discussing the minimal role of eighteenth-century history at the centennial celebration of 1876, he dismisses the "New England Kitchen of 1776" as one of a handful of relics (pp. 139-140), when in fact it is generally credited with being the first "three-sided room," later to be so crucial to the development of history museums and emulated at such museums as the Essex Institute and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Schlereth aims to help everyone—students, teachers, curators, museum visitors—to become their own historians, to provide "methods, sources, and ideas" to further this end. *Artifacts and the American Past* can be a reference book for all of us; but it is unfortunate that it will be so difficult, perhaps too difficult, to use.

Rhode Island Historical Society

LAURA B. ROBERTS

From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research. By BARBARA ALLEN and LYNWOOD MONTELL. (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1981. xii + 172 pp. Bibliography and index. \$12.50.)

From Memory to History is a book for oral historians written by Lynwood Montell, author of *The Saga of Coe Ridge: A Study on Oral History* (1970), and Barbara Allen, a frequent contributor of articles on folklore and oral history to such journals as *International Journal of Folklore* and *Journal of American Folklore*. Their purpose is to provide a guidebook to "set forth ways to evaluate and use oral materials once they have been gathered." Oral historians seeking information about such topics as interviewing techniques or transcribing problems will not find it here, but there are manuals enough for these. What will be helpful in this book are chapters on the uses of oral history, interpretations of conflicting accounts, characteristics of orally communicated accounts, and tests for validity in oral sources.

In discussing the characteristics of orally communicated history, Allen and Montell point out that human beings may show a disregard for standard chronology. Narrators tend to date events by association with other episodes in their lives. They write, "Persons, places, and events are important in human perception of history, time is not." Also characteristic of orally communicated history is that association is the organizing principle: "relationships among people in the community constitute the human context within which events take place." The

narration may seem rambling, but there is organization. It is a pattern in which each human being involved in the event described is accounted for.

Readers interested in interpretation will find the chapter on "submerged truth" in oral testimony fascinating. It begins:

The truth in orally communicated history does not always lie in its factual accuracy. Local historians should look for underlying truths contained in values, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings as expressed orally in exaggerations, distortions, and seeming contradictions of historical fact. What people *believe* happened is often as important as what actually happened, for people think, act and react in accordance with what they believe to be true.

The authors discuss ways to detect "submerged truths" in oral histories, ballads, songs, and proverbs. Allen and Montell are at their best here. They point out, for example, how two conflicting versions of an event gleaned from numerous interviews can represent the polarization of attitudes within a community.

There is, however, some confusion underlying their discussion. Usually oral history is thought of as both a methodology involving the gathering of historical data by means of tape-recorded interview and the document (tape or transcription) which results. The author's definition is that oral history is a "method by which oral information about the past is collected and recorded" and also "a body of knowledge that exists only in people's memories and will be lost at their deaths." In the second half of their definition they forget that testimony has to be *communicated* in order to be history. In similar fashion, they decline to make a distinction between oral history and folklore. Oral history is not heresay—it is an eye-witness account. This distinguishes it from folklore. Lumping the two together, the authors create confusion: for example, they suggest that both informal conversation and structured interviews are characteristic of oral history and folklore. The oral historian works on the basis of thorough preparation for the interview, rigorous planning of the interview format, and careful use of questioning techniques. An informal conversation just won't do it! This does not mean that the oral historian should disdain information obtained from informal conversations in the barbershop, but it does mean that such conversations are not oral history interviews.

Despite the confusion, *From Memory to History* can be useful because the discussions on evaluation and hidden truths are not easily accessible elsewhere. Also of much help are the references in footnotes to local histories based on oral history methodology. This is not a book for all purposes, but it contains important observations for the oral historian who has already collected data on local history and is now sifting through it.

Early Americans. By CARL BRIDENBAUGH. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981. xii + 281 pp. Illustrations and notes. \$19.95.)

Carl Bridenbaugh, professor emeritus at Brown University, is the unanointed dean of American colonial historians. In nearly a score of important books he has illuminated innumerable aspects of British North America's first century and a half. *Early Americans*, a collection of nine of his essays, is somewhat a microcosm of his larger *opus* and very much a reminder of his continuing intellectual vitality.

Readers may be surprised at the recentness of Bridenbaugh's essays. Four of them were published in the late 1970s and two are here published for the first time (although one of them paraphrases a chapter in his *Jamestown, 1544-1699* [1980], only three predate 1965). All are admirably written, and if collectively they offer no startling concepts or novel interpretations, they are models of thorough research, sound organization, and lively presentation. Most of them are also persuasive. The lone exception is a mini-biography of Powhatan's brother Opechancanough which stretches credulity (mine at least) to the breaking-point. But by and large, Bridenbaugh moves convincingly and gracefully from Indians to Englishmen, from New Englanders to Virginians, and from rogues to aristocrats. Along the way we learn about Delaware Valley immigration, Puritan adaptability, Yankee architecture, Quaker volunteerism, Virginia law and politics, and colonial mineral spas, to list a few of Bridenbaugh's topics. Especially entertaining, though of minor significance, is the only really new chapter: "'The Famous Infamous Vagrant': Tom Bell"—Harvard student turned con artist.

The principal purpose of reprinting these essays, Bridenbaugh asserts in a brief introduction, "is to entertain thoughtful general readers with a bent toward colonial history." It would be hard to argue against that goal, but because most of the essays first appeared in scholarly journals, historians as well as general readers are likely to use this book. Both sets of readers, especially professional historians, will regret the absence of introductions to the individual chapters and of revisions to the older essays. (How, for example, does Bridenbaugh view his 1939 ruminations on "The New England Town: A Way of Life" in light of the recent avalanche of New England town studies?) Two comparable Oxford University Press collections would have served as good models: James Axtell's *The European and the Indian* (1981) and Timothy Breen's *Puritans and Adventurers* (1980) have valuable editorial commentaries.

Several years ago, Carl Bridenbaugh decided not to continue his multi-volume series on "The Beginnings of the American People," which was to have run to about ten volumes. Two impressive volumes had appeared: *Vexed and Troubled Englishmen, 1540-1642* (1967), and, with Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690* (1972). Since then, Bridenbaugh has published three books and most of the essays in this anthology. Despite the charm of this recent work, many of Bridenbaugh's readers may wish

that he had marshalled his energies for the series, rather than dispersing them to several small projects, so that we might one day have the master craftsman's systematic assessment of the whole colonial era. In lieu of that, we must be thankful for what he has given us in this collection and elsewhere.

Columbia University

ALDEN T. VAUGHAN

Settlement and Unsettlement in Early America: The Crisis of Political Legitimacy Before the Revolution. By KENNETH A. LOCKRIDGE. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981. ix + 134. \$9.95)

The three suggestive essays that comprise this book by Kenneth Lockridge explore the relationship between authority and the social structure in colonial and Revolutionary Massachusetts and Virginia. In them, Lockridge argues that the physical settlement of the American colonies unsettled the social structure and created a seventeenth-century colonial world whose leaders lacked the natural authority of England's social elite.

The dissolution of the traditional social order was most apparent in Virginia where the activities of freebooting adventurers, the absence of a stable family structure, and an extraordinarily high mortality rate combined to destroy the symbiotic relationship between leaders and society. But Massachusetts did not escape the trauma of transplantation, and despite the efforts of stern and well-born magistrates such as John Winthrop, wilderness conditions eroded authority in the Puritan world. As both areas struggled to cope with this problem, two differing impulses for building authority emerged and struggled with one another to attain legitimacy. The first impulse, "worldly and hierarchical," flowed from the urbane clergymen and merchants of Massachusetts and from the Tidewater tobacco aristocracy in Virginia. These New England and southern elites, emerging at the end of the seventeenth century, tried to create a traditional deferential relationship between social and political leaders and followers. The second impulse, "pious and localistic," flowed from the small villages in rural Massachusetts and the Piedmont backcountry in Virginia. It challenged the legitimacy of the centralizing and deferential authority of the new elite and wanted to establish a social and political order based on local community standards and a revivalistic piety. Each impulse denied the legitimacy of the other and neither achieved intellectual hegemony.

The American Revolution, according to Lockridge, broke the logjam and provided a new system of political thought that emerged from the constitutional debates. This new system, best expressed in the federal Constitution and James Madison's defense of the Constitution in Fed-

eralist Number Ten, accepted the legitimacy of a mechanistic world where aggressive individuals competed with each other to dominate the political and social orders. The selfishness of each individual was neutralized by the selfishness of his competitors: out of the conflicts between self-seeking persons came a good, middle-of-the-road whole that benefited all. This system of pluralism legitimized the conflict between "worldly and hierarchical" and "pious and localistic" impulses by arguing that, when harnessed, the conflict produced a society free from the tyranny of overweening authority. Ironically, the question of where authority should lay was settled when the Revolutionary generation accepted the idea that there should always be some unsettlement in the political and social structure and no one group should dominate—neither the urban or plantation elite nor the devout, rural farmers. Lockridge comments that this resolution shared a philosophy of human behavior with the economic system of Adam Smith, a contemporary of the Revolutionary generation.

Few historians will quarrel with Lockridge's overall analysis. Although it contains little primary research and the main outlines of his argument are familiar to most professional American historians, these essays are valuable because they succinctly articulate a view of early American political thought that has not received a brief, forceful statement. Moreover, Lockridge is nimble in assembling the detail to support this statement. Although many complexities are not explored and a large body of important secondary literature that would qualify some of his lesser conclusions is ignored, *Settlement and Unsettlement in Early America* is what its author intended it to be: a readable, intelligent synthesis that explicates the social origins of American political thought and behavior.

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BRUCE C. DANIELS

William Ellery Channing: An Essay on the Liberal Spirit in America. By ANDREW DELBANCO. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981. ix + 203 pp. Notes and Index. \$15.00.)

Rhode Islanders have a claim upon William Ellery Channing, although he gained fame as a minister of the established churches of Massachusetts which had, in the seventeenth century, banished Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson. Newport has a statue in his honor because he was born there in 1780 (though he summered in Portsmouth in later life). Grandson of William Ellery, who signed the Declaration of Independence for Rhode Island, Channing was the son of a slaveholding lawyer. A delicate, studious youth, he ultimately became the champion of what was called "Liberal" or "rational" Christianity. Today it is known as Unitarianism, a small denomination famous for the many noted Bostonians and Harvard men who graced its pews and pulpits.

When, after graduation from Harvard, Channing became pastor of the Federal Street Church in Boston in 1803, the Unitarian movement still existed clandestinely within the Congregational churches. It appealed to those who found Calvinism too gloomy and evangelicalism too noisy. Channing, and other liberal ministers in and around Boston, gradually abandoned predestination as unreasonable and the doctrine of the Trinity as tritheism. Unitarianism brought no unity to Boston; in 1825 its adherents left the churches of their Puritan forefathers to found a new denomination. Channing, who had battled genteelly against the "Trinitarian" fulminations of Lyman Beecher and Jedidiah Morse, remained a revered minister among the Boston Brahmins until his death in 1842. By 1836, however, a younger generation of Harvard men and Boston women found his "Liberal Christianity" too pale, cold, and formal; they joined young Ralph Waldo Emerson in "the Transcendental revolt" against Unitarianism. Channing was no longer a liberal but a conservative.

Andrew Delbanco's study is subtitled "an essay on the liberal spirit in America." It is a biography of the mind, not of the life, of Channing. With infinite care and erudition, it traces the mental development of this prestigious, discerning, eloquent man from the days when he delivered Federalist sermons against "Mr. Madison's War" to his final attacks upon slavery. Written under the spell of Perry Miller and Alan Heimert, this volume sometimes suffers from the stylistic complexities which make their books hard to read, but it is worth the effort. It vividly answers the question which Perry Miller raised thirty years ago: How did New Englanders move from Edwards to Emerson? The answer is, through Channing.

Channing, Delbanco writes, was "caught between one age and another"—the Age of Lockean rationalism and the Age of Romantic idealism. Trying to face up honestly to the complex issues of this transformation, "Channing was internally divided almost to the point of paralysis" at times. He tried to preserve a balance between the temptations of excessive self-interest and the fanaticism of collective action. He found deism too mechanical and Transcendentalism too antinomian; he disliked slavery but he thought abolitionists fanatical; he thought traditionalism too binding and disestablishment too anarchic. Temperamentally cautious, earnest, and high-minded, Channing emphasized the virtues of restraint, morality, order, balance and patience. Yet, as Delbanco describes with great subtlety and sympathy, Channing lived a life of enormous tension, anxiety, and concern. He took seriously his role as an arbiter and philosopher of his age.

Channing may be unjustly neglected (this is the third book about him that claims to retrieve his neglected importance), but Delbanco seems at times to make too much of him. He overemphasizes his sagacity and underestimates his timidity, his fearfulness of being misunderstood, his reluctance to seem controversial. Delbanco indicates that he took a strong stand against slavery sooner than Emerson, but when Emerson stood up boldly against Indian removal in 1838, Chan-

ning was silent. Channing's view of poverty was blinded by his own upperclass style of life: "That some of the indigent among us die of scanty food is undoubtedly true," he wrote in 1835, "but vastly more in this community die from eating too much. . . many shiver from want of defences against the cold, but there is vastly more suffering among the rich from absurd and criminal modes of dress. . . the poor are often over-worked, but they suffer less than many among the rich who have no work to do." There is at times more equivocation and ambiguity than common sense in Channing's high-toned discourses. Nevertheless, in the end he did employ "his large prestige and spoke out publicly" against slavery when he knew his wealthy parishioners would deeply resent it.

In chapters devoted to Channing's views of Nature, History, Language, Scripture, Romanticism, and "the Problem of Evil," Delbanco lays bare for us the agonies of a sensitive mind in turmoil. Those interested in the drama of the life of the mind in America or who doubt that Unitarians ever agonized over sin will find this book illuminating. This is a perceptive analysis of a conscientious man who spoke for a transitional generation in New England.

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